

## **Introduction**

This essay emerges from an on-going study of academic achievement, persistence and graduation of undergraduate students—particularly those who arrive in the academy with limited preparation.

The essay is prepared and distributed in advance for those attending the 2007 General Education Institute who would like to participate in a concurrent session on this topic. To avoid a lengthy presentation we ask that you read the paper before the session and come prepared to analyze and critique the essay. Feel free to present your own perspectives based on your research, experience or general observations.

We will ask 3-4 participants to prepare brief reaction papers to initiate the discussion. Our goal is maximum participation toward deeper insights and understandings of successful principles of student retention and graduation.

## **ACADEMIC PRINCIPLES for STUDENT SUCCESS**

I would like to focus on some analytical principles developed in more than four decades of teaching and research at a variety of institutions. These principles come out of my work with undergraduate students from all backgrounds, most of them with limited levels of preparation and confidence. While most of my research has focused on African American students, I have found the principles work for all students. My efforts have always been inclusive—even when focused on Black students.

The retention and graduation of African American students has long been a key issue in higher education. Although educators have developed a variety of programs to meet the challenges of academic success for African Americans the progress has been painfully slow and often disappointing.

While I do not claim to have a perfect formula, I believe it is important to look beyond specific institutions, programs and groups toward the development of analytical principles. These can be subjected to scholarly research in the pursuit of a general theory of academic achievement, persistence and graduation for undergraduate students—with a particular emphasis on those who arrive with limited preparation and skills, but high hopes.

I come to this task from a long career as a faculty member and administrator in a wide range of academic institutions ranging from one of the most elite private liberal arts four-year colleges to one of the highest-ranked research universities in the nation. This experience also includes service at a private historically black college, an urban university, and a land-grant university. In every venue I have placed significant emphasis on academic achievement, persistence and graduation for all students—but particularly students of color and low-wealth White students—with considerable success.

I also had the benefit of participating in study and research programs that probed issues of student motivation and academic achievement in depth. Two of the most notable were the National Institute of Education Study Group that produced the path-breaking report, Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of Higher Education in America (1984), and the Indiana University study led by George Kuh that resulted in the book, Involving Colleges (19\_\_).

In my most recent full-time academic position at Iowa State University—where I served with my wife Dr. Emily L. Moore (**currently Provost and Academic Vice President at Dillard University in New Orleans**)—we were able to combine the key lessons learned from our research, experience and literature review into a comprehensive and systematic program where we concentrated on getting students actively involved in their learning, and raised their academic expectations. Largely as a result of this effort Iowa State University has experienced a five-year period in which the (six year) graduation rates for African American students has exceeded the national average for public universities. **[cite ISU data and web-site reference]** This rise followed a 20-year period of below average graduation rates for African American students.

I would like to focus on the key principles that led to this dramatic change, and discuss how they were implemented at the university. I also believe these principles have significance for different academic settings and students.

## **Goals, Principles, and Operating Strategies**

### **Major Goal**

Help students expand their sense of identity from the social arenas of their racial/ethnic selves into a complex academic arena where they also view themselves in academic terms.

### **Operating Principle**

**“Retention and Graduation of Undergraduate Students: A Comprehensive Approach”**

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General Education Institute—2007

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Carefully constructed links between high academic expectations, traditional academic programs, and academically-focused student life programs helps students shape an identity with academic domains, within the framework of their social identity.

### **Fundamental Principles**

1. Place academic programs at the center of all retention efforts.
2. Academic programs must emphasize very high expectations.
3. Front-load academic programs and retention efforts.
4. Stress active involvement of students in the learning process.
5. Increase time on task to maximum levels.
6. Student life programs should supplement academic programs.
7. Mutual respect, cooperation and support between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.

### **Effective Strategies**

1. Academic programs with high expectations.
2. Student life programs with academic focus:
  - Heterogeneous
  - Homogenous
  - Multicultural/Multiracial
3. Active involvement of faculty, staff and graduate students.
4. Build on student assets rather than emphasize deficits.
5. Transform student’s sense of alienation from deficits to assets.
6. Counter the “ultimate doom” syndrome experienced by students and some faculty/administrators.

### **African American Students at Iowa State University**

For many years Iowa State University has aggressively recruited African American students—thus upholding the legacy of George Washington Carver. Few understand that George Washington Carver was the first African American to graduate from Iowa State University and also serve on the faculty. He received his Bachelor’s degree there in 1898 and went on to complete a Master’s degree in Botany. Then he was appointed to the faculty and taught at Iowa State University until Booker T. Washington recruited him to Tuskegee Institute. The George Washington Carver spirit of academic achievement is strong on the campus. A distinctive statue of Carver stands in a plaza just south of the main administrative building. An extraordinary mural depicting his life and work hangs in the Food Sciences Building. In addition, a major building on the campus, in which the African American Studies Program is located is named after George Washington Carver. Therefore there is justification in recruiting minority

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students—and particularly Black students—in honor of the legacy of excellence in study, research and teaching left by George Washington Carver.

As of the fall semester 2002 (when we began to see the impact of our retention efforts) ISU had enrolled 641 African American students, 300 males and 341 females. The total numbers have been steadily growing and show an impressive gender balance. **[Must update to most recent data—Fall 2005 or Fall 2006]**

On the other hand Iowa State University has had a serious problem with the persistence to graduation of African American students. Data from the Office of Institutional Research revealed that from 1983, when these results were first collected, until recent times the University has been well below the national average in the six-year graduation rate of African Americans. For an eleven-year period, from 1983 to 1994 the six-year graduation rate of each cohort ranged from 24 to 34 percent. When Dr. Moore and I joined Iowa State University in January 1998 we had a very different mission, but we felt these results were unacceptable and had to be addressed through our academic and administrative efforts.

We started with the conviction that a comprehensive and systematic approach to academic achievement for minority students—particularly African Americans—could be very effective. We felt that through the African American Studies program and related efforts we could combine rigorous academic programs with student affairs strategies focused on academic performance. We engaged in a relentless pursuit of academic achievement and intellectual excellence for every student we encountered.

In developing this program the support of the administration was crucial. We had strong and unequivocal support from the President, Gregory Geoffroy, the Provost, Ben Allen, the Vice President for Student Affairs, Tom Hill, and the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Michael Whiteford. All of these administrators and their support staff did all they could to ensure we did not encounter barriers that would impede our efforts.

I also benefited from similar levels of support for to earlier efforts at the University of California Santa Cruz, Tougaloo College in Mississippi, Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, and Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. Strong administrative support freed us to focus on academic and co-curricular programs that would impact student academic achievement and persistence.

## **Academic Achievement: A Comprehensive Strategy**

**High Expectations and Student Active Involvement in Learning:** The first step was to increase the academic rigor of the curriculum. The goal was to create an environment of high expectations in which students would realize they could achieve far beyond their perceived ability. Therefore the courses for which we were personally responsible raised the level of expectations. In the introductory course in African American Studies (201) designed for freshmen and sophomores students were required to read 18 major books in their entirety. In addition they wrote 13 short essays on assigned topics, led 3-4 class discussions with *additional* written presentations and completed a comprehensive final examination. The course required that students become actively involved in the learning process, and the syllabus indicated we expected a student to spend approximately 12 hours each week studying for the course. The course regularly attracted 60-80 students every semester, about 15-20 of them African American.

**[The course syllabus is appended]**

Similar heightened expectations—combined with active student involvement in learning—were also a part of two other basic courses, “African American Women” (30 students—10-15 African American) and a freshman-only course **[LAS 150]** taught for our Multicultural Learning Community (60 students—20 African American).

Through these curricular efforts we personally engaged approximately 150-200 students each academic year—about 35-60 of them African American. **The goal was to help students expand their sense of self-identity from the social arena of their racial/ethnic backgrounds into an equally complex academic arena. Our own experience and research for more than 4 decades as well as the scholarship of others shows that deliberate and carefully constructed links between high academic expectations and student life programs help students strengthen their identity with academic domains—often within the framework of their social identity. [Cite: Treisman, Hrabowski, Blake, Saufley, Melodia, Porter, Cowan, Tinto, Astin, NIE Study Group, et. al]**

I cannot stress too strongly the significance as well as the difficulty and complexity of the process I am attempting to describe. We sought to do much more than change the pattern of behavior of ill-prepared and under-achieving students. We wanted a change in perception and self-definition. Although much emphasis was placed on their racial identity in social programs and student activities, our goal was to get them to self-perceptions as more than *only* African American students. Much more we wanted to get them to perceive themselves

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as students in general, and particularly as biologists, chemists, journalists, sociologists, political scientists, engineers and more. We wanted their identity with the academic domain to ultimately become almost as important as their identity with the racial/ethnic domain.

The two components of this process were first of all high expectations within a context of respect for their ability to learn, and secondly active and intense involvement of students in the learning process. We asked students to plan 4 hours of study out of class for every hour of class time. One part of active involvement in learning was a strong emphasis on writing. We saw writing as an important part of the process of exploration of self and promoting the expansion of identity. As one observer put it, writing “celebrates the value of each person’s unique story and song.” [Sharon Olds, The Nation Magazine, October 10, 2005, pp. 5-6]

We realized this was an incredible stretch to ask of undergraduate students, but felt we could do no less than challenge our students because we could not accept failure—in any form. It was the task we took on and even when our success was limited, we started a thinking and consciousness-raising process among students that was extremely important.

The central focus then was in the academic realm. We built the student affairs parts of our program to supplement and promote this emphasis on an expanded and complex role-identity through academic achievement.

**Multiple Co-Curricular Strategies:** The curricular innovations and pedagogical strategies of high expectations and student active involvement in learning were combined with three carefully designed student support groups whose goals were to also promote active student involvement in the learning process while stressing high expectations. The student groups met regularly in consciousness-raising sessions that placed emphasis on academic identity, self-esteem and academic achievement. The groups provided students with both homogeneous and heterogeneous settings where they could explore many complex and often very personal issues. Led by undergraduate peers, the student support groups also included participation by faculty, administrators and graduate students who were important resources to the undergraduates. Between the regular meetings these groups sponsored study tables, mentoring programs and collaborative efforts all designed to keep students focused on their academic studies—and only their academic studies. The student support groups made special efforts to engage freshmen from the time they arrived on campus so they would be less likely to let the social side of campus life interfere with their academic progress. All of the student support groups met in comfortable settings with a nice box lunch always provided free of charge.

**In every arena of interaction with students, and through teaching assistants as well as student support staff I relentlessly stressed academic achievement, active involvement in learning, and high expectations in three ways: (1) an expectation that all students would uphold the intellectual legacy of George Washington Carver and strive 4.0 gpa; and (2) students would develop study schedules that allocated 4 hours of study each week for every hour of academic credit in their course work. (3) Finally I stressed that a student should NEVER miss a class session. Regardless of the circumstances a student should be present in every class.**

**The A-Society** was the umbrella student support group from which the other groups built their programs. The A-Society is a heterogeneous group where men and women from all backgrounds gather. What is more the A-Society has become the place where committed and supportive faculty can go to increase their communication with minority students. Recently the Chair of a major science department asked the students to advise him on their experiences in his programs and with his faculty. It was an effort to increase faculty understanding of the students, but in the process the session raised the student’s sense of their responsibilities for their success in the program. Other faculty came to these meetings to seek student guidance on dealing with delicate classroom discussions of race and ethnicity. It led to a sense of partnership between the students and faculty, as well as creating a sense of empowerment and responsibility among students. The general features of the A-Society are: (Post Transparency).

**The Band of Brothers** (transparency) is open to men only—from all backgrounds. However the focus is on consciousness-raising and academic achievement among African American males. In their meetings the participants talk candidly and honestly about issues they would be uncomfortable discussing in the presence of women. The candor reflected in the deliberations leads students to deeper insights about what they must do to succeed academically.

**The Circle of Trust** (transparency) focuses on self-esteem and academic achievement among African American females. In their meetings they are also able to explore ideas that would be impeded by the presence of male peers. In all the meetings of the student support groups some of the discussion is consciously directed toward study and learning strategies to meet the higher expectations of the African American Studies courses.

### **Student Responses:**

A number of students have written evaluations of the combined academic and student affairs efforts. A few of them follow (permission granted):

### **Latino male: Biology/Pre-Med**

*The amount of work the students have to complete (in the classes) doesn't sound that extreme once they finally realize they are ACTUALLY learning something. This is the moment the students understand and appreciate that they are required to THINK and NOT to REPEAT. The fact that I have been taught to analyze and to think critically for myself has been the most valuable aspect of my experience in the African American Studies Department. It is a feeling of consciousness that allows you to be amazed by your own capacity. This is a power that was once shadowed by the insecurities and fears I felt because of the experience of a totally new environment.*

*The student support groups like “The A Society” and “The Band of Brothers” were a place for me to meet new students and faculty who could help me achieve my best. The experiences I had in the support groups, completed the learning process outside the classroom. They also provided a safe environment for my academic development. All this in such a synchronized way that I could relate what I was learning there and apply it to my other classes. For example, the way I used to read my Biology books was that I would look and try to memorize every single word in the chapter. Now, after my experience in the support groups, I try to comprehend the material, understand and develop my own conclusions from what I have learned.*

### **African American Male: Meteorology**

*Currently, I am a fifth year senior in Meteorology and planning to attend graduate school in the fall of 2004. I am originally from Baton Rouge, Louisiana.*

*Importance of family and collaboration with others are fundamentals that I have held to since youth. Throughout middle and high school, academics came easy. I graduated high school third out of 158 students. I had applied to several universities including Iowa State. I was accepted to each school. ISU was not my first choice. In fact, it was probably close to the last. The main reason I accepted my offer of admission to ISU was financial aid – just as many minority students. Without any prior visit to the campus or conversation with anyone familiar with the university, I stepped onto campus grounds in the fall of 1999.*

*My first perception of Iowa State University was not necessarily a positive one. For the first time, I was away from home and it didn't seem like I could make a new home there. The culture shock hit immediately. I went through my entire first semester basically on my own and distant, even from the African American community. I knew of no evident support group I could truly depend upon. An image of the necessity of individuality had successfully infiltrated my*

*thought patterns. This was directly contradictory to the groundwork that had been laid throughout my life.*

*Over the next couple of years, I began to become involved socially with different organizations on campus. I became more comfortable with my surroundings but I was unable to point at any of these groups and honestly admit they had a direct bearing on the way I approached my academics. My intellectual ability was not nearly being tested enough and my thirst for academic excellence was rather short-lived at times. The majority of the people I had met had the similar goal of graduation as I did, but very few really seem excited or enthusiastic about learning everything they can from every different angle possible. Then during my junior year, I attended my first Band of Brothers meeting.*

*Never before had I seen such zeal pertaining to academic and intellectual advancement, especially among African American men. Undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, staff, and even administration were all on the same page. Everyone was concerned with the betterment of students, specifically undergraduates. I had never been in a setting where professors would sit down and just tell students what they expect of them through conversation. In turn, they also asked how they could be more accessible. It was tremendous how these exchanges aided in closing the gap between instructors and students. It made the relationship more personalized rather than just lecturer to student. Even when it came to interaction with other students, their words left impressions. In college setting, it would be ideal to say that students are always participating in intellectual exchanges and conversations. In most of the cases that I have witnessed, though, this isn't the norm. At these meetings, I was exposed to other students in similar situations as myself speaking on their research projects, preparations for graduate school, and discussions with their faculty mentor. They even shared ideas from books they had recently read and shared information about their experiences. Once I was exposed to this environment, I began to invite other people to attend as well.*

*There are numerous stories of the group's influence on individuals. Many of these experiences are very similar in nature. For instance, one participant began attending during his sophomore year. He had been struggling academically since he arrived at Iowa State. Even though he never really asked anyone for help directly through the Band of Brothers, he credits the participants therein to be very influential in making his academic goals a priority again. The examples of the others before him had a profound impact causing him to charge himself to reach his potential. A graduate student in engineering has pledged himself to the Band of Brothers by offering free tutoring to anyone in need. That has had a direct impact on several participants as well. Some students have developed mentor-mentee relationships that have provided them with direction in respect to their academic endeavors.*

### **African American Female: History, Education, Psychology**

*I am senior in History and Secondary Education with a minor in Psychology. I have been an active participant in the Circle of Trust for the past 3 years. One of the reasons I joined the Circle is because it is a true academic support system. The ladies of the Circle genuinely care about each other's success. I often tell interested ladies that one of the benefits of participating in the Circle of Trust is the community connection that it creates.*

*In meetings sisters often voice their concerns and/or problems in certain classes and this results in other members offering solutions to these concerns. For a freshman battling with academic and social adjustments, it is encouraging to walk on campus and come across a sister from the Circle and having her ask how your test went or if tutoring is going well. Many times new students struggle with balancing the social and academic side of college life. The first portion of the Circle's mission is to "...encourage the academic achievement, professional development, and personal empowerment..." helps facilitate group achievement and support.*

*The Circle's make up of students, faculty, and staff creates a sense of family, because every family has leaders it is essential that the Circle has elders as well. Our elders are the faculty, staff, and graduate students who contribute to our success. These ladies motivate the Circle towards achievement. By encouraging academic achievement, professional development, and personal empowerment with inclusive meetings, participants are introduced into the world of professionalism and success. Faculty's participation is a must to the effectiveness of the Circle of Trust. Often undergraduates feel disconnected with their professors and instructors. Consequently, whenever a faculty or staff member is speaking at a Circle of Trust meeting attendance is exceptional. Why? Because the Circle's members are looking for motivation, stimulation, and validation from their elders. Motivation comes from the kind words of encouragement from faculty and staff. At times, students are so overwhelmed with external conflicts that they lose the focus of their internal desires. Fortunately, for the Circle the support of faculty and staff can bring the educational goals back into perspective. Stimulation takes place from the challenges faculty and staff provide to the Circle, they promote higher academic standards and expectations. Lastly, validation occurs from their presence, as professionals they confirm that our efforts are attainable. As undergraduates striving to reach academic goals, interaction with individuals who sincerely care about our success, achievement, and well being intensifies our academic expectations and performance.*

### **African American Female: Communications**

*I am a sophomore majoring in Communications. I have been working with the African American Studies program in one way or another for a year now and the Circle of Trust for the same amount of time. With my dealing with the Circle and from hearing of the dealing and interactions among the other groups and their members, I have realized that one of the key ingredients that makes each group highly successful is diversity. Not just ethnic diversity, but diversity in every sense of the word. From the freshman from Oakland CA, to the graduate student from Baltimore, to the nontraditional student who has a family living five minutes from campus each member brings a different perspective to the group. With the different backgrounds and experiences, members can potentially find solutions to achieving academically. Whether it be learning how to study more effectively, dealing with peer pressure or coping with the daily pressures of life as a college student.*

*In dealing with groups whose objective is to create an environment where various life issues are addressed, it is important that we lean on the diversity of the group. By lean, I mean that in order to get a more full and complete feel of a subject, the expertise of the nontraditional student, the freshman, the graduate student, faculty, and the like are needed.*

*What is more, each member has something they can bring to the meeting. In each group, because of cohesiveness among each member, not only ideas, but also possible opportunities can be shared. For instance: a sophomore looking for an internship expresses as much during a group meeting. Listening carefully, a graduate student in that same field of study remembers that the department is looking for sophomores to work with. Instead of that sophomore waiting around to get an e-mail or a letter in the mail from the college about internships, the student gets a chance that most students do not stumble upon until later in their academic career. This is a result of the connections made within our student support groups. From personal experience as an active member in the Circle of Trust, I have met and made connections that I can potentially call on further down the road to completing my dream.*

I have some very short video-taped segments from the meetings of each of these groups to share with you. You will see the students are quite honest and open about some of their problems and they talk about strategies for resolving them. In one segment you will hear the voice of an African American professor “coaching” the students about strategies for dealing with their

professors. In the process the faculty member also helps the students to understand their own responsibilities. Such approaches build self-esteem and raise the level of student consciousness in a way that leads to greater academic achievement.

### **The Anatomy of Student Persistence**

The results show that our efforts are successful. Between May 2000 and May 2001 the six-year graduation rate for African American students increased by 13 percent and for the first time rose above the national average for students in public colleges. Furthermore, these higher levels have been maintained through May 2006. With six years of increased levels of graduation above the national rate, and continued student involvement in our academic and co-curricular programs we anticipate the six-year graduation rate will rise over the next few years. A review of our success will not only show how these results were obtained it will give insight into both the difficulty and complexity of raising graduation rates.

We saw some of our earliest success—and problems in the **Band of Brothers**. The program was initiated in 1999 with limited participation of dubious students. In the Fall 2000 semester 19 Brothers completed forms pledging their commitment to work toward higher levels of academic achievement. Most of them set semester goals of a GPA of 3.0 or higher. 12 of the 19 reached that goal with 4 of them exceeding 3.5 and making the Dean’s List.

We thought we had discovered the key to success in academic achievement among Black males but this initial surge was not sustained in the Spring semester 2001. In the Spring only 4 of the 19 reached their goal of a 3.0 GPA, with 2 of them exceeding 3.5.

Because we had the trust of the students we talked with them to see what had happened after such a successful semester. We got an interesting response from a student who had moved from a 2.0 in Spring 2000 to a 3.6 in Fall 2000 and then his GPA plummeted to a 2.6 in Spring 2001. He told us he could not understand his actions himself. He said he just stopped working at achieving academically. He overslept, missed classes, procrastinated and acted in an irrational manner. In his remarks I saw the reflection of some of my earlier research on a phenomenon we labeled “The Ultimate Doom Syndrome”. However, continued discussion and consciousness-raising along with active involvement in the learning process did result in significant change for this student. In his last two semesters in the University he scored GPAs of 3.9 and 4.0 respectively. He also became a model and inspiration for the other Brothers because it was discipline, dedication and hard work that produced these results.

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In other situations we have seen the same phenomenon. A Fall semester of high levels of academic achievement seems to be followed by a reversal in the Spring semester. This variegated pattern of academic achievement is worthy of greater study.

More recently we have maintained records on student participants that allow us greater understanding of our success. This next transparency shows the growth in attendance and participation in our student groups. You can see that in just three years the numbers doubled and they continued to rise. Our goal is to engage 10 percent of the African American students in regular participation in our student groups. We believe that when we can fully involve 10-15 percent of the Black students we will impact as many as 1/3 of all African American students.

This next slide shows the six-year graduation rates for students from the entering class of 1988 to 1997. You can see here that after a long period of rates in the mid-30s, there was a significant jump for the entering class of 1995, exceeding the national rate for African American students. That level of graduation has now been sustained for six years.

It is when we examine the grade performance of students over a period of 3 years that we get greater insight into student persistence to graduation. This next transparency shows the grade point averages for our student participants for six semesters. You can see from these data that even though we have good participation from high performing students, our highest levels of participation are from those students at the lower end of the academic achievement spectrum. In the first two semesters of data the strongest participation was among students below a 2.5 GPA. More recently our greatest participation has come among students with the lowest grade point averages—below 1.99.

As we talk with students directly, as well as listen to their comments in meetings and elsewhere, we have come to realize that in raising graduation rates our greatest impact thus far has not been in increasing levels of academic achievement. Instead it appears that we are reaching students on the low end of the scale, students who in previous years would leave college before the completion of their baccalaureate. These students are not dropping out. It appears they are persisting—although at minimal levels—they are persisting until they reach their degrees.

While we are aware of the ways in which our comprehensive approach has impacted academic achievement of undergraduates, it is also apparent that we are doing an even better job—initially—of impacting student persistence to graduation, but at minimal levels of academic achievement. We are doing well, but not well enough. We still have a long way to travel on this difficult journey.

## Faculty Involvement

Our quest to stimulate deep learning and academic identity among students was significantly enhanced by the generous participation of faculty from all backgrounds—in their classes, in the student group meetings and as advisors and mentors. However, faculty life is an unknown to most students and we felt it was a missing ingredient in our efforts. Students often sat next to faculty and interacted with them but did not make the full identification we hoped for. While faculty endeavored to be good mentors and role models, too often students did not perceive themselves as potential scholars for even though they admired the faculty they did not understand the process by which they had become scholars. Since our goal was to get students to identify with academic domains we decided to organize a research project whereby students would study the process of becoming a scholar and faculty member. This was also a part of the strategy of getting students actively involved in the learning process.

In our research project we selected five students to work under our direction conducting a study of the faculty and the process of becoming a scholar. Three of the students were male and two female. Of the five, three were sophomores. With our guidance the students went through all the steps of conducting research. They conducted a review of the literature on student academic achievement and wrote summaries of the works they reviewed. They also prepared a protocol to guide them in the interviews of faculty. Finally they had to go through the training program of the Human Subjects Committee to receive IRB certification. The very act of preparing to conduct scholarly research was a deliberate strategy, designed to raise levels of confidence as well as create higher expectations for students through their active involvement in the learning process.

We then recruited fourteen faculty and administrators (five women and nine men) as respondents. The disciplines of the respondents included Education, Engineering, English, Social Sciences and Veterinary Medicine. Two of the faculty members were white, while 12 were African American.

We found that the process of involving young students seeking to reach higher academic levels by studying faculty lives had positive consequences, but there were also some unexpected dynamics. The research goal was to come to an understanding of how and when the faculty defined themselves as scholars—beyond being students—and began to identify themselves as a Professor of English, or an Engineer as well as a woman or African American.

## Initial Results

In the interviews, some faculty admitted they had been in the academy so long their undergraduate student experiences had faded from memory. They had lived the life of an undergraduate but it was like a distant and different world. We realize that while we were trying to get students to identify with the faculty and faculty were committed to the students, there was still this gray area, which was like a gulf between the two. We are still trying to understand the deeper meanings of this phenomenon. However, this fact spurred some resentment among the student interviewers. They were going through processes that were so intense to them they could not understand how faculty could fail to recall a similar process. Students asked probing questions of the faculty and often wrote very critical reflections.

On the other hand, students were sometimes overwhelmed by the powerful memories. In one case, a seasoned faculty member began talking about his undergraduate experience, which brought to mind his key mentor. As he talked about his experience and the role this person played in helping him overcome difficulties, he began to weep and did so without shame. In this case, students were humbled by the realization that this person had come through much more perilous times than they experienced.

We saw clear evidence of an approach/avoidance process as young students came to understand the complexity and difficulty of becoming a scholar. While our students gained greater understanding of the faculty, identification and indeed emulation was not necessarily a consequence of the experience.

## Faculty strategies for success

In general, faculty described successful strategies for studying and learning as undergraduates, which paralleled those students had learned from their surveys of the literature. These involved such activities as intensive periods of study before attending class, and arriving at the lectures well prepared.

The students learned about note taking skills that included, special symbols to allow students to keep up with the professor; and marginal notations of when the professor used changes in voice to stress important points; and rewriting, revising and expanding their notes shortly after the class.

Only two of the fourteen faculty respondents reported that they were stellar students as undergraduates and their path to academia was determined and straight. One described himself as a nerd, unpopular and uninterested in anything social. The others talked about long nights playing bid-whist, or excessive drinking and partying. We are still analyzing these interviews to seek

understanding of when these faculty began to change their focus to academic life.

Faculty repeatedly stressed the importance of involvement in a culture of achievement. This meant that they had to make conscious decisions as undergraduates to associate with other students who were serious about their academics; they had to change their friends so that they did much less partying and stopped patterns of excessive drinking and poor eating.

In one case a very productive faculty member, pointed out to students that as an undergraduate she reached the point where she regularly spent ten hours per day outside of class in active study. Indeed when she reached that point, she realized she had made the transition from a student taking courses to a learner achieving academically.

Perhaps the most meaningful learning for the students came when faculty described their family experiences as they began to achieve academically. Some of our students come from difficult family circumstances and have often had to turn to the extended family for the support they needed. Therefore, they were particularly moved when they learned faculty had traveled similar routes. In several cases, faculty talked about surrogate parents or grandparents who were the key influences in their lives. One respondent spoke of living just a few miles from two different grandfathers, neither of them with high levels of education. One of whom was severely disabled. Both grandfathers made sure that this individual maintained a steady academic course in high school and then monitored progress in college.

In another instance, a faculty member spoke of parents who were as close as the telephone even though in another state. These parents provided the guidance and mentoring needed.

As our students learned the process by which faculty got through their adolescence and undergraduate experiences; they saw their current circumstances within a context of hope and triumph over adversity. This made the concept of faculty as role models, much more real and present in their lives.

When we reviewed the reflections and reports the students wrote after the faculty interviews we learned even more about the complexity and difficulty of reaching our goal of identification with an academic domain. For the faculty themselves it was not a simple process and students appreciated the insights they gained. On the other hand, students were really angry that faculty would state they were so far from their undergraduate experiences they could not recall much of the difficult stress of the process. For the students the process was intense and very real. They could not envision such a process ever becoming dim in their memory.

What we found most interesting is that even though some of the student participants in the research process were at the lowest levels of academic performance, all of them graduated and went on to post-graduate study without any hesitation or delay. One has been awarded an MBA and another has just completed law school. The other three have completed master’s degrees and are presently in doctoral programs—all of them seeking to become faculty members.

### **In Conclusion: Some Caveats**

We would like to close with some *caveats* we think are very important for you to consider.

First of all: we found our greatest success when we made our programs inclusive. Even though the focus was on African American men and women, the participation was open to everyone. Indeed we crafted the leadership of our student programs to include Latino and White students as leaders—and invited others to participate. Even though this practice was at times condemned, the benefits justified this strategy. If the program excludes any group of people it will create challenges that are unnecessary and enervating. On the other hand, all students regardless of background can profit from such programs and will bring a lot to the exchanges.

Secondly, we must always keep in mind that every institution has its own unique culture and other characteristics. Therefore the programs should be organized to take advantage of local circumstances. Success is ultimately a process and not a blueprint.

Developing and maintaining successful programs will challenge the leadership and the staff. You should be prepared, you should expect to constantly grow and change as you learn more. If you are unwilling to grow and change, if you have staff that can only do what they did last year, or “back in the day” then you are poised to fail.

Finally, there is an African proverb that says: “You don’t build a house for yesterday’s rains.” Be prepared to deal with a new cohort of students who have very different views than our cohorts. Student generations are short—very short and you should look for changes among them every year. These are the students taking advantage of the fruits of our labor, and they often see only the fruits and hardly understand the labor. Be careful of categorizing any student, no matter what they look like. In another paper I wrote:

**“Retention and Graduation of Undergraduate Students: A Comprehensive Approach”**

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*There is little in the nomenclature and concepts of previous teaching experiences that can be used with accuracy to describe current students. Just a few years ago I might have said I have students who are Black, White, Latino, Hispanic, Asian and American Indian. Those concepts, while still accurate at one level, are no longer sufficient descriptors. They simply will not work with much efficacy. Within these traditional categories there is as much internal diversity as there is diversity between the groups. There are bi-racial and bi-cultural students who resist any effort to categorize them, they must be seen for whom they are as humans and unique individuals—the categories do not work for them. There are students who are recent immigrants. Among them there are students who are not only immigrants; they were once refugees or displaced persons, and the trauma of those events shape their present perspectives on life. Then there are those whose parents are immigrants but they were born and raised in the United States, making them products of two and sometimes three cultures—truly marginalized youth. What is more, there are the students who come from fairly comfortable backgrounds but who have been raised by parents who came from poverty backgrounds. In their families and general social situations they must incorporate competing and sometimes conflicting value frames, and as a result they are unique. To add to this mix, there are students from all backgrounds who have been adopted and raised by mainstream middle class families in the Midwest, and they claim secular heritages that are both intimate and foreign to them, and they want both heritages. On top of this, there are students who are of a wider range of faith traditions than we have usually encountered in the academy.*

*There is no way one can look at a student’s face, name, or any other feature of identification and know anything substantive about the student’s identity. Indeed, my students are so diverse within their racial/ethnic groups, and then so diverse internally, that one has to almost totally abandon all previous analytical categories in order to effectively communicate with them. Last semester standing before one class a student began to describe their background. This student had all the physical attributes of an African American: skin color, dress, hair style, and most of all attitude. The student indicated they had been born in a Central African nation, and had spent their early years in a refugee camp, then resided in two different Middle Eastern nations, and then an Eastern European nation before coming to the United States about five years ago. Speaking flawless English the student stated the family were practicing Muslims, and also one week out of every month they spoke nothing but Arabic in their home. If that student were to walk into this room with the friends I saw around them you could not identify that person.*

Long years of research, administration and teaching along with demonstrated success in retaining and graduating students leave me with the conviction that programs that adopt these **fundamental operating** principles to their unique campus environments can be successful over time.

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## **J. Herman Blake**

J. Herman Blake, Ph.D. currently serves as Scholar in Residence and Director of The Sea Islands Institute at the University of South Carolina Beaufort. Dr. Blake received his BA from New York University and his MA and PhD from the University of California at Berkeley. All degrees are in Sociology.

Previous positions include:

- Founding Provost of Oakes College at the University of California, Santa Cruz
- President, Tougaloo College in Mississippi
- Eugene M. Lang Visiting Professor for Social Change at Swarthmore College
- Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
- Director of African American Studies at Iowa State University

He retired from Iowa State University as Professor of Sociology-Emeritus.

Dr. Blake is also Vice-President of Scholars for Educational Excellence and Diversity, Inc. Established in 1996 with Dr. Emily Moore, on the principle that diversity and academic excellence are intertwined and enhance each other, Scholars for Educational Excellence and Diversity, Inc. provides consulting services on strategic planning, program evaluation, faculty and staff development as well as community organization to educational institutions, organizations and foundations.

Throughout his career Blake has focused attention on academic achievement and persistence of under-represented students in higher education. His special skill is motivating poorly educated undergraduate students to higher level academic performance and ultimately graduation. He has also done pioneering work in service learning.

Blake is best noted for his unparalleled research on urban militants in the African American community, particularly the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense; and social change and community development in rural and urban African American communities. His publications include the autobiography of Huey P. Newton, Revolutionary Suicide, numerous monographs and articles. His essay “Doctor Can’t Do Me No Good” based on his interviews with descendants of African slaves in the sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia has been republished in several journals and monographs.

Early in his career, Blake was named one of the top 100 emerging leaders in higher education by the American Council on Education. Among his many honors since are the Mina Shaughnessy Fellowship from the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE); and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Education and the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education 2002 Iowa Professor of the Year. He has been awarded 7 honorary degrees.

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**“Race is the continuing moral dilemma of America, and the inheritance of slavery its ineradicable moral stain.” Peter J. Gomes**

**African American Studies 201**  
**INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES**

<http://www.lib.iastate.edu/commons/afam201/index.html>

**Fall 2004**

**Tuesday 3:40-5:00 p.m.**  
**Lectures: Carver 0001**

**Thursday 3:40-5:00 p.m.**

**Discussion Sections**

**A: Ross Hall**

**0024**

**B: Ross Hall 0025**

**C: Ross Hall 0120**

**D: Ross Hall 0020**

**J. Herman Blake, Ph.D., Professor**

345 Carrie Chapman Catt Hall

294-4392 [jhblake@iastate.edu](mailto:jhblake@iastate.edu)

Office Hours: Wednesdays 2-4 p.m.

***Graduate Assistants***

Shantha Pieris

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**SYLLABUS**

**INTRODUCTION**

This course introduces students to African American Studies through a survey of the experience of African Americans in the United States. It covers some of the rich and complex features of African American life from its African roots to contemporary times. The course combines historical, sociological, anthropological and psychological perspectives in analyzing African American life and culture. The pedagogy utilizes readings, lectures, music, discussions, written assignments and other activities.

The course is based on the guiding principles of liberal education.

The goal of the course is to give students a greater understanding of American life in general as well as African American life in particular. The pedagogy and assignments are designed to promote academic skills of:

1. Focused discipline and study
2. Analytical and critical thinking
3. Synthesis of complex ideas
4. Expository writing

**The instructor assumes that students will spend approximately 12 hours per week studying the assigned materials and preparing for lectures, discussions and essays.**

***NB: Students with documented disabilities that affect their ability to participate fully in the course or who require special accommodations are encouraged to speak with the instructor so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged.***

## REQUIREMENTS

### **Readings**

The books assigned are selected to give students a deep as well as intuitive sense of African American life. They are primarily novels, biographies or autobiographies. Students are expected to read each book in its entirety. All the books are related to each other and to all the lectures. While we will not explicate the texts in lectures, students will learn much more if the books are completed early in the appropriate week. Even though we will not make any specific effort to relate any particular book to any particular lecture, students are expected to seek the understanding of the salience of the books to the lectures and discussions.

### **Course Companions**

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Each student will be assigned four specific individuals selected from the WPA Slave Narrative collection (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/>). Students will be expected to access the narratives of these particular individuals and become very familiar with their experiences. Students will be expected to discuss these narratives in class as well as in their essays as appropriate. Students will be called upon to discuss these narratives throughout the entire course.

### **Class Sessions**

**Lectures:** The class will meet in plenary session each Tuesday for a lecture by the principal instructor. The course syllabus, lecture notes, supplementary material (statistical data, lyrics of the traditional spirituals, analytical tables and the chronology of critical events) will be posted on line at

**The Instruction Common:**

[www.lib.iastate.edu/commons/afam201/index.html/](http://www.lib.iastate.edu/commons/afam201/index.html/). Students should access these materials before each lecture. No supplementary materials will be distributed in class.

**Discussion Groups:** Students will participate in small group discussions led by the instructional staff. These discussions will usually start with a brief paper prepared by the students in each section. Discussion starters will be appointed in advance to prepare papers based only on the readings, lectures or previous discussions within the group. Specific instructions for discussion starters are at the end of the syllabus.

### **In-Class Essays**

The last portion of each discussion session will be used for a brief essay on an assigned topic related to the lectures, readings and other course materials. The assigned topic may cover any book or lecture required prior to the date of the in-class essay. Students may use their books and notes in writing these essays. Unless specified, the essays must be completed in class and there will not be a make up for students who are absent. The essays will be read and returned the following class session with critical comments designed to provide effective feedback on the student's performance. These comments will become a part of the total assessment of the student's performance. They will not be graded. There will be 13 in-class essays.

## **Examination**

There will be no mid-term examination in this course. Students whose work is below expectations will receive appropriate notification.

A take-home final will be distributed on December 9, and will be due on December 13. ***The final examination must be typed and double-spaced.***

## **SCHEDULE**

### **A: INTRODUCTION and OVERVIEW**

#### **1. August 24-27: Introduction to the course**

Reading: Walter White, A Man Called White

Lecture: Review of course requirements

Disc: Assignment of course companions and discussion starters

### **B: SOCIAL STRUCTURE in the AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

#### **2. August 31-September 2: The Family**

Reading: Brian Urquhart, Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey

Lecture: “Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on The Black Family”

Disc: In-class essay #1

#### **3. September 7-9: Education and Schooling**

Reading: Daisy Bates, The Long Shadow of Little Rock

Melba Beals, Warriors Don't Cry

Lecture: “The Educational Imperative: A Passion for Learning”

Disc: In-class essay #2

#### **4. September 14-16: Religion/Spirituality**

Reading: Howard Thurman, With Head and Heart

Lecture: “Spirituality, Religion and Church in the African American Community”

Disc: In-class essay #3

**C: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS of the AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

**5. September 21-23: Perspectives on African Roots**

Reading: Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Melton McLaurin, Celia, A Slave

Lecture: "African Roots/American Fruits"

Disc: In-class essay #4

**6. Sept. 28-30: The Crucible of Slavery**

Reading: Margaret Walker, Jubilee

Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery

Lecture: "Slavery: The Ineradicable Moral Stain"

Disc: In-class essay #5

**7. October 5-7: The Struggle for Freedom**

Reading: W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk

Lecture: "Ineradicable Moral Stain: Reconstruction and Black Codes"

Disc: In-class essay #6

**8. October 12-14: Creating an Old/New World**

Reading: Chana Kai Lee, For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer

Lecture: "*The Rise and Triumph of Jim Crow and James Crow*"

Disc: In-class essay #7

**D: CIVIL RIGHTS TO HUMAN RIGHTS: The First African American Century**

**9. October 19-21: Toward Civil Rights**

Reading: Mary Beth Rogers, Barbara Jordan, American Hero

Lecture: "The Quest for Civil Rights—The Protest Era"

Disc: In-class essay #8

**10. October 26-28: Internal Challenges to Civil Rights**

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Reading: Franklin Love, One Blood: The Death and Resurrection of Charles R. Drew

Lecture: “The Quest for Civil Rights: Integration v. Separation”

Disc: In-class essay #9

**11. November 2-4: The Quest for Community**

Reading: Anna Julia Cooper, A Voice from The South

Lecture: “Reflections on Martin Luther King, Jr.”

Disc: In-class essay #10

**12. November 9-11: African American Men**

Reading: John Lewis, Walking with the Wind

Lecture: “Black Men: el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz; The Panther”

Disc: In-Class essay #11

**13. November 16-18: African American Women**

Reading: A’Lelia Bundles, On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C. J. Walker

Lecture: “Warriors in Life and the Spirit”

Disc: In-class essay #12

**14. November 30-Dec. 2: The Black World: Community and Society**

Reading: Myrlie Evers-Williams, Watch Me Fly

Lecture: “From Civil Rights to Human Rights”

Disc: In-class essay #13

**E: THE CHALLENGE OF A NEW MILLENNIUM**

**15. Dec. 7-9: 1903/2003: Predictions & Reflections**

Lecture: “Looking Forward in the Mirror: The Past as Prologue”

Disc: Final Examination Distributed

## **DISCUSSION STARTERS----Role and Responsibility**

Each Thursday, several students will be appointed in advance to initiate the discussion in the small groups. The role of the discussion starter is to stimulate the group with ideas and issues under consideration in this course. The presenter should also offer tentative answers/solutions to the issues they raise.

The discussion starters will be required to prepare a brief paper with their ideas and present that paper to the class. **The papers can only be based on the assigned readings, the course lectures, or previous discussions.** These presentations may not exceed 7 minutes in length. The instructors will enforce the time limit.

Discussion starters should begin with the assumption that all students have read the assigned material, attended all the lectures and participated in previous discussion. Therefore it is not appropriate for the discussion starters to summarize any of the material. **The discussion starter is expected to build on the ideas/issues under consideration at any point in the course and stimulate deeper thinking about the material.**

At the end of the session the discussion starter’s paper must be submitted to the instructor. It will be critically evaluated by Professor Blake and returned at the next class session.