

Getting Serious About Diversity: Reaching Out to Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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In 2002, surveys were sent to heads of agricultural communications offices at land-grant universities (LGUs) and to journalism placement officers at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Research questions focused on the hiring practices at the LGUs and the placement activities at the HBCUs. Although the LGU offices professed a desire for a diverse workforce, respondents indicated that about 88 percent of their employees and 65 percent of their student workers were Caucasian. Three quarters said they posted job notices on their university's personnel lists and in their local newspapers. Only nine of 40 said they sent notices to journalism schools at 1890 (historically black) LGUs, and only seven sent them to journalism schools at HBCUs. Thirty-five respondents said they used interns, although 30 of those only hired students at their respective universities. Nine of 12 HBCU placement officers said they had never seen a job or internship notice from a LGU. They preferred receiving job or internship notices by surface mail or email. Two thirds of the internships held by their students were unpaid. Although most internships were near campus, respondents said students often seek summer internships near their homes. For LGU communications offices to increase the number of minorities on staff, these offices need to send notices for jobs and internships (especially for summer) directly to minority-serving institutions. Agricultural communications offices at LGUs and minority-serving institutions should work together to develop a system for increasing the number of minority applicants in the LGU pipeline.

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Abstract

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As public institutions, land-grant universities profess a desire to have a diverse workforce and to offer programs of value to all people. A quick search of Web sites at any LGU Cooperative Extension Service will find statements describing the agency as an equal opportunity employer, offering educational programs that do not discriminate against people based on such

Professional Development

things as race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin (e.g., www.umext.maine.edu, www.texasextension.tamu.edu, www.uaex.edu, www.ext.colostate.edu).

The reasons for promoting diversity within the land-grant system are outlined in the Cooperative State Research and Education Extension Service document, "Diversity and Pluralism: Pathway to Diversity" (<http://www.reeusda.gov/diversity/pathway.htm>). Reasons for seeking a diverse workforce include tapping into the resources of underrepresented groups in society, expanding the reach of programs and services to attract new clientele, developing new management styles based on different life experiences, learning how to interact with people who are different from one another, and building structures that better meet the needs of our organizations and society (Dorsey, 2001; Schauber & Castania, 2001; Ewert & King Rice, 1994; Roach, 2001; White-Hood, 2000; Toney & Lowe, 2001; Johnson, 1995; Woodley, 1993).

Finding Minority Applicants

Many companies and organizations—including Extension—find it challenging to attract, hire, and retain a diverse workforce. For example, the Diversity Pipeline Alliance is a coalition of 11 academic groups, foundations, and nonprofits that have joined forces to increase enrollment by minorities in business schools. The group starts recruiting students in middle school and reaches out to minorities already in the field who might be interested in earning an MBA or Ph.D. (Gilroy, 2003). And the Institute for African American E-Culture is working to increase the number of African Americans in the high-tech computer field (Roach, 2001).

Often, the problem is that minorities are not aware of jobs or else they have not seen the jobs as possible careers for them (McCray, 1994). The Halifax Bank system in Great Britain, for example, invited members of the Chinese community in Manchester, England, to apply for jobs in the bank—a job not previously recognized by community elders as a viable career. To the bank's surprise, dozens of Chinese candidates applied; after the bank hired Chinese employees, the bank experienced significant increases in business from the Chinese community (Merrick, 2001). Similarly, organizations such as the Extension Service, libraries, schools, newspapers, and correctional facilities have sought to increase the number of minorities choosing those careers (Schauber & Castania, 2001; Spencer, 2002; Woodley, 1993; Jackson, 2002; White-Hood, 2000; Stewart, 2001; Johnson, 1995).

Professional Development

Several strategies have been identified for successfully recruiting and retaining minorities. At Indiana University, the library system came up with a five-part plan:

- Focus on one particular minority group at a time.
- Listen to the needs of minority students, such as including minorities at orientation sessions and in recruitment material.
- Connect with campus advisers who can advise minority students to choose a career in library science; openly welcome minorities to the program, including using alumni to make one-on-one contacts with potential students.
- Help students find the resources—such as scholarships—that they need to succeed (Spencer, 2002).

Using minorities who have already succeeded within the profession is a common strategy used to recruit other minorities (Doverspike, Taylor, & Shultz, 2000). Reaching out to where many minority students can be found—such as historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs, including 1890 LGUs), tribal colleges (including 1994 LGUs), and Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs)—is another strategy (Gursky, 2002; Doverspike, Taylor, & Shultz, 2000).

Creating internships where minorities can build the necessary skills to prepare themselves to compete for full-time openings is another important strategy (Ewert & King Rice, 1994; Stewart, 2001; Doverspike, Taylor, & Shultz, 2000; Grogan & Eshelman, 1998). And once minorities are hired, strategies for retaining them include building a critical mass of minority employees, networking with other minorities within the community, supporting alternative work schedules, helping spouses find work, and promoting a culture of diversity and multiculturalism within the organization (Ewert & King Rice, 1994; McCray, 1994; Grogan & Eshelman, 1998; Schauber & Castania, 2001).

Networking also is a strategy for finding employees. The “good ole boys” network of white males helping other white males get jobs traditionally hasn’t been effective for women and minorities; however, one alternative is virtual networking on the Internet. Knouse and Webb (2001) point out that networks of women and minorities, when compared to the “good ole boys” network, tend to be smaller, not as strong, not as far-reaching, and lacking in “tie strength”—that is, the time, intensity, and degree of contact among people within the network. The Internet, they argue, contains several features (e.g., Web pages, e-mail, chat rooms) that help expand the networking opportunities for women and minorities.

Professional Development

A reality facing Extension these days, however, is a lack of funds and cutbacks in staff (Schauber & Castania, 2001). These factors make it challenging to do any recruitment, not just recruitment of underrepresented groups.

The Studies

For nearly 30 years, this author worked for the Extension Services or Agricultural Experiment Stations at four different LGUs. For 10 of those years, the author headed agricultural communications departments, which has given her an inside perspective of some of the issues confronting these offices as they seek to hire diverse staffs. In 2001, the author joined the teaching faculty in the School of Journalism and Graphic Communication at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, an HBCU and 1890 LGU. This has given her additional insight of how students and graduates at HBCUs find out about job opportunities.

In 2002, a two-pronged study was conducted. One part focused on LGU agricultural communications offices, and the second focused on journalism departments at HBCUs. This article reports on the first study, plus some of the results from the second.

The LGU study set out to address the following questions:

1. What is the racial group makeup of people employed in LGU communications offices?
2. For typical and most-recent job searches for professional positions in LGU communications offices, what is the racial group membership of applicants?
3. Where do applicants typically come from? And where are job notices typically sent?
4. How difficult do LGU communication department heads think it is to attract African-American applicants and those with Spanish surnames? And why?
5. How important is internship experience for candidates for jobs in LGU communication offices? And what, if anything, are the LGU communication departments doing to attract and employ student interns?

The second study was a 15-question survey sent to 79 historically black colleges and universities. A mailing list of potential career-placement officers in academic units was developed after searching the Internet to identify likely HBCUs that offer at least one journalism course. Thirty-two people responded, for a response rate of 40.5%. Of those, only 12 indicated that they offered journalism programs. Some of the questions addressed in the HBCU study were as follows:

Professional Development

6. Are HBCU journalism departments aware of jobs or internships available at LGU agricultural communications offices?
7. How do HBCU journalism departments prefer to hear about jobs or internships?
8. What types of internships do students at HBCU journalism departments tend to get?

For the LGU study, a 19-question survey was sent by surface mail to 76 people on a list of communication department heads provided by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service communication staff. An advance e-mail notice was sent to the sample the week before the paper survey was sent by surface mail, and an e-mail reminder was sent to the sample two weeks after the surveys had been mailed. Forty people responded, for a response rate of 53%. Several people told the author by e-mail that they chose not to respond because they believed that someone else from their university had already responded. Respondents represented the following regions (Table 1):

Table 1. *Location of LGU survey respondents*

| Region | Total responses | Responses from HBCUs |
|-----------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Northeast | 9 | 1 |
| South | 12 | 4 |
| Midwest | 7 | 0 |
| West | 10 | 0 |
| D.C. | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 40 | 6 |

1. *What LGU Ag Communication Departments Look Like*

The 40 respondents reported having a total of 859 employees on their staffs, representing the following racial groups (Table 2):

Professional Development

Table 2. *Racial group membership of employees in LGU agricultural communications offices*

| Racial group | No. of employees | % of total |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Caucasian | 753 | 87.66 |
| African American | 61 | 7.10 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 27 | 3.14 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 15 | 1.75 |
| Other (e.g., Indian) ² | 0.23 | |
| American Indian | 1 | 0.12 |
| Total | 859 | 100.0 |

Similarly, respondents were asked to identify the racial group membership of any students they used in their departments (Table 3). The total number of students on staff was 195.

Table 3. *Racial group membership of student employees in LGU agricultural communications offices*

| Racial group | No. of students | % of total |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Caucasian | 127 | 65.13 |
| African American | 16 | 8.21 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 23 | 11.79 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 20 | 10.26 |
| Other | 6 | 3.08 |
| American Indian | 3 | 1.54 |
| Total | 195 | 100.01* |

*Total does not equal 100% because of rounding.

According to the 2000 U.S. census data (www.census.gov), 71.3% of the U.S. population is white, not Hispanic; 12.2% is black, not Hispanic; 11.9% is Hispanic, white or black; 3.8% is Asian/Pacific Islander; and 0.7% is American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut. This means that the makeup of LGU communications offices contains significantly more Caucasians than in the general population and significantly fewer members from other racial groups. The student employee group, on the other hand, contains a higher relative percentage of people from groups other than Caucasian.

Professional Development

2. The Search Process

When writing position descriptions, departments typically indicate the types of majors they will accept from applicants. Usually, this is dictated by the type of job; sometimes, it reflects biases against certain majors. Of the 40 respondents, 10 indicated that they do not accept applicants with degrees in the following subjects (Table 4):

Table 4. *Degrees not acceptable within agricultural communications units*

| Major/degree | No. not accepting major/degree |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Advertising | 6 |
| Marketing | 4 |
| Computer/Information science | 3 |
| Broadcasting | 2 |
| Communications | 2 |
| Ag. communications | 1 |
| Graphic design | 1 |
| Public relations | 1 |

These results are surprising, especially considering the strong emphasis within Extension in recent years on marketing (entering “Extension marketing” on a search engine will yield dozens of entries from Extension offices across the country).

When asked which unit actually solicits job applications, 38 respondents replied: 14 indicated it was the communications office, 15 said it was personnel or human resources, and nine indicated that it was a combination of offices or that it depended upon the position being filled.

Respondents were asked to indicate the percentage of people from different racial groups that were in a “typical applicant pool.” Of those who responded, most said that Caucasians made up between 75% and 100% of the applicant pool; African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos each made up between 1% and 10% of the pool; Asian/Pacific Islanders made up between zero and 10% of the pool; and typically, there were no American Indian applicants.

Respondents then were asked about the racial group makeup of the most recent search they conducted. Respondents indicated that sometimes their personnel or human resources department would not tell them about all of the people who had applied for jobs. However, of the 474 people that the respondents knew had most recently applied for a job, the racial-group makeup was as follows (Table 5):

Professional Development

Table 5. *Most recent searches: Who applied and who got interviewed?*

| Racial group | Total no. applied | Percent of total | No. interviewed | Percent of total |
|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Caucasian | 360 | 76% | 77 | 21% |
| African American | 34 | 7% | 15 | 44% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 31 | 6.5% | 8 | 26% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 25 | 5% | 6 | 24% |
| American Indian | 3 | < 1% | 2 | 67% |
| Don't know | 21 | 4.5% | 1 | 5% |

By far, the majority of applicants for recent vacancies were Caucasians. Members of minority groups, however, stood a slight to a significantly better chance of getting interviewed, probably in response to Extension's stated intention of building a more diverse workforce.

Respondents were asked how difficult they felt it was to get applicants from members of various racial groups, with 1 = very easy and 5 = very difficult (Table 6).

Table 6. *Perceived difficulty in getting applications from members of certain racial groups.*

| Racial group | Average perceived difficulty |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| African Americans | 3.49 |
| Hispanics/Latinos | 3.49 |
| Asians/Pacific Islanders | 3.42 |
| American Indians | 4.38 |

Respondents were asked to rank five possible hiring challenges. For all minority groups, the number one response was "hard to reach applicants," followed by "few members of the minority group in the community." The third challenge for African American applicants was "job location," which ranked fourth for Hispanics/Latinos, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and American Indians. The third challenges for Hispanics/Latinos, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and American Indians was "few members of the minority group on staff," which was ranked fourth for African American applicants. For all groups, the lowest-ranked problem was "noncompetitive salary."

Professional Development

3. Finding Applicants

Respondents were asked the scope of their most-recent search. Two-thirds indicated that their searches were either regional or national. Table 7 shows their responses.

Table 7. *Scope of most recent search*

| Scope | No. responses |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| National | 14 |
| Regional | 13 |
| Other | 4 |
| No response | 4 |
| Local community | 3 |
| Inside unit/ university | 2 |

However, when asked where they sent their job notices, respondents most often listed local newspapers or university personnel job postings—both of which would require that applicants go to “local” sites for information (Table 8). Major dailies are good outlets for regional and national searches. Future research is needed to determine whether sending announcements to deans of land-grant universities is effective: Do Extension deans take the time to forward job announcements to potential applicants in academic journalism programs? Only nine and seven respondents, respectively, indicated that they sent job announcements directly to journalism schools at 1890 LGUs or HBCUs. And only five respondents indicated that they sent job announcements to minority publications.

Table 8. *Where respondents send job announcements*

| Where announcements are sent | No. respondents |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| University personnel posting | 30 |
| Local newspapers | 30 |
| Listserves | 17 |
| Major dailies | 16 |
| Chronicle of Higher Education | 15 |
| Deans, 1862 LGUs | 15 |
| Deans, 1890 LGUs | 15 |
| Journalism schools, 1962 LGUs | 11 |
| Deans, other LGUs | 10 |
| Other (e.g., Internet sites) | 10 |
| Journalism schools, 1890 LGUs | 9 |
| Other LGU communication offices | 7 |
| Journalism schools, HBCUs | 7 |
| Minority publications | 5 |

Professional Development

5. Internships versus Job Experience

When asked whether they would hire new employees right out of college with no work experience, 13 respondents said “yes” while 27 said “no.” When asked if they would hire new employees right out of college who had internship experience but no other work experience, 21 respondents said “yes” while 19 said “no.” Internships, therefore, increase an applicant’s chances of getting a job with Extension. But prior work experience is an important determinant of whether a person gets a job with Extension.

Thirty-five respondents indicated that they use interns or student employees. Four said they did not. One did not respond. Of the 35 who use interns, 30 find students from the journalism programs at their respective universities. The next most popular source (16) is area universities, with 12 respondents indicating they use both sources.

Of the four who did use interns, three indicated that the major reasons for not doing so were “not enough staff to supervise” and “no space to house them.” When asked if anything would change their minds about whether to hire interns, the four respondents selected the following reasons (number of responses are in parentheses): available pool of qualified applicants (3), financial help to hire interns (3), information on how interns might help them (3), and help in crafting intern positions (2).

When looking for student interns, respondents indicated several characteristics that they look for (Table 9). The top four qualifications are a specific major, work samples, references, and a willingness to do or learn the job.

Table 9. *Qualifications looked for in potential interns*

| Qualification | No. responding |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Specific major in college | 22 |
| Work samples | 21 |
| References | 20 |
| Willingness to do/learn job | 19 |
| Application | 15 |
| Grade point average | 5 |
| Application test | 2 |
| No response | 1 |

Professional Development

When asked how they compensate interns, 28 respondents said they offered wages, 13 offered credit through the student's university, seven offered experience only, and one offered both a housing allowance and travel allowance.

6. LGU-HBCU Connection

Of the 12 HBCU journalism career-placement representatives who responded to the survey, nine indicated that they had never received job announcements from LGU agricultural communications departments; 10 said they had never received internship announcements from LGUs. Only one respondent could remember which LGU had sent job or internship notices. One recalled having received a journalism job notice from Michigan State University while another recalled having received a journalism internship notice from the University of Missouri.

7. How HBCUs Like to Hear About Openings

When asked how they prefer to receive notices about job or internship vacancies, respondents preferred written messages over any other technique (1 = most-preferred method; 5 = least-preferred method). The second most-popular choice was e-mail (Table 10). Such messages can be targeted and are easy for career-placement representatives to share with students or recent graduates.

Table 10. *How HBCUs prefer to receive job and internship notices*

| Notification method | Average |
|---------------------|---------|
| Printed notices | 1.27 |
| E-mail | 2.20 |
| Posted on the Web | 2.50 |
| Fax | 3.40 |
| Telephone | 3.75 |
| Job fairs | 3.80 |

8. Internships

Hundreds of students graduate from HBCU journalism programs each year. And most of the students will have completed one or more internships before they graduate. When asked what sorts of benefits typical internships offer to students, respondents said that more than three quarters of intern-

Professional Development

ships are eligible for college credit while about two thirds of the internships are for experience only. Respondents indicated that 10% or fewer of employers offer wages, stipends, or transportation or housing allowances to student interns. Respondents indicated that about two thirds of the internships were located near their universities. Summer internships, however, sometimes are located near students' hometowns or other places they choose to live.

Reaching Out to HBCUs

To increase the likelihood of getting applications from African Americans, target HBCU journalism programs, not local papers or university Web sites that require potential applicants to seek you out. The same can hold true for other minority groups.

To get more minorities into the Extension pipeline, offer internships. Don't limit hires to your own university. Send notices to HBCU (and other minority) journalism programs, especially for summer jobs. Students often look for jobs "back home" during the summer.

Internships that offer wages are not the norm and are highly sought after by students.

Send print and e-mail messages directly to career-placement specialists at HBCUs (and other such universities).

About the Author

LaRae M. Donnellan has been a professor of journalism and public relations at the School of Journalism and Graphic Communication, Florida A&M University, since 2001. She is a former ACE president. In 2003-2004, she earned the Accredited in Public Relations (APR) and Certified Public Relations Counselor (CPRC) designations. Prior to joining FAMU, she was at the universities of Vermont, Idaho, and Tennessee. She is the author of *A Practical Guide to Newsletter Editing and Design*, two book chapters, and numerous journal articles and other publications. She has a bachelor's and master's degree from the University of Minnesota and a doctorate from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Her e-mail address is larae9411@hotmail.com.

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