

Groups doing well, but needs more help

Program that's key to attracting minority students needs some company if IU is to make its goal

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Indiana University's goal of doubling the number of under-represented minority students by 2014 is ambitious, particularly at the same time admissions standards are becoming tougher. In plain English: the under-represented minorities at IU are blacks and Hispanics - the two groups that score the lowest on standardized tests used for college admissions.

IU's Groups Student Support Services program, featured in a two-day series by H-T reporter Steve Hinnefeld, must be one of the key components to helping IU meet its goal. The program helps first-generation college students - those without a parent who has completed a four-year college degree - get a strong start on the university experience.

About 65 percent of the students in the Groups program are either black or Hispanic. About half of the new black students at IU Bloomington every year take part in the program.

The students receive strong counseling, mentoring and support from program director Janice Wiggins, Groups alumni and the students' peers. The six-week experience is an introduction to the rigors of college, and includes the chance to build an invaluable academic and social network.

The program, which began in 1968, is getting better with age. During the last 10 years, the graduation rate for students who have entered the program has doubled.

"The Groups program is a major feature, historically and presently, of Indiana University's efforts to diversify the student body," said Charlie Nelms, IU's vice president for institutional development and student affairs. "And going forward, I fully anticipate it will continue to be a major piece."

IU needs to build on the success of Groups if it is going to have any shot at making its goals for minority recruitment. The university should investigate expanding it from its current enrollment of 300 students.

But more than that, IU officials must aggressively seek new avenues for attracting and retaining qualified under-represented minority students.

It's a diverse world out there, and IU's flagship campus can't be as effective as possible unless it reflects that.

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