

# ICAS

The Intercultural Community for Academic Success (ICAS) is a project of the Academic Enhancement Center (AEC) Its mission is to support the academic growth and development of students from underrepresented racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds; improve retention; and insure that all URI students have equal opportunities for academic success.

ICAS' current working plan (available in its entirety upon request to davidhayes@mail.uri.edu) links six project goals to six sets of actions to be initiated beginning in spring 2006, and sustained through subsequent semesters. These projects aim to create a more inclusive and interculturally competent AEC environment, connect more students to support services, and ensure that all AEC support services are effective in providing support to students of color.

## Goals:

1. Create a more welcoming, inclusive, and interculturally competent Academic Enhancement Center through hiring and staff development, and increase use of AEC support services by students of color (*All actions*)
2. Help students of color to reflect on their academic experience, identify supports and barriers, and develop and implement strategies for success. (*Actions 2,3,4,5*)
3. Develop and/or strengthen academic supports that have historically succeeded in addressing needs for underrepresented students. (*Action 1, 6*)
4. Provide support to student and university organizations which work to enhance the opportunities for students of color to flourish academically. (*Actions 4,5*)
5. Collaborate with students, faculty, and staff to develop a vision of student success that values the strengths and identifies and addresses the needs of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse student communities. (*Actions 2,3,4,5*)
6. Conduct ongoing evaluation of the use and impact of AEC programs on retention and academic success across racial, ethnic and cultural distinctions (*All actions*)

## Actions:

**1. AEC Hiring and Staff Development (goal 1) A:** In fall 2005, AEC staffing reflected a stratified organization, with students of color occupying 8 of 10 clerical and receptionist positions, and tutoring and administrative staff nearly 85% white. This staff structure works against creating a more inclusive, welcoming space for non-white students, both as employees and as service recipients. The AEC will aim to hire and sustain a tutoring staff that is at least 30% students of color by fall semester of 2006.

**B:** Much of the work which occurs in tutoring and academic counseling interactions involves helping students to identify sources of struggle, reflect on their assumptions, and develop effective strategies for enhancing academic success. For the AEC to conduct this work with students of diverse backgrounds and racially and culturally informed experiences, our staff needs to be trained specifically in the development of intercultural communicative competence.

In Spring 2006, additional training processes that focus specifically on intercultural interaction were added to our pre-service and ongoing training process, which include monthly meetings, peer observations, and weblog discussions. In addition to integrating activities into existing processes, we will add several meeting/workshop activities during the semester. Activities for these meetings will include analyzing media influences and challenging core assumptions, role-playing critical incidents relevant to AEC work, and other critically reflective exercises.

**2. Supporting the fall transition for Talent Development students(goal 2)** The AEC has been fortunate to have built a supportive relationship with Talent Development (TD), which has resulted in an increase of use of our support services by talent development Students. Plans for additional, more focused supports have been proposed, including opening the AEC as a physical space for TD tutoring and study skills development in summer; providing space and support for peer facilitated and facilitated fall study groups, and support for transition-to-fall oriented discussions and workshops, and offering supplemental instructional support for select courses.

**3: Peer Facilitated Student Focus/Action Groups (goals 2,5)** A major goal in all areas of AEC work is to provide students with opportunities to build supportive, collaborative processes for identifying and addressing academic needs. In Spring 2006, ICAS trained a group of facilitators and conducted focus/action groups aimed at students of color to identify forces that work for and against academic success, develop strategies for enhancing academic performance, and plan action. We will continue to offer these groups in future semesters.

**4: Collaborations with and outreach to student groups and organizations (goals 2,4,5)**

In Spring 2006, ICAS began conducting outreach efforts among student groups which work to support success for students of color. Our goals are to raise awareness of ICAS and AEC mission and values, and connect students to available resources such as:

- Interactive training in tutoring and study skills techniques for AEC and non-AEC tutors, study group leaders and peer mentors. These sessions provide guidance in principles of effective learning, studying and tutoring; create opportunities for crucial reflection on existing tutoring and mentoring practices, and provide opportunities for collaboration, idea sharing between existing programs.
- Provide formal and informal referrals to organizations and services.
- Providing space for independent and tutor-supported group study.
- Access to internet and text-based resources such as study skills tip sheets, internet study support sites, course textbooks (for use in AEC only), books and resources on study skills development
- AEC-facilitated student workshops on any subjects related to academic success
- Closed large-group tutoring sessions for student groups
- Tutor support for off-center study events.

**5: Additional outreach/activities** ICAS student workers will be involved in ongoing outreach activities including:

- Staffing information booths in the memorial union, and conducting surveys and other kinds of activities from the booths and providing information about ICAS and about AEC programs
- Organizing and presenting panel discussions, dorm-based discussions, film nights, open mike events and other occasional student activities.
- Promoting ICAS initiatives in campus-based and local media
- Working with Resident Assistants to promote ICAS through dorm-based events and advertising.
- Maintaining an ICAS mailing list and communicating with students via the ICAS list
- Using facebook and other student interactive media to promote ICAS
- Using Talent Development's email newsletter to promote events and services

The ICAS project assistant will be additionally involved in:

- Working with faculty and staff to promote participation in ICAS-sponsored events, create for-credit opportunities for reflection on intercultural issues, encourage further student participation in AEC.
- Work with Athletics advisors and official to strengthen support for student athletes.