Before classes start each fall, 200 first-year students arrive on College Hill to participate in the Third World Transition Program (TWTP). The program marks the beginning of their time at Brown, but participants have described the experience as the start of so much more—from “meaningful conversations about difference” and “opening my eyes to the world” to “building a more unified community at Brown” and “friendships that lasted throughout my four years and beyond.”

For more than forty years, this unique program has introduced incoming students to campus resources and support services while challenging them to engage in self-reflection and honest conversations around topics of diversity and social justice. The program serves as a warm welcome and a much-appreciated message of support from the University to its newest community members. Participants benefit from direct access to faculty, staff, and peers to whom they can turn when they have questions about life at Brown. They also gain exposure to those individuals who work closely with or are members of Brown’s communities of color. As Rahil Rojiani ’13, 2011 TWTP student coordinator observed, “TWTP is a transition program, literally, for people from different, often marginalized, underprivileged backgrounds, to transition to an Ivy League institution.”

Transformative Experiences

Many alumni recall their experiences exploring the difficult topics of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other social identities as transformative moments in their lives. Through TWTP, they were exposed to new ideas and points of view that challenged them to examine their own beliefs. The thoughtful and thought-provoking conversations don’t stop at highlighting the issues, but continue on to the important question of “how do you deal with these situations?” Through these discussions, incoming students are prepared for the kinds of experiences and interactions they will have throughout their time at Brown and beyond.

TWTP also encourages participants to examine and build their personal identities. Ken Padilla ’92 discovered that the opportunity to express his culture to others made him better understand and accept his own identity. He recalled, “…I grew up in an environment where everyone looked like me, almost everybody was Puerto Rican, but I never really got to appreciate what that meant until I went to TWTP. I learned more about who I am, and that benefit has been long-lasting.”

A Unique History

Mary Grace Almandrez Ed.D., director of the Third World Center and assistant dean of the college, is particularly proud of one aspect of the program that makes it “uniquely Brown”—its attention to the history of student activism at the University. Through a tour of key places, including Rites & Reason Theatre, Manning Hall, the University Library, and the Third World Center, Mary Grace explained participants learn “the ways that previous students have created meaning for themselves and others and have been activists and agents of change within the University.”
sends a very empowering message to the students who have just arrived on College Hill—you have the capacity to make a difference here.

Put it all together, and the three-and-a-half day TWTP experience is intense and emotional. Mary Grace remembers seeing the program for the first time: “There were tears. There were affirmations. I saw first-year students supporting one another in the reflection of the experience. They were able to be their most authentic selves.” It’s no surprise that participants consistently describe the experience as “pivotal,” “meaningful,” and having “the greatest impact” on their time at Brown. It’s also no surprise that alumni are taking action to ensure that the Third World Transition Program will continue to be offered to incoming students by creating an endowment to support it.

A Call to Action

Mary Grace views the Third World Transition Program Endowed Fund as “symbolic of the level of commitment the institution has to introducing the newest members of our community to social justice.” Ken, one of many contributors to the endowment, explains why he made his gift: “Because of the impact the program had on me and the other people who went to TWTP with me, I want to ensure its longevity. I want to know that there will always be money available for it to continue and that it will have the same effect on future students.”

Participants do not pay to attend TWTP; the University covers all costs, including meals, workshop materials, and stipends for student coordinators, an alumni speaker, and a facilitator who helps with the social justice workshop. The TWTP Endowed Fund provides support in perpetuity to help cover these expenses. As she considers the positive impact of TWTP, Mary Grace asks, “What greater gift could alumni give to the Third World Center community?”

In the fall of 2012, student interest in TWTP was greater than ever. For the first time in its history, the program had an 80-person wait list. But enrollment was capped at 200, in large part due to available funding. Through your support of this endowment, the Third World Center can respond to growing student demand and rising operational costs, and ultimately allow more students to participate in and benefit from the program.

All members of the Brown community are invited to help sustain and grow TWTP through their support of the Endowed Fund. By participating in this collective effort, you can help ensure that future generations of scholars and activists start their time at Brown with a rich, engaging, and transformative experience.

To learn more about contributing to the Third World Transition Program Endowed Fund, please contact:

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Providence, RI 02912-1893 USA
Phone: (401) 863-1730 / Fax: (401) 863-3301
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To make an online contribution, visit gifts.brown.edu, click “Give Now,” scroll to the bottom of the giving page to the heading “The Alumni of Color Initiative,” and check the box for “Third World Transition Program Endowed Fund.”

Additional information is available online at: Giving.Brown.edu/Initiatives/AOCI/TWTP

“TWTP can be the beginning of individual lives of activism or of a movement,” observes Rahil Rojiani ’13, TWTP Student Coordinator (right) pictured with Dayna Joy Chin ’11, MPC Friend.