

Higher Ed Impact

Follow AI

- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)

Share This Page:

[Share on twitter](#) [Share on facebook](#) [Share on email](#) [Share on print](#)

Boosting Retention for Ethnic Minority Students: Faculty Buy-in and Involvement

Date Published: April 27, 2012

For this third article in our series on supporting the academic success of underrepresented minority students, we interviewed Goldie Adele, director of the Disability Resource Center at Southern Connecticut State University. Adele is an attorney with expertise in diversity and disability services, a past chair of the National Bar Association, Legislative Division, and a key thinker on supporting diverse student populations.

In this article, we'll share Adele's tips for inviting meaningful faculty involvement and buy-in.

Presenting the Plan

When it comes to making the case for their involvement to faculty, Adele suggests taking a methodical approach. "It's very important to bring the deans and department chairs on board first," Adele notes, "and then approach faculty with a clear plan."

Approach the faculty with:

- Specific goals for how the institution hopes to improve minority student retention
- A framework or foundation for how the plan -- how the institution hopes to meet those goals
- The data and the research that documents the need and provides the rationale for your approach

In other words, show the rigor in your thinking, and have the data ready to support it. "Rather than just tell faculty "This is the plan, and this is your part in it," Adele cautions, "invite them into the big picture of the institution's plan for recruiting, retaining, and educating minority students ... and the reasons for it. Then invite their input, listen closely. Have them act as contributors to the plan."

Most especially, after presenting faculty with the data and with the framework for a plan to move forward, invite faculty to form their own committees or learning communities to investigate how they can address the issues and what resources they can bring to bear to make a real impact. Encourage this discussion within departments and across disciplines. For the plan to succeed, faculty must assume ownership of it.

WHO TO INVOLVE AND WHEN

If this initiative is a strategic priority with support from the top, start by meeting with the provost. If your institution has a faculty union, meet with the union leader and the provost. It will be critical that the champion of the initiative and these two individuals are on the same page from the outset. "If the union head is on board," Adele notes, "a directive from the provost will gather more momentum."

Then proceed to the deans and the department chairs.

If this is more of a grassroots initiative, identify those faculty who may be potential "champions" of the effort.

"Look for faculty who are influential among their peers," Adele advises, "and who are passionate for minority students. But don't just look for faculty who are from ethnic minorities themselves. Minority faculty are not the only faculty who will be passionate about minority students, and it is not true that only minority faculty can take the lead on minority issues. This is a fallacy. Get everyone involved that you can."

Specific Ways to Involve Faculty

The first step -- which many institutions have already or are currently undertaking -- is to involve faculty in an early alert and intervention initiative for at-risk students. If you regard faculty as the "front lines" in empowering student success at your institution, then you need to focus first on educating faculty about at-risk students and their needs, as well as what resources on campus faculty can connect those students with when needed, and especially who on campus can serve as a resource for the faculty themselves in helping them determine when and how to intervene. To learn more, read our article "[Identifying and Intervening with At-Risk Students](#)."

Beyond an early alert initiative:

- Identify faculty who can volunteer a few hours a week at an academic resource center (your writing center or your math lab)
- Encourage faculty to support programs hosted by minority student organizations on your campus; "seeing both minority and non-minority faculty attending or participating in these programs," Adele advises, "is a huge psychological boost, and further connects students with a faculty who care about them and can serve as resources to them"
- Help connect student organizations serving minority students with faculty advisors

In a related example, the University of Iowa is launching an initiative focused more broadly on first-generation students, aimed at connecting under-represented students with their peers and with faculty mentors. The initiative invites faculty who are from under-represented backgrounds to self-identify, and the university hopes to offer:

- "Brown bag" lunch seminars for ethnic minority and first-generation students, where a faculty member converses with the students for an hour, answering questions, providing encouragement, and addressing recurrent challenges
- (At a later phase of the initiative) End-of-year dinners with a first-generation faculty keynote speaker, a venue for first-generation faculty and first-generation students to socialize

INCENTIVIZING INVOLVEMENT

Faculty are the key to any effective retention initiative; if your institution is serious about seeing gains in student persistence for ethnic minorities, faculty work toward these outcomes has to be incentivized, recognized, and rewarded. Ways to do this include:

- Tying this form of institutional service to faculty evaluation and ensuring that this service can be quantified, documented, and included in the tenure portfolio. (For more information on undertaking the significant task of defining clear evaluation criteria and a clearer performance evaluation process for faculty as well as the institution's administrative staff, review our recent edition of *Higher Ed Impact: Monthly Diagnostic*, "[Deploying Intentional Staff Performance Metrics in Higher Education](#).")
- Creating a grants and awards program that could fund faculty research on recruitment and retention of minority students, thus not only inviting and rewarding closer faculty involvement in a retention initiative but also advancing our knowledge about the factors that impact student success.