

## SUNY New Paltz: Scholars Mentorship Program

The SUNY New Paltz Scholars Mentorship Program (SMP) serves high-achieving students from racial groups who have historically been underrepresented in higher education. The program has served Black, Latino/a/x, Asian, and multiracial students for the last 30 years. Its success can be attributed to the many collaborating partners on the New Paltz campus. Our partners include over 80 faculty mentors, and 30 peer mentors, who are trained by SMP to support the specific needs of SMP students. It has grown from a small program, supporting approximately 50 students, to supporting over 280 students campus wide. The program also benefits from support and partnership with entities such as the Black Studies Department, the Margaret Wade-Lewis Endowment Fund, the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, the Center for International Programs, and many more, who employ, nurture and guide our students.

SMP has a high retention rate, in the mid-90<sup>th</sup> percentile for first-year students, and an overall retention rate across all four years in the high 70<sup>th</sup> percentile. This can largely be attributed to institutional support and the level of commitment demonstrated by our collaborative partners. These high early retention rates have led to an 82% six-year graduation rate for one of the most diverse student cohorts at the institution.

At SMP we believe that exposure to positive self-images is key to expanding our students' perspective on their unlimited potential. As such, SMP provides programming and events that are an expression of our students' diverse backgrounds and cultural experiences. Each year they have an opportunity to listen to and ask questions of guest speakers, people of color, who have successfully navigated academic careers and are excelling in their chosen professions. Our students are able to explore the arts; visiting museums, and attending Broadway shows that reflect the cultural richness of those who have been marginalized. For the last 10 years, we have supported our students' need to see positive representations of themselves in culture, history, and the arts, and we are proud to be able to provide programming to show them that humanity has a shared history, in which all peoples from around the globe have made contributions.

As SMP is poised to be a leading change agent for social justice in education, our partnership with the Black Studies Department has given us the opportunity to educate our students on diversity, equity, and inclusion. We are teaching students how to become leaders, educators, and advocates for fellow underrepresented students. They are working to close the academic educational gap, and modeling how living in a diverse campus community enriches everyone's academic experience.

The Scholar's Mentorship Program has made large strides over the past several years to positively impact the graduation rates of the students it serves, and despite the ever-present need for a consistent source of funding, to ensure students receive the same level and quality of experiences and exposures year-to-year, SMP has a very bright future. SUNY New Paltz has invested in that future. We recently opened the doors to a brand new SMP center, a dedicated cultural suite that houses offices, gathering spaces, and a study area. SMP is also looking to increase the number of supported students from 280 to 350-400 each year; and we hope to establish a pipeline program for underrepresented high school students who wish to attend college.

SMP will continue to advance the academic and personal development of its black and brown scholars on the New Paltz campus, their presence and achievements not only contribute to an increasingly integrated, diverse, and more harmonious campus culture, but on a wider level, they are taking the lessons they have learned, becoming economically self-sufficient, and making positive contributions to their communities, and to society in general.

*“SMP to me means family, from the very beginning I felt a sense of comfort because I had a community of people that look like me and related to a similar upbringing. Over these past three years, SMP has given me the support to grow and perform at my best potential, both socially and academically. I remember speaking to my SMP liaison and she said “there aren’t many things in life that are free and ask for nothing in return,” which is the perfect way to describe this amazing program. Since I’ve been in SMP, I’ve received an immense amount of support, job opportunities both during the school year and over the summer, and the push I needed to get outside of my comfort zone and grow as a person.”*

*- Mame Sow, ‘21*

*“It was a pleasure being a part of the Scholar’s Mentorship Program, as it allowed me the opportunity to learn and grow while being part of a loving community.”*

*- Priscilla Kwarteng, ‘20*

*“It has been an honor being a part of the Scholar’s Mentor program. I have learned a lot and found a community in New Paltz through SMP. I sincerely thank you and the other members of the program for your impact in my college experience.”*

*- Thalia Quinones ‘20*

*“Thank you for the positive impact you have made in my experience at SUNY New Paltz.”*

*- Greyson Thomas ‘20*

*“Thank you for being the director of such a wonderful [program] as SMP and the lessons that you gave us through the years! I cannot thank you enough for my great mentors and protégés. Good luck with SMP and future endeavors!”*

*- Yohely Espiritusanto ‘20*