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Title: Mentoring African American Males

Author: Allessia P. Owens, LMSW

Student Success Programs Manager & Adjunct Faculty, Sociology

The ALANA Experience at Prince George's Community College has been promoting educational attainment for over 15 years. With this tradition in place we are devoted to assisting all students continue their education by providing structured support opportunities that include mentoring, academic advising, study skills and social development workshops. Our goal is to retain students so that they reach their educational and/or professional goals.

This semester The ALANA Experience will focus its efforts toward retaining African American males. We intend to raise their expectations of success and increase their levels of self-esteem and confidence. Research data indicate that African American males have fewer higher education opportunities than their female counterparts. Sum (2007) reports that African American males also have lower educational attainment than all their direct counterparts. In the 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplement of the Current Population Survey, the U.S. Census Bureau states, "African American women are attaining higher education at higher rates than African American men". African American males make up less than half, 42%, of African Americans earning bachelor's degrees. Of the small number of African American males in higher education, research has shown they feel isolated and unwelcome. However, researchers at The Ohio State University note that mentoring initiatives can help combat low retention rates, increase self esteem, and enrich black students overall college experience.

Research also highlights that African American males earn significantly higher income after obtaining a college degree as compared to those who drop out of high school (Sum, 2007). The challenge now is to assist and retain African American males in higher education. The ALANA Experience believes that advising, mentoring and offering African American males the opportunity to achieve are essential retention tools in meeting this challenge.

Mentoring is a proven retention strategy which when employed regularly improves students' academic performance. This fits well with Prince George's Community College's strategic goal of lifelong learning for all students. Through the mentoring experience, we establish a network of resources that are beneficial to the success of our students. In a mentoring relationship, educators have an opportunity to prepare our students to succeed in the academic and professional world in which they find themselves and to master the nuances of social development (Thomas, 2007). Mentors must have well-developed interpersonal skills including patience and compassion, and be knowledgeable of academic success strategies. Additionally, mentors must be skilled in assessing students' needs and understanding their career, educational, and personal aspirations. Mentors provide critical encouragement that serves to retain

students and promote their completion of an undergraduate degree. As a result, students also learn to develop trusting and mutually beneficial relationships.

With over four thousand colleges and universities in the United States, the limited educational attainment among African American males is appalling. ALANA is committed to changing this phenomenon by mentoring males, particularly its *Men Moving Forward* participants. *Men Moving Forward* is a student group coordinated through The ALANA Experience that fosters social skill development and promotes community involvement.

Men Moving Forward provides a network of assets that serve to counteract students' lack of personal resources. Through the use of dialogue sessions and participation in community service activities *Men Moving Forward* also provides its participants an opportunity for socio-emotional learning, self reflection, and discovery. This semester the *Men Moving Forward* participants are currently engaged in a community service project with a local middle school mentoring younger males. By reaching back to help their younger counterpart's students build personal confidence and improve their overall skill set for coping with the challenges confronting African American males.

In addition to providing students mentoring, social development and community service opportunities, ALANA also offers academic advising. This semester we plan to contact all ALANA male students to discuss and review their goals, academic program, and course selection for spring 2009. During this process, we will encourage and aid all ALANA students in the use of Owl Link. We believe this intervention will improve retention as well as increase their comfort level and competence with Owl Link.

If you are interested in becoming a mentor or participating in *Men Moving Forward*, please contact Alessia Owens at 301-322-0180 or email Alana@pgcc.edu.

References

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