Fall 2015 UDR Newsletter

Fall August 30th UDR Training

The Fall UDR training is on Sunday, August 30th, 5:30-7:30pm in the Faculty Club. All UDRs attend at 5:30pm to meet and collaborate with your new UDR teams. The training provides a hands-on opportunity to plan your fall initiatives with fellow UDRs with support from the UDR Council. The training also introduces program goals and resources to plan collaborations with campus offices such as Hiatt, Experiential Learning, Study Abroad and more! A dinner buffet will be available. Please RSVP asap! A sign-in sheet will record attendance. Please read the online UDR Handbook and Frequently Asked Questions before the training!

SAVE the DATES

Academic Fair  Tuesday, August 25th
Set Up: 10:45-11:45; Event: 11:45am-1:45pm  Farber Library

Advising  Wednesday, August 26th
11:30am-2:30pm  Sherman Function Hall

Activities Fair  Sunday, August 30th
1:00-3:00pm  Great Lawn (Rain: Levin Ballroom)

UDR Training  Sunday, August 30th
5:30-7:30pm  Faculty Club

UDR-Sponsored Majors Fair  Weds., September 2nd
6:45-9pm  Sherman Function Hall

UDR Council Application (Juniors Only):
Applications Due: Sunday, October 4th

UDR Initiative Report:
Reports Due: as you complete each initiative
Fall 2015 UDR Newsletter

**UDR Training:** TheFall UDR Trainingwill take place 5:30-7:30pm onSunday, August 30thin theFaculty Club. All UDRs who are on campus are required to attend to learn about the exciting initiatives they can provide for their fellow students, departments, and the Brandeis community, and to be introduced to important contacts who will help make this happen. UDRs will also work with fellow UDRs to participate in hands-on planning of your first fall UDR initiatives. **PLEASE READ THE ONLINE FAQs and UDR HANDBOOK before the training.** Light buffet dinner provided at 6:30pm. No other food served.

**Academic Fair and Advising Day:** UDRs are invited to support both the Tuesday, August 25th Academic Fair (11:45-1:45) and Wednesday, August 26th Advising Day (11:30-2:30). For more information and to sign up for access to early campus housing, please contact: Sybil at sybilsch@brandeis.edu

**Activities Fair:** Sunday, August 30th, 1-3pm. UDRs are invited to table the Activities Fair to promote UDRs and the services you provide for your fellow students. Please sign up with Sybil if you are able to help out! (sybilsch@brandeis.edu)

**UDR-Sponsored Sophomore Majors Fair:** UDRs are hosting a Majors Fair for sophomores (first year students welcome to attend) on Wednesday, September 2nd from 7-9pm in Sherman Function Hall. Please arrive by 6:45pm to help set up and to meet your fellow UDRs to discuss possible collaborations. Stay to help your fellow students learn more about your department/program. Snacks will be served. Be sure to sign up with Sybil if you are able to attend! (sybilsch@brandeis.edu)

**JUNIORS PLEASE APPLY:** If you see yourself as a leader with more to offer and are a junior (2015-16), please apply to become a member of the UDR Council. We are looking for up to two outstanding UDRs who would like to participate at the next level to improve the overall UDR program. The UDR Council participates in UDR Trainings and attends two to three additional meetings each semester. The application is due no later than Sunday, October 4th and is available online at:

http://www.brandeis.edu/das/programs/udr/councilapply.html

**All UDRs are now required to fill out an online form each time you complete an initiative.** This form is available at: https://brandeis.wufoo.com/forms/pgnexoc0lx4rpe/

UDRs are invited to apply for a Recognition Prize for each two months of service: September/October, November/December, January/February and March/April. Winners receive lunch at the Faculty Club with a friend and faculty member of your choice! To apply for a Recognition Prize:

http://brandeis.wufoo.com/forms/s1vg8wx51s372v2/
Three seniors received Outstanding UDR Awards in Spring 2015: Malika Imhotep, African and Afro-American Studies, Karan Malik, Biochemistry, and Elise Sobotka, German. All three spoke at our annual April UDR Lunch; their speeches are included below:

Malika Imhotep, African and Afro-American Studies

Greetings faculty, staff, new UDRs, returning UDRs and those of us who are graduating!

It’s an honor to be speaking to you today as one of 2015’s outstanding UDRs. Representing the African and Afro-American Studies department has been a labor of love. Not always the warm love of family (while there is and will always be a lot of that!) But the kind of love that leads you to protect and defend. When our department faced a firestorm of violent rightwing backlash as a result of a Brandeis student’s sensationalist and ill-informed publication over winter break, I was confronted by both the limits and responsibilities of my position. While unlike the erroneous article stated, a UDR is not in a position to mold the malleable minds of the Brandeis community, we are leaders selected because of a commitment to both our academic disciplines and our student body.

We are students. We are humans, with a right to our own opinions and their consequences. While I may have personally disagreed with my department’s decision to relieve my colleague of her duties I understood that as a department they had a responsibility to handle the situation gingerly. I, as a student had more liberties. I took this, and the numerous instances of racial terror this year—yes, there have been more than 10 murders of unarmed black folks over the past 6 months; yes, black lives matter—as opportunities to employ my AAAS training. I supported my sister scholar and my community at-large by listening and offering whatever resources I could, I encouraged folks with more questions then I could handle to look to our faculty and course listings.

Serving as undergraduate representative has meant more than quarterly events, it has given me a formal venue to enact an African and Afro-American Studies practice. Most of my advising has occurred in social settings. Most of my extra-curricular activities have been informed by my time spent in AAAS. To be an outstanding UDR is to be a student and advocate everywhere, all the time. It is a commitment to the interdisciplinary nature of lives.

Karen Malik, Biochemistry

Thank you, Dean Birren for the introduction. I would also like to thank the professor or student who nominated me for this award. Thank you, Elaine and Sybil, for bestowing this honor upon me.

New, returning, graduating UDRs: welcome! I am very honored for being given the opportunity to speak to you all. For those of you that I have not met before, my name is Karan Malik and I’m a UDR for the Biochemistry department. Sybil asked that I share what I have done as a UDR and what I have learned from this position. I promise to keep it short – I know everyone would like to get on with lunch.

I would like to share a quote from my favorite author, Toni Morrison. Toni Morrison said, “I tell my students, ‘When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game.’”
Karen Malik, Biochemistry

I believe I have truly internalized this directive from her. I definitely tried to employ this approach to my position as a UDR. As campus leaders, we have a special responsibility to advocate for those students who cannot – to use our unique experiences to facilitate necessary discourse. Our experiences and excellent professors have brilliantly trained us for this job. However, this leadership position is much more than just knowing about major requirements or revising class schedules. Not only do we serve as role-models, we also have a responsibility to use the access we are given to improve our department for its constituents.

In approaching this position with Ms. Morrison’s quote in mind, I felt as though my focus was always guided – I simply wanted to help anyone that my sought help. I also felt that my experience as a UDR was multifaceted in that I also am a Roosevelt Fellow, a TA for the core class for my major, and an undergraduate researcher in a biochemistry lab. So, I never really felt like the UDR position required a lot of effort, because in an attempt to do my other jobs, I found that my UDR job did itself. Specifically, I was able to employ my advising skills in the UDR position as I frequently met with students who were curious about the biochemistry major. I was always in lab, so I thought it would be helpful if I reserved some time every week when anyone could meet with me to talk academics. However, all of my conversations were not about academic issues. Often times, students communicated stresses they felt due to the major. They communicated feelings of apprehension and anxiety – they told me about every-day concerns. Many times, students just came to talk. I think we can all agree that every now and then it’s nice to hear: “Hey, that plan sounds great!” I am very grateful that I was able to meet and advise such wonderful students – I wouldn’t have met them if it wasn’t for this position.

Some tasks that our Biochemistry UDR team accomplished specifically centered on the fact that UDRs serve as liaisons between undergraduates and the department faculty. Many students were not the happiest with one course required for biochemistry majors. Seeing this general consensus, we went to the UAH and Department Chair and asked that we have a feedback session – where current majors can highlight positives and negatives regarding specific classes.

As UDRs, we are also given access to enact change within our departments! The major bulletin for your department isn’t written in stone – it is always tentative and subject to change. For instance, a BS in biochemistry requires upwards of 23 courses. It is advised that students place out of introductory courses when possible. One problem was that students were not able to use AP credit to place out of biology, but they could use it for chemistry. I brought this up to the UAH, and this started a conversation between the biochemistry and biology department UAHs/chairs about the possibility of allowing the use of AP credit for biology. It is my hope that this change is employed as it could make the lives of some biochemistry majors a bit easier.

I would like to thank you all once again. Thank you for hearing my reflection regarding this wonderful position. I would like to remind everyone that what you do with this position is entirely up to you! I’m always excited by the innovative and unique ideas that we come up with. I wish that you all have a wonderful academic year. Thank you!
Elise Sobotka, German

In my first semester as UDR for the German Studies program, not only was I just a sophomore who actually hadn’t quite figured out college yet, but I was also the sole UDR. I honestly had no idea what I was doing. In fact, my very first UDR event was a complete failure. I planned a Meet the Majors event and only five people showed up, most of whom were my friends. I hadn’t done any advertising, had waited too long to schedule our normal event room, and just generally had no idea how to plan an event. So the next semester, the other UDRs and I resolved a space well in advance, visited every course in the program, made flyers, and spammed our list serve with emails. That fall our Meet the Majors event had such high attendance that our program head took a picture just so we had proof that it actually had happened. Since then, in my over two years as a UDR, I have helped organize eight events for the program and represented German Studies in seven other events organized by other departments and groups on campus.

I honestly think my success, or rather my efficacy, as a UDR has not come about due to any amazing organizing skills or an ability to avoid procrastination (those still remain struggles of mine to this day). Instead, I think I am up here because of my ability to work on a team and, frankly, because of the team with which I had to work.

German Studies is a small program. At most events for prospective or admitted students, we rarely get any interest. I am often asked more about other departments than I am about the one I actually represent. However, there has really been something special about working with and for a group of people that are as passionate about German studies as I am. I definitely have made up for the limited resources and funding that come with being a small program by tapping into the vast wealth of interests, experience, and knowledge students and faculty in the program provide. Rather than strength coming in numbers, I think it grows from investment in a shared interest. Cultivating and nurturing that interest was how I connected with students and got them to maybe consider taking that one extra German class and then maybe thinking about turning that one extra class into a minor. So representing a small program has its challenges, but they don’t have to be inhibiting.

If anything, my greatest challenge has been just to remember that not everyone actually loves the German Studies program as much as I do.