

Psychology's diversity leaps 'Beyond 2000'

A mentoring program for ethnic-minority community college students recounts its successes and looks to secure it's future.

BY EILEEN O'CONNOR
Monitor staff

When Keith LeQuay, a Howard University doctoral student in social psychology, wanted to help hoist other minorities over psychology's pinnacles, he decided to mentor at Diversity Project (DP) 2000, a summer institute for community college minorities held at APA's Annual Convention. In collaboration with Psi Beta, the national community college honor society in psychology, and APA's Office of Ethnic and Minority Affairs (OEMA), DP 2000 matched LeQuay with students seeking exposure to career opportunities and lessons in leadership.

LeQuay's ethnically diverse mix of six students spent their first two days participating in leadership and mentoring exercises, and the next two attending the convention, where they practiced their newly honed skills networking with prominent ethnic-minority professionals.

His group "felt very empowered by being exposed to all this knowledge and support," LeQuay says. "They were glad to attend talks on topics—from education to drug prevention—which exposed them to disciplines besides the traditional clinical area."

Equally important, he says, was the exposure to different students the program provided. "There was a nice cultural exchange and comradeship."

Pointing his young colleagues on the path to success was indeed gratifying, but perhaps the greatest



Teacher, community activist and burgeoning author—for Dr. Tawa M. Witko, it all started with the Diversity Project. She says the experience "changed my life, and touched others'."

lesson LeQuay took away from DP 2000 was a renewed sense of why he himself chose to become a psychologist. By giving back to his own minority-student community, LeQuay's dedication to diversifying the field—both in terms of membership and the issues addressed—was strengthened. Now in its seventh year of boosting recruitment and retention, DP has already primed 200 students for APA's Annual Conventions and is looking forward to continuing its work this year and beyond.

Growth beyond 2000

Sandra Ladd conceived of the program, now called DP 2000 and Beyond (DP2KB), as national

president of Psi Beta in 1992. Her goal was to "help nurture the development of psychologists for a global community," she says.

The program's emphasis, indeed celebration, of difference is elemental to its mission of checking the underrepresentation of minorities in psychology. While ethnic minorities make up 29 percent of the U.S. population, only 5 percent are psychologists—a disparity OEMA Director Bertha Holliday, PhD, blames on insufficient funding and academic support for ethnic minorities in psychology at the high school and college levels.

"Waiting to contribute money and support ethnic minorities until the doctoral level is the nature of the

problem, as you have lost two-thirds of your potential by then," she laments.

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Sandra Ladd

Founder, Diversity Project 2000

and Beyond

Holliday dubs DP2KB's recruiting strategy a "pipeline approach"—starting on the community college level to retain and encourage students to take the next step toward a PhD. The program reaches minorities by operating as "a cooperative and collaborative effort," says Robin Hailstorcks, PhD, who began co-directing with Ladd in 1998. In addition to Psi Beta and OEMA, the program attributes its success to the hard work and generosity of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the Center for Mental Health Services and the American Association of Community Colleges.

Also key to the program's success, says Ladd, is its student focus.

"Students are empowered to be actively involved in all aspects of the program," she explains. "They introduce speakers, monitor the time of presentations, problem-solve in teams and develop their mentoring networks. It is impossible to differentiate program facilitators from student participants."

But perhaps one of DP2KB's greatest strengths is the fact that "alumni become co-directors," Hailstorcks points out. "Consistent with the focus on leadership training," she explains, two alumni interns become co-directors for a four-year period and during the third year train the second set of interns. This cycle

ensures DP's maintenance while empowering students to run the program. Both Ladd and Hailstorcks say their top priority now is to secure enough funding to keep the program going and to develop a model that can be translated to other disciplines.

Future promise meets the present

This year, Ladd and Hailstorcks will serve as executive committee co-chairs. Leadership's torch has passed to Tawa M. Witko, PsyD, co-director for the West Coast, and Orville Jackson III, co-director for the East Coast. They have grown alongside DP since 1994, when they were students at the first institute, and their stories are nothing short of inspiring.

Jackson, currently finishing the Cognition, Brain and Behavior Program at Harvard University; recalls "the first letter of recommendation I ever got—it was to attend Diversity Project 2000!" Jackson's fate thereafter was signed and sealed. "After that experience I was hooked," he says. "The program really jazzed me up about the field and showed me I had a place in psychology;"

Fed by the encouragement of multiethnic mentors and presenters pursuing equally diverse specialties, Jackson's "tentative interest" bloomed into a strong drive that pushed him all the way into graduate study.

Now facing his first year as director, Jackson will keep traditions, such as the popular business-card collecting contest—in which the student who has garnered the most professional contacts at the end of the conference wins a prize—going strong. Such activities foster students' networking skills, introduce new career options and, Jackson adds, "are a lot of fun!"

Two years from now, when he cedes his student status for a PhD, Jackson will still look to DP2KB as a source of professional and personal support as a minority psychologist. As a professional, Jackson is confident the program will help him "better understand, appreciate and participate in the increasing diversity of our discipline, and our world."

West Coast mainstay Witko, who recently received her doctorate in clinical psychology from the California School of Professional Psychology, can also mark the moment when DP set her upon the course to becoming a professional psychologist.

"I was one of five full-grant recipients from different regions in 1994,"

she says. "I was floating on air the entire time, and for years afterward."

Witko knows the experience "changed my life, and touched others" as well. In particular, American Indian mentors showed Witko she "wasn't the only one and could still serve my people in the field."

Today, Witko works part-time at Fullerton Community College, where she mentors students and exposes them to diversity issues from their very first psychology course. In addition, she works full-time at the United American Indian Involvement Inc. in Los Angeles, bringing community-based health, wellness and education programs to the people she always wanted to serve; DP showed her how.

The mental health needs of urban Indians are of particular interest to Witko, and recently APA Books offered her a contract to write on this very subject. Conceiving a vital project and bringing it to fruition is an accomplishment Witko credits to the inspiration and encouragement she discovers, to this day, in the Diversity Project.

Brightening the prospects

APA members can get involved in the DP2KB program by volunteering to replicate it on a state or regional basis, or by serving as presenters or mentors.

Perhaps this year's keynote speaker, Gail Wyatt, PhD, illustrates the Diversity Project's driving force when she says, "I like to speak to my future. That is why I take the time to speak to students. I grew up in a segregated America as a colored girl. To be a professor at UCLA, a highly successful author, a wife and mother and to have grants equaling millions of dollars is where many aspire to be. I would like to help them get there."

From her perspective as OEMA director, Holliday too believes in the magic students can weave from within a support network.

"If Tawa [Witko] hadn't made that link and realized there was a way to combine her interest in psychology with working with her people, she would not be a psychologist today," she says.

Like the participants themselves, the needs—and possibilities—for DP2KB are endless.

For more information about how to participate in Diversity Project 2000 and Beyond, contact Alberto Figueroa, OEMA program officer, at afigueroa@apa.org or (202) 336-6029.