

Three Summer Programs for Minority Students: The Case at Stanford University

Andrew John Lisac

Summer at universities is an appropriate time for activities that enhance minority recruitment and retention efforts, explore multicultural issues or maximize the institution's resources for students of color. Stanford's open admissions policy in the summer, its emphasis on research, and the close mentoring relationships and flexibility in student, faculty, and staff schedules make such projects especially well suited for its Summer Session.

Historically, the goals of the Summer Session at Stanford, in operation since 1916, have been to foster innovative curricula and offer departments flexibility in arranging visiting faculty appointments. What has occurred in the past few years is a convergence of two sets of institutional goals in the summer, the first set concerned with educational innovation and the second set concerned with transforming the University into a more pluralistic academic environment.

The following summer programs represent distinct aspects of this convergence of pluralistic and innovative goals: the American Indian Summer Institute Program (AISIP), the Introduction to Academic Medicine Program, and the Stanford Summer Introduction to Research Program (SSIRP). The following profiles examine the goals and experiences of each program as a representative example and suggest a rich array of possibilities for universities concerned with preparing students for the multiracial and multicultural realities of American society.

American Indian Summer Institute Program

In January 1988, Stanford University was awarded a large six-year grant from the James Irvine Foundation to increase the number of minority students who will teach in secondary school and university settings in the future. The Stanford/Irvine Foundation partnership complemented an existing institutional goal: the encouragement of more students to enter educational careers. The partnership allowed the university considerable flexibility in

addressing the more difficult task of increasing the supply of minority students directed toward academic careers.

At the undergraduate level of admissions and curricula, a recent initiative developed by the small community of American Indian faculty and staff at Stanford has created a model prematriculation program that departs from the standard program of this type in important ways. Prematriculation programs have been thought of primarily as remedial programs for students who lack the necessary training to have an equitable opportunity for success in college. For this reason the curricula of such programs have stressed basic skills in math, science, writing, or a combination of these. Program duration is several weeks just before matriculation or first-year orientation, hence the title. Students completing the program enter introductory courses with what is assumed to be an equal chance for success as any other fiscal-year student.

Due to the students' presumed or demonstrated deficit in academic training, this type of program came to be known as "deficit training" in discussions at Stanford. For students invited to participate in a deficit-training program, problems can arise around the notion that participation assumes substandard status, thereby reinforcing the educational disadvantage. When this occurs at the beginning of a college career, the long-term effects on self-esteem can be quite severe. Another consequence sometimes associated with the deficit model has been the confusion of cultural difference with disadvantage — such that *difference* is equated automatically with *academic impoverishment*.

American Indians as a whole have had the highest attrition rate of any group of students at Stanford. Recent studies in cross-cultural education suggest a positive link between the affirmation of the student's distinct cultural learning environment and that student's educational performance.^{1,2,3} To enhance retention, AISIP evolved as a three-week intensive program integrating confidence-building and comfort in the university setting with a residential education program emphasizing community and interpersonal development. Close mentoring relation-

ships between the program's faculty and students are designed around the coursework; peer tutoring among Indian students is included to complement the instruction and provide Indian student role models. If the Indian studies context is viewed as a framework that can be replaced by any ethnic context, the program's social and academic attractions are such that any student might enjoy participation. Most importantly, the proposal was written and developed by American Indian faculty and staff who were intimately connected with the college transition problems experienced by American Indian students.

The American Indian Summer Institute Program begins when all admitted American Indian students planning to enroll at Stanford are sent information about the program. All student costs, including instruction, transportation, room and board are funded by the grant award. Students attend classes five days a week. Nonclass time is reserved for a wide variety of cultural and interpersonal workshops, tutoring and advising sessions, campus and local area tours, and group activities. Weeknights are for individual or small-group study; weekends are for outings and extracurricular activities.

Students live in the American Indian Theme House which is staffed by an American Indian resident fellow and his wife. Both are assisted by three upper-division American Indian resident assistants who share the responsibility for facilitating discussion groups, organizing group projects and outings, and operating the evening tutor service and study hall. One resident assistant specializes in math tutoring, one in writing tutoring, and one provides assistance in both areas. Three instructors are hired to teach in the program, two for the main course offerings in math and English, and one for the American Indian studies seminars.

The academic results from two summer groups are just beginning to be analyzed. Impact has been noted in the retention of students entering their second year and in completing core first-year courses. Significantly, AISIP students have made more progress in first-year introductory series and have received better grades than their non-AISIP counterparts in comparable or the same courses.

The features of this type of prematriculation program include: (1) the primary emphasis on interpersonal skills and confidence building, (2) origination and administration by the minority community, (3) a curriculum that is focused on learning skills rather than on subject-specific remedial training, and (4) social or academic attractions that any student would enjoy. Too, the program must be responsive to each unique individual through a diversity of educational processes and provide a 'continuum of services' between the students' prior educational/cultural

background and the academic environment at Stanford.⁴

Introduction to Academic Medicine Program

Prematriculation programs at the professional and graduate school levels have also shown to be beneficial at Stanford. The Irvine Foundation Grant for Minority Students was able to fund a portion of another model program sponsored by the Stanford Medical School since the mid-1980s. Comparison with the goals of the American Indian Summer Institute Program is instructive.

Underrepresented minorities have been entering the field of medicine in increasing numbers over the past 20 years with the aid of affirmative action programs.⁵ Stanford Medical School has been one of the leaders in this area, ranking among the top five schools in the country having significant minority student representation. Of the approximately 32,000 US medical school faculty in 1988, only 1.8 percent were from underrepresented minority backgrounds — and if one excludes the black medical schools and schools in Puerto Rico this percentage drops below one percent.⁶ This is an important statistic because it not only shows clearly the lack of minority medical school faculty but also shows the lack of potential role models for minority students currently enrolled in medical schools who might wish to consider academic careers.

An important component of the 10-week summer program is the opportunity for second- and third-year graduate minority medical students to be teaching assistants in the program's biochemistry and histology courses. They participate in the development of the course curriculum, give four to six lectures during the session, conduct problem sessions and reviews, develop the final examination, and provide academic counseling to students. These activities are more intense than those usually performed by teaching assistants, but provide the student with a more comprehensive experience in teaching.

Stanford Summer Introduction to Research Program

The two purposes of the Stanford Summer Introduction to Research Program (SSIRP) are to identify and enlarge the national pool of first-rate underrepresented minority undergraduates — defined by the program as American Indian, Black, Mexican American/Chicano, and Puerto Rican — who would consider applying to graduate school, and to introduce these undergraduates to research with a

Stanford faculty mentor. The program is conducted in the summer to take advantage of faculty research projects underway at that time and the open admissions policy for the Summer Session which encourages undergraduates from other universities to participate. The research projects involve substantive work under faculty sponsorship. SSIRP also augments these experiences through enrichment activities such as seminars on practical matters in the life of researcher/academicians, site visits to scholarly and scientific facilities, and a required presentation by the students on their summer research project. Students receive a stipend and the program covers the student's travel costs to and from Stanford.

The assignment of students to faculty mentors is made by the Graduate Studies Recruitment and Retention Office under the close supervision of the dean of graduate studies. This commitment to undergraduates by graduate studies personnel displays the recognition that minority recruitment at the graduate level must begin in the undergraduate years. The student's background and interests are carefully matched with faculty who have volunteered to participate. Currently there are over a hundred faculty volunteers — far more than can be accommodated with the modest resources of the program.

Students receive support through frequent meetings with their mentors and the mentors' research staffs. They receive access to research equipment, materials, and the necessary scholarly journals. Students are expected to work fulltime, five days a week; however, due to the excitement of the project many students choose to work longer hours. The result of the summer experience is the insight and background each student gains and, in many cases, students use their summer preliminary research for a senior honors thesis at their home university.

Students live together in a cluster that promotes the sharing of information on graduate programs and admissions issues, the particulars of graduate study in a variety of fields, and integrating graduate issues with nonacademic lifestyle issues. Students and faculty have been extremely positive in their evaluations of the program.

Conclusion

Summer programs at universities serve a useful function. Such programs, as a group — and especially those which support the "continuum of services" model — can combine the goals of educational programming for the gifted with new opportunities for minority students. Exposure to the university teaching and research environment gives minority students an alternative to predetermined career

paths, opening the possibility of an interest in graduate programs and educational careers.

As our culture becomes increasingly diverse, we will need many more educators who have benefited from experiences such as prematriculation programs. In the pluralistic world of the late 20th century, programs such as these and other more innovative programs will be necessary to make real progress in the educational level of the diverse people who comprise our nation. Universities are uniquely positioned to lead in new and exciting directions as we attempt to ensure disadvantaged students a place in the society of the future, but it will take experimentation, sharing ideas that work in practice, and renewed commitment to action by each educational institution.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Sing, David Kekaulike. "Raising the achievement level of native Hawaiians in the college classroom through the matching of teaching strategies with student characteristics," *unpublished doctoral dissertation*, Claremont Graduate School, 1986.
- 2 Gallimore, Ronald; R G Tharp and G E Speidel. "The relationship of sibling caretaking and attentiveness to a peer tutor" in *American Educational Research Journal*, 15, 1978, 267-273.
- 3 Jordan, Cathy. "The selection of culturally compatible teaching practices" in *Educational Perspectives*, 20, 1981, 16-19.
- 4 Clarke, Barbara. "Gifted education: an issue of equity" in *Educational Perspectives*, 26, 1989, 4-9.
- 5 Altman, Lawrence K and Elizabeth Rosenthal. "Doctors in distress," *New York Times*, 18 February 1990, 1.
- 6 Mendoza, Fernando, MD. "Irvine foundation proposal: early matriculation program," *photocopy* (Stanford CA, 1988), 2.

Andrew John Lisac is Assistant Director of the Summer Session at Stanford University and Grant Administrator for the Irvine Foundation Grants for Minority Students and Multicultural Curriculum Development. Founder of the American Indian Language Archives, he has taught minority history courses and semiotics at Stanford.
