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Central Washington University, College of the Sciences
Science Talent Expansion Program
Recruiting and Retaining the Next Generation of STEM Professionals

The Science Talent Expansion Program (STEP) at Central Washington University (CWU) continues to work toward increasing the total number of students who obtain STEM degrees. We have developed successful strategies that recruit and retain students who are traditionally underrepresented in STEM disciplines at CWU. These strategies include: (1) recruitment of students in traditionally underrepresented-serving high schools and community colleges in central Washington State by a STEM recruiter who works jointly with CWU STEP and Admissions; (2) merit-based financial support for STEP-participating students; (3) an interdisciplinary freshman curriculum; (4) a bridging program for sophomore and transfer students that involves research, teaching, and recruiting opportunities; and (5) a unique residence opportunity for STEP students through the STEP Living Learning Community in two of our Ellensburg campus residence halls. Our successes suggest that all of these tactics can be adapted for use at other universities. Enrollment for Fall 2012 included 41 students in the freshman program (85.3% underrepresented), 25 students participating in the sophomore/junior bridging program (56.0% underrepresented), and 10 students in the transfer bridging program (60.0% underrepresented). Since 2007, CWU STEP has served 287 students (approximately 48 students per year and overall 76.7% underrepresented). CWU STEP students declare STEM majors at a higher rate than do a control group of students who indicated an interest in majoring in a STEM field on their entrance applications but chose to not participate in STEP. STEP students also have similar or higher cumulative GPAs compared to the students in the control group. Our STEP Recruiter continues to reach out to underrepresented students throughout central Washington State and to work closely with staff in the CWU Admissions Office. Financial support in the form of tuition waivers is available through the university and continues to help underrepresented students attend CWU and fund their college education. Strategies that have been developed and utilized by CWU STEP to better serve underrepresented students have local and national application, from mentoring and social support to the innovative and successful curriculum delivered to STEP freshman. CWU STEP students are involved in faculty-mentored research, participate in upper-level STEM programs at CWU, publish articles in peer-reviewed journals, attend national and international STEM conferences, and move on to STEM graduate programs.