Awareness Points for Interacting with African American Students

from “African American Student Retention: History, Trends, and Challenges”

http://www.jcu.edu/STUDENTL/vpsa/assessment/focus01.pdf

From 1960 to 1995, the national percentage of African American college graduates between the ages of 25 and 29 increased from 5.4% to 15.4% (Bowen & Bok, 1998). In particular, from 1988 to 1997, African American student enrollment increased 57.2%. During that time, African American students exhibited the greatest progress of all racial and ethnic groups in terms of increasing graduation rate (Jones, 2001).


According to Moore (2001), many of the factors that contribute to the academic success of African American college students are also factors identified for all college students at predominantly White institutions. African American students, however, differ from their majority peers in that they must also shoulder the burdens of racism, discrimination, and negative stereotypes (Moore, 2001). When asked to describe the campus climate of JCU, one African American student stated, “The climate can be cold. Sometimes people on campus make you widely aware that you are of color...Most times, you are aware that you are different.” Moore (2001) suggested that such “oppressive forces constantly convey messages of intellectual incompetence, which at times have debilitating effects on the academic identity and achievement of African American students” (p. 77).

Bowen and Bok (1998) argued that successful initiatives for African American student retention generally combine all or most of the following features:

- A culture of high expectations with emphasis on meeting intellectual challenges rather than remediation;
- Encouragement of participants to work in groups to support one another;
- Appropriate advising and counseling;
- Mentoring;
- Summer internships to broaden student experience;
- Adequate financial assistance;
And, parental involvement.