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Issues of Retention and the Survival of African American Students Attending Predominantly White Institutions

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“By the year 2000, the minority population will comprise 32 percent of the total population. It is imperative that issues of retention be closely examined.”

As American institutions of higher education embark upon the challenge of effectively educating the minority population, which by the year 2000 will comprise 33 percent of the total population, it is imperative that issues of retention be closely examined in an effort to delineate institutional commitment to and the effectiveness of existing and prospective programs on behalf of students of color (Ward and Cross, 1989).

African American student retention at predominantly white universities (PWUs) remains a critical issue, since 8 percent of the African American college student population is enrolled in PWUs (Jewel, 1988). Moreover, a disproportionate number of African American college students tend to lag behind White counterparts in areas such as academic achievement, persistence, and postgraduate study. Salient factors contributing directly to the retention of African American students at PWUs include high school preparation, educational and occupational status of parents, availability of financial aid, and presence of Black faculty, other mentors, and role models (Allen, 1992; Blackwell, 1987; Fleming, 1984; Griffin, 1992).

The purpose of this presentation is twofold. First, we will highlight issues related to retention of African American students attending PWUs. The focus will be on formal and informal mentoring networks as a means for retaining African American students through degree completion. Second, participants will analyze various retention-focused case studies and develop strategies and alternatives for use in existing and potential university retention programs.

PRESENTERS

Joelle I. Davis is a Graduate Student in the School of Educational Policy and Leadership at Ohio State University. She is a June 1997 master's degree candidate in higher education and student affairs. Davis holds a B.S. in middle grades education from Winston-Salem State University in Winston-Salem, N.C. She is a Graduate Administrative Associate in the Office of African American Student Services at the Ohio State University, where she is responsible for university- and community-based programming that increases knowledge and acceptance of internationalization of historically Black colleges and universities and issues pertaining to them.

Robin Vann Lynch is a Graduate Student in the School of Educational Policy and

Leadership, Cultural Studies Department at Ohio State University. She holds an M.A. in Black studies from Ohio State and a B.A. in Black studies with concentrations in economics and communications from the University of Virginia. She is a Graduate Administrative Associate with the Office of Minority Affairs, Retention Services at Ohio State, where she coordinates and manages a formal mentoring program for African American students. Research interests include the persistence of African American students attending predominantly White universities, focusing on mentoring as a tool for persistence; and access and opportunity for students of color in both secondary and higher education with an emphasis on curriculum reform.