



Balancing school and sports since her days as a track star and honor student at nearby Clovis High School, Janisha Richardson carried her success to CSUF as a sprinter and AEO member.

If you have a *vision*, you have to share it. At least that's how one distinguished looking young man sees it.

Not too long ago Naim Shah had a vision . . . an idea that Fresno State's African American athletes wanted to get involved in academics.

Coming to this university on a football scholarship, Naim was a gifted athlete. After one successful year and then reconstructive knee surgery, he quickly learned that football could not be his top priority. He also discovered that many of his fellow athletes felt the same way about their priorities. They wanted to excel in the classroom as well as on the playing field.

Thanks to Naim's vision, the Academic Excellence Organization for African American Athletes is now a reality! These student athletes share a bond, being African American and about the same age and sometimes

"AEO sends a message that there has to be a balance between mind and body and soul. You can't put all your eggs in the athletic basket."

Keith Carodine,
Former AEO adviser

coming from the inner cities. When they need support, they can turn to their peers — *their friends* at AEO.

The driving force behind AEO is to keep things in perspective for these young student athletes. The dreams of multimillion dollar contracts motivate them, but the key is to keep some realism about the game. After all, only a select few make it to the pros. That's reality.

"The focus is for athletes," Naim explains, "but AEO is open to *all* students. From the athletic standpoint, it introduces us to a different world — networking, study groups, workshops, and guest speakers. Career consultants talk to us about interviewing techniques, how to put a resume together, and things of that nature. Speakers come in from various disciplines. They talk about what it takes to be successful in their particular professional areas. It exposes us — the athletes — to people working



AEO members (from left) Leroy Kelly, Janisha Richardson, and Dana Steward work at the on-campus chicken gumbo sale.



Naim Shah, founder of AEO 4 AAA, welcomes guests to the first AEO Student Athlete Awards Banquet.

in the real world and teaches us how to prepare ourselves so we can become successful."

AEO — believed to be the first organization of its kind in the nation — was founded in September 1991 by Naim and several other student athletes who recognized the need for additional academic support and professional career development. The organization inspires and motivates members to pursue academic excellence.