

**Minority Arts and Sciences Program**  
**Educational Principles & Guiding Philosophy**  
**October, 2005**

**Brief History**

The Minority Arts & Sciences Program's establishment in 1993 was the response of the College of Arts & Sciences to the alarming rate of students of color leaving natural science majors, and sometimes the University of Colorado altogether. At its inception, MASP's mission was to support historically underrepresented and marginalized students in the natural sciences and to retain them until their graduation from CU.

MASP has grown dramatically with its student population into the program it is today. Particularly since 1997, its focus has grown beyond its initial charge. MASP is a four-year academic program for an academically adept community of scholars that aids in their transition to post-graduate realms, whether they be graduate school, medical school, law school or other careers. As continuously attested to by current and former MASP students as well as by campus administrators, MASP continues to be relevant and a model program for the University of Colorado at Boulder.

**An Academic Environment for Challenge, Enhancement, and Excellence**

First and foremost, MASP exists as an idea—a state of mind—that transcends its administrators, instructors and students. It must always resist any efforts to undermine its principles and aspirations. It is an idea that unwaveringly holds that students—particularly underrepresented students of color—can achieve academically and intellectually through determination and can persist through inhospitable situations without sacrificing culturally sustaining values. The idea of MASP provides for the creation of an academic space and set of academic challenges that are consistent with the high ideals of the campus and College of Arts and Sciences.

MASP is a program comprised of high-achieving students who aspire to work as an academic community. The creation and development of this Academic Community is dependent on students' continuous achievement of strong grades (the MASP minimum is a 3.0), but more significantly, to wanting to learn more than what is expected in their courses, and sharing this knowledge with their peers. As such, MASP requirements revolve around three major areas: the Summer Program for Excellence in Academics & Community (PEAC), the MASP academic program and academic community support services. As an academic community, MASP students are exposed to the behaviors and activities of scholars and academic professionals. As an academic community, MASP students are exposed to the behaviors and activities of scholars and academic professionals

**MASP Summer Program for Excellence in Academics & Community**

MASP's relationship with its students typically begins the summer prior to their freshman year at CU. MASP invites high school students admitted to CU, all amongst the tops of their classes, to apply to its Summer Program for Excellence in Academics & Community. From this pool of

talented students, participating MASP students and instructors invite only those students they feel would perform best in its highly challenging Summer Program and only those that identify the desire to work in community with other students. Every year 20-30 students (split between majors in the natural sciences & math and those with Social Sciences & Humanities majors) spend 6 weeks attending non-credit classes developed specifically to introduce them to scholarly concepts essential for their success at CU-Boulder.

PEAC's curriculum challenges all students - regardless of pre-college preparation - with conceptual and critical thinking, and to work with each other and their instructors in order to truly understand the topics. Students' PEAC grade point averages determine if they will be invited to join the MASP community and be awarded its \$500/semester scholarship, or whether they will best be served by being referred to one of the other academic communities at CU. Participation in PEAC also fosters the development of the MASP cohort. Students in this high-stress environment band together and learn to support and encourage each other while working toward academic excellence. MASP operates from the assumption that students who successfully complete the summer experience have the intrinsic motivation to join other MASP scholars who are striving for academic excellence. The blend of self-reliance and the ability to work within a cohort community define the essential character of a MASP scholar. The bonds forged during the summer are strong and often last until graduation and beyond.

### **MASP Academic Program**

MASP's identity as an academic program (rather than as an academic support program) has driven its success over the years. MASP continually re-iterates its commitment to academics and familiarity with academic culture, as it best serves our students goals, and how they are perceived in the larger campus community. It is this academic nature that drives MASP's academic component, which includes credit-bearing co-seminars and seminars completely independent of courses offered on the campus and informed by students' schedules, and inter-program advising. It is also its dedication to developing the strongest possible academic program that drives the MASP administrative team to constantly evaluate its entire academic curriculum and to research and develop new components to enrich the program.

### ***Co-Seminars & Seminars***

MASP offers a series of co-seminars for students majoring in the natural sciences and a combination of co-seminars and seminars for students in the Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts. The science co-seminars are co-requisite with specific courses common to many science majors as well as requirements for those students seeking to attend medical school. MASP co-seminars are NEVER courses that focus only on reinforcement of material taken directly from the university courses. While the smaller class size (8-12 students, as opposed to 100-500 in university courses) does present opportunities for students to ask for clarification or explanation, this is not the purpose of the co-seminar. The MASP co-seminar is NOT an extra recitation. The MASP co-seminar begins with material covered in the lecture-based university course but quickly asks students to use and think about this material in a broader sense. The rationale for requiring extra work with more challenging problems is to show students the essential concepts that underlie that which is assumed in the lecture classes.

MASP Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts majors also must fulfill the program's academic requirements. This track has students in co-seminars during their freshman year, which are co-requisite with a Writing class in the fall semester, and an anthropology class in the spring semester. During the sophomore year, however, these students begin taking seminar classes developed specifically to introduce them to academic research and to ultimately have them undertake some form of undergraduate research.

### ***Academic Advising***

Each department requires that students have some contact with their major advisor. In addition to meeting with designated department advisors, students in the program must meet regularly with the MASP Advisors. MASP advisors are familiar with a variety of department requirements down to specific courses, but primarily work with students on: selection of major(s), completion of Arts & Sciences core requirements, assistance in schedule planning, university resources, short term goals (e.g. internships, study abroad opportunities), long-term (post-graduate) plans, and assessment of other relevant skills and opportunities that will enhance the likelihood of whatever they hope to attain. Because MASP advisors usually know students as pre-freshman, and because they are/have been their instructors, they have a much richer knowledge of their students than department advisors could. This knowledge enables them to customize the best plans possible for each individual student.

### **Community Support and Enhancement**

While MASP's academic commitment is continuously stressed, the program's efforts to build a strong community for its students are equally important. MASP has developed ways in which we encourage students to act as a group for each other, as well as to develop relationship with departments and individual from across the campus on behalf of our students.

### ***MASP Student Community Support***

MASP students often cite the importance of their cohort experience and the overall community of scholars as a source of comfort on the campus, and as the overwhelming benefit in their continuing involvement with the program and at the Boulder campus. In fact, our students often motivate non-MASP students to become part of the program, as well. MASP is committed to offering meaningful opportunities for its students to be supportive of each other and to encourage each other.

MASP has four community events during the school year to celebrate students' individual and collective academic achievements, to welcome new members of the community and congratulate our graduates, and to assemble the entire community to interact.

More recently, with the support of the MASP administrative team, a student community board has formed and is working to serve a liaison between the administrators and the students. The MASP Community Board voices student concerns and ideas, and works with input from administrators to address them. They also are organizing fundraising opportunities to subsidize an annual community retreat, seeking to begin a mentoring program for newer members of the program and finding other events to bring everyone together regularly.

### ***MASP Community Enhancement***

In addition to supporting activities for students within the program, MASP brokers relationships with resources from around the campus on behalf of our students. MASP has existing relationships with other LEAD Alliance Programs (e.g., the School of Journalism, Student Academic Services Center and The Ronald E. McNair Postgraduate Program), PLC, the Undergraduate Academy, the CU Honors Department, the Financial Aid Department, the Office of Diversity and Equity, the Biological Sciences Initiative, the Molecular Cellular Developmental Biology department, and CU Health Sciences Center, as well as other individuals and department who want to work with our students. MASP always seeks to expand its network, and has begun developing a relationship with several lawyers to find ways to connect with our pre-law students.

These relationships are vitally important to the program and are continually maintained as resources for our students. They represent both our commitment to our students' pursuit of excellence, as well as the achievement of our former students, which made these relationships possible in the first place.

### **Conclusion**

The Minority Arts & Sciences Program works diligently to challenge its students to achieve their best academically, and to celebrate these achievements in community with them. While the program recognizes a certain measure of its success in working with its highly talented students, the MASP administrative team continually assesses itself. From its Summer PEAC Curriculum (which is never identical from year to year) to its entire Social Sciences, Humanities & Arts curriculum to community requirements – every aspect of the program has grown by learning from previous cohorts of students, and assessing what worked well and what needed improvement. The team constantly discussed individual component, research what our colleagues in other programs and universities have found successful and evaluate what impact changing the smallest part of the program will have on the students with whom we have yet to work. The self-assessment is vital to the success of the program, and it will continue to be a hallmark of the Minority Arts & Sciences Program.