

The Peer Advisor Program
In the Office of African American Affairs at the University of Virginia
Under the Directorship of Associate Dean Sylvia V. Terry
1989-2009

Author: Sarah L. Williams
Administrative Assistant in the Office of the Vice President and Chief Officer for
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Background on Sylvia V. Terry

From the beginning, education was a pillar in Sylvia V. Terry's life. She grew up in the small town of Courtland, VA where both of her parents were teachers, her father later going on to become the principal of Riverview High School and then a State Supervisor for Agriculture Education in the Commonwealth of Virginia where he supervised teachers on curriculum and best teaching practices. Her parents were very active in the community, inspiring their students and providing information on how and why to pursue a higher education. In a recent interview, Sylvia Terry commented on her parents' dedication to their students, saying, "When I was a little girl, I remember sitting in the back of our car and my parents driving to the homes of some of their students to talk...about the value of college education." Many of the students were interested in attending Virginia State College, her parents' alma mater. My father would drive the students from Courtland to Petersburg, Virginia...he would take them there to meet with people, such as academic advisors, career advisors, and financial aid advisors. He wanted to re-enforce the idea that college was a very real possibility for the students. These were the days of segregation. Educators were role models for the students, representing what a college education could help them to accomplish. That became my inspiration." (1) Encouraged by her parents' example, there was never any question in young Sylvia's mind that she would go to college. While reflecting on their influence in her life, Dean Terry remarked that, "My passion comes from my parents about what a college experience should be." (1)

After receiving her bachelor's degree from Virginia State College (now Virginia State University), Sylvia Terry enrolled as a graduate student in UVA's Department of English in 1971. Throughout her graduate studies and until 1979, she also taught English in the college preparatory program for first-generation, low-income students, "Upward Bound." Following her

graduation from the University of Virginia, she became an English teacher at Charlottesville's Walker Junior High School for two years and later transferred to the newly opened Charlottesville High School, where she was among its first faculty members. While she loved her work, Sylvia Terry quickly realized that what she really wanted was to assist students in their pursuit of higher education.

Tenure with the Office of Undergraduate Admission

Sylvia Terry joined the Office of Undergraduate Admission in the fall of 1980 where she was responsible for the recruitment of Black students. As an assistant dean in the Office of Undergraduate Admission (and later the Director of Minority Recruitment), she knew that her role in recruiting African American students to the University would be challenging. The University's history of enslavement and discrimination would be of serious consideration to potential Black applicants and their families. Speaking on the role of admissions, Dean Terry later wrote, "Mindful that the University has a history of separation with which to deal, the Office of Admissions has to be sensitive to the views, perceptions, and experiences of Black families. It has an obligation to outreach rather than to close ranks as it did in the past," (2).

Dean Terry used many different methods to reach out to the community and recruit Black students, including school visits, recruitment events, community meetings, information sessions, publications, personalized letters, and alumni outreach. Throughout her recruitment efforts, Dean Terry quickly found that one of the most effective ways to connect with potential applicants was to have current UVA students available at these events. The UVA students would inspire their younger counterparts and stand as examples of what every young Black man or woman could be at UVA. As a result, Terry and another dean with whom she worked, Hope Wilson, developed the Black Student Admissions Committee. While the committee had previously mainly assisted

with the Spring Fling event, a recruitment program for Black students who had been offered admission to UVA. Dean Terry expanded its role. The students on this committee would now attend and actively participate in recruitment events both on and off Grounds to answer questions, give tours, and talk about their own experiences at UVA.

Two years into her tenure in the Office of Undergraduate Admission, the Vice President for Student Affairs at the time, Ernest Ern, invited Dean Terry to a meeting of African American student leaders to discuss their experiences at the University. During that meeting, a young man said something that would affect the history of the Peer Advisor Program forever. He said, “UVA has done everything to get me here, but now that I’m here, nobody seems to care.” This poignant observation spoke to the gap between admission and retention efforts during that time. Dean Terry wrote, “It was a voice of disappointment, of isolation, of confusion. It spoke volumes to what the University needed to do beyond recruitment...We as admissions officers had...set expectations of what the University would offer after the students enrolled...We had to make good on our implied promises,” (2). In her speech and presentation, “Peer Advising: The Link between Admission and Retention,” she reiterated this notion by quoting John P. Bean who said, “Students who feel they have been misled will find it especially difficult to form positive attitudes towards the institutions.” (3) Years after the incident, on remembering this young man’s words, Dean Terry responded, “That’s going to always be with me because I felt responsible for that student and for all of the students who had come. I was committed to seeing students have the opportunities that my parents didn’t have - that I didn’t have,” (1).

In response to this young man’s experience, Dean Terry created a subcommittee of the Black Student Admissions Committee called the “Visitation Sub-Committee.” It was the practice of Dean Terry and Hope Wilson to go to the dormitories during the first two weeks of the fall

semester and check on the welfare of the new Black first-year students. After those first two weeks, however, they had to go “back on the road” to recruit more new students. Now with the Visitation Sub-Committee, Terry assigned upper-class students to residence halls where they, “...picked up where we [admissions deans] left off...we were gone—but the upperclassmen were there to check on the welfare of the first-year students,” (4). This committee was the forerunner of the Peer Advisor Program.

Dean Terry was not the only one to notice that the University had more to do in terms of retaining its African American students. Not long after her encounter with the young man, the Office of Undergraduate Admission received a letter from the Provost Office saying The State Council for Higher Education wanted some suggestions for retention programs. Dean Terry had witnessed first-hand the effectiveness of using current UVA students to inform, motivate, and inspire potential applicants. She had also been following the research of several preeminent scholars who studied the effectiveness of various methods of retention and the state of colleges in America for African American students and the population at large.^a She therefore suggested, “a big brother, big sister program or a mentoring program.” (5) With her suggestion sent, there was nothing to do but wait and see if it would really happen. works

The Peer Advisor Program was officially founded and established in 1984 in the Office of African-American Affairs. At the time of this writing, there are few or no records available of the first five years of the program. Dean Terry recalls that it was initially somewhat different from what she had proposed, including that it did not work with every Black first-year and entering transfer student at UVA. Rather, the PA Program originally only worked with students

^aSylvia V. Terry would continue to follow the research of many scholars throughout her time with the Peer Advisor Program. A list of publications that influenced her work, but are not explicitly referenced in this paper, can be found in Appendix A: Bibliography of Publications Important to Dean Terry’s Work.

who were members of the Summer Transition Program run by the Office of African-American Affairs (OAAA). From her post in the Office of Undergraduate Admission, Dean Terry was unable to work directly with the PA Program during this time, but her interest in it never waned. It was not long before she had the opportunity to turn the Peer Advisor Program into what she had always envisioned.

Directorship of the Peer Advisor Program

In 1989, Dean Terry transferred to the Office of African-American Affairs at the University of Virginia and became the director of the Peer Advisor Program. Informed by her years in the Office of Undergraduate Admission, she had a clear vision in mind of what she wanted the program to be and what she wanted it to accomplish. In a presentation to the Board of Visitors, Dean Terry defined the PA Program's objectives as follows: "To provide students with a caring and supportive environment," "To promote academic excellence," "To inform students about the services and resources available at the University of Virginia," "To encourage involvement in University organizations and activities," and "To increase the retention of entering African-American students through assisting with academic and social transitions," (6). A personalized, one-on-one experience between Peer Advisors "PAs" and advisees was at the heart of all of these goals. Dean Terry understood that the best way to reach students was by developing personal relationships with them.

Dean Terry led the program by example and was as personally involved with every PA and advisee as she possibly could be, saying in a recent interview, "I tried to be a Peer Advisor to my Peer Advisors and emulate the things I asked them to do," (5). By sending countless cards, personalized handwritten notes, and thousands of emails she was constantly in touch with her students and tried to be as accessible as possible. Furthermore, she encouraged students to come

to her office and talk with her about their experiences. She also asked her PAs to inform her of all of their advisees' accomplishments and concerns. Everything she did was to remind students that there were people at UVA who wanted to support them and see them succeed. Dean Terry explained this personalized approach saying,

My role as Program Director...extends beyond the administration of the program...I also do outreach to complement the efforts of Peer Advisors...The rationale behind my expanded role is to help make the transition easier for students in connecting with faculty as a whole...If I can make students comfortable in coming to me, perhaps this will be a first step in approaching other faculty (2).

Dean Terry encouraged her Peer Advisors to have this same personalized approach to their advisees. This approach was informed largely by what Dean Terry called the “caring person syndrome.” She wrote in “Peer Advising: The Link between Admission and Retention,” that, “If a college student has someone to whom he or she can turn--someone who cares--if he has a supportive network of peers and/or faculty in place--the chances for remaining in college are enhanced.”^b Based on this understanding, Dean Terry fostered the “caring person syndrome” between PAs and advisees.

The Peer Advisor/Advisee Relationship

Interestingly, the relationship between Peer Advisors and advisees could actually begin before the students were even accepted into the University. Dean Terry noted in her presentation for the John Templeton Foundation, “Through meeting Peer Advisors at recruitment programs

^b This understanding was based on research from several texts. These included: *Preventing Students From Dropping Out* (7); *The Impact of College on Students* (8); *Blacks in College: A Comparative Study of Students' Success in Black and White Institutions* (9); *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research* (10); *Black Students in Higher Education* (11); “Connecting Students to Institutions: Keys to Retention and Success” (12); and “Student Retention, Social Support and Dropout Intervention: Comparison of Black and White Students” (13).

sponsored by the Office of Admissions, parents and students alike value these special upperclassmen whom they meet. It is not uncommon for students (and parents) to be influenced during this investigative stage of college exploration.” (14) She went on to quote an article from the *Roanoke Times and World News* which highlighted the Peer Advisor influence on potential applicants. The article said, “Both Lindsey and her mother were impressed by a senior peer advisor they met when they visited UVA... ‘I want you to come here, and I want you to be like [the mentor],’ Lindsey said her mother told her. Lindsey herself is a mentor now.” (15)

Once the students accepted their admission into UVA, the next step to ensure that both parties could have a personal, beneficial relationship was to consider how they were matched. Each year, Dean Terry took the matching process between PAs and advisees under careful consideration. PAs would provide vital academic, extracurricular, and social support to their protégés, so she spent a great deal of time reading every application to pair students with similar interests. It was a time consuming but necessary task; PAs would better assist their advisees if they were interested in the same subjects and/or extracurricular activities. The upperclassmen could suggest courses, programs, and clubs based on their own experiences and serve as personalized guides both in the classroom and out.

Once she matched the students, contact between the PAs and advisees began the summer prior to the advisees’ first semester. Dean Terry wanted the first-year and entering transfer students to feel they had a community before they even arrived on Grounds. Therefore, in the summer, every PA would write unique, personalized letters to their advisees, introducing him or herself and beginning to form a bond. One first-year student responded to this introductory letter saying, “Before I had even arrived at the University, I felt the backing of a strong community of

peers. Furthermore, my parents were comforted by the character and integrity of the students and administrator who would be guiding me through my first semester at the University,” (2).

Major Events and Programming

There were several Peer Advisor Program events throughout the year, both to help the students get acclimated to the University and to celebrate their successes. The first major event was the Welcoming Reception and Program on move-in day for the students and their families. The President of the University, the Vice President for Student Affairs, and the Dean of African-American Affairs would speak, addressing the significance of the University’s difficult past and the possibilities for its future. All of the Peer Advisors attended to meet their advisees face to face and assuage any move-in jitters. One of the most moving parts of the reception was what Dean Terry called the “march of PAs.” “Dressed in their Peer Advisor Program tee shirts, advisors walk down the aisles of the auditorium to individually introduce themselves [giving their names, majors, and an organization in which they were involved]. When the ceremony ends, the students have provided a wall around the families giving a sense (symbolic and real) of comfort, protection, and community,” (2).

The next major event was an orientation called Harambee, a Swahili word meaning, “Let’s work together.” This orientation was designed to inform and encourage the new first-year and entering transfer students by outlining expectations and highlighting student resources. Perhaps one of the most inspiring aspects of this event was the sense of ownership that it fostered for the students. It was crucial to Dean Terry that the students recognize their ownership of the University so they could make it theirs to shape, enhance, and thrive within. Holding up a model of the Rotunda, she would stand before the students asking, “Whose university is this?” She would ask them repeatedly until they responded, powerfully and confidently, that this university

belonged to them. She believed that this sense of ownership was crucial to retaining students. “It’s important for a student to feel a connection with an institution,” Dean Terry said. “If I’m not connected in any way, I can leave there in a moment. But that’s one of the things we try to do in the program--to provide that personal support, to provide a connection with U.Va.,” (4). One student commented on this moving ceremony at the “Ridley Board ‘Tribute to Dean Terry’ Upon Her Retirement” event saying, “I love Dean Terry! Because of her, not only did I become a Peer Advisor, but I learned to embrace this university as my own (as she so passionately stated at Harambee, holding the replica of the Rotunda).”

Mindful that her students deserved and needed recognition for their accomplishments, Dean Terry created Harambee II, an event that celebrated the students’ completion of their first semester at UVA. She would always invite alumni to speak and share their experiences and successes. She would tell her students, “Thousands upon thousands of students enter college just like you in August, but not all of them completed their first semester, and you have. Thousands upon thousands of students enter college in the fall just like you, but not all of them returned, but you did. (4)

In addition to these major events, the program sponsored several other enrichment opportunities, including “Raising the Bar” which aimed to raise the average GPA of first-years. In this initiative, PAs and advisees would gather weekly or more to tutor each other and study together. Workshops such as a second-year panel, pre-professional week, Majors Night, Pre-Med Night, Study Abroad, Pre-Law, Pre-Commerce, etc. would provide additional support and ongoing engagement for the students. The PA Program was constantly engaging with the students, providing opportunities for program participation and personal enhancement.

Recruitment and Training for the Peer Advisors

The Peer Advisors had to assume a great deal of responsibility as they mentored their students, so selecting the right candidates was a vital task. The ideal PA would be, “upright, responsible, organized, sincere, compassionate, personable, tolerant, creative, attentive, a listener, a sustainer of relationships, and one who relates well to others,” (14). Additionally, PAs were expected to have a minimum GPA of 2.8. Every applicant was required to submit a written application and additional writing supplement, followed by an interview complete with running possible scenarios.

A few years into Dean Terry’s directorship with the program, the OAAA’s Parents Advisory Association contacted the Office of the President to propose increased funding for the program. Their request was approved and the funds went to provide the program with training for the PAs. This training eventually evolved into a series of workshops throughout the year. These workshops would cover a wide range of topics, such as academic advising, problem solving, interpersonal relations, safety, crisis management, sexual assault, women’s issues, and men’s issues. The training for new Peer Advisors began in the spring as they were not assigned advisees until the summer. This training was held for three Saturdays throughout March and April and explored the PA Program’s history and philosophy. For example, in the session run by Dean Terry and the PA Orientation Committee the newly selected PAs worked in groups to create a Peer Advisor program “model.” They also discussed issues facing the student body such as first-year problems, racial and other stereotyping, problem solving, academics, and resources. The new PAs practiced being Peer Advisors by having veteran PAs serve as their advisees. This was a very valuable mock process as the veteran PAs could present real-life problems for the new PAs to tackle. Time was set aside each Saturday for a collaborative discussion in which the

newcomers received feedback and suggestions from the PA Orientation Committee. Finally, following the three Saturday orientation sessions, Dean Terry met with each new PA individually to review what they had learned and discuss their responsibilities and commitment to the program.

There was similar training in August before all the first-years arrived on Grounds. During this training, the new and veteran Peer Advisors participated in a three-hour ropes course to enhance group bonding and team building. It was also important to Dean Terry that the PAs make connections across the University. In order to do this, she would ask various faculty and staff from across Grounds to host sessions for the PAs. These sessions covered a broad range of topics such as academic advising and the Counseling & Psychological Services office. It was a way to connect the PAs to the resources the University had to offer. There was also a Faculty/Peer Advisor Cookout where the PAs could create a variety of connections. These opportunities provided PAs with venues to meet and interact with UVA administrators, faculty, and staff.

Finally, there was a Mid-Year Retreat held at the beginning of the spring. The topics for discussion during the retreat were often based on experiences and issues that had come up during the fall semester. For example, one year the focus was on the “Three R’s of the PA Program.” The concurrent sessions were on the “Responsibility to the Program,” “Responsibility to Advisees,” and “Responsibility to You.” The orientation, ongoing training, and development opportunities were designed to prepare PAs for a broad spectrum of possibilities as they worked with their advisees and with one another. When asked why the PA Program worked, Dr. M. Rick Turner (Dean of the OAAA from 1988-2006) said, “It works so well because of how it’s managed and how it’s developed and the passion that goes into that. Sylvia Terry...is the best in

the country. She insists on excellence. She trains her [peer advisers]. They are trained to serve African-American students, and it starts before the students even get here.” (16)

The Program’s Impact on the Peer Advisors

While the purpose of the Peer Advisor Program was to provide support for first-year and entering transfer students, the program could be just as beneficial for the Peer Advisors themselves. Dean Terry was vigilant in making sure that the PA Program provided support for its Peer Advisors. In a conference presentation titled “Keeping the ‘M’ (Motivation) in Mentoring” presented at the International Mentoring Conference in Fort Worth, Texas, Dean Terry said, “The mentors [the Peer Advisors] are in the same environment as their protégés. Thus, it is important for them to receive the same kind of nurturing and the same kind of support they provide our first-year and entering transfer students.” (17) Dean Terry always remembered that while her PAs were some of the most dedicated and accomplished people that UVA had to offer, they were still students and needed support.

Dean Terry created a supportive network for her Peer Advisors in a variety of ways, the first of which being that she was constantly asking them for their feedback. She understood the value of their perspective and would have the PAs submit weekly reports to her. She did this so that, at least once a week, all of the PAs would have a chance to interact with her or their peers as they turned in their reports. It was a small but consistent way to make sure the students had access to her and each other. The PAs also had mailboxes at the OAAA that Dean Terry used for official correspondence, treats, and notes of encouragement. The mailboxes provided another way to bring students into the OAAA and form a stronger community. In addition to the weekly reports, Dean Terry would have personal appointments with the PAs throughout the year to

better understand their experience. Dean Terry described these meetings saying, “It is our time without interruption to focus solely on them - the Peer Advisors - as people – not as role models, not as confidants, not as shoulders on which to lean. It is my time to provide them with support, encouragement or a listening ear.” (17)

Another important element of the Peer Advisor experience was autonomy. Dean Terry recognized the importance of assigning responsibility and autonomy to her PAs not only in their roles as Peer Advisors, but also as vital support within program’s structure. She said, “I grabbed the opportunity to have the mentors take ownership beyond their protégés into the actual shaping of the program as an entity.” (17) As the structure of the program evolved over time, PAs were assigned to more and more leadership positions. For instance, in her third year Dean Terry appointed five Senior Peer Advisors to help her keep the program running smoothly. Over time, those five positions would evolve into leadership Co-Chair positions, an Executive Committee, Selections Committee, PA Relations, PA Accountability Committee, Pre-Med Committee, The BST (Black Study Time) Committee, and the Newsletter Committee. “Through committees,” said Dean Terry, “my mentors now help select new Peer Advisors, orientate and train them, design the homepage and the newsletters, evaluate one another, and help plan and implement program activities.” (17)

The last way Dean Terry ensured her PAs had a positive experience with the Peer Advisor Program was by recognizing them for all the work they did. She would acknowledge their successes (in both their roles as PAs as well as their work more broadly across the University) in the PA newsletter for advisees, “First Year Achiever.” She would also recognize them in the weekly newsletter for Peer Advisors, the “PA Memo.” She placed a box of cutout stars by the Peer Advisor mailboxes so that she and the other PAs could write little notes of

encouragement and recognition. Dean Terry described the End of the Year BBQ saying, “Each mentor receives a certificate of appreciation. I give the committee chairs books and the Senior Peer Advisor (president) an engraved keepsake. Every graduating mentor receives a rose. I say words—the mentors say words—and (because we are a hugging program) we give lots and lots of hugs.” (17) Finally, Dean Terry said at the end of the fall semester, “I send the parents of the Peer Advisors a personalized letter from me thanking them for the quality of their son or daughter’s work.” (17)

On being a Peer Advisor, one student remarked that, “Being a Peer Advisor this year has definitely helped me grow and mature in my college life. It has given me the opportunity to have someone look up to me for guidance, and for me, in turn, to use the experiences (both good and bad) that I had during my first year.” (2) Another had similar sentiments saying,

I feel that being a Peer Advisor has benefited me in various ways. Academically, I have seen my grades improve each semester since I first became a PA. All of the suggestions for academic success that we learn to pass on to our advisees have really helped me as well. I now attend review sessions, office hours, form study groups, and many other things that I have learned through this program...this program allows me to have a whole other family which I can turn to and be comfortable with...Lastly, being a Peer Advisor has been part of my social experience here at UVA. (2)

Internal Assessment

From her first year with the Peer Advisor Program, Dean Terry wanted feedback from her students. In her presentation, “Peer Advising: The Link between Admission and Retention, she quoted M. Lee Upcraft who wrote, “The effectiveness of efforts to promote first-year student

success is not self-evident, nor should it be. There should be evidence of their effectiveness...”

(18) Based on this understanding, she knew that it was critical to collect evidence of the program’s value. There were monthly Peer Advisor meetings during which Dean Terry and the PAs reflected on the previous month and voiced any potential concerns. While these meetings were invaluable both to the PAs and the program itself, Dean Terry also utilized more formal means of gaining feedback. The program was internally assessed through, “PA Report cards, telephone spot checks, mid-year interviews, and end of the year evaluations,” (2). The end of the year evaluations were completed by both PAs and advisees which allowed Dean Terry to map a clear picture of the program’s effectiveness from both perspectives. Every year Dean Terry would use the information obtained to better inform her approach to the program. It was, “never a stagnant program,” she explained. “Whatever information I got, I used to shape other things,” (1). Each year she wrote detailed reports about the state of the program, highlighting both the accomplishments and the areas needing improvement.

It was not only internal assessments that found the PA Program to be effective. From 1995-1999, the University of Virginia’s Institutional Assessment & Studies office conducted the “Longitudinal Study of Undergraduate Education: Class of 1999.” (19) Dean Terry explained, “It [the study] found that during their first year of enrollment, Black students rated the Office of African-American Affairs Peer Advisor Program more highly than any other resource offered by the University of Virginia. In subsequent years as they moved through the pipeline, they continued to talk about the program’s impact.” (2)

Recognition

In 2009, the year Dean Terry retired, the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* released an article stating, “Our calculations show that by a large margin the University of Virginia has the highest black student graduation rate of any state-chartered institution in the nation. The black graduation rate at the university is 87 percent,” (20). This is just one of several articles the journal had written stating that The University of Virginia was leading the nation’s flagship universities in Black graduation rates. These numbers had not always been high, however. Graduation rates for Black students rose significantly from the 80s to the 90s^c and The Peer Advisor Program has been cited as one of the main contributing factors. In a May 1998 letter sent to alumni and friends, UVA president, John T. Casteen, III noted:

Graduation rates remain excellent. Overall, 91 percent of students entering the University complete their degrees within six years, which is the national standard of measure.

Faculty and students take special pride in the fact that no fewer than 89 percent of our African-American students graduate within six years. This is the highest such graduation rate in the country. Strongly supportive parents and an innovative peer advising program overseen by Associate Dean Sylvia Terry have been critical components of these students’ success.

Echoing his words, a 2006 article by *The New York Times* stated, “The University of Virginia has long led the nation’s public universities in its graduation rate for blacks, according to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, which tracks graduation rates of African-Americans at the nation’s major public and private higher education institutions. The main reason, university officials and students...say, is the structured and intensive mentoring program.” (21)

^c These graduation rates were calculated from data on “Graduation Counts of First-Time Freshmen” provided by The University of Virginia’s Institutional Assessment & Studies Office.

Dean Terry presented at two international conferences on behalf of the Peer Advisor Program: the 14th International First-Year Experience Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii in 2001; and the International Mentoring Conference in Fort Worth, Texas in 2002. She also presented at numerous national conferences, including but not limited to the National Student Retention Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana; the Best Practices in Black Student Achievement in Clemson, South Carolina; and the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Chicago, Illinois.^d

The Peer Advisor Program has received both national and University-wide recognition for its work. In 1993, the American Association of University Administrators (an organization with national and international membership) recognized the Peer Advisor Program for “exemplary practice in achieving campus diversity.” (6) When informing Dean Terry of the award, the Chair of the Exemplary Models Awards Committee noted that many institutions are interested in recruiting students, “but are not always as concerned about retention.” (22) In 1998, the John Templeton Foundation recognized the Peer Advisor Program as an “exemplary first year program” of character development. (6)

The Peer Advisor Program was featured in articles by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Associated Press*, the *Journal for Higher Education Management*, and the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. It was also cited in four books during Dean Terry’s time with the program: *The Multicultural Student’s Guide to Colleges: What Every African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic, and Native American Applicant Needs to Know About America’s Top Schools* (23); *Mentoring Minorities in Higher Education: Passing the Torch* (24); *Instructing and Mentoring the African American College Student: Strategies for Success in Higher*

^d A list of the conferences can be found in Appendix B: National and International Conference Presentations on the Peer Advisor Program by Dean Sylvia V. Terry.

Education (25); and *What Makes Racial Diversity Work in Higher Education: Academic Leaders Present Successful Policies and Strategies* (26).

During her time with the program, Dean Terry and the Peer Advisor Program were recognized by UVA's 7 Society, Z Society, and The Raven Society. Dean Terry was also inducted into the Raven Society in 1997. She was the inaugural recipient of the Elizabeth Zintl Leadership Award in 1998, the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award in 2003, and was honored twice by the P.U.M.P.K.I.N. Society. Following her retirement, the Walter N. Ridley Board of Directors created the "Sylvia V. Terry Scholarship" in her honor which provides, "two years of full tuition-and-fees support for the recipient," (27). The plaque she was presented reads, "The 9000 Black alumni you've touched honor your leadership, your service, and you mentorship." The Alumni Board of Managers of the University of Virginia Alumni Association created a resolution in Terry's honor acknowledging and expressing, "gratitude for the distinguished service she has rendered to the University of Virginia...Central to the success of generations of African-American students, always quick to aid the Alumni Association's efforts to support diversity and always caring for each individual student. Sylvia V. Terry has created a legacy that will long be remembered as nothing short of phenomenal and amazing." The Raven Society presented her "The Raven Faculty Award" for her University work, one of the University's most prestigious faculty awards. The OAAA established the Sylvia V. Terry August Radiance Award, "celebrating her tireless dedication to the African-American student experience." Finally, John Casteen, III, the President of the University of Virginia, in paying tribute to Terry upon her retirement, noted, "Over the years, in your various roles, you gave generation after generation of our students the self-confidence they needed to apply for admission and then the guidance they needed to earn top degrees...Thousands upon thousands of women and men around the nation

are succeeding in their careers and community lives because of what they learned here from you and your student advisors.”^e

Conclusion

Dean Sylvia V. Terry retired from the University in 2009, but thanks to all of her work the Peer Advisor Program lives on. To this day, the program continues to provide support for UVA’s entering first-year and transfer students under the current director and associate dean, Dr. Kimberley C. Bassett. When reflecting on her time at the University, Dean Terry stated, “UVA students have been my life – my calling. To work with them through recruitment in the Office of Admission and to work with them through retention in the Office of African-American Affairs’ Peer Advisor Program has been a tremendous experience. I love these students and am proud beyond measure of all that they have done and for all they are achieving both at the University and beyond. They have made the University of Virginia theirs!” By fostering a sense of community, ownership, and pride, Dean Terry’s years with the Peer Advisor Program saw it become an indispensable part of the UVA community. Informed by what she observed during her time with the Office of Undergraduate Admission, she spent her 20-year term with the Peer Advisor Program working to bridge the gap between admission and retention efforts at UVA. Perhaps one student best illuminated the program’s role as the link between admission and retention saying in a program evaluation, “It was the Office of Admission that attracted me to the University of Virginia; it was the Peer Advisor Program that kept me here,” (2).

^e A list of awards and recognitions can be found in Appendix C: Awards and Honors Bestowed Upon the Peer Advisor Program and/or Dean Sylvia V. Terry.

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Appendix B
National and International Conference Presentations on the Peer Advisor Program by
Dean Sylvia V. Terry

- 1992 The Minority Student Today Conference, San Antonio, TX
- 1993 National Assembly, American Association of University Administrators, San Diego, CA
- 1996 National Student Retention Conference, New Orleans, LA
- 1997 National Conference on Multiethnic Perspectives, Arlington, VA
- 1997 Mapping a New Direction: Student Success, Harrisonburg, VA
- 1997 Annual Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education, Memphis, TN
- 2001 14th International First-Year Experience Conference, Honolulu, HI
- 2002 International Mentoring Conference, Fort Worth, TX
- 2002 National Black Student Leadership Conference: “The Ends and Outs of Peer Advising”
- 2005 National Symposium on Retention, Dallas, TX
- 2005- Best Practices in Black Student Achievement, Clemson University, SC
2006
- 2005- National Conference on Race and Ethnicity, Chicago, IL
2006
- 2008 Dean Terry presented a televised internet conference from her office for the National Symposium Conference sponsored by the University of Oklahoma. This was an “encore presentation” following Dean Terry’s presentation at the National Symposium Conference in 2005 in Dallas, TX.
- 2008 College Board Conference, Houston, TX
- 2008 Genome Institute National Meeting
- 2008 Gallaudet University presentation, Washington, D.C.

Appendix C
Awards and Honors Bestowed Upon the Peer Advisor Program and/or
Dean Sylvia V. Terry

- 1991 P.U.M.P.K.I.N. Society recognizes Dean Terry for her work with the Peer Advisor Program
- 1993 American Association of University Administrators recognizes the Peer Advisor Program for “Exemplary Practice in Achieving Campus Diversity.”
- 1993 “Champion Beyond the Playing Field,” The UVA Department of Intercollegiate Sports
- 1994 7 Society recognizes Dean Terry for her work with the Peer Advisor Program
- 1995 UVA Department of Intercollegiate Sports recognizes Sylvia V. Terry for her “Devoted service to the University.”
- 1996 Washington D.C. Chapter of the National Organization “InRoads” recognizes Terry as “Educator of the Year”
- 1997 Dean Terry’s induction into The Raven Society
- 1998 John Templeton Foundation recognizes the Peer Advisor Program as an “exemplary first-year program,” of character development.
- 1998 Elizabeth Zintl Leadership Award (She was one of the two inaugural recipients for this leadership award.)
- 1999 Z Society recognizes the Peer Advisor Program at Harambee II
- 2000 PUMPKIN Society awards Sylvia V. Terry a second time saying, “It is difficult to imagine a community without the many blessings which you have brought, the love that you spread daily with your perfect smile and kindness.”
- 2002 The Good Society recognizes the Peer Advisor Program
- 2003 Sylvia V. Terry is presented with the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award, which recognizes “Excellence of Character and Service to Humanity.”
- 2006 The Jefferson Trust (UVA Alumni Associations’ new endowment fund for excellence at The University of Virginia) awarded the Peer Advisor Program one of its inaugural grants in the amount of \$5000 in support of the work of the Peer Advisor Program.
- 2007 The Z Society recognizes the Peer Advisor Program at Harambee II

- 2008 The Seven Society recognizes Dean Terry for her work saying, “your passion is a guiding light for all to follow.”
- 2008 Z Society recognizes Terry for her “selfless work in serving the University.”

Other recognitions include but are not limited to the Golden Key Induction, the “Above and Beyond” Award (from the OAAA Parents), and a Dedication from the Athletic Department.

Other honors for Peer Advisor work following Dean Terry’s retirement include:

The Walter N. Ridley Board of Directors created the Sylvia V. Terry Scholarship to honor her work. The Board notes in the award’s inscription, “To our role model Dean Sylvia V. Terry. The 9000 Black alumni you’ve touched honor your leadership, your service and your mentorship.” The Board also sent Terry on a “Farewell Tour” to interact with the alumni she recruited through the Office of Admission or retained through the Peer Advisor Program.

The University of Virginia Alumni Association Board of Managers issued a proclamation recognizing and expressing “gratitude for the distinguished services she [Terry] has rendered to the University of Virginia...Central to the success of generations of African-American students, always quick to aid the Alumni Association’s effort to support diversity, and always caring for each individual student, Sylvia V. Terry has created a legacy that will long be remembered as nothing short of phenomenal and amazing.”

The University of Virginia Office of African American Affairs establishment of the Sylvia V. Terry August Radiance Award, “celebrating her tireless dedication to the African-American student experience.”

The Raven Society presented Dean Terry the “Raven Award” for her service and contribution to the University of Virginia. This is the highest honor the Society bestows on faculty.

John Casteen, III, the President of the University of Virginia, in paying tribute to Terry upon her retirement, noted, “Over the years, in your various roles, you gave generation after generation of our students the self-confidence they needed to apply for admission and then the guidance they needed to earn top degrees...Thousands upon thousands of women and men around the nation are succeeding in their careers and community lives because of what they learned here from you and your student advisors.”

In 2011, The Office of African-American Affairs’ Parents Advisory Association presented Sylvia V. Terry a “Star Award” for her “Commitment to Education” and “For Your Untiring Commitment to the Office of African-American Affairs.”

Appendix D

Comments from Students on the Peer Advisor Program and Sylvia V. Terry

“The Peer Advisor Program has been helpful to me by placing me with an upperclassman who can make UVA more personalized. My Peer Advisor often calls me to check on my academic and personal development... My Peer Advisor nominated me for a leadership program so I could utilize my abilities along with House Council...The Peer Advisor Program is beneficial to minorities because it provides a support system through academics, culture, and social aspects.” (1995-96 First-Year Student, “Longitudinal Study of Undergraduate Education: Class of 1999.”)

“The resources at the OAAA are unlike [any] other at the University. Dean Terry [Director of the Peer Advisor Program] is a wonderful resource. Dean Turner [The Dean of the Office of African-American Affairs] is a wonderful student advocate, and the Peer Advisor Program is simply remarkable. It’s comforting as an African-American student to know that there is an office full of people that actually care about your success and wellbeing at the University...” (1996-97 Second-Year Student, Unsolicited Response, “Longitudinal Study of Undergraduate Education: Class of 1999.”)

“Lavar gives me personalized advice about my major in particular and my plans that I want to make in the future. When I have questions about anything, if Lavar does not know the answer, he knows who I can get in touch with to find out. If he doesn’t know at that moment, he promptly gets back to me with the information. I speak with Lavar weekly, either in person or on the telephone. I would definitely give him an ‘A’ for his role as a Peer Advisor. He’s been a heaven send in making a difference to me here at UVA.” (1997-98 First-Year, Peer Advisor Evaluation.)

“My Peer Advisor was extremely helpful. He was always there for me... He helped me make very important decisions regarding both academic and social issues. My first-year experience would not have been as rewarding, fun, or complete if he had not been there...” (1998-99 First Year, “Peer Advisor Program End of the Year Evaluation.”)

“...my PA went above and beyond the call of duty...No matter the day or time she was always available to talk and give an encouraging word to me. I believe she has helped me tremendously in my spiritual, academic, and social growth at UVA. If it weren’t for her guidance and assistance, I am sure that I would’ve gotten very discouraged in my transition from being the “best” in a small private school to one of the ‘mediocre’ students at a large University. Kisa made me believe, even after a few initial setbacks that I could be the best again. Thanks to her loving advice and nurturing care, I can say that I have been successful and am welcoming the upcoming year knowing that I will do even better because of the strong foundation which she helped me to build....” (1999-2000 First-Year, “Peer Advisor End of the Year Evaluation.”)

“I ABSOLUTELY LOVE Michelle. She has been such a tremendous help in my feeling comfortable here at the University. Her words of wisdom and insights on situations have totally enlightened me. She is concerned about her peer advisees and does everything in her ability to alleviate our stress. She has meetings and fun activities all of the time...I could not have asked for a better Peer Advisor. Michelle is my friend, my mentor, and I have a great deal of respect for her. I sincerely hope that if I am chosen to be a Peer Advisor next year, I can do my job as well as she has. I just thought I would take this opportunity to let you know how much I appreciate Michelle and all the things she has done for me. She has truly made me feel like this is my

second home. Thanks for having such a wonderful program.” (2000-2001 First-Year, Peer Advisor Program Report Card)

“Wow, Chantale is absolutely amazing!!! She is extremely knowledgeable and such a fun person to be around. Ever since the first time I spoke with her on the phone over summer break, I knew somehow everything would be just fine. I really am happy to be a part of the Peer Advisor Program.” (2000-2001 First-Year, Peer Advisor Program Report Card)

“I LOVE the PA PROGRAM. The OAAA is holding it DOWN!!! Great initiative, great effort, I don’t know what I’d do if I didn’t have a PA. Just the idea of having someone who will support me was an incentive for me to come here and it really eased up things for me. A plus for the Program.” (Sylvia V. Terry’s “2005-2006 End of the Year Report.”)

“I truly think this is a great program! It made me feel more comfortable here as a first-year. It helped me to meet more people like myself who have a genuine concern for me and other African-American first-years. During the times that I was questioning where on earth I fit in on the campus, my PA would always happen to call me. Whenever I began to feel like there was nothing here for Black people in this entire town, my PA told me more about Black resources in the city and on Grounds. This program made all of the difference in how much I really enjoyed my first year.” (Sylvia V. Terry’s “2005-2006 End of the Year Report.”)

“Kimberly Jones took peer advising to another level, doing things that not most peer advisors would consider: like driving me home for breaks, taking me grocery shopping, inviting me to her house for dinner, and so much more.” (Sylvia V. Terry’s “2005-2006 End of the Year Report”)

“Since my enrollment at the University, I have recognized the first semester to be integral in shaping a student’s outlook on college and their primary assessment of their abilities and future goals. It is necessary to have a fellow student who can assist in our acclimation to the academic and social climate of the University. New students are challenged to move away from their comfort zone and to excel in a more competitive arena. They must face obstacles that only the insight of students who have faced similar feats can help surmount. Students, particularly, students of color, need resources that can offer support for their sustained effort at the institution. In my transition, I have faced challenges on two fronts: at home as well as at school, which at times impacted my performance and self-confidence. Being able to call my peer advisor or meet with her truly helped to alleviate my anxieties and fears in order to further persevere. Though a PA does not fill the role of parent, their advice is significant in the decisions that many students must face. PA’s are not solely helpful to their advisees; they are also pillars of strength for their fellow classmates.” (Quote taken from Sylvia V. Terry’s “Peer Advising: The Link between Admission and Retention” presentation.)

“Dean Terry, you are irreplaceable to me, so many of my UVA memories are littered with your smile, and because of you, I know that this IS and will ALWAYS be MY UNIVERSITY. I love you.” (Comment from a student at the “Ridley Board ‘Tribute to Dean Terry’ Upon Her Retirement” event.)

“Dear Dean Terry, no matter how sick or stressed I was, you were always there to cheer me up. You make me feel at home even though I was so far away from it. Your smiles and hugs made my days as a first-year a whole lot easier, because I knew you cared. Thank you and I appreciate

everything you have done for me.” (Comment from a student at the “Ridley Board ‘Tribute to Dean Terry’ Upon Her Retirement” event.)

“Any visitor to the University campus that crossed paths with Dean Terry heard about the most promising collection of students that UVA had to offer, the Peer Advisors. Many of us viewed ourselves as typical students, working hard in the classroom and contributing to the University Community. But Dean Terry saw young men and women destined for greatness; she treated us as though we would be lawyers, doctors, and CEO’s in a few years. If you talk to someone like that for long enough, they just might go and apply to that Fortune 500 company or that Ivy League medical school. And when they get there, they will know that they are supposed to be. Year after year Dean Terry reminded us that UVA was “our” university. If UVA can be mine, why can’t the world? Thank you Dean Terry. (Comment from a scrapbook gifted to Dean Terry by several of her Peer Advisors in the 2008-2009 school year. From a UVA Alumna, Class of 2007.)

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