

## PhD Project opens doors, provides support

Mays works with national program to increase diversity in business

By **Brittany Brown** • May 1st, 2008 • Category: **Featured Stories**, **Programs**, **Students**

There is a shortage of minority representation among U.S. business school faculty. Research indicates that this in turn leads to fewer minority students choosing to pursue business studies at all levels of education; As a result, corporate America continues to be hampered by a lack of diversity.

That's where the PhD Project steps in. Texas A&M's Mays Business School is one of many universities that have partnered with this innovative non-profit program whose mission is to increase cultural diversity in the marketplace by increasing ethnicity within business school faculties. The project was developed 13 years ago to provide a network of support for African-American, Hispanic American, and Native American doctoral students.

"The PhD Project is one of the most important and successful initiatives to have been launched in the ongoing quest for advancing higher education in the business disciplines," says Rajan Varadarajan, associate dean for research and doctoral programs at Mays. "Mays Business School takes great pride in its long standing association with this important educational endeavor and is committed to actively recruit participants in the PhD Project to its doctoral programs."

Since its inception, the project has aided in increasing the number of minority business professors in the nation from 294 to 876, with nearly 380 more candidates currently enrolled in doctoral programs.

### Success in and out of the classroom



Miller

The project recruits successful minority business people and asks them to consider leaving the corporate world to become college professors. Prospective students are invited to learn more about the organization by traveling to its annual conference, held each November in Chicago. At the event, recruits receive helpful connections to peer support to help them begin their PhD studies.

One such recruit was Mays PhD candidate Toyah Miller, who was contemplating her educational options while working as a consultant for Capgemini Ernst & Young. After

attending the project's conference, she quickly made her choice. "You hear from people who really love what they do...everyone is so helpful and wants to help you achieve your goals. I came away from the conference feeling inspired," said Miller, who will complete her PhD in management this spring. She will begin teaching at the University of Oklahoma as an assistant professor in the fall.

The Chronicle of Higher Education reports that studies suggest the rate of attrition for doctoral programs in the U.S. could be as high as 40-50 percent. This is not the case, however, with project participants, 95 percent of whom complete their degree. A peer and mentor network provide an essential element of support for those in the program. The project also hosts an intensive annual conference for participants each year, focusing on every stage of the doctoral program.

Christopher Porter, associate professor and Mays research fellow, knows about the PhD Project from both sides of the coin, as he is a graduate of the program who now recruits and supports project participants at Mays. Porter says that Mays has been particularly successful at recruiting these students, and that has been a valuable thing for the school. "The program has helped us diversify our business [school] which benefits both our faculty and students. There are many students at A&M who have never had an instructor who was African American, Hispanic American, or Native American. They need these experiences and this exposure to others and the Ph.D. project has helped us provide those experiences," he said.

Mays Management Assistant Professor Brett Anitra Gilbert is also a graduate of the PhD Project.

#### **Strength through diversity of experience**



**Triana**

Mary Triana, who will finish her PhD at Mays this spring, is very excited to achieve her long-time goal. Though she grew up in San Antonio, Triana's family emigrated to the U.S. from Cuba when she was a child. Triana says her parents always stressed the importance of learning. "One thing people can't take from you is your education," her father often told her, encouraging her to learn English and apply herself to her studies at a young age. Through her affiliation with the PhD Project, Triana has landed an assistant professor position at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where she will start this fall.

The unique background of the project's participants contributes to its growing success. Curtis Wesley, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and a former naval aviator, is a current Mays management doctoral student. He had previously taught at the Naval Academy, as well as worked in the banking industry before deciding to pursue his PhD. Wesley said that he had been receiving postcards from the PhD Project for years and eventually attended the Chicago conference out of curiosity. Once he attended, he knew that returning to teach on a college campus was the right calling for him.

"I'm a professional student at heart. I like to learn, be heard, and make an impact on students' lives, and this career will let me do that. And yes, it's tough, but anything worth having is not easy to get," said Wesley.

For more information about the PhD Project, visit <http://www.phdproject.org/>.

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