Equity Panel: Maria Fernandez

Maria Fernandez, Florida International University, mfernan@fiu.edu

I am here to talk about the program recruitment and retention Research Action Cluster (RAC), which was the previous MATH RAC, Marketing for Attracting Teacher Hopefuls. Part of the leadership team that was involved in what I'm going to be sharing today was Dana Franz and Julie McNamara and then Ed Dickey. They asked us to think about what we had been doing, what were the challenges we had.

In the original MATH RAC, the recruitment target was just margin of error; there really wasn't a focus on diversity on the recruitment target itself. When you look at the primary drivers, we had one out of four that was attracting and graduating diversity candidates. That's very broad and not well-defined, so that is part of the challenge we had in the original MATH RAC in terms of equity and diversity. We were trying to just throw a large net out to try to increase enrollment. We weren't focusing as much on how many Hispanics, how many African-Americans, how many Native Americans, those kinds of things.

Another challenge was in collecting the data. There were logistical issues related to collecting data on race/ethnicity. When students are just being made aware of the program, how do you capture that? In sign-in sheets, are you always going to have the question, "What is your race/ethnicity?" When they call in and ask about the program, do we say "oh, what's your race/ethnicity?" No, so we had those struggles. Then there was concern that asking that question can make a negative impression. People asking, "well why are you asking me about my race/ethnicity?" Gender, too. And, you have the people who might think it's prejudiced.

The other challenge we had was defining "diverse"; how "diverse" was very broad across the different institutions, and we really hadn't pinned that down. We weren't focusing on the retention piece of retaining the teacher candidates from diverse backgrounds or from backgrounds related to our local needs. With the focus on diversity in the revised program for recruitment and retention, our recruitment target mentions, directly, "reflecting diversity targets of each program." We recognize that different programs are going to have different targets because of their local setting, their local context. We came up with three out of five primary drivers that directly address the local demographics and the diverse communities, so more targeted thinking about what "diversity" means. Like the AMTE Standards for teacher preparations, saying "You need to be more direct about it. You need to infuse it throughout. It can't just be an add-on, the idea of diversity and equity." Those primary drivers then influenced the change ideas. The possible change ideas are targeting the issue of diversity and how do we bring in more students that meet the demographics of the students they're going to be teaching, of the students in our locale. Because we were more direct about it at the recruitment target with the new reboot of the RAC, then that fed into more direct targeting in the drivers, which then led to more direct targeting for us in particular for this RAC in the change ideas. Thank you.