Howard G. Adams wonders why minority students frequently fall just short of making A's in their college classes. He doesn't think it's a coincidence, he believes there's a grading bias based on the evaluator's perception of how well a minority student can perform academically.

Adams is was one of the founders of GEM, the National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for Minorities in Engineering and Science (headquartered at the University of Notre Dame), a group of universities and corporations founded in 1976 to support fellowships for underrepresented minority students in science and engineering. He served as executive director of GEM from 1978-1996, designing strategies and implementing programs to enhance the participation and success of ethnic minorities and women in engineering, science and other technical careers.

Prior to that he had been Vice President for Student Affairs at Norfolk State University. He earned his B.S. from Norfolk State University; an M.S. from Virginia State University; and a Ph.D. from Syracuse University in New York. "I'm in the business of calibrating people and helping them get to school," he told Chemical and Engineering News. "I have never in 20 years seen one black, Hispanic, or American Indian student be recommended by a white professor who said: 'This is the best student I ever had.' " Case in point: Adams recalls when one black engineering student who graduated with a 4.0 average was recommended by his professor as "the best black student" he ever had. "If the professor had said, 'This is my top student who also happens to be a minority,' that would have been different," said Adams.

Jolted by such observations, he founded H.G. Adams & Associates, a consulting company that provides career, personal, and professional development services to educational, governmental, and industrial organizations. He has delivered his inspirational seminars at more than 400 colleges and has written extensively about how to improve workforce development, student programs and mentorship programs.

In 1989, President Ronald Reagan named Dr. Adams to the U.S. Congressional Task Force on Women, Minorities and the Handicapped in Science and Technology; in 1993, the American
Society of Engineering Education awarded Adams its Centennial Medallion for his lasting impact on engineering education; in 1995, President Clinton named Adams a recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring.

Here are some of his own tips for students on how to deal with faculty:

Do treat them as busy professionals

Don't drop in on them for help or advising without arranging a suitable time

Do make sure to be open to constructive criticism.

Don't take every negative comment as a personal attack.

Do take the initiative to build a solid foundation of support

Don't expect the faculty or other graduate students to seek out individuals

Do treat everyone with respect and honesty

Don't try to manipulate; this is risky and it won't work

Be prepared and participate in discussions

Source: H.G. Adams (1993), Making the Grade in Graduate School: Survival Strategy 101, National Center for Graduate Education for Minorities. Some of Adams' publications include:


Recruiting Graduate Students: Implementing the Key "R" of Graduate Education, 1997.


Your Internship is as Good as You Make It: A Practical Guide to Student Internships, 1994.


Making the Grade in Graduate School: Survival 101 (1993).