

Lincoln University Cooperative Extension Men on Business— A College Assurance Program

Yvonne Matthews and Ernest Bradley

Abstract

This article describes Lincoln University's Men on Business—A College Assurance Program, which was awarded a 2010 Outreach Scholarship/W. K. Kellogg Foundation Engagement Award for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities category.

Introduction

In this article, the authors tell the story of Lincoln University's Men on Business—A College Assurance Program, which was awarded a 2010 Outreach Scholarship/W. K. Kellogg Foundation Engagement Award for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities category. They provide context about Lincoln University, the nature of the community, and the program.

Lincoln University

Lincoln University was founded in 1866 by the men of the 62nd and 65th United States Colored Infantries and their white officers for the special benefit of freed African Americans. Today, Lincoln University's role in the education of Missourians and others, and its service throughout the state, the nation, and across the globe, are well-recognized. The university is a Historically Black, 1890 land-grant, public, comprehensive institution that provides educational opportunities, including theoretical and applied learning experiences, to a diverse population within a nurturing, student-centered environment.

Lincoln University's Cooperative Extension has, as a primary goal, the provision of evidence-based learning experiences designed to enhance the quality of life for diverse, limited-resource audiences. The Cooperative Extension staff includes campus-based state specialists located in Jefferson City, Missouri, the state capital, and regional educational staff who, along with state specialists, deliver programs throughout Missouri.

With urban impact centers located in Kansas City and St. Louis, and three outreach centers in southeast Missouri, Lincoln University staff keep their fingers on the pulses of their communities' needs.

The Needs of Lincoln University's St. Louis Urban Impact Center Partner Community

In 2007, the St. Louis, Missouri public school system administration, teaching staff, and students, and Lincoln University's Urban Impact Center staff members partnered to take a proactive stance against what has been referred to in the popular press as "the nation's worst crisis in the history of the Black family; . . . the particularly disturbing plight of young African-American men, half of whom are now unemployed, and have a 30% chance of serving time in prison before age 30" (*Gale, 2007*). In another article, Smith (2004) reported:

The African American male student stands alone in terms of the accumulation of negative factors affecting his future. The evidence is startling, and the sum of all these negative factors alarming. Expulsions and Suspensions: Despite representing only 8.6 percent of public-school enrollments, black boys comprise 22 percent of those expelled from school and 23 percent of those suspended. Dropouts: While between 25 percent and 30 percent of America's teenagers, including recent immigrants, fail to graduate from high school with a regular high-school diploma; the dropout rate for African American males in many metropolitan areas is 50 percent. Graduation Rates: Nationally, 50 percent of black males (as compared with 61 percent of black females, 80 percent of white males and 86 percent of white females) receive diplomas with their high-school cohort. In some urban districts, 30 percent of black males are in special-education classes, and of the remaining 70 percent, only half or fewer receive diplomas.

The Lincoln University–St. Louis Public Schools partnership was initiated as a result of this crisis as experienced in its local high school district.

Program Beginnings

In 2006, Ernest Bradley, the program assistant with Lincoln University's Cooperative Extension who conceptualized the Men on Business program, awoke to a morning news story; a St. Louis public school district's superintendent being escorted out of a school in handcuffs. He pondered how the children in the school were going to react to the humiliation of the incident at their school.

His actions reflected an underlying personal belief: “You don’t help to develop programs where they have everything. You help to develop programs where they need everything.” That morning before going to work, Mr. Bradley went to the school to meet with the principal to discuss how Lincoln University Cooperative Extension could engage with the school to address whatever was needed by the students and administration.

The principal told Mr. Bradley that he thought the young people needed mentoring because many of them did not believe they would qualify academically or financially for college. The principal asked Mr. Bradley to observe a particular group of young men meeting at the school and suggested that they were the young people with the greatest need.

Trusting relationships between Lincoln University staff, the school principal, the high school staff, and the male students were developed after numerous conversations regarding the type of programs that were needed in the school. The conversations resulted in the development of the Men on Business—A College Assurance Program in 2006.

The Men on Business— A College Assurance Program

The vision of the Men on Business is to institutionalize an academic and social development program that transforms boys into young men with integrity, character, respect, and professional ambition. The mission of the program is to provide male students with opportunities, resources, information, and mentors that will assist in the development of the students’ leadership skills, academic achievement, sense of community, and college focus.

Goals of the Program

The guiding principles of the Men on Business program are scholarship, goal setting, and goal attainment. All Men on Business participants are expected to successfully matriculate from one grade to the next. They are expected to maintain an above-average grade point average, and to consider pursuing postsecondary education upon completion of high school. At the beginning of each school year, each Men on Business group, as well as each individual within the group, develops a strategic action plan for the school year. The members work with the group mentors, advisors, and student leaders to define their goals and to make sure that they are attainable and the success is measurable. A midyear review of

action plans is conducted. Adjustments to the plans are made if necessary. At the end of the school year, plans and accomplishments are evaluated and used to begin the planning for the next year.

A key goal of the program is to help young men find success in areas outside their comfort zone. The program uses agriculture, through community gardening, and the sport of golf as platforms for skill building. For example, each young man participating in the program is required to work in a neighborhood community garden. This exposes them to the idea of growing and consuming nutritious foods.

Another goal is for the students to develop a commitment to contributing to the communities in which they live. By 2012, the students will establish community gardens at four or more of nine of the participating schools. In addition, the students are encouraged to start junior chapters of the college organization Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences at their schools.

Examples of Program Activities

The young men in the program serve as educators in other outreach programs. For example, they have traveled to other schools in St. Louis and to the other outreach offices of Lincoln University to encourage other young people to seek positive educational outcomes while juniors and seniors in high school, and to go on to postsecondary education.

Each Men on Business group is encouraged to be self-sustaining. They raise money to offset the cost of activities in which they choose to participate. For example, the students developed, organized, and implemented fund-raising activities including skating parties, a video game tournament, and three-on-three basketball competitions.

Outcomes of the Program

Since it began in 2006, the program has expanded to nine St. Louis City and County schools. The schools have African American male graduation rates of around 50%. More than 150 young men have participated in the program. One hundred percent of the program participants have been promoted from grade to grade. Of the 150 participants, 22 have gone on to college.

The student participants have changed the culture of the school. Participants' teachers report that the program's young men

demonstrate improved self-esteem (e.g., they are not afraid to ask for help, and do not walk through the school with their underwear showing). The teachers have also observed that the program participants have adopted better management and social skills, and that they are earning better grades.

An ancillary benefit of the program is the pride felt by the staff and surrounding community members when in the presence of a group of young men from the Men on Business program.

“One hundred percent of the program participants have been promoted from grade to grade. Of the 150 participants, 22 have gone on to college.”

Future of the Program

If the Men on Business program continues to be successful, there will be a need to expand the program’s scope. Today, there is a waiting list of schools (two public schools and one charter) that are interested in starting a Men on Business program.

Lincoln University Cooperative Extension has recently established a new program area called intergenerational programming. Intergenerational programs have a component that deals with fathering and raising healthy children. Inquiries have been made to staff regarding interest in programs focused on raising healthy boys to healthy men in central Missouri by Columbia Public Schools. This could provide an opportunity to replicate the Men on Business program in another part of the state. The program coordinators are developing a curriculum guide and train-the-trainer manual to assist others interested in replicating the program. For more information about Lincoln University’s Men on Business program, please contact

Ernest Bradley, Program Assistant
Men on Business—A College Assurance Program
bradleye@lincolnu.edu

Patrice G. Dollar, Regional Educator and Site Coordinator
dollarp@lincolnu.edu

Lincoln University Cooperative Extension
Urban Impact Center of St. Louis
9041 Riverview Dr.
St. Louis, MO 63137
Phone (314) 867-4915 • Fax (314) 867-5029

References

- Gale, C. L. (2007). Black males' rampant joblessness, high drop-out rate, incarceration dooming Black community: Study. Retrieved from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1355/is_12_111/ai_n18765592/
- Smith, Rosa A. (2004, February 01) Saving Black boys: The elusive promises of public education. *The American Prospect*. Retrieved from http://prospect.org/cs/articles?article=saving_black_boys

About the Authors

Yvonne Matthews is the interim associate administrator of Lincoln University's Cooperative Extension. In the capacity of interim associate administrator, she provides both budgetary and subject matter expertise and support to the program. She earned her bachelor's degree from Herbert H. Lehman College, and her master's degree from Howard University.

Ernest Bradley is the cocreator and current program assistant for the Men on Business—A College Assurance Program at Lincoln University.