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Letters to the Editor

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A Project Helps Minority Students Earn Ph.D.'s in Business

To the Editor:

"[21 Colleges Win Grants to Study What Helps Minority Ph.D. Students in Sciences Succeed](#)" (*The Chronicle*, March 15) raises the important question of why minorities enter, and complete, STEM doctoral programs at a lower rate than nonminorities. Some experiences and lessons from efforts to increase minority representation in business Ph.D. programs may shed useful light for the 21 STEM program grantees to examine.

After launching the PhD Project, an aggressive recruitment and support system to attract minorities to doctoral studies in business, we set our sights on the troubling reality of low completion rates. We learned that lack of mentors, peer support, and role models were contributing to high dropout rates among all doctoral candidates, but especially minorities, who typically were the only minorities in their doctoral programs, and frequently at schools with no minority faculty members in their discipline.

We formed an active program of peer support, mentorship, and hands-on guidance to assist minority students through the many rigors and challenges of earning a doctorate. Through five Minority Doctoral Students Associations, one for each business discipline, Ph.D. candidates establish meaningful and helpful relationships with others facing similar challenges, minority professors who serve as role models, and other critical contact points in the academic community. The retention rate of doctoral students who are members of the PhD Project Doctoral Student Associations exceeds 90 percent, as compared with an average of about 65 percent among all business doctoral students.

As to attracting more minorities to enter doctoral studies, we approached this in 1994 as a marketing challenge: African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans were severely underrepresented among Ph.D.-program applicants. We developed an educational outreach program to market a career in business academe not to current undergraduate or M.B.A. students, but to early- and midcareer business executives and professionals who were seeking a career change and the opportunity for a more meaningful life as a professor. The results exceeded our wildest expectations: 18 years later, there are 1,120 minority business professors, an increase of more than 275 percent. Further, 371 minorities are currently enrolled in doctoral programs, and will take places at the front of the classroom over the next few years.

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