

# MIZZOU

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## Around the Columns

### How friendships start

In fall 2009, when business major Korian Harrington joined the first class of the Mizzou Black Men's Initiative, he wasn't sure how things would work out. The native of East St. Louis, Ill., wondered just how 18 freshmen from towns large and small nationwide would form friendships and come together as a group.

The new program — launched to improve the 38 percent graduation rate for black males at MU — provides its members leadership training as well as academic help and all-important social support.

Plus hotdogs. Thousands of them.

The guys got their hands on the frankfurters one evening as they volunteered at the Central Missouri Food Bank to package bulk weenies for distribution to hundreds of families in need. Suddenly, they started clicking as a group, Harrington says. "We were there for a couple of hours, just sparking off different conversations. I consider all these guys my brothers now."

In addition to carrying out service projects and listening to guest speakers, the group meets regularly for study halls at the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center. Marcus Mayes, BS BA '08, program coordinator, says the group has an ethic of high achievement. "I tell them, 'We expect you to do well academically. If that means not hanging out with your buddies Friday night, then that's it.'"




Whatever members accomplish, the social component is what holds it all together, Mayes says. "It's going well when the guys get that sense of belonging and acceptance. We let them know, 'We like you, you belong here, we want you here,'" he says. "Mizzou is a good place."



Korian Harrington, left, of East St. Louis, Ill., is part of the Mizzou Black Men's Initiative, which helps participants succeed in college. He works with Gary Craig of St. Louis, center, and Nic Smith of Bolingbrook, Ill. Photo by Rob Hill

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