

# Student Outreach and Engagement in Action: A Review of Georgia Daze Minority Recruitment

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## Abstract

Throughout higher education in the United States of America, Black students are underrepresented in their enrollment at public, flagship universities relative to the population of Black people in their respective states (Harper & Simmons, 2019). At the University of Georgia, a student-initiated retention project (Maldonado et al., 2005) and registered student organization, Georgia Daze Minority Recruitment, has worked alongside institutional and administrative efforts to grow and retain the population of Black students for over 15 years. In this article, the authors detail how Georgia Daze student leaders participate in high school outreach, yield programming, and campus engagement as part of a successful community engagement program for underrepresented students. In addition, the authors provide the context in which Georgia Daze operates, the structure and institutional support of the organization, and promising practices learned from the success of Georgia Daze.

*Keywords: Black students, underrepresented students, Georgia, minority recruitment, insitutional support*



**T**he University of Georgia, the state's flagship university, is the birthplace of public higher education in the United States of America (McGuinness, 2011). The University is a Carnegie-classified doctoral university with very high research activity and received the elective Carnegie Community Engagement Classification in 2010 and 2020. It is a large, land-grant and sea-grant institution with its main campus in Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, and smaller campuses in Griffin, Georgia, and Tifton, Georgia. In fall semester 2019, the institution had an enrollment of over 38,000 students, with an undergraduate population of nearly 30,000 students. The University of Georgia has a comprehensive offering of educational programs, attracts some of the state's most academically competitive students, and is ranked in the top 20 public universities by *U.S. News and World Report*.

In alignment with its public mission, the University of Georgia serves as a resource for the state and its citizens. In addition to teaching, research, and service provided by faculty and staff members, the

university has a physical presence in every county within Georgia, achieved through its Public Service and Outreach units and UGA Extension. The University of Georgia and the State of Georgia even share the same symbol—the Arch—with three pillars that remind the university community and state citizenry to embody wisdom, justice, and moderation. Its many designations and commitments to the state reflect the impetus that leads the University of Georgia to continuously strive to serve its population and reflect the state of Georgia by being representative of its citizenry.

In Harper and Simmons's (2019) examination of inequities in higher education, as it pertains to Black students, they assigned letter grades to institutions of higher education based on their level of equity in four distinct areas: representation equity, gender equity, completion equity, and Black student to Black faculty ratios. In this assessment, the University of Georgia scored in the top quintile for its Black faculty to Black student ratio and in its completion rate for Black students compared to the institution's average completion rate. According to the

National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the 2012 cohort of African American and Black students in the United States had a 43.7% graduation rate; institutional data shows that the graduation rate at the University of Georgia for the 2012 cohort was 85.8% overall, and 80.9% for African American and Black students. Graduation rates at the University of Georgia surpassed the national average, with a slight difference between the rates of the overall student body and students who identify as African American and Black.

The University of Georgia scored in the middle quintile for gender equity and in the bottom quintile for the representation of Black students on campus when considering the population of Black people within the state. In fall 2018, Black and African American students made up approximately 8% of the student body at the University of Georgia. However, the U.S. Census Bureau (2019) reported that Black and African American people made up 13.4% of the population in the United States, 28.5% of people living in Clarke County (home to the University of Georgia), and 32.4% of people living in the state of Georgia. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the institution to actively engage and attract admissible underrepresented students to apply to and attend the university.

In addition to striving for representation equity, it is also important for institutions to concurrently value the attributes of prospective and currently enrolled Black students. Informed by Bell's (1987) critical race theory and its tenets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework provides meaning to and values the lived experiences and cultural norms that students of color live with, learn from, and bring with them to college campuses. This framework includes the following as forms of capital fostered by students of color: linguistic capital, aspirational capital, familial capital, resistant capital, navigational capital, and social capital. Community cultural wealth is an applicable framework as it centers race and combats the idea that students of color are lacking in social or cultural capital, as defined by middle- and upper-class people. Ultimately, community cultural wealth pushes educators and practitioners to understand, value, and nurture the capital that students of color possess. This framework informs the authors' perspectives and practice as it per-

tains to Georgia Daze outreach and engagement. While describing Georgia Daze, the authors parenthetically note where forms of capital (i.e., linguistic, aspirational, familial, navigational, resistant, and social capital) are embedded within the organization's operations and its programming.

### **Georgia Daze Minority Recruitment: An Organization and Program**

In fall 2004 three Black students created the Georgia Daze Minority Recruitment program. Georgia Daze was originally designed as a community engagement program for underrepresented students that consisted of a two-night campus visitation program for high school seniors who were admitted to the University of Georgia, with aims to encourage talented, historically underrepresented students to enroll at the institution. After 15 years of existence on campus, the scope of Georgia Daze has expanded. Georgia Daze is now a student-led organization that operates with a multitude of student hosts, most of whom are from Black and other minoritized communities. Georgia Daze focuses on the recruitment, yield, and engagement of underrepresented students at the University of Georgia, with an emphasis on Black students (resistant and navigational capital). The organization's goals are to promote underrepresented students' educational attainment, growth in the university's student population, and connection with Black alumni for mentorship, as outlined in its constitution (Georgia Daze Minority Recruitment, 2018). Though Georgia Daze receives support from the university, students have a significant and primary role in organizing, running, and funding Georgia Daze. This level of student contribution makes Georgia Daze what Maldonado et al. (2005) termed a student-initiated retention project (SIRP).

To fulfill the purpose of Georgia Daze, members engage with and serve their community—primarily on campus, locally, and in the Atlanta metropolitan area—in ways that enhance personal development, enrich experiences for current and prospective students, and align with institutional initiatives. The organization's members engage in community outreach, host two overnight visitation programs for admitted students, and provide transition programming for first-year students at the university. Staff in the Office of Institutional Diversity, a division of the Office of the Senior Vice President

for Academic Affairs and Provost, provide administrative support for Georgia Daze. The assistant director of student initiatives in the Office of Institutional Diversity serves as the primary advisor for the organization, and the graduate assistant for student outreach provides administrative support and serves as a secondary advisor for Georgia Daze. In addition, the Office of Institutional Diversity supports Georgia Daze financially, coordinates with campus partners, and solicits additional sponsorships from campus allies such as the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, the Division of Student Affairs, and the University of Georgia Athletic Association to support the programming efforts of the organization.

### **High School Outreach**

Georgia Daze volunteers prioritize their community engagement through high school outreach and take pride in their role as advocates for higher education. The organization engages in outreach by participating in multiple events hosted by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. These events include high school students attending visitation days at the University of Georgia, prospective student receptions, and high school lunch and learn sessions with Georgia Daze. The Georgia Daze student leaders recognize that a major component of their outreach is making sure that high school students can see themselves in college; through their outreach, high school students engage with enrolled college students who have similar identities and backgrounds (aspirational capital).

Outreach volunteers serve on panels for high school students and participate in small group conversations when given the opportunity. The Georgia Daze high school outreach cochairs help to organize the volunteers and assign their responsibilities and schedules. In addition, the cochairs work with the organization's advisors to ensure all volunteers can work in a group setting and individually with minors, in adherence to the institution's policy for programs and activities serving minors. During their outreach, volunteers focus on providing information about why they chose to apply to and attend the University of Georgia, college life at a historically and predominantly White institution, and advice regarding how to have a smooth transition into their first year in college (navigational capital). Throughout their 2019–2020 academic year, the Georgia Daze high school outreach volunteers en-

gaged with over 350 high school students.

### **Yield Programming**

Georgia Daze is best known for its Georgia Daze Weekend program. The organization facilitates the Georgia Daze Weekend program twice each spring. The first iteration of the program focuses on early admitted students, and the second iteration welcomes all admitted students to participate. During the Georgia Daze Weekend program, admitted students meet and learn from student leaders, faculty, administrators, and alumni (social capital). In addition, they visit classrooms, academic departments, dining halls, and residence halls. Ultimately, the goal is to yield admitted, Black students through familiarizing them with the community and systems of support at the institution. This program provides these students and their families or guests, who are often influential in the college selection process, with the information needed to make an informed decision regarding their admission to the University of Georgia (familial capital). At the weekend program, admitted students are encouraged to stay in contact with their host and other students through digital communities and social media, where they feel more comfortable communicating, which later turns into face-to-face engagement and continued mentorship after admitted students enroll (linguistic capital).

Georgia Daze executive board members interview student hosts and pair these hosts with Georgia Daze Weekend program participants, with assistance from their advisors. In addition to interviews, hosts complete trainings and are vetted to work with minors through the same process as Georgia Daze high school outreach volunteers. These hosts engage in the planning of the weekend, share their living space with the admitted student they host, and serve as a resource for admitted students throughout the weekend. Student hosts are integral to the facilitation of the Georgia Daze Weekend program. Hosts are often first-year and second-year students who live on campus and are eager to assist incoming students as they transition to the University of Georgia. The schedule from one of the Georgia Daze Weekend programs in spring 2020 is available in the Appendix.

### **Student Engagement**

Georgia Daze facilitates programming for students it recruited and who then attended

the university to assist as they acclimate and engage with their new campus environment. The organization holds numerous general body meetings and programs focused on fostering a welcoming environment and connecting students to faculty, staff, and alumni (social capital). For example, “Exploratory Day” is an annual program hosted by Georgia Daze where students receive a tour of campus and learn the location of their classes before the semester starts. In fall 2019, Georgia Daze had four tour leaders from the visitor center to provide these tours to over 80 students in attendance. Another major program hosted by Georgia Daze is “Exposé: An All-White Affair,” an event that aims to promote the talents and entrepreneurship of Black students at the University of Georgia. Many students and organizations, like the African American Choral Ensemble and the Pamoja Dance Company, contribute to the event with their performances. To promote unity and fellowship among the students, attendees are encouraged to wear all-white attire or clothing, hence the event’s name, “An All-White Affair.” In addition, Exposé is also an outlet for student business owners to gain exposure to the campus community through having their businesses recognized as vendors at the event. Lastly, “Dazed No More” is a program that aids in connecting current students to alumni. This program facilitates discussion between current students and recent graduates, and the alumni talk about their experiences on campus, the importance of representation on a campus that is a historically and predominantly White institution, and how to maximize their access to resources at the institution (navigational capital).

An important engagement initiative of the organization is recruiting hosts and ambassadors for the Georgia Daze Weekend program. Most students who attended the program as high school students are more inclined to give back and serve as hosts during their first year. Georgia Daze members actively recruit hosts through tabling in the student center and expressing the importance of hosts throughout their campus programming. Throughout the host and ambassador interview process, the Georgia Daze Executive Board stresses the importance of preparedness and professionalism. In addition, the interview process provides the students with the opportunity to engage in an interview and receive feedback; this experience is valuable as they pursue other

opportunities on campus or employment in the future. In spring 2020, Georgia Daze held a retreat for all hosts and ambassadors where they participated in training and team-building activities in preparation for the Georgia Daze Weekend program.

### Evaluating the Success of Georgia Daze

Colleagues in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and Institutional Research assist the staff members in the Office of Institutional Diversity to support and evaluate the success of Georgia Daze. When Georgia Daze engages in outreach initiatives, the high school outreach leaders ask high school students to complete an information card if they are interested in learning more about the University of Georgia. These information cards allow the Office of Undergraduate Admissions to reach out and provide the high school students with additional information and add them to the institution’s customer relationship management system. Using this system allows staff members to identify the nature of prospective students’ interactions with the university community and when those interactions occurred.

Institutional Research colleagues provide the yield rate of the institution annually. The yield rate of the institution is the percentage of first-year students who enrolled in the fall of all the first-year students admitted for fall enrollment. This is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled for the fall semester by the number of students admitted for the fall semester.

When determining the success of the Georgia Daze Weekend program, the Office of Institutional Diversity compares the overall yield rate of the institution to the commitment deposit rate for students who participated in the program. This comparison includes a few data points: the number of students who attended the program, the number of students who paid their commitment deposit prior to attending the program, and the number of students who paid their commitment deposit after attending the program. Using these numbers, the Office of Institutional Diversity calculates the percentage of students who committed to the institution after they attended the Georgia Daze Weekend program as well as the overall commitment rate of all attendees. Table 1 displays an example using the data from each of the spring 2018 Georgia Daze Weekend programs.

Georgia Daze yield programming contributes to the overall yield rate of the institution, which is used to measure the success of Georgia Daze. The yield rate of Georgia Daze Weekend program attendees is often substantially higher than the overall yield rate of first-year students at the University of Georgia. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the University of Georgia had an overall yield rate of 45% for fall 2018. During the following semester, spring 2018, 87 admitted students attended one of the Georgia Daze Weekend programs, and 71 of them committed to attend the university. Thus, 72.9% of attendees committed after participating in the program, and 81.6% of all attendees committed, including those who committed prior to attending the program.

As we continue our efforts to increase retention and graduation rates for Black students through the Georgia Daze Weekend program, we are focusing on scaling up to include more participants and finding ways to incorporate best practices into the program. We attribute much of the success from the Georgia Daze Weekend program to the intentionality that the students and staff have in their planning, the continued support that Georgia Daze student leaders provide to admitted students beyond the weekend, and the Georgia Daze programming that builds community between the enrolled first-year students and other underrepresented students and alumni.

### Next Steps and Promising Practices

The Office of Institutional Diversity is committed to the continued assessment and success of Georgia Daze. In conjunction with the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, the

organization's advisors intend to examine institutional data to better predict where Georgia Daze high school outreach is needed most and the rate at which their outreach initiatives foster interest in attending college in general and the University of Georgia specifically.

In collaboration with the Office of Service-Learning and the Office of Institutional Research, the Office of Institutional Diversity has engaged in additional assessment to examine the impact of the Georgia Daze Weekend program on participants' academic performance. An initial study was part of a research project funded by the 2014 First in the World (FITW) Program. The broader project targeted students at six research universities to measure the effect of service-learning and community engagement programs on the academic outcomes of undergraduate students and underrepresented students. Looking at Georgia Daze, the research team used propensity score weighting and survival analysis modeling to examine the relationship between program participation and two key academic performance indicators: retention rates and graduation rates. Using existing institutional data, this study examined four cohorts (2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014) of first time, full time students and the differences between Georgia Daze participants vs. non-participants. Using preliminary findings, Georgia Daze participation appears to favorably impact both retention and graduation, especially for male students. Based on these promising results, the Office of Institutional Diversity will engage in additional analysis to determine ways to maintain positive programmatic outcomes and build upon the program's success.

**Table 1. Spring 2018 Georgia Daze Weekend Program Data**

	Attendees	Preevent Deposits	Postevent Deposits	Total Deposits	Postevent Deposits (%)	Total Deposits (%)
First Weekend	31	1	19	20	63.3%	64.5%
Second Weekend	56	27	24	51	82.8%	91.1%
Spring Semester	87	28	43	71	72.9%	81.6%

Lastly, the Office of Institutional Diversity is looking into expanding the capacity of Georgia Daze without diluting its impact. In spring 2020, the second iteration of the Georgia Daze Weekend program occurred virtually due to Covid-19; the organization's executive board and its advisors will determine if the virtual format is an ideal way to expand the organization's high school outreach, yield programming, and engagement throughout the academic year.

Our hope is that this overview can serve as an impetus for institutional leaders to provide intentional support for student organizations, especially those who have grounded their missions and purposes in community outreach and engagement. With adequate support, these student organizations and SIRPs can assist in building and sustaining efforts that often align with institutional initiatives. Over its 15 years of existence, Georgia Daze has become an integral and embedded component of the experience of Black students at the University of Georgia, and the organization's members, with assistance from their advisors, have worked to fine-tune many aspects of their programming. However, we consider four key aspects of Georgia Daze and its programming to be promising practices—the first two points speak to student engagement, and the second two points speak more to institutional support.

1. *Student leadership*: Student leaders are best equipped to speak to prospective, admitted, and enrolled students about their lived experience of going to college and attending the institution. Though it is not their responsibility to be recruiters or programming professionals for the institution, their candid conversation with the population is unmatched.
2. *Intentional, continual programming*: Georgia Daze has experienced remarkable success with helping students acclimate to campus by extending its programmatic efforts throughout the academic year. Some prospective students see Georgia Daze high school outreach volunteers before they apply. As admitted students they engage with Georgia Daze hosts during the weekend program, and in their first year on campus, the Georgia Daze Executive Board works to ensure the students feel included in the Black community. This intentional, continual programming adds to the organization's success and recognition on campus.

3. *Alumni involvement*: We have found that beginning with the end in mind brings immense value to Georgia Daze, and the Georgia Daze Program has identified alumni engagement as a primary purpose of its organization. Therefore, Georgia Daze students talk about what alumni are doing when they engage in outreach, bring alumni to serve on panels during the Georgia Daze Weekend program, and facilitate discussions with alumni and current students during the academic year. This continuity of alumni involvement also provides Georgia Daze Executive Board members direct access to members of the institution's Black Alumni Leadership Council, which can be beneficial for them as they prepare for graduate education and career opportunities.

4. *Institutional support*: It is imperative to galvanize university-wide support for the organization and its programming. Georgia Daze benefits from the relationships fostered and maintained with senior administrators, leaders in academic colleges, and colleagues in the following areas: academic enhancement, admissions, alumni relations, athletics, financial aid, honors, housing, institutional research, student affairs, and undergraduate research. Some of this support helps to defray costs associated with the organization's outreach and subsidizes costs associated with attending the Georgia Daze Weekend program for participants. Other support includes giving presentations to prospective students and their families and guests, training high school outreach volunteers and Georgia Daze Weekend program hosts, and providing facility rentals for various programs.

## Conclusion

Leaders within higher education, and particularly those who are at public, land-grant institutions, should strive to support their institutions' efforts to reflect the demographics of their citizenry and seek to mitigate inequities that impact Black students. Georgia Daze Minority Recruitment is one component of a multifaceted approach to achieving representational equity at the University of Georgia. In this regard, Georgia Daze Minority Recruitment's most significant impact is the sense of community it fosters for admitted students, which is dem-

onstrated by yield rates of admitted students who attend the program, the involvement of past participants within the organization, and the willingness and eagerness of alumni to participate in panels and provide mentorship to current students.

Georgia Daze Minority Recruitment is complex, and its strong student leadership, coupled with intentional and year-round programming, alumni involvement, and campus support, makes it a signature program and involvement at the University of Georgia. However, what enhances the impact of Georgia Daze Minority Recruitment, aside from what the institution is doing around recruitment and yield efforts, is that the

experience of Black students and families is centered throughout their engagement with the program and organization. The centering of Black students and their families results in a program that naturally taps into forms of capital that are abundant in the Black community. Leaders on college campuses who are looking to create similar programs or organizations should engage students, faculty, staff, alumni, and families to identify how to best serve the population and design programs and services in ways that align with their community's cultural wealth.



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## **Appendix. Schedule of Events for Georgia Daze Weekend Program**

<b>Day 1</b>	
7:00 AM	Check-in opens and students begin to arrive with their families or guests.
8:00 AM	Senior administrators from the Office of the President, Office of Institutional Diversity, and Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs greet admitted students and their guests. Georgia Daze Executive Board members introduce themselves and the Georgia Daze hosts.
9:00 AM	Georgia Daze Executive Board members and hosts separate the admitted students and their families and guests before leading the admitted students in icebreakers. The families and guests engage in an orientation hosted by the Office of Institutional Diversity until noon.
10:00 AM	A faculty member meets with the admitted students and provides advice for academic success at the University of Georgia.
11:15 AM	Admitted students attend a class with one Georgia Daze host. Admitted students have the option to choose from four classes that the Office of Institutional Diversity has approved with the teaching faculty member.
12:15 PM	Admitted students have lunch in the dining halls with Georgia Daze Executive Board members, Georgia Daze hosts, and other student leaders.
1:30 PM	Volunteers lead groups of admitted students to tour academic colleges based on their intended major and academic interests.
3:00 PM	Admitted students engage with representatives from study abroad and study away programs, the Honors Program, the Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities, and the Division of Academic Enhancement.
4:00 PM	Georgia Daze hosts take admitted students to “Tate Time”—a recurring student-led gathering of Black students in the Tate Student Center—to meet other members of the Black community.
5:00 PM	Admitted students drop off their luggage at their host’s residence hall. This also serves as a break for admitted students.
6:30 PM	Admitted students eat dinner with the hosts and volunteers while various campus partners and student leaders present about their respective organizations. This provides an opportunity for students to learn the importance of networking and getting involved.
8:30 PM	Georgia Daze Executive Board members host a game night to get the admitted students engaged with the community of host, volunteers, and other student leaders.
<b>Day 2</b>	
7:30 AM	Admitted students drop off their luggage until their families or guests arrive.
8:00 AM	Admitted students have breakfast with administrators, faculty, staff, and students from the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Faculty discuss supplemental financial aid and resources within the college, and a student group shares their insights on community and systems of support as underrepresented students.
10:00 AM	Alumni of the University of Georgia talk about their postgraduate endeavors and their experiences on campus. Alumni also give admitted students their tips on how to be successful at the University of Georgia and beyond.
11:00 AM	Admitted students complete program evaluations and disclose if they intend to commit to the University of Georgia, and if the Georgia Daze Weekend program influenced their decision.
12:00 PM	Students depart with their families or guests.

