

Pilot Evaluation of a Video Message to Increase Minority Enrollment in Mass Communication Doctoral Programs

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Executive Summary

- ✓ Students had favorable impressions of the DVD presentation.
- ✓ Students commented that, after watching the DVD, they felt “inspired” and described the featured faculty as “passionate.”
- ✓ Students said that, after viewing the DVD, they felt a greater responsibility as African- Americans to teach, and better understood the impact that a minority teacher can have upon a minority student.
- ✓ Students said the DVD made them more aware of the shortage of minority faculty. Some of the students said the DVD made them consider the teaching profession as a career.
- ✓ Students said that the DVD, in addition to discussing the benefits of academia, should have included more information about faculty obligations, research demands, and salaries.
- ✓ Students stated that more information about financial aid opportunities for graduate school should have been presented in the DVD.
- ✓ Students observed that the DVD should have featured a greater variety of university campuses. The DVD featured predominantly southern university campuses.

Background

Analyses of the characteristics of faculties in journalism and mass communication programs around the country in 2001—the most recent year for which data are available—show that they have become more diverse in the last 12 years, both in terms of gender and race and ethnicity.

The rate of change has been notable for women, suggesting slow but steady growth in the number and percentage of women who are on journalism and mass communication faculties around the country.

Diversification along racial and ethnic lines, however, has been much slower. More minorities are being hired, but the rate of hiring is comparable to that of other faculty members.

At present, only 35% of the faculty are female, and only 15% of the faculty are members of racial or ethnic minority groups. The population of students in journalism and mass communication programs around the country is considerably more diverse than the faculty population. In fact, a 25% gap exists between students and faculty in terms of gender! For race and ethnicity, the gap is 11%.

The evidence suggests that journalism and mass communication faculties are unlikely to diversify further without major changes in future hiring practices. To diversify, journalism programs around the country must hire more women and more members of racial and ethnic minorities.

Many journalism and mass communication programs fill faculty vacancies by hiring graduates of doctoral programs in the broad field of communication. Yet the evidence is that this key part of the pipeline is constricted.

In academic year 2002-2003, the nation's communication doctoral programs graduated 444 domestic doctoral students, only 21% of whom were members of racial or ethnic minorities. The figure was 20% in both 2000-2001 and 2001-2002. Of the 2002-2003 domestic doctoral degree recipients in the field of communication, 58.3% were female. That figure had been 58.4% a year earlier and 53.7% in academic year 2000-2001.

In short, without increased minority presence in the pipeline, change in the composition of journalism and mass communication faculties is not likely to be great in the near future, and students in journalism and mass communication will continue to be taught by faculty who are not like them.

Having a diverse faculty is important to students in the journalism and mass communication classrooms in the country. It also is important to mass communication scholarship. The research questions posed and the answers found through that scholarship are likely to be influenced by those in a position to ask them.

This Project

Changing the pipeline has to be a top priority of the field of journalism and mass communication.

Changing the pipeline means getting more minority students interested in doctoral study in the broad field of communication, and particularly in the subfield of mass communication.

To determine if it possible to influence career decision-making on the part of a target group, a video was produced to recruit minority students, and specifically African-American students, to graduate study in journalism and mass communication. The goal was to provide information to this target group of African-Americans about academic careers in such a way as to increase their interest in such study.

In order to create the video's script, interviews were conducted with faculty members in the field of communication at three institutions: Howard University in Washington, D.C., the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, and the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. These interviews were taped, analyzed, and edited to produce a cohesive message of recruitment. Moderator stand-ups and accompanying video images also were gathered at these locations. The video was produced by Alan Stecker, founder of ASV Communications of Atlanta and a faculty member in the Department of Telecommunications in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. The finished DVD, labeled "Making a Difference," won a bronze Telly Award in 2004 in the "recruitment" category.

The video message, which lasted 12 minutes and 30 seconds, offered the following arguments for enrollment in graduate study in the field of mass communication:

- ✓ It is important to have a diverse faculty to match and help create a diverse study body.
- ✓ Students should have an opportunity to be taught by someone like them.
- ✓ A professor's mission is to affect people through teaching.
- ✓ Teaching is a rewarding experience.
- ✓ Graduate study enables people to learn about themselves.
- ✓ Faculty members create new knowledge that is used to set policy and to improve media performance.
- ✓ Teachers get a lot back from their students.
- ✓ Many faculties in journalism and mass communication are seeking to hire more racial and ethnic minorities.

The message was moderated by an African-American male and included excerpts of interviews with faculty at the three institutions. Of the 10 persons interviewed and included in the DVD, five were female, six were African-American, one was of Hispanic origin, and three were non-Hispanic Whites.

A review of the literature on career choices of college students and other young people suggests that it should be possible to modify the interests of students through a video message of the sort produced. To test this, a pilot study was undertaken in which students who watched this video were compared with those who did not in terms of their interests in pursuing graduate study in the field of journalism and mass communication. Following the experiment, the students from both groups also participated in a focus group discussion of the DVD.

Because the pilot study, designed to allow for a pretest of procedures, involved only eight students, data from the experimental phase of the project are not presented here. Only data from the focus group are summarized.

Students were recruited for participation in this study with the assistance of an instructor for a race, gender, and media course in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia; through the university chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists; and through word of mouth. When a student expressed interest, he or she was presented a flier which listed the date and time for the study. Eight students participated in the experiment and they were all women; seven of those eight participated in the focus group.

The presentation of the DVDs took place in identical seminar rooms. Four students were placed in each of two groups. One group saw the DVD designed to increase interest in doctoral study in mass communication, while another group viewed a different video. The DVDs were viewed on identical oversized (laptop) computer screens. Students were seated around the table upon which the computer was placed, and at a comfortable distance from the viewing screen. Following completion of the view, the participants completed a questionnaire asking for their reactions to the video message. Next, students who had seen the relevant video message watched the irrelevant message; students who had not yet seen the relevant video watched it. After this second viewing, the respondents completed another questionnaire.

The students were then invited to take a break to eat snacks and have a soft drink. After this break, they were asked to come into a large conference room and seat themselves around a table. They were informed that the group discussion would be taped. A focus group leader then led the group through a discussion of the video. The responses were taped and later transcribed.

Summary of Focus Group Findings

Students positively received the DVD presentation. They stated that it felt like a recruitment video, and that, in many cases, it spoke to them personally. Students commented that after watching the DVD, they felt “inspired” and described the featured faculty as “passionate.” Many also stated that they felt a call to action. One student stated, “It kind of made me feel responsible, like I have a responsibility to go teach, or go pursue a degree in mass communications so that I can teach and be representative of my own culture, because as they said, they’re recruiting more minorities.” Another added, “...you never really think about the impact that having a minority teacher has on you, but even recently I was talking to one of my friends...and asked if they’d ever had a black teacher here, and two of them could say ‘no’...I didn’t realize there was such a high recruitment at the college level.”

The idea of having racial and ethnic role models in the classroom appealed to other focus group participants as well. One said, “I just saw it as more minorities in general becoming professors because like I said...minorities respond better to other minorities teaching.” Another added, “I thought it was sort of like a recruitment video. You know how the Army sends out...you’re an African-American student, you’re studying a subject field, join the communications team!”

Students said the DVD helped them to become more aware of the shortage of minority faculty. Some, but not all, of the students said the DVD made them consider the teaching profession as a career field. “It kind of sparked your mind to think about [teaching]...It did make me think ‘OK, I want to go get a Ph.D...so that I can come back and teach later on in my career,” said one subject. Another participant desired more information on Ph.D. programs, saying, “I just think this video...actually made me consider and fill out the pink form to get more information because...I really didn’t know that it was in such high demand.” One participant added that not just anyone can teach. She noted that the video featured passionate faculty. “The video let me know that there are people who are needed who are energetic. You don’t get into a doctoral program with the life drained out of you. You can go on and teach and be inspiring,” she said.

The benefits of academia were appealing to several of the students. “Like they harped on the whole self-fulfillment thing...when the guy said he quit his job in TV, there’s many things you can do. But to me when he said that, it was like...you can take this to another level personally,” one student commented.

Some students felt that, in addition to discussing the benefits of academia, the DVD should have included more information about faculty obligations, research demands, and salaries. “I think maybe they should have put the reality of being a professor or going to graduate school [into the DVD],” said one. Another suggested including information about “the hours that you put in a week or the demands, the amount of research you’re required to do...and that would be the one thing that would turn me off most...”

Benefits could have been discussed in greater detail, suggested one student, saying “I think everyone knows about teaching and self-fulfillment, you’re giving back to the community or whatever. I think they could have explained more on benefits of becoming a teacher. Like the one guy started saying how you’re paid to do research and [have]...time to...craft your skills.” Many participants wanted to know about faculty income levels. “High school teachers don’t get paid a lot; I don’t know [about] college,” said one.

In addition, the focus group findings suggested that the DVD should have included more information about financial aid opportunities for graduate school. “They said something about fellowships and grants available...but not about requirements. It would have been helpful if they went into that in some depth....I mean, I’ve thought about going to grad school but I was like, clearly I don’t have the money,” said one student. After one student inquired about assistantships, another exclaimed, “Wow! They don’t tell us about that!”

Other participants said that the DVD could have been improved by featuring a greater variety of university campuses. “I think they should have one school representing every major conference...because you don’t really even know what different parts of the country are like,” explained one participant.

Finally, the concept of the faculty pipeline was unclear to a few of the students, who said this was not well articulated in the video. One expressed her confusion, which was shared by others, and asked, “Were they trying to get people into graduate school or are they trying to get people to be professors?” One student suggested, “Focus more on faculty and deans and people of higher status to say ‘this is what we need.’ From the students’ perspective, yeah they want it, but who hires you?”

Concluding Comments

Participant feedback gathered in this small focus group suggests that the use of a video message, such as the “Making a Difference” DVD, can alter the views of students about an occupation. The respondents said they learned from the video and gained new insights about it.

The DVD created for this project was designed specifically for African-American students, and the responses from the focus group suggest it touched responsive chords with those who saw it. Though the data are quite limited—drawn from only seven students at a single university—they suggest that creation of a video message can be an effective tool in recruiting minority students into certain professions. As such, they are one way of increasing the supply of minority graduate students and college faculty in the field of journalism and mass communication.

Additional evaluation of the video message is needed to strengthen this conclusion. In the

meantime, the DVD is being released to all doctoral programs in mass communication. The programs can use it as a recruitment tool or as a guide in creating a tool themselves to better suit their own recruitment needs.