Project Title: *Academy for Student Excellence in Math and Science: Bioscience Initiative*

Prairie State College (PSC), a comprehensive community college that serves the south suburbs of Chicago Illinois, recognizes the problem of too few graduates in the bioscience disciplines. Over the past 50 years, PSC has been an institutional mirror of its eclectic community. Of the 5,791 total student body, 58.1% are now African American.

Prairie State College’s project supports the PBI program to enhance the institution’s capacity to serve more low- and middle-income African American students. This initiative will be a branch of the long term vision of Prairie State College to create a STEM hub for the Chicago Southland region. The College estimates that the project will serve 250 students per semester in the biosciences area, and more than 600 undecided students who take the non-science general education biology course. PSC’s five-year project, *Academy for Student Excellence in Math and Science: Bioscience Initiative*, has two goals and five objectives.

The goals are: (1) strengthen the academic programs at Prairie State College to prepare African American students to pursue and persist in biosciences, and (2) strengthen academic services at PSC to improve completion and transfer rates in the biosciences. The objectives are: 1) design and articulate courses that are equivalent to second semester general biology and microbiology courses at 4-year institutions; 2) increase faculty professional development through summer institutes with 4-year institutions; 3) upgrade the equipment and renovate space in biology and microbiology laboratories; 4) establish a completion and transfer rate for African American students who enroll in general biology and microbiology courses; and 5) increase the quantity and quality of tutoring and other academic services for students who enroll in bioscience courses.

Program components will lead to increased enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates for students in the biosciences. Activities include: academic instruction in disciplines in which African Americans are underrepresented; development and improvement of academic programs; and tutoring, counseling, and student service programs. The program components will improve academic success through innovative, customized, group and individualized instruction. The components are designed to help retain students and move them rapidly into core courses and through program completion.

Services that will be provided include outreach to students in feeder high schools and on the PSC campus; assistance with college applications and financial aid; academic and intentional advising that includes monitoring academic progress; supplemental instruction; help with admission and transfer to 4-year institutions; career counseling; faculty-led research projects for students; and increased tutoring services. A portion of the funding for tutors will be in-kind commitment from the College. Through PSC’s thoughtful and well implemented plan, African American students at Prairie State College will be invited to explore possibilities in the biosciences, engaged by state-of-the-art laboratory tools and supported academically by faculty and staff. In this way, students will come to realize their full potential, and they will become more engaged in courses and careers in the biosciences.
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