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Furman University

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Major grants will help DLA and Bridges programs offer enhanced services

Two community service initiatives sponsored by Furman have received generous grants that will help them expand their programs.

The Diversity Leadership Academy, which aims to help South Carolina's corporate and community leaders better understand the diversity of the communities in which they work and live, has been awarded a $500,000 grant from The Wachovia Foundation to provide scholarships for minority participants.

An outgrowth of the Richard W. Riley Institute of Government, Politics and Public Leadership, the DLA was first held in the Greenville area in the fall of 2003 and has since spread across the state. The DLA held its first program for the Charleston area this spring, and a forthcoming program has been scheduled for the Columbia area in the state's Midlands.

"Each class of Diversity Leadership Academy participants includes leaders from a wide range of organizations and backgrounds. This generous gift from Wachovia will make sure the cost of the program is not a deterrent to anyone," says Don Gordon, professor of political science and director of the Riley Institute. "The DLA has become the state's premier diversity management program, and this financial support from Wachovia will only make it stronger and more inclusive."

The inaugural DLA program in 2003 included about 40 participants. Since then more than 200 community leaders have been involved in the program.

Each group meets one day per month over five months to engage in learning exercises, build leadership skills and develop the ability to identify important diversity issues and bring about effective solutions. The groups are also responsible for pursuing community projects, which have included improving the transition of international students into middle schools and providing a Spanish translation service for EMS.

Kendall Alley, Wachovia's regional president for South Carolina, says, "Our hope is that through programs like this we can enhance diversity awareness among the leadership in the South Carolina business community and foster an appreciation for the similarities we all share."

The DLA was developed with the aid of the Atlanta-based American Institute for Managing Diversity. In addition to Wachovia, it is supported by a consortium that includes the Coca-Cola Co. of Atlanta, Michelin North America and Furman.

More information about DLA can be found on-line at www.furman.edu/riley/programs/diversity.htm.

The Bridges to a Brighter Future program has received two separate grants that will establish endowments to fund salaries for teachers and to launch an on-campus tutoring program.

A $100,000 gift from the Greenville-based Graham Foundation establishes the "Bridges to a Brighter Future Graham Foundation Endowment." Annual proceeds from the account will be used initially to fund salaries for full-time science and art teachers.

In addition, a $48,000 grant from the Jolley Foundation will be used to pilot a tutoring program that will be held one Saturday a month during the school year.

The Bridges program, which began in 1997 thanks to a gift from Greenville benefactor Mamie Jolley Bruce, serves economically disadvantaged Greenville County students in the ninth, 10th and 11th grades. The program's goal is to provide promising students with the essential tools that will help them complete their high school educations, prepare for college, and allow them to become productive members of the workforce and citizens of the community.

The 75 students who participate annually in the program are nominated by teachers and guidance counselors. They attend a four-week tutoring and mentoring program each summer at Furman, where they work on academic skills and learn about the importance of such traits as responsibility, empathy and service to humankind.

The program's older students receive guidance in the college admissions process. Furman students serve as counselors for the summer program.

Bridges director Tobi Swartz and her staff follow up with the students throughout the academic year, monitoring their progress and visiting them at their schools. The Saturday tutoring program will help foster and maintain further interaction.

Since the program's inception, 100 percent of its participants have graduated from high school or earned their high school equivalency diploma, and more than 90 percent have gone on to higher education.

To learn more about the program, visit the Bridges Web site at www.furman.edu/bridges.