

Program Reflects Colleges' Commitment To Change

By Greg Becker,
Director of Graphic Services

Seth Snyder knows he is different when he first meets with students attending one of the 35 urban high schools in the Twin Cities. He was raised in a small southern Minnesota town. He is white. And he represents two private colleges located 70 miles from the urban center.

"Kids are reluctant to talk to me at schools or at college fairs. But their comfort level increases when they realize that I'm actually knowledgeable and interested in them," asserts the 2000 graduate. "They find out that I know something about Hmong culture, that I enjoy their music or that I speak Spanish."

For the last five years, Seth has been an assistant director of admission and diversity coordinator, working with the Twin Cities schools, where Hmong, Somali, Hispanic and other students of color have been increasing in numbers. He's very aware that many of these students are reluctant to consider a private college, particularly located outside of the metro area.

"Many of these students have heard about the advantages of a private college. But financial and other hurdles remain. For many, they come from low income backgrounds and are the first ones in their families to attend college."

To become more of a force in recruiting and retaining students of color, CSB and SJU developed the I-LEAD (Intercultural Leadership, Education and Development) Fellowship Program. With a mix

of scholarships, mentoring programs, and leadership development opportunities, the program aimed to recruit a group or "cohort" of 15 students each year. Now preparing to enroll its third cohort, the CSB/SJU I-LEAD program is pathbreaking recruitment and mentorship program. It goes beyond the admission process and involves all areas of college life, including student development and academic affairs (*see sidebar*).

Students eligible for the I-LEAD program are identified by high school guidance counselors and admission representatives. They are evaluated for their academic achievement and potential and must demonstrate leadership and service in their school or community. "Prospective I-LEAD Fellows look at what every student looks at: academics, sports, etc. They know that race is an issue no matter where they go. And they're aware that the program is pushing intercultural competence which will help others gain intercultural skills.

"They also know that they're being given an opportunity to invest themselves in a development program which allows them to access many different opportunities. We expect that they will be leaders of clubs that they join, that they will be in senate and participate in study abroad."

In the program's first two years, I-LEAD Fellows have taken full advantage of the program's opportunities. "These students are ready to take on any challenge," says

I-LEAD

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Seth. "They are able to go above and beyond." Success stories abound. For instance, Bibi Abdalla and Mai Thao Moua were selected as two of a small and select group of students to represent CSB at the international womens' colleges conference in the Middle East last year. Also, Raquel Gudiel was one of 25 young women in the country to be selected for a national Latinas Leadership conference in Washington, D.C. last summer.

Seth notes that the faculty have taken notice. "Faculty members who taught and mentored the first cohort were thankful for the opportunity to work with these students. They started recruiting other faculty members to be involved. Now our faculty are starting to understand how this program works and are looking for ways to take advantage of the I-LEAD students in their own area."

The program's success has led the colleges to expand the number of new participants to 30 in fall 2007.

Seth sees great opportunity with the I-LEAD program. "These students are thriving. They have been embraced by the community. We're not going to graduate students who just got through. We will be graduating those who seek and attain competitive jobs and fellowships or internships because of their I-LEAD experience here."

I-LEAD Steering Committee Members

Theresa Anderson, Academic Advisor

Mike Connolly, Dean of Students,
Saint John's University

Seth Snyder, Assistant Director of Admission

Jody Terhaar, Dean of Students,
College of Saint Benedict

BernaDette Wilson, Director,
CSB/SJU Intercultural Center

Additional CSB/SJU Programs

Intercultural Directions Council (IDC)

The Intercultural Directions Council is the cross-functional group of administrators, faculty and students working together to promote "climate change" on campus. The council helps various student groups, academic departments and functional areas of CSB/SJU build intercultural competence skills. IDC's goal is to change the way the CSB/SJU campus values, welcomes and celebrates differences.

Retreat on Racial Equality (RORE)

The RORE retreat is an evolving event where a group of students, faculty and staff spend time off-campus to discuss issues of race on-campus. Future retreats will include a larger number of students and reach a broader audience.