



December 2010

ProSAAM and You

The Journey Is Coming To An End

Grant funding runs out in January 2011

Simply put, we could not have done it without you! We appreciate you and the time you have invested in the program. In partnering with you along this journey, we learned a great deal about factors that contribute to success among African American couples as well as those dynamics that challenge a couple's ability to maintain their relationship over time, until death do you part.

However, as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end. We have been richly blessed with five years of funding for the program. We do not have any plans to pursue additional funding for the program at this time. Should our goals to follow-up with you and other program respondents change and we secure funding for additional research, we will be in touch.

In the meantime, we plan to focus on a large data set of information on couples in northeast Georgia and metropolitan Atlanta. For the next several years, our efforts will be focused on analyzing the data, publishing research articles, delivering presentations across the nation, and promoting the sale of the curriculum. Altogether, we hope that these efforts will raise awareness about the successes and struggles among African American couples, help to shape policy, and influence how programs are delivered with African American couples at every level (community, state, and nation).

Let's Stay In Touch

Complete enclosed forms by January 15

Though the program is ending, we plan to stay in touch with you by email. You can continue to contact us at prosaam@uga.edu. *Please be sure we have your current email address on file.* We will also post information about study findings and new initiatives on the website at <http://www.uga.edu/prosaam>.

In the event we aim to collect more information from you, we want to be sure that we can locate you. To ensure that we can locate all participants—more than 800 respondents in total—we kindly ask that you complete the enclosed forms and return them to our office using the self-addressed envelope provided *no later than January 15, 2011*. Our goal is to (1) update your contact information, especially phone numbers, and (2) revise your additional contacts (e.g., next of kin, close friends) who can help us find you if our efforts to use your contact information are unsuccessful.

For our participants who have separated from their mates or are now divorced, it is important to note that we still value your participation in the program! Though extremely unfortunate, learning more about separation and divorce and the circumstances that predispose such life-changing decisions, is an important part of understanding the course of marriage from a research perspective. We desire to continue to keep in contact with you as well.

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Special Thanks For Your Feedback

Lessons Learned from the Online Survey

A special thanks to those who were able to provide us with feedback about the interview process and the program in October 2010 using the online survey. ProSAAM participants were invited to comment on the interview experience in an email blasted to the project listserv. Participants responded to ten questions about factors that promoted and discouraged the completion of an interview. We learned a great deal from your input. Next, we respond to a few notable issues.

Many of you appreciated the incentives that were offered for completing the interviews. (You're welcome!) In addition to the incentives, many of you were motivated to complete the interview in order to provide feedback about your lives, finish a program that you started, and contribute to a movement to help strengthen marriages and families in the African American community. Most of you understood the importance of completing the interviews for the program's success. As you know, we cannot do it without you.

Perhaps the best feedback we received related to the preferred method for taking the survey: online. We are currently working closely with the Institutional Review Board, who oversees all research at the University, in order to offer the survey online for couples who have not yet completed their interview. We are diligently working to have a complete set of interviews for all participants, and so, any method that will better help respondents to finish the process is a worthwhile goal.

Many of you complained about the length of the questionnaires. Yes, we ask a lot of questions. But, if you place the number of questions in the context of the size and scale of this project, the interviews are average length for this kind of study. ProSAAM is the strongest research design available in behavioral research—a randomized controlled trial. With this kind of design, the researcher wants to ensure that there is a substantial number of participants and that they answer a variety of questions that could point to changes in participant behavior and attitudes over time. Moreover, in studying the complexity of marriages, it would be important to ask a wide range of questions. Therefore, we aim to ask a diverse battery of questions in order to capture the experiences and context of participants' relationships as closely as possible given this type of research design.

It is also important to highlight that in order to publish information about the study in high-impact journals and be influential in the field, the interview data must contain core measures and questions from the field of marital studies. Similar to when you for a regular check-up at the doctor, there are some basic questions that all patients are asked (e.g., blood pressure, heart rate, weight). In the field of marital research, there are a host of key measures that are important to report on in order to detail couples' communication, problem-solving, and commitment. For this reason, we ask a lot of questions that seemingly have little to do with African American marriages specifically. In order to be competitive in the marriage research arena, it's critical to ask these very basic, standardized measures like the Marital Adjustment Test or MAT.

Others objected to the redundancy of the questions. In response to this

feedback, we have done the best that we can to remove repetitive questions from the online survey. But that said, it is important to note that we need a certain degree of redundancy in order to check the stability of answers across a range of contexts in marriage.

One final note, some participants had misconceptions about the research project. We would like to remind you that we are always available to respond to your questions—large and small—about the program, the research process, and why certain procedures are in place for effective research design and delivery. As a participant, your first resource for this information is in the Informed Consent document that all of you signed prior to completing each interview. If you have further questions about the program and delivery, be sure to let us know.

Again, we thank you for your valuable feedback about the interviews. We will do our best, now and in the future, to keep you informed and provide you with an efficient interview experience.

ProSAAM Kit

The ProSAAM curriculum is available to faith-based groups, programs with a marriage enrichment focus, and individuals with a passion for supporting engaged and married couples. The kit is available at <http://www.prepinc.com> in the PREP Store under Christian PREP. It includes DVDs, participant manuals, a leader guide, Speaker-Listener tiles, a resource CD, and free resources on commitment.

A prayer journal titled, "Like a Tree Planted By the Water," is also available from Christian PREP. It is a devotional for individuals to help cultivate their prayer life in their marriages. Inspired by ProSAAM's use of prayer to strengthen relationships, the journal has sold more than 3,000 copies.

SSNs

Protecting Your Social Security Number

The University of Georgia no longer requires that we collect social security numbers from participants earning checks of \$50 or less. Moving forward, we will revise all forms to reflect this procedural change. It is also important to note that the University prohibits offices from storing individuals' social security numbers. This includes employees and research participants.

Man-to-Man Program

A community service opportunity in the Athens area

Athens Pregnancy Center seeks to establish a Man-to-Man program to provide mentorship and support to young fathers, most of whom are unmarried to their female partners, in the transition to parenthood. The pregnancy center has served the Athens community for over 20 years. It is a non-profit organization committed to providing compassion, information, and support to anyone facing the challenge of unintended pregnancy. The Center is currently seeking male volunteers to serve as counselors in this program. For more information, call (678) 753-3180 or visit the Center's website <http://www.athenspregnancycenter.com/>

So What Have You Found???

We look forward to sharing program findings with you as soon as we can. At the present time, we are still diligently working to achieve a 90% completion

rate with respondents. What does this mean? We are actively contacting and trying to work with all respondents who have not yet completed their last and final interview. Once we get through the process of collecting data from participants, we will be in touch with some first fruits and key findings from the program. We cannot risk contaminating the data and the pool of respondents and sharing information on how ProSAAM has influenced respondents' lives. Be patient with us, we will be in touch with the results as soon as possible.

Know Someone Who Hasn't Finished The Program?

We would certainly appreciate your help to encourage those ProSAAM participants who have not completed their 36-month interviews to finish the program. Perhaps you reside in a home with someone who is hanging onto their 36-month interview questionnaire? Or maybe you attend church with a friend who participated in the program and you know they have not gotten their \$50 check yet?

Each and every participant in the program is valuable and their responses are critical to the success of the program. As one respondent shared, "What they contribute could bless someone else that might be in crisis or at a crossroad in life." Perhaps more importantly, we simply cannot achieve our goals and take the ProSAAM program to new heights with missing information on individuals. Rather, it is our desire to highlight the complexities that African American couples face and appropriately represent African

American families in context. As one participant said, "We are in a unique position to change the way we are viewed as a community. Completing the surveys allow us to see where we fall short and measure up and get assistance if needed. We can be a road map for others in the future as well as our own children."

With a complete set of information on all ProSAAM respondents, we can truly strengthen families from a research and policy perspective. With the size and strength of the research design—the best in the field—we will be able to document change over time, an important consideration for research studies that make a strong impact. Such a research program can also help communities to deliver culturally-sensitive programming to local citizens. When lay leaders seek to implement curricula in communities, they frequently rely upon the research literature for an assessment of what works for people of color.

A benchmark of 90% has been set for the research team. That is, we need at least 90% of ProSAAM respondents to finish the race and complete their 36-month interviews. We can achieve this goal with your help and assistance. Please help us send a strong, clear message to the funding agencies (private and federal) that ProSAAM is a worthwhile effort and that African American participants are responsive to such efforts to strengthen their families and communities. As one survey participant shared, "It helps us all in the long run!"

We thank you for your help in these efforts!