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Tapping into the Campus Power Structure: The Duty of Black Student Leaders in Predominantly White Universities

Andrew C. Davidson
Cornell University

As young student leaders, the knowledge gained through experience, discipline, reading, and a clear vision can be helpful in developing strategies to produce a more positive campus climate.

In this paper, I wish to expound upon my experiences as a student leader at Syracuse University in New York, which is a predominantly White institution with an underrepresented (i.e., African American, Native American, Latino, Asian/Asian American) student population of approximately 15 percent. From 1992-1996, I attended Syracuse University while pursuing my bachelor's degree in psychology and African American studies. Throughout this time I served as a leader within organizations directed toward the Black student population and also the larger student body. I believe the knowledge gained through these experiences will be helpful in the development of strategies which will produce a more positive campus climate, especially concerning race relations.

During my sophomore year, I was elected Comptroller of the Student African American Society. This organization serves as the vanguard for addressing Black student concerns. Within the position of comptroller I was responsible for overseeing the allocation of a budget of approximately \$75,000. I simultaneously served on the Assembly of the university's Student Government Association.

The following fall semester, in 1994, I traveled abroad to study African culture in Zimbabwe. Upon returning to Syracuse in the spring of 1995, I ran for President of the Student Government Association and won in a tight election against two other candidates. As the chief executive officer of the university's student government, I was responsible for addressing the concerns of approximately 11,000 undergraduate students and distributing a budget of approximately \$1 million dollars to various student organizations. The wealth of knowledge which I gained from this experience is vital for other students of color as well as members of the larger campus community who wish to effect change in a positive manner by tapping into the campus power structure.

PRESENTER

Andrew C. Davidson graduated from Syracuse University cum laude in May 1996. He has entered Cornell University, where he is pursuing a master's degree in African studies.