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Suffolk University Professor Honored for Research on Student Preparation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

BLOOMINGTON, IND. — Dr. Tryan L. McMickens, a visiting assistant professor in the Master of Education in Administration of Higher Education Program at Suffolk University in Boston, has received the 2011–2012 PDK International Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award. His dissertation examines how historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) prepare their students for cross-racial, post-collegiate environments.

“I am most passionate about teaching, learning, and exploring the ways education can positively influence one’s life,” said McMickens, who has worked in undergraduate student affairs, academic affairs, and institutional advancement at several institutions across the United States. McMickens added, “My research not only has implications for HBCUs, but also offers strategies to enhance teaching and learning, student development, and career development at predominantly white institutions.”

McMickens’ dissertation research, which was supported by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Millennium Scholars Program, examined how HBCU graduates are prepared to confront racism and experience racially tumultuous encounters in American society. To discover how HBCUs prepare students for these experiences, he interviewed more than 80 alumni and graduating seniors from 20 HBCUs across the country.

“The resulting theoretical model provides a new way of thinking about the influence of childhood socialization, racial messaging from faculty and student affairs educators, and the utility of HBCUs in American society,” McMickens said.

He will receive a \$5,000 award from the PDK Educational Foundation. A summary of his dissertation, “Racism Readiness as an Educational Outcome for Graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A Multi-Campus Grounded Theory Study,” will be published in the May 2012 issue of *Kappan* magazine, the nation’s leading magazine on education policy and practice.

“It is an honor to name Dr. McMickens as the recipient of this award,” said PDK Executive Director Dr. William Bushaw. “His study sheds light on the educational experiences of students at historically black colleges and universities and how those experiences inform their response to racism in post-collegiate environments. The reviewers were unanimous that his dissertation made an important contribution to the field of education.”

Because critics question the need for HBCUs in today’s multicultural society, Dr. Shaun R. Harper, McMickens’ dissertation supervisor and the director for the University of Pennsylvania Center for the Study of Race and Equity

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in Education, said McMickens' research makes an important contribution to empirical research on this topic, as well as adding to the discussion about how to prepare students to participate in a racially diverse society.

“Some African American parents discourage their children from attending HBCUs for fear that being educated in a majority black context will not prepare them well for post-college settings in which they will routinely interact with whites,” Harper said. “McMickens' research does much to advance our understanding of HBCUs, race, and student preparation for post-collegiate settings and offers useful implications for educators, administrators, and students.”

McMickens received his doctoral degree from the Higher Education Program at the University of Pennsylvania.

The PDK Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award is sponsored by the PDK Educational Foundation, which provides support for the projects of PDK International, a global association for educators. This award, which is designed to further research in education, is given to the PDK member whose dissertation best meets the criteria of sound scholarship and shows the most promise for improving education. In addition to the Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award, four members received Recognition of Merit for their dissertations. PDK received more than 40 submissions for the award, which was selected by a panel of education researchers.

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About PDK International

Founded in 1906, PDK International is a global association for professional educators. The organization's mission is to support education, particularly public education, as the cornerstone of democracy. More information is online at www.pdkintl.org.

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