2014 - 2015 Diversity Progress Report

The University of West Alabama (UWA) remains committed to establishing and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive campus environment for all. It remains the vision of UWA to build a community of students, faculty and staff in which diversity is a fundamental value. The University works hard to achieve this vision of inclusion and diversity through innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement as well as its ongoing efforts to recruit black students, faculty, and administrative staff. The following is a synopsis of diversity efforts and achievements during the past year.

UWA’s Division of Outreach Services is a vital resource in the region by assisting in the creation and growth of minority and disadvantaged businesses throughout the West Alabama Region by helping these businesses secure minority-business certifications, financial assistance, government contracts, contract bonds, training and technical assistance. In 2014, the Division of Outreach Services was awarded the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Supportive Service contract from the Alabama Department of Transportation. The DBE Supportive Services program provides many outstanding resources, individual business counseling sessions, and group trainings intended to help companies excel. The primary purpose of the DBE/SS is to provide training, assistance, and services to minority, disadvantaged, and women business.

UWA continues to partner with other Alabama-based institutions of higher education to advance program activity through its relationship with the Alabama Association of Higher Education Diversity Officers (ALAHEDO). ALAHEDO’s mission is to advise its members on issues, policies, and practices that affect diversity at higher education institutions in Alabama. The association proposes initiatives to ensure that institutions fairly meet the needs of minority faculty, staff and students. University personnel played an active role in the 2014 Statewide Diversity Conference “Continuing to Achieve Excellence through Diversity and Inclusion” held on November 13 -14, 2014.

The University of West Alabama’s Department of Athletics became one of only eighteen Division II schools selected for an NCAA Coaching Enhancement Grant, which provides funding for Division II institutions to enhance diversity and inclusion through the hiring of full-time coaching positions. The grant, which funds UWA’s Assistant Women’s Soccer Coach position addresses the issues of access, recruitment, selection and long-term success of women, racial/ethnic minorities and other individuals in Division II who seek to overcome hiring barriers.

The University of West Alabama Department of Athletics was also selected for the NCAA 2013 Division II Strategic Alliance Matching Grant Enhancement Program,
which provides funding for Division II institutions to enhance diversity and inclusion through the hiring of full-time administrative positions. The five-year grant, which funds UWA’s Assistant Compliance Director position, addresses the issues of access, recruitment, selection and long-term success of women, racial/ethnic minorities and other individuals in Division II who week to overcome hiring barriers.

In 2011, the College of Education received a multiple year PBI formula grant entitled Project BLOOM. Project BLOOM (Bringing Learners Opportunities through Outreach and Mentoring) is a collaborative effort between the Julia Tutwiler College of Education and the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. Project BLOOM promotes the enhancement of STEM Teacher Education for black American students through progressive workshops and outreach activities, imbuing them with the skills to integrate STEM best teaching practices in the teacher education program. The project addresses the critical shortage of minority students enrolling in teacher education programs in the areas of science and mathematics. Project BLOOM is designed to recruit first generation black American students as Project BLOOM candidates. Project BLOOM has two different tracks in which students are eligible for candidacy. The first track targets existing UWA students. The second track targets high school students from local partnership schools.

Project Engage is a capacity-building effort on the part of the University of West Alabama to attract and retain underserved students in STEM disciplines. A major focus of the project is to increase the retention rates of STEM majors between their freshman and sophomore years by immersing them in an engaging STEM-related curriculum, guided career counseling, and strategic mentoring activities. A secondary focus of Project Engage is to increase retention rates of sophomore, junior and senior-level STEM students through their continued participation in the project. The project also seeks to address the critical shortage of minorities in professional STEM fields by conducting outreach activities with area K-12 schools to encourage enrollment growth in science, math, and technology degree programs. The project is designed to improve passage, persistence, and retention rates of minority students in STEM courses.

In order to facilitate an increase in minority students’ motivation to pursue STEM-related careers, retention in STEM programs and completion of STEM degrees, Project Engage has implemented the following major components:

1. Strategic Mentoring of Minority STEM students;
2. Intensive STEM Engagement;
3. Guided Career Exploration;
4. Outreach to High-Need Students;
5. Collection and Analysis of Persistence and Completion Data.
High quality and timely data are collected and evaluated to determine the program’s impact on participants.

The University of West Alabama was awarded a $45,000 grant from the Alabama Department of Transportation in 2014 for a summer transportation institute. The Summer Transportation Institute will be a 3-week, residential program focused on sparking interest in careers in transportation among rural, west Alabama youth with a STEM-focus. The target service area is in great need of programs such as STI to motivate and prepare students for future employment. Currently, the college-going rate of target school graduates is only 40%, and only 43% of target school seniors are enrolled in a rigorous program of study. The target area perpetuates the cycle of ill-prepared high school graduates; the area is socio-economically deprived, a low percentage of adults have earned college degrees, and a high percentage, consequently, earn low wages. As a designated Minority Serving Institution, The University of West Alabama has significant experience with and is well-equipped to offer programmatic educational and outreach activities serving minority, first-generation, and low-income student populations.

Also, in 2014, UWA was awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation, Division of Integrative Organismal Systems. The grant offers twenty-four students, of whom sixteen are underrepresented minorities (women and African Americans), a 14-week modern cell biology class. The class provides students with training in cell and molecular biology techniques used in studying fungal discovery. In addition, the grant supported two summer internships, one was offered to an African American male, for ten weeks. Currently the grant is providing part time research employment to two African American students, in addition to the training and educational component in the area of plant-fungal interaction, and agriculture systems.

The University of West Alabama also encourages and supports a diverse student population. Black students accounted for a little more than 44% of the overall enrollment for Fall 2014, with the total number of black students equaling 1,769. Graduate enrollment of black students was 989 (47.8%), with undergraduate enrollment making up the remaining 780 students (40.6%). The University continues to monitor its admission policies and retention and transfer policies on a regular basis to ensure that all students receive equal treatment. In addition, all literature and informational brochures used in student recruitment and admissions are reviewed annually to determine if they contain clear statements of the University’s non-discrimination policy.

Currently, the University of West Alabama has 17 full-time black faculty members. The percentage of full-time black faculty is 13.8%. Seven of these faculty are tenured, five are tenure-track, and five are non-tenure track. One is currently a Minority Faculty Development Fellows, and two others are past recipients of the fellowship.
The University employs twenty-four full-time administrative and professional staff members, which is 14.2% of all administrative and professional staff. Minority administrative and professional staff hold the following positions: Associate Dean of the College of Education and School of Graduate Studies, Chief of Police, Director of Auxiliary Services, Director of Center of Business & Economic Services, Director of Outreach Services, Director of Small Business Development Center, Director of Instructional Support, Director of ADA Services, Assistant Director of Regional & Community Economic Development, Facilities Manager, Supply & Bookstore Manager, Warehouse Manager, Curriculum Laboratory Librarian, Admissions Counselor, Employment Counselor, Career Counselor, Grant & Community Project Administrator, Administrative Coordinator, Academic Coordinator, PC Technician, and four assistant coaches.