

# Retention and Graduation of African-American Students at UNC

be aware of the general college requirements because obviously some of them are not.

Problems also arise when a student has too many courses. Half-way decent advisors should explain to the student that certain course combinations are detrimental both academically and physically.

"I'm not convinced that black freshmen receive the best advice as first semester students regarding course selection and academic load," Dean Woodard said.

Carolyn Cannon, assistant dean of academic services, said that sometimes the problem is not the adviser, but the student.

"One of the most difficult problems I encounter with black students is that they have very little flexibility about what courses they choose to take. They read the majors' manual and develop a mindset about the courses they want. I find it is very difficult to get people to listen to someone else's advise."

Dean Cannon also believes that black students mistrust white advisers.

"I often find that black students don't go to see their advisers because they automatically suspect that the adviser won't help them because they're black. I think they ought to at least keep their appointments with them to see whether the adviser is going to help them or not."

Black students have an alternative to the regular University advising system. The Office of Student Counseling's (OSC) primary objective is to assist African-American and Native American students with their academic goals. OSC is directed by Associate Dean, Rosalind Fuse-Hall and Assistant Dean, Harold Woodard. The deans counsel students on all types of programs ranging from preregistration to personal problems.

Minority Advisors (MA's) in the office are upperclassmen who serve as peer counselors and tutors for incoming freshmen. Each African or Native American student is assigned an MA. MA's visit freshmen at least twice a month and report back to graduate assistants who in turn report to the OSC Deans.

OSC also sponsors Scholastic Advancement Sessions (SAS) to tutor freshmen in almost all courses at the University. In addition, the office holds Academic Skills Sessions designed to help freshmen adjust to college by giving them tips on notetaking and time management.

Despite all of OSC's work, it too has problems.

"We marginalize our support services," said Rosalind Fuse-Hall. "We don't put enough money into the program to provide the kinds of support the kids need. OSC is basically staffed with three people, yet we see probably about 1500 students. No other advisers have a workload compared to ours. I would like to have money and more professional staff to make the office more

efficient."

## Inadequate high school preparation

High schools traditionally have offered college preparatory or advanced courses to students who want to go onto higher education. However, almost no high school curriculum can prepare a student for the demands of collegiate rigor. Consequently, almost all students enter college with some educational deficiency—some have more deficiencies than others. Trends indicate that rural counties and smaller counties with limited resources have fewer college preparatory courses. As a result, students from these high schools, black or white, may not be well-prepared for college.

"I don't believe African-American students fully understand how unequally North Carolina prepares its students for college," Dean Woodard said. "If you examine the degree of difficulty of a student's high school work, you'd find a great degree of variation from student to student. The result being that students enter UNC with impressive grades, but they haven't all been prepared at the same level."

Students entering UNC may have difficulty adjusting to large classes and taking notes effectively. Students many also find it hard to keep up with the vast amount of reading that accompanies college courses. And writing papers in college always proves to be a problem because many high schools stressed grammar basics rather than content in the English courses.

Instructors expect students to have certain minimum skills when they enter UNC. They look for everyone to be basically on the same level. Students cannot be blamed for a poor educational system created the deficiencies within them. However, a problem arises when a student does not utilize the academic support services on campus in order to make up for the inadequate high school preparation.

If you can't keep up in class, then get some help.

"Black students have to accept the responsibility of doing the extra work necessary to meet an instructor's expectations," Dean Woodard said. "They may fall behind if they fail to take the initiative to work to overcome any deficiencies they may have."

The College of Arts and Sciences has developed a wide range of academic support services to help UNC students. Academic support services include tutorials in math and chemistry. The Writing Center, which works under the English Department, offers tutorial assistance to students who want to strengthen their writing skills.

The Learning Skills Center (LSC) located in Phillips Annex, also addresses problems that students may have with adapting to collegiate academics. LSC provides services in several areas that mainly target students in General Col-

lege. The center offers a number of programs including mini-courses in speed reading and comprehension.

Although LSC provides valuable services to the University, few black students actually use the center. Dr. Martha Keever, assistant LSC director, said that black students do not use the center because they're afraid people will think they're not intelligent.

"There's a stigma attached to the learning skills program," Dr. Keever said. "Some people feel that when you go there for speed reading or other help, then there's something wrong with you. Black students who use the center would be highly criticized since people think they're not supposed to be at the University anyway."

The only truly dumb are those who are fazed by what other people say.

## But We're Gonna Make It

Statistics on the retention and graduation rates of African-American students are not encouraging—yet numbers do not tell the whole story. The statistics are dangerous because they might deter other intelligent black students from attending UNC, which would only perpetuate the problem of low minority enrollment. It is im-

possible to pinpoint precise reasons for the relatively low number of black students who enter the University because African-American are indeed a diverse group of people. And despite the discouraging statistics, there are black students all over UNC who are excelling academically. There are blacks all this campus, who graduate in four years. There are black students all over campus, who make positive contributions to the University. The number of black UNC students is irrelevant—numbers are sometimes a psychological mechanism designed to keep people oppressed. Fourteen hundred blacks doesn't seem like many, but it can be enormous if all of them can graduate. A few in a minority can have the same voice as a majority, if the group works together toward acquiring common goals. Since 1938, people have constantly told us that we do not belong at UNC-Chapel Hill, but no matter what they say, "We're gonna make it."

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