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Rapporteur's Report

A Summarized Report on Equal and Equitable Access: Obstacles and Opportunities in International Education

This report will summarize the issues addressed at the session titled Toward Equal and Equitable Access: Obstacles and Opportunities in International Education.

The purpose of this session was to examine the tangible and intangible barriers and challenges to international and foreign language education for low-income, disadvantaged and underrepresented students.

It was to include the obstacles to providing the education, training and credentialing that is prerequisite for successful minority pursuit of careers in the international arena, as well as for creating a more internationally aware body of global citizens among minorities. The research was to focus on best practices or proven models, for increasing minority participation in international education and, ultimately, international careers.

Dr. Nicole Norfles' paper focused on study abroad (a tangible subset of international education) in relation to TRIO programs. However the discussion branched out into other broader areas.

The session was introduced by Dr. Ben Kedia asking the participants to synthesize the important and critical challenges for equal and equitable access albeit internal, external institutional, personal and/or professional and then requested not only a litany of challenges but also to provide recommendations.

Background:

In conducting research on this topic, Dr. Norfles discovered that even though the goal of the paper was to examine the barriers and challenges to international and foreign language education for low-income, disadvantaged and underrepresented students, particularly the obstacles providing education, training and credentialing that is prerequisite for their successful pursuit of careers in the international arena, the available data was extremely limited. Therefore the question was redesigned to place a focus on perceptions of study abroad in relation to TRIO programs.

The limited findings included the following, which applies to the broader issue of international education and opportunities for underrepresented students:

A study conducted in 1998 (Washington) looked at the perception and attitudes of African Americans with a focus on study abroad. The study looked at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and a Majority institution. Two areas of significance included:

- a. Income – the cost factor
- b. Institutional affect between the HBCU level of information provided to students and level of information provided at the Majority institution.

In order to obtain data on the topic the question was redesigned to ascertain the following:

1. Do TRIO program directors' perceive the study abroad opportunities for TRIO participants?
2. Are TRIO participants made aware of study abroad opportunities?
3. What are the perceived barriers to study abroad for TRIO participants?

Approximately 1,100 TRIO directors were surveyed with a 25% response rate.

The survey rendered the following barriers (in many cases unique to the underrepresented population and relevant to the larger issue of equitable access):

Opportunity Cost:

Participants argued that opportunity cost was a barrier. In this case, opportunity cost refers to the cost of the study abroad experience per se but the cost of being away, leaving a full-time and part-time position, family responsibilities (i.e. child constraints) and other financial commitments. In such cases, a stipend would be needed.

Lack of Information:

Explaining the logistics of the abroad experience is important but equally, or perhaps even more important, is the need for information workshops to help students understand the cost benefits. In addition, the only general information on the international experience found through the media is negative and may deter underrepresented or disadvantaged students from pursuing international opportunities.

Family Constraints:

The lack of emotional and financial support from the family comes as a result of not fully understanding the benefits of the experience.

It should be noted that approximately half of the survey respondents indicated that language was not a barrier.

The American media was another major barrier mentioned in the discussion.

Recommendations:

1. Collaborations and Partnerships (These are important as the Department of Education representative indicated. On a policy level, Congress and the administration are not interested in duplicating efforts, therefore they would rather see things streamlined through collaborations in order to economize.)

a. International studies and professional schools

- Study abroad can be used as a hook to get students (Business and Engineering for example) interested in studying a language. After their abroad experience they will continue with their professional studies, but may also study a language, albeit Mandarin or Zulu on the side.
- Encourage double majors (Business and Area Studies).
- Undergraduate FLAS program initiative can have a dramatic impact in making international careers plausible. (i.e., taking FLAS in law school could lead to a student returning to a career as a lawyer in the State Department.)

b. Community Colleges

Encourage international education at the community college level, where a large number of first generation students and underrepresented students may start at a two-year institution due to the cost factor and then transfer to a four-year institution. This, like K-12 collaboration, will encourage international involvement early. Another option at the two-year institution level is to take advantage of the existing accelerated (two week) abroad experiences.

c. Engage in K-12 partnerships and collaborations

Highlight international opportunities in pre-college programs. For example: The Ralph Bunche Centenary is taking place this year and the steering committee in Washington, DC has partnered with the DCPS (DC Public Schools) to provide international education programming that encourages careers in International Affairs through essay writing and other activities. This effort can also be duplicated in other cities and states.

2. Provide proper information through an outreach mechanism to this population

- Another participant in our session referred to this as “connecting the dots”. There are students that are interested but are unclear of their options and they need someone to walk them through the process so it is clear and feasible.
- Mentoring – Inviting professionals with similar ethnic backgrounds to talk about their international experiences and instill the benefits of a global perspective.

3. Develop marketing research for International Programs that will appeal to underrepresented students.

- It was suggested that higher education fails to market international education opportunities successfully to this target population. A marketing firm could possibly be used to work for the coalition in order to present information on International Affairs and the benefits of an international experience in a way that would be appealing to underrepresented students.
- Place this information in a central location (i.e., a Website) that would drive students through enticing marketing to the site.

4. Diversify field of International Educators and Administrators

- This recommendation came from an administrator in a large, predominately white midwestern state school. Students witness and observe other underrepresented students advancing and being successful in the professional area (Business, Law, and Engineering). However, students find it difficult to come across that same type of representation in some of their study abroad or international programs offices. It is also hard to find the same representation in International Affairs careers. That is why programs such as the Institute for International Public Policy can serve as a pool of talent for well-trained language proficient internationalists.

Enlist heritage speakers to teach

- Participants in the session mentioned that there are many heritage speakers (Africans/Asians) that work in computer labs on campus. This is a pool of talent that can be utilized to teach their (in many cases less commonly taught) language.

5. Increase capacity of MSIs (Minority Serving Institutions) for foreign language beyond infusion of business

- If a student would like to learn a less commonly taught language, provided that opportunity at institutions that have the largest populations of underrepresented students.

Best Practices:

University of Wisconsin, Whitewater has college level TRIO programs that provide students with international educational experiences and international curriculum. This program also promotes staff development along international subject matter since they may accompany students on foreign travel.

Wesleyan University has a TRIO pre-college outreach program for secondary students. This program creates in essence a pipeline for international education and has proven successful in engaging student's interest at an earlier age.

The Council for Opportunity in Education ensures professional development for TRIO professionals. This allows individuals with access to underrepresented students to go abroad, network with professionals in other countries as well as promote abroad education, curriculum and experiences for the students.

IIPP's Assistant Director is conducting an outreach initiative with secondary schools to increase the opportunities and individual applicants with International Affairs disciplines at the college level that participate in the program.

Conclusion:

It is unfortunate that very limited data is available on this important issue. However, Dr. Norfles' study did provide an ideal platform for the discussion on the topic. Participants expressed that there is ample room for growth in this area. As stated in the recommendations, more concentration should be applied to research, which can be accomplished through collaboration and partnerships. Keeping this concept at the forefront, continued exploration of equal and equitable access for minorities in International Affairs is necessary. The opportunity to continue dialog within the coalition and international education arena as a whole will be a catalyst to addressing inequities in the field. This in turn paves the path to rectifying inequitable access and aiding in the transformation of obstacles into opportunities.

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