Partners plus motivates students to reach goal

Jennifer Mangiapane
Staff Writer

What more could a student ask for? A step-by-step plan that is tailored for you, countless resources made readily available to you, and a support system like no other program can match. These are the things that Partners Plus can provide, along with so much more.

Partners Plus is the only step-by-step system connecting with students both here at HFCC and U of M-D who are working closely with minorities who under represented at four year colleges. A low comp is shown rate of bachelor degree programs and statistics that reveal the unlikelihood of successful graduation are factors that have sprung Partners Plus into action.

Partners Plus works with African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Arab Americans who are enrolled in at least 10 credit hours and are interested in transferring to a four year university. Guidance, preparation, and advice are among some of the things provided to students to ensure that they will follow through with the transferring process and thrive in their chosen program once they are there. Although Partners Plus works in cooperation with U of M-D, students are considering other institutions will receive help as well. The overwhelming majority of students involved hold their interests in education and business. These are two areas that are strongly encouraged through the program.

So, what's the first step to becoming involved with Partners Plus? A brief orientation with Mike Thomas, Director of Partners Plus will give you your eyes to the opportunities that await you, if you're up for the challenge.

Upon your initial meeting with Mr. Thomas, in addition to discussing your personal educational goals, it will be clearly defined to you that your education is your responsibility and you hold the key to your own success. He wants to equip you with the right state of mind and provide valuable learning experiences to help you along.

After you have become a Partners Plus member, you'll be required to meet with Mr. Thomas once a term or advising. By being directed through his students, he stresses the importance of taking the business of education seriously. He attempts to provide assurance and encouragement to be sure that students remain confident and on task. In addition to one-on-one mentoring, Partners Plus holds College Success Techniques workshops that show you how to cope with the daily stresses of college life. Also, currently in the works is a Mentorship Program for students at U of M-D, expected to begin this fall.

Once all tutoring, workshops, hands-on experience, and wise words have been said and done, the choices is left to the students as to what to do with it. The old adage of “do something or do nothing” sheds some light on their potential.

Michael Thomas, Director of Partners Plus, helps students of HFCC.

Mike Thomas would like everyone to understand that they... give students survival skills and motivation. We have taken no test for them, yet they have proceeded and persist to obtain their educational goals.” As coordinator and director of this highly successful program, Mike Thomas is personally very proud of his student's achievements. Many of them came into our program thinking they would never get through college, let alone obtain an associate degree. These same students are now gearing up to entering Master's programs.

“We give them more than motivation,” says Mike Thomas. It may be hard to believe, but that is exactly what they need in their lives. In addition to this, we have set up a scholarship program that gives grants to students who have met our criteria.

• A retention rate of 96.3% of program students have transferred to U of M-D.
• Scholarship completion rate of 98.6% of credit hours at HFCC.
• Partners Plus has awarded 10 scholarships ($5,000 each) to education students, ($5,000 each) to business students worth $60,000.
• 77 credit hours were completed successfully by students who made a C or better. These 77 out of 79 credit hours were funded with scholarships, the majority receiving A’s and B’s.
• An increase in overall GPA from 2.95 to 3.4.

As a result of the successful students that come out of the program, some outstanding contributions have been made possible. Some Partners Plus members are now being paid to tutor in the Westwood School District, Assisi Elementary. Partner's Plus member, is now the Education Representative for the program. Her experiences as a student with Partners Plus led her to take a position with whom she gets the support from although she works with local school districts and student tutors.

While anyone is only one of the many success stories to come out of Partners Plus, not everyone took the same road as she did. Partners Plus has transferred over 30 of it’s students to U of M-D, and since 1994, 11 have graduated with bachelor degrees.

Although HFCC and U of M-D work closely together, they have also received tremendous outside support from the community. Partners Plus has an ongoing relationship with several corporate partners and organizations who have donated both time and money, which has been beneficial for our students to gain valuable experience in the areas of job placement and educational funding. By utilizing the National Retention Model, these sectors of the community have come together to provide advising, counseling, workshops, and tutoring.

Partners Plus students attend at least two workshops per term. One of them is the Annual Retreat called “Create it in my life.” Another is the Detroit Economic Luncheon, which is funded through the state of Michigan.

Partners Plus has many corporate sponsors, their biggest being Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Recently, in December of ’98, they gave a generous grant to contribute to student professional development; NBD funded the Partners Plus office and scholarship program.

In addition to these major corporations contributing to the ongoing achievement of Partners Plus, they also have an outstanding support system within the system, through the president of HFCC, Dr. Andrew Mazzara, the Chancellor of U of M-D, Dr. James Renick, and the Dean of the Schools of Education and Management at U of M-D as well.

As a preparation method for getting students toward U of M-D, students are welcomed to attend a campus tour, meet faculty, staff and chancellor, and take classes as a guest before graduating from HFCC. All transfer students from HFCC to U of M-D School of Management with a 3.0 GPA or higher receive a $1,000 scholarship.

And last, but certainly not least, perhaps the most devoted and enthusiastic person involved with the program is the Director, Mike Thomas. He stands as a shining example of the kind of achievements and rewards that can be obtained through self-motivation and hard work. He has attended U of M-D Mercy on a full academy scholarship where he did his undergraduate study with a 3.8 GPA, and was attended by 3 honors societies and served on all at least 6 boards. He attended U of M-D’s School of Management, and from there he went to Lawrence Technological University, where he received his MBA with a 3.7 GPA.

Mr. Thomas now teaches business and economics classes here at HFCC, and as part of this significant role of Director, he flies around the world speaking at colleges nationwide. He tells students about the growth of the program and how successful the students have become because of it. He also addresses the issues of retention, diversity, and American African pride. In doing so, he begins every speech by thanking the students for their accomplishments; without them, Partners Plus could not be. He thanks his faculty members, who give him the confidence to become what he is today. He also lets people know that they are not alone, and they aren’t the only ones who struggle.

If you would like to get involved with Partners Plus, there are two upcoming events currently being planned. The Annual Retreat (which started both HFCC and U of M-D students at no cost, and near the end of February, the Wisconsin YMCA National Convention in Milwaukee.

Seminars urge us to look beyond race

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The Council for American Culture, and the Center for Teaching Excellence and Innovation, are jointly sponsoring a ten week seminar entitled "Beyond Race, Between Cultures: Preparing for the Twenty-First Century." The purpose of the ten week seminar which began February 4th is to give an opportunity to the faculty, staff, students and administration to explore personal and institutional issues such as ethnocentrism, and multiculturalism. The seminar includes one session per week.

The seminar was established for several specific reasons. It was created to "help its participants overcome barriers to recognizing and internalizing the commonality of the categories of humanity," to aid participants in recognizing "racism and its internalized oppression", and to teach how individuals are conditioned to participate in racism.

Furthermore, the seminars teaches the "power of language," which is a method designed to process the thoughts and emotions experienced by participants as they share experiences. Finally, by organizing individuals to take effective action to dismantle the racism in our school, economic and political institutions, participants are taught to stop the cycle of racial conditioning.

The seminars are run by Ron Spann and Jim Perkinson, both former part-time instructors.

Perkinson said that they conducted the seminar in previous years. If the evaluation is positive, they plan to run another ten to twelve week seminar.7 If the current week seminar sequels the evaluation are still good, then they will think about how to go about on a broader basis.

About ten to fifteen people are expected to participate. Mr. Perkinson and Mr. Spann asked that after the second week, all new people come. The reason for this is to build trust between the people at each seminar.

The idea of the seminar comes from a group of people called Healing Racism, Inc., based in Chicago. Healing Racism has trained people nationally in business and educational facilities. In their diversity training, it is believed that we first need to come to grips with where we have been in this culture, before we can move on explained Mr. Perkinson. Both facilitators said that "to move into a multicultural future, we first need to move on.

If any interested as anyone in the next ten-week seminar, you can contact either Lynn Haney at 619-6494, or Barb Near at 313-845-6467. Each remaining seminar session takes place on Thursday from 2:15 - 4:15 pm in A101.