

Support Unit Reviews:
Units Seeking to Improve Student Representation
Of Undergraduate Students from Underrepresented Groups

OFFICE OF MINORITY STUDENT AFFAIRS (OMSA)

For over three decades the Office of Minority Student Affairs (OMSA) and its forerunner have provided leadership on campus and collaborated with Academic Affairs units, faculty, community agencies, the U.S. Department of Education, and Student Affairs units to ensure that the University of Illinois remains a leader in the recruitment, retention and graduation of students from backgrounds underrepresented in higher education. The unit also credits the pioneering leadership of students enrolled in the mid 1960's, alumni, the Office of Admissions, local community leaders, campus administrators and the faculty, concerned citizens and student organizations for its success.

The OMSA provides essential services to about 3,500 undergraduate students, including: academic services, monitoring academic progress through graduate student counselors, preparing first generation college students for graduate school through the McNair Scholars Program, providing summer orientation sessions, instructing students in the use of information technology, conducting competency testing in software applications, and planning programs and events ranging from scholastic recognition ceremonies to career fairs. In addition, the Upward Bound College Preparatory Academy helps to prepare about 60 local low-income and first-generation high school students for college.

Compared to similar programs at other institutions, OMSA is a pacesetter in its educational retention and achievement system that is administered in conjunction with the Office of the Provost and the undergraduate colleges. This academic support model includes the monitoring of academic progress for students from low-income, first generation college or underrepresented backgrounds as well as such course-related support as subject-specific tutorial assistance, supplemental instruction in high-risk beginning courses, and language conversation groups. All academic support services are designed to assist students in becoming engaged and effective learners.

Effectiveness in Identifying and Serving Students

A close working relationship with the Office of Admissions and Records results in OMSA's notification beginning each fall semester as students are admitted for the following fall semester, resulting in early communication between OMSA and underrepresented students and their families. In addition, when students attend the University's Summer Orientation and participate in OMSA's extra two half-days for the President's Award Program (PAP) and the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) participants, as well as other underrepresented students, participants complete a Needs Assessment that provides staff with demographic information as well as students' career and academic aspirations and expected use of services.

Colleagues in other federal statewide TRIO programs such as Upward Bound and Talent Search refer students to the University. In addition, OMSA staff facilitate other relationships with high school guidance counselors and community agencies.

The Graduate Counselor model is used to provide intensive academic monitoring and encouragement of freshman students, as well as connection with other campus units, particularly college offices. In 1999, an external review team, described below, cited this

component as being particularly effective at helping to connect students to the University and to facilitate a culturally relevant community experience that also contributes to students' retention and graduation in a less than ideal (for underrepresented students) campus climate.

During 1997, the campus completed the renovation of an Academic Services Center at 1204 West Nevada for OMSA's delivery of academic services. The addition of this space has greatly improved the Academic Services component's ability to provide tutorial services, study skills instruction, and supplemental instruction and created a much more conducive learning environment for students. An analysis of tutoring and Supplemental Instruction services shows that students who are regular services users usually perform 0.5 to more than 1.0 mean grade point better than non-users with similar ACT composite scores and campus selection indices. In addition, the Center is known to be the most diverse academic work environment at the University: during 1998-99, of 97 student peer tutors, 38% were African-American, 23% were white, 20% were Latino, and 19% were Asian.

Other services include pre-professional advising through student organizations such as the Minority Association of Future Attorneys (MAFA) and Minority Opportunities for Pre-Health Students (MOPS); the creation of a campus-wide directory of minority organizations; two career fairs, one for career opportunities and the other for summer internships; and workshops in areas such as resume writing and leadership skills development.

Many cultural activities are facilitated through the African-American Cultural Program. These include workshops through WBML radio, a theater course, the Lunch and Learn series, the University Black Chorus, and the Omnimov dancers.

Success in Improving Student Participation and Achievement

The OMSA state budget is augmented through three federal U.S. Department of Education TRIO grants that together equal nearly one-half of the unit's total budget. During 1999 the department was notified of the receipt of two multi-year grants from the U.S. Department of Education to continue the Upward Bound Pre-college program and the McNair Scholars Institute.

The Upward Bound program has existed on the UIUC campus since 1966 and serves low-income, first-generation high school students throughout the academic year and during an intensified summer component that includes courses in reading, writing, mathematics and science. In 1999, 65 students, including 12 graduating seniors, completed the summer program. All 12 seniors matriculated at four-year institutions that include the University of Illinois, Southern Illinois University, Morehouse College, Clark/Atlanta University, and Tougaloo College.

The Student Support Services Program (SSSP) serves more than 250 low-income, first-college generation students with intensive tutorials and non-cognitive advising and career counseling. Recent cohorts of SSSP participants have entered UIUC with a mean ACT composite score approximately 7 points below that of the freshman class as a whole (20 vs. 27), yet during 1999-00 academic year, the freshman persistence rate was greater than 95.0%. More than 27.0% of participants achieved a GPA of at least 3.0, with another 35.0% above a 2.50 GPA (A=4.0).

The McNair Scholars Program, which is supplemented by OMSA's state funding, reflects the fact that the University recognizes the importance of encouraging students from underrepresented groups to seek careers in higher education and of preparing them to enter doctoral programs and eventually, the ranks of the professorate. Now in its tenth consecutive year, the program provides intensive academic services with an emphasis placed on the early identification of students' interests, strengths, and weaknesses. More than two-thirds of already-graduated McNair Scholars from the 1997 and 1998 cohorts are enrolled in graduate and professional programs across the nation. Their mean cumulative grade point averages were 3.52 for the 1996 cohort and 3.39 for the 1997 graduates. Since 1990, 170 campus faculty have mentored 247 summer McNair research students. That figure represents 7.4% of tenured faculty in 1997 and includes more than twenty faculty from underrepresented groups.

More than 700 students receiving OMSA services attained at least a 3.40 GPA during 1999.

The graduation rate for underrepresented students, which is the unit's "bottom line," ranks 20th in the nation among Traditionally White Institutions, and 29th for African-American Baccalaureate degrees.¹ As of fall 1998, the University's graduation/retention rates for students who matriculated in 1991 were 67.0% for African Americans, 72.0% for Latinos, and 83.0% for all other students. Data from comparable institutions shows a graduation rate for the 1991 cohort of 34.0% (male) to 45.0% (female) for African Americans, and 56.0% (male) to 60.0% (female) for white students.² Recent data from other Illinois institutions shows graduation rates of 25.0% for African-Americans and 37.0% for Latinos.

Effectiveness in the Use of Resources

High marks for the department came from an external review committee that was comprised of representatives from two peer institutions, the Universities of Wisconsin and Maryland, and commissioned by the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs to review OMSA during spring of 1999. The process involved the review committee's gathering information from a wide array of campus administrators, faculty, and students. The committee's findings indicated that the department was providing outstanding services but was in need of increased financial resources.

The committee particularly noted a concern that half of the department's funding was from federal grants and in their evaluation indicated that the budget is "too heavily reliant on Department of Education funding." Furthermore, the report states that "the number of targeted minority students served has more than doubled over the past ten years, (but) the state base budget has not kept pace."

Changes Based Upon Previous Evaluations

¹From *Black Issues in Higher Education*, July 8, 1999

²UIUC data is from the University's Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, *Underrepresented Groups at the University of Illinois* Fall 1998 report. Comparable data is from the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* September 10, 1999 issue; see Graduation Rates At NCAA Colleges by Division, Gender, and Race (Division I table). Note that UIUC underrepresented student data is not reported by gender; NCAA is **only** reported by gender.

OMSA continuously assesses both students and services. The Needs Assessment conducted during the summer before a student's matriculation is supplemented by surveys and interviews aimed at particular sub-groups such as particular majors or career aspirations. Services are added, subtracted, or otherwise altered, based upon these assessments. One recent trend concerns increased consumer-orientation on the part of students, and a concomitant increase in demand for staff time and services.

Based upon a recommendation from the external review team, improved coordination now exists between OMSA's and the campus-wide summer orientation. Orientation student leaders for both programs now train together for the entire previous spring semester, and other campus units such as the Office of Student Financial Aid and University Library are integral parts of OMSA's segment. In addition, for the past six years OMSA staff met for 1½ hours with each group of parents of students attending orientation. Via evaluations, parents communicate their appreciation of the opportunity to meet OMSA staff and students and to ask questions about the environment that their children will be entering.

OMSA has made a significant investment in technology. A comprehensive Web site for the office offers considerable information. Graduate Counselors track the academic progress of their undergraduates in a timely manner by utilizing sophisticated databases, maintained via the Web. This information is available to assistant and associate deans to facilitate their work with students in colleges. OMSA's partnership with Microsoft and 40 other leading colleges and universities have greatly facilitated the unit's technology upgrades. The retail value of software alone has exceeded \$250,000, and the staff have benefited from the company's training as well.

OMSA collaborates with various national entities in order to provide services appropriate to students being educated in a world-class university. The director has participated in the Council of Graduate Schools' (CGS) Annual Deans' Retreat, which has contributed to OMSA's effectiveness in placing students in Research I graduate schools nationwide. The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) has provided invaluable professional development opportunities, and has helped staff to remain aware of national trends and cutting-edge issues in the support of non-traditional students. The Director and one of the Associate Directors annually co-chair the National McNair Research Conference, which attracts nearly 600 students and staff from more than 30 states and over 100 McNair and Student Support Services programs. The conference brings together agencies and organizations such as the U.S. Department of Education, Educational Testing Services, the Princeton Review, the CGS, COE, and other interested collaborators who wish to help provide opportunities for underrepresented students.

AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL PROGRAM (AACP)

The African American Cultural Program had five student workshops and several workshops and presentations designed to inform and strengthen students in their development. The workshops include the University Black Chorus, OMNIMOV dance workshop, Theater of the Black Experience, GRIOPT newsletter, and WBML radio. The AACP also conducts MAAFA week, Student Leaders Summit, and Lunch and Learn. The following is a comparison of the number of participants from 98-99 and 99-00:

	<u>1998-1999</u>	<u>1999-2000</u>
Black Chorus	140 participants	145 participants
GRIOT Newsletter	16 participants	6 participants
Theater	35 participants	50 participants
OMNIMOV	8 participants	10 participants
WBML	43 participants	30 participants
MAAFA Week	80 participants	350 participants
Leaders Summit	65 participants	60 participants
Lunch and Learn	65 participants	200 participants

The above numbers reflect changing needs in the student workshops versus AACP's budgetary constraints. The GROIT newsletter was not staffed so that resources could be allocated to student leadership development.

As shown above, the AACP showed significant success in improving student participation. Many of the students participating in the Leadership summit have gone on to become leaders of student organizations. AACP's programming seems to be conducive to the extra-curricular needs of students.

A comparison of the total number of contacts through all of the African American Cultural Program activities versus the dollars allocated in the 1998-99 budget reveals that the African American Cultural Program expends approximately \$10.00 per contact. This figure is based upon the total dollars allocated in the 1998-99 budget (\$188,661) divided by the total number of AACP contacts (20,431). For 1999-00 the Program expended approximately \$7.50 per contact based on an annual budget of \$194,737 divided by the total number of AACP contacts of 26,835. This number is an approximation based upon attendance at all AACP sponsored and co-sponsored events, plus building usage numbers.

The AACP also participates in a number of campus-wide recurring events designed to serve as an outreach to local and state-wide communities. AACP staff members participate in the following programs and activities sponsored by other campus units:

- President's Award Program day
- Mom Day Activities
- Affirmative Action Awards Program
- Black History Month outreach to local area schools
- Champaign County Urban League Achievement Matters Rallies at Local High Schools

The AACP also encourages the use of its facilities for student and community groups. Several community advocacy organizations such as the Concerned Citizens for Quality Education, the NAACP, the Urban League, and the ACE Mentorship program, utilize the facility as part of their

outreach efforts to students. The AACP also allows programs serving high school and elementary school age children to utilize AACP's computer lab as they promote computer and internet literacy. All of the above activities have the secondary purpose of encouraging local children to give consideration to attending college in general and the UIUC in particular.

The AACP conducts a yearly survey of undergraduate students to assess their familiarity with the AACP and its programming. The AACP depends greatly on this survey to evaluate its current programs and make projections on how to allocate resources for future program efforts. Based upon the surveys and focus group information, efforts on student leadership development and information dissemination were enhanced and the need for more publicity of AACP major programs was addressed. Thus, the program's numbers were significantly higher this year. Better coordination of programming for Black student organizations was initiated so that human and financial resources could be used more efficiently. The AACP realizes that students would use the AACP facilities for many more activities if the meeting space were adequate to fill their needs. Data reveals that the largest meeting room is heavily used and students would benefit from a facility that is large enough to hold additional student oriented programs and meetings.