

# University of Arkansas at Little Rock

## Student Affairs Success Initiatives

### **Dr. Charles W. Donaldson Summer Bridge Academy (SBA)**

The UALR Summer Bridge Program (SBA) is a three-week intensive residential program aimed at improving the retention and graduation rates of first generation, multi-ethnic students. A collaboration between academic affairs, student affairs, the Department of Math, and the Department of Rhetoric and Writing began in April 2013 to develop a three-week residential program—primarily targeting minorities—to eliminate the need for developmental courses in math, writing, and reading. The curriculum for the program was developed with an eye toward national literacy learning outcomes for first-year writing students and habits of mind from the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing.

The last three summers have proven highly successful. Students engage in an intense academic curriculum that consists of four hours of math and four hours of reading/writing each day. Students are assessed using the COMPASS exam, which has a diagnostic component that identifies problem areas.

*To date the Summer Bridge Academy has resulted in a total of 203 course advancements and saved students over \$152,750 in non-credit bearing course fees.*

The program is an example of what is possible when faculty from diverse disciplines, staff from divisions across campus, administrators, and student leaders work together with the common goal of student success.

### **Summer Bridge Academy Developmental Course Passing Percentage**

<b>Year</b>	<b>At least one developmental course</b>	<b>Bypassing Developmental Math</b>	<b>Bypassing Developmental Reading</b>	<b>Bypassing Developmental Writing</b>
Summer 2013	100%	93%	87%	87%
Summer 2014	100%	97%	90%	100%
Summer 2015	100%	96%	92%	100%

### **Dr. Charles W. Donaldson Scholars Academy (CWDSA)**

Based on the success obtained in the 2013 SBA class, UALR was granted \$10 million for the creation of the CWDSA in June 2014. This collaborative effort between UALR, Philander Smith College (PSC), and the Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD) seeks to break the cycle of underprepared students and low graduation rates for minorities. The goals of

the program include improvement in academic achievement and in test scores used in college admission; an increase in high school graduation rates; entry in post-secondary programs without the need for remedial courses, and completion of a baccalaureate degree in four years. In addition, program staff seeks to enable students to apply and utilize creative and critical thinking, prepare students for success beyond high school graduation, and positively impact each student's life choices through civility. To date, this program has impacted over 400 students, provided over \$200,000 in scholarships, and lead to another expansion to the Little Rock and North Little Rock School Districts (Tri-District Saturday Academy).

### **Tri-District Saturday Academy**

This expansion was made possible because of a grant from the Arkansas Department of Education and UALR. Students who attend high schools in the Little Rock School District and the North Little Rock School District are eligible for the Tri-District Saturday Academy, a weekend component of CWDSA. One Saturday of each month, students will go to UALR or PSC and work to improve competencies in reading, writing, and math.

The Tri-District Saturday Academy prepares students for success in high school and beyond by increasing high school graduation rates and preparing students for college. Students in LRSD and NLRSD who are accepted into the program attend the Tri-District Saturday Academy for the Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 semesters where they will receive specialized instruction based on their COMPASS scores, including ACT prep, college prep, and fun activities.

### **Interdisciplinary Experiential Cohort (IEC)**

In the 2013 inauguration of SBA, students had great success on improving test scores and moving into credit-bearing courses; however, the institution needed to do more for success of SBA students throughout the academic year to support student retention and ultimately student persistence. In 2014, the first Interdisciplinary Experiential Cohort (IEC) was piloted, which focused on the 50th anniversary of the desegregation of UALR. These 28 students completed their first semester with a 3.12 overall average and 94% of them continued into the next semester. This solidified the need to place students in thematically driven communities.

The IEC is an environment that embraces high academic standards and an intensity similar to that of the three-week summer SBA program. With this in mind, study sessions and team-based learning approaches are built into the curriculum with the expectation that each student meet his or her academic goals. Faculty and staff work together to create opportunities for students to learn across the curriculum. To foster hands-on learning, students will move into the community to experience sites of historical significance.

Healthy academic competition is a part of the IECs through study sessions, math olympics, quiz bowls, social media challenges, and interactive learning methods. Classes appeal to a host of different learning styles through assignments and assessments consisting of at least three of the following options: *test, project, paper, group assignment, presentation, and/or portfolio*.

### **IEC Goals:**

- Bridge Academic Affairs and Student Affairs by providing a learning space conducive to student achievement.
- Ease the transition between high school and college by developing cohorts where students gain an interpersonal connection with students, faculty, staff, and the institution.
- Offer a curriculum rich in interdisciplinary studies through courses linked through themes.
- Increase student's ability to be successful in the classroom by providing support outside of the classroom through study sessions, mentorship, and tutoring.
- Provide experiential learning that demonstrates relevance to knowledge learned in the classroom.

### **UALRworks**

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock serves a varied population of students who often attend part time, are the first generation in their family to attend college, and have multiple responsibilities outside of the university. These students also often face financial difficulties that prevent them from continuing their education. In response, UALR has implemented a holistic professional work education program with a strategic and intentional focus on increasing retention and graduation rates.

### *Objectives:*

UALRworks seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

- Create year-round employment opportunities for students.
- Provide real world job experience through applications, interviews and employee evaluations.
- Allow students to experience professional and leadership development in a positive atmosphere.
- Prepare students for success beyond college graduation.
- Build relationships between students, faculty, and staff on campus.

Students have the opportunity to gain advancements and promotions by achieving a work grade of B or higher and completing specific professional development opportunities, like the Leadership Institute. UALRworks has been received well by faculty and staff. The

program has experienced rapid growth, beginning with only 17 students in Fall 2014. It has now reached capacity at 125 students. UALR is currently seeking external funding to expand the program.

### **Leadership Institute**

Leadership Institute aims to strengthen qualities student leaders possess and nurture the qualities that need improvement. Groups are created and given tasks that require skillful collaboration amongst its members. This simulation gives participants firsthand insight into “The Apprentice” style format of this highly engaging approach to student leadership development.

The students who participate in the institute have already shown leadership capabilities but may have various areas they could improve on. Through the completion of group tasks and monthly meetings the students are challenged to utilize their strong qualities and forced to receive constructive criticism on their weak areas, whether it be from their group members or the institute facilitators. These students must be open-minded in order to receive this constructive criticism as well as have the personal desire to reflect on how they can improve. Reflection is crucial to any individual’s growth and our goal is for each student leader to grow to their full potential. The Leadership Institute seeks to take students who have exemplified leadership qualities and challenge them to do the following:

- Work with other student leaders from the university.
- Explore the deeper concepts of leadership theory.
- Contemplate what their strengths and weaknesses are as a leader.
- Reflect on ways to improve their weaknesses and implement these changes in their daily life.

Leadership Institute is graduating its fourth class in January 2016 and in the last four years has successfully graduated over 75 students. Noted accomplishments include the raising of over 14,000 non-perishable items in the four-year period, raising of 521 items for Career Closet, creation and execution of numerous successful student success programs like Etiquette Express, Black Rose Ball, and Freshmen Reinvention.

Graduates have gone on to serve in very important roles including, but not limited to: President of Student Government Association, President of Greek Organizations, other student government positions, attend law schools, Green Dot Advisory Council, McNair Scholars, Summer Bridge Academy Coordinators, African American Female Initiative Coordinator, Engineering & Information Technology Ambassadors, Presidents of Advisory Boards.

### **Success Initiatives**

The Student Affairs Division has created and sponsors the African American Male Initiative (AAMI), the African American Female Initiative (AAFI) and the Hispanic/Latino Initiative (HLI), student success programs designed to empower, support, and assist African-American and Hispanic/Latino students to increase retention and graduation rates. High expectations, early interventions, and intrusive advising and interaction form the operational base of the program. The programs' mantra affirms "Failure is not an option!" The programs are multi-faceted and offer students the opportunity to participate in both professional and peer mentoring. Student participants are assigned peer success advisors (PSAs), upperclassmen who have excelled academically and exemplified strong leadership skills to help them experience a successful first-year transition to UALR. Further, student participants develop informal and formal mentoring relationships with professionals including faculty, staff and university alumni. Specialized programming is designed to assist students with making the transition to college, understanding the institutional milieu, developing the necessary academic skills, and achieving success both inside the classroom and out.

### **Hispanic/ Latino Outreach Expansion**

Plans for a more intentional approach to the recruitment and retention of Hispanic/ Latino students is currently in development. Through partnerships with the Hispanic/ Latino Initiative, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and other institutional and community efforts, UALR will strategically create pathways for the Hispanic/ Latino population of Arkansas. This effort will be inclusive of current UALR students and designed in a way that allows them to positively impact their communities with the gift of higher education.