Digging DEAP Reaps Rewards

By Lynn Trupp

Confucius said: “Do something you love, and you will never work a day in your life.” This reality is for Khaliah Shabazz, director of the Diversity Enrichment and Achievement Program (DEAP) of University College which is housed in the Multicultural Success Center in Taylor Hall on IUPUI’s campus. She is passionate, energized, and driven to see her students and program succeed and is excited to see what each new day on the job will bring!

When asked about a typical week in her work life, the best answer she can give is that it’s atypical each day and each week. Certainly there are recurring tasks and responsibilities, but how they play out and are managed is as different and distinct as the students she encounters and mentors. Every other Tuesday night she mentors the female students involved in the Student African American Sisterhood (SAAS). Wednesday nights each week you’ll find her at Guion Middle School in Indianapolis from 4:00–6:00 p.m. with some of her SAAS mentees who are also volunteering their time to meet with young girls to help them get a head start on their quest for academic and personal excellence.

Shabazz graduated from IUPUI in 2000 with degrees in social work and psychology. After a short time working with Head Start, she got a position as the scholarship coordinator at IUPUI. Shortly after being hired, a joint position of assistant director was created between University College and Enrollment Services; she applied and landed the job.

In her new role, she began going to Indianapolis public high schools and talking with students about a college experience and how they could receive financial assistance — perhaps even scholarships — to help in such an academic journey. This connection and encouragement of students started her on a path that led to her desire to work in higher education and pursuit of a master’s and doctoral degree in that field. She is currently working on chapter four of her dissertation!

Of her own college experience, Shabazz remembers “feeling alone, wondering who to turn to,” so she has used her experiences to create and craft a program, DEAP, that will allow students of color “to realize their academic dream even when they don’t believe in it themselves.”

All the basic components of DEAP — academic advising, tutoring, community engagement, designated study time, peer support — are comprised of strategies to enhance students’ academic, social, and personal growth and success. Students in DEAP often receive small scholarships in return for attending Bridge for two weeks prior to the start of their freshman year, attending four developmental workshops per year, responding to academic check-ups throughout each semester, and spending one-on-one time with Shabazz and/or a designated peer mentor. Over the years, Shabazz has developed her own personal directive to describe her work with the students, as represented in the acronym CAGE: C = connecting, A = affirming, G = guiding, and K = engaging.

When discussing the biggest challenges of the program, Shabazz quickly states, “Solid mentor connections in the workforce.” On the other hand she says that the most rewarding experience to date is helping the students she encounters and mentors. Every other Tuesday night she mentors the female students involved in the Student African American Sisterhood (SAAS). Wednesday nights each week you’ll find her at Guion Middle School in Indianapolis from 4:00–6:00 p.m. with some of her SAAS mentees who are also volunteering their time to meet with young girls to help them get a head start on their quest for academic and personal excellence.

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