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Regents fund UGA diversity program; size of the sum questioned

Latest 'Move'

By Kate Carter
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An Athens program targeting young African-American men received a financial boost from the University System Board of Regents Wednesday.

The regents, through their new African-American Male Initiative, allocated \$10,000 for University of Georgia cross-cultural counseling professor Deryl Bailey's program, "Project Success: Gentlemen on the Move." But even as regents unanimously approved the measure, one regent expressed concern that the level of funding for the university systemwide initiative is too low.

The African-American Male Initiative, designed to increase the number of African-American males admitted to the state's 34 colleges and universities, was launched several months ago. The state legislature allocated about \$250,000 for the initiative, and the regents - who govern the state's institutes of higher education - commissioned a 52-member task force to investigate the reasons for the low number of African-American men attending and finishing college in Georgia.

As part of the initiative, the 16 regents, meeting in Athens for the first time since 1984, allocated \$60,000 Wednesday to fund pilot programs or to expand existing programs at UGA and five other schools: Albany State University, Atlanta Metropolitan College, Coastal Georgia Community College, Fort Valley State University and Savannah State University.

Arlethia Perry-Johnson, African-American Male Initiative chairwoman and press spokeswoman for the regents, told the regents Wednesday that external funding would be sought to help continue the programs in the future.

But Regent Elridge McMillan remarked that he would prefer that the regents make the initiative a priority.

"External funding is always good, but if funds don't come from the primary source, it seems to me that it doesn't send the proper message," said McMillan. "... I have a problem that in this country, the road to progress for African Americans is often under construction."

Bailey, whose Gentlemen on the Move program targets both men and women in Clarke County schools, said participation in Gentlemen on the Move and several other spin-off programs has tripled in the past year, and that the funds are much-needed.

Ohio State University recently tried to hire Bailey, offering an initial sum of \$45,000 to fund his program, with \$25,000 each of the following years, according to Bailey. He added that UGA administrators convinced him to stay, but he indicated that his program can use more money.

"In tough economic times, the challenge that these kids are facing doesn't change," he said. "It's not how much they give when things are good. The true test is how much they give when things are tight."

Rashaan Matthews, a UGA graduate student and a leader of the "1.9 percent" group - a student group raising awareness that African-American males comprise only 1.9 percent of the student body at UGA - called the \$10,000 allocation to UGA "a step in the right direction."

"For that program I think it's a decent amount of money, but if they were trying to find ways to provide access for African-American males to higher education, then that amount of money was very minimal," said Matthews.

But Perry-Johnson indicated that "it is tight budget times," and future funds may have to come from a variety of sources. She also acknowledged that the universities, including UGA, are implementing other diversity measures in tandem with the African-American Male Initiative.

In other business Wednesday, the final day of a two-day meeting here, regents approved establishing a Georgia Research Alliance (GRA) Eminent Scholar in crop genomics at UGA. The College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences received a \$1.5 million endowment from the Georgia Research Alliance and the state Department of Agriculture for the professorship, marking the tenth GRA scholar at UGA.

Also Wednesday, the regents voted to allow the use of alternative tests to fulfill the 30-year-old Regents' Test requirements. The Regents' Test is used by the University System to make sure all undergraduate students have mastered basic reading and writing skills before graduation. Now, students who score at least a 510 on the SAT Verbal, or an equivalent score on the ACT, will be exempt from that section of the Regents' Test.

In addition, students scoring at least 650 on the SAT II English Writing test would be exempt from the writing section of the Regents' Test.

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