

Color in Business

Junior Ashli Cook wanted a change of pace.

No, we're not talking about her switch from sprinter on the track team to wing in rugby, a sport the Upper Darby High School product from Drexel, Pa., knew precious little about before rooming with a member of the rugby club as a freshman. This change of pace goes back to her decision to leave the Philadelphia area to attend college in an area that sometimes feels like a world apart from where she grew up.

"I really wanted to experience something different because I'm from Philly, so I am really used to the city," she said. "I definitely wanted to go somewhere that was smaller, where I could really get that one-on-one attention and experience a different setting for my four years in college because I know that I'm going to be in the city for most of my life."

With the move to rural New Hampshire have come the challenges for a person of color living and studying at Dartmouth. It's why, the treasurer of the college's Afro-American Society said, as part of a panel meeting with alumni she stressed the importance of bringing more minority faculty to the College.

And it's why, as president of the Dartmouth Minorities in Business Association, she's actively trying to build up a minority alumni network to help students of color enjoy more and better opportunities after graduation.

"I feel it is so important to have people that look like you, who can speak to your experiences," she said. "I think there's definitely a lot of value in receiving advice from Dartmouth alumni of all colors, but I think it's kind of impossible to put yourself in someone else's shoes, especially if they are a different race. You can try your best to understand what they have gone through, but I think the minority experience, especially at Dartmouth, where it is so small and is so isolated, can leave you feeling like you are on your own."



Junior women's rugby player Ashli Cook emphasizes the importance of creating a minority network to help current students of color navigate the world of business.

Cook will be working this summer in investment banking at Bank of America Merrill Lynch. She's hoping that leads to a permanent offer, something she had a hard time imagining when she arrived on campus.

"I wasn't sure coming in as a freshman what I wanted to do and how to get there, and I had difficulties finding the right people to talk to," she admitted. "I was lucky because Donnie Brooks was the career advisor for DP2 and a great resource for me. He was able to connect me with a lot of opportunities although I wasn't fully able to take advantage of them because I didn't know how to prepare properly for what he brought to the table.

"I feel like there are now more programs in place geared toward helping minority students with that, whether within DP2 or Dartmouth in general. But I still don't think there has been enough progress. That's why I am so engaged with it."

It's why she is determined to build a stronger bridge between students of color and alumni of color, particularly those from recent classes.

"We want to target those alumni and say, 'Listen, we understand what you went through and we really want to make the process easier for students who look like you, who are coming through this program now,'" she said.

Although she hopes eventually to return home and do graduate studies at Penn's Wharton School, she remains eager to help those who follow in her footsteps at Dartmouth, and she's determined to get more recent alums to do the same.

"A lot of it is relationship building," she said. "Being able to have someone you can call that can give you constructive criticism with an understanding of where you are coming from.

"I think those first few years after I graduate will be really important, whether that's me visiting campus and sitting on a panel or doing whatever is needed because being fresh out of the experience I'll be able to speak to the interviewing process and everything like that." **DP**