

Leading by example
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Most college students can't find enough time to attend classes, study and work. GMU graduate student Andrew Ryan has managed to balance all three and volunteer his time to mentor high school students.

Using his technical background, Ryan focuses on the importance of achieving one's potential by investing into education. Specifically, he concentrated upon the low numbers of blacks and minorities in the science and tech field.

Ryan has served his societal mentorship for three years and recently helped implement the National Society for Black Engineers at Wakefield High School.

In 1998 Ryan, Brian Blake, Ernest Minefield and Rochelle Jones set out on a voyage of enlightenment. They started by distributing 16 letters to high schools in surrounding areas. They got only one response, that coming from Wakefield High School.

By December, they obtained the opportunity to pitch the science and technology program to John Clisham, the head guidance counselor at WHS.

Launched in the beginning of February, the National Society of Black Engineers has already been a success. It meets twice a week, from 2:20 to 3:45 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays.

"All the different questions I have about college that can't be answered by Wakefield, can and have been answered by this program," said Amado Diaz, a 17-year-old senior who hopes to attend GMU.

The group of the National Society of Black Engineers was able to focus all of its budget to Wakefield. Ryan, Minefield, Black and Jones received the larger portion of funding from the society. With that money tucked under the PCI program of the society, and the rest coming from a corporate sponsorship, there is currently no concern about finances.

The program is available to ninth through 12th graders, but "we focus on getting 11th and 12th graders geared towards college," Ryan said.

A very high point for the program is the bridge between ages. "The people in charge are not that much older, which makes it more easier to relate and more meaningful when we do," Diaz said.

The program encompasses computer science and engineering exercises, and among others, analytical skills. This fits into the overall scheme of life skills, which most students were not fortunate enough to pick up from their home environment, Ryan said.

NSBE is also a great opportunity to learn about career options.

"Rochelle Jones gave us a packet which includes all of the different options in the engineering field, which helps me focus on a more specific area," Diaz said.

Ryan said his main point is that anyone can make it, no matter how humble the beginnings, as long as he or she is aware of his or her options. With the combination of options and a strong dedication to one's field, one can achieve, said Ryan. He has been pursuing this idea ever since attending undergraduate school at SUNY Binghamton. Up and down the east coast, Ryan has left his mark from Boston to Harlem. Notwithstanding with a science and engineering graduate student's schedule, Ryan still finds the motivation to be a teacher's assistant for computer science. He also teaches two credits for New Century College.

Ryan's future may be busy as well. He strives to incorporate some formal teaching, working towards a Ph.D., eventually leading to a position with a corporation such as Lockheed Martin.

Perhaps the best way to incorporate Ryan's message is to emphasize his disbelief in W.E.B. Dubois' statement that "Ten percent of people lead, while 90 percent will follow." Ryan's effort is meant to reach out to the 90 percent, which he said he feels are neglected.