

# “Take the Fifth”: Mentoring Students Whose Cultural Communities Were Not Historically Structured Into U.S. Higher Education

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**Abstract** This article presents a description of the African Atlantic Research Team as exemplary of ten years of successful mentoring of undergraduate and graduate university students who are focused on a Ph.D in disciplines traditionally associated with academic research and teaching. The team is distinctive because it is multi-disciplinary in composition, the majority of its members are from communities historically excluded from structures of U.S. higher education, and its activities focus on members working collaboratively and collectively through most areas of their academic learning and socialization. Though the numbers of this case study are small, 95% of team members successfully completed their bachelor’s degree with majors that facilitate their application for graduate study in disciplines linked to academic research, writing, and university instruction. These undergraduate majors differ from those focusing upon social problems or applied or professional majors. Eighty percent of the team members applied for graduate study, and only one did not attend graduate school.

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The African Atlantic Research Team (AART) is a multi-disciplinary, voluntary, mentoring collective of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty members, and community persons. As a mentoring association, team members share material and informational, emotional, and social resources to ensure that students engaged in university studies will have the specialized advising and career information needed to become strong in graduate programs that lead to the Ph.D. in academic disciplines traditionally identified with research, writing, and university teaching. We concur with Donaldson and Crowley (1978) in their discussion of distinction in the objectives of academic and professional disciplines. These authors explained this distinction as follows:

The aim of academic disciplines is to know, and their theories are descriptive in nature. In contrast, professional disciplines...are directed toward practical aims and thus generate prescriptive as well as descriptive theories. The prescriptive theories characteristic of professional disciplines deal with the actual implementation of knowledge in a practical sense. (p. 115)

Our team does not reject or discourage members from professional disciplines; but our goal is to provide a supportive, collective environment of academic mentoring that assists students in the successful pursuit of doctoral degrees in fields that focus on knowledge production.

This article provides a narrative account of what the AART has done and how that has affected a small group of students in higher education. We contextualize specifics of our efforts within salient issues of U.S. higher education, and we clarify the things we do that have led to the success of our students. Of course, there are limitations to our work and this article, beginning with the small number of students with whom we work and the anecdotal nature of this text. However, we present this description with the hope that experiences of the research team may contribute to innovative directions for mentoring students whose communities have historically been structurally excluded from U.S. higher education.

Currently, the research team is based at Michigan State University (MSU), but we began ten years ago at the University of Colorado, Boulder (CU-Boulder). The team was formed to help increase the number and quality of academically prepared students of color who aspire to the doctorate in descriptive rather than prescriptive knowledge production (Donaldson and Crowley 1978, p. 115). Unless specified otherwise, we refer to the demographic groups Native, African, and Chicano/Latino Americans collectively as “students of color.” Like other research reports (Barlow and Villarejo 2004; Gandára and Maxwell-Jolly 1999; Johnson 1997; Martin 1996; Petersen et al. 2005), we have not included “Asian American/Pacific Islanders” in our concept. Our team does include Asian racial groups underrepresented in U.S. institutions of higher education as well as other Asian groups that are not underrepresented in many academic fields. We have omitted the full population because of the potential impact of this heterogeneity on the overall assessment of educational trends. In this article, we present the work of the AART as a model of collective academic mentoring with students of color.

To begin providing today’s students with the strength of an academic mentoring collective, as exemplified by the AART, we believe that it may be critical to advise undergraduates to “take the fifth,” i.e. plan to graduate in 5 not 4 years. With strong mentoring, the extra year will give undergraduate students time to pursue their core intellectual interests and potential thoroughly. This extra time helps alleviate pressures too commonly associated with quickly

completing employment and/or credential-oriented undergraduate programs. Our goal is to shift a few students' focus toward gaining maximal critical thinking skills and encouraging their pursuit of graduate education. Equally important, the fifth year can offer an opportunity to enhance preparatory mentoring and professional activities, in addition to strengthening the content of their undergraduate major. One AART student summarized the experiences of the fifth year in the following comment during a team evaluation session:

Taking a 5th year of college refocused my attention away from completing requirements and obtaining credentials to finding a vocation and direction for my life. As I advanced through courses, time spent in college became less important than getting an education of academic substance. (Anonymous, personal communication, 2007)

In addition to mentoring undergraduates, the AART works with graduate students to augment their core departmental advising. Efforts with these students of color are designed to support their successful completion of dissertation research and pursuit of funding and to broaden their academic and social acculturation.

### **Students of Color in Higher Education: Access**

The modern U.S. Civil Rights Movement, precipitated mostly by African Americans' rejection of the societal inequities they faced, must be given credit for pushing our society to re-consider how higher education should incorporate students whose ancestral communities had been historically excluded from institutions of higher learning. As early as 1965, largely in response to Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, some campuses began to redesign their recruitment and admissions activities, to organize special programs to ensure students' academic preparation, to reinforce academic achievement through tutorial programs, and to provide some campus-based socio-cultural outlets for the new students of color at their schools.

Between 1976 and 1988, the number of racial/ethnic students of color enrolled in U.S. four-year colleges and universities increased from 812,300 to 994,400 (Snyder and Hoffman 1991, p. 199), and between 1990 and 2005 this number increased from 1,128,900 to 2,309,500 (Snyder et al. 2007, p. 310). The number of students of color who finished their college education and graduated increased from 80,705 in 1976 to 247,553 in 2005 (Snyder et al. 2007, p. 416). Thus, despite the larger number of students of color enrolling in colleges and universities, the percentage of these students graduating from the schools showed extremely limited growth over nearly three decades of active interventions, i.e., 9.9% in 1976 vs. 10.7% in 2005. Girves et al. (2005) assessed particulars of the situation and argued that college enrollment, persistence, graduation, and pursuit of graduate education continued to be areas where students of color were excluded or dropped-out in disproportionate numbers. Effective mentoring is viewed as a partial solution to the situation, particularly to address the issue of low graduation rates (Girves et al. 2005; Hayes 2006).

Statistics on enrollment of students of color at Michigan State University (MSU) show that African American, Chicano/Latino, and Native American students comprised 11% and 12.4% of the total number of freshmen and transfer students admitted for 2004 and 2005, respectively (Michigan State University 2006, p. 9). For the same two academic years, these three groups equaled 9.7% and 10.7% of those admitted to graduate programs (Michigan State University 2006, p. 10). Numbers for 2006 reveal that the percentage of admitted freshman and transfer students of color declined from 12.4% to 11.7% while MSU graduate admissions for these groups also dropped from 10.7% to slightly less than 9% (Michigan State University 2007). Nationally, graduate enrollment increased at least 3% for

racial/ethnic groups from 2005 to 2006 (Redd 2007), which is in contrast to what happened at MSU during the same time period.

### Students of Color in Higher Education: Mentoring

There is an abundance of published research literature addressing issues of how universities and colleges can improve the number of students of color on their campuses and how campuses can and must restructure their programs and activities to enhance the campus presence of these students (Brotherton 2001; Campbell and Campbell 1997; Davidson and Foster-Johnson 2001; Lee 1999; Rogers and Molina 2006; Smith and Davidson 1992; Taylor 1998; Ulloa and Herrera 2006). This literature identifies mentoring as a primary means to increase the quantity of the targeted students in professional or practice-based fields, (e.g. Jacobi 1991). Perhaps not surprisingly, doctoral degrees earned by U.S. Native American, African American, and Chicano/Latino Americans are concentrated in such fields as education, human services, humanities, and the applied social sciences (Hoffer et al. 2007). However, our assessment is that there seems to be inadequate consideration given to preparing students of color for a Ph.D. that focuses on working with ideas and the production of intellectual knowledge—as Donaldson and Crowley (1978) clarified, the “academic” degree. Equally important but neglected are areas of socialization and acculturation that have been identified as critical for students of color to succeed in completing the Ph.D. (Dorsey and Jackson 1995; Gardner 2008).

Higher education in the U.S. needs effective mentoring and socialization programs for students of color who are preparing for the professoriate if these students are to possess the critical, analytical abilities required for those careers which aim “to know” and focus on “theories...descriptive in nature” (Donaldson and Crowley 1978, p. 115). In an extensive review of mentoring that included an assessment of its impact on academic success, Jacobi (1991) reported that indirect or circumstantial collaboration certainly exists to support the positive impact of mentoring (pp. 515–516) though empirical studies on the impact of mentoring are few. Additionally, Tinto (1993) reported that academic and social integration was important for retention of students, especially students of color. Rendon (1994) also reported that academic validation, that is, actively working with students in a way that “affirmed them as being capable of doing academic work and that supported them in their academic endeavors and social adjustment” (p. 44), was transformative in nature. Accordingly, we contend that carefully designed mentoring models can add significantly to the quantity *and* quality of students of colors pursuing advanced academic training.

Toward this end, a number of mentoring models have been reported in published literature about the traditional model, which consists of an experienced, generally older, individual serving as the mentor for a younger, novice mentee. This paradigm includes “planned mentoring” through which institutions or institutionally sponsored mentoring activities match mentors and students (Redmond 1990, p. 188). At the same time, additional models have emerged in recent years; and one that has gained popularity is peer mentoring. These types of models generally involve pairing more advanced students with novices and peer mentors, who have responsibilities for providing emotional support and serving as role-models (Jacobi 1991). Significantly, peer support has been recognized as a vital component for increasing the success of students of color in higher education (e.g. Good et al. 2000; Marable 1999; Miller and García 2004; Saenz et al. 1999).

Padilla et al. (1997) presented an “expertise model” of mentoring in which the supportive work “focuses on the knowledge that successful students possess and the actions

that they employ to overcome barriers” (p. 126). This model suggests that to be successful students must increase their theoretical knowledge, knowledge classically gained through classroom instruction, as well as their comprehension of heuristic or practical knowledge, hands-on knowledge that aids in persistence and success in a campus environment. The authors further argued that formal channels rarely exist to ensure the transfer of heuristic knowledge even as the acquisition of such practical appreciations is associated with effectively overcoming a number of barriers to their success. Primary among obstacles to be conquered is the discontinuity between racial/ethnic students’ communities of origin and the cultural environment of campus life, the absence of supportive campus surroundings for the presence of individuals of colors, and existing barriers to vital resources needed for successful and timely completion of a degree.

Addressing a different model, Haring (1999) acknowledged the “networking-mentoring model” described in other research literature; and she characterized it as:

...the expectation that each person in the network can and must contribute something to the others’ success. Thus, each person in networking mentoring may sometimes serve as a mentor to others and may sometimes receive benefits as a protégé. Generally, this model is perceived as empowering individuals to develop in unique professional ways. It also is perceived as having the potential to marshal the strength of the group to alter the profile for success in the institution. (p. 12)

This model of mentoring encompasses the academic as well as professional socialization of students, and a number of programs have utilized networking mentoring for students of color (Laden 1999; Lamb 1999; Talbert et al. 1999). One such program is the Puente Project that primarily targets first generation Latino students at a community college in California (Laden 1999). Puente has attempted to merge academic mentoring and socialization, and Laden explained that the project was designed to “help Latinos persist in college and succeed academically, transfer to senior institutions to earn their bachelor’s and advanced degrees, and then return to their communities as leaders and mentors” (p. 61). The program uses traditional approaches whereby students are paired with professional or academic mentors in conjunction with academic counseling and writing assistance. The extreme success of the project in student retention for this group of students of color is attributed to its “holistic” approach for instilling success and encouraging academic aspirations (Laden 1999). Laden equally acknowledged that the project “offers a holistic model for effectively incorporating the diverse ways students of color have of acquiring knowledge and understanding the world around them” (p. 72).

The emphasis on group/collective work that the AART uses in its academic mentoring evolved from firsthand encounters with students of color and some first-generation college students. We propose that this model exhibits some of the most valued principles of each of the recognized mentoring models in the literature. For example, the AART employs attributes of the peer support and networking mentoring models because undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty members and community persons work cooperatively and collaboratively with each other; they work collectively. Also, many AART events actively formalize the transfer of heuristic knowledge as described in the expertise-mentoring model. There are clear distinctions in the collective mentoring model of AART; but it, too, focuses on holistic socialization by the participation of undergraduate students of color who are committed to success for continuation to an academic Ph.D. Not even the Puente Project, or other popular campus-based programs, such as the McNair Summer

Research Opportunity Program, Research Experience for Undergraduates, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program, the Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation, or Preparing Future Faculty, offer students of color an on-going collective community that accompanies their matriculation while simultaneously helping to guide them through graduate school experiences where the aim is knowing and theory production is of a descriptive nature. This was the role the AART expected to fill when we began, and it is the role we continue to fulfill.

### **The Collective Mentoring Model of AART**

The AART was founded on the campus of the University of Colorado at Boulder. Like most large universities, CU-Boulder had a variety of student programs designed to give assistance to students of color. Primarily, these services centered on assisting in admissions and matriculation. The campus also participated in other supplemental activities including undergraduate research programs. However, there still was a recognized need to provide students of color with guidance through solid preparation for theoretical, academic graduate studies and with mentoring through that type of post-baccalaureate graduate education. Our research team was founded to accomplish this task for a small number of self-selecting students willing to work within the parameters of the program.

Currently, AART is based at Michigan State University (MSU), a land-grant university of some 53,000 students, faculty, and staff, the majority of whom are white or of European ancestry. The team relocated to MSU when the founder/director was recruited to the faculty. As of fall 2006, “domestic Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Black/African American students” comprised some 5,193 or 11.4% of the total university student population of just over 45,000 (Michigan State University 2007, p. 2). There were 177 faculty members from these racial-ethnic groups, which represented 9.0% of the total 1,961 tenure system faculty members (Michigan State University 2007, p. 2). Like CU-Boulder, MSU has a number of programs geared toward assisting students of color; but the need persists to provide specialized mentoring that promotes the success of these students in the pursuit of doctoral degrees in academic disciplines.

At this point, some may wonder why we are a “research team” when our work focuses on mentoring rather than specifically defined research projects. The name AART is a result of the direct or indirect interest of team members in issues related to African descendants in the Americas, as well as issues of contacts with the African continent. Such contacts have been continuous since the “Middle Passage” crossing of the Atlantic Ocean by enslaved Africans. Two faculty facilitators do maintain specified research agendas on such topics, and team members may choose to participate with them on projects related to this area of research. Similarly, graduate students have identified dissertation projects on related topics for their academic discipline. Faculty facilitators assist these AART members in framing a research question, provide broad guidance for the successful preparation of a dissertation proposal, and offer general direction about conducting academic research. We also encourage undergraduate students to identify their own topic of interest, whether within a faculty member’s agenda or not, in order to demonstrate how the investigative and intellectual enterprise begins. Undergraduate research projects usually are undertaken as independent study or as a part of a campus research program such as the McNair Program.

Within the context then of such specified research projects, faculty facilitators mentor undergraduate and graduate students through the long-term procedures of information

gathering, concept identification, integration of the two toward a research design, gathering and analysis of data, professional conference participation, writing for publication, and engaging in other project components stimulated by the research work. Notably, undergraduate students of color who participate in this type of mentoring report greater satisfaction with their university experiences (Barlow and Villarejo 2004; Strayhorn and Terrell 2007). Faculty facilitators and community persons also provide mentoring, guidance, and instruction in other aspects of academic and social acculturation that are critical to successful careers as well as to scholarly research.

### Goals and Objectives

Succinctly stated, the AART is a mentoring collective of faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, as well as community persons interested in issues related to people of African descent anywhere in the Americas. Officially, we conceptualize our mission as follows:

Our mission is to enhance and increase the number of students of color academically prepared for acceptance into the highest quality of Ph.D. graduate program that matches their abilities and intellectual focus.

The AART mission, faculty facilitators, students, and community volunteers implement team objectives with students prepared to work within stated parameters. These objectives are:

- To expand students' knowledge and comprehension of the social and political context of academic work,
- To enhance the quality of their academic achievements,
- To expose them to extra-curricular activities that expand their understanding of the depth and breath of academic life,
- To provide interpersonal experiences and analyses with peers of the academy, and
- To introduce them to the variety of possibilities offered by an academic career.

Ultimately, the intent of AART is to provide a physical, intellectual, and quasi-social community for students of color who have potential, who choose to pursue an academic Ph.D., and who have an interest in African-descendant populations and those communities with whom these populations have had contact. All members of the team including faculty facilitators, community persons, graduate and undergraduate students work together in all arenas of the team's efforts.

### Membership and Selection

Over the 10 years that the AART has been in existence, at CU-Boulder and MSU, there have been a total of 36 persons who belonged to the team. Currently, there are 21 active members at MSU—nine graduate students and 12 undergraduates (see Table I). We attempt to attract students early in their undergraduate career in order to heighten their consciousness about the need and significance of an on-going supportive environment for intellectual development. We do not actively recruit members but identify potential members primarily through an informal, quasi-snowball technique wherein existing affiliates invite individuals to visit with us. Some students, both undergraduate and graduate, also are attracted to membership through enrollment in courses taught by AART faculty and graduate teaching assistants.

**Table 1** AART Numbers Through Ten Years at University of Colorado, Boulder and Michigan State University (1998–2008)

Category of participation	Undergraduates (males/ females)	Graduates (males/ females)
Total student members (1998–2008)	25 (7/18)	11 (4/7)
Members at University of Colorado, Boulder	13 (6/7)	2 (1/1)
Current members at Michigan State University	12 (1/11)	9 (3/6)
Bachelors completed	14 (6/8)	N/A
Bachelors completed with honors	6 (4/2)	N/A
McNair participants	8 (3/5)	N/A
Fellowships earned	4 (2/2)	8 (4/4)

The membership process is reciprocal. Prospective members participate in AART gatherings and activities and then may request consideration for membership. Current team members listen and observe prospective members' participation and assess their demonstrated focus and potential match with team goals and objectives. At the end of a period that can last an academic year, prospective members affirm their desire to continue participating or choose not to continue. Team members vote on acceptance or declination of a prospective member. This reciprocal process means that we accept some persons but do not accept others, and some people choose not to continue working with the team. The selection process generally results in students who exhibit high levels of self-awareness joining AART. Morales (2000) noted that high self-awareness is associated with academic resilience and success (p. 17).

In addition to participation by prospective members, the team also uses the following criteria to determine and maintain membership:

- Maintain at least a 3.0 (B) Grade Point Average,
- Study a second language,
- Consider a career in academic fields,
- Work collectively,
- Contribute to maintenance of the team's communal space (see below),
- Participate in AART activities (see below), and
- Travel outside of the developed world.

The insistence on students' willingness to study a second language and travel outside the developed world builds what has been termed "cultural capital" for team members (Yosso 2005, p. 76). The acquisition of a second language, specifically, builds "linguistic capital". "Linguistic capital" means "the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (Yosso 2005, p. 78). The research team has found this to be an important asset for students of color pursuing academic careers centered on knowledge production and descriptive theory advancement.

There is always cultural diversity in AART membership. However, the racial/ethnic, social class, and gender diversity is definitely skewed toward African American, Chicano/Latino American, and other students of color; those from low-income backgrounds; and women. We have attracted fewer male members. Generally only 20% to 30% of our membership is male (see Table 1). Notably, prior reports suggest that it is typical to have more females than males in programs designed to enhance the academic performance of students of color (Gandára and Maxwell-Jolly 1999). The three current faculty facilitators

also are females—one in Sociology and African American & African Studies, another in Biochemistry, and the third on the library faculty of the MSU library.

### Space

The research team does not have a budget beyond that of the director as a tenured faculty member—a total no more than \$25,000 per academic year, but this budget will terminate in 2 years and has yet to be renewed by any unit of MSU. However, the University does provide physical space for our team, and we have designed it to create an inviting and conducive learning environment. The accommodations are pivotal and include a resource center, study area, communications network, and special collections library mostly provided through the personal funds of the director, Jualynne Dodson. Almost all materials in the center have an educational focus and are available to solve reference questions and stimulate students' curiosity.

Given that there are graduate students, the space is awash in daily conversations on such questions as what books are read in graduate school, what courses undergraduates should take to be ready for graduate work, how many classes graduate students take, what a dissertation is, and what is a guidance committee. Students ask, "Should we do a master's degree and then do the Ph.D.?" and pose questions about various other aspects of graduate education. Such conversations are augmented by open meetings of AART graduate students with their departmental guidance committees. These are three to five faculty persons who meet periodically to discuss students' progress. The meetings are not confidential; and team members, undergraduate or others, may be present though they cannot participate. The openness of these gatherings was an experiment supported by and in cooperation with academic departments. It has proven to be exceptionally effective in the anticipatory socialization of younger students and in giving support to graduate students sitting with their committees. Students have said, "It's better to meet in our space. You feel less isolated and powerless." This method of conducting some graduate advising demythologizes the process of graduate education for students whose families and cultural communities historically have had little exposure to academic procedures.

Based on skills and abilities, each potential AART member is assigned or selects an office task for which they take responsibility; this task might be cataloging books, cleaning office floors, giving another member help with course assignments, answering telephones, designing a webpage, or cataloging the image collections. The team has no budget for administrative, secretarial, or maintenance support so completion of such tasks helps maintain the office space. In addition, although team members do not receive course credit or monetary return for these tasks, they are not doing "busy work" as the activities help contribute to building members' sense of team ownership, of its mission and its limited resources. Students also become better acquainted with each other in the completion of these tasks.

### Activities

Although AART activities occur throughout the academic year, key events are scheduled at the beginning of a semester, before mid-term examinations; just at the close of a semester, after final exams and prior to students leaving campus; or at the end of holiday periods when students have returned to campus but before classes begin. Mock interview sessions are one important AART activity that helps integrate the team's mission, values, and learning objectives. This activity evolved after one member performed badly on the

interview portion of an international fellowship application. The member was disappointed and helped the team understand how we could assist everyone in becoming well prepared for such highly competitive situations. Subsequently, with help from campus faculty who had received Ford Fellowships and from community volunteers, we began mock interview sessions.

The sessions consist of evaluating members' one-page summary of their research project and an oral presentation based on such a project. The research can be an undergraduate assignment or a masters' or doctoral thesis proposal. Students are told to come to the interview fully prepared to demonstrate why they should be awarded a monetary fellowship based on their written statement and oral presentation. The mock interview panels of two to three faculty Ford Foundation Fellows evaluate each student; and, after all interviews are complete, we conduct a full-group discussion that includes all students and interviewers. Both students and Ford Fellows have agreed that it provides helpful feedback as students have a chance to review their performance even as they listen to comments and recommendations from the Fellows. In addition, the closing discussion is an opportunity for students to hear how academic professionals formulate critique, to hear how others integrate such comments, and to learn how to receive critical recommendations. Students have used interview information to craft applications for funding and to prepare for actual interviews associated with such awards. AART also provides peer and faculty advice to assist in such application processes.

Equally important among our team activities are what we call "Skills Workshops" (see Table II). These workshops focus on providing refresher opportunities to enhance reading, writing, research, and other skills in addition to sharing knowledge about how universities

**Table II** Skills Workshop Categories

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Living room conversations
Informal topical discussions with visiting campus scholars
Mock interviews
Experiential trial interviews of research proposals
Skills development
Reading comprehension
Academic organization
Writing for funding
What is research
Social interactions
The art of conversation
Manners for formal occasions
Films of identity
"Daughters of the Dust"
"Magamisi—The Ancient One"
"Cosmic Slop"
Cultural expansion
Encountering Native American culture
Music of South Africa
Gospel roots of African American culture
Spiritual and Jazz—M. L. King Concert
Spanish language roundtable

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and academic professions function. Each gathering concentrates on one skill and is heuristic or practice-oriented. Students report that the skills workshops entitled “Living Room Conversations” are the most impressive and inspiring. In these intimate, informal, and focused gatherings, members have an individual opportunity to describe their research ideas to an active and published university faculty member. The invited guest then shares specific recommendations for students’ further work. Similarly, we invite AART alumni and community persons with salient career experiences or skills-sets to make a workshop presentation on such topics as: “Beyond Poverty Mentality,” “Thinking Like a Professional,” “Organizational Structure in the Academy,” “Building a Strong Curriculum Vitae,” “Which Fork is Appropriate?,” and “Job versus Position in Academic Arenas.” Knowledge about such topics is equally pivotal for students of color whose energies are usually focused on coursework and its successful completion as they see course completion as vitally important for their future success in chosen fields (Maynard 1980).

Faculty and community workshop facilitators also work with one or more AART students to plan and facilitate the skills events. Beyond the learning that occurs in the activities, the joint preparation model reinforces understanding of the values and mission of AART while promoting essential planning and implementation skills. The most difficult of our skills workshops has been “Reading Comprehension and Writing” as student team members often need more than we can offer. We appreciate the previously noted importance of offering assistance in developing these basic skills (Dorsey and Jackson 1995), and we refer AART students who need such enhancement to external skills training. Together, these activities are central and vitally important because of the recognized benefit of mentoring in the social environment (e.g. McKinney et al. 1998).

Brown et al. (1999) stated that “out-of-class interactions move the student closer to witnessing, if not participating in, the totality of his or her chosen professional or academic arena” (p. 107). Furthermore, they asserted that:

Non classroom activity also (a) improves the students’ self-confidence in their ability to do professional work, (b) teaches them how to cope with the formal and informal structures of the organization or profession, and (c) fosters the likelihood that students will enter their selected field. (p. 107)

We give attention to such “non-classroom” social and cultural activities that supplement classroom work as AART members collectively attend concerts, films, operas, museum exhibits, lectures and symposia, and other events of this nature.

We also view films that are related to cultural identity and have proven helpful to members for comprehending how to maintain cultural roots and continue academic pursuits. After all categories of AART activities, we engage in a discussion of salient issues of the occasion and their relationship to human development. This integration of course work with extra-curricula activities is usually left for individual university students to pursue haphazardly. We call the closing discussions “de-briefing sessions.” They were initiated because most students from cultural communities historically structured out of higher education have had little lifestyle exposure to many of these types of sociocultural activities, particularly the critical post-event ‘de-briefings.’ Although research demonstrates that such socialization activities are positively correlated with students’ academic success (McKinney et al. 1998; Saenz et al. 1999), most well-meaning and well-planned campus programs only attend to this type of socialization as a peripheral concern.

There is another part of our holistic socialization that is quite small compared to other activities in which we engage, but it is one that students say “reminds us of family.” We advise all members that human beings need to comprehend their relationship to the

universal order in order to help answer questions about ultimate existence. This can be accomplished through a religion of choice or through whatever means students find successful, but it should not be overlooked. We are not a religious group, and we do not provide answers; but, as one member articulated, “there’s a spiritual core to what AART does and how we work. It’s not like ‘spiritual’ in any standard way, but a spirit is definitely there.” Students express and appreciate the fact that the team provides a fundamental foundation similar to what their families do, only with different specifics.

Prior academic research has reported a positive correlation between spiritual beliefs, religious participation, and academic performance, particularly for students of color (Walker and Dixon 2002; Watkins 2005). We do not advocate a religious perspective but believe that the collective way we do our work, together with AART activities, embodies the notion that successful programs seeking to increase the achievement of students of color in the university “must be inclusive, comprehensive, persistent, and respectful of the whole person” (Miller and García 2004, p.197).

In addition to the AART evaluative “debriefing” sessions, we publish written materials. For example, there is a printed newsletter in which students write peer-reviewed articles about their experiences with the team and in their academic programs. We also have published a small book of photographs and poetry of AART members and conducted content analyses of our debriefing transcripts and other written published team materials. We use these to assess our programming and to improve its implementation.

## Results

The collective academic mentoring model of AART is leading to success for student members. Their average GPA is greater than 3.8; and more than one-third of them have participated in the McNair SROP Program, in Colorado as well as at MSU. One AART colleague participated in an off-campus, national summer research program; and a recent graduate won the prestigious Marshall Fellowship for two-years of study in Great Britain. Yet another member was funded to conduct dissertation research in Ghana. The majority of all members regularly receive financial scholarships and fellowships for their research projects and in recognition of their academic success. Since its formation AART has facilitated the graduation of fifteen undergraduates, and more than 40% of these bachelor degrees were with honors (see Table I). Of all AART bachelor graduates, and in addition to the Honors Degree, one was summa cum laude, one magna cum laude, one cum laude; and one was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. All but three graduates were students of color while the others were first-generation college graduates of European descent.

Further, more than 70% of AART graduate students have received competitive fellowships to support their dissertation research (see Table I). Apart from these quantifiable successes, AART students are recognizing the valuable skills and tools that they are obtaining by participating in this academic mentoring collective. One undergraduate stated, “I learned ways to examine course work and topics that interested me....I became particularly aware and conscious of issues that affect people of color....My experience with AART offered a new perspective on academics and life in general” (Escalante 2006, pp. 4-5). A graduate student summarized the benefits of AART participation as follows:

Participation in AART challenges everyone to strive for excellence in every arena of her or his life....You choose to be a member if you’re truly interested in furthering yourself and want a space that helps promote thinking....Professionally, AART gives

space and opportunities to hone necessary skills for participating in the academic world and more. (Gelbard 2006, p. 5)

## Conclusion

We present AART as an effective, collective, academic mentoring model. All strategies employed are designed to carve socio-academic space in the university where students from cultural groups which have historically been excluded can thrive and continue through the doctorate degree to become strong successful professionals who replicate mentoring activities with students of their own. We believe that we actualize an important and unusual way of mentoring students of color without neglecting any aspects of their professional development.

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