

## **UGA's GAAME: Georgia African American Male Experience**

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### **The Students**

Since its inception in 2013, the Georgia African American Male Experience (GAAME) at the University of Georgia has implemented programing and student success initiatives that have gained national attention. The success of this program is due to the continued support of the University System of Georgia's African American Male Initiative (AAMI) as well as the culture of support and inclusion at the University of Georgia. With representatives from across campus coming together to support the academic and personal achievement of these young men, there are faculty and staff members who are able to assist GAAME students with virtually anything they will need during their time at UGA.

When comparing the success of African American males at the University of Georgia to national statistics, UGA is faring exceptionally well. UGA consistently upholds some of the highest graduation rates of African American males in the nation (71%), but retention is also exceptionally high, with rates remaining above 90% for the last ten years. African American Male enrollment continues to rise at the University of Georgia, from 651 in 2012 to 720 in 2014, and increasing enrollment remains the major objective of GAAME.

With the first true cohort of GAAME students matriculating in Fall 2014, the University of Georgia anticipates that this will be the most successful cohort of African American males in the University of Georgia's history. 23 first-time, full-time freshmen began their undergraduate endeavors in Fall 2014, with intended majors ranging from Economics to Biochemical Engineering. These men are some of the brightest, most talented students at the University of Georgia. They are committed to assisting GAAME in continuing to attract, retain and graduate future cohorts of African American male students at the University of Georgia.

### **Community Issues**

The largest community issue for GAAME and the Black Male Leadership Society (BMLS) is finding a sense of belonging in the UGA and Athens-Clarke County communities. In addition to the GAAME Weekend recruitment program and partnership with the BMLS student organization, GAAME partners with community organizations to ensure that students are invested in their community while completing their undergraduate education and beyond.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, GAAME will continue its partnership with two prominent community organizations, the Athens Area Human Relations Council and the Athens Alumni Chapter of the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

The Athens Area Human Relations Council is a nonprofit organization that was established in 1989 with a mission "to honor individuals that promote respect for all people, acceptance of

diversity, social justice, and the elimination of discrimination.” The Council sponsors a Youth Academy twice each year with which GAAME will assist, allowing the students to serve as mentors to African American high school students in Athens-Clarke County. The Council also provides 15-25 scholarships to students in the community each year. Members of the Council will play a prominent role in mentoring UGA students in developing leadership and professional networking skills that will benefit them throughout college and beyond.

The Athens Area National Pan-Hellenic Council, Incorporated (AANPHC) consists of nine historically African American Greek letter sororities and fraternities. AANPHC promotes interaction through forums, meetings and other mediums for the exchange of information and engages in cooperative programming and initiatives through various activities and functions. AANPHC is also very active in the larger community as it promotes education to minority communities around Athens. GAAME will work with AANPHC in two basic capacities. First, the students will be mentored by members of AANPHC, many of whom are professionals in the area and alumni of the University of Georgia. Second, GAAME students will work with AANPHC to conduct outreach into the community through service projects each semester.

In addition to participating in a community service project once each semester, assisting with high school tutoring twice each year through Youth Academy and personal mentoring provided through the partnership with GAAME, AAHRC and NPHC, the role of a civic partnership extends beyond activities and events. The leaders of AAHRC and AANPHC are true pillars of the Athens community. Many members of these organizations are UGA alumni, business owners, and revered individuals whose impact will help members of GAAME not only succeed academically while at the University of Georgia, but they will also foster the development and personal growth of these young men. The members of AAHRC and AANPHC regularly attend events hosted by GAAME, invite members of GAAME to events that their organizations are hosting, and interact at events throughout the UGA and Athens communities.

### **The History/Evolution of the Program – How did it end up as it is?**

The Black Male Leadership Society (BMLS) is a student organization that was started at the University of Georgia by a group of Black male students who hoped to come together to build a community of support. After a few years of being active on campus, many of the leaders graduated and the group did not continue growing. In 2013, the University System of Georgia issued a request for proposals to participate in the African American Male Initiative (AAMI). Members of the Office of Institutional Diversity at the University of Georgia built a team of campus partners, including the Black Male Leadership Society, and later received an AAMI start-up grant. The program was later named the Georgia African American Male Experience (GAAME).

The UGA GAAME program is supported by UGA's Office of Institutional Diversity (OID). The mission of OID is to provide institutional leadership to the focused effort to enhance and maintain a diverse and inclusive environment for learning, teaching, research and service at UGA. OID goals include:

- Providing leadership, guidance and support to the implementation of the UGA Diversity Plan.
- Enhancing diversity awareness and education through training and learning opportunities for faculty, students and staff throughout the university.
- Promoting awareness of UGA's diversity efforts by supporting diversity related events across the UGA campuses.
- Establishing and defining strategic partnerships between the Office of Institutional Diversity and other units.
- Identifying and obtaining additional resources that will enhance and support institutional diversity endeavors.

OID seeks to ensure an environment where people of many different backgrounds and perspectives join together to actively advance knowledge. As a community dedicated to scholarship, research, instruction, and public service and outreach, we recognize the importance of respecting, valuing and learning from each other's differences while seeking common goals. OID provides the leadership to establish the University of Georgia as a national and international model in creative ways to address diversity and equity issues in an academic setting.

GAAME also maintains an existing partnership with the Black Male Leadership Society (BMLS), a UGA student organization. The purpose of the BMLS is to establish and foster a sense of unity, strength, and love among Black males and to direct it towards uplifting the community at large. It is our goal to support the academic, social, intellectual and spiritual growth of Black male undergraduate and graduate students as well as alumni, at The University of Georgia by maintaining a community of men who will continuously support and encourage one another. BMLS will foster positive relationships for Black men with others, to develop and highlight the leadership of black men in their communities, and to engage and affect the lives of others beyond the boundaries of UGA campus. Through the implementation of community service efforts, the BMLS seeks to insure that the strengths, talents and experiences of UGA Black men are reinvested back into the community through mentorship. Lastly, it seeks to provide for the professional, academic and personal success of Black men at UGA and to intellectually engage them in a broad range of issues facing black men and boys.

**A short anecdote that reveals how the program is embodied/enfleshed/enacted in relationship. It could be the story of a life, or a relationship, or a mistake, but just something to hold onto to give a sense of the program as lived in/not static.**

"What I find so intriguing about the BMLS and its members, is that we are constantly finding ways to redefine ourselves. Black male leaders are only three parts of our ever expanding

identities. Each of us, with our different talents, gifts, perspectives and opinions, gives society things that are unique in shaping the image of a Black male here at UGA and within the surrounding communities.”

—Charles King, BMLS President

**What makes the program sustainable? What makes the program vulnerable? What threats to the program’s vitality exist? What dilemmas of practice is the program facing?**

The campus-wide and community-wide partnerships are what make GAAME sustainable. Having representatives from the Office of Institutional Diversity, Division of Student Affairs, Multicultural Services and Programs, Peach State Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation, Office of Undergraduate Admissions, University Housing, UGA faculty and two civic partners in addition to support from additional members of campus and the community helps GAAME utilize a wealth of resources that contribute to its ultimate success.

A vulnerability of the program is that it is currently dependent on grant funding for half of its annual budget.

**The Edges of the Project – Where the project hopes to go, what is happening that might be beyond expectations (dangerous or exciting).**

The Black Male Leadership Society was named the 2014-2015 UGA Student Organization of the Year. Chosen among 170 nominations of 70 student organizations, the Black Male Leadership Society was recognized for its impact at UGA and in the Athens community.

<http://news.uga.edu/releases/article/student-organization-awards-2015/>

In addition to celebrating its current accomplishments, GAAME/BMLS stays focused on measureable goals and outcomes in order to ensure growth and progress in the years ahead. Table 1 shows the goals, proposed outcomes and measurement tools for the GAAME program.

Table 1. Goals, Proposed Outcomes, and Measurement for GAAME

Goals, Proposed Outcomes & Measurement		
Goal	Proposed Outcome	Measurement Tool
<b>Goal 1:</b> Increase the yield of African American male students to UGA.	The enrollment of African American male students at the University of Georgia will increase as a result of 25 African American male students committing to UGA after attending the GAAME Weekend program.	Office of Admissions data; Institutional Research data
<b>Goal 2:</b> Increase engagement and participation of African American males in leadership,	Increase African American male student organization membership/leadership from 23	Internal tracking of program participation; Programmatic activity participation data; Focus

professional and service initiatives at UGA.	student organizations to 30 student organizations.	groups
<b>Goal 3:</b> Increase the level of support for GAAME students to improve graduation rates.	GAAME students will graduate at a rate of 75%, exceeding the 71% current rate of African-American males at UGA.	Participant surveys; focus groups; Institutional Research data
<b>Goal 4:</b> Maintain current level of retention of African American males at UGA.	Maintain 91% retention rates with increased enrollment numbers.	Institutional Research data

To meet Goal 1, the GAAME visitation program will bring 30 additional African American males to campus for an overnight visit. The expectation is that this interaction will yield an additional 25 males, increasing the African American male population to 2.8% of the overall undergraduate student body. To accomplish Goal 2, GAAME will provide formal leadership training and opportunities to engage with UGA faculty, administrators, community professionals and alumni. GAAME will strengthen the UGA experience of African American males through increased membership and leadership in BMLS.

Students will engage in community outreach via service-learning experiences developed in conjunction with our civic partners. This type of connection focused on leadership and service will assist the students in broadening their engagement and leadership on campus and within their communities.

To accomplish goal 3, GAAME will work with students individually to make sure that they are receiving the needed and relevant level of academic, social and professional support that will enable them to graduate. This added attention to the individual student and their specific needs will result in a graduation rate of 75% for GAAME students, which exceeds the current graduation rate (71%) for African American males at UGA.

In addition to the activities described in goals 1-3, GAAME will continue providing an Academic Resource Center specifically for African American males at UGA because the optimal outcome of GAAME is to maintain the current retention rate of 91% and not lose young men in the process of enrollment growth, hence the fulfillment of Goal 4 of the initiative.