

# OSU's black male graduation rates up

**By Encarnacion Pyle**

The Columbus Dispatch

**COLUMBUS** — More black men today are graduating from Ohio State University than ever before, and they're completing degrees at rates higher than average among other Big Ten and research schools.

"Am I satisfied? No way. Is our work done? Absolutely not. But no one has made the kind of gains we have, and for that I'm extremely proud," said James Moore III, who oversees an OSU resource center that challenges black men to excel in the classroom and in life.

In the past five years, the graduation rate for African-American men at Ohio State rose 24 percentage points to 67 percent. The overall average for the Big Ten is 60 percent. And the average for the Association of American Universities, which represents 62 of the top public and private research schools in the Unit-

ed States and Canada, is 61 percent.

Ohio State also has a higher freshman-to-sophomore retention rate for black men who take part in the university's summer early-arrival program: 95 percent, compared to the overall student body with nearly 92 percent. However, the retention rate for all black men has dropped slightly over the past five years to 85 percent.

Nationwide, black men are severely underrepresented in college. In the U.S., black men represent 8 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds, but less than 3 percent of undergraduates at public flagship universities.

At Ohio State, they make up only 2.5 percent of the total undergraduate student body, and their numbers have been dropping for the past several years, in part because of shifting demographics. Nationwide, the number of white and black

high school graduates is in a period of decline as the number of Latino and Asian graduates rises.

"We are expanding our outreach, targeting programs and services (in reaction to the changes), and we are all working hard and expect to see increases in our minority student enrollment in the future," said Dolan Eganovich, OSU vice president for strategic enrollment planning.

Black men also come to school less prepared overall than their peers for the rigors of college-level work.

About two-thirds of black men who enter college leave before completing a degree. And their graduation rates are the lowest of all major racial and ethnic groups in the United States: a dismal 35 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Education. The average graduation rate for all college students is 61 percent.

Ohio State has a leg up

on many other schools, officials said, because it started experimenting with ways to help black men succeed in the early 2000s, which eventually led to the creation of the Todd A. Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male in 2004. The center is named for the former Ohio State and NFL standout who helped create the center before his death from a heart attack in 2005.

The center offers classes, guest lectures and other events to ease new students into college and help those who are returning become campus leaders. Its four-day early arrival program introduces incoming freshmen to the people and tools that can help them succeed academically. Its leadership institute exposes students to opportunities to lead.

"The Ohio State University has a model that should be emulated," said Robert Franklin, president emeritus at Morehouse College in Atlan-

ta, a private, historically black college for men.

Franklin spoke to about 150 students and faculty and staff members at Ohio State last week at the Bell Resource Center's annual Gathering of Men event. Franklin encouraged Ohio State students to become "Renaissance men with social conscience and global perspective" who are well-read, well-spoken, well-traveled, well-dressed and well-balanced. Those are the same character traits he encouraged at Morehouse.

Several Ohio State professors are researching ways that educators and parents can improve graduation rates for black men. Educational studies professor Terrell Strayhorn, for instance, found that "grit" — a dedication to pursuing and achieving a goal, whatever the obstacles — affects students almost as much as good test scores and high school grades. Strayhorn

is now exploring how to nurture grit in students who are at risk for academic failure.

"You can't change where a student grows up, or the quality of the high school he attended," he said. "But grit is something that can be taught and instilled in young men, and it will have a real effect on their success."

Corey Lipkins Jr., a 19-year-old theater major from Canton, certainly has grit. He recently co-wrote, directed, produced and co-starred in a play based on a friend's experience overcoming domestic violence, teen pregnancy and imprisonment.

Lipkins said the Bell Resource Center made him feel like he wasn't the only black man in a sea of white students at Ohio State.

"I would like for Ohio State to eventually not need a Bell Resource Center because we're just as well-represented and successful as all other students," he said.