

RMU president pledges continued emphasis on diversity

by Denise Johnson
Col. Staff Writer

Acknowledging a less than glowing track record in diversity and inclusion, the president of one of the region's up and coming universities shared his plans for atone for past shortcomings.

"Three years ago, Robert Morris University took a good, honest look at itself and realized that the university wasn't as diverse as it should be," said Gregory G. Dell'Omo, president of Robert Morris University during the monthly meeting of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania Friday morning.

Dell'Omo shared some impressive statistics illustrating RMU's phenomenal growth of facilities, course offerings, overall enrollment and faculty. The area in need of the most improvement, he said was diversity.

RMU is currently in a two-part planning process "to clarify RMU's core values, and then to set forth five strategic initiatives that will improve our ability to implement those values consistently," said Dell'Omo. "These five short phrases represent RMU's core values: academic excellence; professional focus; global perspective; individuals matter; changing lives."

"Diversity isn't an option for higher education today. Our

students need to understand cultures that are unlike their own. They need to be able to work with people who are different from them. They are going to encounter people with different backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities."

A snapshot assessment in 2003 found that only eight percent of the students were Black, one of out 108 faculty members was Black; an overwhelming majority of the student body was from Pennsylvania (especially Pittsburgh)

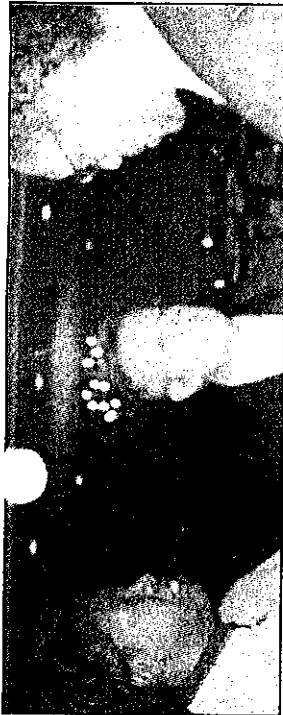


PHOTO BY C. DENISE JOHNSON
GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS—Chamber president Doris Carson Williams facilitates an introduction of RMU president Gregory G. Dell'Omo, Ph.D. to Howard K. Graves.

and fewer than two percent were foreign countries.

"That wasn't the type of environment that would nurture and build students into leaders in the global community," Dell'Omo commented. "It wasn't even an environment that would resemble the work-world they'd soon be entering."

A standing diversity committee has been charged with creating a more diverse and inclusive environment at the school.

"We have to recruit a diverse student body, faculty and staff...to create a diverse mix of people in our classrooms and dorms and offices."

One of the first changes the University made was

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adopting a new faculty hiring policy. We also provided training for managers to teach them how to recruit employees from different cultural backgrounds," said Dell'Omo.

RMU has created scholarships for African-American students, including two full-tuition scholarships offered through the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and launched a partnership with Building United of Southwestern Pennsylvania to offer scholarships to minority students who attend local churches and belong to BUSP.

The University's admissions team is also targeting high schools in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia that have high minority populations, and they have plans to enlist mem-

bers of the Black Students Organization to talk to prospective minority students about RMU. We're also using direct mail to target Latino high schoolers, detailed Dell'Omo.

The efforts have already garnered positive results. Last year 29 percent of the university's doctoral candidates were African-American or international students. Minorities make up 10 percent of RMU's faculty, double the percentage of just a few years ago.

A commitment to diversity should also be reflected in business practices, said Dell'Omo.

Last year RMU spent an estimated 4.5 to 6 percent of its unrestricted expenses with minority-owned vendors, which will be reflected as campus growth continues.

BUSINESS CALENDAR

E-Marketing

OCT. 26—Duquesne University's Chrysler Corporation Small Business Development Center will host "E-Mail Marketing Tools for Your Business."