

Mentors target at-risk freshmen

■ Researchers look at students of color with low test scores or low high school GPAs and their response to extra support

By Jeremy Lang
Oregon Daily Emerald

Students in the new Peer Mentor Program aren't just getting help adjusting to campus life.

They're also human subjects in a University research project aiming to discover how to keep minority students on campus.

The 17 students being mentored are freshmen students of color and classified as "at risk" based on low SAT scores and low high school grade point averages. The 10 mentors in the program are upperclassmen who are involved with many student groups on campus. Besides meeting for lunches and coffee breaks, the mentors introduce their students to the library, student groups and important locations on campus.

Assistant Dean of Student Life Troy Franklin was responsible for selecting the research groups, which include the 17 students being mentored and a "control group" of students with similar characteristics who will not receive mentors. The names of the research subjects, all volunteers, are being kept confidential for privacy and security reasons.

Franklin said the actual mentoring will continue only through fall term but the research

will continue until fall 2000.

"At the end of fall term next year, the students will fill out surveys, which will be compiled with grade information. We will compare the mentored group with the control group to find out if the program helped new students of color do a better job of using campus resources and adjusting to college life," he said.

The research was authorized by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects from the University's Human Subjects Compliance Office, which ruled that the research is ethical based on federal guidelines before the program started.

Franklin explained that the program evolved from a model for increasing student involvement in campus leadership, and it was a natural decision to pick student leaders as mentors.

"Many of them are in leadership roles on campus and are succeeding because they got hooked up in programs and groups," he said.

The overall goal of the project is to improve retention of students of color on the University, according to Franklin.

"The first year is the critical time when students are most likely to drop out. The mentors

are showing the students how to make the campus work to their advantage," he said.

Mentor Javier Hernandez, a senior majoring in international studies and environmental studies, said he's mostly trying to be a friend and not a parent to his students.

"Normally, it might take a year for students to get involved simply because they don't know how. I'm just showing them what they can do to accomplish here," he said.

Senior political science major Jessica Billingslea, another mentor, said she thinks the program is another step in improving campus diversity as a whole. "If we can keep more students of color on campus, it will broaden diversity into every classroom and enhance the campus," she said.

Both Billingslea and Hernandez said the mentoring is going well and their students are excited to learn how to succeed.

"It gives me hope that something is being done here," Billingslea said. "That in itself is a success."

Calendar

Monday, Oct. 25
Today at 3 p.m. Sexual Assault Free Environment will hold a meeting at the Humble Bagel, 881 E. 13th Ave.



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