

Strategic Investment Proposal

African American Males: A Pipeline to Professionalism

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Introduction and Foundations for the Proposal

For decades metro leadership and the university have emphasized the need to develop a skilled, talented workforce of current residents to remain in the area and help build the city and the state. UNO has been successful in helping deter a brain drain, but has had difficulty in attracting and retaining a significant population sector -- African American males. This group of students will matriculate at the university, but will not remain. Unlike other groups, African American males find difficulty in forming and maintaining social connections. It is difficult for them to realize a sense of belonging in an environment that previously stripped the group of venues to congregate, socialize, and excel as they pursued their academic studies. For example, the elimination of football and wrestling sent a strong message, that the skills and talents that allowed many African American males to build self-efficacy and a sense of place were unnecessary and even unwanted. More importantly African American males have found it difficult to gain recognition to participate in opportunities for internships and other skill-building experiences that provide tangible competencies upon graduation.

Objectives and Proposal Components

The objectives of the proposal reflect *student centeredness* and *racial justice*:

1. Recruit and retain African American males at the University of Nebraska at Omaha since records indicate this is the population that is most vulnerable to drop out from their university studies.
2. Build a pipeline of skilled African American males to assume professional positions in business and public sector jobs in the city and state.

To achieve these objectives, the proposal components include:

- A) Identify 10 African American males entering the freshmen class (each of 3 years) starting in fall 2021 who want to learn the culture of employment professionalism, gain valuable on-the-job skills in private and public sector enterprises, and receive a paid internship with

guidance and support from university offices and their placement business/organization.

Interns will be paid \$20 an hour for training and employment working approximately 15 – 20 hours per week for 40 weeks.

- B) Identify 10 private and public sector organizations that will commit to introducing African American males to the culture of work, training and mentoring them in skills and activities carried out by the business, and hiring them for summer employment. Summer employment will be contingent on an assessment of sufficient progress in adapting and learning the work environment. Business placements will be responsible for compensation during summer employment. Each year additional placement organizations will be identified as new interns are added.
- C) Provide on-boarding and mentoring experiences on a monthly basis beginning prior to the start of the fall semester with discussions on topics such as dress, communication, student/mentor relationships, resume development, organizational culture, etc.
- D) Make weekly individual contact with each intern to address academic or internship concerns with an emphasis on how to balance work and academic studies. Also contact the sponsoring company on a monthly or as-needed basis regarding each intern.
- E) Hire a graduate assistant (9 month contract) who reports to proposal principals to coordinate the activities of the interns and communicate with the participating businesses and organizations. Proposal principals will do recruitment, follow-ups, and business/organizational interactions during the summer.
- F) Conduct a year-end assessment to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the model and design and implement mechanisms to sustain the program.
- G) Add 10 new interns and new or recurring business/organization sponsors each year to build the pipeline asking sponsors to pay salary expenses for the second and third year placements of the interns.

The success of the program will depend upon cooperation and collaboration from the business and nonprofit community along with potential community partners: 100 Black Men, the Urban League of Nebraska, Omaha Chapter of the NAACP, the Omaha Empowerment Network, Omaha Economic Development Corporation, and the Omaha Chamber of Commerce. Each of these organizations will be contacted to participate in mentoring and year-long, onboarding activities. To retain African American

male interns, it will be crucial they build ties and connections with these and other organizations that will support them throughout their academic studies.