Introduction

The President’s Institutional Diversity Council was convened in January of 2006 under the leadership of Larri Mazon. The Council was charged with expanding on two of the recommendations made by the diversity committee last year.

- To develop a holistic and systemic admission process to insure the recruitment, admission and enrollment of a more diverse student body.
- To develop a support service system that integrates Trio program services and personnel, into a coordinated effort to meet the needs of all students, and insure high retention and graduation rates.

The members of the Diversity Council included:

Mr. Larri Mazon, Director of the Center for Multicultural Relations, Chair
Dr. Debnam Chappell, Dean of Freshman
Dr. Georgia Day, Assistant Vice President, Director of Trio Programs
Ms. Deirdre Eller, Director of New Student Programs
Mr. James Fitzpatrick, Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs
Dr. Betsy Gardner, Psychology Department
Dr. Evangelos Hadjimichael, Dean, School of Engineering
Mr. William Johnson, Associate Director of Undergraduate Admission for Diversity
Ms. Karen Pellegrino, Director of Undergraduate Admission
Dr. Thomas Pellegrino, Dean of Students
Mr. Cynthia Swift, Coordinator of Academic Advantage Program
Dr. Renee White, Department of Sociology, Black Studies
Dr. Yohuru Williams, Department of History, Black Studies

The Council met weekly from January through May. The Council made a number of specific proposals for new programs and general recommendations for future activities. Specific topics for the future agenda of the Diversity Council were also proposed.

Process and Organization

In order to address our specific charges, the Council was divided into three working committees:
Admission Process and Policies; Retention Strategies and Resources and Program Development. The Committees were guided by a Steering Committee. (See Appendix 1 for membership and specific committee charges.) The individual committees met regularly to discuss their specific charges and brought recommendations to the Council as a whole.

The Admission Process and Policies Committee

In response to a recommendation made by the Diversity Committee last year, the Office of Undergraduate Admission added a new senior position. The Associate Director of Diversity is charged with overseeing the Office’s recruitment efforts of students from all diverse populations. A concerted effort was made this fall to visit more high schools and communities with a diverse profile. In order to recruit these students, it is necessary for Fairfield University to develop strong relationships with schools, counselors, and programs that assist college bound students. Contact was made with a number of college enrichment programs that brought students to campus as well.

The process of reviewing the applications of all AHANA students was revised. All AHANA students were read by the Associate Director of Admission for Diversity as either a first or second reader. This was important as the office sought to more thoroughly review the credentials and assess the abilities of AHANA students applying to the University.
The committee was able to utilize the combined resources of all individuals on the council to make improvements to the annual AHANA yield activity Horizons’ Weekend. These enhancements included a program dedicated to parents, gift packs for the students, larger venues to hold activities, more organized activities for students in the evening and a larger network of professionals in frequent contact with current students who might serve as hosts. A wider range of faculty, staff, and administrators were participants in the program giving students and their families easy access to them and the ability to address any issues or concerns that they might have before deciding to attend Fairfield. Students from our New York City Community Partner schools were invited to attend the Fairfield Awards Dinner by the Office of Undergraduate Admission and the Office of Development. This event gave the prospective students who had been offered the Community Partners Scholarship a chance to engage with alumni, current students, and various administrators at the University.

**Retention Strategies and Resources Committee**

The Committee on Retention focused on a number of questions which need to be addressed in order to enhance the retention of all students at Fairfield, and particularly those students from diverse backgrounds. The Committee suggested that we examine model programs at other institutions and address critical questions regarding their programs, such as why they have been successful and what specific programs and innovations have been put in place to increase enrollment and retention. Research is also needed on the expectations and cultural differences between various ethnic groups. It was acknowledged that the first step towards improving the retention of diverse students is the creation of a critical mass on campus.

The University already has a great deal of data regarding the enrollment and retention of all Fairfield students, and particularly students from diverse backgrounds. Some of the questions which must be further probed include:

- Who struggles most at Fairfield?
- Which majors appear to be most problematic for students?
- Who is having difficult with transition?
- What are the specific issues regarding the satisfaction of first year students?
- What are the specific issues regarding the satisfaction of sophomores? Are there specific predictors of sophomore year withdrawals?
- What are the specific issues surrounding the retention of AHANA students at Fairfield?
- Should we require a standard survey for students who are withdrawing voluntarily?

It was noted that in order to create programs to enhance the retention of all students, global change was needed within the Fairfield University community. This change must include conveying specific expectations about diversity to the parents of our students, as well as training students, faculty, staff and administrators about the University’s expectations.

**Program Development Committee**

The May 2005 Report of the Committee on diversity commented on specific deficiencies in the programs, activities and event planning that typify the Fairfield University living experience. Echoing these points, the subcommittee on programming noted that one of the reasons why efforts at addressing this cultural cool revolves around the concept of comfort. In one respect, a portion of the Fairfield University community does not find Fairfield to be a comfortable home, particularly when it comes to the programs and events offered for consumption by students, as well as education and seminars. Conversely, the majority population at Fairfield has never been challenged to go outside its “comfort zone” when it comes to challenging concepts in the areas of culture, lifestyle and diversity. Fairfield has failed in this area because it has not challenged the majority culture’s belief system and creature comforts. This is necessary because as an educational institution, Fairfield failed its students when it allows them to become complacent about the diverse and difficult world outside the utopian-like campus life inside Fairfield’s four walls. Not unlike our alcohol culture, our culture which rejects diversity only perpetuates dangerous attitudes, ones that will harm students once they have graduated.
Project Excel, one of the programs which functions under the umbrella of the Fairfield University TRIO Programs, represents a model for a successful retention program for eligible students. All of the TRIO Programs operate with two major goals in mind. The first is to “increase the retention and graduation rates of eligible students.” The second is to “foster an institutional climate supportive of the success of low-income and first generation college students, and individuals with disabilities.” Project Excel accomplishes these goals by involving a select group of students in an intense summer program which provides the opportunity to take two Fairfield course while receiving academic support and participating in social activities. During the academic year an expanded group of students are offered support and tutorial services.

**Strategies and Recommendations**

Over the course of the past year, a number of actions have already been taken to address some of the issues outlined in the Council’s charge. These actions include:

- Development of Associate Director of Admission for Diversity position as well as designation of junior staff member whose primary responsibility is the recruitment of AHANA students.
- Significant enhancement of financial aid packages for AHANA students, including permanent addition of $3 million dollars to financial aid budget, allowing us to meet the full demonstrated financial need of all AHANA students.
- Enhancement of Horizons’ Weekend Program for admitted AHANA students.
- Commitment to host College Summit summer program on campus.
- Movement of Offices of the University TRIO Programs to a more central location on campus.
- Education of committee members on issues surrounding the mentoring and retention of diverse students.
- Participation in mentorship workshop offered in June at Boston College.
- Development of Academic Advantage Summer Scholars Program. (Further detail on the program follows.)

Throughout its conversations, the Council continually returned to the topic of mentorship. It was acknowledged that a key component in the success of all college students is the presence of mentors. This need is magnified in AHANA students. A theme throughout our recommendations for the future is the development of opportunities for mentorship for our students. The responsibility for this development must be one that is shared by all facets of the University, including the academic deans and faculty. In addition, students must also be provided with the opportunity to “give back” to others, in the hopes that students will begin to assume greater ownership for their own development.

In addition, a number of specific recommendations for the future were made relating to the work of the individual committees.

- Continued and expanded outreach to Community Partnership Schools, as well as other designated high schools and agencies with significant AHANA populations. Included in this recommendation is the desire to bring these students to campus, since statistically a very small number of AHANA students actually visit campus prior to admission.
- Re-evaluation of traditional travel plans and identification of high schools in all travel regions with significant populations of college bound AHANA students.
- Coordinated outreach to admitted AHANA students from multiple members of the Fairfield University community, including current students, faculty and administrators.
- Re-activate University Retention Committee. Included in this recommendation would be an ongoing assessment of “student satisfaction” as an important element of student retention.
- Develop a program for training of new mentors, including students.
- Emphasize importance of “zero tolerance” policy on racial intolerance for entire university community. Included in this recommendation is the development of a poster for display around campus to emphasize the importance of “zero tolerance.” Also, add a specific element to the
training programs for all student leaders, including resident assistants, on the importance of “zero
tolerance.”
- Develop a reading packet on dealing with diversity for distribution to parents during summer
orientation.

**Description of Academic Advantage Program, Short and Long Range plans and goals associated with its development**

**Recommendations for future Diversity Council activities:**

Public statement of university standards, zero tolerance

Focus on transforming campus culture and environment

Focus on transforming the curriculum

Recommendations for composition of future council

Senior Position for diversity – Could we establish that one of the goals for future council meetings is a more thorough description of the position?