

Preview Week- a big program with little recognition

A chance for minority students to adapt to Behrend

by Danette Parrett
Features Editor

Each year countless hours are put into a program that much of Behrend's campus knows little about. Preview Week is a program that is designed to help the transition of minority students to the Erie community and, more specifically, Behrend.

Preview Week was founded in 1989 by Biddy Brooks and P.J. Brown. They developed the program on the basis of the needs and experiences shared by previous minority students.

Gerald Spates, the Minority Advisor and Special Programs Counselor, now heads Preview. Spates works all summer developing the programs that Preview Week will entail. Preview is held one week prior to Freshman Orientation.

Spates focuses the program on the college adjustment.

"We are looking at the geographical locations that our students are coming from. A lot of them are coming from urban areas and the inner city. To come to a place like Erie, and then to Behrend, is to them like going to the boonies. We bring minorities here to help them get acclimated to Erie and Behrend. We look long-term to help their adjustments and bring them to like this place."

Jamele Adams, a fifth semester Psychology/Pre Law major, feels that Preview "made my transition from a large, busy city to a rural, slow-paced area smoother."

It made me want to educate white students more about minorities and what it is like to be black."

The main objectives developed in 1989 remain the same today. Preview Week puts its major emphasis on:

- Becoming acquainted with and developing a sense of community with other minority students.
- Critical thinking and study skills assessments.
- Skill building for college adjustment and lifelong learning.
- Field trips to Greater Erie.
- Introduction to University policies and procedures.
- Testing and freshman advising (if needed).
- Fun and relaxation.

Spates notes that "the only change is that we have eliminated activities that aren't as helpful to students, and we've added new programs."

The basics of the week cover introducing study skills, exposing them to certain departments, and exploring issues like racism and other major issues the students might face.

"It is not to make students aware that racism exists here. We are working students, putting them through scenarios, teaching them and talking to them. We don't want students to come here and automatically assume that racism is going to occur.

If an instructor says something to them that seems racially motivated, unless it is very direct, we want to assure the students that the professor would do or say the same thing to anyone. We don't want them to be paranoid."

The only plans Spates has for

peer for Preview Week. She feels that Preview Week has a positive effect on the students.

"It helps the students understand financial aid and their relationships with professors. They get to know Dean Lilley. They get to put a name with the face. It also helps them to adjust not being with a family anymore."

Acting as a peer counselor, she feels that "with having my first semester's experiences, I could use them to help [the students] to adjust. I could give them advice in similar situations, according to

Preview is funded with a proposal through the Educational Opportunity Program Committee (EOPC). Spates notes that he receives a great deal of help.

"We get a lot of support for Preview Week. The budget I submitted had its funds doubled."

Spates attributes his support to the fact that the program helps to retain students in the Penn State system. After tracking the program since its existence, over 60 percent of the students that were in the program have continued their studies at either Behrend or University Park.

is an opportunity to educate, and be educated as well."

Another program generated from Spates's office is Buddy Weekend. This program is targeted towards academically talented high school students. It is a seven year-old program that was directed out of University Park. Now, several branch campuses have adopted the program also. Most of the students who attended this weekend say it was the deciding factor that helped them to decide to stay.

Spates is in the planning stages of a mentor program. It entails matching freshman students with faculty members or upperclassmen.

"I would like to develop this type of 'big brother/big sister' program where you can connect a freshman with an upperclass role model. There are a large portion of faculty and staff that share my opinion."

Spates has also developed a new program that is exclusively for Behrend. It is for minorities and women interested in Behrend majors, more specifically, science and engineering.

"We are trying to get more minorities, especially white women, to go into those primarily male dominated fields"

Spates concentrates the majority of his efforts in programming for the student body, but he also holds other responsibilities.

"I serve as an advisor to the minority students and a few international students. I am the person who advocates programs and activities that will insure their retention here."

Spates facilitated a Black Studies 100 class last spring. He feels the students gain new ideas from diversity courses.

"Some students automatically think in the diversity classes that they have to learn about black culture. [In these classes] we talk about different cultures, religions, women, etc. I'm not sure how I feel about making it a requirement. I don't think we have enough of a choice to offer students."

Spates also oversees disability services and the veterans affairs.

With all these ideas, Spates still sees opportunities for more programs, but he doesn't have the time to take on any new endeavors.

"I'm usually afraid to suggest new things because I am so overloaded. I can't handle anything new, but I would like to see more new programs on this campus."



Gerald Spates, Minority Advisor and Special Programs Counselor, hard at work in Student Affairs.

Tim Barr/Photographer

renovating the program is to include all students, minority and white.

"We have an interesting student makeup. We have a large amount of students who come from areas where they are not exposed to different kinds of people. I think a program like Preview could really benefit everyone if it was expanded."

There are two things that hold Spates back from including all freshman students. First, there are not funds available. Secondly, Preview comes strictly from his office, and encompassing the entire freshman class would be too much work for just one office to handle.

One new program that was developed was that of Preview Peers. Peers are older minority students that act as guides and helpers to the students during Preview.

Catherine Kunkel, a 4th semester history major, acted as a

what I had gone through."

As of now, all the peers are minority students, but next year Spates hopes to invite some white students to be peers as well.

"Right now, the only contact the students have [during Preview] is a session with the RA's. I want more of that. I want to get more students involved. With the RA's, I want young students to know that if their RA is of a different color, they will be given the same treatment."

Spates hopes to convince students that this same attitude in all aspects.

"Sometimes I have students come in and say that they think people are picking on them because they are black or Hispanic. I try to make the students look at the situation objectively. I help them find a better way to approach the situation."

Adams feels that after Preview he realized "what opportunities Behrend had to take a hold of and how much fun you could have doing it."

He also said, "[Preview] let me see where I could implement programs, like *Sweet Daddy's World*, that would educate the students."

"I think after awhile the students usually feel pretty good about being at a place like this. Our students know that not all the other students are open minded or tolerant of differences, even some of the minority students, but we want to help them to bridge the gap."

"We want students not to assume that certain comments are not racially motivated. I understand in the *Collegian* office there was a misunderstanding. Someone said the word 'colored.' Some people don't know we don't use 'colored' anymore. We use African-American or black. That