

Maroon and gold, and blacks

New programs help black students find a place at BC

BY DANA NARRAMORE

THE RECENT HISTORY OF minority enrollment at Boston College is something of a success story. Within the statistics, however, lies a more complex tale about enrollment of black students.

There have been minority students (blacks, Hispanics, Asian or Pacific Islanders, American Indians or Alaskan natives) at BC for several decades, but a push in the '70s instigated an impressive growth in numbers. The University succeeded in increasing minority enrollment by nearly 100 percent over the course of a decade—to nearly 1,000 students, or 9.5 percent of the undergraduate population this year.

In 1977, black enrollment here peaked at four percent. Since, at BC and other predominately white universities, the numbers have been dropping. This year, blacks constitute two percent of BC's undergraduate population, with Hispanics and Asians making up the largest proportion of minority students.

Despite this, University officials remain optimistic about attracting blacks, and enthusiastic about programs that have been established toward that goal. Indeed, a 30 percent increase in blacks in the entering class over the last three years would seem to indicate a corner has been turned.

The University's most aggressive campaign to enroll minorities began in 1973 when President Monan related to the Board of Trustees his interest in reviewing educational opportunities for minorities at BC. At that time,

minorities were five percent of the undergraduate population. Blacks were three percent.

In 1974, black trustee David Nelson '57, JD'60, a Massachusetts superior court judge, was appointed to chair the Trustee Committee on Minority Education. The committee's work resulted in board approval of a 10 percent goal for minority enrollment.

Nelson, who remains a trustee, said in a telephone interview that it was assumed then that blacks would continue to represent a more significant portion of the minority percentage than has been the case.

The rapid growth in Asian and Hispanic student enrollment was not anticipated.

Nelson's assumption was a national assumption at the time, as the civil rights movement led blacks to the doors of white colleges. According to newspaper reports, black enrollment at predominately white campuses increased 173 percent between 1964 and 1970.

But in the early '70s, black enrollment began to drop. Between 1970 and 1974, black enrollment at Harvard University, for example, dropped from 5.8 to 2 percent.

Today, white colleges can no longer expect blacks will be attracted unprompted. As one black administrator here put it, "Blacks need more aggressive recruitment than other students."

As the recent increase in numbers indicates, the University has not sat passively by during the period of declining black enrollments. The Admissions Office initiated a host of pro-

grams. As a result of one, black students are now volunteer recruiters at a number of predominately black high schools.

In the last few years, the University has also made an effort to send black and white representatives to conferences addressing the issues of blacks at predominately white colleges. The intention, said Executive Vice President Frank Campanella, "is to make a statement that BC is a good place for blacks."

A group of faculty and administrators attended such a conference this year at MIT, and afterwards, hosted a University reception for participants.

This year, Campanella initiated a financial aid program for black students. He said this year's increase in black freshmen—60, as opposed to 53 last year—is a result. "While numbers are still small," he said, "if we could increase numbers every year, we will significantly increase the size of the black population here."

In other areas, the University has established a program to aid in retention of minority students, has involved black alumni in recruiting efforts and given more support to the Black Studies Program.

Fr. Monan said the University is not only involved in a "vigorous" effort to increase the number of black students, but also, in attracting the "best" students. Whether the University is recruiting whites or blacks, he said, its focus is on "getting the strongest candidates."

Fr. Monan is pleased with the upward trend in black enrollment here.

'Because of our religious traditions, BC has a special concern for making sure all have a fair opportunity to make their way in American society'

—Fr. Monan

"This is not a typical picture for colleges and universities in this country," he said.

Progress is obviously being made, but some community members, black and white, while acknowledging the University's efforts, believe that more can and should be done.

Although its primary concern is monitoring the hiring of minority personnel, BC's Office of Affirmative Action also keeps an eye on student enrollment. Alice Jeghelian, office director, feels that when the fires of the civil rights movement died down, so did the nation's emphasis on black recruitment, both in hiring and student enrollment.

"It is an example of what blacks in the early '70s feared would happen," she said. "The effort to increase black numbers has lost its momentum through concentration on minorities, rather than on blacks."

Jeghelian joins others in saying recruitment of blacks needs to be performed "aggressively." Since many black families assume that Boston College is an institution designed for a student body predominately Catholic, white, and middle-class, she said, "We have to tell the black student a lot more. We have to convince them there is a place here for blacks."

Darcel Clark '83, a black from the Bronx, NY, found a place at Boston College. During her senior year, she became a role model for many black undergraduates as the first recipient of the Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship—now awarded annually to a deserving black senior.

Clark said that her decision to attend BC involved overcoming "Boston's reputation as a racist city." Despite the discouragement of family and friends, Clark came to BC because of its academic reputation and "the challenge of attending a white university." She found that, "There is racism in Charlestown and South Boston, but out in Chestnut Hill, well, it isn't as overt."

Many blacks don't overcome their fear of Boston, she said, and consequently never consider BC. "There

has to be more effort put into the recruiting process," she said, "and I don't mean having a white talk to a black about BC."

Clark was involved in several student organizations here, and was active in admissions recruitment efforts. "I went on several trips to black high schools. The families would listen to the whites talk about BC, then afterwards, pull me aside to ask, 'What's it really like?'"

"BC has to start thinking more seriously about its efforts. Right now, it's simply not tapping all resources."

When black alumna Opal Adams '73, was a student at BC, she was admissions adviser to the Black Talent Program, in operation here from 1971-76.

The program was student-run, and its goals were to allow students to gain management experience through involvement in the program, and to recruit black students.

Adams, now affirmative action coordinator for Bank of New England, and treasurer of the AHANA (Afro-American, Hispanic, Asian and Native American) Alumni Association, said, "From my own experience, BC is definitely a good school for blacks, but as far as I can see, there are still not that many blacks who know it."

The AHANA alumni group was organized in 1981 to bring the minority community together and assist in recruitment efforts. Adams joined because, "If I'd had an alumna to talk to when I was a student, it would have helped me understand what the working world was going to be like. I think undergraduates can benefit from what I have to offer, and I wanted to provide the kind of support I never got."

WHEN BLACK NUMBERS BEGAN to drop four years ago, said Richard Escobar, minority and international stu-

dent admissions director, "We responded with a score of programs designed to recruit blacks." Included among them: an annual informational mailing to black community agencies, schools and churches; a recruitment program that utilized black student recruiters; a program that brought blacks to their former high schools to talk about their BC experiences; and a telethon in early April for contacting accepted black students to answer questions about the University, hopefully, to increase the number who would enroll.

Minority admissions became a separate division of the Admissions Office three years ago, at which time Escobar was appointed director. There are two minority recruiters, including Escobar, who is Hispanic, and one secretary.

"Minority recruitment doesn't involve just two people," said Escobar. "It's been frustrating at times because I don't always feel that we have the focus we should have. But I'm beginning to see changes in attitudes. Our majority recruiters are now going out of their way to visit minority high schools."

Speaking as "a member of a minority group," Escobar said, "I can sympathize with the feelings in the black community, as in the entire minority community. Unless we have more people of color at the University, minority groups will continue to feel isolated."

Escobar said increasing black enrollment "is going to be a lengthy process. All the words in the world will not help this process along. We all realize now that we can't rest on our laurels and expect things to improve, and that we need action more than anything."

"The problem cannot be addressed only by the Admissions Office. Admissions doesn't function in a vacuum. Before we can be successful in increasing numbers, we have to make sure our current students are having a good experience here. That takes a university-wide effort."

Black alumnus Michael Gee '76, leader of the Black Talent Program his junior and senior year, and remembered

by Campanella as a "radical," visited BC this summer to ask how he could help in this "university-wide effort."

A sales manager for a New York computer company, Gee said, "While I was in school, it was difficult to see how sensitive BC was to the concerns of minority students. Once I got into the world of work and stepped back, I saw that I really did get a hearing when I was there."

"BC is an excellent school for blacks, and I would like to help in recruitment efforts so I can tell other students about my experiences."

THERE SEEMS TO BE A CATCH-22 built into the issue of black enrollment. With enrollment so low, black students often feel isolated from, and intimidated by, the white majority. Black high school students sense this and are leery of placing themselves in that situation.

Gerald Harris '85, of Boston's Roxbury section, is pleased with the education he is receiving here. Newly-elected president of the Black Student Forum—which sponsors programs related to Afro-American culture—Harris said he was surprised two years ago to find so few blacks here. He said it makes him "feel like a foreign student. I often wonder how other students really see me."

"In class," he said, "I always feel I have to speak well and do extra well, because I feel that I'm only expected to get a 'C' since I'm black."

Frank Dumont '85, of New York, a friend of Harris', said it is difficult for a black freshman to feel accepted. "A non-black freshman is concerned with making friends when he first comes here. A black's first concern is being accepted by whites."

Art Laske '84, president of UGBC, said, "I've heard that blacks feel alienated here, but whites feel just as apprehensive about breaking into the black group."

Laske, a native of "white, suburban," Trumbull, Conn., came to BC from a high school he described as "Jesuit, all male, with few minorities."

'BC is a good school for blacks, but there are still not many blacks who know it'

—Opal Adams '73

He said, "A lot of kids here come from communities like mine, and have no experience with blacks. When you come to BC, you see very few blacks. When you do see them, they tend to be in a group. They eat at their own tables, and seem to prefer it that way."

He said during his campaign for president, however, he realized, "The walls are not super strong between blacks and whites. I realized blacks and whites feel the same apprehension about getting to know each other, and that it's probably just a matter of understanding one another."

Laske moderated a presentation to the Trustee Student Life Committee in September at which black students discussed campus experiences. The students told trustees that because they are so few, they often, in the words of Gary Jackson '84, "feel paranoid." "Because I'm black, (people assume) I'm here as an athlete," he said, "whether I'm an athlete or not. If I go to class and say something brilliant, I'm considered an exception."

The students said they wanted to make the trustees aware of their feelings, so they would be more sensitive when these issues arose at board meetings.

Two blacks have joined Nelson on the board: attorney Wayne Budd '63, and, most recently, Blenda Wilson PhD'79, vice president of Independent Sector, Washington, DC.

THERE IS AN AWARENESS HERE that as the University has grown more heterogeneous, communication gaps have developed between different groups. Three years ago, some members of the community decided it was time to get students talking.

Instituted was the annual Intercultural Awareness Forum, designed to educate freshmen on issues of race, culture and ethnicity. Sponsored by the Chaplaincy, racially-mixed groups of

freshmen meet during orientation and engage in guided discussion of their ideas about each other. Follow-up meetings are held during the year.

Black administrator Amanda Houston feels the Black Studies Program, of which she is director, is one of the most effective ways for blacks and whites to understand themselves and each other.

Black Studies, open to all students, is an interdisciplinary program designed to provide understanding of the black experience through courses in black history, literature, political and social sciences, and the arts. The program also offers conferences and seminars, including a "Blacks in Boston" conference held here last spring. The conference was co-sponsored by the University for teachers, historians, and others interested in preserving the black heritage of greater Boston. A similar program will be held this year.

Houston, a Boston native, feels blacks and whites understand each other less today than they did 40 years ago and that "morale needs to be built back into the black community."

Houston intends to make Black Studies more visible. "It is important that this campus have an academic program that focuses on the life, culture, history and philosophy of blacks, and the contributions they have made to the American way of life."

When Houston joined Black Studies three years ago, she found a 14-year-old program that was barely known within the community, and was considered by students a "gut," or non-demanding course of study.

Houston would like to see the program's reputation improve to the degree that some of its courses become core requirements. "The most important thing any college or university should do is offer an education that enlightens students about people of different cultures and the contributions they have made to this world."

IN THE EARLY '70S, ACCORDING to former Admissions Dean John Maguire, although black enrollment was

increasing, the rate of blacks who stayed to graduate was as low as 17 percent.

So many blacks left the University prematurely, he said, because there were no programs to help them adjust to the university climate and academic programs.

In 1979, BC instituted Options Through Education (OTE), a summer support program for pre-freshmen—mostly minorities—who had been described as economically or educationally disadvantaged.

Donald Brown, black director of the Office of AHANA Affairs, which coordinates programs designed to support and enhance the academic performance of AHANA students, attributed a turnaround in retention rates here, especially among blacks, to the OTE program.

AHANA records, which track minority students from the time they enter BC until they graduate, show that retention rates have climbed from 65 percent for the Class of '82, to 73 percent for the class of '83. Of minorities enrolled now, 77 percent are expected to complete their education here.

This is very close to the retention rate for all students, which is 80 percent.

Services offered by OTE include a tutorial program, a counseling program by graduate assistants, and a monitoring system whereby faculty complete progress reports on OTE students.

This summer, 52 students entered the OTE program—22 blacks, 13 Asians, 10 Hispanics and seven from "other" nationalities. These students contribute to an OTE population of about 150.

Junior Gerald Harris is one of the students who came to BC through the OTE program. He is now firmly established in his computer science and marketing major, but wonders what his career will be like after he graduates. "It would be good if I had a black teacher to talk to in my department," he said. "Other faculty just can't tell me what I need to know."

There are eight full-time black faculty members teaching at BC this fall—three in A&S, one in SOE, three in GSSW, and one in the Law School.

'Black and white students feel the same apprehension about getting to know each other'

—Art Laske '84

Said Black Studies' Houston, "How is it we are doing so many good things here at this university, but we can't find any black faculty?"

Psychology Department Chairman Randolph Easton said there are two reasons his department has no black faculty among its 18 full-time members. "There are not that many qualified blacks in the field," he said; and, "The ones who are qualified are also being sought by universities with greater reputations than BC has—Harvard, for instance. That may change as BC becomes a finer and better-known university."

Universities attempting to find black faculty are competing for a small pool of PhDs. According to the Department of Education, about four percent of 33,000 doctorates granted in 1980 went to blacks. In 1980-81, blacks received 24 of 2,551 doctorates in engineering and 32 of 3,140 doctorates in physical sciences. Blacks are also eagerly sought by business.

Associate Professor Charles Smith, the only black faculty member in SOE, noted, however, "Close to 50 percent of the blacks receiving PhDs receive them in education. With this percentage, you would expect to see more in education.

"Yes, the gross number of blacks receiving PhDs is small, but when you look at the proportions of blacks and whites in each field, and then at how many blacks and whites are teaching in these fields, it doesn't even out."

Smith, a faculty member since 1968, is chairman of BC's Black Faculty and Administrators Association, begun here about 10 years ago.

"I don't want to minimize the work of a lot of hard-working people at the University," he said. "There have certainly been some impressive moves made by the University."

"(But) it is very critical for the black student to be able to see where the world might be going from a black perspective. The black student seeing so few blacks here cannot help but ask why. 'Is it prejudice?' the student may ask, or, 'Is it that blacks aren't capable?'"

Smith said, "I would like to see incentive given to each department to aggressively recruit black faculty—something like an increase in travel budget that all members of the department can benefit from. I'm not saying that is the only solution, I'm just suggesting something that will make the department aware that improving black numbers is a sincere priority of the University."

"Aside from societal goals or expectations of affirmative action," Smith said, "as a Jesuit Christian institution, we are responsible to a higher power. And that higher power, as I understand it, will find us lacking."

Hiring more black faculty is one of the administrative priorities of Academic Vice President Joseph Fahey, SJ. His office recently took an advertisement in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* which invited minorities to send their credentials to a BC "vita bank." This information will be on hand for special consideration, Fr. Fahey said, when positions open.

Fr. Fahey has urged department chairmen to identify blacks from other institutions who may be interested in coming here on a part-time basis. The purpose is to allow the black faculty member to see that the environment here is one "in which people work together," he said, and to make black faculty from other institutions more likely to apply for full-time positions here when they open.

Said Fr. Monan, "Because of its tradition and educational programs, Boston College has a great deal to contribute in a distinctive way to blacks."

"Because of our religious traditions, BC has a special concern for enhancing the dignity of all people, and in making sure all have a fair opportunity to make their way in American society." ■