UVa leads in black graduates

BY KATE ANDREWS
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The University of Virginia has posted the highest graduation rate of black students among public universities for the 10th year in a row. While the numbers were received positively Wednesday, one UVa administrator's mixed reaction included an attack on the school's minority faculty recruiting record.

UVa graduated 87 percent of black students who entered in the fall of 1996, according to university officials. The school outpaced the University of New Hampshire, second on the list of public flagship universities, by 21 percent.

Nationally, the black graduation rate was 39 percent, according to the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.

"We're so very proud," said M. Rick Turner, dean of African-American Affairs at UVa. "There are good students out there, but good students have to come into an environment that's nurturing."

Turner said he credits President John T. Casteen III, who was previously an admissions officer at the university, as well as Sylvia Terry, another dean in the Office of African-American Affairs, which has led mentoring efforts over the years.

"We shower students with love," Turner said. "We have a very strong connection with parents."

The private Amherst College was ranked first in the nationwide survey, with a graduation rate of 95 percent for blacks. UVa tied with Dartmouth College for 18th place among all 327 Division I schools, public or private.

"African-American students have been one of the great success stories here at the University of Virginia," Casteen said.

"Together, these students have proved by their successes that they can take on the hardest challenges, overcome them and move on into the adult mainstream to take their places as leaders and makers and women and men who are at once thoughtful and creative."