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Almost all glanced; but not many seen the bronze statue standing in front of the Multicultural Center at the University of Rhode Island. It is the body of the late Rev. Arthur L. Hardge holding onto a Bible. Hardge, who was once a freedom rider and a civil rights activist alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had a determination to create opportunities for the next generation. He founded the Talent Development Program in 1968 as a response to King's death to help disadvantaged students and students of color receive a college education at URI. His dream and determination still lives in the advisers at TD, especially his son, the Coordinator Counselor, Marc D. Hardge.

After his mother died when he was 14 months old Hardge's father took care of him. Hardge graduated from East Providence High and did not start college until a year later because wasn't ready.

"I wasn't serious enough," he said.

When he decided to go to college he applied to the TD program.

"I knew I wouldn't get in (college) any other way," he said. TD was a great opportunity for him because of his need of the resources that the program provided including financial aid and tutorials. He said it also helped that he was the son of the man who founded the program. However, he was dismissed after his first year not returning to the university until seven years later.

“I didn’t apply myself,” he said explaining his dismissal.

In the seven years he took off of college he studied ministry and worked in construction management. When asked why he chose to study ministry he said after his father died and felt a calling to pursue it. He said his father never pushed him to follow that path although Arthur Hardge, his father and great-grandfather were all clergymen.

In 1990 and 1991 the construction industry was dying. Knowing Hardge was studying ministry, a friend of his suggested that he should be a counselor for the Key Program. The Key Program is a program that helps troubled youth and their families’ develop life skills that would encourage them to pursue productive lives, according to their website www.key.org. Hardge worked for the program until he was the supervisor. However, he couldn’t be promoted because he didn’t have a college degree. He decided to return to URI.

At URI he pursued a bachelors and master’s degree in English. Hardge said that returning to school as an older student was a better experience than the first time he started college; however, he still faced challenges. He didn’t have any money, unlike when he worked in construction management and he had been on his own he was 19 when his father died.

Despite the challenges he always found himself in TD. He took advantage of all their resources including advising and tutoring. He also became a peer advisor for the program. His heart desired for him to become an attorney. He had no intention of working at TD for a career.

After graduating URI he worked as a monitor for TD’s computer lab from 2002-2005. In 2005 he worked at Rhode Island College’s Upward Bound. He returned to URI to work as an academic advisor for the TD in August 2006.

Today, Harge carries the title of Coordinator Counselor at TD which means he “advises like everyone else” referring to his colleagues. Advising is the core and foundation of TD and he loves it.

Hardge remembered the stories his father would tell him about his experiences in working with King. Arthur Hardge asked King his reason for persisting in the fight for equality. King responded, “We have to do this. We have no choice.” King, according to Hardge, was saying this fight was their responsibility and their calling. Hardge believes that he is continuing this fight through the TD and he believes the fight is won because of TD’s success. The TD that began with 13 students now supports 1200 students. This summer’s TD freshmen carried the highest collective GPA in TD history as well as the most number of students admitted to URI through the program.

“Anybody can go to college,” said Hardge. “It’s a matter of how hard you work and (how) willing (you are) to get there.”

Through his experience with education he learned how much he could achieve by applying himself.

“You’d be surprised what you could achieve when you apply yourself and if you don’t ever apply yourself, you’ll never know what you could achieve,” he said. “Ask yourself, ‘what if?’”