EXCELLENCE BASED ON EQUITY AND INCLUSION:  
THE BLACK MALE INITIATIVE AT QUEENS COLLEGE

BACKGROUND

The proposed Black Male Initiative at Queens College is part of a broader national effort to address equity and inclusion in higher education. Queens College is faced with the particular challenge of having proportionally very few black males involved in its campus life as faculty or as students. Black male students are underrepresented at Queens College compared to other senior colleges. In Fall 2005, 387 black male undergraduates and 902 black female undergraduates were enrolled at the College. This represents the smallest number of black male undergraduates enrolled in all the senior colleges in CUNY even though our undergraduate headcount is higher than all the other campuses except Hunter College. Black male faculty, too, are underrepresented. The success of the Black Male Initiative is therefore of particular importance to the College. The experience of several other universities has been that creating a critical mass of students is essential to continuous recruitment and success of that particular group of students. Queens College is facing the crisis of not having a critical mass of black males. It is with these realities in mind that a special Queens College committee undertook developing the strategy for the Black Male Initiative that is proposed here. This strategy aims to bring together not only underrepresented groups, but representatives of the general Queens College population to promote academic excellence and diversity.

The committee’s mission was twofold: to increase recruitment efforts and to create a retention plan that would involve key departments, programs and offices that are crucial to student success. In keeping with this vision, the committee identified the Office of Admissions, the Department of Secondary Education, College NOW and the Athletics department as key units in the recruiting process. The Advising Center, the Office of Counseling and Advising, the Academic Support Center, together with the office of Student Life and the Career Development Center, are key units in the retention process. The Africana Studies Program and the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship program will also be involved in this initiative. Another area, not to be underestimated, is the engagement of all students with programs devoted to exploring the intellectual connections between their lives and histories and the national and global worlds. This discussion requires the curriculum to provide tools for such an analysis of society and history. At this time in the College’s history such studies can be facilitated by the work of the Center for Teaching and Learning. The General Education curriculum is slated to go into effect in 2009 and, as a result, the Center has the responsibility of developing and piloting Perspectives on the Liberal Arts and Sciences (PLAS) courses. The Center would develop, as part of the General Education curriculum, for example, courses that draw upon a discipline or disciplines to address key social and moral issues. Comparative information may be gathered from the aacu.org and compact.org sites. At http://www.compact.org/syllabi-index.php there are interesting syllabi that the College can draw upon where service learning is integrated into coursework. The Africana Studies Program, the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship program, selected academic departments and the Career Development Center will also be involved in the effort to develop coursework and outreach activities that are attractive not only to black males, but also to other underrepresented groups and the college population at large.

Redoubling recruitment efforts is to the advantage of the College’s student body generally and is a key element of the Black Male Initiative. Under this effort and in order to reach a wider
audience of potential freshmen, the College will intensify its outreach programs in the following schools with largely black populations: Sewanaka High School, Brooklyn Technical High School, Thomas Jefferson High School, Uniondale High School, Freeport High School, Baldwin High School, Malverne High School and Floral Park High School. These targeted recruitment efforts will balance the efforts already in place at schools that have been traditional feeders into the College: Hillcrest High School, Jamaica High School, Springfield Gardens High School, St. John’s Preparatory High School, Christ the King High School, Archbishop Molloy High School, Holy Cross High School, Beach Channel High School and Thomas Edison High School.

The data show that over the last five years the number of black males has shown a slight increase. In Fall 2000 the College admitted 20 first time freshmen and 54 advanced standing students who were black males. In Fall 2005 29 first time freshmen and 54 advanced standing students were admitted. It is important to note that Queens College is conveniently located near many areas with large black populations such as Jamaica, Hollis and Queens Village.

The College welcomes the opportunity to address the problem of the paucity of black males on the campus compared to their much higher percentage in the general population of Queens County. The College realizes that in order to increase enrollment and retention, it must focus its efforts on creating an environment where black males feel at home on campus while being fully integrated into the larger world of the College. This initiative will foster encounters among students of all ethnicities by creating opportunities for intellectual engagement beyond racial and ethnic boundaries.

Fully aware of the reality and the challenges associated with the Black Male Initiative, Queens College describes below a strategy for increasing the success of black males on its campus. As the *Summary and Final Recommendations of the University System of Georgia’s African-American Male Initiative*, referred to in the report of the Chancellor’s task force indicates, “funding is a constant challenge,” therefore, Queens College will in addition to the funds requested, support the initiative by fully utilizing existing offices and services wherever possible.

Members of the committee were: Vincent Angrisani, Executive Director of Admissions; Tesfaye Asfaw, Director, Career Development Center; Martin Braun, Director, FYI; Valli Cook, Director, Health Professions Advisory Services Office; Robert Engel, Chemistry Department and former Dean of Graduate Studies; Daniela Francisco, Director, College NOW; Charles Martin, Chair, Comparative Literature Department; Maureen Pierce-Anyans, Director, Minority Student Affairs; Jennifer Jarvis, Director, Student Life; Tom Gibson, Assistant Director, SEEK Program; Irving Macario, Academic Advising; Tom Strekas, Dean of Mathematics and Natural Sciences; Steven Schwarz, Professor of Physics and Acting Dean of Research and Graduate Studies; Ross Wheeler, Director, Honors and Scholarships; Zahra Zakeri, Biology Department and Director of Minority Access to Research Careers (MARC); and Tom Cracovia, Director, Continuing Education Program. The committee was chaired by June Bobb, Acting Assistant Provost, who will coordinate the campus initiative. The College’s CUE Council, which includes many of the aforementioned members, will be the oversight body supervising the various projects and assessing the outcomes of the Black Male Initiative.

**PROJECT GOALS**

1. To increase the recruitment of black males, freshmen and transfer students by 10%.
2. To engage the College in a discussion of race to promote understanding and community.
3. To put in place recruitment and retention strategies to address this population as well as members of the broader college community.
4. To create a climate of access.

According to the 2000 census, the population of Queens is approximately 2.5 million. Out of that number approximately .5 million, or 21.3% are African Americans. These figures suggest that at least 10% of the African American population would be included in the pool of incoming freshmen. Instead, the percentage enrollment is approximately 3%.

PROPOSED PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Activities – Fall 2006 to Spring 2007

1. The Center for Teaching and Learning will work with appropriate academic departments to design PLAS courses to address the issues of race as it relates to higher education, and social aspiration and opportunity.
2. Fall 2006 will be devoted to developing a more coherent information package outlining specific opportunities already in place as well as programs that would encourage black male students’ participation. These programs are: The Louis Stokes New York City Alliance for Minority Participation (AMP), the Honors in Mathematics and Natural Sciences Program (HMNS), The Time 2000 Program, The NIH Minority Access to Research (MARC)-Undergraduate Student Training in Academic Research (USTAR) Program at Queens College, the Queensborough Community College and LaGuardia Community College NIH Bridge Programs, FYI, BALA, and the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program. As part of the outreach effort, a number of biographies of current students as well as graduates from underrepresented populations, with a brief commentary by each as to why Queens College worked for them, will be solicited.
3. A team from the College, including peer recruiters, faculty and staff members will be added to teams from the Office of Admissions to participate in recruitment activities at the high schools identified.
4. Teachers and guidance counselors from schools with large underrepresented populations will be invited to visit and participate in programs on the campus.
5. College NOW, in consultation with the Department of Secondary Education, will explore programming possibilities aimed at attracting more underrepresented students into its workshops and classes.
6. The Career Development Center will develop an internship program to and give students exposure and practical insight into career possibilities.
7. The Continuing Education program will collaborate with Admissions to increase recruitment efforts.

Activities – Spring 2007 to Fall 2007

1. Admit and place freshmen and transfer students.
2. Enroll students in FYI communities.
3. Enroll transfer students in relevant courses.
4. Enroll freshmen and transfer students in a special seminar under the auspices of the Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs.
5. Organize free-hour lectures in collaboration with participating offices, programs and departments.

TIMETABLE

December 2006 - Develop, design and print information package through the College’s Office of Publications.
December 2006 - Hold planning meetings with offices and programs participating in the project.
January 2007 - Visit high schools as part of the College’s recruitment teams.
January 2007 - Activate College NOW’s participation in the recruitment plan.
Summer 2007 - Advising and Registration
Fall 2007 - Implementation of Project

PLANNED OUTCOMES

By the end of the 2006-2007 academic year, the College anticipates that there will be a 10% increase in black male enrollment, freshmen and transfer students. There will be 90% movement of students to sophomore status.

PARTICIPATION OF DEPARTMENTS, OFFICES, and CENTERS

Africana Studies: Professor Evelyn Julmisse, Director, and the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Studies Program, Professor Francois Pierre-Louis, Coordinator, will collaborate on bringing to the campus Mellon fellows currently in graduate schools, or now teaching at colleges or universities, to give public lectures on the campus and to address the seminar. In addition, other speakers relevant to this initiative will be invited to address the seminar.

Office of Honors and Scholarships: Professor Ross Wheeler, Director, will be involved in the collection and dissemination of materials identifying the programs already existing on the campus that can attract underrepresented students.

The Admissions Office: Mr. Vincent Angrisani, Executive Director, will, in conjunction with the project’s recruitment team, spearhead the special outreach recruitment efforts. The team will reach out to the schools identified and target students and their parents who will be invited to activities at the College designed to capture student interest, and to showcase support interventions available.

The Advising Center: Ms. Laura Silverman, Director, will utilize two major initiatives to monitor and ensure academic success:
a) A Pathways to Graduation initiative that will provide benchmarks to students to gauge their rate of progress toward graduation. The Center has already developed a Pathways rubric.
b) The Sophomore Initiative, a program of the Advising Center where, working in collaboration with the advising units of departments and other advising entities on campus, the Center’s advisors will focus on students’ early selection and declaration of the major. Student progress
will be carefully monitored to ensure that the College’s graduation requirements are met, and supporting mechanisms will be put into place to facilitate success.

**The Academic Support Center:** Mr. Howard Kleinmann, Director, will provide tutoring in Gateway courses and expand its Tutoring in the Sciences program. These services will be available to all students. A major problem for incoming students is achieving good grades in introductory courses, especially in the sciences. Tutors will have a regular schedule and be available ten hours a week. Tutors will be graduate students and/or upper level undergraduate students.

**The Office of Counseling and Advising,** in collaboration with the Director of Minority Student Affairs, Ms Maureen Pierce Anyan, will develop a group community and offer a specialized seminar. Such a community is essential to the project’s success and will bring together students from all backgrounds to participate in the seminar. A senior level graduate student fully committed to excellence and with strong academic credentials will be recruited to assist in the seminar. As part of the seminar requirements, students will read materials engaging the national discussion on race, excellence and equity; for example, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* by Barbara Ehrenreich; *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* by Andrew Hacker; *Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools; The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* by Jonathan Kozol; and *Brothers and Keepers* by John Edgar Wideman. In addition, scholars will be invited to address the group and engage in dialogue.

**The Freshman Year Initiative:** Professor Martin Braun, Director, will integrate a pilot group into a freshman learning community consisting of students who will take an English composition class together with a Reacting class. The pilot group will be included in the larger FYI community. *Reacting to the Past* is a relatively new teaching pedagogy which engages students in great ideas and issues in history through the use of elaborate “games.” Students will engage a particular historical moment; they will write papers defending their positions on related issues, and must *speak* their positions. A typical Reacting class plays two games in the course of a semester. One of these games will be a new game set in Selma, Alabama, during the 1960s that addresses the issues of non-violent protest. The Director of FYI feels that this particular program will be highly successful, and will result in a significant increase in the retention rate of the students who participate. Rigorous assessment at Barnard College has shown conclusively that Reacting greatly enhances the critical skills of speaking and writing, and even more important, greatly enhances a student’s sense of academic confidence.

**The Center for Teaching and Learning:** At the end of the 2006 Spring semester, the Queens College Academic Senate adopted a new, general education “areas of knowledge” curriculum, which will go into effect for students entering the College in 2009. At the center of the new curriculum are Perspectives in the Liberal Arts (PLAS) courses, which will be designed to provide multidisciplinary perspectives on the course subject matter, while examining social and moral implications, with an emphasis on inquiry and research. We propose to develop a PLAS course that addresses the issues of race, higher education, and social aspiration and opportunity. It is expected that the course would be of interest to a wide range of students, but it would focus on the problem of moving from particular local cultures and environments into a different kind of educational environment that can be alien and intimidating, if not frightening. This would address directly some of the goals of the Black Male Initiative. The course will be designed and developed in the Spring 2007 semester and then piloted in the 2007 Fall semester, and after
revision incorporated as a permanent PLAS course. In addition, the Center for Teaching and Learning will develop and conduct a faculty development workshop in each of these semesters that addresses the issues that black males face as they enter into and seek to succeed in a complex college environment.

**Academic departments** will be asked to encourage underrepresented students who meet the requirements to register for specialized courses. For example in the Comparative Literature department, Comparative Literature 240, *Representation, Photography, Literature*, and Comparative Literature 341, *Life Writing* are taught by Dr. Charles Martin, a photographer of considerable repute. *Representation, Photography, Literature* is a useful component of curriculum that might play a part in the retention of black males. The course encourages a consideration of the imagery, written and visual, of cultures. Images of black cultures and their variants play large parts in Western arts. *Life Writing* considers what and how autobiographical writing communicates to the reader. This course, too, should be useful to a program aimed at increasing retention. The course encourages a consideration of the professional self-expression of writers, and also the personal self-expression of students through discussion and writing. A new FYI community that might be expressed in the motto of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, “Ancient to the Future,” might well sum up the FYI combination of Comparative Literature 230, *African Literatures* and Dance 166, *Tai Chi Chuan*. Tai Chi, a traditional Chinese martial art and moving meditation, and African cultures, as expressed in writing, both investigate directing tradition through the demands of modern world changes and environments. Historical and contemporary, old and new, these age-old questions are, now as much as ever, the crux of world culture and society. These are only three courses out of many others housed in the College’s various departments that all students might find attractive. They will be featured in our recruiting efforts, promoted in freshmen and sophomore advising, and will be described in that seminar.

**College NOW:** Ms Daniela Francisco, Director will recruit high school seniors through a new series of formal and informal events at selected high schools and on campus for students and their parents, teachers and guidance counselors. These students will be supported in a college credit course in Media Studies/Video Production. College Now history points to such a course as a successful venue for attracting students.

**The SEEK Program**, long experienced in advising underrepresented students, will participate in the recruiting initiative and the programs created on campus to host high school juniors, graduating seniors and their parents.

**The Office of Student Life** will support social, recreational and educational programs, open to all students, but aimed at attracting underrepresented students, especially black males.

**The Career Development Center:** Mr. Tesfaye Asfaw, Director, will develop an internship program. Experiential learning, such as internships, is known to give students exposure and practical insight. Such experiences help them to find tangible value and purpose in what they study in college. Studies show that students stay in school and complete their studies when they see value and purpose in what they study in school. Indeed when they are able to connect what they study in the classroom to something practical in the workplace, their perspectives about their goals are altered. Moreover, they develop skills that are valuable both in the classroom and elsewhere. A person or persons will be hired to work under the supervision of the Director of the Office of Career Development and Internships. The responsibility will be to organize internships programs which, while open to all, are targeted to underrepresented students,
particularly black males. Our current internship database and existing contact will provide strong bases to start the program. Outreach to the communities through internships will aid the recruitment effort as well. The internship programs will focus on:

- Recruiting and preparing students for the work experience, developing appropriate internship sites, monitoring and evaluating student performance.
- Promotion, development and expansion of the program, and work with faculty.
- Maintaining records on student registration, placement and evaluations.
- Visiting employers as part of student follow up and evaluation.
- Providing advice and counseling to students.
- Organizing events such as seminars and fairs for the students participants
- Internship preparation workshops
  - Pre-placement: Overall understanding of internships, types of internship, presentation skills, interviewing skills, and coaching.
  - Post-placement seminars: Three weeks after their placements, students meet to discuss their initial observation and impressions.
  - End of the semester seminar: Assessment of the challenges and the learning opportunities, what worked, what did not work, preview of next goal, another internship.

**Continuing Education Program**: Mr. Tom Cracovia, Director, will focus on:

1. Leverage local community-based organizations (religious institutions, community centers, mentorship programs) in the areas of New York City that have a higher percentage of residents from underrepresented populations. (Ozone Park, Jamaica, Cambria Heights, East New York, etc.) Create a pipeline of potential students through these organizations' community influence and positive history.

2. Offer GED Preparatory, PSAT, and SAT prep courses at no charge to aid students from targeted high schools to achieve higher scores. Such free courses will be open to all students at the target schools.

3. Continuing Education will use its unique course creation flexibility to establish enrichment courses, as needed, to assist with academic excellence.

4. The Continuing Education recruiting personnel will expand their conversations to link potential candidates to our admissions personnel.

5. To aid in continued support of the project, Continuing Education will enroll students, at no charge, into courses geared towards over achievement. Students will be selected based on need and/or their status as first generation college students.

6. The Continuing Education staff will be made available in case additional resources need to be mobilized to meet program and project needs.

7. Continuing Education will cultivate its relationship with the United Methodist Church and other organizations to provide a quality and much needed source of mentorship.

**EVALUATION**

The cohort of freshmen and transfers will be carefully monitored. The College will keep records of their progress throughout the academic year. It will keep records of their connections and
engagements with key elements of the initiative: academic advising, tutoring, and participation in the seminar. It will correlate all of the units of the initiative and assess their effect on GPA and successful completion of courses attempted. In tracking the students' academic progress, the Advising Center's Pathways to Success and Sophomore Initiative programs will be the tools of evaluation. Each of the aforementioned offices, programs, or centers will provide regular detailed reports to the CUE Committee on the additional activities funded by the initiative.