



MU has made  
recruitment and retention  
of African-American  
students a priority.

**E**ighteen-year-old Bryant Pryor is one of the 339 African-American freshmen who entered MU in fall '94. His class made news because it represented a one-year, threefold increase in black enrollment at a time when growth in African-American college enrollment is leveling off at the national level.

A resident of north St. Louis, Pryor had not planned to attend Mizzou. The offer of a scholarship changed his mind.

"There were two things I'd always heard about MU," Pryor says. "One, that it had the No. 1 journalism school in the world and, two, that it had a reputation for racial discrimination."

Now, well into his second semester, he's feeling good about his decision to attend MU. But he's not cruising.

**Bryant Pryor attends Mizzou on a George C. Brooks Scholarship. Three other schools recruited the graduate of Hazelwood Central in north St. Louis, but "they couldn't beat MU's offer." Pryor, who finished the fall semester with a GPA of almost 3.4, plans to enter medical school.**

"Am I anxious? Yes and no," says Pryor, who holds a George C. Brooks Scholarship, the most competitive of MU's minority scholarships. "It's a pretty relaxed atmosphere, there's not a lot of tension among students, but there's a lot to handle. Twenty-two thousand students, my classes, the professors. I'm

wondering, "Will I make it? Will I fail?!"

And that, in fact, is the question, for Bryant Pryor, the other 338 black freshmen who enrolled with him and Mizzou as a whole. Can a traditionally white, Midwestern university, one with a reputation for less-than-optimal race relations, nurture these students academically and provide them with an

# Determined to succeed

BY SUSAN SALZER, PHOTOS BY NANCY O'CONNOR

emotionally satisfying environment in which they can succeed?

Early indicators are promising. When classes resumed in January, 320 were back for a second term for a return rate of 94.4 percent. That compares with a 93.8 percent return rate for the freshman class as a whole. According to Registrar Gary Smith, more than 70 percent of these African-American students finished the fall semester with a GPA of better than 2.0 and almost 25 percent ended up with a 3.0 or higher. Six of the black freshmen who enrolled last fall withdrew during the semester.

Pryor earned an impressive 3.375 for a 14-hour load that included courses in chemistry, political science and math. He wants to be a pediatrician.

"I need to succeed," he says. "I want to be a doctor very much."

## In the spotlight

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported MU's minority enrollment story, citing offers of financial aid, aggressive recruiting and an effective public relations campaign as contributing factors.

"We have an obligation to our students to provide the diverse environment that will prepare them for the global work place of the 21st century," says Chancellor Charles Kiesler. "And if our state is to remain competitive, it must have a well-educated work force, one that taps Missouri's full array of talent."

Mizzou's 1993 freshman class had 97 black students; 339 black freshmen enrolled in fall '94. Nationwide, African-American enrollment rose only .3 percent in 1993, the last year for which statistics were available.

"We saw a 24 percent increase in African-American enrollment from about 1986 to 1992, but during the past three years there's been a slowing of that increase," says Deborah Carter, associate

director of the American Council of Education's Office of Minorities in Higher Education. "What you've done at Missouri is commendable, but you have to keep in mind that you were well below the national average" with black students representing only about 3.3 percent of total freshman enrollment in 1993. Minorities now account for 10 percent of the freshman class. "The issue now is what are you going to do at Missouri to support these students? Many campuses make the mistake of recruiting African Americans but fail to provide the support system many — not all — of these students need."

MU officials are keenly aware of it. "We've got a lot at stake," says Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Charles Schroeder. "We've made a big

commitment to changing a pattern, a legacy, that's existed at MU for a number of years. This is not an experiment in diversity for us. It's an obligation and an investment in the future of the state."

## Retention initiatives

No one expected MU's five-year goal for minority student recruitment to be met in one year. Schroeder, Vice Provost for Minority Affairs KC Morrison, and members of their staffs are working overtime to make Mizzou a welcoming place for these newcomers.

"A couple of our African-American students said to me, 'The University wasn't ready for this,' and they were right," Schroeder says. "We weren't ready and we're not going to be completely ready next year or five years from now. But we have a vision, we have the will and we're creating the programs to ensure student success.

"A nice thing about Mizzou is that we're honest enough to admit this is challenging," Schroeder continues. "We can talk all we want about diversity in America, but there are significant economic and social problems that we as a nation must solve together. A university is simply a microcosm of that."

Schroeder and Morrison lead a task



Pryor lives in Baker-Park residence hall with his best friend since childhood, Vaughn Sanders. An engineering major, Sanders also attends MU on a scholarship.



Bowling at Brady Commons is one of Pryor's favorite ways to unwind. The 18-year-old freshman says he feels pressure — mostly self-imposed — to succeed. "I have to stay focused."

African-American students are encouraged to take the freshman experience course, a key element of Mizzou's retention program. The class teaches study skills.



Pryor and Sanders, left, share a laugh with fellow freshmen Leslie Tolliver, in plaid shirt, of St. Louis, and Olisa Warren, of Kansas City. About 95 percent of the black freshmen who entered last fall returned for the winter semester.



force on African-American recruitment and retention. Meetings are weekly.

"It's tough, intensive work," Morrison says. "We've suffered all the things you would expect, given the scope of our directive." But Morrison believes their work is paying off.

"Bryant Pryor is a good example of the type of African-American student we recruited. He demonstrates excellent leadership skills and motivation, he is engaged in a number of activities that will enable him to discover the University at its fullest."

Morrison says "the University will work to meet the special needs of these students; in turn, one expects they will develop a degree of loyalty and respect for the institution."

He details steps MU is taking to meet its obligation. Almost all of MU's black freshmen are receiving some form of financial aid: the Brooks Scholarship, the African-American Achievement Award; or a scholarship awarded after completion of a transition program for students who were considered to be "at risk" for successful graduation. Twenty-four transition students were among the 339 black freshmen enrolled last fall.

"It's important that everyone understands that each one of those students

— including those in the transition program — met our admissions criteria," Schroeder says. "We are not sacrificing quality to increase diversity."

Once enrolled, students are encouraged — though not required — to take a class acquainting them with the college experience. Morrison calls it "a major retention tool that helps the student understand this new place. They are taught study skills, they study relationships, the general controversy of issues. They learn to become involved right away, which is very important because of the potential for isolation."

In addition, students are directed to Mizzou's learning communities, or specialized residence halls such as Wakonse and the Fine Arts Residential College, that provide academic and social support by fostering regular faculty and student interaction. Study groups with assigned tutors are offered by the Learning Center; sensitivity training for faculty is sponsored by the Office of Minority Affairs and Faculty Development.

Also to foster support and security, MU created the Minority Achievement Program, or MAP. Like all Brooks Scholars, Pryor is required to participate. Each student is assigned a graduate student counselor, who functions as mentor,

adviser and, in Pryor's case, friend. Pryor's counselor is Derrick Virgil, a doctoral candidate in history.

Useful as these retention programs are, Pryor says, it's people who make the most difference for him. His roommate and longtime best friend, Vaughn Sanders, is an important part of his life. He also invests much personal time in the Legion of Black Collegians gospel choir, where he plays keyboard.

Dr. Keener Tippin, assistant to the vice provost for minority affairs, is a staff member Pryor feels close to. He says Tippin is "like a grandfather" to African-American students, particularly those who attend summer Alpha Academy programs for promising high-school juniors.

Pryor stays in contact with LeAnn Scott, coordinator of the Brooks Scholarship program. A former Brooks Scholar herself, Scott says Pryor and his classmates are having a very different experience at MU than she and her contemporaries did. She graduated from MU in 1991 with a degree in personal finance management.

"It's one thing to be one of 97 black students here (as in '93) and another to be one of 339," she says. "When you sit down and look around and see you're the only black person in the class — that's a shock. And that's not happening anymore."

## Changing a pattern

One of the biggest challenges Mizzou had to overcome in recruiting black students was the perception that the school turned a blind eye toward racism. Indeed, Pryor said Mizzou's reputation was such that "if it weren't for the scholarship, I would have gone somewhere else. Probably to a less expensive school, closer to home."

Kiesler, Schroeder and others decided early in the campaign to confront that perception head-on. The chancellor traveled to Kansas City and St. Louis to discuss the issue personally with public school officials. Schroeder tackles it when dealing with potential students.

"When African-American students visit this campus I ask them, 'How many of you have been told this is a racist place?' Of course, no one raises a hand, but you can tell from their non-verbal language that every one of them has heard it. And I say, 'Well, that's a partial truth. If you come here, you may encounter racism. Just as you might in St. Louis, Dallas and New York, Chillicothe and Kirksville. But it is

not a predominant feature of this environment.”

The semester was relatively trouble-free with the exception of several incidents that occurred in the Pershing group of residence halls, where Pryor lives. According to reports, a Caucasian student threatened an African American living on his floor, using a racial slur. The white student was disciplined and no longer attends MU. Several weeks later, a black student reported receiving anonymous, threatening telephone calls. A third offense involved a white student who reported being shoved and kicked by a group of African-American males. The complainant, who received a bloody nose and bruises, could not identify his attackers, and it is not known whether they were students.

Administrators responded by calling a series of open forums where staff and residents discussed ways to prevent and respond to these episodes.

“We spent most of two weeks dealing with it,” Schroeder says. “We’ve got zero tolerance for that behavior. Period.”

Pryor was aware of the incidents, although he wasn’t involved directly.

“MU’s not as bad as they said, but there is some racial tension,” he says. “I haven’t had any trouble personally.”

### So far, so good

Pryor is adjusting to college life, although he experienced some “freshman daze.” “I spent a lot of time sitting around, but that was before I got involved.”

Pryor now spends his non-study hours with the LBC choir, bowling at Brady Commons, playing cards in his residence hall and attending pre-med club meetings and gatherings specifically for minority students pursuing medical careers. He occasionally drops in on one of the parties

**A**re you an MU graduate who would like to be a part of Mizzou’s recruiting network?

Tiger Trackers is the way to do it. To find out more about this new program, contact Joyce Lake, director of alumni programs, 123 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, Mo. 65211, or call (314) 882-6611.



Pryor plays the keyboard in the Legion of Black Collegians gospel choir. Though determined to succeed academically, “that doesn’t mean I don’t get down.”

Rob Hill photo



Pryor’s mother, Mitchele Betts, is greeted with a kiss as she and the family come to bring him home for the semester break. Her husband, Ross, and Pryor’s sister, 14-year-old Kristen, also made the trip.

sponsored every Friday and Saturday night at the Memorial Union by one of MU’s five black fraternities or four black sororities. He doesn’t party as much as he did early in the semester.

“I kick it. When it’s time to act crazy, I act crazy. I just don’t go overboard,” Pryor says.

According to a survey by MU’s Student Life Studies, most freshmen, black and white, had a positive fall semester experience.

“The freshmen we called indicated very high levels of satisfaction with their experience at Mizzou,” says Director Gary Pike. “That’s true of our African-American and our Caucasian students.”

Pike says 96.7 percent of the black freshmen polled said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their time at MU. The percentage was 98.1 for white students.

“We’re not saying it’s been a breeze for these African-American students — it hasn’t been,” Pike says. “But this survey speaks to their resilience and determination to succeed.”

### Why do it?

Pryor suspects MU moved to recruit black students to avoid trouble with the federal government. It’s a common perception, but untrue, Schroeder says. He acknowledges

that as recently as 1988 Mizzou was at odds with the NAACP, the LBC and the U.S. Department of Justice. Since then, MU and the Justice Department officials reached agreements concerning “issues of sensitivity, civility and generally making this a more affirming place for people of color. But we were under no mandate to enroll X number of African-American students.”

Says Kiesler: “This program is about increasing diversity and breaking the cycle that perpetuates the American underclass. We could continue to look at African-American students at the top of their class who get ACTs of 17 and say, ‘Well, it’s the high school’s problem,’ or ‘It’s the elementary school’s problem.’ We could do that, but actually, we in higher education have an obligation to remedy these inequities.”

And MU, the chancellor says, is prepared to do its share.

“When it comes to the recruitment and retention of African-American students, it’s time to quit talking and put our resources where our mouth is. As an institution, Mizzou has gone from racism to benign neglect to reaching out. And as the fall semester has shown us, we are reaching out to students who can graduate.”