

Student Center

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Larry Thomas G'99, a School of Education graduate student, has distinguished himself as a student leader on campus. He takes special pride in founding the African American Male Congress.

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—Larry Thomas G'99

Guiding tomorrow's leaders

Larry Thomas G'99 came to Syracuse University determined to take a leadership role in minority student activities. Recognized as a "champion of diversity," he garnered applause from SU officials, including Chancellor Kenneth A. Shaw, for his brainchild, the African American Male Congress (AAMC).

In February 1998, Thomas's vision for the AAMC became a reality. He invited a group of SU freshmen he calls "the cream of the crop" to the Talented Tenth Institute, a 12-week leadership training program he devised to provide intellectual and social challenges. Participants were responsible for leading forums on communication and team-building skills, conflict resolution, negotiation, stress management, and networking. Thomas shared many of the skills he acquired in leadership roles as an undergraduate at Rowan University in New Jersey. The training, Thomas says, elevated the AAMC on campus to "the premier student organization for African American males as emerging leaders."

"I found that being a leader is not just having responsibility fall on you," says Thomas, who is pursuing a master's degree in higher education administration from the School of Education. "This is special leadership training for a core group of African American men in the freshman class."

At Rowan University, Thomas was an active member of the campus chapter of the NAACP, established the chapter newsletter, and founded a prototype of SU's AAMC. Thomas sees the organization as a way to fill a gap in black male leadership. African American women, he observes, have taken a significant interest in leadership roles. In 1994, at the Eighth Annual National Black Student Leadership Conference at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, women pointed to the dearth of African American male leadership. "The women were pleading for help," Thomas says.

The AAMC has earned support from Students Offering Service and the Supportive Services and Residence Life offices. To be eligible for membership, one must be a freshman in good academic standing, have a leadership position in a campus or community organization, and have an interest in effecting social change—something Thomas strives for daily.

A typical day for Thomas, assistant area director for South Campus, is filled with meetings, mentoring, and advising, in addition to his academic responsibilities. He organized the Black History Month calendar of activities; arranged events for I Have a Dream Week to celebrate the life and legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.; and helped develop activities for Women's History Month and Latino Heritage Week. "I just saw a need for these activities," Thomas says. "I thought it was very important to do something to help educate people."

He also has worked closely with Irma Almirall-Padamsee, asso-

ciate dean of student relations and director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs. "There are many people one meets in life who talk about making a real difference in the lives of those around them," Almirall-Padamsee says. "But it is only once in a blue moon that you meet a person like Larry who doesn't merely talk about making change, but invests the necessary time and energy to do it."

The AAMC is recruiting new members this spring, and wants to develop a mentoring program next year with upperclassmen working with students a year behind them. Several members volunteer a few hours a week with the Bishop Forey Foundation, a neighborhood program based on Syracuse's west side and coordinated by the local Catholic Diocese. Eventually, freshman members will mentor high school seniors.

Thomas says he is confident that the congress will continue to grow after he leaves SU. "This is a group with tremendous potential," Thomas says. "They are the leaders of tomorrow." And congress members are grateful to have Thomas's example to follow. "He's done a good job keeping the glue in the seams," says sophomore Kevin Cooper. "He'll do whatever he can to help people reach their goals."

After graduation, Thomas plans to work in higher education for several years and then pursue a Ph.D. in sociology. Above all, he wants people to know he cares. "Students need to know you care," he says, "before they will care what you know."

—KIMBERLY BURGESS

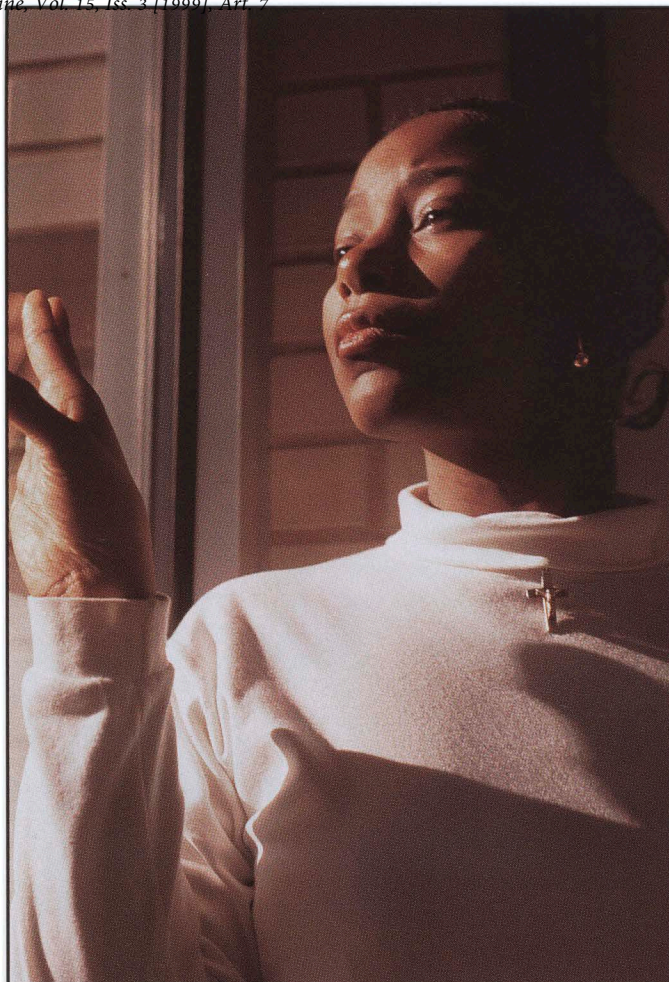
Compassion is the best medicine

During her frequent visits to the SUNY Health Science Center last spring, Judly Pierre '99 tried her best to put even the faintest of smiles on the faces of patients enduring rigorous physical therapy sessions. It wasn't always easy, but the experience affirmed her belief that a career in medicine isn't just a career. To be a good physician, one must have a calling.

"I learned so much from the doctors there, and from the patients," says Pierre, a biology major and Remembrance Scholar. "It was so sad to see people in those situations, because sometimes they really believed they would not get better. The doctors have to encourage them to keep going. It made me appreciate all that doctors do that really isn't about medicine. They use their personalities to help people do what they need to do for themselves."

Professor Marilyn Kerr, director of the biology department's Health Care Professions Advisory Program, says Pierre often displays a similar aptitude for selflessness both in and out of the classroom. "Helpfulness is her second nature," Kerr says. "I don't know anybody who isn't comfortable asking Judly a question, and she cheerfully helps any student who asks for it. I think her number-one attribute is that she is sincere about helping people." Pierre guides classmates through tough organic chemistry and calculus lessons, but she prefers to downplay her efforts. "It's not like I'm doing any formal tutoring," she says. "It's more like I try to help other students figure things out on their own. Sometimes I'm the one learning from them. They may show me a way to solve a problem I hadn't thought of before."

For as long as she can remember, Pierre has wanted to be a doctor. She was initially interested in pediatrics, but has since decided to specialize in gynecology. In particular, she would like to provide care to at-risk young mothers. "Growing up in Brooklyn, I realized a lot of young women have nowhere to go and are not getting proper



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Remembrance Scholar Judly Pierre '99, a biology major, plans to pursue a career in medicine, which will allow her to put her academic talents, work ethic, and compassion for others to good use.

prenatal care," Pierre says. "I felt that was where I could make the biggest impact as a doctor."

Kerr says Pierre has academic ability, a strong work ethic, and solid social skills—important makings of a good doctor. Her gentle demeanor does not convey shyness, but an inviting calm that puts those she meets at ease. "Those are the kinds of students you want to see going into medicine," Kerr says.

While Pierre hopes to attend medical school in New York City, she is grateful for her years in Syracuse. "I left the city because it was all I knew," Pierre says. "The best part about coming here was the opportunity to be on my own and find out who I am. Now I'm ready to go back."

Pierre says her family has always been a strong source of support. Her parents emigrated from Haiti before she was born and the family maintains many Haitian traditions that Pierre proudly embraces. Since the SU community includes a sizable Haitian population, Pierre has found plenty of opportunities to celebrate her ancestry. She is a member of the Haitian American Students' Association, the Caribbean Student Association, and the Latino Dance Troupe. "I consider myself Haitian American," she says. "Many times I even think in Creole. I know people who try very hard to downplay their ancestry, but for me, maintaining those cultural traditions is important. If I am blessed with children, I will pass on those traditions."

—TAMMY CONKLIN