

Celebrating Thirty Years of Empowering Students

“The SSS program has provided exemplary services to help students succeed at The University of Alabama. I have been deeply impressed by the caring, imaginative ways that SSS has introduced students to the resources and cultural richness of the University and the surrounding community.”

Dr. Hank Lazer
Associate Provost
The University of Alabama

The 2006-2007 school year marks the 30-Year Anniversary of the Student Support Services TRIO Program on The University of Alabama campus. Since its inception in 1976, SSS has provided outreach and support services to nearly 2,500 undergraduates at the Capstone. Over its 30-year history, the program has successfully received funding in seven consecutive federal grant proposal competitions which are held every four years.

History of TRIO The history of the federal TRIO programs, which are located on over 1,000 college campuses across the nation, is progressive. It began with Upward Bound, which emerged from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. In 1965, Educational Talent Search, the second outreach program, was created as part of the Higher Education Act. Then, in 1968, Student Support Services was authorized by the Higher Education Amendments and became the third in a series of educational opportunity programs. By the late 1960's, the term “TRIO” was coined to refer to these three invaluable programs. Over the years, TRIO programs have been expanded to provide a wider range of services and to reach more students who need assistance. The University of Alabama is also home to these additional TRIO programs: the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program. Known as the McNair Scholars Program at UA, the focus of the program is on preparing participants for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities. The goal is to increase the attainment of Ph.D. degrees by students from underrepresented segments of society. Like McNair, Student Support Services assists students in their progression through the academic pipeline and is designed to increase college retention and graduation rates of underrepresented individuals.

Since 1965, an estimated 2 million students have successfully graduated from college with the assistance and support of our nation's TRIO programs. According to the Council for Opportunity in Education, although 11 million Americans critically need access to the TRIO programs, federal funding permits fewer than 7 percent of eligible youth and adults to be served through the programs. Recent threats to cut TRIO funding have resurrected bipartisan congressional support as evidenced in a letter to the House Appropriations Committee signed by both republicans and democrats requesting a \$100 million increase for TRIO programs for FY 2007.

Milestones at UA The impact of the Student Support Services Program on the University of Alabama community extends far beyond retention and graduation. During the past thirty years, SSS grant funding awarded to UA has totaled more than \$4.6 million. In 2001, Student Support Services legislation made special grant aid available to

participants who were at a high risk of dropping out of college due to incurred student loan debt. Since that time, SSS has awarded a total of \$165,000 to 148 participants in an effort to help them reduce the amount of student loans necessary to complete their degrees. Additionally, due to the devastating affect of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 on many students from coastal areas, the U. S. Department of Education awarded \$75,000 in supplemental aid to the UA SSS program to serve eligible students who were displaced by the storm.

Academically, since its inception, the SSS program has helped approximately 1,000 first-generation and/or economically disadvantaged program participants successfully complete their baccalaureate degree at the Capstone. An average of 33 students per year receive their degree as either a direct or indirect result of their participation in services provided by the program. Of the 200 students served by the program in 2005-2006, 91% were in good academic standing at the end of the spring semester. The average GPA of these students was 2.86. Since 1995, the average retention rate of participants is around 91% with an average completion time of five years.

What's Working and Why National research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, *Third Year Longitudinal Study 1997*, compared a group of 2,900 SSS participants with the same number of non-SSS participants. The study showed positive and statistically significant impacts including increased GPA's, increased semester credits earned, and an increase in retention of 7%. Factors that led to increased student achievement in the study are the same services that are provided by the UA SSS program: one-to-one peer and professional tutoring, one-to-one counseling, SSS workshops, participation in regional and campus cultural events, SSS exclusive instructional courses, and peer mentoring activities. At UA, each program participant is assigned to a full-time counselor who provides academic advising and counseling, career and financial aid counseling, and advice on graduate school admissions. Program participants can take advantage of a private computer lab as well as several personal study areas including a student lounge on the second floor of Osband Hall. Federal grant funds allow the SSS program to hire peer tutors and graduate student tutors to work with participants during 90-minute sessions throughout the semester. The success rate of SSS participants who attend six or more tutoring sessions during the semester and receive a passing grade in the class is 90%. Furthermore, the University currently has an agreement with Kaplan Testing Service that provides Kaplan review courses free of charge to SSS participants. Since 2001, forty students have enrolled in these courses and many have successfully completed requirements for admission to graduate and professional schools around the country.

Where They Are Now Since 2001, 170 SSS graduates have left the Capstone well-equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in today's demanding and ever-changing world of work. TRIO graduates are working in business, education, government, medicine, law, communications, finance, computer science, engineering, accounting, and the list just goes on. The following comments are from SSS graduates and current participants:

- Michael Becallo, a sophomore communications major from New York says, "When I get to a brick wall in my studies, SSS is the ladder that gets me over that wall."

- While completing my undergraduate degree at Alabama I was also a Student Support Services participant. As I worked in that nurturing atmosphere, I received the awards of Best Undergraduate Creative Writer and Best Undergraduate Poet in the Department of Creative Writing. I am Kwoya Fagin and I am now working on my Master of Fine Arts degree and teaching undergraduate English courses at The University of Alabama.
- Student Support Services helped me in so many ways. I am most grateful for the support and leadership opportunities that enabled me to build my self-confidence and led to success in my professional life. As a City Planner for the City of Tuscaloosa, I have the skills I need to be effective. SSS challenged me to explore the possibilities of what I can be.
- I am Marquita Dorsey, and I attribute much of my success at UA to Student Support Services. Without the tutoring and supportive staff, I would not be here today. My first year on campus was a real challenge and I had to find a way to turn that around. As a Human Development major, I have found it extremely helpful to surround myself with positive people who encourage me and share in my vision.

By and large, the Student Support Services Program at UA has consistently continued to be a pillar of support for hundreds of underrepresented, economically disadvantaged, and disabled students. Being the first in their families to attend college has not hindered these students from achieving greatness. With support from SSS, all things are possible!