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Georgia Southern recognizes integration of the University with commemorative marker

MAY 17, 2017



A new commemorative marker on Georgia Southern University's campus pays tribute to a special part of Georgia Southern's history and the University's first African-American students who courageously paved the way and provided hope for a better way of life for students who followed. The Integration of Georgia Southern marker, prominently placed on Sweetheart Circle in front of the University's Marvin Pittman Administration Building, recognizes the efforts of the African-American students who, in their pursuit of higher education entered an inhospitable environment, counted the costs and found education worth it.

"The marker will serve as a constant reminder of the bravery and perseverance of our first African-American students, and the community they built," said Georgia Southern University President Jaimie Hebert, Ph.D. "Their work was the foundation upon which this University built its mission —

integrity, civility, kindness, collaboration, and a commitment to lifelong learning, wellness, and social responsibility.”

Former Georgia Southern President Guy Wells (1926-1934) set out to address racial injustices and the duty to honor and respect all people without respect to race. In 1933, Wells and the president of what is now Savannah State University brought esteemed African-American scientist Dr. George Washington Carver to speak to the student body and Bulloch County community. Following Wells’ presidency, former University President Marvin Pittman (1934-41 and 1943-47) continued the work through his commitment to progressive educational and political ideas in a climate that rejected them.

In January 1965, John Bradley became the first African-American student at Georgia Southern University. In the fall of 1965, Bradley was followed by six undergraduate African-American students: Clavelia Love Brinson, Arlene Marie Daughtry, Ulysee Mosley, Shirley Anne Woodall, Jesse Zeigler Carter and Catherine Davis, a sophomore transfer student who later earned the first bachelor’s degree awarded to an African-American graduate in the University’s history.

“The unveiling of the historical marker is an awesome honor – a marker honoring the first seven African-Americans to walk the grounds as students at GSU,” said Carter (’69, ’79). “I’m glad to have been a part of the brave warriors who paved the way for the many students who followed.”

African-American student enrollment gradually increased through the 1970s and 80s and dramatically grew in the 1990s to above 25 percent. In 1972, Dr. Charles Bonds became the first African-American faculty member. Today at Georgia Southern, more than 35 percent of our students, 32 percent of our full-time staff and 23 percent of full-time faculty include African-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and Asians.

Georgia Southern’s First 500 alumni have held steadfast in their commitment to higher education. They have set an example through their character and resilience and have provided access to the same educational opportunities at Georgia Southern through scholarships for those who follow in their footsteps.

The two-sided commemorative marker reads:

Side A:

Integration of Georgia Southern

African Americans have always been an important part of operating the college. Prior to 1965, though, it was as carpenters, dairymen, custodians, and cooks – many of whom lived in cottages on campus and had long careers with the college. Mose Bass began working at the college in 1929 as

a dairyman and retired as a custodian for Sanford and Cone Halls after 38 years of dedicated service.

President Guy Wells (1926-34) challenged traditions of racial inequality. An advocate of Y clubs, Wells introduced to campus the social awareness promoted by these programs. He also addressed racial injustice in the South while maintaining relationships with influential politicians and others who did not share his views. With the help of Benjamin Hubert, president of the black college in Savannah, Georgia (now Savannah State University), Wells arranged for Dr. George Washington Carver to give a historic address in 1933 to the college's student body and Bulloch County community; a crowd of 1,500 people. President Marvin Pittman (1934-41 & 1943-47) continued the progressive direction established by Wells.

Side B:

In January 1965, John Bradley became the first African American student at Georgia Southern. A teacher at Statesboro's all-black William James High School, Bradley applied for admission to complete requirements for a master's level teaching certificate. President Zach Henderson (1948-68) personally assisted Bradley's registration and, ultimately, oversaw the college's integration. In the fall of 1965, six black students attended the college as undergraduates: Clavelia Love Brinson, Arlene Marie Daughtry, Catherine Davis, Ulysee Mosley, Shirley Anne Woodall, and Jessie Zeigler.

The earliest black students created close and supportive relationships to ensure their success and to encourage others. African American enrollment increased gradually throughout the 1970s and 80s and jumped dramatically in the 1990s to above 25 percent. In 1972, Dr. Charles Bonds became the first African American faculty member. President Dale Lick (1978-86) encouraged the first significant recruitment of black faculty, which included Mical Whitaker and Dr. Wil Grant. The University is grateful to these and many other trailblazers.

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/Research University founded in 1906, offers 119 degree programs serving 20,673 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. Georgia Southern is recognized for its student-centered and hands-on approach to education. Visit GeorgiaSouthern.edu.