

## **Award Title**

Pathways to Success African American Male Initiative

## **Awards Categories**

International, Multicultural, Cultural, Gender, LGBTQ, Spirituality, Disability, and related

## **Executive Summary**

According to Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund, only three out of 100 African-American males entering kindergarten will graduate from college and Harper (2006) supports this by purporting that African-American men are underrepresented at most institutions of higher education. In a 2007 Diverse Issues article, Harper states that, some 67.6 percent of African-American male students who begin college never graduate. Additionally, Harper reports that African-American males have the worst attrition rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education. Nationally, Black men comprised only 4.3 percent of all students enrolled at American institutions of higher education, the exact same percentage as in 1976 (Roach, 2007). In 2008 the Chronicle of Higher Education reported that only 3% of all bachelor's degrees disseminated in 2008 went to African American males nationwide.

Resembling national statistics, African-American males are under-represented at Georgia Southern University and in the past 10 years, they have been outperformed by all other demographic groups at the institution. The Pathways to Success program offers this underrepresented group the opportunity to break the trend and is one of the few programs in the country that targets African-American males specifically as they enter college.

Pathways to Success is a benchmark mentoring program in place to increase the retention, persistence, and graduation rates of African-American male students. The program is designed to enhance the entire college life experience for participants through programmatic efforts intended to maximize academic and co-curricular experiences. It is aimed at African-American male students entering as freshman and offers positive mentorship and guidance, campus engagement opportunities, and activities that promote academic success. The program was created in a cohort format. Years one and two focus on retention and developing a strong academic foundation and years 3 and 4 focus on persistence, career preparedness, and graduation. The primary goal of this program is to simply increase the success of African American males at Georgia Southern University as measured quantitatively by the participants' GPA's, retention, and graduation rates and qualitatively by their stories of success. It is our hope that NASPA will choose to recognize and award Pathways to Success as a benchmark program responsible for retaining and graduating future African American male leaders, CEOs, educators, engineers, doctors, etc.

## **Award Description**

The Dean of Students is responsible for writing a matching grant from the University System of Georgia which supports the Pathways to Success program in collaboration with institutional support. During the inaugural year in fall of 2009, the program served 20 African-American male

first-time freshmen at Georgia Southern, almost double at 38 students in fall 2010, and currently serves 35 first time freshman in cohort 3. The cohorts are recruited in three ways: 1. In cooperation with the Office of Admissions, a personal email was sent to all African American men accepted as freshman in early summer; 2. The program was represented at on and off campus University recruitment events, and 3. The program was mentioned during a breakout session during SOAR (Southern's Orientation Advisement and Registration).

The program is housed out of the Multicultural Student Center. The director of the Center is charged with project management and a graduate student is hired to coordinate the program. Mentors are selected, trained, and given a stipend of \$200 per semester. The ratio of mentors to mentees ranges between 1 to 4 and 1 to 5.

All potential mentees can complete an online application, which includes an essay, once they have been accepted into the University. Beginning with cohort 3, applicants are also required to go through an interview process in addition to the application. There were 70 applicants for 35 slots for cohort 3. The following are measures taken from the application and the interview are highly considered in the selection process of mentees in order to accomplish a good fit: a thirst to learn, the desire to have Black male role models, challenges with family support, first generation college students, what the student felt that could bring to the program, strong work ethic, extra-curricular activities, initiative, and accountability. Although important, High school GPA and SAT scores are secondary in the selection process.

Mentees and Mentors are matched closely based on major first and brought to campus for a week long "Jump Start Week" which includes all day informational sessions on campus resources and rap sessions about the realities of college life. These activities include the following topics and areas: Using the Counseling Center, Knowing Your Legal Rights On and Off Campus, Sex Education, Time Management, the Myers Briggs Assessment, African American Male Student Leader Panel, African American Male Professor Panel of Classroom Expectations, and a Black History Tour of Historic Savannah.

Mentors are required to meet with their respective groups twice per month and with the project manager and coordinator as a staff twice per month. Mentors are also required to make phone or in person contacts and turn in a contact log weekly.

Mentees are required to meet with their group twice per month and attend monthly pathways activities with civic partners. They are also required to turn in bi-weekly grade reports to their mentors which will be used as an academic program needs assessment. They are also offered sponsorship to attend alternative spring break trips, leadership conferences on and off campus, and potential internship and other opportunities. Mentees are expected to participate in SAAB beginning their second year.

Rewards and acknowledgement of achievements occur throughout the semester but more formally at an end of year banquet.

Through a number of programs and activities designed to empower the individual, these strategies are used to assist in the program's success:

• To improve the GPAs of African-American males. Strategies will include, but are not limited to, a specialized orientation 1 week prior to the first day of classes called Jump Start Week, ongoing peer academic advising, grade monitoring, tutoring, and assessments of strengths, weaknesses and academic major options. Furthermore, participants will be encouraged to take a series of classes that will assist with identity and leadership development that include: Preparing for University Leadership, Principles of Leadership: The African-American Male Experience, and FYE 1220 (Black Men in America, and Blacks in TV and Film. • Participants will be members of the Georgia Southern Chapter of the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB). While students will be encouraged to explore other student groups and organizations, SAAB specifically addresses the needs of African-American males enrolled in college. • Participants will experience 2 off campus curricular or co-curricular activities during the program. These experiences will be from the following list: Study Abroad, a leadership or major related internship, an alternative holiday or spring break experience, and a professional or student leadership conference. • To satisfy the objective of promoting civic engagement, the program participants will identify and coordinate an academic year service project. This year's service project is tutoring 6th graders at Langston Chapel Middle School. Previous years projects have included volunteering with the Statesboro Parks and Recreation Department, Habitat for Humanity, the Youth Detention Center, and the male mentoring programs through the TRIO/Educational Opportunity Programs Office. • Cohort 1 participants, currently in year 3, who qualify are encouraged to participate in the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program. • A special recognition program is in place for students at the end of each academic year. • Annually, a panel or workshop will be conducted with local African-American male professionals to discuss preparation for the professional world. In addition, students assist and participate in Georgia Southern University's annual Black Male Empowerment Summit. Sessions at this year's conference included a keynote address by Black psychologist, Dr. Naim Akbar, entitled, "Developing the Black Male in the New World Order." The conference included other topics such as The Black Male Identity Crisis, Healing Oppression's Wounds, Social Activism & Leadership, College Masculinities & Sexuality, Money Matters, The Black Male Athlete & the Colorline, The Mis-Education of the Negro (based off of Carter G. Woodson's book of the same name), and a Panel of Black Male Professionals in Corporate America. The Conference drew over 260 participants representing institutions through Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida. • Students participate in "mock interviewing" sessions and the Dining for Success programs offered by career services to assist participants for preparing for internships and other employment opportunities.

The Pathways to Success Program's cycle is designed to run four years. The objectives and activities are all designed to facilitate success for African-American male students at Georgia Southern University. The purpose of the cohort is to assist the participants in decreasing feelings of isolation, to provide a lens in which students can examine their educational concerns through their own lived experiences, to learn from each other, to develop socially, to improve critical thinking and to develop lasting, meaningful, "family like" relationships (Seed, 2008). The specialized orientation will assist with the successful transition into to the University community.

The service and civic activities in place based on the literature has supported the positive impact that co-curricular activities and service learning opportunities can have on students' experiences in the higher education environment. In 2000, the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA

completed a quantitative and qualitative study that undergraduate service participation shows significant positive effects on all 11 outcome measures: academic performance (GPA, writing skills, critical thinking skills), values (commitment to activism and to promoting racial understanding), self-efficacy, leadership (leadership activities, self-rated leadership ability, interpersonal skills), choice of a service career, and plans to participate in service after college. Additionally, this program will include a study abroad component. According to Sutton (2006) students of color who participate in study abroad programs have higher retention and graduation rates, as well as higher GPAs. Furthermore, academic performance and persistence will be monitored through academic advisement, grade monitoring, and peer mentoring.

### **Assessment Data**

Quantitative: The programs intended outcomes are measured by program participants' grade point averages, retention rates, and graduation rates. Assessment is based on data gathered after the first academic year of each cohort. The following are highlighted outcomes of the Pathways to Success Program: • the 1st year retention rate for participants from Cohort 1 is 90%. This rate exceeds the first year retention rate of the university (81%), African American females (87%), and African American males (81%). Institutional statistics have not yet come out to reflect this data for cohort 2 or 3. • Cohort 1 average GPA after the first semester was 2.73 compared to non-participant African American male first time Freshmen average GPA of 2.29. Additionally Cohort 1's GPA for the first academic year was a 2.60 which exceeds that of all males on campus (2.53) and that of African American males (2.37) during the same period. Cohort 2's GPA for their first academic year was a 2.55 and the combined GPA of both cohorts to date is 2.61 which includes 5 semesters from cohort 1 and two semesters of cohort 2. • During first three semesters of the program, participants from both cohorts have made the Dean's List 16 times, and additionally, during the past three semesters participants earned above a 3.0 GPA 57 times. • Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) is a national organization for the uplift of African American men on college campuses. The chapter at Georgia Southern University is largely made up of past pathways participants, meets bi-weekly, and is advised by Multicultural Student Center staff. The chapter won New Chapter of the Year at the national convention during Spring 2011.

### **Qualitative: Testimonials**

Timothy Pathways pushed me to strive for excellence by linking me to other students who shared the academic drive that I have been instilled with. Not only was I around like-minded individuals, but I was also challenged by them to do better; increasing my expectations for myself and improving my performance at the end of the semester. Another aspect of the program that helped me was a support system of people that I could go to for help. Once I got to college I was able to include a list of individuals who really pushed me to accomplish more than I had in the past and set goals for myself that wouldn't be easily attained.

The final impact of the program that I would like to mention would be the opportunities that are provided by being a member of Pathways compared to not being one. My peers and I were able to sit front and center during a presentation to our campus by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, attend such programs as the Black Male Empowerment Summit, visit

monuments of our Black heritage in Savannah, do volunteer work with the Special Olympics, and I was blessed enough to be funded for a Study Abroad trip to Costa Rica over the summer that I would have not been able to attend otherwise. This trip was very beneficial to me for both my International Studies and Spanish majors and was made possible by Pathways' funding. And these events composed just a handful of the experiences that we were offered.

Brandon Choosing to take part in the Pathways to Success program was one of the most beneficial decisions I've made in my life thus far. I was never the most organized student, and some of that carried over to my first semester in college. Being a part of pathways, and having influential mentors I could look up to made me make that transition from being unorganized to focused. I would even go as far as saying that Pathways was the sole reason I was able to turn my life around and make all A's my second semester. Not only were they able to help me from an academic standpoint, but also I was able to connect with a good group of people that I'm still able to call friends. Pathways has been a great transition from boy to manhood, and honestly I couldn't imagine where I'd be without it.

Djuan With the help of Pathways to Success, and hard work, I was able to achieve a 3.88 GPA during my first semester at Georgia Southern University. The Pathways to Success Program was a tremendously life changing experience. While being a mentee of the program, I was involved in a range of activities from Welcome Week, (where I gained much needed information about being a successful black male), to playing an exciting game of paintball. I met lifelong friends and faculty, whom instantly became mentors, and sources of support and guidance. I was so inspired and intrigued by the program that I became a mentor so that I could pass the knowledge given to me onto the next generation of Pathways to Success Brothers. I'm humble for the opportunity to have participated in a program that has given me the tools and self-initiative to succeed.

#### Focus Group - Benefits

David: I've benefited from Pathways. I've gotten help when I needed it. My mentor sat down with me and helped me with some of my math first. I also was able to go to other mentors for math help. I was able to go to some of the seminars on campus for free and gotten a lot out of it. I was able to talk to Chris and everybody about everyday stuff. That's what I've gotten out of it.

Freddy: I think Pathways has helped me a lot in the fact that since I'm not from Georgia, I don't know a lot of people. Pathways has given me the opportunity to be around a lot of positive African- American males. And also given me something to do to stay out of trouble and work to a goal, which is getting a high gpa and making sure I actually do succeed in college.

Ron: This semester coming down to GA Southern I've gotten a lot of help from Pathways to Success. I got to meet a whole bunch of people, people that I could relate to and people that I could hang out with. And just companionship for this semester, people that I could be cool with. I've also had a lot of help from my mentors. I've been helped academically as far as schedule planning for next semester. Just getting a lot of information that I wouldn't have been able to get right off the bat, that I would have had to learn from experience. That I got it in the beginning that's helpful for me in the long run.

## Focus Group – Mentor Ratings

Ron: My mentor was Justin. Because he's one of the few people that I've encountered that also is majoring in computer science, he's been able to give me a lot of tips and advice about teachers, about class schedules, and just things that'll help me to better my grades. And to be prepared for upcoming years and stuff like that. He was also an example as a senator for me in SGA. He helped me in the application process for that program. He's kept me pretty familiar with what's going on around campus. On a scale from one to ten, I give him an 11.

David: I will go ahead and give my mentor a four out of four, because every week we have a meeting in the library. On Wednesdays and he helps us, talks to us about what's going on, what we need to do. He's helped me outside of the meetings. He's easy to contact and get in touch with. So he's been doing a good job.