

STUDENT LIFE

Stepping Up

The Black Students' Union hosts an annual competition fostering community and celebrating African-American dance.

Interview by Kathleen McGarvey

Alexandra Poindexter '15, a political science major from Lawrenceburg, Indiana, is president of the Black Students' Union, or BSU. Founded in 1968, the group organizes educational and cultural events that promote diversity within the University community. In February, BSU hosted its 12th annual step show for students in Rochester-area schools.

What is a step show, and what's its history?

Stepping has a rich tradition rooted in African-based communities and uses movement, words, and sounds to convey a message. It draws originally from African foot dances such as gumboot, a dance created by South African miners who would communicate with the stomping of their boots. The stepping tradition in the United States stemmed from African-American fraternity and sorority life's song and dance rituals starting in the early 1900s. A step show is simply a showcase of a community or school's talents in the genre of stepping. This show can be competitive or exhibition. Most step shows usually have a theme.

How did the BSU create its annual step show?

We started in 2004, when LaShara Evan '05, '06W (MS) was in her first term as president. She and her copresident, Tani-sha Lisle Johnson '05, '07W (MS), along with the social and cultural chair, Yannize Joshua '08—who was also the Black History Month chair—wanted to revamp Black History Month into four major events. This included the step show, the Pan-African Expo, the Black Tie Affair, and a dating auction.

How does the show work?

The show is typically split up by grade level. This year, we had an elementary and middle school category and a high school and college category. All teams in each category competed for one specific prize.

What is your group's connection with students in the community?

BSU has been involved in various pre-



INTRODUCTIONS: Alexandra Poindexter '15, president of the BSU, says the group's annual step show is fun and serves as a way to introduce school-age participants to college.

college initiatives over the years. Usually the schools reach out to us and we help to provide tutoring, college advice, or mentorship.

The step show in particular works as outreach as it brings the students into the University space. In the past, students have said that they didn't feel like the University of Rochester was an attainable goal or they would never just come and visit here. The step show gives the students an easy way to be a part of the University space and also meet students who have similar backgrounds.

How does the community, on campus and off, respond to the show?

The show has been well received. All sorts of people come to our step show. I take pride in the number of community

members who come out annually to support their steppers!

What about the show makes you proudest? And what's the most fun?

What makes me most proud of the show are the step show participants. They take this competition very seriously, and as a high school student, I don't think I had an outlet to which I dedicated so much passion and drive to win. A close second would have to be my executive board. It's a high-intensity event, and it takes all 12 of us to manage the day and ensure it runs smoothly.

What is most fun is the day of the competition. The atmosphere, the anticipation of the sets, the performances are all so much fun. It is a very challenging process to get the step show well organized, but it all pays off when the step teams hit the stage. 