On Friday, April 15, the APA NY Metro Chapter Diversity Committee and Student Representation Committee hosted a forum at Columbia University with local planning schools and programs to brainstorm strategies on overcoming barriers to recruitment and retention of diversity in their student body, faculty, and curriculum.

5 MAJOR BARRIERS TO RECRUITING AND RETAINING DIVERSITY IN PLANNING PROGRAMS

1. Economic injustice and inequitable neighborhoods that perpetuate cycles of poverty.
2. Limited exposure to urban planning and good planning practices/outcomes.
3. Lack of diversity among (and support for) students and faculty in planning programs.
4. Lack of cultural competency and diversity lens in the curriculum and classroom.
5. Financial barriers and unequal access to gaining experience (e.g., unpaid internships).

Source: Presentation by Giovania Tiarachristie on her study on overcoming barriers to recruitment and retention of planners of color (2016).
OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO DIVERSITY IN PLANNING PROGRAMS

The following section summarizes tangible ideas for planning programs to better promote diversity and more equitable planning. These ideas include recommendations from Tiarachristie’s “Elephant in the Planning Room” thesis (2016), combined with additional ideas suggested in the small group discussions during the diversity forum.

01

REMOVING FINANCIAL BARRIERS FOR UNDERPRIVILEGED STUDENTS

- Work with local firms to create fellowship and scholarship programs geared towards underprivileged students, in exchange for internship/work. Advertise well.
- Develop fast track college to Masters programs, or joint degrees with professions that have greater diversity, eg. a masters of social work and urban planning.
- Enable related community development/activist work experience to count as credits towards graduation, create scholarships for community leaders/activists.
- Create more flexible programs for existing civil servants, eg night programs, part time programs.

02

IMPLEMENT EARLY RECRUITMENT INITIATIVES AND MAKE THE PROFESSION (AND PLANNING PROGRAM) MORE VISIBLE

- Create programs in schools where planners can work with local teachers to facilitate workshops around planning (affordable housing game, planning scenarios, etc). Create resources (reading lists, website) where students can learn more about planning careers.
- Start a summer program where planning students and APA members teach kids in local schools (K-12) about urban planning, its impact on everyday life in neighborhoods, and related professions. Contact Kate Selden for existing curriculum and best practices (kselden@gmail.com).
- Connect with undergraduate students of local colleges (particularly public colleges and universities) in related studies (such as American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Sociology, Urban Studies, etc.) to inform about the planning profession and its career pathways.
- Advertise programs and connect with guidance counselors in Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Tribal Colleges across the nation.
- Highlight more alumni, students, and faculty of color in newsletters and features to increase visibility.
- Advertise in local minority-market media (eg. El Diario) and more public spaces (eg. on the subway) about the role of planning in communities and available educational programs.

03

PROMOTE CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH CURRICULUM

- Organize breaking bias trainings during orientation. Contact Daniel Lim for workshops specific for planning students (worldrising@gmail.com).
- Start diversity group(s) or students/faculty of color coalition to help support and lead diversity initiatives for the planning program. Connect with other local schools and their diversity groups.
- Update curriculum to include courses that integrate diversity (see ACSP People of Color Interest Group or POCIG’s website for their syllabi book compiled in 2013).
- Include a question that measures students’ growth in understanding of related diversity issues in end-of-semester course evaluations and encourage faculty to respond and collaborate.
- Create planning studios/practicum that include community partnerships.

04

PROACTIVELY RECRUIT FOR FACULTY OF COLOR AND SUPPORT THEIR GROWTH AND VISIBILITY

- Recruit practicing planners of color, not just academic planners of color, to teach.
- Encourage and support faculty of color to write peer reviewed journals, apply for fellowships, attend conferences, etc.
- Create space for faculty of color to meet and share concerns and ideas on how to promote diversity in the planning program.
- Promote mentorship and collaboration across all faculty, including time for casual gathering outside of the classroom.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ELEPHANT IN THE PLANNING ROOM
FORUM ON DIVERSITY IN PLANNING SCHOOLS

Organized by
American Planning Association (APA)
NY Metro Chapter Diversity Committee
Email diversity@nyplanning.org if you would like to get involved.
APA Website: http://www.nyplanning.org/