



Maximizing Research Opportunities



MISSION

Building the New Learning Environment

Maximizing Research Opportunities

Competing in a Global Economy

Education professor Jerome Morris has received a \$505,000 grant from the Spencer Foundation to investigate issues of identity formation and negotiation in African American adolescents. PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

Helping narrow the achievement gap

A UGA education researcher hopes a new, four-year study of the experiences of African-American adolescents in a predominantly black Atlanta suburb will help explain the reasons behind a persistent achievement gap between African-American and white students.

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“Adolescence is a period of time when young people are attempting to gain an integrated sense of self,” said Jerome Morris, an associate professor of social foundations of education in the College of Education and a research fellow at UGA’s Institute for Behavioral Research (IBR). “For African-American youth, this process can be further complicated by race, gender and class status.”

Morris has received a \$505,000 grant from the Spencer Foundation to investigate issues of identity formation and negotiation in a project beginning in January 2006 called, “African-American Adolescents in a Black Suburb in the U.S. South: A Social Study of Schooling, Identity, and Achievement.”

Morris will explore the role of class status and context as mitigating factors to improve the educational experiences of African-American students. Unlike previous studies that have looked at African Americans in either urban, low-income areas or predominately white and affluent areas, this one focuses on African-American adolescents in a predominately black middle class suburb.

“This study attempts to find out what might be different in the more middle class black suburbs and schools and how that might influence African-American adolescents’ understanding of school achievement and identity,” explained Morris.

Morris will use multiple data collection methods in the study – conducting extensive interviews and observations with 100 adolescents and their families, seeking diversity in grade-levels, gender, achievement-levels, socioeconomic status and the extent of involvement in school-related activities.

He will also review U.S. Census and geographical data on the area and gather sociological data on the adolescents' parents, school personnel, schools and district.

"There are lots of ideas out there regarding black achievement gaps. Some argue it is about structural discrepancies and others say there are discriminatory practices in place," said Morris. "The most recent view has asserted that African-American culture is a major cause for the academic achievement gap. I believe there has to be a multi-disciplinary approach to looking at black achievement."

To incorporate multiple scholarly traditions and disciplines, Morris will focus on understanding adolescents' social identities as students and African Americans as well as members of other social groups.

The UGA researcher believes the information he gathers will help policymakers develop strategies that will reduce the achievement gap between African-American and white students in the nation's public schools.

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Critical to the success of the research program at UGA is the construction of badly needed facilities in this area of institutional strength. The \$40 million Paul D. Coverdell Center for Biomedical Health Sciences, which will be completed in 2005, will include two floors of biomedical research laboratories, a state-of-the-art bioimaging research center, a 20,000-square-foot rodent-barrier facility and program offices for BHSI and the College of Public Health. Also, the College of Veterinary Medicine expects the new Animal Health Research Center to be operational in early 2006. AHRC will house scientists who study infectious diseases and toxicity problems that affect human and animal populations. Additionally, the College of Pharmacy's capital campaign has raised \$7 million of the \$10 million it committed to build new facilities that will "bridge UGA and Medical College of Georgia," while the state has promised to fund \$36.5 million of the project. The new 140,000-square-foot Complex Carbohydrate Research Center was dedicated in February 2004, and its 900 MHz NMR spectrometer became operational in January 2005.

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