

Mentors model possibilities for African-American students

by Natalie Johnson - Tuesday, November 08, 2011

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/15281/mentors-model-possibilities-for-african-american-students/>

A new mentoring initiative already has paired nearly 50 African-American students and alumni in an effort to boost retention rates at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

The African-American Alumni/Student Mentoring Initiative (AAASMI), which began with a kick-off barbecue in September, seeks to provide African-American students with external sources of support, inspiration and encouragement throughout their college careers.

Students should “seize” their educational opportunities, says UW Oshkosh alumnus Al Howard ’84, of Oak Park, Ill., president of Stone Logistics.

“Becoming a mentor to a willing mentee should net nothing but positive results,” said Howard, who was matched with UW Oshkosh student Chaz Hamilton. “I believe that my experiences as an African-American male student at a predominantly white university in a northern Wisconsin city can provide insight and motivation to those who now follow in my footsteps.”

Howard and Hamilton have met in person on campus twice already this semester and communicate frequently via email, cell phone calls and text messaging.

“I find that we have a lot in common, and he seems to have a similar mindset and drive that I had at his age,” Howard said. “I’m mostly a resource and a model of possibilities. This program is long past due and will give willing and able African-American alumni a vehicle to give directly back to the University and the community.”

UW Oshkosh associate history professor Stephen Kercher said the idea for a mentoring program for African-American students has come up a number of times in the past and is, in part, an outgrowth of the 1968 Black Thursday protest on campus.

Ninety-four students were expelled from the University after their list of demands, including more fair treatment by faculty and administrators, new African-American history and literature courses and better housing options triggered protests.

Kercher said the initiative also reflects the Wisconsin Idea, which calls for the boundaries of the university to be the boundaries of the state. “This initiative helps extend our commitment to students from the Milwaukee area,” he said.

UW Oshkosh senior Chukwunyere Omegbu, of Milwaukee, co-coordinator of AASMI, recruits students and UW Oshkosh alumni to the initiative, organizes events and communicates the initiative’s vision and goals.

“By developing this group, I plan to help the retention and success of black students and help black alumni feel connected to campus again,” she said. “I think students will benefit greatly from having a mentor. It’s an external source of support.”

Apply to join [AAASMI](#).

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[UW Oshkosh Alumni Mentor Network](#)