

School of Information Sciences

Provost's Office Funds for Disadvantaged Students FY 14-15 Report by the School of Information Sciences June 29, 2015

Introduction:

The School of Information Sciences received \$100,000 for FY14-15 from the Provost's Office Funds for Disadvantaged Students. This allocation was used to continue to recruit and retain disadvantaged students by:

- offering graduate assistantships and/or tuition scholarships to two diverse students, both of whom have graduated or are on track to graduate
- attending conferences and recruiting venues to recruit new diverse applicants and maintain the School's visibility amongst educators of diverse students
- implementing programs to foster and sustain diversity within the culture of the School
- coupling our PDF-funded diversity efforts with other diversity funds and efforts within the School

Assistantships/scholarships to diverse students:

Through PDF-funded graduate assistantships and scholarships we were able to retain two diverse students:

- Jourdan Walls – Jourdan started in the Fall of 2013 as a full-time student in our Master of Science in Information Science (MSIS) program, and we have funded her through PDF funds for a 12.5 hour per week assistantship in Fall 2013, a 15 hour per week assistantship in Spring 2014, and a 15 hour per week assistantship in the Fall of 2014. In fiscal year 2013 – 2014 we also awarded Jourdan \$4,000 in additional aid from an endowed scholarship fund provided by one of our alumns, Leona Mitchell (MSIS, 1981), and we paid her an hourly wage in Spring 2015 until she graduated in April 2015. She is currently also working post-graduation for our iSchool Inclusion Institute this summer through grant funds until she begins her career with Accenture in July.
- Shayla Boyce - Shayla started in the Fall of 2014 as a full-time student in our Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) program, and we have funded her through PDF funds for a 20 hour per week assistantship in Fall 2014, Spring 2015, and this current Summer of 2015, when she is slated to graduate.

Activities, students impacted, and evaluation:

The diversity efforts of these two PDF-funded graduate students and our professional staff can be summarized as follows:

- we have attended 4 off-campus recruitment events pertaining to diversity (NSBE national, NSBE region 2, HACU, and Grace Hopper) which have yielded a total of 93 diverse prospective students;
- we communicate on a year-round basis - via email, phone, chat, and/or face-to-face meetings –with all applicants to the School’s graduate programs who identify as coming from a diverse background;
- we maintain a diversity recruitment database and use it to inform which recruitment events we choose to attend;
- we offer weekly Student Services assistance to current students who have questions or seek help in addressing current student concerns (registration procedures, graduation processes, petitions for exceptions to University rules, etc.);
- we have implemented 40 community-building activities for current graduate students between July of 2014 and June of 2015, with an approximate sum total of 1200 student attendees. 11 of these activities were directly implemented by our Commonwealth graduate assistants.

As part of the terms of this allocation of PDF monies to the School, the School was charged with providing:

- 1) A brief description of the recruitment and retention activities supported by the allocated funds;
- 2) The total number of students impacted by each activity;
- 3) An evaluation of each activity to include an articulation of the progress made in meeting the targeted outcome;
- 4) An outline of student demographics

The next two pages contain a table summarizing numbers 1-3, and number 4 is addressed in the section following the table.

Activities supported by PDF	Total number of students/potential students impacted	Evaluation/progress made
<p>Supported Shayla Boyce, both in terms of tuition and a stipend, for Fall 2014, Spring 2015, and Summer 2015.</p>	<p>Over 1,600:</p> <p>Co-coordinated 11 community building events (ex. social hours, open forum on student success within the School with a sum total attendance of approximately 800 current students.</p> <p><i>Shayla and Jourdan combined answered approximately 700 emails from prospective students, applicants, and current students and had approximately 170 combined face-to-face interactions with mostly current students.</i></p> <p>These interactions covered everything from one-on-one correspondences with <i>prospective students</i> who applied to the School's programs; email outreach to all viable Master's applicants for Fall 2015 admission, several information sessions in the building for prospective students, and registration assistance, procedural questions, and petition inquiries for current students.</p> <p>Shayla also took the lead on a phone campaign, reaching out to about 40 applicants to offer her assistance as a current student with any questions they had.</p> <p>Finally, the Commonwealth Scholars' Blog Shayla and Jourdan maintained combined with their facebook postings on our School's page were viewed by thousands of students from around the world.</p>	<p>She is graduating with an MLIS degree in August of 2015.</p> <p>We continue to receive feedback from prospective students who state that we are "more personal than the other graduate schools they considered."</p> <p>Student satisfaction surveys are sent to all graduating students each semester, and there are little to no complaints about outside the classroom events and processes and procedures within the School. A number of respondents also indicated that they felt like they are part of a community.</p> <p>Community continues to be built within our School through two primary means (both of which directly involve our Commonwealth Scholars) 1) continued engagement by our Commonwealth Scholars in our social media – a facebook presence, a Wordpress blog, and twitter, 2) 10 Social hours (1 per month except May and August) which have been expanded to include karaoke, and have gone up in attendance (from an average of 50-60 last year to 80-100 this year)</p>
<p>Supported Jourdan Walls, both in terms of tuition and a stipend, for Fall 2014.</p>	<p>Over 1,600:</p> <p>See above write up for Shayla, as the written analysis applies to both equally.</p> <p>Jourdan was also particularly good at building community in a grassroots way; she befriended students across our graduate programs and formed a small core of MLIS, MST, and MLIS students who would participate in extracurricular activities together, collaborate on conference presentations, bring their friends to social hour, and share their opinions about improvement of the student experience with the School's administration</p>	<p>She graduated with an MSIS degree in April of 2015 and will begin working in an IS position with Accenture in mid July of 2015.</p> <p>See above write up for Shayla, as the evaluation applies to both equally.</p>
<p>Attended the national Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) conference in Denver in October of 2014.</p>	<p>Jourdan Walls and School staff obtained 44 <i>prospective diverse student contacts</i></p>	<p>Increased awareness of graduate school opportunities within our School, direct follow-up communications with prospective students on a regular basis, planting the seed for what iSchools are with prospective graduate students.</p>

Attended the National Society of Black Engineers regional conference in Pittsburgh in October of 2014.	Jourdan Walls and School staff obtained 3 <i>prospective diverse student contacts</i>	Increased awareness of graduate school opportunities within our School, direct follow-up communications with prospective students on a regular basis, planting the seed for what iSchools are with prospective graduate students.
Attended the National Society of Black Engineers national conference in Anaheim in March of 2015	Jourdan Walls, MSIS student Xavier Dillahunt, and School staff obtained 19 <i>prospective diverse student contacts</i>	Increased awareness of graduate school opportunities within our School, direct follow-up communications with prospective students on a regular basis, planting the seed for what iSchools are with prospective graduate students.
Attended the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing Conference in Phoenix Arizona in October of 2014	Three of our School's doctoral students – Christina Robles, Claudia Lopez Moncada, and Jessica Benner – attended along with one of our faculty members, Rosta Farzan, and one of our recruitment staff members. They networked with both employers interested in our students, professionals at other colleges and universities, and they obtained 27 <i>prospective diverse student contacts</i>	Increased awareness of graduate school opportunities within our School, direct follow-up communications with prospective students on a regular basis, planting the seed for what iSchools are with prospective graduate students and employers.

Outline of student demographics:

In addition to the above table tracing the use of PDF funds and the outcome of those expenditures within our School, we will continue to provide data on an annual basis that connects the School's efforts with to the University's big picture goals of recruiting and retaining diverse students by providing the number of African American, Hispanic, and Native American Students who:

- were identified as prospects to the School's programs
- applied to the School over time;
- enrolled in the School over time;
- graduated from the School's programs over time

Prospects:

Below is the diversity recruitment prospect data, by venue, that we gathered through PDF-funded travel. We continue to face a challenge we articulated for the past two years – that of a decline in both diversity recruiting venues and attendance of those venues. We have addressed that challenge by attending an additional recruitment venue – the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing Conference. This conference showed a promising start, garnering 27 prospective students for us, and afforded us an opportunity to interact with potential students at multiple levels – undergraduate, master's, and doctoral – as well as the chance to raise awareness of our viability with very successful technology companies.

HACU and NSBE continue to remain staples for us, and we attended both national conferences as well as our local regional NSBE conference (which was held in Pittsburgh this year). The prospects numbers we gleaned at HACU far outstripped our prior numbers (44 this year as opposed to between 5-9 in each of the past three years). This was because of a systemic change in how HACU provides data on student attendees to recruiters, and it was a most welcome change. NSBE national was up slightly for us (19 this year compared to 15 the prior year, but this is still less than the 20-30 contacts we

gleaned each year in prior years). The number and breadth of recruitment events we attended this year mapped perfectly to our school’s recruitment travel budget (Commonwealth plus our own funds), and we intend to attend these same venues next year.

HACU 2014	NSBE Regional 2014	NSBE National 2015	Grace Hopper 2014
44	3	19	27

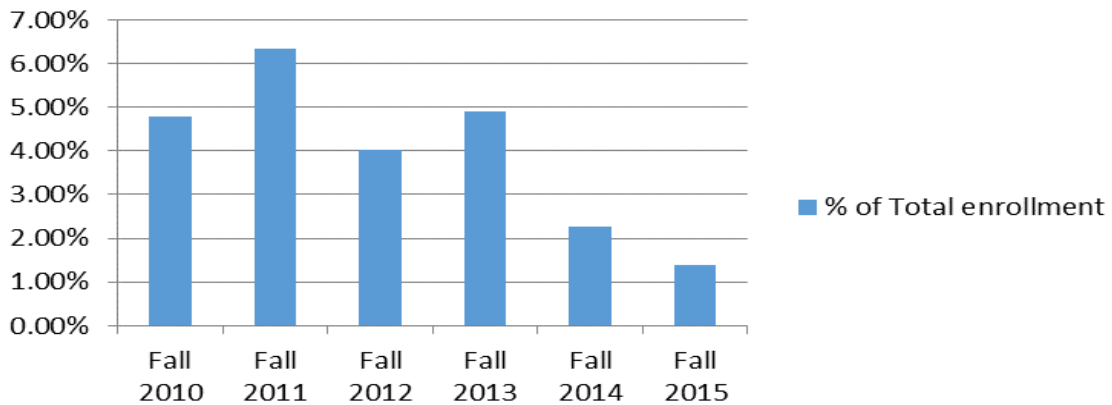
All of the prospects we met at HACU and NSBE have received multiple follow-up emails from us through our online graduate prospect system (Hobson’s Connect) and some have also had additional personal correspondences with Shayla and Jourdan. We are continuing to monitor how many students we met at HACU and NSBE over the past four years have applied, enrolled, and graduated from our programs. We now have one graduate from this pipeline – Jourdan Walls – but only a handful in total have applied to our School from these sources. This means that the prime value of HACU and NSBE to us continues to be not in direct recruitment of students but in keeping our School visible and networking with those who may refer students to us. Given that this was our first year at the Grace Hopper conference, we will need to examine this source as well over the coming years.

As we mentioned last year, we looked for commonalities in how our applicants find out about us, and we have noticed fair stable data that suggests physical recruitment venues make up a very small pipeline, as the bulk of our students discover us through the Web. This suggests that posts by our Commonwealth Scholars to and blogs will continue to be important in the coming year. Samples of their efforts will be included at the end of this report.

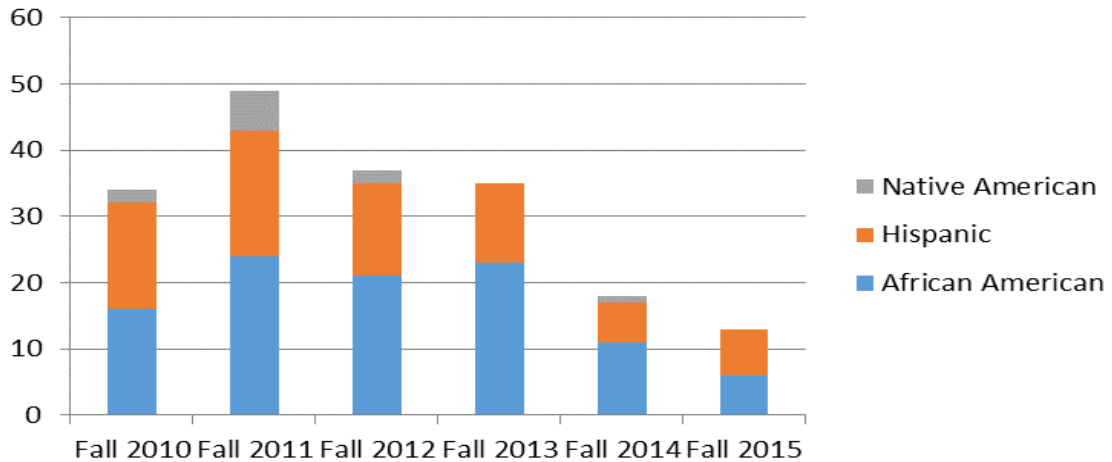
Applications over time:

The tables below show: 1) the number of diverse applicants as a percentage of total applicants over time, 2) the number of diverse applicants by ethnicity, and 3) the total percentage of applicants who are U.S. citizens. All comparisons are for Fall semesters, as fall has been the primary semester of entry for most of our graduate programs for several years now. The number of diverse applicants as a percentage of total applicants continues to decline, but this is no surprise given the continuing dramatic trend in the decline in domestic applicants to our programs in general. In just 6 years our applications have gone from 60% domestic to about 16% domestic. However, as identified last year, in spite of this decline in domestic and diversity applicants, our enrollment numbers in the next section show stability in our diverse enrollment and graduation numbers. This suggests an increase in yield from our pool of diverse applicants. While we are still working on refining our data to examine yield rates for our diverse applicants to see if there has been an increase in yield, we can say that our efforts with diverse applicants have become increasingly personal, with phone campaigns and many in-person one on one interactions with students in our grant-funded I3 program before they even consider applying to our School (not to mention scholarship monies being offered to I3 graduates to attend our graduate programs). In any case, our primary graduate diversity recruitment goals continue to be increasing both the number of diverse applications and the yield on those diverse applicants we do get.

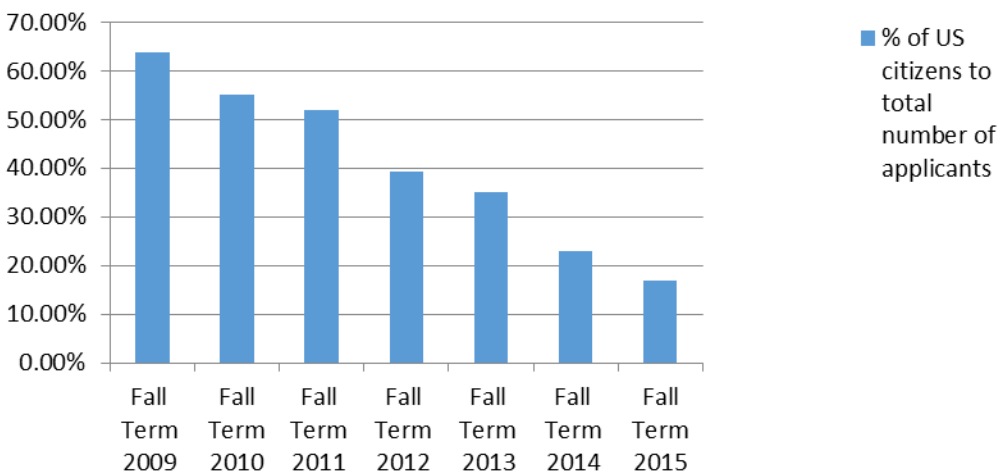
Diverse applicants as % of total applicant pool



Diverse applicants by ethnicity

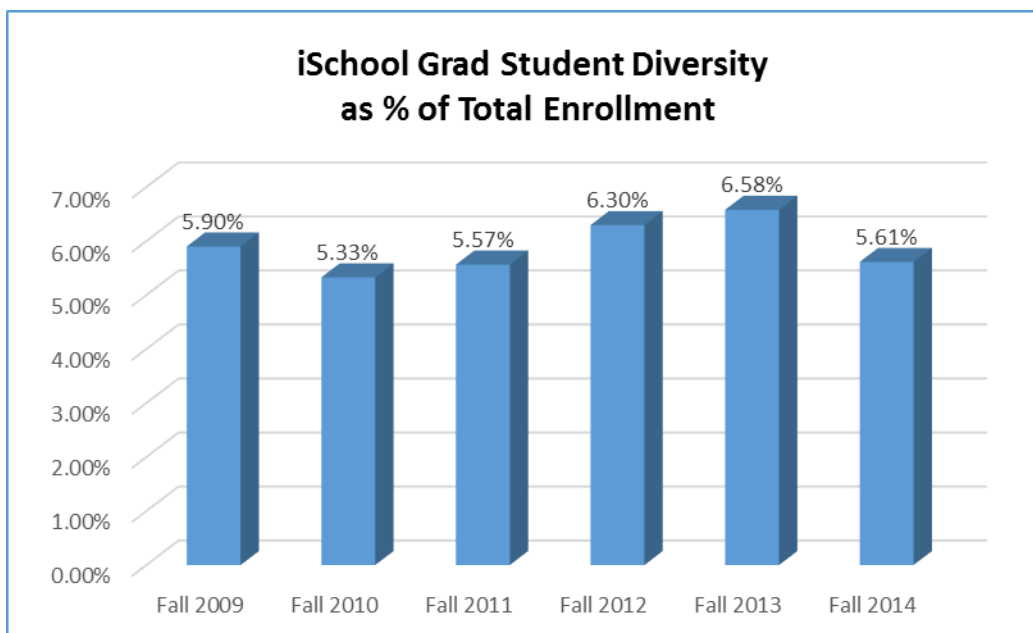
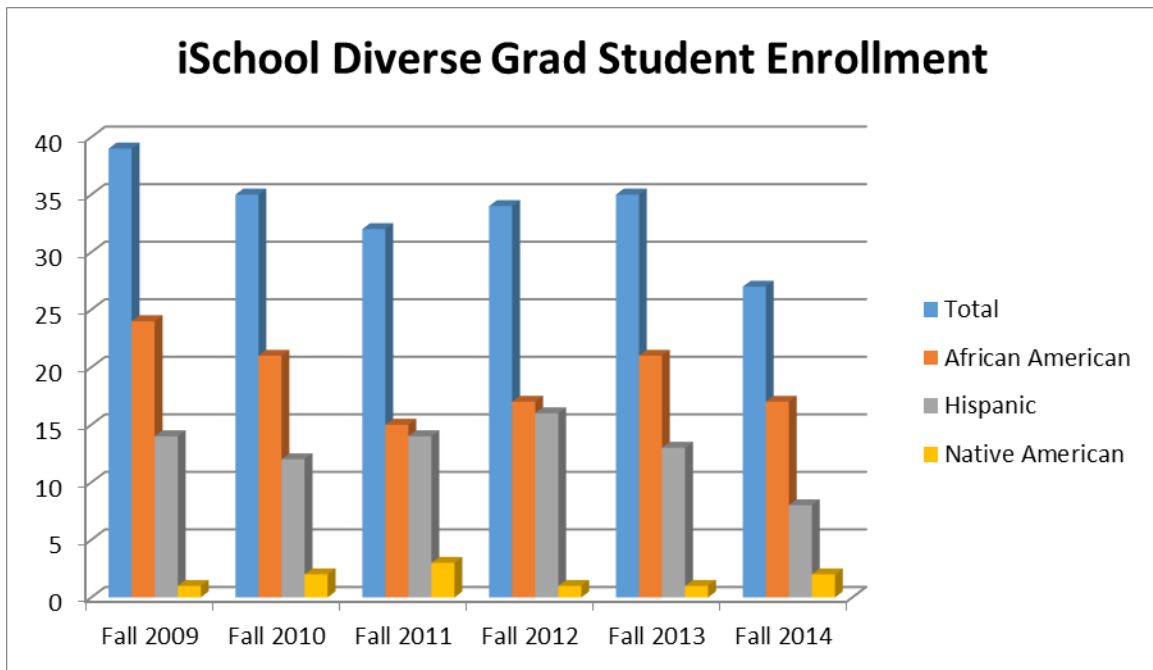


% of US citizens to the Total number of applicants



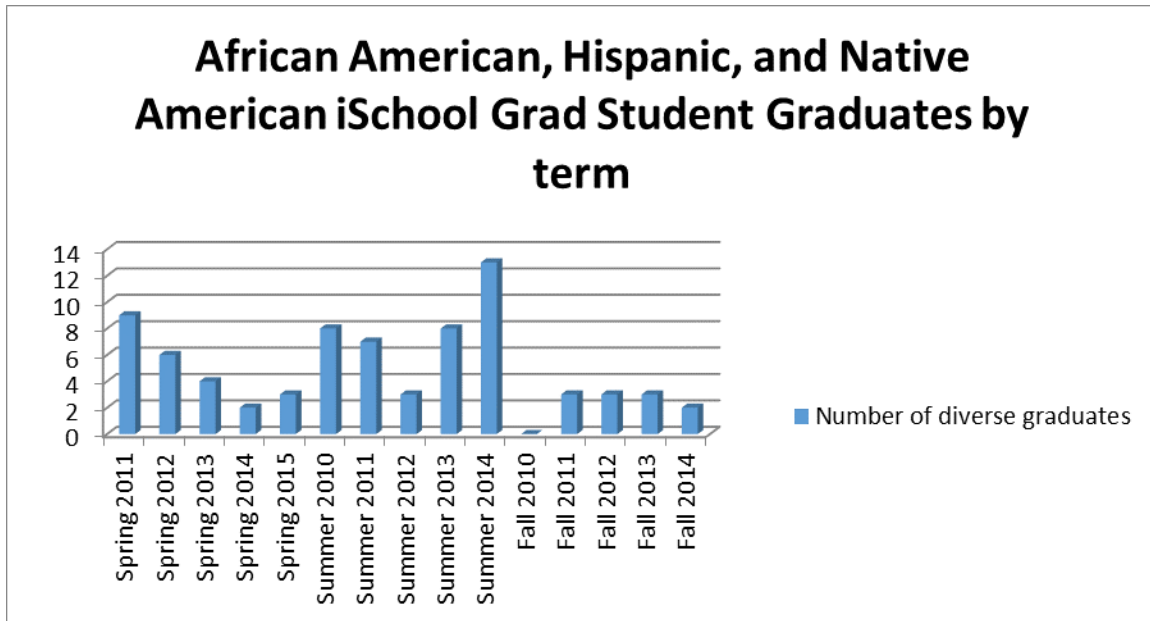
Enrollment patterns over time:

The charts below show the total number of African American, Hispanic, and Native American students enrolled in graduate programs within the School in the given semesters and the enrollment of this diverse population as a percentage of the School's total graduate enrollment. This data reveals that the proportion of diverse students enrolling in the School are relatively stable - the first chart shows that the headcount has gone down slightly, but it has done so proportionately with the School's overall enrollment, as can be seen by the second chart. In essence, for the last 6 years our population of diverse students has remained between 5.3 and 6.6% of the total population. African American students continue to account for an increasing proportion of that enrollment.



Graduation patterns over time:

The table that follows presents the number of African American, Hispanic, and Native American students graduating from the School’s graduate programs over time. When taken in concert across the full academic year, the graduation numbers continue to be on the rise, suggesting that our retention efforts with diverse students within the School remain strong.



Future directions:

As we stated last year, while financial assistance is not the only determinant in successfully recruiting the diverse students we are courting for our School’s programs, it is a key ingredient in a shrinking domestic applicant pool. Our School continues to offer three significant funding sources dedicated to the funding of diverse students in our Master’s programs. To remain competitive, we continue to increase the reward – the Commonwealth Funds had often been given as 50% assistantships, but we now are leaning towards 75% - 100% assistantships, meaning fewer Commonwealth scholars funded but attracting a higher caliber of student. Our Security for Scholarship program continues to offer full tuition coverage and a stipend, and for those who complete the iSchool Inclusion Institute, we have increased our scholarship from 75% tuition coverage to FULL tuition coverage this year for up to two students for up to four terms. Between these three sources we can fund about 6 new diverse Master’s students per year.

These consistent and significant funding opportunities have proven their worth in that our diverse graduate student enrollment has remained stable in spite of a smaller applicant pool. Our retention has also remained strong, as is evidenced by our diverse graduation numbers.

However, as they were last year, our greatest challenges continue to be in the areas of awareness and interest. Despite our programs being in demand in the workplace (employers contact us every week looking for our graduates), high school students and undergraduates still do not have an imagined idea of what it means to study the nexus of people, information, and technology in the way that they have an imagined idea of business, engineering, and medicine. Even when they do learn of us, it also takes some

time for them to learn of the rich scope of interests that fall within our School – humanities, mathematics (calculus, statistics), psychology, computer science, history, physics, design, etc. We are continuing to focus our energies on addressing these challenges.

We mentioned last year that we had undergone an extensive branding study that had the tentative support of the faculty and that our Commonwealth Scholars have been heavily utilizing social media. This year the branding study is nearing completion, our Commonwealth Scholars continue to post (see examples at the end of this document), and we have just opened a professional presence on LinkedIn that we hope to use to cast a closer net with our alumni/ae. We also have hired a new director of marketing and communications who has extensive experience with using websites and social media, both in terms of raising brand awareness and in terms of using tools like google analytics to determine which messages work and which ones do not. The stage for the viral spread of the awareness of our programs has been set, but quantifying and evidencing this will still take a few years.

In the meantime, we have a very significant development within our School that has recently occurred with the potential to eclipse all of these other efforts. In accordance with the charge of the Chancellor and the Provost, the faculty in our School and the Department of Computer Science have begun to meet regularly to work out a plan for the joining of our School with Computer Science to yield a new School as yet to be named.

This has already begun to impact diversity recruitment within our School, as we are partnering with Computer Science for the 2015 Grace Hopper Conference to have a larger and more visible presence there, and it will shift our brand and awareness of it to include an even broader swath of students – those with primary interests in computing. In light of this we may, for example, consider attending the Tapia Conference in the upcoming year. In general, however, the computer science student population is also one where diverse students are significantly underrepresented, so the purpose of the Commonwealth Funds will continue to be applied appropriately within our new school, as it solidifies.

Our approach at this time, however, will remain constant (and most likely will be similar but expanded in the next iteration of our school): to use social media to offer prospective students real time case studies through which to learn about the value of the program and the area in which they would be studying from their “fellow students.” We will continue to grow our online presences using both our future Commonwealth scholars and our new brand to spread what we do more virally. This approach, coupled with our traditional recruitment venues, our financial support offerings, and the community building we do with our current students, gives us a varied yet sustainable approach from which to court diverse students moving forward. Our Commonwealth funds continue to be a cornerstone in this sustained approach, not only because this source provides aid to support students, but because the specific mandates for this aid affords us a vehicle through which to have our students share their experiences directly with other students in an authentic ongoing fashion. We still believe the need for the talents our graduates develop will only grow in the coming years, and we want diverse students to continue to be a part of that success.

Appendix: sample blog posts

SAMPLE 1: Our new 2014-2015 Commonwealth Scholar, Shayla Boyce, introducing herself:

A Quick Intro

[SEPTEMBER 8, 2014](#) ~ [SHAYLA](#) ~ [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

Sorry for the delayed introduction. My name is Shayla Boyce and the last two weeks have been a whirlwind.

Hello!

I am Shayla, a Commonwealth Scholar working alongside Jourdan this semester. I am in the Master of Library and Information Science program with a specialization in public libraries. I completed my undergraduate degree in December 2013 from Shippensburg University. Before starting the program I worked at the Hill District Branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. I did not always want to be a librarian (for a number of years I verbally denounced the idea), but working in the Hill District let me know that this career was where I wanted to be.

I am on week three of my program and I still find it strange to say I am a graduate student. The first week was intense to say the least. I elected to attend the on-campus course LIS-2000 which was a bit different than in previous years. I spent the last week of August in class Monday through Friday from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Yes, class from 9 in the morning until 5 in the evening. We attended lecture, were assigned groups, and were told that we had to present a conference style presentation at the end of the week. As crazy as this may sound it was not an entire nightmare. I spent most of the time feeling a little lost and inferior. I was surrounded by all these brilliant people with real world experiences and skills that I simply did not have. It was not until the end of the week that it clicked. I lack a lot of skills, but I was focusing too much on what I wasn't instead of who I was and what my group could teach me.

The second week I started my hours in the Admissions Office at the iSchool as well as my Partners Placement at Carnegie Library of Swissvale. This adds up to about thirty hours a week not including travel time. I have always admired those who worked and went to school full time and now I am not sure how they do it. If you have any secrets please share them!! I am working on keeping on top and ahead of everything, but I make errors like everyone else.

If I have learned anything for sure it is that this is all a learning experience and there is always room for growth. I look forward to sharing my experiences with you. Wish me luck.

Best,

SAMPLE 2: post about our October Social Hour

November's Social Hour (Diwaloween)

NOVEMBER 7, 2014 ~ SHAYLA

The fall semester's Social Hours have centered around the many cultures that make up our iSchool. September's theme was a celebration of the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival. October's theme was Oktoberfest. For this month's Social Hour we partnered with ANKUR-Indian Graduate Student Association to focus on Diwali, the Indian Festival of lights.

In honor of Diwali we decided to challenge students to create Rangoli (Traditional Indian decoration usually created with flowers) with nontraditional materials.



Nontraditional materials = sprinkles and lentils

We were impressed with all of the student's amazing designs



Sample design created by ANKUR-IGSA



Created by DSO member Tom Charly





Students hard at work

The regular Social Hour activities (games, food, socializing) also occurred.



Brian Daniel D'souza, Michael Depew, and Tyler Brooks



Giant Jenga



Thanks to ANKUR-IGSA for all of their hard work! Also thanks to all the students, staff and faculty who made this event a success.

CW Scholar silliness



SAMPLE 3: post about our October Social Hour

NSBE41 Recruiting!

APRIL 6, 2015 ~ JOURDAN



Last week, I had the opportunity to attend NSBE 41: Innovation & Excellence: Reimagining Your Future in Anaheim, CA to recruit for the iSchool! This year was a different in a few ways; I didn't have to look for a job, and I had another student recruiter with me! I had a great time meeting students from all over the country and talking to them about their aspirations. I even talked to a high school student about college and going to med school! I also reconnected with SO many people from my old NSBE chapter at UMCP. It was really beautiful *tear*.

This convention was more about me transitioning into my professional life (and sightseeing Cali, of course). So, most of what I did involved a lot of networking, including meeting my future colleagues at Accenture. Can I just say they're a great group of people in every part of the country?! I'm glad I got to hear tips from working people before I get there. It makes the future seem a little brighter!

But, yeah....sightseeing. I LOVE CALIFORNIA!!! It was gorgeous and soooooooooo warm (it was snowing in Pittsburgh at the time). I really reconsidered returning to the east coast. Well....I did and then I remembered the cost of living and started packing my bags, haha. But, having a friend with me (and many more recruiting in other schools) gave me the opportunity to be a tourist. I got to see how the locals live and connected with a couple of new, awesome acquaintances on the west coast!

I definitely had an amazing time! As this is my last conference in school, I must stress how IMPORTANT it is to go to one (several). They're absolutely great for networking and obtaining employment/academic opportunities. You also get to see a part of the world that you haven't seen before (a friend went to BERLIN once). Worried about funding?! Look for some! The University of Pittsburgh offers traveling funds, especially to those who are participating as an exhibitor at the conference. If you're interested in being an MSIS/MST Commonwealth Scholar, recruiting comes with the job ;-). There are also tons of external programs and scholarships. Don't lose the opportunity! You won't regret it!