



THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

PRINT THIS

Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

A bid to boost ranks of minorities with PhDs

In its 14 years, The PhD Project has helped to triple minority presence on business school faculties.

By Stacy Teicher Khadaroo | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor from the June 4, 2008 edition

After Frank Igwe picked up his doctoral diploma at Penn State in May, he promptly handed it to his parents. He wants them to see it at home "and know that their son made a mark in this world, bringing honor to the family name."

There's one more "family" for Mr. Igwe to thank for supporting him through the crucible of graduate school: The PhD Project, a mentoring network for African-Americans, Hispanics, and native Americans on the path to becoming business professors.

Since its formation in 1994, The PhD Project has helped triple representation of these groups among the faculty of American business schools – from 294 to 903. Another 400 are working toward their doctorates.

That signals "tremendous growth," says Thomas Kochan, a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management in Cambridge. "Too often, underrepresented minorities don't have access to those networks [in academia], so this provides more of a leveling effect."

Universities still have a long way to go to bring a wide range of backgrounds to business teaching and research, experts say. The three minority groups represent less than 4 percent of the roughly 26,000 business professors with PhDs.

With so few role models, many minorities don't even consider a PhD, preferring instead the more popular MBA – until they're drawn in by the project's recruitment web. Each year, the nonprofit invites potential career-changers to an introductory, all-expenses-paid conference where professors, deans, and current minority doctoral students demystify the PhD pursuit.

Get the genuine article.



Subscribe to the Monitor at a **50%** savings off the regular rate

Click [here](#) to subscribe

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

"We uncovered four myths that would have been preventing people from thinking further about it," says Bernard Milano, president of both The PhD Project in Montvale, N.J., and the KPMG Foundation, a business-education backer and the project's principal funder.

First, people think they have to earn an MBA before a PhD. Not true, he says. Second, they expect a PhD to be costly. In reality, most doctoral programs waive tuition and give a stipend. Third, people well into a career often assume they're too old to switch, but business schools look for PhD candidates with work experience. Finally, there's the perception that scholars take a vow of poverty. With a shortage of business professors projected to intensify in coming years, Mr. Milano says, it's not uncommon to start out with a six-figure salary.

"I wasn't sure what to expect, but when I went to the conference, I was sold," says Jennifer Cordero. She started a PhD program the next year at the University of California, Irvine. A former banker, she wanted to combine her interest in international marketing and her academic curiosity.

As the only Latina in her business school's doctoral program, Ms. Cordero is glad to know people in similar situations around the country, including the "buddy" assigned through The PhD Project. They regularly send her reassuring e-mails and advice. "It's a subtle support I can't get in my program," she says.

With funding from university and corporate sponsors, The PhD Project pays each year for minority doctoral students to meet in advance of national professional conferences in particular disciplines such as accounting and management. But the network operates year-round. That helps explain the project's 92 percent completion rate, compared with about 70 percent overall for business doctoral programs, Milano says.

Igwe says friends from The PhD Project were a "lifeline" when his dream appeared to be dying. The department he joined at Penn State, where he was the first African-American to pursue a PhD, turned out to be a bad fit. "We couldn't communicate," he says, noting there were no black professors. Igwe found a way to transfer to an information-sciences and technology program at Penn, where he connected with mentors, including an African-American professor.

This fall Igwe is likely to be teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, and he's looking forward to giving back through The PhD Project. "Somebody who might not even be born yet, he's waiting for me to stay plugged into the network; so for him, whoever he may be, I have to succeed," he says with a determined thump of his fist.

Although The PhD Project is not a direct recruiting venue, a company sponsoring it at a minimum of \$25,000 a year may generate good feelings toward it among people who will influence business students' job choices.

"With more diverse faculty, you're going to attract more diverse students into the colleges of business, and you're also going to educate your majority students ... so they're sensitive to the global marketplace," says Jody Hestand, a diversity recruiter for Wal-Mart, now in its second year of sponsorship.

Patricia Martinez was a first-generation college graduate when she connected with The PhD Project in 1994. Now a professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, she sees her presence having an effect on students' aspirations.


"The minority students identify with you ... and they'll be more open to the message because it's coming from someone like them," Ms. Martinez says.

Now that the first participants are publishing their research and earning tenure, "the next dream for us is to see ... these people ascend to leadership positions in higher education," says Nicole Chestang of the Graduate Management Admission Council, which runs the admissions test for business schools and has

been an early sponsor of the project. In the US, there are fewer than 10 black, Hispanic, or native American business school deans, according to The PhD Project.

Find this article at:

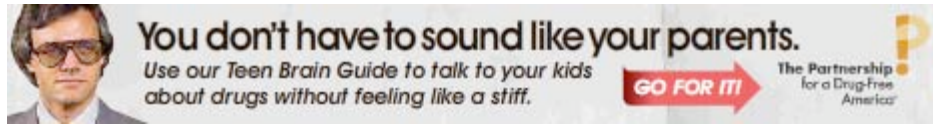
<http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0605/p02s01-ussc.html>

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

www.csmonitor.com | Copyright © 2008 The Christian Science Monitor. All rights reserved.



You don't have to sound like your parents.
Use our *Teen Brain Guide* to talk to your kids about drugs without feeling like a stiff.

GO FOR IT!

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America