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## Professors' Guide

By Lynn F. Jacobs and Jeremy S. Hyman



### 10 Tips for African-American College Students

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Most black college students attend "majority campuses"—schools with whites as a majority of the student body (and faculty and staff). The dropout or transfer rates for black students at some of these campuses can be as high as 60 percent. This week, visiting blogger Charles Robinson, professor of history and director of the African American Studies program at the University of Arkansas, contributes some tips for success for African-American students attending historically white institutions:



Students at George Mason University.

- 1. Identify resources.** Find out about your college's resources for academic performance, such as enhanced learning centers and writing centers. See, too, what possibilities are offered for social networking in the African-American programming units, the multicultural center, and Greek life.
- 2. Immerse yourself in the campus culture.** Attend football and basketball games, talent shows, debate clubs, and language groups.
- 3. Attend class regularly.** African-Americans often have to deal with cultural stereotypes. Especially prevalent is the notion that blacks are not serious students. Help to debunk myths about lack of purpose among students of color by attending all the classes. Going to visit a professor during office hours will also demonstrate your focus on academic matters.
- 4. Find a black faculty mentor.** Finding a black faculty mentor can help you deal with problems you might encounter on campus, such as what to do when class discussion (or even a professor) demonstrates insensitivity. A black faculty mentor can also help you understand the purpose and the workings of the university in a broader way and advise you on diversity options

such as the African-American studies program, Greek life, and various multicultural student-centered groups.

**5. Find a sympathetic black upperclassperson .** A more advanced student can talk to you —on a student level—and help you determine what courses are more culturally sensitive, which professors seem more appreciative of diversity, and which sections of required courses (for example, American history) might be more focused on the African-American experience.

**6. Find a "cohort."** Your peers can become your brother's and sister's keeper. You can develop a sense of camaraderie with peers by taking courses together, doing homework together, forming a discussion group, and even getting together for out-of-class activities. This will not only help you develop better study habits but will provide a sense of security that will stand you in good stead, especially in your required courses.

**7. ...but also go outside of the "community."** Become more culturally literate and comfortable among various groups of people. For example, if you grew up in a neighborhood that was homogenous, build relationships outside your group—especially at "majority" campuses. And broaden your social networks, too. You'll feel more at ease, and you'll be able to take ownership of your campus—you'll feel it's yours and you belong.

**8. Establish and maintain a spiritual network.** Worship in ways familiar to you—just as you did back home.

**9. Become involved with the African-American studies or Africana program.** In these programs, you will not only learn the history of African-American and African diaspora culture, you also will come to understand why the university you attend is the way that it is—why, for example, there's such a disparity in the racial distribution of the students. Understanding this will help you put your college life into some perspective.

**10. Locate the black businesses in the town.** A visit to the black hairdresser or to clubs with black music will help you feel comfortable in your surroundings at college.

**Bonus Tip.** Build a community. Do research about black organizations at other campuses, then create the ones that your campus lacks. For example, if your college doesn't have a black student organization, create one by petitioning for student funds. A chapter of SAAB (Student African

American Brotherhood) could be created fairly easily at most campuses. Also good would be intramural teams and a black students' newsletter—if your college doesn't have these already. Coalesce into a community; be proactive.

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