

University of Missouri

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# MIZZOU

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## Initiating a Brotherhood

**Mizzou Black Men's Initiative to graduate first class.**

*Story by Kelsey Allen*

*Photos by Marcus Mayes*

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**I**n 2009, Nathan Stephens, former senior coordinator of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center, and graduate assistant Marcus Mayes formed the Mizzou Black Men's Initiative to retain and help persist black men all the way through graduation. The group started with nine members in 2009 and has grown to more than 80 students.



Jonathon Butler listens to a guest speaker during Ndugu, an event that brings in campus and community professionals to network and fellowship with MBMI members.

“Our goal is to have 100 percent of the men who come through the program graduate,” Mayes says.

But sometimes, it’s not just about the numbers.

Mayes, the staff coordinator for MBMI, graduated from MU in 2008 with his bachelor’s in business administration. While a student at MU, Mayes competed in track and field and says the closest thing he had to a support system like MBMI was his team.



Mizzou Black Men’s Initiative members stop to check out the sites of Washington, D.C., during the 2012 Alternative Spring Break trip. From left: Jamon Finely, Nicolas Colbert, Donovan Charleston, Lindsay Murray, Josh Grinston and Kevin Boyd.

“It was a family,” Mayes says. “I had the benefit of being an athlete and having that environment set up for me. It’s hard to get that when you’re first coming to a university, no matter who you are. MBMI serves that purpose for black males on campus. Nine out of 10 guys you ask, the first thing they’ll talk about is the brotherhood.”

As the group prepares to graduate its first class in May 2013, some members realize that the bonds they’ve formed and the confidence they’ve

developed through support from the brotherhood are more important than a graduation rate.

Donovan Charleston, a sophomore business major from Alton, Ill., came to Mizzou because of the MBMI. As a high school senior, he visited campus through the minority-recruiting program Clue N2 Mizzou hosted by United Ambassadors. Because he didn't know anyone else coming to MU, he liked how the MBMI created a smaller community.

Charleston, now activities chair for MBMI, says the group has made its mark on his time at MU. In spring 2012, Charleston participated in the Alternative Spring Break program. About 25 MBMI members rode a bus 14 hours to Washington, D.C., where they attended a leadership conference and spoke to a group of elementary school students about the importance of education. "When you're on a bus with the same people for that long, you hear their life stories," Charleston says. "It opened my eyes to the diversity at Mizzou, even within MBMI.



Kevin Boyd, right, and Nicolas Colbert have a friendly debate before the start of a leadership conference held at Howard University during the 2012 Alternative Spring Break trip.

But we're all here for the same goal: to graduate and to be successful."

To support black male students on campus, MBMI offers weekly study hall; mentoring by peers, faculty and staff; and leadership and personal development.

"If someone is getting an A in algebra and someone is failing algebra, we failed as a group," Stephens says. "We connect that person with an A with that person who is failing."



Jamon Finely talks with a student at Daniel Payne Elementary about college and leadership during the 2012 Alternative Spring Break trip.

Lindsay Murray, president of MBMI, says cultivating leaders in the black community on campus is also important.

"We give our members something more to strive for than just good grades," says Murray, a senior theatre major from St. Louis.

MBMI has members in more than 20 other organizations on campus, with most holding leadership positions.

“Our vision for the next few years is to strengthen our resources for academic and social support, leadership and personal development, and community involvement.,” Mayes says. “We’re making sure we are developing the members, giving them the resources so they can continue to be successful at the university and helping prepare them for life after Mizzou.”

*Learn how [black women are leading the way at MU](#), and [read a Q-and-A with the co-coordinators of the 2013 Black Women Rock! event](#).*

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