

## **Academic Success Program for Students of Color at the University of Rhode Island**

### **An Overview**

The University of Rhode Island experienced its first major influx of minority students in 1968 (primarily African American) with the creation of the Special Programs for Talent Development. Since this historic event, URI has become increasingly diverse. Along with the Athletic Department, the Talent Development Program remains the primary vehicle for the recruitment and matriculation of students of color. As the university has increased the percentage of out-of-state students, this new student mix includes more students of color from beyond the borders of Rhode Island.

One of the important hallmarks for promoting student success in the Talent Development program has been its strong counseling and advising support network. Athletic programs are also unique by their ability to promote affiliation and community building through its various intercollegiate sports teams. Athletes develop strong familial and supportive bonds with fellow athletes and coaching staffs. Students of color who are from out of state and who are not student athletes or members of Talent Development do not have easily recognized and well-established institutional support networks.

Students who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities routinely come into contact with staff and faculty of color and therefore have greater opportunities to interact and develop mentor-mentee relationships. At predominantly white institutions such as URI, students of color rarely find themselves interacting with faculty and staff of color. It is not unusual for students to report that they have never or rarely have taken a course with a faculty member of color. Thus, opportunities for interaction and mentoring are limited and somewhat haphazard. Consequently, intentional programs and activities to bring faculty, staff and students of color into contact with each other on a regular basis can best assure these interactions.

### **The Program**

The academic success program for students of color at the University of Rhode Island is an initiative that has been proposed at various points in time since 1968. As recently as 2004, the URI Faculty and Staff of Color Association spearheaded this initiative. The purpose of that mentoring initiative was to provide an informal as well as formal mechanism for students of color to interact with faculty and staff and other students of color. The underlying assumption was that the resultant networking and mentoring relationships would help support students during their adjustment to college life, thereby increasing their overall retention and graduation as well as satisfaction with their college experience. In addition, this program will include an orientation to study skills and campus academic support networks.

## **Basic Description – URI Model**

### **Mentor Group Composition**

1. The mentoring program is based on matching faculty and staff mentors with a group of student mentees.
2. Ideally, mentor groups will be developed by matching academic and personal interests of students and faculty/staff.
3. The ideal mentor group will include at least one faculty/staff and one student mentor and five freshman student mentees.

### **Nature and Frequency of Mentor Meetings**

1. Mentor Groups will begin meeting during the Fall Semester 2006.
2. Mentor Groups will meet at least once every two weeks for not less than one hour.
3. Mentors will communicate (e-mail, telephone, in person) with each mentee at least once a week.
4. Every other mentor meeting will discuss academic concerns and personal/social concerns respectively.
5. Mentor Groups will meet at locations to be determined mutually by mentors and student mentees.
6. Subjects of discussion at mentor groups will be based on:
  - Academic and personal needs of students
  - Mutually determined subjects for discussion
  - One of several suggested topics:
    - Impact of race/ethnicity on academic achievement
    - Impact of race/ethnicity on personal comfort on campus
    - Unique challenges attending a predominantly white university
    - Opportunities for involvement in organizations, clubs, extracurricular activities

### **Mentor Expectations, Training and Support**

1. All mentors will participate in a training program to be held at the beginning of the academic year.
2. Mentors will receive a University of Rhode Island Resource Guide as well as information to participate in a mentor group listserv.
3. Mentors will participate in monthly mentor meetings for ongoing training and support.
4. Mentors will maintain a record of attendance of mentor meetings and brief summaries of topics discussed - information will be turned in to the Office of Planning Services.
5. Mentors will participate in program evaluation activities.
6. Unless personal and/or community safety and well-being are in jeopardy, all mentor discussion will be considered confidential.

## **The First Meeting**

1. Introductions and Expectations of Mentoring
  - a. Group expectations/norms shall be mutually determined by the group members
    - i. attendance, confidentiality, discussion topics, communication, etc.
2. Identify potential topics for discussion (academic, social, personal)
3. Exchange contact information
4. Establish a meeting schedule

## **Program Evaluation**

1. Mentees will complete surveys prior to the beginning of the program and after the fall and spring semesters.
2. Mentees will participate in a focus group to assess the effectiveness of the program and to offer recommendations for improvement.
3. Mentors will complete a survey and participate in a focus group to assess the effectiveness of the program and to offer recommendations for improvement.
4. Academic progress of mentees will be monitored after the fall and spring semesters and compared with the academic progress of comparable student groups on campus, including:
  - a. All first time-full time freshman
  - b. Talent Development and student athletes
  - c. Instate and out of state students of color