

## **Office of Academic Support**

The Office of Academic Support (OAS) coordinates academic programs and services that are integral to the university's commitment to providing educational and social opportunities for a diverse student population. The OAS mission is to provide academic and personal enrichment services to all UF students, while serving as the principle unit that coordinates and administers programs and services to first-generation, underrepresented and underserved students. Primary objectives of OAS includes creating an inclusive environment that fosters students' success, preparing at risk students for the rigors of academic life, empowering students to achieve their goals, and assisting in the development of students that will become leaders, educators and productive citizens. A high level of attention is focused on decreasing disparities in accessibility, enhancing recruitment, and increasing retention and graduation rates.

In association with units and offices campus-wide, OAS addresses the diverse needs of our students through a variety of programs and services. Beginning in August 2010, the OAS began administering the AIM program, which serves incoming first-year students that are selected by the Office of Admissions from the freshmen applicant pool. This year, OAS has worked closer than ever to provide academic support to AIM students from the time of their admission until they graduate. These students are offered a comprehensive learning plan for the first year, which includes preemptive advising and smaller class sizes to allow the strengthening of their math, science and communication skills. In addition to the learning plan, AIM students are offered support and guidance through one-on-one academic tutoring, peer mentoring and a series of workshops developed to facilitate academic achievement.

This year the OAS fully participated in 2010 Destination Gainesville (DG), a university recruitment program that is designed to generate a diverse applicant pool from which the university seeks to attract and enroll ethnic minorities. The OAS was represented at all of the DG receptions to ensure that prospective students were aware of the support services provided to UF undergraduates. The OAS Director provided important information about the program and answered questions, as well as addressing concerns of potential students, and parents. A significant number of students that were present at the DG receptions were admitted to UF through the AIM Program.

Each year OAS coordinates the Transition Orientation Program (TOP) with the assistance of a variety of departments on campus. The program usually begins the weekend prior to the start of summer B and fall classes, but after student housing opens. This is an important consideration that removes a financial barrier that may exist for low-income students admitted to UF that make up a large percentage of the first-generation student population considered at-risk with regards to retention. The transitional program serves as an extended orientation to assist underrepresented and/or first-generation students in successfully acclimating to campus life at

the University of Florida. According to the American Institutes for Research (AIR) a significant percentage of first-year college students fail to return to college for a second year. Furthermore, a large percentage of students not returning are considered underrepresented, low-income and first-generation college students. Over 1,500 incoming students were invited to participate in the 2010 TOP, with over 750 fully participating. The program is an initial introduction to a series of seminars and workshops provided by OAS. It is also strategically coordinated activities that are representative of the academic support services available year-round to a currently enrolled UF student. Incoming students attending the program are informed about campus-wide support services, expectations and available resources to enrich their educational experiences. The TOP program contributes to the university's successful efforts to increase first-year retention and graduation rates of underrepresented students. Overall, OAS is pleased to report that there has been a continued increase over the last year in retention and graduation rates of AIM students, which embodies a significant number of underrepresented students that use OAS services.

The OAS Peer Mentor Program is another important component of student support provided to incoming freshmen. This year OAS coordinated an intensive week of training workshops for 45 newly recruited OAS peer mentors. Mentors were privileged to participate in a leadership training workshops, as well as financial aid, general counseling, academic advising and other informational workshops lead by the respective representatives from the various units campus-wide. This intensive training prepared the peer mentors for working with new students during their transitional first year at UF. The week of training culminated with OAS Spring 2010 Peer Mentor Retreat that provided additional leadership exercises and team building activities. The peer mentoring programs serves to strengthen the leadership skills of a diverse group of current UF students and paves the way for a smoother transition of incoming students.