Partners Plus began in 1993 as a dream to help under-represented minority students at Henry Ford Community College acquire a four-year degree at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. By the next year, 40 students had begun participating in the program and Michael Thomas had joined Partners Plus as its coordinator. Today more than 600 students receive Partners Plus services, including tutoring, academic and career guidance, life-skills training and positive college experiences. Since 1996, nearly 160 Partners Plus students have earned bachelor’s degrees from U of M-Dearborn, Wayne State University or other four-year institutions. It has become a model program for the State of Michigan, which directs other schools to Partners Plus for suggestions and guidance.

In 2001, the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce granted Partners Plus first place honors for “outstanding commitment and investment in the educational process of youth.” Partners Plus received the award in recognition of its tutoring program in the Westwood School District, which includes part of Inkster and Dearborn Heights. This partnership allows HFCC students considering an education degree to work individually with middle school students in crowded classrooms who need academic help.

“These kids – who were previously falling behind the rest of their class – are learning to read better and do difficult math,” program director Michael Thomas said.

“This program enables HFCC students to experience a real education environment and decide whether teaching is the career they want,” he added. “It’s also an opportunity for HFCC students to learn classroom management, interact with kids and identify successful teaching methods.”

Partners Plus also received a significant award in November 2000 from the Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACRAO). MACRAO’s Equal Education Opportunity Committee named Partners Plus its “2000 Award Winning Program” for promoting equal educational opportunities involving ethnic minorities, using creativity in doing so, and showing a proven record of success.

Partners Plus has received financial support from the Michigan Department of Career Development King-Chávez Parks Initiative MICUP grant, including $66,000 for the 2001-2002 school year. Other contributors include U of M-Dearborn, HFCC, WSU, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, the Automobile Association of America, Bank One, IBM, and Ford Motor Company.
If you’re an HFCC student...

If you are interested in pursuing a four-year degree, Partners Plus can help you. Here are some examples of the kind of assistance we offer our students:

- Academic advising on U of M-Dearborn requirements
- Peer coaching
- Mentoring
- Tutoring
- Financial scholarships, when available
- Leadership and life skills development through workshops and student retreats.

What’s expected of students who are Partners Plus members?

- Commit personally to graduating from a four-year degree program.
- Attend at least one event, such as a training workshop or student retreat.
- Conduct yourself appropriately – lift your expectations.
- Dress and “carry” yourself like the professional you want to be.

If you are motivated, our workshops and services can teach you everything you need to know about appropriate conduct and dress. Contact the Partners Plus office to join today.

If you’re an employer...

Employers today are seeking a diversified workforce; Partners Plus is helping to bring highly motivated, talented young people into the pool of available professionals. Most of its students are ethnic minorities; many represent the first generation in their family to attend college. Partners Plus is assisting these students in realizing their dreams...to become educators, managers, pharmacists, doctors...leaders.

The program began with a budget to accommodate 40 students. Today, with nearly the same budget, it provides services to more than 600 students. Corporate or individual financial support is needed to help with the following:

- Scholarships
- Tutoring
- Leadership development and materials
- Academic counseling
- Annual student retreats.

Businesses also may help by providing mentors, volunteering, and offering internships. If you’d like to become involved, please contact the Partners Plus office.

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“Partners Plus has a long standing record of success in helping minority students achieve their educational goals. The program is a model for others across the State.”

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Financial security is the foundation for reaching many goals, such as owning a home and raising a happy family.
After 17 years as a cosmetologist, Monica Lawrence decided it was time to make a few of her dreams come true. She enrolled at Henry Ford Community College, where she encountered the newly developing Partners Plus program. The program provided educational workshops and student retreats, networking opportunities and above all, encouragement. She was provided with mentors from management in the business community who discussed her goals with her and encouraged her to persevere through hard times.

During her participation with Partners Plus, Ms. Lawrence learned about business and herself by attending lectures with guest speakers, meeting with her mentors, and using the support system Partners Plus provided.

After graduating from U of M-Dearborn with a degree in Business Management, she began her new career at Comerica Bank as an Assistant Branch Manager. She enjoys her job and loves to travel with her husband, Terance Lawrence. The couple currently lives in Detroit.

As for Ms. Lawrence’s dreams – she envisions owning a beauty salon some day. Her experience in cosmetology, her education, and the business experience she is gaining now with Comerica may be just the perfect combination for one day realizing that entrepreneurial dream.

Detroit native Christopher Joseph first met Michael Thomas in 1997 after seeing a Partners Plus flyer. He was still at loose ends, without a major and no plan for his future. Thomas invited him to attend Partners Plus’ first student retreat.

“Mr. Thomas has a passion for helping students succeed and he knows how to motivate,” Joseph said. “He won’t offer sympathy, but he might give you a kick in the pants if that’s what you need!”

Apparently it worked for Joseph. Now a senior majoring in finance at U-M Dearborn, he has been employed by the U.S. Attorney’s office in Detroit for several years. He’s involved with two community-based programs, “Weed & Seed,” and the Explorer Scouts, a Boys and Girls Club program. In an effort to weed crime out of the community and plant the seeds of hope, Weed & Seed runs a summer camp at Selfridge Air Force Base, where mentors like Joseph and other law enforcement and military personnel provide drug and gun awareness, and teach kids to handle peer pressure.

The Explorer Scouts program offers after-school activities for teens interested in law and law enforcement. Joseph may pursue a graduate program in urban or economic development, through which he could combine his community work experience and his undergraduate education.
Employer Success Story: Comerica Bank

Employers generally agree that hiring and training new employees is expensive – especially if those employees don’t work out. But hiring a self-starter like Partners Plus alumnus Raggeria Goddard makes the effort worthwhile, according to her supervisor, Elizabeth Gersch, Vice President of Investment Management for Comerica.

“Raggeria has come to us with an excellent work ethic and very good problem-solving skills,” said Ms. Gersch. “She knows how to make contacts and create her own opportunities. I’m sure she learned many of those skills from Partners Plus.”

Ms. Goddard graduated with a business degree from Eastern Michigan University. In 1999, she began in Lending at Comerica. Less than a year later, she transferred to Investment Management as an Investment Assistant. She is the sole person responsible for overseeing the performance management systems, which involves working with a variety of people both internally and externally. She also is preparing to take the first of three exams to achieve her Chartered Financial Analyst certification.

Ms. Gersch has been very pleased to have Ms. Goddard on her staff and would be happy to learn that other job candidates have Partners Plus in their background.

Partners Plus Mentor Admires Program

Tim Mackie, Executive Vice President for AXA Advisors, is a strong supporter of Partners Plus. He remembers in his own college experience realizing that not everyone was going to make it. “For most kids, it’s a big emotional adjustment and challenge,” he said.”Mike Thomas gets them through, the results are outstanding.”

Mackie helps by mentoring Partners Plus students interested in business careers, especially in his own field, financial management. He loves working with students and encourages other business leaders to support Partners Plus in any way they can.

Why Get a Bachelor’s Degree?

Income rises dramatically with level of education and degrees earned. For example, based on statistics provided by the 2000 U.S. Census, a 25-year-old with a bachelor’s degree will likely earn more than a similar person with an associate’s degree. Though money isn’t everything, financial security is the foundation for reaching many other goals, such as owning a home and raising a happy family.

Most of Partners Plus students are ethnic minorities; many represent the first generation in their family to attend college.

www.partnersplus.umd.umich.edu / (313) 845-9690
Supported by the King-Chavez-Parks MICUP Initiative
Michigan Department of Career Development
Ford Executive Challenges Students:

Floyd Washington, Jr., Director of Civic Affairs & Community Development for Ford Motor Company, addressed an audience of about 200 people at Partners Plus’ sixth annual awards banquet April 19, 2002 at the Marriott Dearborn Inn. Washington counseled students in the audience that in this era of whirlwind advances in technology, education is more important than ever. Corporations seek educated individuals who have a sense of fellowship, trust and integrity, who can gain knowledge but also share it with others on a team, he advised.

He also encouraged students to be proud of their heritage. The best corporations today embrace diversity, he said. The Ford executive concluded with the three words that encapsulate his philosophy: “Visualize, Actualize and Realize.” Coming from a poor farm family in the bayous of Louisiana, it was not always easy for Washington to envision a successful future. However, all eight children ultimately graduated from college because they had a vision and a plan to realize it.

“Knowledge is like electricity,” he said. “It is of no use if it is not available to all.”

Michael Thomas, director of Partners Plus, presented Washington with an award for overall dedication to and support of education. Other awards were presented to Partners Plus staff members such as Marla Johnson, who coordinated the event, and graduates like Nikita Plummer, the first program participant to graduate from WSU’s pharmacy school. In addition to the many students and graduates present, several business and educational partners were represented as well, including Daniel Little, Chancellor, U-M Dearborn; Robert Simpson, Provost, U-M Dearborn, Gary Waissi, Dean, U-M Dearborn’s School of Management; Jo-Ann Terry, Vice President, HFCC.

“Expect to be the best,” Washington urged.

“Deem it; will it; and it will be so.”
HFCC students seeking a four-year degree in medical, health or life sciences can receive assistance from a Partners Plus collaborator at Wayne Statue University, Dr. Jerrolynn Johnson, program coordinator for WSU’s “Bridges to the Baccalaureate Degree” program. Dr. Johnson splits her time between the Partners Plus offices at HFCC and WSU. She provides students who are interested in transferring to WSU with guidance counseling, mentoring, and training through her workshops on Time Management and College Preparation. The Bridges program also provides funding to pay for tutors and assists with the process of transferring to WSU.

Dr. Johnson began working with Partners Plus in January 2000. She has been working with Wayne County Community College since 1996.

“Partners Plus is a pivotal link in assisting a lot of students in reaching their goals for the future,” she said. “It’s success is mostly due to the diligence of Michael Thomas, as well as his commitment, dedication and expertise.”

For More Information
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