

1989

## Omaha Minority Conditions and Research Conference Report: Issues in Education

Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR)  
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

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# OMAHA MINORITY CONDITIONS AND RESEARCH CONFERENCE REPORT



## Issues In Education

Conference Date: May 19 and 20, 1989





**P**LANNING FOR THE 1989 Omaha Minority Conditions and Research Conference began during October 1988. In the early stages of the planning, a luncheon meeting of community members representing the three groups (Blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics) for which the conference would be targeted was held. One purpose of this meeting was to further ascertain whether community members generally thought such a conference would be worthwhile. A second purpose was to identify persons who would be willing to serve on a steering committee which would have the task of planning and structuring the conference. A third purpose of the meeting was to identify a plan for selecting, from among many relevant issues of concern to the targeted minority communities, one central problem area to serve as the focus of the conference.

Shortly after this meeting the conference coordinator developed a brief survey which was sent to 225 persons (community sample) who were identified by various agencies, such as the City of Omaha Department of Human Relations and the Chicano Awareness Center, as being a part of the influential, leadership, activist segment of those minority communities. Each person receiving the survey was asked to rate a set of 18 general problems that confront Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans in Omaha. Each respondent also was given the opportunity to identify and rate other priority problems that they thought should be on the list.

With the help of Mr. Ramon Hernandez (Acting Director of the Chicano Awareness Center), Mr. Art Hill (Director of the Native American Development Corporation), and Reverend Negil McPherson (President of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance), a second wave of the survey was administered to 129 grassroots people in the communities (grassroots sample). Each of these three individuals assisted in sampling and surveying the three minority groups. Table 1 presents a summary of the size and racial composition of both samples.

After the data obtained from these surveys were returned and analyzed, it was apparent that two areas – education and unemployment – were of the highest concern to the three communities. Combining the results from the two surveys, education received an average

Table 1 - Distribution of Sample Respondents by Race and Sample Source

	Grassroots Sample	Community Sample
	----- Percentage (n) -----	
Black	61.2% (79)	49.3% (111)
Hispanic	25.6% (33)	25.3% (57)
Native American	13.2% (17)	25.3% (57)
Total Sample	100.0% (129)	100.0% (225)



ranking of 6.0 on a 7.0 scale, and unemployment received an average ranking of 5.9 on a 7.0 scale. The survey respondents also were asked which area they would select as the single focus for the conference. More indicated education than unemployment, so the former was selected as the major topic for the conference. Substance abuse and survival of the family unit also were issues that received considerable support, and subtopics that related to the role of schools in dealing with these two issues were added to the conference agenda. It was decided that the topic of unemployment was best left for a separate conference in the future.

Table 2 presents the mean scores and ranks for the various issues, by race, for the community sample.

Table 3 presents the mean scores and ranks for the issues, by race, for the grassroots sample.

On May 19-20, 1989, the Omaha Minority Conditions and Research Conference was held at the Peter Kiewit Conference Center. The conference, sponsored by the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Center for Public Affairs Research (formerly known as the Center for Applied Urban Research), had two major purposes. One purpose was to provide a forum where Blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics could come together to discuss, analyze, and understand, from a minority perspective, problems in the arena of education as they relate to minority youth in the K-12 grades. A concomitant part of this purpose was to identify a list of action steps that would help to alleviate

Table 2 - Rank Order and Average Values of Issues as Rated by the Community Sample, by Race

	Black	Hispanic	Native American
	x (Rank)	x (Rank)	x (Rank)
Education	6.5 (1)	6.8 (1)	5.9 (1)
Survival of the family	6.0 (2)	5.2 (8)	5.3 (2)
Unemployment	5.9 (3)	5.9 (2)	5.3 (2)
Drug abuse	5.9 (3)	5.7 (3)	4.6 (10)
Economic development (business)	5.7 (5)	5.6 (5)	5.3 (2)
Crime	5.5 (6)	4.7 (15)	3.8 (15)
Gang violence	5.4 (7)	4.7 (15)	3.4 (16)
Political participation	5.2 (8)	5.7 (3)	4.8 (8)
Political powerlessness	5.0 (9)	5.6 (5)	5.1 (5)
child welfare	5.0 (9)	5.2 (8)	5.0 (6)
Housing	5.0 (9)	5.0 (11)	5.0 (6)
Juvenile delinquency	5.0 (9)	5.1 (10)	4.3 (12)
Policy-community relations	5.0 (9)	5.3 (7)	4.1 (13)
Elderly	4.7 (14)	5.0 (11)	4.5 (11)
Alcohol abuse	4.7 (14)	4.9 (13)	4.8 (8)
Social welfare	4.6 (16)	4.8 (14)	4.1 (13)
Transportation	3.4 (17)	3.9 (17)	2.8 (17)
Community parks/recreation	3.1 (18)	2.5 (18)	2.3 (18)

The Lickert scale used for rating each issue ranged from 0 to 7, with 7 equal to most important.



the problems identified in the areas of academic preparation and achievement, retention, and the role of the schools in substance abuse and survival of the minority family unit.

A second purpose of the conference was to help set a community-relevant and community-generated minority research agenda for UNO's Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR). In addition, our hope was that the conference would help to identify and develop minority and non-minority researchers at UNO who would be willing to engage in collaborative research projects on issues of concern to the targeted minority communities, and specifically on issues of this conference. Two major reasons buttress the adoption of this second purpose. First, CPAR serves as the major research unit of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service, and in this capacity its aim is to be actively involved in conducting research on a wide range of problems and issues of concern to Omaha and Omaha's minority population. Second, the Center is currently coordinating the Urban Policy Research Program, which funds faculty research projects of a policy-relevant nature in several broad areas, one of which is minority conditions. In this role CPAR is interested in giving priority to research projects that address issues and problems that have been afforded priority status by minority communities.

Table 3 - Rank Order and Average Values of Issues as Rated by the Grassroots Sample, by Race

	Black	Hispanic	Native American
	x (Rank)	x (Rank)	x (Rank)
Survival of the family	6.4 (1)	5.2 (6)	5.8 (2)
Education	6.3 (2)	5.3 (5)	5.0 (7)
Gang violence	6.3 (2)	4.5 (12)	3.7 (13)
Unemployment	6.2 (4)	5.5 (4)	6.6 (1)
Drug abuse	6.1 (5)	6.1 (1)	4.9 (8)
Crime	5.8 (6)	5.6 (3)	4.2 (11)
Housing	5.8 (6)	4.8 (10)	5.2 (5)
Alcohol abuse	5.4 (8)	6.1 (1)	5.1 (6)
Economic development (business)	5.4 (8)	4.2 (13)	3.0 (18)
Elderly	5.4 (8)	4.8 (10)	4.8 (9)
Juvenile delinquency	5.1 (11)	5.0 (7)	4.0 (12)
Police-community relations	5.2 (12)	4.2 (13)	5.6 (3)
Child welfare	5.0 (13)	4.9 (8)	4.5 (10)
Political powerlessness	4.9 (14)	4.9 (8)	3.7 (13)
Political participation	4.7 (15)	4.4 (15)	3.6 (15)
Social welfare	4.3 (16)	4.1 (16)	5.4 (4)
Transportation	3.4 (17)	2.9 (18)	3.6 (15)
Community parks/recreation	2.8 (18)	3.4 (17)	3.1 (17)

The Lickert scale used for rating each issue ranged from 0 to 7, with 7 equal to most important.



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## Workshops

Dr. Carol Minugh, professor of Native American Studies at Evergreen State College, and Dr. Marty Ramirez, counseling psychologist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, served as workshop facilitators for the two-day conference. Dr. Minugh took the lead on the topics of Academic Retention of the Minority Student and Substance Abuse: The Role of Education. Dr. Ramirez took the lead on the topics of Factors Impacting Academic Preparation and Achievement of Minority Students and The Role of Schools in the Survival of the Minority Family. Brief summaries of the focuses of these workshops are presented below.

- I. Topic: **Factors Impacting Academic Preparation/Achievement of Minority Students**  
Leader: Dr. Marty Ramirez

This workshop focused, from a minority perspective, on clarifying some of the ambiguities underlying academic preparation/achievement. It encompassed a theoretical framework for analyzing minority students' school failures. It addressed individual and community strategies to respond to this failure in a manner that represents the interests of the student. The workshop was concerned with developing plans that will assist professionals and community members in developing the necessary resources and skills to meet the needs of minority students.

- II. Topic: **Academic Retention of the Minority Student**  
Leader: Dr. Carol Minugh

Participants in this workshop discussed ideas and effects of reductionism as it relates to minority students. The workshop provided a forum for discussion, from a minority perspective, of various options that might be used throughout the K-12 educational pipeline to enhance retention rates of minority students. The workshop examined advantages and disadvantages of a variety of strategies in terms of their effectiveness in increasing the retention of minority students in the K-12 grades.

- III. Topic: **Substance Abuse: The Role of Education**  
Leader: Dr. Carol Minugh

This workshop examined the role schools can take in fighting substance abuse among minority students. It explored the effects of substance abuse on families and how this, in turn, affects the classroom performance of children. Participants studied prevention and treatment programs and how to fill the void that exists in the student's life after treatment. Participants learned how alcohol and drug abuse may



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be detected in the school setting and considered issues in the student's life that may contribute to involvement in alcohol and drugs.

- IV. Topic: **The Role of Schools in the Survival of the Minority Family**  
Leader: Dr. Marty Ramirez

Education occurs within a social context that is partly shaped by the interrelationships of schools and the family. This workshop was designed to help participants become more aware and sensitive to the interrelated dynamics that affect the student's role as student and family member. This workshop examined the question, Can education be effective without those persons who make up the delivery system knowing something about a student's home and community?

### **Action Steps**

Each of the workshops focused on drawing comments and specific action steps from the conference participants. The participants helped amplify concerns about the ability of our schools to fairly and effectively serve minority youths. A number of action steps or strategies to deal with minority youths were recommended. For ease of presentation and analysis, recommendations from the four workshops have been consolidated. They also have been grouped into four categories: (1) administrators, (2) counselors, (3) curriculum, and (4) instructors.

### *Administrators*

#### **Institutions of Higher Education**

1. Evaluate current practices used by all units to recruit minority faculty, staff, and students.
2. If evaluation dictates, design and implement more active recruiting practices to attract minority faculty, staff, and students.

#### **Greater Omaha Metropolitan School Systems (GOMSS)**

##### **Accountability**

1. Publish annual reports on the condition of minority students.
2. Strengthen procedures, including the grievance system, to identify and deal with racism on the part of teachers and counselors.
3. Strengthen periodic evaluations of teachers to determine whether they can effectively teach minority students.





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## **Community**

1. Hire representatives on a paraprofessional basis from the Black, Hispanic, and Native American communities to work with the schools.
2. Develop a structure to inform parents of the value of parental involvement in the educational process. This structure should encompass the sharing of research in this area.
3. Develop ongoing community forums designed to serve as parent outreach programs.
4. Design and implement training programs to address teachers' and administrators' attitudes toward minority parents.
5. Develop a multi-cultural structure to address minority educational issues.
6. Work with community groups to explore the feasibility of using child advocates to attend GOMSS meetings.
7. Help minority parents establish a "buddy" program designed to encourage more minority parents to attend various school meetings and functions.
8. Utilize bilingual educational resources to make school meetings more accessible for non-English speaking parents.
9. Hold parent-teacher conferences in the community, and investigate parent-teacher conference times and locations to determine whether there is a need for more flexibility.
10. Conduct workshops on multi-cultural issues in the community.

## **Government**

1. Provide safe places for children in their communities. Children need a place where they can be at ease and not worry about pressure to become involved in illegal activities. These places need to be conveniently located and have suitable hours of operation. Local government should take the lead in this venture.

## **Instruction**

1. Determine whether student/teacher ratios need to be lowered in the primary grades (especially K-3).



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### **Personnel**

1. Employ more minorities as psychologists, supervisors of instruction, and consultants.
2. Evaluate current practices to recruit minority administrators, teachers, and staff. If evaluation dictates, design and implement more active recruiting practices to attract minority administrators, teachers, and staff.

### **Resources**

1. In order to ensure that multi-cultural education goes beyond the concept stage and becomes a reality, target more of GOMSS's human and financial resources toward this goal.

### **Students**

1. Re-examine grouping by ability to ascertain whether it is operating in the best interests of minority students.
2. Examine the distribution of educational scholarships by race to ensure equity.
3. Develop a child care program for high school students who are parents. The program should be sure to address the needs of single-parent families.
4. Design and implement effective retention programs for minority students.

### **Training**

1. On a periodic basis, provide sensitivity training for all personnel.

### ***Counselors***

#### **Greater Omaha Metropolitan School Systems**

1. Display more bias-free counseling, including:
  - a) Encouraging minority students to set and obtain goals;
  - b) Being more supportive of minority students interested in higher education;
  - c) Displaying more effort in steering minority students into college preparatory classes;



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- d) Advising students earlier of college information (students in 9th and 10th grades, for example, need to be given the information);
  - e) Actively seeking scholarship information and being accountable for passing the information on to minority students; and
  - f) Preparing minority students for entering college by advising of required testing, deadlines, and current college requirements.
2. Spend more time counseling and less time on unrelated duties such as hall duty. Consider implementing programs that would pay parents to assist counselors in their non-counseling duties.
  3. Increase the number of minority counselors in elementary schools.

## *Curriculum*

### **Greater Omaha Metropolitan School Systems**

1. The curriculum should be periodically examined to ensure that it has a historically relevant, multi-cultural focus and that courses accurately reflect the contributions and scholarship of racial minorities.
2. Utilize minority expertise in curriculum planning and selection of text books.
3. Ensure that drug education is a part of the curriculum and that it addresses both the reasons for drug use and abuse and the problems associated with drug addiction.

## *Instructors*

### **Institutions of Higher Education**

1. Provide prospective teachers with multi-cultural education during their educational process. Institutions of higher education should require all students who are education majors to take courses focusing on the three minority groups—Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics. These courses should be taught by representatives of the respective minority group and, ideally, a member of the full-time faculty at the university. It is strongly recommended that UNO's Black Studies department be utilized as the delivery system for minority courses related to Blacks.



1. Require teachers to attend multi-cultural sensitivity training as part of certification. This training needs to be on-going.

### **Research Arena**

The action steps and recommendations generated at the conference spawn a number of applied and basic research thrusts. These, for the most part, can be broadly characterized as fitting into four arenas: (1) Improved Minority Recruitment and Retention; (2) Improved Racial Sensitivity, (3) Elimination of Disparities by Race in Educational Outcomes, and (4) Improved Linkages between the Educational Enterprise and its Communities. Examples of research topics by category include:

#### *Administrators*

1. Effective strategies and programs for recruiting minority administrators, faculty, staff, and students at a predominantly white university.
2. Effective delivery systems for minority students.
3. Analyses (behavioral, attitudinal, etc.) evaluating the ability of teachers to be effective delivery systems for minority students.

#### **Community**

1. Community and educational institution linkages designed to foster effective recruiting, retention, and academic success rates of minority students.
2. Potential linkages between family structure and educational outcomes.

#### *Counselors*

1. Racially sensitive and bias-free counseling.

#### *Curriculum*

1. Racially and multiculturally sensitive curriculum and instruction.

#### **Government**

1. Enhancing the quality of life for racial minority youth so as to lessen stress and promote self-image and educational achievement.

#### **Instruction**

1. Analyses evaluating the effectiveness threshold of lower student/teacher ratios in the primary grades (K-3).



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*Instructors*

1. Racially and multiculturally sensitive training for teachers and faculty.

**Personnel**

1. Relationship between increased minority employment in key personnel positions (e.g., psychologists, supervisors of instruction, and consultants) and the multi-cultural relevancy and retention/achievement levels of minority students.
2. Appropriate models for evaluating minority hiring practices at all levels.

**Students**

1. Educational impacts of ability grouping.
2. Ascertaining whether, and if so, why, there exist significant racial differences in the allocation of educational scholarships.
3. Determining methods to eliminate drug and alcohol use among students.

**Training**

1. Effective multicultural sensitivity training for educators along with implementation strategies which promise to work.

## Appendices





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## Conference Steering Committee

Dr. Philip E. Secret, Coordinator  
Associate Dean, College of Public Affairs and Community Service, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Portia Anderson  
Archdiocesan Liaison, Black Catholic Pastoral Coordinating Committee

Marilyn Appel  
Sales Assistant, KFAB Radio

Richard Carmona  
President, Hispanic Association of AT&T Employees

Teri Dameron  
Adult Education Coordinator, Native American Community Development Corporation

George Dillard  
Executive Director, Urban League of Nebraska

Juana Espejo  
Director, Catholic Hispanic Ministry

Dr. Mary S. Hall  
Office of Indian Education, Omaha Public Schools

Marti Harrison  
Entrepreneur Coordinator, Native American Community Development Corporation

Ramon Hernandez  
Interim Director, Chicano Awareness Center

Lonnie Johnson  
President, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Omaha

Erven McSwain, Jr.  
Human Relations Community Services Specialist, City of Omaha

Dr. Jim Ramirez  
Human/Community Relations, Omaha Public Schools



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## List of Participants

Marquita Ali  
Portia Anderson  
Marilyn Appel  
Sheila Banks  
Virginia Barajas  
Judy Beveridge  
Janice Brown  
Jesse Cardenas  
Fernando Castillo  
Nancy Contreras  
Teri Dameron  
Bobbie Davis  
Joe Davis  
Sharon Davis  
William Davis  
George Dillard  
Margarete Durant  
Terrill Edwards  
Sherry Elliott  
Juana Espejo  
George Garrison  
Karen Garver  
Deanne Gaspard  
Wali Gill  
Diane Gillespie  
Jake Gonzales  
Delores Goodlett  
Ovalyn Grice  
Mary Hall  
Cheryl Harris

Marti Harrison  
Toni Hernandez  
David Hinton  
Martha Holmes  
Richard Hoover  
Cheryl Hubbard  
Sammie Jackson  
Lerlean Johnson  
Loretta Jordan  
Lucy Klusaw  
Efijemia Lara  
Ofelia Lara  
Leonita Lasley  
Trixie Lomeli  
Steve Luna  
Ellen Madison-Holts  
Theresa McKeagney  
Erven McSwain  
Terrie Miller  
Carol Minugh  
Jose Montanez  
Reggie Morris  
Mary Mudd  
Esperanza Natera  
John Newton  
Penny Nordahl  
Nancy Phams  
Marty Ramirez  
Jim Ramirez  
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Stephanie G. Robinson  
Mary Salcedo  
Antonio Sandoval  
Philip Secret  
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Charlotte Shropshire  
Harold Simmons  
Russell Smith  
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Peter Suzuki  
Darlene Swait  
Ruth Thomas  
Theresa Toledo  
Vincent Toledo  
Vickie Traynham  
Robbie Tyler  
Michele Valdez  
Esperanza Valencia  
Mary Vazquez  
Tony Wach  
Roxanne Walker  
Kina Watson  
Joan Weber  
Karen Welch  
Janet West  
Linda Whipple  
Joe Wilson  
Irving Young  
Margaret Zuke





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## Conference Evaluations

Each workshop participant was asked to evaluate the workshops and the conference as a whole. On a Lickert scale of 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest) the overall mean evaluation for the workshops is 5.2. The grand mean for the workshop presenters with regard to preparation and knowledge is 5.4. The overall mean evaluation for the conference as a whole is 5.2.