NO. 1 FOR 12 YEARS STRAIGHT
U.Va. leads nation’s publics with highest graduation rate for African-Americans

For the 12th consecutive year, the University of Virginia has posted the highest graduation rate for African-American students among major public institutions, according to an annual survey published this month by the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.

Data published in the journal's winter issue show that the six-year graduation rate for African-American students who entered U.Va. in the fall of 1998 is 86 percent.

U.Va. is the only public institution in the top 20 of all colleges and universities and is the leader among flagship state universities, according to the journal, which used statistics compiled by the NCAA.

The next-highest rates among the flagship universities were 70 percent at the University of California at Berkeley and the University of New Hampshire, 69 percent at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and 67 percent at the University of Michigan.

By Anne Bromley

The Peer Advisor Program, often cited as a national model, is credited with the successful transition from high school and retention of African-American students at the University. Established in 1984 by Sylvia Terry, associate dean of African-American Affairs, the program provides personal, sensitive support and counseling and highlights academic work and achievement. For example, peer advisers have created a regular study hall time for students (shown here) called "Raising the Bar."

By Anne Bromley

For the 12th consecutive year, the University of Virginia has posted the highest graduation rate for African-American students among major public institutions, according to an annual survey published this month by the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.

Data published in the journal's winter issue show that the six-year graduation rate for African-American students who entered U.Va. in the fall of 1998 is 86 percent.

U.Va. is the only public institution in the top 20 of all colleges and universities and is the leader among flagship state universities, according to the journal, which used statistics compiled by the NCAA.

The next-highest rates among the flagship universities were 70 percent at the University of California at Berkeley and the University of New Hampshire, 69 percent at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and 67 percent at the University of Michigan.

The graduation rates at flagship state universities are especially important, the article asserts, because "America’s large state universities educate three-fourths of all African-American college students."

Bruce Slater, managing editor of the journal and author of the article, said that "by a
large margin the University of Virginia has the highest black student graduation rate of any state-chartered institution in the nation.

The black student graduation rate at the University of Virginia is even higher than at two Ivy League institutions.”

Nationwide, the graduation rate for black students is 42 percent, and the journal lists several factors as possible explanations for the high rates at schools like U.Va. These include orientation and retention programs, curricular issues, a critical mass of black students on campus, favorable racial climates, locations near African-American population centers and the availability of financial aid.

U.Va.’s supportive structure consists of three primary elements: a strong link between admissions and retention; ongoing mentoring relationships with personal attention from upperclassmen, teachers and administrators; and a wealth of activities that emphasize leadership and self-governance.

“African-American students have a long-running record of success at the University. They enter with a solid academic foundation and with a desire to build upon their achievements. Their families are engaged in the students’ experience here, and University faculty and staff work with the students and their families to maintain a high graduation rate. Together we prepare these young women and men to enter the workplace as thoughtful and creative leaders,” said U.Va. President John T. Casteen III.

In particular, the Peer Advisor Program at U.Va., often cited as a national model, is credited with the successful transition from high school and retention of African-American students at the University. Established in 1984 by Sylvia Terry, associate dean of African-American Affairs, the program provides personal, sensitive support and counseling and highlights academic work and achievement. For example, the peer advisers have created a regular study-hall time, called “Raising the Bar,” and the Office of African American Affairs holds an annual Harambee event to celebrate student academic success. During this celebration, Terry has begun a new tradition, thanks to a model of the Rotunda left at her office several years ago by a group calling themselves the Good Society. (She had never heard of them and hasn’t heard of them since.) “It had a message — ‘Remember, this University is yours’ — so I took it … to Harambee. Now … when we have that orientation program … I bring that Rotunda out, and I say, ‘Whose university is this?’ And the students say, ‘It’s ours!’”

Why Students Come to U.Va.; Why They Stay

By Sarah Gatsos

**Phillip Jackson • Class of 2006 • Major: Commerce • Hometown: Yardley, Pa.**

When Jackson arrived at the University of Virginia in 2002, he did not find the activity he wanted. So, he created it. Jackson established Oluponya Records, U.Va.’s only student-run record label. Aside from recording music for students and student groups around Grounds, Jackson makes his own music as a member of Black Voices.

He followed his older brother to U.Va. But once he became acclimated to U.Va., he extended his family to include his peers. His role as one of the senior peer advisers for the Office of African-American Affairs’ Peer Advisor Program allows him to act as a resource and a guide for younger African-American students.

“I recognize the benefits I had from my peer adviser,” Jackson said. “Having a peer adviser was one of the best things for me.”

**Isaac Agbeshie-Noye • Class of 2006 • Major: Sociology • Hometown: Fredericksburg, Va.**

U.Va.’s high caliber of excellence attracted Agbeshie-Noye to Charlottesville. He had heard about the school’s exceptional reputation from members of his community and local high school alumni. After becoming more familiar with U.Va. through the Days on the Lawn orientation program and Spring Fling, a first-year African-American student orientation, Agbeshie-Noye said he knew he could excel at U.Va. and that he could become
involved in student life. While here, he has served as president of the Pan-Hellenic Council, secretary of the Class of 2006 and president of his fraternity Phi Beta Sigma. Through his leadership roles, Agbeshie-Noye said he saw opportunities where he could change the atmosphere at U.Va. to make the environment a positive place for all students. Also, Agbeshie-Noye cited the African-American community of upperclassmen, peer advisers and faculty advisers as a significant support system that welcomed him into U.Va.

"The ability to do a lot of different things appealed to me," Agbeshie-Noye said. "I saw a way to change the community around me."

To read more about why African-American students come to and stay at U.Va., visit http://www.virginia.edu/topnews/releases2006/20060316StudentVignettes.html.