

LEADERSHIP

**FACULTY
EXCELLENCE**
at Spelman College



Spelman College®

A Choice to Change the World

SPELMAN IS A LEADING WOMEN'S COLLEGE AND RANKED AT NO. 57 ON A LIST OF THE BEST LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES IN THE NATION (2020 U.S. News and World Report Best Colleges)



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Mary Schmidt Campbell, Ph.D.
PRESIDENT

FACULTY LEADERSHIP IS ONE OF THE MOST CONSEQUENTIAL FACTORS THAT MAKES SPELMAN COLLEGE AN EXTRAORDINARY PLACE TO LEARN AND WORK. INDEED, OUR STRATEGIC PLAN – SPELMAN 2022: IMAGINE. INVENT. ASCEND. – RECOGNIZES THE EXPERTISE OF SPELMAN FACULTY TO INSPIRE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS. ELEVATE THE SPELMAN DIFFERENCE, THE FOUNDATIONAL THEME OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN, RECOGNIZES FACULTY AS PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATORS AND THOUGHT LEADERS. THEIR MINDSET IS THAT, EVEN AS THEY TEACH, THEY ARE LEARNING. EVERY DAY, THEY WORK AT MAKING THE CLASSROOM A PLACE THAT SUPPORTS LEARNING. AND EVERY DAY, THEY WORK AT CENTERING SPELMAN IN THE CRITICAL DIALOGUES OF THE PRESENT AND FUTURE. CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FACULTY PROFILED WITHIN, AND TO ALL SPELMAN FACULTY WHO DAILY MODEL EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP.



Sharon L. Davies, J.D.
PROVOST & VICE PRESIDENT
FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

As we mark the 138th year of Spelman College, we are rightfully proud of the breadth and depth of our record of accomplishments. For over 10 years, Spelman has been ranked the No. 1 producer of Black women who complete doctorates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields (National Science Foundation). We are one of only two historically Black colleges and universities in the country to be classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning as a highly selective, highly competitive Baccalaureate I institution, and one of only four HBCUs to be awarded a chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa National Honor Society.

Spelman is a leading women's college and ranked at No. 57 on a list of the best liberal arts colleges in the nation (2020 U.S. News and World Report Best Colleges). We are among the top 25 colleges in the nation producing high numbers of students studying abroad (Institute of International Education Open Door Report). Last year, 75 percent of our seniors graduated with at least one study abroad experience. Many had two or more. At a time when wealth inequality is widening for Black families, and questions are being raised about the value of a college degree, Spelman has been recognized as among the nation's strongest liberal arts colleges for producing "social" or "intergenerational mobility."

None of this would be possible without a faculty wholly dedicated to our students' development and success. Spelman faculty members know the importance of teaching

and leading by example. Thus, in this publication, we salute their excellence in leadership. In the pages that follow, you will enjoy profiles of their leadership in myriad settings. They are thought leaders across multiple disciplinary lines—gender theory, documentary filmmaking, economic theory, educational policy, social justice, mathematics, literature, biology, curation, the world of words, the life of the mind, and more. These teachers inspire "Black Girl Magic" and grow Black women leaders. It is right to celebrate them.

Congratulations to each of the Spelman faculty members recognized herein, and to all of your colleagues. By embracing leadership as central to your roles, you are the living embodiment of our college motto, that choosing Spelman is truly "a choice to change the world."

LEADING THROUGH A PASSION FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOLARSHIP

Donna Akiba Sullivan Harper, Ph.D.

A SENIOR AT THE END OF A SCHOOL YEAR, SHATTERED BY THE REALIZATION THAT SHE HAD NOT QUALIFIED FOR GRADUATION, ASKED TO MEET WITH DONNA AKIBA SULLIVAN HARPER, PH.D. SHE'D COME TO PLEAD FOR "HELP, OR MERCY, OR SYMPATHY" FROM THE COLLEGE'S DEAN OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES. DR. HARPER CAREFULLY CONSIDERED THE STUDENT'S PLEAS. THEN SHE DID SOMETHING BOTH SIMPLE AND DEFINITIVE. SHE HAD THE STUDENT CALL HER PARENTS AND TELL THEM SHE WOULD NOT BE GRADUATING.

"She was on speakerphone and her mother said, 'You're not going to graduate? Do you know I am packing this car right now?'" recalled Dr. Harper. "That was a case of tough love and it's something that I felt was needed for her. Ultimately, she did graduate."

ADVOCATE AND BENCHMARK

During her 32 years at Spelman, Dr. Harper has held broad and varied leadership roles as both an instructor and administrator. She served six years as chair of the English Department and three as president of Faculty Council, is one of just three endowed chairs at the College, and was in the midst of a two-year term as dean of Undergraduate Studies the day that distraught senior knocked on her door.

That incident is crystalized in Dr. Harper's memory because it exemplifies a defining characteristic of her long career: students are her preeminent concern.

"I'm a teacher at heart," said Dr. Harper. "Focusing on students is what I love."

That focus isn't always directed through her classroom teaching. Dr. Harper often impacts her student's academic experience through her forceful engagement with the administrative and managerial processes that influence everything from curricula development to department size and faculty governance.

"I think there are many faculty members who are shy about speaking," she said. "I'm not one of them."

As department chair, dean, and faculty leader, Dr. Harper has encouraged the College to direct its energies toward assuring that instructors have the many, and often highly-varied, tools they need to be effective.

"People think because it's a college for Black women [everyone is the same], but that's not the end of the story," Dr. Harper said. "Our faculty, in terms

of ethnicity and gender and age are so much more diverse than our student body, so our faculty needs are very different. Being able to interact with colleagues and learn that we had one group of people who needed equipment and one group of people who were concerned about safety and one group of people who wanted space showed that our needs are really diverse."

Dr. Harper said that diversity should also be reflected in how Spelman faculty and administrators evaluate the school's programs relative to those of other institutions. For Spelman, such "benchmarking" can be tricky because as a small, historically Black, women's college, it defies easy categorization. Still, Dr. Harper sees benchmarking as a vital step in assuring that the College remains competitive.

"Spelman has a challenging identity, but I think benchmarking can help us know who our peers are and who our peers are not," said Dr. Harper. "I think benchmarking tactics would be good, certainly for all chairpersons. The more colleagues who know it, the better the appeals will be, the more knowledgeable the appeals will be, and the more reasonable the requests will be when people understand more about what is being done at other institutions. And I think I learned a lot about that from my leadership roles at Spelman."

SACRIFICE FOR SCHOLARSHIP

Sixteen years before her arrival at the College, the future Dr. Akiba Harper was a high school senior tasked with one of her earliest leadership roles – serving as the first African-American valedictorian at her school in southern Virginia. Dr. Harper had been among the first three African-American children to desegregate the public schools in her hometown of Suffolk, so she

“IT WAS A CHALLENGE WHEN SPELMAN KIND OF WENT THROUGH A NEW STAGE AND WE WERE SO WOMAN CENTERED AND WANTED FACULTY WHO TEACH ABOUT WOMEN,” SAID DR. HARPER. “BUT I DO LANGSTON HUGHES, SO I HAD TO KEEP PUSHING. I THOUGHT ‘I’M NOT GOING TO GIVE UP. YOU’VE GOT TO HAVE LANGSTON HUGHES.”

had already spent more than her share of time as “the only Black student in the class.” She managed to excel in her studies and opted to attend Hampton University, one of the nation’s earliest HBCUs. At Hampton, Dr. Harper met Dr. Jessie Lemon Brown, a distinguished professor who helped broaden her literary perspective. During this time Dr. Harper discovered the writer who would inspire her most profound and important scholarship: Langston Hughes.

“He saw beauty in Black people and was saying that in 1926,” says Dr. Harper. “In 1971, we thought we were Black and proud and that we had invented that idea. Seeing that this man was writing those lines in 1926 - I was so in love.”

That love has been expressed and re-expressed in Dr. Harper’s award-winning excavations of the life and work of the poet who ignited the Harlem Renaissance and has influenced writers of every race, gender, and ethnicity. Dr. Harper’s voluminous essays, scholarly papers, and compilations have established her as a leading authority on Hughes and earned her numerous recognitions including The Langston Hughes Prize for Excellence in Literature and Vision presented by the Langston Hughes Society, and Spelman’s own Presidential Faculty Award for Scholarly Achievement. A founding member and past president of the Langston Hughes Society and a founder of the Langston Hughes Review, Dr. Harper is only the fourth person in Spelman history to be named Fuller E. Callaway Professor, an endowed chair awarded for meritorious scholarship.

Despite the praise and commendation for her work on Hughes, Dr. Harper says there have been times when the poet was out of vogue at Spelman.

“It was a challenge when Spelman kind of went through a new stage and we were so woman centered and wanted faculty who teach about women,” said Dr. Harper. “But I do Langston Hughes, so I had to keep pushing. I thought ‘I’m not going to give up. You’ve got to have Langston Hughes.’”

Her effort to keep Hughes high on the College’s reading list led Dr. Harper to a revelation: teach women about how Langston Hughes interacted with women.

“I found a way to grow the evidence of how he wrote about and interacted with women as part of a seminar focusing on Hughes as a writer as opposed to the works, per se,” said Dr. Harper. “So I am willing to change in whatever ways are necessary, but Langston is not going to leave my heart and my mind.”

Of course, retooling a college seminar isn’t always a passion project; usually, it’s just work. And Dr. Harper, who earned her master’s degree and Ph.D. at Emory University, has spent much of her long career engaged in the back-breaking, mind-bending labors associated with running a college department, managing the varietal demands of a busy faculty, and addressing the small but emotionally-taxing concerns of students in academic trouble. In fact, her tendency to work longer and harder than anyone else in the room once prompted a colleague to suggest that Dr. Harper is a “victim of her own competence.” She laughed off the comment, blithely, ignoring the fact that her three-year term as president of Spelman’s Faculty Council was supposed to be for two years or that she allowed herself to be arm-twisted into the presidency of the College Language Association despite her efforts to recruit an alternate.

Dr. Harper said that although leadership makes myriad personal and professional demands, she still “encourages people to step up and be leaders.”

“Many times I hear people hesitate because they say, ‘I’m too busy,’ or ‘I’ve got to do my research,’ or ‘I’ve got a family.’ And all of these are real, but I assure you that the things I’ve done in my life, I’ve done while caring for elderly parents, taking care of a child, being a significant other to a partner. People should find a way to juggle a little bit because leadership teaches you lessons you cannot learn any other way.”



75%

**6-year graduation
rate for Spelman
College**



TAKE A MINUTE TO PERUSE THE CURRICULUM VITAE OF KAREN BRAKKE, PH.D. IN FACT, TAKE TWO; AFTER ALL, DR. BRAKKE'S CV IS A FULL 22 PAGES LONG. AND THAT'S WITH SMALL FONTS AND A CONSPICUOUS ABSENCE OF PUFFERY. DR. BRAKKE, A SPELMAN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY, HAS A REPUTATION FOR BEING PROFESSIONALLY OMNIPRESENT – IF THERE'S WORK TO BE DONE AT THE COLLEGE, IN EDUCATION, OR IN THE FIELD OF PSYCHOLOGY, SHE WILL GET IT DONE. THAT DOESN'T MEAN DR. BRAKKE IS FLASHY OR SELF-AGGRANDIZING. AS THE FORMER CHAIR OF SPELMAN'S PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT, SHE BELIEVES HER ROLE AS AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER IS TO PUT HER STUDENTS AND THE COLLEGE FIRST.

"I think very much that I have the servant-leader mentality," Dr. Brakke said. "I feel that what I'm doing is setting the context for other people to succeed."

PACK YOUR PATIENCE

Collaborative effort is an essential element of Dr. Brakke's servant-leader ethos, but it isn't the only one. With a bachelor's degree from Carleton College and both a master's degree and a Ph.D. from Georgia State University, Dr. Brakke espouses a layered approach to leadership that includes patient persistence, a willingness to accept a call to lead, and a recognition of the importance of bringing key stakeholders "to the table."

As her manuscript-length CV suggests, Dr. Brakke has had an expansive array of roles and responsibilities that have deeply informed her views of educational leadership. For example, as chair of the Psychology Department from 2008 to 2014, she formulated an ambitious plan to update the curriculum to reflect better the contemporary concepts of assessment and accountability. Dr. Brakke believed she could execute the new program in short order. It took years.

PRIORITIZING STAKEHOLDER SUCCESS IN LEADERSHIP

Karen Brakke, Ph.D.



Faculty have received over \$5.4 million in external funding for research and curricular projects

Dr. Brakke said the experience helped her understand that “whenever you work with a group of people, the outcome isn’t always going to be exactly what you first envision. But it tends to be an outcome that is more workable, I think. We now have a new curriculum which... incorporates some of the things that I had originally envisioned, as well as other experiences that colleagues felt were important.”

Sometimes, a leader must accept that her job is to take the first tentative steps toward future attainments, said Dr. Brakke. When the Spelman psychologist became president of the Southeastern Psychological Association in 2016, she realized that her one-year term provided barely enough time to identify new objectives, let alone complete them. Still, Dr. Brakke was able to lead the 1,500-member association in taking the critical step of selecting and appointing a much-needed administrative officer.

“Sometimes you have to be happy with starting the conversation, bringing it to people’s attention, making small steps, and building momentum,” she said. “Just having somebody who is willing and able to follow up and see an initiative through as far as possible is important.”

EMPOWER STAKEHOLDERS

Dr. Brakke’s contributions are rarely confined to “follow-ups” and “small steps.” A consummate Spelman insider, she is so attuned to the College’s academic and administrative ebbs and flows that both students and faculty seek her out for guidance on how to get things done. However, it took her involvement with SEPA to help Dr. Brakke embrace her more nascent talent for personal leadership.

“I think one of the biggest things that I get out of it rather than just trying to keep the organization itself moving forward, is the one-on-one interaction,” she said. “As a visible leader, I get sought out for conversations, maybe to give advice or just listen or chat, to develop a mentoring relationship. That interaction is really fulfilling because you can see the direct impact that you have.”

Dr. Brakke’s ability to transit effortlessly among Spelman’s students, faculty, and administrators, likely influenced her 2014 appointment as special assistant to the provost. The job gave Dr. Brakke fresh insight into the College and helped her “get to know people across campus and learn more about...the different things that have to fall into place in order for a college to operate well.”

As she moved beyond the Psychology Department, Brakke became aware that some of the College’s problems were campus-wide. Those included a lack of updated, contemporary learning spaces. Working in concert with fellow psychology professor Dolores Bradley Brennan, Ph.D., Dr. Brakke came up with a plan to revitalize Spelman classrooms and presented it to administrators and faculty. Spelman has since completed 17 “active learning classrooms.”

Most of Dr. Brakke’s work as special assistant didn’t involve installations of high-tech instructional tools in Spelman’s venerable lecture halls. Instead, her attention was focused on faculty members and how to help them achieve their objectives as instructors and researchers. Dr. Brakke not only discovered that she relished working with faculty, she solidified her view that faculty members have much to contribute to the College’s decision-making processes.

“I think it’s critical that faculty are at the table, and that they have a voice both within the College and in the broader landscape,” she said. “We are the ones who have the day-to-day interaction

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with the students. And if we’re doing our job right, we know those students fairly well, and we know how we can best approach helping them learn and helping them thrive. We lose something critical if we lose that faculty-student relationship informing how we approach teaching and learning.”

Dr. Brakke, an expert on developmental psychology, said faculty members play a critical role in helping students navigate the oft-troubled waters separating childhood from adulthood in a modern world defined by information overload and technology-driven socialization. As such, faculty members are in a unique position to help institutions of higher learning attune themselves to this new gestalt.

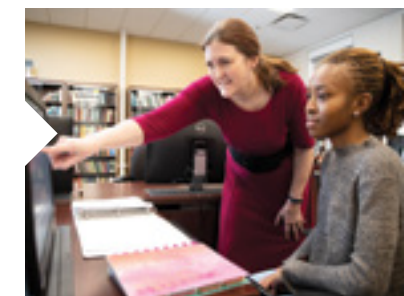
“Higher education is changing along with the rest of the world, but it’s unknown territory,” Dr. Brakke said. “I think we still are relevant, even though students have access to a lot more information from different sources than they used to. I think someone can have a lot of information and not know what to do with it or how to communicate about what they know. I think there’s definitely still a place, and in some ways more of a need than

ever, for higher education. But it is going to look different than it looked 20 years ago.”

Dr. Brakke has already begun exploring what the next 20 years may bring. She has traveled to Tacoma, Washington, to confer with more than 60 leading educators on a “blueprint for the future of psychology education,” and in 2016, she joined yet another group of educators intent on developing new assessment resources for psychology teachers. The following year, she took part in an American Psychological Association institute targeted at women likely to emerge as leaders in the field.

You’ll find it all in Dr. Brakke’s voluminous CV, right along with her numerous speaking engagements, dozens of research publications, and plethora of grants and awards. The one thing you won’t find is any sign that the Spelman psychologist is slowing down.

“I always need a challenge,” Dr. Brakke said. “When I do sit back, I’m content for a while, but then I get restless. I feel that I always want to be learning something new.”





HAVING DONE DOCTORAL RESEARCH ON THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN THE 19TH CENTURY, KATHLEEN PHILLIPS LEWIS, PH.D., KNOWS THAT SUCH KINGDOMS OFTEN OWED THEIR EXISTENCE TO THEIR MILITARIES: RELENTLESS COMMANDERS LEADING HARDENED TROOPS IN WARS OF CONQUEST. BUT WHEN IT COMES TO HER OWN STYLE OF LEADERSHIP, DR. PHILLIPS LEWIS WOULD RATHER EMPLOY A SILK THREAD THAN A FIXED BAYONET.

MAKING HEADWAY THROUGH A SILK ALTERNATIVE

Kathleen Phillips Lewis, Ph.D.

“One of the things I’ve learned is that you don’t have to be abrasive to lead,” said Dr. Phillips Lewis, an associate professor of history. “You can use silk or you can use calico to make the same statement, to speak the same truth. But I think that with the silk alternative, you make more headway.”

Dr. Phillips Lewis has had ample opportunity to employ her silken approach during a quarter century of leadership at Spelman. She chaired the History Department from 2003 to 2006 and 2010 to 2016; she served as director of the College’s African Diaspora and the World Studies Program 2001 to 2004; and she is currently division chair for the humanities.

A self-admitted “workaholic,” Dr. Phillips Lewis has focused her research inquiry and scholarly writings on the Caribbean’s social and

economic history, the African Diaspora, women and gender, Caribbean migrations, and world history. Her list of awards and recognitions includes a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar Fellowship, New York University’s Faculty Resource Network Scholar-in-Residence Fellowship, an Oxford Roundtable Fellowship, and Spelman College Presidential Awards for Excellence in Teaching and Distinguished Service.

Dr. Phillips Lewis, who grew up in the Caribbean, earned her bachelor’s degree at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago before completing her master’s and Ph.D. at The University of Manitoba in Manitoba, Canada. An inveterate cosmopolitan, she travels extensively for research, to present scholarly papers, and to consult with other historians, usually on topics related to the Caribbean or the African

Diaspora, and currently serves as assistant chief examiner for Caribbean history with the Caribbean Examinations Council. Despite this broad sphere of influence, Dr. Phillips Lewis said she has done some of her best work close to home.

FOCUS ON PEOPLE

“Most significant for me has been leadership at this College,” she said. “I started with an ADW directorship and that was significant. It helped me to understand that I have some leadership skills that can be used in helping to promote the mission of the College.”

Those skills include the ability to inspire others to share her vision for a particular endeavor, as she did with the ADW. Dr. Phillips Lewis envisioned the program as an engine for study and research into the history of African peoples outside of Africa, an engine fueled by teamwork.



SIGNATURE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Innovation Curriculum

“My focus was on people,” recalled Dr. Phillips Lewis. “I’m not saying that I was not also focused on content, but I thought that if you get the group working together as a team and seeing that they are all invested in the same vision, then we could all move forward and have productive outcomes.”

As faculty members became more invested in the program, Dr. Phillips Lewis became more concerned with finding a way to strengthen their understanding of the diaspora. She organized annual ADW faculty workshops in different locations within the diaspora, each one offering a new perspective on the trials and achievements of people of African descent.

“We didn’t have funding at that time to travel outside of the U.S.,” said Dr. Phillips Lewis. “We had to get creative. The first place I took them was Sapelo Island, Georgia, and that was a wonderful experience. There, we experienced the same diasporic culture that we were teaching about, but in a different locale – a different setting of the diaspora.”

Dr. Phillips Lewis eventually oversaw trips to Sapelo Island/ Savannah, Georgia, Memphis, Tennessee, Charleston, South Carolina, New Orleans, and finally, out of the country, to attend an African

Diaspora Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, providing Spelman ADW faculty members with direct experience of the variety of places, peoples, and cultures that help define the African Diaspora. They also gained firsthand experience of the points of cultural connection and disconnection within that diaspora. The trips became a “bonding experience” for ADW faculty, reinforcing the idea that “we are all in this together and working towards the same goal,” said Dr. Phillips Lewis.

Knitting diverse, even divergent, faculty members into a functional body is something of a specialty for Dr. Phillips Lewis. She became vice president of Faculty Council in 2014 and was president from 2016 to 2018. During those busy and sometimes turbulent four years, she was a member of the Faculty Council Ad Hoc Committee that produced a white paper calling for greater involvement in the governance of the College, and chaired the Handbook Advisory Committee that undertook a milestone revising of the

faculty handbook. Regarding the former, Dr. Phillips Lewis said the white paper was intended to help the College recognize the importance of shared governance at a time when Spelman was intensifying its focus on students.

“We felt that while the College was centering on students, there wasn’t that much attention on the needs of faculty, and faculty is essential,” said Dr. Phillips Lewis, adding that Spelman must continue to explore ways to ensure shared governance and to keep faculty, as a key stakeholder, fully engaged and included in institutional decision-making.

“You can’t give students the best, if you don’t provide faculty with the best tools and resources,” she said.

Regarding the faculty handbook, Dr. Phillips Lewis said she was eager to start the revision because the existing document was “outdated,” and it was critical that faculty members have “something we can work with.” As chair of the Faculty Council, she found it necessary to adopt a more formal approach to the conducting of meetings.

“We adhered to parliamentary procedure as laid out by Robert’s Rules of Order at regular meetings and in the voting process so that we could get more done and have everything move along smoothly,” she said.

The more structured approach worked, and Dr. Phillips Lewis and her team were able to complete the revision of the handbook. That doesn’t mean she has abandoned her “silk alternative.” She still believes that the key to motivating people is to “treat them in an equitable fashion... to know the resident strengths within the team, and what approaches would work best with each member of that team.”

LEAD BY SELF ASSESSING

Dr. Phillips Lewis began her unique leadership approach long before she taught her first college class.

“I did 12 years as a high school teacher and it was challenging to say the least,” remembered Dr. Phillips Lewis. “For seven years, I taught all teenaged girls and for five years, all teenaged boys. I had to learn quickly how to manage the classroom.”

After graduate school, Dr. Phillips Lewis accepted an appointment as a lecturer at her undergraduate alma matter, the University of the West Indies. It wasn’t long before she found herself in a position that would strongly influence her belief that leadership “must be grounded in self-sacrifice. Individual interest or personal aggrandizement must take a back seat to the good of the collective.”

“I was secretary of the university teachers’ union and that taught me a lot because it was a time when unions negotiated salaries every three years,” she recalled. “Many times negotiations would be very tense and deadlocked, so we had to stay at the table until we reached a resolution. I knew our colleagues depended on us to secure the best terms for them. I felt at that time that my leadership skills were being sharpened.”

Since accepting her appointment at Spelman in 1994, Dr. Phillips Lewis has shown herself to be a leader in a wide range of roles and capacities. As chair of the History Department, she oversaw the development of a new major, that, she said

“deepened and strengthened the major core” of courses required to earn a degree in history while introducing “thematic electives” that broadened the range of historical topics available to both students and instructors.

As the former director of Cultural Orientation at Spelman’s Gordon Zeto Center for Global Education, Dr. Phillips Lewis was responsible for cultural orientation and inter-cultural competency for the 400 students who, each year, take part in the Center’s study abroad programs. She is also founder and director of Spelman’s summer program with The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus, in Trinidad and Tobago and has represented the College on faculty familiarization trips and site evaluation teams for the study abroad program.

“I am firmly committed to global education and ensuring our students get the most out of their inter-cultural experiences,” Dr. Phillips Lewis said. “I believe that inter-cultural competency is an essential 21st century skill that all college graduates should possess, not just to be truly global citizens, but in preparation for every workplace.”

With so much territory to cover, Dr. Phillips Lewis has had moments when the mantle of leadership felt burdensome and isolating. In such times, she has found it essential to infuse her silk with the searchlight of self-reflection.

“Leadership is a lonely enterprise, so even when you think you are doing a good job, there will be critics,” she said. “Sometimes there were periods where I would think, ‘Should I continue?’ But with each periodic self-assessment and recalibration, my conclusion has always been that if you have something to give, you have a responsibility to give it, and to do so in the way that works best for you. Ultimately, I would say make sure you are in it for the right reasons, and if you are not prepared to give it your all and then some, don’t sign up for the job.”





LEARN LESSONS THROUGH MENTORSHIP

Marionette Holmes, Ph.D. C'90

FOR MARIONETTE HOLMES, PH.D., THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MENTORSHIP AND LEADERSHIP IS DEFINITIVE. IT IS MENTORS, SAID THE CHAIR OF SPELMAN'S ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT, WHO PROVIDE THE GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT THAT CAN TRANSFORM A CAPABLE FOLLOWER INTO A PROMISING MANAGER AND, A PROMISING MANAGER INTO A MATURE LEADER. IN FACT, DR. HOLMES CREDITS MANY OF HER PROFESSIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL SUCCESSES TO THE "LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP" SHE LEARNED FROM HER MENTORS.

LESSON ONE: THINK LIKE A LEADER

Dr. Holmes said people in authority often engage in counterproductive, time-wasting pursuits, such as blame-assignment. A mentor can challenge a would-be leader to think critically and to assess objectives and outcomes honestly. Dr. Holmes said she initially learned that lesson when she was an undergraduate student at Spelman, a place she says virtually bustles with mentorship opportunities. However, the importance of thinking like a leader and finding mentors to help guide that process really hit home for her much later.

"The second time I was in a leadership position, I was more introspective and my whole attitude was, 'How can I improve? How can I grow?'" recalled Dr. Holmes. "I was no longer wanting to look at a person and say, 'The reason why something's not done is because of that person.' I wondered what I could do differently. That's what caused me to seek out mentors and coaches, and I would recommend to anyone that they do the same. It's good to have somebody who can challenge you."

That “second” leadership position was at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where Dr. Holmes was lead investigator on a project that examined the economic feasibility of shifting from one type of polio vaccine to another in Indonesia. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding for phases of global polio eradication were on the line; the World Health Organization and the Indonesian government were demanding hard, clear data; and Dr. Holmes and her team of fellow researchers - four medical doctors and two research assistants – were in the breach. In the end, the work met muster for peer-review, and more importantly, informed policy changes that could ultimately improve health outcomes for millions in Indonesia and elsewhere.

The Indonesia experience proved that Dr. Holmes was a mature leader, but that didn’t prevent her from relying on two of her mentors while she thought through the ups and downs of her time at the CDC. She recalls how one mentor helped her “disentangle my personal script from what was happening in the workplace;” and acquainted her with her next lesson.

LESSON TWO: FOCUS ON THE DESIRED OUTCOME FOR THE OVERALL GOOD

Dr. Holmes espouses the belief that a leader should be a “systems” thinker. A systems thinker must see the multiple

vantage points of the different stakeholders within the institution. A leader therefore must think, make decisions, and act on the best decision of the institution as a whole. “Leaders’ behaviors are sometimes driven by things we can’t understand or we don’t see because we’re not at the tables where certain decisions are discussed and certain decisions are made,” said Dr. Holmes. “A leader operates with a higher purpose in mind and sometimes they can’t disclose it.”

Since taking over as chair of the Spelman economics department in 2016, Dr. Holmes has found herself repeatedly relying on her mentor’s lesson, particularly as she has attempted to juggle the competing demands of department stakeholders.

“There was one issue I had to address, and I had to make sure I was operating in the best interests of all of the constituents, internal and external, including faculty and students and the administration,” Dr. Holmes recalled. “And I could not communicate everything to everybody as I was executing this process.”

In the end, said Dr. Holmes, an effective leader must be willing to pursue complex, long-term, confidential plans -- even when that means being misunderstood or outright unpopular. However, a mature leader also knows how to mitigate the interpersonal and professional turbulence that

may result from the execution of a plan or strategy that excludes certain stakeholders, said Dr. Holmes. That mitigation begins when the leader pays close attention to the needs and interests of those stakeholders, a notion codified in the next lesson.

LESSON THREE: OBSERVE & CONNECT

“One thing I learned from my second mentor is a lot of work is done behind the scenes, so you have to connect with the team,” said Dr. Holmes. “You poke your head in on everybody and say, ‘Hi, how are you doing with that?’ I touch base, so they know you’re interested.”

Dr. Holmes’ interest in the work being done by those she leads is sincere and incisive, but that doesn’t mean she’s willing to squander her time and attention on efforts she doesn’t find meaningful. Back when she was an ambitious Spelman student weighing her future choices, she balked at an obvious career choice, insisting she “did not want to work as an accountant.” Instead, on the advice of her college professor father, Dr. Holmes enrolled in an MBA program at Clark Atlanta University. She completed the MBA, but remained strongly attracted to the study of economics, so she completed a master’s degree in



SIGNATURE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

African Diaspora and the World



that discipline before earning a Ph.D. in agricultural and applied economics at the University of Georgia in 2002.

Before joining Spelman as an assistant professor in 2006, Dr. Holmes had wide-ranging and increasingly impactful leadership positions as an economist, including a post-doctoral fellowship at the CDC, and a five-year stint as a research associate, project manager, and later, affiliate researcher at the Harvard School of Public Health. During her time at Harvard, Dr. Holmes was responsible for economically evaluating alternative treatment, prevention and adherence protocols for HIV/AIDs, most notably in Botswana.

Dr. Holmes has continued her leadership in the field of health economics. In addition to her work on the CDC’s Indonesia polio project, she has been actively engaged in a series of CDC initiatives in Ethiopia, South Africa, and South Sudan. These increasingly challenging positions and her growing list of responsibilities at Spelman have given Dr. Holmes cause to rely on the fourth of her mentor’s lessons.

LESSON FOUR: DON’T JUST MANAGE. LEAD.

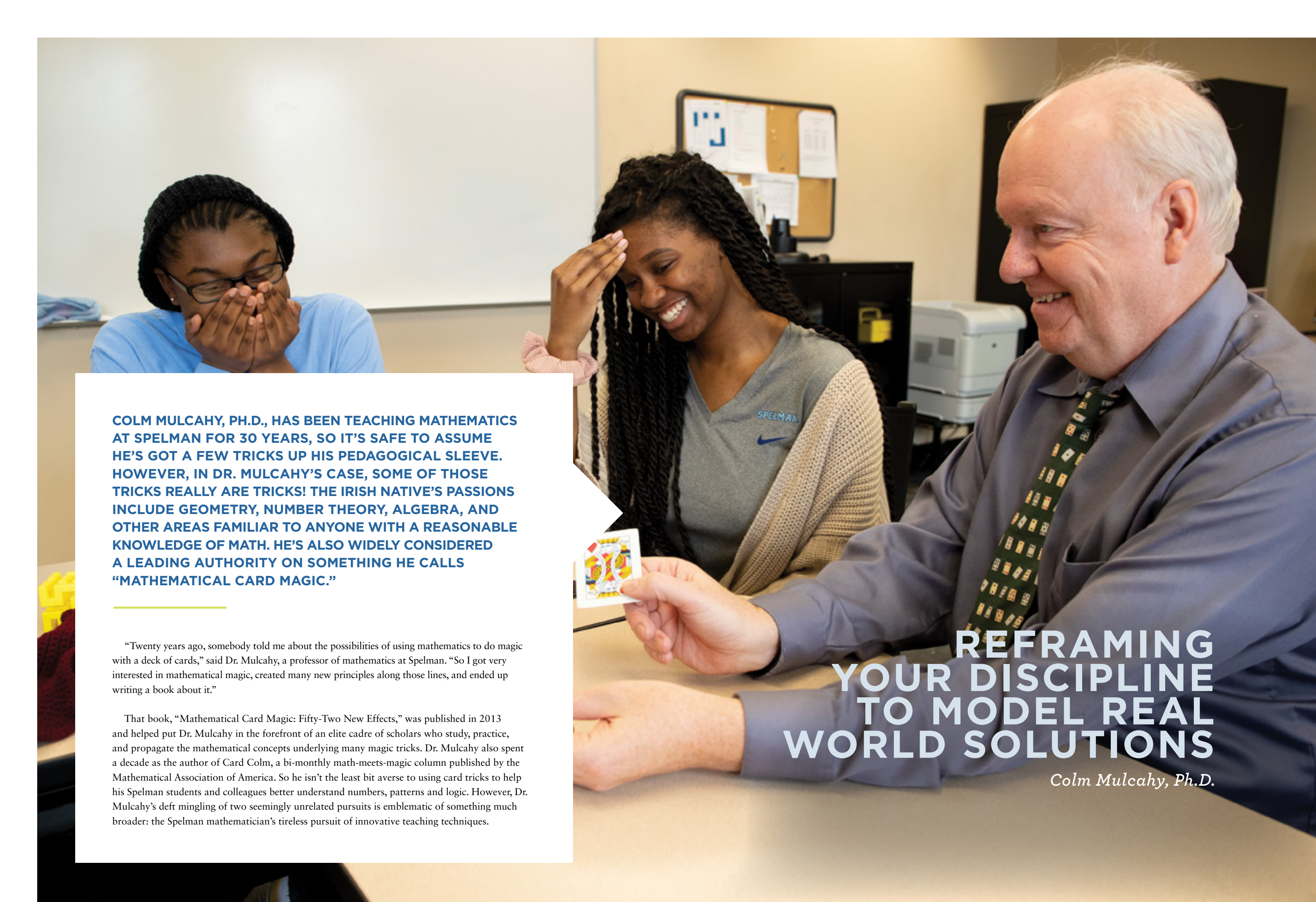
Dr. Holmes said her mentors helped her understand that while a manager merely directs workers, a leader inspires them to “buy in” to the work at hand.

“You must talk to people and try to get buy in versus just telling them what to do,” said Dr. Holmes. At Spelman or any institution, anyone who hopes to be a leader must master the art of getting people to buy in. People are more accountable when they feel they are a part of something and have a vested interest, Dr. Holmes added. “Even though I am chair, everybody is like an equal. We all need to say ‘yay’ or ‘nay.’ It’s better to get people’s buy in and be a leader versus a manager.”

Dr. Holmes shares this message with her students and encourages them to develop skills that will make them leaders in their own right. She has developed programs, such as the data science module for Spelman’s Career Pathways Initiative, intended to help graduating students “hit the ground running.”

“In my experience, people will respect you more in the beginning if you need less help,” said Dr. Holmes. “Therefore, they will align themselves with you and help you to succeed. So it’s good for us to prepare our students to go in there with confidence and with skills.”

For Dr. Holmes, giving students that sort of help and guidance likely comes from Lesson Five: Be a Mentor.



COLM MULCAHY, PH.D., HAS BEEN TEACHING MATHEMATICS AT SPELMAN FOR 30 YEARS, SO IT'S SAFE TO ASSUME HE'S GOT A FEW TRICKS UP HIS PEDAGOGICAL SLEEVE. HOWEVER, IN DR. MULCAHY'S CASE, SOME OF THOSE TRICKS REALLY ARE TRICKS! THE IRISH NATIVE'S PASSIONS INCLUDE GEOMETRY, NUMBER THEORY, ALGEBRA, AND OTHER AREAS FAMILIAR TO ANYONE WITH A REASONABLE KNOWLEDGE OF MATH. HE'S ALSO WIDELY CONSIDERED A LEADING AUTHORITY ON SOMETHING HE CALLS "MATHEMATICAL CARD MAGIC."

"Twenty years ago, somebody told me about the possibilities of using mathematics to do magic with a deck of cards," said Dr. Mulcahy, a professor of mathematics at Spelman. "So I got very interested in mathematical magic, created many new principles along those lines, and ended up writing a book about it."

That book, "Mathematical Card Magic: Fifty-Two New Effects," was published in 2013 and helped put Dr. Mulcahy in the forefront of an elite cadre of scholars who study, practice, and propagate the mathematical concepts underlying many magic tricks. Dr. Mulcahy also spent a decade as the author of Card Colm, a bi-monthly math-meets-magic column published by the Mathematical Association of America. So he isn't the least bit averse to using card tricks to help his Spelman students and colleagues better understand numbers, patterns and logic. However, Dr. Mulcahy's deft mingling of two seemingly unrelated pursuits is emblematic of something much broader: the Spelman mathematician's tireless pursuit of innovative teaching techniques.

**REFRAMING
YOUR DISCIPLINE
TO MODEL REAL
WORLD SOLUTIONS**

Colm Mulcahy, Ph.D.

EMPLOY ACCESSIBLE TEACHING TOOLS

As an instructor and mentor to a generation of aspiring Spelman mathematicians, engineers and scientists, Dr. Mulcahy has championed the instructional value of everything from math software to 3D printers to the art of M.C. Escher. Dr. Mulcahy, who garnered bachelor's and master's degrees in mathematical science at University College Dublin before earning a doctorate at Cornell University, said the ability to turn new or obscure source materials into accessible teaching tools is a fundamental element of educational leadership.

"I've taken advantage, over the years, of new technology and started using it here to enhance our math classes," said Dr. Mulcahy. "And sometimes, when I've become intrigued by something new that I've heard about, I'll even run a seminar on it (to introduce the new concepts to Spelman students). Right now, a colleague and I are exploring the curves and surfaces of computer aided geometric design with six research students, thanks to funding from Boeing."

Dr. Mulcahy said his efforts to help Spelman uncover fresh approaches to math education took another step forward in 2016 when the College opened its Innovation Lab. Crammed to the rafters with high-tech tools, the lab includes 3D printers which Dr. Mulcahy now uses to create multi-dimensional geometric figures.

"3D printing, one of the many, many impressive things they do in the Innovation Lab, is a total natural for mathematics," said Dr. Mulcahy, who credits the lab's leaders Jerry Volcy, Ph.D., Philip Eric Thompson and Robert Hamilton with helping him learn the intricacies of the new technology. "When you first start mathematics you learn about two dimensional stuff, but then when you try to model the real world, you have to step up in three dimensions. But it's hard to draw those pictures on a board or understand them

from pictures in a textbook. Yet when you have tangible and tactile 3D printouts to play with, you can really use your imagination and design things that would have been very difficult otherwise."

Dr. Mulcahy even grinned a bit when he revealed that he hopes to inspire some of his students to tackle intimidating math problems by confessing his own trepidation about solving Rubik's Cube. "The Rubik's Cube scared me for decades, then last spring I met Rubik himself here in Atlanta," he remembered. "I figured it was time I made myself learn how to solve it." In fact, his pride and respect is evident whenever he talks about his students, colleagues, and what he described as Spelman's "peerless track record of producing women who go out and change the world."

"I've had the pleasure of teaching some extraordinary [young women] who've gone on to get Ph.D.s [in mathematics]," he continued. "We started tracking them a few years ago as a departmental effort and we discovered – I don't know if we're allowed to say this – that we might have a better track record than many other schools, including some of our neighbors."

Say it? Thanks to Dr. Mulcahy and his colleagues in Spelman's math department, the College may soon be able to shout about its success in training women mathematicians. The department has been compiling a database of Spelmanites who majored in math, and tracking their post-baccalaureate achievements. Dr. Mulcahy said he's still pulling together the numbers, but over 60 Spelman women have gone on to earn Ph.D.s in math and related fields. Given that those women often faced considerable racial and gender hostility, it's remarkable, said Dr. Mulchay, that so many have secured advanced degrees. Spelman, he insists, is "clearly doing something right."

As for those Spelman math majors who don't pursue advanced degrees, they still

benefit from their exposure to numbers and clear reasoning, said Dr. Mulcahy. He contends that math is relevant for anyone who wants to think more precisely, reason more effectively in a data-laden world, and live more constructively.

"While not everybody is going to be a researcher or teacher, people should appreciate the importance of math because logical thinking is so crucial in real life," Dr. Mulcahy said. "For instance, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, people making decisions in verdicts, and all voters need to know the difference between causation and correlation. There are huge implications for social justice there."

Innumeracy, the lack of basic math skills, is a hot button topic for Dr. Mulcahy. He confesses both puzzlement and ire at the nation's seeming inability to embrace even elementary mathematical reasoning.

"When you meet a person and they ask 'What do you do?,' if you say 'I am a mathematician,' nine times out of 10 they're going to say 'Math was my worst subject!'" said Dr. Mulcahy. "And they're proud of it! Now if somebody says they're an English professor, nobody responds 'Oh, I'm illiterate. I never learned to spell.'"

KNOW YOUR HISTORY

One way to make math more appealing is to make sure students at every educational level learn contemporary math concepts and how to apply them to real world situations, Dr. Mulcahy said. Another way would be to show to give human mathematicians are and give them some of the recognition they deserve. That includes helping Spelman students understand that when they're learning math, they're following a path blazed by extraordinary African American women, he adds.

"I would like to see every Spelman math major who walks out that gate, if they're stopped on the street and asked to name a Black woman mathematician, they would

have at least three names on their lips," said Dr. Mulcahy.

Those names might well include Georgia Caldwell Smith, Ph.D., who started teaching at Spelman in 1929 at the age of 19, having already earned a master's degree. She later became chair of the College's math department, and finally earned her doctorate just before she died in 1961; or Etta Zuber Falconer, Ph.D., another of the very first African American women to earn a Ph.D. in math and a fixture at Spelman from the 1960s until 2001 when the science building that bears her name was opened. Dr. Mulcahy, who chaired the math department for three years starting in 2003, cites those two as just some of the "remarkable" examples of the talent, courage, ability and achievements of African American women in the mathematical sciences.

Dr. Mulcahy knows a bit about achievement. He was presented with the Mathematical Association of America's Allendoerfer Award for excellence in expository writing for his paper on

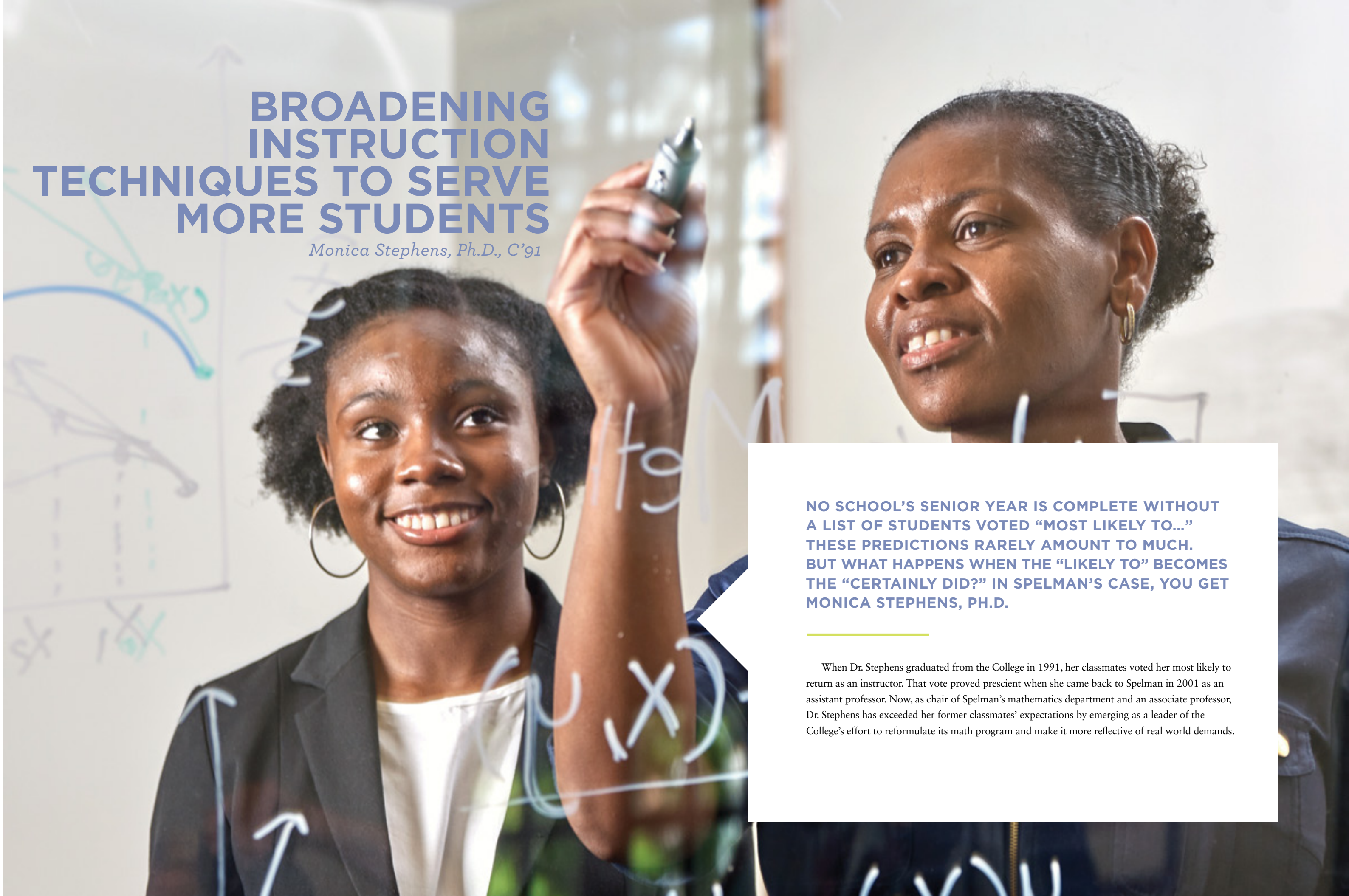
wavelet image compression; his math-based puzzles have been published in the New York Times; he has blogged for The Huffington Post and Scientific American; and he serves on various boards and foundations, including the Advisory Council of the National Museum of Mathematics in New York City.

He is also an outspoken advocate for the preservation of Ireland's mathematical heritage, a topic on which he currently blogs monthly. He's a passionate proponent of the work and ideas of his late friend, prolific mathematics writer Martin Gardner. Dr. Mulcahy currently serves as vice president of Gathering 4 Gardner, a non-profit educational foundation that organizes conferences and other events celebrating Gardner's life and contributions. Dr. Mulcahy was a teenager in Ireland when he first encountered Gardner's writings which survey a broad range of topics including popular math and science, scientific skepticism, "Alice in Wonderland," and recreational mathematics.

"He was absolutely delightful, and so modest," recalled Dr. Mulcahy of his first meeting with his hero who was in retirement in Oklahoma. "He was 92, I think, when we met. I had the pleasure of meeting him several times, and I'm one of many people working hard to keep his legacy alive and relevant. He wrote over 100 books."

Gardner was a rationalist who often wrote about the dangers of irrational ideas and practices. That's likely one reason Gardner enjoyed Dr. Mulcahy's original card tricks and suggested he write a book about them. After all, as Dr. Mulcahy will tell you, there is a logical explanation for every magic trick, and sometimes it's actually mathematical. And to mark the centennial of Gardner's birth in 2014, Dr. Mulcahy successfully proposed "Mathematics, Magic and Mystery" as the theme for Mathematics Awareness Month that year nationally.





BROADENING INSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES TO SERVE MORE STUDENTS

Monica Stephens, Ph.D., C'91

NO SCHOOL'S SENIOR YEAR IS COMPLETE WITHOUT A LIST OF STUDENTS VOTED "MOST LIKELY TO..." THESE PREDICTIONS RARELY AMOUNT TO MUCH. BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE "LIKELY TO" BECOMES THE "CERTAINLY DID?" IN SPELMAN'S CASE, YOU GET MONICA STEPHENS, PH.D.

When Dr. Stephens graduated from the College in 1991, her classmates voted her most likely to return as an instructor. That vote proved prescient when she came back to Spelman in 2001 as an assistant professor. Now, as chair of Spelman's mathematics department and an associate professor, Dr. Stephens has exceeded her former classmates' expectations by emerging as a leader of the College's effort to reformulate its math program and make it more reflective of real world demands.

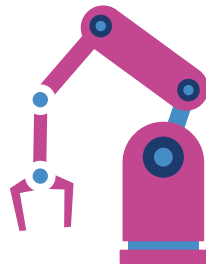
DR. STEPHENS AND HER FACULTY EXTEND THE CLASS’ EXPERIENTIAL FACTOR BY PAIRING STUDENTS WITH TEACHERS AND CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS WHO MONITOR PROBLEM-SOLVING EXERCISES AND OFFER ON-THE-FLY, HIGHLY PERSONALIZED GUIDANCE AND INSTRUCTION.

“Our math students get accepted into very competitive graduate school programs, but a lot of them have other interests such as in industry and in banking,” said Dr. Stephens. “We’ve have to focus our attention on making sure students get the kind of career development they need.”

Dr. Stephens envisions a math department built on a core curriculum suited to math majors aspiring to advanced degrees, but enriched with course offerings for non-majors who need solid mathematical skills. That vision includes an expanded emphasis on basic math instruction to improve students’ quantitative skills.

SIGNATURE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning



“We now have a course for students who are liberal arts majors to expose them to math in the areas that they might use in everyday life, like budgeting, some statistics and some logic,” said Dr. Stephens. “And then, of course, we have the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) majors, and economics; the majors we touch the most.”

INFUSE INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

Dr. Stephens’ efforts to take her department beyond the rarified confines of high-level mathematics are rooted in some of her earliest experiences as a Spelman instructor. Working on a summer program during her first year at the College, she noticed how readily her students – some with relatively limited math training – responded to mathematics when it was applied to real-world problems.

“We had a partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency, and the students would work on data for the EPA and report back their findings,” recalled Dr. Stephens. “A lot of times their perspective

was very fresh because they were not tainted by the kinds of things more experienced researchers might be focused on.”

It’s possible that the “taint” her students so deftly avoided may be linked to a problem Dr. Stephens finds pervasive in math education: an over-reliance on traditional teaching techniques, including classroom lectures. She cringes when she reads statistics suggesting that a wide majority of college instructors believe “lecturing is the best way to teach mathematics,” adding that she prefers to regard learning as an “experiential” process relying on a range of techniques intended to fully engage the student. That’s why her department has retooled some of its classes, scaled back lectures in favor of personalized instruction and online coursework, created what Dr. Stephens calls “hybrids.”

“For example, we have completely altered our Intermediate Algebra class,” she said. “The course, which addresses deficiencies students have when they arrive here, now uses online adaptive learning software, so there’s very little lecturing.”

Dr. Stephens and her faculty extend the class’ experiential factor by pairing students with teachers and classroom assistants who monitor problem-solving exercises and offer on-the-fly, highly personalized guidance and instruction.

“This,” said Dr. Stephens, “is where higher education needs to go. Why are we sitting students in a classroom lecturing at them? Think about the learning that can really take place when they’re involved in the process and not just taking notes.”



PRIORITIZE RELEVANCY

Improving the classroom experience is more than a means of bolstering students’ learning quotients; it is also a response, shared Dr. Stephens, to what some pundits are calling “the changing landscape of higher education.” In that landscape, bricks-and-mortar liberal arts colleges are increasingly squeezed by the encroachment of online schools, questions about the social and educational value of a liberal education, and a radical escalation of student expectations driven by rising tuition rates. Dr. Stephens believes traditional liberal arts schools such as Spelman will ultimately prevail, but they must be proactive in finding ways to remain relevant.

Dr. Stephens sees evidence of that proactivity in her work with The Center for the Advancement of STEM Leadership. Formed in 2016, CASL is a consortium of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) that works to make the study of STEM more accessible to marginalized student populations. In the process, it helps those students see the relevance of a liberal education at an HBCU, in part, by exposing them to emerging leaders such as Dr. Stephens.

“I have a cohort of people who are with me from all different HBCUs and we’re a very diverse group in terms of discipline,” Dr. Stephens said. “That experience has really shown me I have leadership potential I didn’t really think I had.”

Dr. Stephens’ gradual acceptance of her leadership potential began while she was still a Spelman student. It was then that she came under the influence of two women with leadership ability to spare: Sylvia Bozeman, Ph.D., professor emerita, mathematics, and Etta Zuber Falconer, Ph.D.; Spelman’s former Fuller E. Callaway Professor of Mathematics. By the time Dr. Stephens arrived at Spelman in 1987, both women had already achieved near-legendary status as mathematicians and instructors, but that didn’t stop either from helping Dr. Stephens reassess her choice of a major and find her way into mathematics.

“I came to Spelman as a chemistry and dual degree chemical engineering student, but then I was extremely impacted by my instructors, particularly Dr. Bozeman and Dr. Falconer,” remembered Dr. Stephens.

“As a young student, I had, quite honestly, never seen African American women mathematicians in any capacity.”

Dr. Stephens, who also spent some of her Spelman credit hours on physics and electrical engineering, eventually earned her master’s degree and Ph.D. in applied mathematics at Brown University. After “a few post-docs” she headed back to Spelman, ostensibly because she had completed her post-doctoral research, but mostly because “I always knew I was going to come back,” said Dr. Stephens. “It was in my heart from the time I left.”

Apparently those “most likely to return to Spelman votes” votes weren’t wasted.

IMPACTING CHANGE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Marta Dark McNeese, Ph.D.

FOR A SELF-DESCRIBED “QUIET PERSON,” MARTA DARK MCNEESE, PH.D., HAS MADE PLENTY OF NOISE AS A PHYSICIST, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND FACULTY LEADER AT SPELMAN. DR. MCNEESE HAS TWICE BEEN ELECTED TO THE COLLEGE’S TENURE AND PROMOTION COMMITTEE, WHERE SHE WORKED TO “DEMYSTIFY” THE COMPLEX PROCESSES OF THAT POWERFUL AND INFLUENTIAL BODY. SHE WAS A KEY PLAYER IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPELMAN’S GROUNDBREAKING WOMEN IN STEM SUMMER BRIDGE ACCELERATOR PROGRAM, HELPING FURTHER SOLIDIFY THE COLLEGE’S REPUTATION AS A PREMIER EDUCATOR OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. SHE IS ALSO ONE OF ONLY A HANDFUL OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN TO OBTAIN A PH.D. FROM THE MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (MIT). SHE’S DONE IT ALL WHILE MAINTAINING HER REPUTATION AS A QUIET-SPOKEN SCIENTIST WHO PREFERS TO BE “THE DRUM MAJOR IN THE BACKGROUND.”

“The leadership experience I most appreciate is servant leadership,” said Dr. McNeese, an associate professor of physics. “So although I am a somewhat quiet person, I do seek out leadership where I can push people to be their best. I may not be in the spotlight, but I do like to make sure things are getting done.”

“WE’RE IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY. WE’RE IN THE 21ST CENTURY. WE ARE FACING MORE CHALLENGES WITH TECHNOLOGY, AND NOT JUST IN DEVELOPING THE TECHNOLOGY BUT ALSO ETHICAL APPROACHES TO HOW WE USE IT,” SHE SAID. “WE NEED THOSE CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS.”



LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Dr. McNeese’s desire to get things done was evident early. She was just 12-years-old when she convinced her parents that her interest in astronomy was serious enough to warrant investment in a telescope. By middle school, Dr. McNeese’s nascent interest in science had become a full-fledged passion, in part because of the encouragement of an attentive teacher.

“My seventh-grade physical science teacher was the first African-American teacher I ever had,” remembered Dr. McNeese, who grew up in suburban Washington, D.C. “She must have noticed my interest because she was always giving me different [scientific] things to play with. I could feel that she cared about me.”

By her freshman year at the University of Virginia, Dr. McNeese had shifted her focus

from astronomy to physics. By the time she entered MIT and began work on her doctorate degree, she was increasingly involved with her eventual area of specialization, biomedical optics. Her work in that field, which studies the use of lasers to manipulate living tissue, has required that Dr. McNeese function as a de facto leader among the small cohort of African-American women at the highest educational level in physics. Just eight African-American women have earned Ph.D.s in physics at MIT, said Dr. McNeese. According to the website for African-American Women in Physics, fewer than 150 African-American women have earned advanced degrees in the discipline’s varied fields. Dr. McNeese said she feels no particular pressure to function as a leader among African-American women in physics, but she welcomes the opportunity when it arises.

“I have had students over the years who definitely seem to look up to me, and it’s very touching to have those students,” she said. “I’m glad that I can provide some sort of role model for them because I didn’t have that, except for Mercedes Richards.”

The late Mercedes Richards, Ph.D., was among the first Black women to earn a doctorate in physics and among the very few to work in the rarified field of astrophysics. A tireless lecturer and researcher, the Jamaica-born Dr. Richards was a long-time professor at the University of Virginia. Dr. McNeese says her exposure to Dr. Richards helped her feel more confident because “It’s a good thing to know that there’s at least someone who looks like you” working in the sciences.

Since her arrival at Spelman as an assistant professor in 2000, Dr. McNeese has tried to give her students a view not only of how a scientist works but how a scientist lives. As an instructor and advisor to the Physics Club, she has rejected the image of the hide-bound, “off-the-wall” scientist with limited social skills, choosing instead to project herself as a whole and healthy individual who just happens to love science.

“I hope for my students that I’ve also been able to model a physicist who has the ability to be personable and have a family and just juggle the work-life balance,” said Dr. McNeese. “I think that’s important to see because that’s not something I saw coming up with the women faculty at MIT.”



**Atlanta University
Center Art History +
Curatorial Studies
Collective**

DRIVE THE INTERNAL PROCESS

Dr. McNeese’s effort to bring light to the shadowy contours of the scientific life is in keeping with her overall desire to clarify things unseen. When she first sought a seat on Spelman’s Tenure and Promotion Committee, she did so because, as a newly-tenured faculty member, she was convinced that junior faculty were being excluded from the group’s inner workings. She decided that the best way to understand the process was by “being on that committee and trying to find ways to demystify some of it and help junior faculty feel empowered to be involved, ask questions, learn more, and not feel intimidated,” said Dr. McNeese.

Impressed by her work, a group of fellow professors recruited Dr. McNeese to seek what became her second term on the committee. At the same time, Dr. McNeese was expanding her leadership credentials on and beyond the campus, serving on the General Council and the Awards and Diversity Committees of the American Physical Society, the nation’s largest umbrella organization for physicists; giving her support and effort to Spelman’s emerging STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) curriculum; and pushing to make “project-based learning” the centerpiece of Spelman’s Physics program.

Basing the study of physics on real-time, hands-on projects that exemplify physical principles such as gravitation and motion helps students “take leadership of their own learning” and develop better critical thinking

skills said Dr. McNeese, adding that such skills are broadly applicable and essential to virtually every field of endeavor.

“We’re in a global society, we’re in the 21st century. We are facing

more challenges with technology, and not just in developing the technology, but also ethical approaches to how we use it,” she said. “We need those critical thinking skills.”

In science and technology, the development of critical thinking skills is often linked to quantitative literacy – a fundamental understanding of numbers. So, it follows that Dr. McNeese is a leader of the College’s Summer Bridge Program which introduces recent high school graduates to college-level work in math and computer programming. She worked in partnership with Monica Stevens, Ph.D., chair of the Spelman Mathematics Department, to facilitate the program, placing heavy emphasis on providing Summer Bridge students – all aspiring science majors – a firm quantitative foundation.

“From the physics perspective, it’s critical that we get students ready to take calculus from the time they start as first-year students,” Dr. McNeese said. “They also are involved with some hands-on interdisciplinary projects, so we hope that exposure will give them alternate areas of interests, maybe photovoltaics or robotics or a chemical synthesis of cosmetics, different topics they may not have thought about.”

Dr. McNeese said it’s critical that instructors and administrators at Spelman help science students and their families understand the implicit career potential in STEM (science, technology,

engineering, and math), and avoid the mistaken belief that the undergraduate study of science is a financial and professional dead-end.

“It’s important especially for African-American families to understand that there are good careers that can come from these degrees,” said Dr. McNeese. “You could go into research and development with a company, and there’s now a lot of interest in engineering. I think there are certainly women mathematicians and physicists that are doing important things.”

Dr. McNeese has first-hand experience with “doing important things” in physics. An expert in the complex physics underlying the use of lasers to repair damaged cartilage and ligaments, she is also deeply involved with research on what she describes as “hydro gels.”

“They could possibly be used as a way to repair or perhaps grow tissue,” said the physicist. “Right now I’m working with a few students on how we can develop this gel material, how we can give it the strength it would need to be able to support the mechanical loads that joints would experience.”

Beyond her research, Dr. McNeese remains intensely interested in the administrative and managerial elements of educational leadership. She said, albeit quietly, that she’d like the opportunity to make a little more noise at Spelman.

“At some point, I would like to become chair of the department,” she intimated. “I do think about administrative things with regards to programs. It’s nice to see a big project come together.”

THERE'S NO GETTING AROUND IT: JULIE DASH IS A STAR. THE CEILING-SHATTERING DIRECTOR, WRITER, PRODUCER, AND DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF ARTS AT SPELMAN, HAS SPENT MORE THAN THREE DECADES DEFYING OFTEN-HOSTILE FORCES WITHIN THE MOVIE INDUSTRY TO CREATE AND BRING TO AUDIENCES AN ART SO VIBRANTLY LIFE-AFFIRMING THAT IT HAS BECOME A GUIDING INFLUENCE FOR A GENERATION OF FILMMAKERS.

Dash's masterwork, the visual tone-poem "Daughters of the Dust" was released in 1991 and became the first feature-length film directed by a woman of African descent to receive wide theatrical distribution and the first by an African-American woman to be named to the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress. The production's passionate, layered storytelling and soul-stirring imagery have given creative impetus to everyone from directors Ryan Coogler ("Black Panther," "Fruitvale Station") and Ava Duvernay ("Selma," "When They See Us") to singer Beyonce, whose visual album "Lemonade" draws on filmic concepts rooted in "Daughters" tale of a Gullah family navigating the currents of an uncertain future.

While there is no disputing Dash's honored position in film's firmament, in her role as an academic leader at Spelman, the director doesn't hesitate to remind her students that being a movie maker often has little to do with being a star.

"It's about the work," she said. "Most students think in terms of fame, but it's not about the film festival; it's not about the party. It's about gaining the skills it takes to tell a story."

Dash goes further, saying she encourages her students to see film work not as a gateway to celebrity, but as a practical, multi-dimensional enterprise. A talented, well-trained film student could eventually build a productive – and lucrative – career in TV, documentaries, industrial films, music videos, and movie shorts, said Dash, adding "you don't have to be a famous filmmaker to be a successful filmmaker."

Dash practices what she teaches. Her own output has been stunningly varied, ranging across genres and mediums, and earning her bouquets of encomiums. Her direction of the CBS Network Television movie "The Rosa Parks Story" starred Angela Bassett, captured an NAACP Image Award, and made Dash the first African-American woman to be nominated by The Directors Guild of America for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in a Movie Made for Television.



**PRIORITIZING
THE WORK**
Julie Dash

“ILLUSIONS,” WITH ITS POWERFUL EVOCATIONS OF BLACK WOMEN COMING TO TERMS WITH QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY AND INJUSTICE, HINTED AT THE FILMIC GENIUS THAT WOULD EXPRESS ITSELF IN “DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST,” AND HELPED SHAPE A MODERN HOLLYWOOD WHERE AFRICAN-AMERICAN DIRECTORS, WRITERS, AND PRODUCERS HAVE GARNERED SOME MUCH-DESERVED ATTENTION.

She has also directed numerous short films, including the innovative “Brothers of the Borderland,” an immersive cinematic experience narrated by Oprah Winfrey and shown as part of an ongoing exhibit at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. And, as if to fill out an already eclectic filmography, Dash has directed music videos by Tracy Chapman, Tony! Toni! Tone! and Adriana Evans. More recently, she has taken her talents to the director’s chair for the Oprah-produced TV series “Queen Sugar.” Dash had barely wrapped that job when news dropped that she would direct the upcoming feature-length biopic on activist icon Angela Davis.

“I have a lot to do,” said Dash. “I’m a happy camper.”

Don’t mistake “happy” for satisfied. Dash, who turned down a job at the University of Southern California to accept her post at Spelman, said she arrived at the College in 2017 with “a list of things that are important to me.” Since then she has actively promoted several of her priorities, including a more intensive focus to post-graduate training for film students and a greater emphasis on brass tacks skills development.

“I want my students to be able to get into grad school, and that takes preparation,” said Dash, who earned a Bachelor of Arts in film production from the City

College of New York (CCNY) and holds a Master of Fine Arts in film and television production from UCLA. “They must learn how to create and do it well. They need to learn the camera, but they also need to learn how to write and tell stories. You have 120 minutes to make your statement.”

For much of her life, Dash has been finding ways to make her statement. Raised in the combustive hustle of Queens, New York, she developed a discerning eye for human behavior. As a college undergraduate, she initially studied psychology, but a growing interest in story-telling led her to the film school at the Leonard Davis Center for the Performing Arts at CCNY.

As a film student, she gravitated towards documentaries, writing and producing “Working Models for Success,” a promotional film for the New York Urban Coalition. After finishing her undergraduate studies in 1974, Dash migrated to Los Angeles where she completed a two-year fellowship at the American Film Institute Conservatory and enrolled in the graduate program at the UCLA Film School.

Dash soon became identified with a group of independent and outspoken young African-American filmmakers. The group was dubbed the “L.A. Rebellion” by film scholar Clyde Taylor. It was during this time that Dash produced “Four Women,” a short based on the

popular Nina Simone song, and directed “Diary of an African Nun,” which won a Directors Guild Award for a student film.

It was also during this period that Dash became strongly influenced by writers Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, and Alice Walker, and began to gravitate towards narrative filmmaking. The result was her 1982 short “Illusions.” The 34-minute film about an African-American woman passing for white in the Hollywood of the 1940s earned a Black American Cinema Society Award and was named the best film of the decade by the Black Filmmaker Foundation’s Jury Prize.

“Illusions,” with its powerful evocations of Black women coming to terms with questions of identity and injustice, hinted at the filmic genius that would express itself in “Daughters of the Dust,” and helped shape a modern Hollywood where African-American directors, writers, and producers have garnered some much-deserved attention.

Somewhat paradoxically, Dash is loath to contend for her own importance in challenging Hollywood’s long-time neglect of African-American filmmakers.

“I was there,” she said. “But there were others who came before me.” She drops the names of several lesser-known pioneers, including Jessie Maples, the



cinematographer and director whose 1981 release “Will” was the first independent feature-length film directed by an African-American woman.

Dash’s reluctance to claim due credit for her influence on the current generation of high-powered African-American filmmakers isn’t shared by the filmmakers themselves. Coogler and Duvarney have repeatedly lauded Dash as a foremother of their craft and director Barry Jenkins has credited Dash among those who “influenced, willed, nourished, supported” his film “Moonlight,” which captured the 2017 Academy Award for Best Picture.

“There has never been a better time to be a Black filmmaker,” said Dash. “This is not a thing of the moment because the films are being made by Black filmmakers. It’s not going anywhere.”

That’s good news for Spelman film students who benefit from the growing canon of works by successful African-American filmmakers and from the training and direction of filmmaker-scholars such as Dash. And while the director is willing and able to bring her rich experience to the classroom she is careful to avoid addressing contemporary challenges with perspectives borrowed from the past.

“Things change,” Dash said. “The voice I had many years ago is not the voice these young women have. They have different things that are triggering for them. For my generation, it was more about race. For them, it is more their individual identities. That’s not everyone. But it’s true for many.”

Dash’s desire to help her students find their voices sometimes takes her above and beyond her teacher’s podium. Recently, that has included Dash’s effort to get the College to offer training in the piloting of professional-grade drones. Dash said the remote-controlled flying machines open new opportunities for aerial photography and large-scale video mapping (the projection of moving images on large surfaces such as buildings). However, piloting a camera-mounted commercial drone capable of capturing a hawk’s-eye view of the Spelman campus from 400 feet in the air isn’t kid’s play; it’s a complex skill acquired through training and practice. And Dash wants her students to start gaining that skill.

“There are actually jobs for professional drone pilots,” said Dash. “At Spelman, we’re a little behind on this. It’s time that we step up.”

Dash’s mingling of practical concerns and artistic priorities isn’t the least bit arbitrary. For her, being a leader is being ever aware of how all the pieces fit, which is just one more reason why Julie Dash is a star.

“Leadership in the arts is not a one-on-one, binary process,” she said. “It is a multi-prong effort to create something that influences a person’s outlook. There are people who know me, who I have influenced through my work and I’ve never met them.”

FORWARD.

THAT IS THE ONLY DIRECTION FOR SPELMAN BIOLOGY STUDENTS, INSISTS MENTEWAB AYALEW, PH.D., ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND VICE CHAIR OF BIOLOGY. SOME ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES MAY LOOK TO THE PAST AS A WELLSPRING OF PEDAGOGICAL INFLUENCES, BUT BIOLOGY ISN'T ONE OF THEM, SAID DR. AYALEW, WHO DEMANDS THAT HER STUDENTS BOLSTER THEIR FOUNDATIONAL STUDIES OF ORGANIC FORMS AND PROCESSES WITH TRAINING IN CONTEMPORARY MATHEMATICAL AND ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES.

The biologists we train at Spelman need to be 21st century biologists,” said Dr. Ayalew. “Not only do they need to have solid grounding in biology, but they also need to have some degree of knowledge about both mathematics and computer science.”

ADVANCING THROUGH INNOVATIVE RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Mentewab Ayalew, Ph.D.



Assuring that her students acquire the advanced skills they need to undertake contemporary research compelled Dr. Ayalew to expand the scope of her leadership at Spelman.

“The main reason why I became vice chair was because I wanted to see more quantitative and computational biology infused both in our curriculum and faculty research,” Dr. Ayalew explained. “So that gave me the opportunity to really look at our curriculum and the quantitative

and computational approaches we use in our classrooms and also to think about opportunities for faculty to engage in those areas.”

The importance of applying up-to-date approaches to biological research is evident in Dr. Ayalew’s own success as a scientist. Utilizing modern research techniques, Dr. Ayalew has become a leading figure in a new and surprising area of biological study: antibiotic resistance in plants.

“It was not known until I did my post-doc that plants have antibiotic resistance genes,” said Dr. Ayalew. “So, I discovered the first gene involved in antibiotic resistance in plants. In the human world, in hospitals, and so on, people are always worried about antibiotic resistance. But in plants nobody really thought about antibiotic resistance mechanisms until I started. So it’s my niche.”

Since her initial discovery, Dr. Ayalew has moved beyond the gene and worked to uncover the broader, more complex biological mechanisms that underlie the resistance. She believes that certain chemicals and “metal nutrients” in the soil may also play a part. Some scientists hypothesize that a clearer understanding of antibiotic resistance in plants could help farmers make better use of antibiotics to control bacterial diseases in crops.

Dr. Ayalew’s work has spawned the publication of numerous research papers (including a report in the peer-reviewed journal *Nature Biotechnology*), a National Science Foundation grant proposal, several student projects (including first and second place winners at Spelman’s 2018 Research Day science competition) and led to collaborations between Dr. Ayalew and other researchers on and beyond the Spelman campus.

Her research may be forward-looking, but Dr. Ayalew’s interest in plant genetics is rooted in her past. As a child growing up in the Ethiopian capital city of Addis Ababa, the future biologist developed an intense interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). Intent on studying agriculture or health, she became a top student at the Lycee Guebre-Mariam, a French-Ethiopian school, and was awarded a college scholarship in France. She completed undergraduate studies in biotechnology and earned a master’s degree in plant cellular and molecular biology before completing a Ph.D. in the same fields at the Institut National Polytechnique, Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Agronomie in Toulouse, France.

Initially drawn to the United States by a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, Dr. Ayalew later served as a postdoctoral research associate at the University

of Tennessee-Knoxville and as a lecturer at Emory University in Atlanta. She joined the Spelman faculty in 2008, and since then, has immersed herself in the College’s efforts to expand and enrich research opportunities for students and faculty.

“We have been very intentional about it,” said Dr. Ayalew. “For example, we have provided opportunities for our students to participate in developmental workshops during a week at MIT. And last year, I was able to take a group of 10 students to the Institute for Systems Biology in Seattle. That was the first time we had done a program with them.”

As vice chair of the Biology Department, Dr. Ayalew has gained the position and perspective to pursue her belief in a science curriculum that prepares Spelman women to do modern research using modern computational and quantitative skills and tools. In a grant proposal to the National Science Foundation, Dr. Ayalew proffers a plan for a series of workshops that would bring together faculty leaders from Spelman and other schools to develop their acuity in advanced research techniques.

“These workshops will be geared towards specific [scientific] disciplines with the idea that if you are faculty and you want to be innovative in your teaching, you must become comfortable with new, innovative, and computationally challenging approaches. If your training is strictly biology, sometimes it will mean making the leap towards math or computer science.”

Dr. Ayalew knows that such leaps can be challenging, but she said Spelman is gradually equipping itself to help skittish faculty and students step out of their “disciplinary silos” and take an interdisciplinary approach to research. Those steps, said Dr. Ayalew, include the College’s STEM Interdisciplinary Group, which provides a forum for cross-discipline interaction between faculty and expert advisors; a planned collaboration between Spelman and the Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT, which would focus on genomics research; “Finding Your Inner Modeler,” a workshop that brought together Spelman biology faculty, their colleagues from other institutions, and mathematicians with experience creating statistical models; and LINC, an on-campus residency program in which scholars from a range of STEM majors live and work together in an interdisciplinary community.

Dr. Ayalew is co-director of LINC, which operates under the umbrella of Spelman’s Social Justice Fellows

program. She said the connection between science and social justice is hardly coincidental:

“Being a Black woman in the sciences is sometimes challenging. So one of the things they do as part of this community is to reflect on some of these challenges and what the solutions might be. So, they have to think about what it looks like to be a Black woman scientist.”

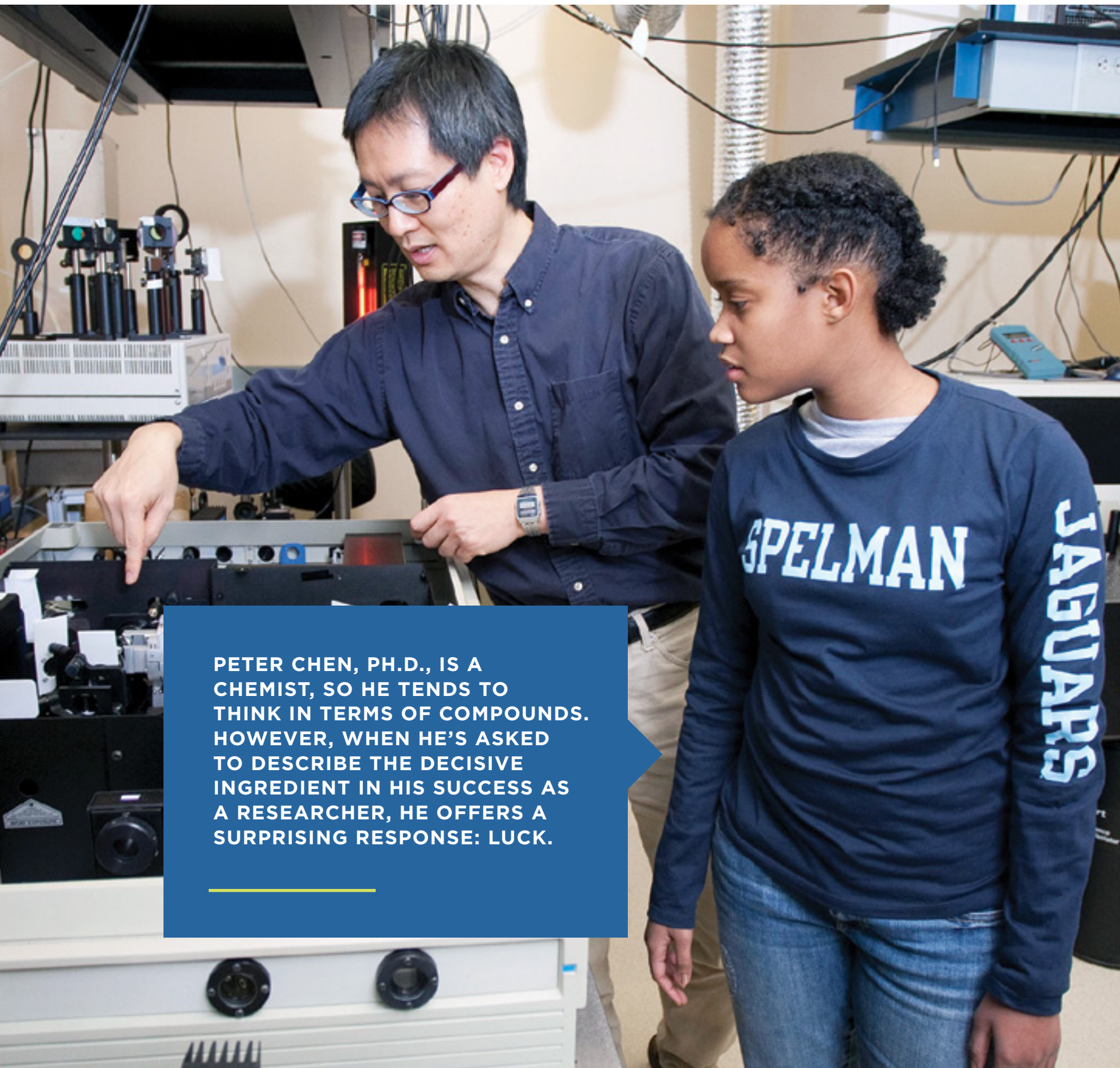
That sort of self-examination is a benefit for current faculty and students, said Dr. Ayalew, but it’s also increasingly important for prospective students who not only question whether they can cut it in STEM, but wonder if they should attend college at all.

“We often hear about college dropouts who start their own start-up companies and become very rich, but I don’t think a lot of people have that golden idea or even the skills and support systems that will help them get there,” Dr. Ayalew said. “So I would say ‘Get your education first.’ I think it’s more pragmatic.”

And, almost certainly, more forward-looking.



THE IMPORTANCE OF APPLYING UP-TO-DATE APPROACHES TO BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH IS EVIDENT IN DR. AYALEW’S OWN SUCCESS AS A SCIENTIST. UTILIZING MODERN RESEARCH TECHNIQUES, DR. AYALEW HAS BECOME A LEADING FIGURE IN A NEW AND SURPRISING AREA OF BIOLOGICAL STUDY: ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE IN PLANTS.



PETER CHEN, PH.D., IS A CHEMIST, SO HE TENDS TO THINK IN TERMS OF COMPOUNDS. HOWEVER, WHEN HE'S ASKED TO DESCRIBE THE DECISIVE INGREDIENT IN HIS SUCCESS AS A RESEARCHER, HE OFFERS A SURPRISING RESPONSE: LUCK.

ADVANCING CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH IN A SMALL LIBERAL ARTS ENVIRONMENT

Peter Chen, Ph.D.

"I do feel really, really lucky when I think about the number of times that we have made mistakes in the lab, and then we worked pretty hard to figure it out, and all of a sudden, we had a 'Eureka!' moment," said Dr. Chen, a professor of chemistry in the Department of Chemistry and Biology. "So it looks like a lot of what we've done was deliberate and straightforward, but a lot has been due to a combination of luck, hard work and persistence."

The chemist's modest appraisal of his achievements isn't shared by others in the scientific community. Dr. Chen has garnered praise – and a prestigious National Science Foundation Career Award – for his groundbreaking research in the field of laser spectroscopy. His leadership in the field, which is devoted to developing new ways of using lasers to study molecules, is all the more remarkable because it's happening at Spelman.

"There's a large community of researchers in the emerging field of coherent multi-dimensional spectroscopy, which uses multiple laser beams to study molecules, but it's almost exclusively happening at major research universities," said Dr. Chen.

While the big graduate institutions have thrown scores of researchers and millions of dollars into coherent multidimensional spectroscopy, which Dr. Chen describes as a "hot area" of research, many undergraduate liberal arts schools left on the sidelines and lack the resources needed to get into the game. This means smaller schools are being left out of exciting research and funding opportunities in an emerging field that could eventually help scientists tackle a wide range of problems in many different fields.

That means smaller schools are being left out of exciting research and funding

opportunities in an emerging field that could eventually help scientists tackle a wide range of problems in many different fields including biology, medicine, energy, atmospheric science, and materials science.

Were it not for Dr. Chen, Spelman also might have been left behind. However, he has used a two prong strategy -- being creative and making the most of what you have -- for securing research funding and making important breakthroughs in his field.

BE CREATIVE AND RESOURCEFUL

"I think the reason I've gotten funding is because the funders say, 'These ideas may not be as fully developed as if they were coming from a research university, but they involve really creative and potentially transformative ideas, so let's support this effort,'" said Dr. Chen, who recently received a half-million dollar NSF grant to develop a new kind of coherent



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Atlanta University Data Science Initiative

multidimensional technique that works in the infrared region.

Most funders don't expect smaller schools to pursue the kind of large-scale, cutting-edge research projects normally undertaken by major research institutions, Dr. Chen said. So, undergraduate liberal arts colleges like Spelman can improve their funding prospects by developing innovative, high impact, targeted projects that give the faculty member a unique niche in an important field.

Dr. Chen also suggests that researchers at smaller schools should constructively assess and utilize their existing resources and areas of expertise identifying areas of interest. He observes that one of his biggest breakthroughs resulted from his use of older style lasers to develop new techniques. "These days, a lot of people want to use newer femtosecond lasers to do laser spectroscopy. We decided to use traditional nanosecond laser systems, and it turns out that these older systems can be used to do things

that the newer femtosecond laser systems have difficulty doing," said Dr. Chen.

In fact, the clever utilization of that "old-fashioned" laser by Dr. Chen, his research assistants and his students literally is pushing the science of spectroscopy into a whole new dimension.

"Many groups have figured out how to carry out two-dimensional spectroscopy, but there are very few that have demonstrated real applications of coherent three-dimensional laser spectroscopy. We're one of the few groups that actually has done that because it turns out that it's easy to do third dimensional work with our nanosecond laser systems," said Dr. Chen. "As a result, we've been able to sort of leapfrog and make considerable progress in the field of high resolution three-dimensional spectroscopy while other groups have struggled with phase stability requirements needed to make 3D spectroscopy work with femtosecond lasers."

LEARN BY INCREASING RESPONSIBILITIES

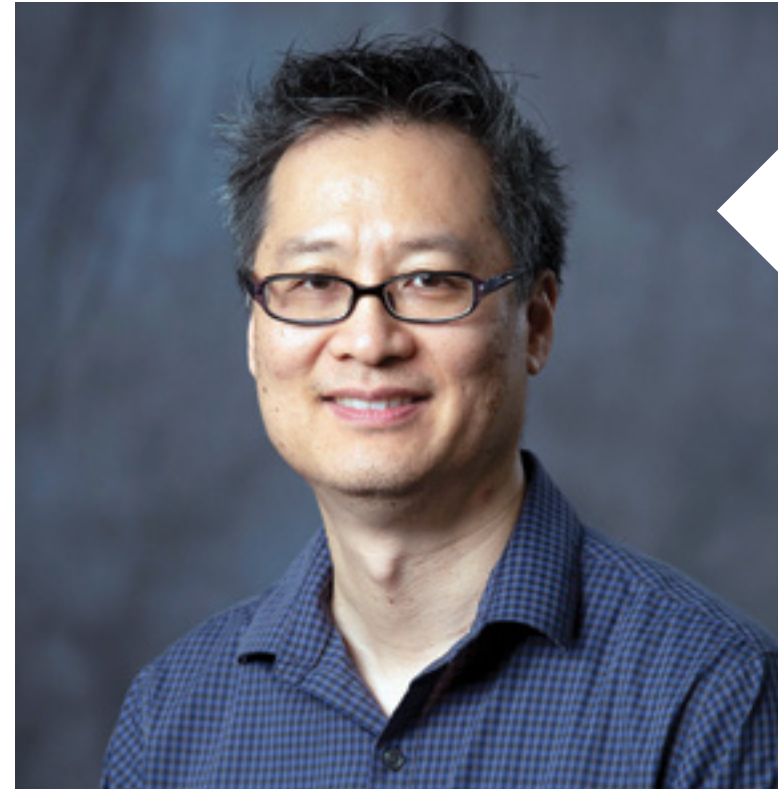
Straddling dimensions in the lab may be Dr. Chen's chief professional preoccupation, but that doesn't mean he's detached from other important

responsibilities of a faculty member at a liberal arts college. A former chair of Spelman's Tenure and Promotion Committee, Dr. Chen says it's important for faculty members to be mindful of their responsibilities to their students and to the College-at-large. There are times when Spelman needs faculty to be willing to lead and help carry out important responsibilities at the institution. Assuming leadership can help teach a person valuable lessons.

"I learned how important it is to learn how to talk and really listen to people, to seek advice when you're not sure yourself, and to benefit from the wisdom shared when dedicated people from different backgrounds come together to seriously think and plan together," said Dr. Chen. "The experience has taught me so much about the institution, about my colleagues, and about myself. With any sort of leadership, you can develop a higher level of dedication and attachment to the institution."

So, while Dr. Chen regards his research as an essential element of his professional life as a chemist, his leadership roles have been a constant reminder of his larger mission at Spelman: to teach.

"I did, at one time, consider whether I should be at an institution with a graduate program," recalled Dr. Chen,



"I LEARNED HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO LEARN HOW TO TALK AND REALLY LISTEN TO PEOPLE, TO SEEK ADVICE WHEN YOU'RE NOT SURE YOURSELF, AND TO BENEFIT FROM THE WISDOM SHARED WHEN DEDICATED PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS COME TOGETHER TO SERIOUSLY THINK AND PLAN TOGETHER," SAID DR. CHEN. "THE EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT ME SO MUCH ABOUT THE INSTITUTION, ABOUT MY COLLEAGUES, AND ABOUT MYSELF. AND WITH ANY SORT OF LEADERSHIP, YOU CAN DEVELOP A HIGHER LEVEL OF DEDICATION AND ATTACHMENT TO THE INSTITUTION."

who holds a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. "I had a couple of offers early on in my career. I'd go there, visit and think to myself 'That's very nice.' I could see how it'd be great to work with these graduate students; but something was really missing. I knew I would not be nearly as excited as I am coming to work with the students here at Spelman."

His decision to forego a job at a research university hasn't hurt his standing in the research community. Dr. Chen holds a number of major recognitions, including a NASA Faculty Award for Research and a Charles N. Reilly-Upjohn Award for outstanding research in analytical chemistry. He has served as a chemistry

councilor with the Council for Undergraduate Research and received Spelman's own Presidential Award for Research.

However, it's possible that the best evidence of Dr. Chen's success in his trifold role as a teacher-researcher-leader might be found in a certain number: 50. That's the approximate number of undergraduate research students who have shared his scientific journey during the past 20+ years. That's 50 women working at the cutting edge of exciting new research in spectroscopy, led by their passionate interest in scientific discovery and the unbridled enthusiasm of their teacher-mentor.



LEADING THROUGH PROGRESSIVE CHANGE

Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Ph.D. C'66

PROFESSOR BEVERLY GUY-SHEFTALL HAS SPENT THE LAST 40 YEARS WORKING TO PUT SPELMAN ON A MORE PROGRESSIVE TRAJECTORY, SOMETIMES BY “FLYING UNDER THE RADAR,” SHE SAID. HOWEVER, IT’S IMPOSSIBLE TO AVOID DETECTION WHEN YOU’RE THE BIGGEST BIRD IN THE SKY. AND MAKE NO MISTAKE, WHEN HER EXTENSIVE—AND ANYTHING BUT LOW-KEY—ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT, SHE CASTS A MAMMOTH SHADOW.

As a junior faculty member in 1976, the current Anna Julia Cooper Professor of Women’s Studies risked her fledgling career to protest the College’s failure to hire an African-American woman as president. A decade later she worked to secure the appointment of Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole as the first Black woman to assume the top post. Dr. Guy-Sheftall, also found time to reimagine “second wave feminism” by articulating a distinctive Black feminist intellectual and political perspective and making it the epistemological foundation for Spelman’s vaunted Women’s Research and Resource Center, which she founded in 1981. Her publications are extensive (12 books, three dozen scholarly papers, and countless articles, essays, and interviews), and they include a broad array of topics from Black feminism to gender and sexuality issues in African American communities, including HBCUs. She holds numerous awards, honors, and fellowships, and in 2017 was named to the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences in a class that includes authors Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Paula Giddings, singer John Legend, mathematician Maryam Mirzakhani, and comedian Carol Burnett.

If Dr. Guy-Sheftall has soared as a scholar, writer, activist, and thought leader, it is likely because she got her start in a decidedly progressive nest. Raised in Memphis, Tennessee, in the 1950s by “a family of public school teachers,” she said she was imbued with a powerful sense of her own potential by a mother who paid little mind to the traditional – and limited—expectations for African American girls.

“She said, ‘You’re going to work to support yourself, irrespective of whether you marry, or don’t marry,’ recalled Dr. Guy-Sheftall. “‘You need to be independent, to have a voice of your own.’”

“SHE SAID, ‘YOU’RE GOING TO WORK TO SUPPORT YOURSELF, IRRESPECTIVE OF WHETHER YOU MARRY, OR DON’T MARRY,’ RECALLED DR. GUY-SHEFTALL. “‘YOU NEED TO BE INDEPENDENT, TO HAVE A VOICE OF YOUR OWN.’”

Confident that young, brainy Beverly was college-bound, her mother bucked Memphis’ White educational authorities and got her excused from the obligatory home economics class for girls and admitted instead to the high school typing class for juniors and seniors – while she was in 8th grade. It wasn’t always a pleasant experience for the future Dr. Guy-Sheftall, who said she initially felt “embarrassed and out of place,” especially when “they had to put some books in my chair because I was too short to get up to a typewriter.” That embarrassment eventually faded and was replaced by a new and urgent understanding of her own power, said Dr. Guy-Sheftall.

“I realized that you can defy patriarchal authority,” she said. “And it was White patriarchy because Memphis public schools at that point were under the control of White males. In retrospect, what my mother did was a very feminist move.”

In 1962, Dr. Guy-Sheftall left Memphis to begin her undergraduate studies at Spelman. She was just 16, but her youth didn’t preclude her from becoming actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Nor did it prevent her from concluding that her college home wasn’t exactly on the leading edge of the struggle.

“I was a student at Spelman at a very particular moment, both in terms of student activism but also in terms of tremendous pushback on the part of administrators,” Dr. Guy-Sheftall said. “I was here when Professor Howard Zinn was fired. So, that historical context probably shaped my journey in the academy.”

Zinn, a historian, writer, and civil rights activist, had been on the Spelman faculty for seven years when he was dismissed in 1963 after strongly criticizing administrators for what he contended was an effort to suppress

student dissent. Dr. Guy-Sheftall regards Zinn’s firing as representative of a tension between the College’s avowed commitment to Black women’s leadership that changes the world and a long-held affinity for counter-progressive traditionalism.

“I think that many HBCUs have been resistant to progressive change, including around gender matters,” she said. “However, I don’t buy the argument that [the problem] is all administrators. Faculty could certainly do more.”

Dr. Guy-Sheftall knows what it means to be a young faculty member on the front lines of progressive leadership. In 1976, she was among a group of faculty and students who staged a “lock-in” of 14 Spelman trustees over the choice of a new college president. The Board had rebuffed calls for the appointment of an African American woman, opting instead to name Donald Stewart, Ph.D., then a dean at the University of Pennsylvania. In response, Dr. Guy-Sheftall and the other protestors locked the trustees in a room for 26 hours, raising the ire of the College administrators and drawing national news coverage. For Dr. Guy-Sheftall, who had joined Spelman’s faculty in 1971 as a part-time instructor, the lock-in became a test of her commitment to progressive ideals.

“I wasn’t tenured, I wasn’t even on a tenure track. I was in the English department and I was among the very tiny group of faculty who was very upset with the Board of Trustees for not hiring a Black woman president,” she said. “So this is my second job, and I’m going to participate in the lockup of the Board of Trustees as an untenured junior professor. And I don’t care what the consequences are; I assumed that I would lose my job, which we almost did. I think that was my first public example of leadership.”

Dr. Guy-Sheftall eventually formed a working relationship with Dr. Stewart. In fact, it was Dr. Stewart who, in 1980, greenlighted her proposal for a Women’s Center that would house its Women’s Studies program. She recalled that “by that time, I was very involved in the women’s movement and Women’s Studies. I wondered why Wellesley College (where she had attended a Fifth Year program following her graduation from Spelman) had a women’s center and we didn’t have Women’s Studies or a women’s center, even though we’re a women’s college. So I proposed it.”

Dr. Stewart was reluctant, said Dr. Guy-Sheftall - until she pointed out that Atlanta University was planning to launch its own women’s center. Apparently unwilling to let another AUC school steal what was clearly Spelman’s thunder, Dr. Stewart approved her proposal, including her plan to fund the program with a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

“We got the grant, I came on full time at the Center in 1981, and that was the beginning of what I would call my institutional leadership—establishing a Women’s Studies program and a Women’s Center,” said Dr. Guy-Sheftall.

In the years immediately following the start of the new program and the formation of the Women’s Research and Resource Center, she would become a fierce and fearless proponent of scholarship devoted to the study of the lives, histories, and culture of women of the African Diaspora. She launched first a minor and then a major in Comparative Women’s Studies; oversaw as co-editor (with Patricia Bell-Scott) the 13-year run of SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women; solidified her program’s progressive credentials by hiring feminist scholar/activist M. Bahati Kuumba, Ph.D., as professor of Women’s Studies; and elevated Spelman’s position as a leading repository of

African-American scholarship by resisting a plan to house the College’s special collections and archives at the Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library and instead developing an archival and research space for them at the Women’s Center.

“No other Black college started off as a women’s college, so having our Archives here was important,” says Dr. Guy-Sheftall. “I also wanted us to be a repository for contemporary Black feminists. I didn’t talk about it very much, but I was very happy when we accomplished it.”

She was similarly pleased when, in 1987, Johnnetta B. Cole, Ph.D., became the first African-American woman appointed president of Spelman. Dr. Guy-Sheftall had pressed for Dr. Cole’s appointment and came to regard the new president as a powerful and progressive force.

“If I go back and ask myself: ‘What are the things that you’re proudest of?’ I have to say that helping to bring Johnnetta Cole here as president is one of them,” said Dr. Guy-Sheftall. “I really do believe that Spelman’s history would have been totally different if the Board had made another decision.”

Dr. Guy-Sheftall credits Dr. Cole with making Spelman’s administration more democratic and with helping make the school’s academic mission more reflective of the social, cultural, and political concerns of women in the African Diaspora.

“She was one of the early founders of Black Studies and she was an out feminist,” says Dr. Guy-Sheftall. “Young faculty appreciated her and the students did too. She worked on the intellectual climate; she worked on faculty governance. I mean, whoever heard of a president telling faculty they have to have faculty governance?!”

During her 10 years as president, Dr. Cole encouraged the development of a Faculty Council and shifted some important decision-making power to College departments, ending Spelman’s historic status as “a president-centered institution,” said Dr. Guy-Sheftall.

The changes are now an integral part of the College, which Dr. Guy-Sheftall sees as a work in progress.

“I always believed that Spelman - and this was one advantage of going to the College - could be better than it was,” she said. “I believed that it could be really committed to progressive women’s education, not just to being an HBCU.”

Dr. Guy-Sheftall’s desire to make the good “better” extends to her feminist activism and scholarship. In her lectures and books, notably 1995’s “Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought,” she has contended for the acceptance of Black Women’s Studies, arguing that it is a co-equal discipline with Women’s Studies. Dr. Guy-Sheftall, an



SIGNATURE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

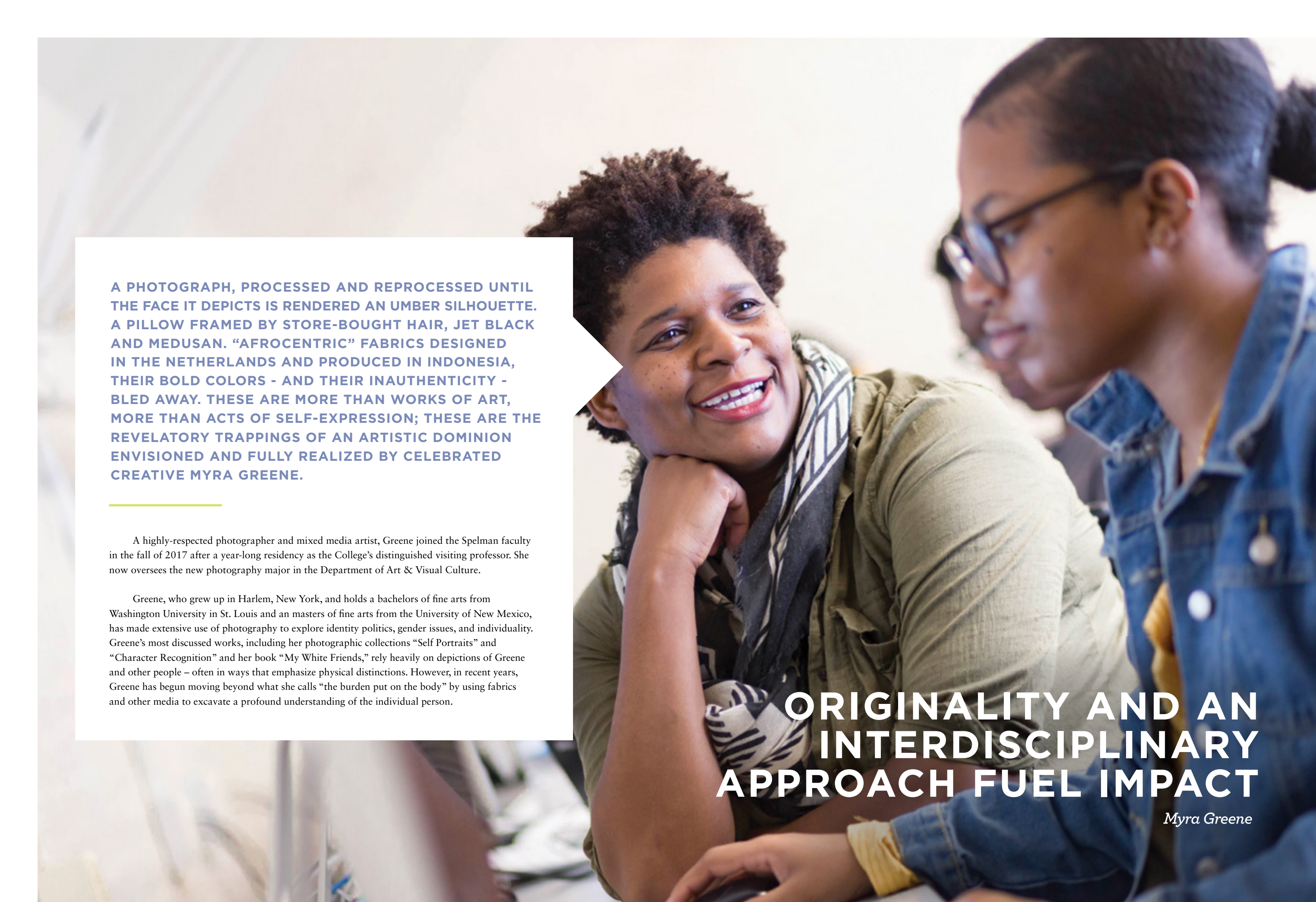
Institute for Sexuality and Gender Expression

outspoken member of both the National Women’s Studies Association (also a former president) and the National Council for Research on Women, says she’ll make the case again in a book she hopes to co-author with feminist icons Gloria Steinem and Paula Giddings.

“We are trying to rewrite the history of the second wave women’s movement and put Black women in the center,” said Dr. Guy-Sheftall, adding that the publication will likely be “my last scholarly book.”

Given the authors and the topic, it’s also likely that the book will inspire thought and spark debate. After all, try as she might, Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall just can’t stay below the radar.





A PHOTOGRAPH, PROCESSED AND REPROCESSED UNTIL THE FACE IT DEPICTS IS RENDERED AN UMBER SILHOUETTE. A PILLOW FRAMED BY STORE-BOUGHT HAIR, JET BLACK AND MEDUSAN. “AFROCENTRIC” FABRICS DESIGNED IN THE NETHERLANDS AND PRODUCED IN INDONESIA, THEIR BOLD COLORS - AND THEIR INAUTHENTICITY - BLED AWAY. THESE ARE MORE THAN WORKS OF ART, MORE THAN ACTS OF SELF-EXPRESSION; THESE ARE THE REVELATORY TRAPPINGS OF AN ARTISTIC DOMINION ENVISIONED AND FULLY REALIZED BY CELEBRATED CREATIVE MYRA GREENE.

A highly-respected photographer and mixed media artist, Greene joined the Spelman faculty in the fall of 2017 after a year-long residency as the College’s distinguished visiting professor. She now oversees the new photography major in the Department of Art & Visual Culture.

Greene, who grew up in Harlem, New York, and holds a bachelors of fine arts from Washington University in St. Louis and an masters of fine arts from the University of New Mexico, has made extensive use of photography to explore identity politics, gender issues, and individuality. Greene’s most discussed works, including her photographic collections “Self Portraits” and “Character Recognition” and her book “My White Friends,” rely heavily on depictions of Greene and other people – often in ways that emphasize physical distinctions. However, in recent years, Greene has begun moving beyond what she calls “the burden put on the body” by using fabrics and other media to excavate a profound understanding of the individual person.

**ORIGINALITY AND AN
INTERDISCIPLINARY
APPROACH FUEL IMPACT**

Myra Greene

“As a Black woman, you sort of have these immediate labels that are placed onto you that are immediately read by others when they see you,” Greene said. “I sort of buckle at that moment when people say, ‘Oh, you are this way because you’re a Black woman.’ It’s like, ‘No! I’m this way because I’ve lived in so many parts of the country...because of how I’ve moved through a class and caste system of the United States, where sometimes I am rich and sometimes I am poor.’”

Greene is convinced that artistic depictions of identity must do more than show what people look like. Her recent work with fabrics has been keenly impressionistic – shapes, colors, textures, some rendered in pale, white-washed hues, some over-written with code-like glyphs – an invitation to the viewer to consider who she is and how she feels about what she is seeing. For her part, Greene is well aware that these newer works may strike some viewers as a challenging digression from her photographs.

“I’m working in realms of abstraction, which is sometimes difficult for people to understand,” said Greene.

Still, contrary to how it may appear to those who know Greene as a prodigious and expressive photographer, the artist has been building her mixed-media realm for more than a decade. Consider the hair: Store-bought, curly, kinky, flaxen, waxen hat in the early 200s served as the medium-of-the-moment in a provocative series of pieces by Greene. The works include sofa pillows stuffed or decorated with flowing tendrils and miniature locket opened to reveal faded portraits of women who appear to be gazing winsomely at hair curling out of the opposing frame. Oddly familiar, yet seductively obscure, the pieces appear to have been drawn from some yet-unexplored province. As with all of Greene’s work, that’s the point.

“I said to my students the other day that I try to make objects that have not existed in the world before,” Greene explained. “When I hit those marks, I find success. When I’m reductive of another artist’s practice, or I’m just adding on to what someone else has done, I don’t find interest in that.”

Despite its stunning originality, Greene’s work is often rooted in unique approaches to the familiar. For example, a recently-completed series of quilts that Greene silk-screened from designs she created on a computer are based on wax prints culled from African fabrics. And Greene’s ground-breaking photo portrait series “Character Recognition” employs the same black glass ambrotype technique used a century ago to photograph and racially classify people of African descent. As for the heady freshness of Greene’s book “My White Friends,” it is derived from a quirky conceit: photographic depictions of white folks in mundane scenes and settings.

Greene said that while her work may provoke viewers to reconsider preconceived ideas about race, gender, and politics, she usually doesn’t set out to produce a specific reaction or set of reactions. In the case of “My White Friends,” for example, the artist had completed the photographs long before she comprehended their message.

“I didn’t know what I was trying to provoke in the beginning,” said Greene, who began taking pictures of her White friends after some of them insisted they didn’t see the race of people in photographs. “I just knew that there was a problem with photography, whiteness and imaging.”

Not all of Greene’s work begins with a serious rumination on a serious issue. Greene said she has moments when her work becomes “my own entertainment,” capturing and conveying a wry creative sensibility. It is

Greene’s ability to convey a conjoined sense of gravity and fun that has, no doubt, helped make the artist so appealing to the galleries and exhibition spaces that now own or show her work. That extensive list includes exhibitions at the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco and the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago, and inclusion in the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston; The Nelson-Atkins Museum and Kansas City; The New York Public Library; and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Greene is also the recipient of the Illinois Arts Council Fellowship in Photography and has completed residencies at Light Work in Syracuse, New York, and at the Center for Photography at Woodstock, in Woodstock, New York.

Spelman was one of Greene’s early champions. Some of the artist’s work is in the College’s permanent collection, and Greene’s exceptional turn as distinguished visiting professor put her on track to become an associate professor in the Department of Art & Visual Culture. Greene’s arrival at Spelman followed decades as a classroom instructor and visiting artist at a wide range of arts and teaching institutions, including The New School in New York, Southern Methodist University in Dallas, and Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston.

Greene said her work at Spelman represents a rare opportunity to unify her interest in academics, art, and the development of a photography program expressly for African-American women.

“To be given this opportunity to influence generations of female image makers is monumental,” she said. “It’s been fascinating, and I think there’s still an amazing opportunity to do something impactful, whether these women make images for the rest of their lives or not.”

Even as she sets to work ushering Spelman women into a new realm of visual expression, Greene is cognizant that there are other colleges and universities stripping away arts programs in favor of seemingly more practical courses and curricula. Such choices are misguided, said Greene, arguing that the humanities and the sciences are not competitors but companions, and that Spelman can be a model of stronger cooperation between the two.

“There’s a space and need for creative thinking, for creative problem solving, in the world,” said Greene. “So I’m starting to reach

out to anthropology, sociology, and women’s studies to think about how photography can underpin other liberal arts programs to help students open up their minds.”

Forging such collaborations will take innovation and leadership. Greene’s work is evidence that she has plenty of the former. As for the latter, surprising as it may seem, Greene is hesitant to describe herself as a leader. Her hesitance isn’t a product of false modesty; it’s a matter of diction. Greene doesn’t consider herself a conventional leader. The word leadership, she said, might simply be the wrong word to apply to the effort to get academicians and students from varying disciplines to set aside their parochial aims and find areas of mutual engagement.

“I don’t lead students because I believe we’re in a shared experience, and I don’t lead faculty because my colleagues and I



are in a shared experience,” said Greene. “I think my work can be inspiring, but I don’t know if that means I’m a leader. I think in this age that I lead by creative problem solving and saying [to scholars and students] ‘Can you answer questions uniquely, with your own voice?’”

Greene posits that all meaningful scholarship arises from an innate desire to discover and express what is yet unknown. For that reason, said Greene, “the value of art and arts education is as self-evident as, say, a lock of hair.”

“Humanities aren’t going away because people will always be expressive,” Greene said. “People will always consider a world outside of themselves - in some form or another.”





DIFFERENTIATING LEADERSHIP STYLES TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT

Dolores Bradley Brennan, Ph.D.

ASK AROUND CAMPUS AND YOU’LL FIND THAT DOLORES BRADLEY BRENNAN, PH.D., IS KNOWN FOR BEING WARM AND EASY-GOING, HER READY AND DISTINCTIVE LAUGH, AND THE RESPECT SHE GARNERS FROM HER COLLEAGUES AND STUDENTS. THESE CHARACTERISTICS MAY HAVE BEEN LESS WIDELY KNOWN AT HER PREVIOUS INSTITUTION. THE WAY SHE DESCRIBES HERSELF BEFORE SHE CAME TO SPELMAN IS REPRESENTATIVE OF WHERE SHE SPENT THE MAJORITY OF HER TIME.

“I came to Spelman as what I would call a ‘lab rat,’” said Dr. Bradley Brennan. “So I was focused on my scientific questions. But through this experience of teaching and working with students, I’ve seen a fundamental shift in the things that I care about.”

Dr. Bradley Brennan was already an established researcher with her own lab at Emory University when she received her initial appointment as a Spelman assistant professor in 2001. However, in the years since, she has increasingly directed her time and energy towards academic concerns, especially the College’s efforts to link classroom scholarship with hands-on research. Dr. Bradley Brennan is quick to point out that her evolution from “lab rat” to pedagogic front-runner isn’t a case of “leadership for its own sake.”

“I just wanted to get things done,” Dr. Bradley Brennan said. “So if I was the most passionate person in the room about getting it done and how it should be done, then I ended up being the leader.”

That observation is strongly exemplified by the psychologist’s work with Spelman’s Research Initiative for Science Enhancement. The program is part of a long-standing effort by the National Institutes of Health to prepare undergraduate students for careers and advanced studies in biomedical research. Dr. Bradley Brennan said that when she became Spelman’s RISE director in 2005, her primary aim was to “help the college keep the [NIH] grant.” However, it wasn’t long before she found herself “the most passionate person in the room” about making RISE fulfil its potential.

“I got more and more interested in how we could develop research skills in students,” Dr. Bradley Brennan recalled. “I realized that the first thing we needed to do was to create the program anew. I had a brand new staff, so we got to work creating a summer program.”



experimental psychologist that I am, I wondered if people had actually looked at the data to see whether or not it was a fact.”

She initially scribbled her idea on a sticky note and set it aside but recovered it when she was offered a chance to present a research paper at a conference. That paper, based on Dr. Bradley Brennan’s painstaking examination of data on intraocular influences in the growth of the two eyes in an individual, showed that the psychologist was on point.

“What we found out was that the growth of one eye varied according to what you did to the other eye,” Dr. Bradley Brennan said. “The strength of the effect was undeniable and hinted at processes that were unexpected. It was very exciting.”

That early success would be replicated time and again as Dr. Bradley Brennan took on larger, more exhaustive projects as a research associate in the Departments of Psychology and Ophthalmology at Emory, and later as head of her own lab at Emory’s Yerkes National Primate Research Center. Professionally, Yerkes was a good fit for Dr. Bradley Brennan because much of her research involved studying the eyes of rhesus monkeys and other non-human primates. However, Dr. Bradley Brennan did more than just shake up the center’s science; she altered its culture.

“For much of my time I was the only African American who was a postdoc there and certainly the only African American who was a principal investigator or PI in a lab,” she recalls. “When I closed my office at Yerkes two years ago, I was still the only [African-American] who headed a lab there, that I knew of.”

Her time at Yerkes gave Dr. Bradley Brennan a highly specific concept of how to lead when others might not be willing to follow.

“I realized that if I wanted to create a space where I could be successful, I had to be at the forefront of what I was doing,” she said. “I had to be able to say, ‘I’m the only one that can do this, so you can’t have the option of not having me at the table.’”

Dr. Bradley Brennan recalls that the hours she spent investigating the ocular and brain characteristics of Yerkes’s test animals not only provided the requisite data for her research, it gave her singular expertise in scientific areas unexplored by many of her colleagues.

Under Dr. Bradley Brennan’s leadership, Spelman RISE not only added a hands-on focused summer program, it became a research-intensive pipeline capable of moving students from the College to top-tier doctoral programs. To make that happen, Dr. Bradley Brennan demanded that Spelman’s RISE students do research typically required of the NIH’s MARC program. Since MARC is aimed at honor students, while RISE is targeted at rank-and-file undergraduates, the NIH initially regarded Spelman’s higher standards as “radical.” However, after noting Spelman’s growing list of RISE graduates – 80 percent of whom go to graduate school, according to Dr. Bradley Brennan – the NIH started to look more fondly on Spelman’s innovations.

“They began to raise their expectations of RISE programs across the country,” says Dr. Bradley Brennan, who had been through both RISE and MARC as an undergraduate at Tennessee State University. “I’m really proud of the changes that I think I’ve made across the country in how people perceive these RISE Programs.” The scientists at NIH were so impressed with her efforts that they invited her to serve as a regular member of the Training and Workforce Development scientific review committee, where she evaluated training grants from the top research universities in the country.

Dr. Bradley Brennan’s penchant for innovation began long before her trailblazing work with RISE. The ink was barely dry on the doctorate she’d earned in experimental psychology at Brown University when Dr. Bradley Brennan began challenging the status quo as a post-doc researcher at Emory. While working to identify treatments for juvenile cataracts and other childhood visual disorders, Dr. Bradley Brennan began to wonder if certain basic suppositions about the eye were faulty.

“In the field at that time there was this assumption that what you did to one eye did not have an influence on the other eye,” said Dr. Bradley Brennan. “But being the good

“I WAS REALLY EXCITED ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE MORE PEOPLE LIKE ME, A WOMAN OF COLOR, AT THE CONFERENCES THAT I ATTENDED,” SAYS DR. BRADLEY BRENNAN. “IT GETS A LITTLE LONELY BEING THE ONLY ONE.”

“Being at the Primate Center afforded me access to animals on the day they were born,” Dr. Bradley Brennan said. “I was able to actually publish a study showing that the eye and its growth begins to respond to the influence of various types of visual input within days of birth. And I was the only one who could do that – it gave me a professional advantage over my scientific colleagues.”

Although she enjoyed her time at Yerkes and praises the colleagues she had at the research center, Dr. Bradley Brennan said that she was overjoyed when a Spelman colleague asked her to apply for a neuroscience position in the psychology department at Spelman, where she could begin to educate the next generation of neuroscientists.

“I was really excited about the opportunity to see more people like me, a woman of color, at the conferences that I attended,” says Dr. Bradley Brennan. “It gets a little lonely being the only one.”

After joining Spelman, the psychologist continued her research at Yerkes until 2016. By then, she’d become a force at the College, reaching the rank of associate professor in 2005, directing several program and research grants, funded by both

private and federal sources; becoming vice chair and chair of the Psychology Department, director of undergraduate research, and then special assistant to the provost.

Dr. Bradley Brennan was named a full professor in 2010 and currently serves as vice provost for faculty. In that role, her responsibilities include supervision of faculty human resources (recruitment, onboarding, payroll, document management), tenure and promotion, and faculty development. She has told her faculty support staff that their guiding principle is to promote faculty excellence at Spelman. “I plan to rejoin the ranks of the faculty someday, and so I’m trying to create the faculty environment that I want to be part of – to have the best faculty colleagues.”

Dr. Bradley Brennan has also accumulated a hefty array of honors, including admission to Spelman’s Phi Beta Kappa society and a student-nominated Golden Key Honour Society award. Her list of publications and citations could reach from Atlanta to her native Nashville. For many years, she has served on scientific review committees for fellowship, research, and program grants awarded by the National Science Foundation,

the National Institutes of Health, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

Dr. Bradley Brennan is also a leading figure in a range of efforts to improve Spelman academics. She co-authored a Mellon-funded initiative to establish capstone research projects for all majors, which included an emphasis on faculty professional development and workshops to enhance pedagogy – introducing inquiry-based learning across disciplines. Leading a group of 20 faculty, a college-wide capstone rubric was created to evaluate competencies associated with completion of an undergraduate capstone experience in the major. As she recalled fondly, “this was a really exciting time for many faculty at the College, who wanted to engage in high-impact practices that would make their students better prepared for whatever they went on to do once they graduated.”

For several years, she has hosted or led workshops focused on student-centered learning practices, student assessment rubrics, or creating capstone courses in the major. It was during one such workshop when a faculty

colleague observed that the physical spaces on campus did not support the student-centered pedagogy that they were learning, and the active learning spaces initiative was born: traditional, outdated classrooms are transformed into flexible spaces that promote collaboration, investigation and innovation. As vice provost, she convenes a college-wide committee on the development of active learnings spaces. To date, they have created over 20 such spaces, with plans to continue transformations for the next four years.

And though the very unrodent-like Dr. Bradley Brennan is increasingly removed from her days as a “lab rat” and a course instructor, she becomes just a bit feral at any suggestion that she’s lost her love of research or surrendered her belief that every Spelman student should be equipped with solid research skills. “Students can learn by doing research,” she insisted. “It requires critical thinking, reading, writing, analysis, all skills we want them to have. And research is a way to better engage students in a learning process because they’re focusing on trying to answer a question. And many times, they don’t realize they’re learning so much more beyond the scope of that question.”



BLENDING CURRICULUM APPROACHES IMPROVES STUDENT PREPAREDNESS

Andrea Lewis, Ph.D., C'96

ANDREA LEWIS, PH.D., C'96, HAS WRITTEN OR CO-WRITTEN A NUMBER OF BOOKS, AND AS CHAIR OF SPELMAN'S EDUCATION DEPARTMENT, SHE HAS ADVOCATED A LEXICAL APPROACH TO LEARNING, ROOTED IN THE APPROPRIATE TEXTUAL SOURCES. NEVERTHELESS, SHE'S QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU JUST CAN'T LEARN FROM A BOOK.

“Students who are studying to be teachers must also have a very well-rounded experience in the field, in clinical experiences,” said Dr. Lewis. “It’s important to have the textbook learning, but you need robust experiences outside the classroom for students to understand the communities in which they will teach.”

Towards that end, Dr. Lewis has led her department toward a more holistic or “blended” curriculum incorporating both traditional textbook-based pedagogy, expanded field work and extended in-school training. For Spelman Education students that means a junior year in which three out of every five weekdays are spent in the field and a senior year devoted to student teaching.

This approach seems to be working. While college Education departments nationwide have seen their applicant pools reduced to a trickle, Spelman’s has shown signs of recovery, said Dr. Lewis, noting that the number of applicants jumped from 10 to 17 for the 2018-2019 and is expected to hold steady in this year’s admission cycle.

Dr. Lewis credits the rebound to the department’s experience-based curriculum, a motivated cadre of faculty and staff, and Spelman Education majors and alumnae, whom she says willingly boost the program. Under Dr. Lewis’s leadership, the department has also enhanced its visibility and strengthened its brand with an annual American Education Week speaker series, a teacher preparation summit for HBCUs, alumnae career panels, an expanded social media presence on Facebook and Instagram and a department study trip to Cuba. The department has also benefitted from the introduction of new interdisciplinary electives such as

Adult and Family Literacy, The Psychology of the Inner City Child, Hurricane Katrina: Implications, Analysis & Action, and Malcom X and the Black Student Movement that broaden the education students’ knowledge base.

“We have a brand that people can see both on campus and in the community,” said Dr. Lewis.

The department’s energetic public persona would be little more than a shiny façade were it not for the hard work behind it. In recent years, Dr. Lewis and her faculty and staff have initiated a new major in Education Studies (targeted at students who are interested in education but don’t intend to become classroom teachers), designed a post-baccalaureate program for non-education majors seeking teacher certification, and nimbly maneuvered through a typically grinding accreditation process that resulted in a sterling “no areas for improvement” rating.



“I’m very proud of the excellence that our Education Department has achieved, both on the state and national level,” said Dr. Lewis. “It’s been a wonderful experience.”

Dr. Lewis’ respect for hard-earned successes and real-world outcomes isn’t surprising; she was field-tested and battle-hardened during 12 years with the Atlanta Public Schools, as both a teacher and administrator. While she loved being an APS administrator, when she learned that the Spelman was seeking a director for its Marian Wright Edelman Center, she felt compelled – professionally and personally – to apply.

“The very first time I visited Spelman, I was in high school, and I experienced such a calm and centering and peaceful feeling when I came through the gates,” she recalled. “When I went for my first interview for the Edelman Center, I felt that same feeling of peace and centering and being at home.”

The Edelman Center, which functioned as a laboratory school for Education majors in need of field experience, gave Dr. Lewis the opportunity to pursue a long-held desire to work in early childhood education.

“My original career goal was to be an elementary school principal,” said Dr. Lewis. “So this was going to be my elementary school, a school of excellence.”

To her disappointment, the Edelman Center closed in 2010, just a year after Dr. Lewis’ arrival at Spelman. However, she soon found herself fully involved with the Education Department as a teacher and student supervisor. In both roles, Dr. Lewis discovered a surprising and highly-rewarding benefit.

“I saw myself in my students,” she said. “I saw the excitement of going out into the school system to be an elementary teacher. I saw my fears of going out into the school. Just hearing their conversations in class reminded

“THE VERY FIRST TIME I VISITED SPELMAN, I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL, AND I EXPERIENCED SUCH A CALM AND CENTERING AND PEACEFUL FEELING WHEN I CAME THROUGH THE GATES,” SHE RECALLED. “WHEN I WENT FOR MY FIRST INTERVIEW FOR THE EDELMAN CENTER, I FELT THAT SAME FEELING OF PEACE AND CENTERING AND BEING AT HOME.”

me of my younger self. And having experience in the school system gave me the ability to communicate and interact with them and let them know what was coming ahead and to alleviate their fears.”

One way to address those anxieties is by giving students a full set of personal and professional tools, said Dr. Lewis. That means providing students alternative learning opportunities while avoiding the current tendency to throw out traditional textbook and lecture-based pedagogy. Dr. Lewis contends instead for a broad-spectrum approach in which Education students “are exposed early-on to teacher pedagogy and theory and practice” and then given real-world experience in a range of classroom environments.

“That’s making sure they are able to interact with students in the heart of an urban area, students who are in very upper-class areas, students in areas where they have very low parent participation, and students in schools where they have very high parent participation,” she explained.

Dr. Lewis knows how it feels to be in an educational environment in which instructors can’t or don’t actively engage

with their students. While working on her master’s degree at the University of Pennsylvania and her Ph.D. at Georgia State University, she says she felt little of the “collegiality” she experienced as a Spelman undergraduate.

“I felt as though I was a number at those institutions,” Dr. Lewis said. “I just didn’t feel the same level of connection with my professors that I had at Spelman. They made sure that we were OK mentally, physically, emotionally.”

The potential disconnect between students and teachers of differing races and classes is one of the subjects of Dr. Lewis’ first book, “Preservice Teachers, Social Class, and Race in Urban Schools.” Based, in part, on her own experiences as a teacher, the book is yet another expression of Dr. Lewis’ leadership in preparing aspiring educators for the diverse world in which they’ll teach. As such, it may be proof that there are, as Dr. Lewis posits, still some things to be learned from a book.



DON'T GET IT TWISTED; LISA HIBBARD, PH.D., IS, WITHOUT A DOUBT, A LEADING FIGURE IN THE INSURGENT "FLIPPED CLASSROOM" MOVEMENT. HOWEVER, THE SPELMAN CHEMIST IS INTERESTED IN MORE THAN JUST INVERTING THE TRADITIONAL COLLEGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE SO IT BLENDS ONLINE MATERIALS AND PERSONALIZED IN-CLASS INSTRUCTION. DR. HIBBARD, AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR WHO HAS SPENT 33 YEARS AT SPELMAN, SEVEN AS CHAIR OF THE CHEMISTRY DEPARTMENT, IS JUST AS EAGER TO ENGAGE WITH ANY NEW IDEA THAT PRODUCES A BETTER, MORE PRODUCTIVE, EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE.

Pedagogical innovation, said Dr. Hibbard, "That's my thing, that's my love. When you first start teaching, you teach how you were taught. But as students change, as technology becomes more and more important, you can't teach the same way you did 30 years ago or even 10 years ago."

It was, appropriately enough, some 30 years ago that Dr. Hibbard received a directive that set her on the path to becoming one of Spelman's most visible pedagogical thought leaders.

"The chairperson of chemistry at the time was Gladys Bayse. I remember her telling me that I was too quiet in department meetings," said Dr. Hibbard. "She wanted me to get my name out there, to be more heard."

Dr. Hibbard began finding her voice when she became involved with the Georgia Academy of Science. Over the course of 20 years, Dr. Hibbard rose through the academy's ranks to be eventually elected president. She is currently an Academy fellow.

"It's because of my gradual, deepening involvement with the Academy that I gained the confidence to do a lot of leadership service at Spelman," said Dr. Hibbard.

In fact, Dr. Hibbard's leadership on matters of science and pedagogy at Spelman is so far-reaching it's nearly impossible to find a related program or initiative that doesn't bear her mark. At one time or another she has served as director of the Health Careers Program, the Minority Biomedical Research Support Program, the Support for Continuous Research Excellence Program and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Program. She also did a three-year stint as vice chair of the College's Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry and a year as interim director of the Health Careers Program.

Dr. Hibbard regards her leadership as a means of achieving two distinct but inter-related objectives: innovative classroom instruction and meaningful faculty research. The latter, said Dr. Hibbard, has become increasingly important since the 1990s when the College administration and faculty made the decision to put more of a focus on research, while decreasing the

INNOVATIVE, DATA-DRIVEN LEARNING TECHNIQUES IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Lisa Hibbard, Ph.D.





faculty teaching load. The shift – motivated, in part, by a decline in private funding for academic programs – proved to be both an opportunity and a challenge. As external dollars for classroom instruction receded, colleges and universities, including Spelman, found new sources from government and corporations seeking research help. Dr. Hibbard decided to get in front of the curve, helping Spelman science instructors heighten their profiles as researchers.

“When I came on board, we were a teaching institution; that was our claim to fame,” Dr. Hibbard said. “But then we switched over to more of an emphasis on research. The programs that I directed [MBRS, SCORE] actually helped to support faculty to move forward to promote and fund their research.”

Spelman’s reputation for producing strong researchers has been enhanced by Dr. Hibbard’s own work in high-level chemistry. Dr. Hibbard, who earned both a bachelor’s degree in textile

chemistry and a Ph.D. in physical chemistry at Georgia Tech, has investigated the effect of near-UV radiation on certain ocular proteins and co-authored a study on how some amino acids interact with the metal Ruthenium. However, Dr. Hibbard has devoted her most consistent and far-reaching scholarship not in lab-based chemistry research, but in the study and practice of alternative and data-age learning techniques.

She has written and lectured extensively on non-traditional methodologies, including “blended learning,” employing a mix of old-school classroom lectures and newer school electronic and online materials; interactive engagement, relying on personalized instruction delivered electronically; and curricular designs intended to address gender and racial inequalities. Dr. Hibbard has also deployed classroom strategies aimed at getting students to engage in intensive self-study, including a “gated” testing system that requires a student to take a series of iterative tests to prove her mastery of a topic. The student has four chances to pass the test and move beyond the “gate” for the topic. That means Dr. Hibbard and her assistants are testing no fewer than five times a week.

“No one in their right mind does that, but me,” Dr. Hibbard laughed.

Despite her wide-ranging interests in new and emerging instructional methods, in recent years, Dr. Hibbard has directed much of her energy to helping Spelman and other schools expand their use of “flipped learning.” An article about Dr. Hibbard’s work published last year in the journal “Scientia,” described flipped (or “inverted”) learning as “a particular type of blended instruction that aims to maximize learning of a particular subject by having students acquire the course content online from home and then focusing classroom learning on other student-centered activities.”

Although she credits high school teachers Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams with developing the technique, Dr. Hibbard has emerged as a propulsive force in the effort to utilize flipped learning at the college level. Her careful documentation of student outcomes and attention to other data charting the technique’s merits and deficits have become models for other schools seeking to emulate Spelman.

“I’m not doing it just for the fun of it,” said Dr. Hibbard, who flipped her first class seven years ago. “I’m analyzing student performance. Students are performing better under this methodology.” Dr. Hibbard and her department colleague, Leyte Winfield, Ph.D., who has spearheaded these efforts in the organic chemistry courses, have been funded through two education grants from the National Science Foundation for the past five years.

“I’M ALWAYS TWEAKING WHATEVER IT IS I’M DOING,” SHE SAID. “STUDENTS CHANGE EVERY 10 YEARS. SOMETHING NEW AND DIFFERENT COMES UP, OR THEY’RE BEING PREPARED IN A DIFFERENT WAY IN HIGH SCHOOL. SO YOU CAN’T REST ON YOUR LAURELS. YOU HAVE TO CHANGE.”



One thing Dr. Hibbard isn’t likely to change is her commitment to the teaching of chemistry. She still regards it as her true calling and gravitates towards every effort to improve chemistry instruction at Spelman. That includes working with a long list of local, regional, and national organizations that provide financial support for Spelman science programs, including the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Howard Hughes Foundation. It also means knowing, and working with, countless researchers and science instructors at historically Black colleges and universities, as

well as educators at other liberal arts institutions and larger research universities who have given Dr. Hibbard both moral and professional support.

“We have shared information, shared struggles, shared our successes, and shared our best practices,” said Dr. Hibbard.

She may be a far-reaching educator with deep respect for other institutions, but she remains vibrantly loyal to the school that helped her find her voice as a teacher, thought leader and pedagogical innovator.

“Spelman is the No. 1 HBCU, and I’m very proud of that,” said Dr. Hibbard. “I think we’re one of the No. 1 liberal arts colleges, period. We are a fabulous institution. I just hope that I have played some small part in making us so.”

Dr. Hibbard notes that chemistry students in flipped classes score better than average on standardized tests and express higher-than-average confidence with the subject matter. She and other researchers have also reported that flipped learning increases student engagement, improves student-teacher-peer interaction, and makes for more efficient use of class time.

Dr. Hibbard is happy with those outcomes, but that doesn’t mean she’s satisfied.

“I’m always tweaking whatever it is I’m doing,” she said. “Students change every 10 years. Something new and different comes up, or they’re being prepared in a different way in high school. So you can’t rest on your laurels. You have to change.”



DISCERNMENT, OBSERVATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT ARE CRITICAL IN LEADERSHIP

Cynthia Neal Spence, Ph.D., C'78

CYNTHIA NEAL SPENCE, PH.D., C'78, THE FOUNDING DIRECTOR OF THE SPELMAN COLLEGE SOCIAL JUSTICE FELLOWS PROGRAM, SCHOLAR-ACTIVIST AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ICON, ANGELA DAVIS, ADMIRING THE MURAL THAT FORMS THE CENTERPIECE OF LAURA SPELMAN ROCKEFELLER RESIDENCE HALL, THE HOME OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PROGRAM'S LIVING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY.

Dr. Spence, who'd been deeply involved in the mural's development, was eager to explain the nature and scope of the project, but feminist icon Davis, who glimpsed her own image among the commanding presence of Black women social justice advocates from the late 19th, 20th and 21st centuries asked for a moment of quiet.

She said, 'Let me just take this in,' recalled Dr. Spence, whose training in sociology and criminal justice has grounded her work as associate professor of sociology at Spelman and director of the Social Justice Fellow Program. It was at that moment Dr. Spence realized the surreal ability of the mural to call women together to exercise their power to advocate for change in the world.

She couldn't help but feel a small flush of pride at the icon's response to the mural. After all, she had guided the decision-making process that shaped the content and design of the mural, with its patchwork of curated photographic images depicting Davis and scores of other powerful and influential women (many of them Spelman alumnae). However, if you consider the mural just part of the vast tapestry of Dr. Spence's nearly four decades of leadership at Spelman, she could easily be forgiven for her brief unbridled shout of self-congratulation.

The Atlanta native "wasn't even 30-years-old" when she was tapped for her first major leadership role at the Spelman: assistant dean for freshman studies. Dr. Spence recalls that many faculty and staff apparently thought she looked too young and inexperienced for the job. Former Spelman Provost Ruth Simmons, Ph.D., suggested that Dr. Spence "dress a different way, so that 'you look older.'" Dr. Spence took the advice and "started wearing business suits." She also found merit in another suggestion proffered by Dr. Simmons, a legend in her own right, who went on to become the first African-American president of Smith College and Brown University, and currently serves as president of Prairie View A&M University.

"She said 'Stop asking for things. Just tell people that you are going to do something,'" recalled the discerning

and observant Dr. Spence. The provost was encouraging Dr. Spence to assert the authority of her position. Though she willingly adopted her mentor's advice, Dr. Spence has expanded on it, adding corollaries of her own.

"I think being a leader is more than being out front and telling everybody else what to do," she said. "It's also watching people and just trying to see who's ready to do what, who's ready for a certain position. Or, if they are not yet ready, help them to develop their strengths so that they can become the best at what they do."

In her 38 years at Spelman, Dr. Spence has made telling and watching, the foundations of a leadership approach that has impacted the lives of thousands of Spelman students during her 17-year tenure in the academic dean's office as dean of Freshmen Studies, associate academic dean and academic dean. She currently drives the development of an innovative social justice program and continues to serve as the national director of the UNCF/ Mellon Programs, which has netted millions of dollars for the development of UNCF undergraduates with the potential to attain doctorate degrees and become future faculty members. The program also provides faculty development opportunities for faculty currently teaching at UNCF institutions.

“ALL MY WORK HAS BEEN ABOUT TRANSFORMATION IN THE ACADEMY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE, SO AS CRAZY AS IT SEEMS, IT ALL IS CONNECTED,” SHE SAID. “THAT’S WHY I TELL MY STUDENTS, ‘DON’T JUST PICK UP THIS AND THAT. TRY TO HAVE A THEME FOR YOUR LIFE. THEN, THE CRAZINESS WILL BE A LITTLE BIT EASIER TO MANAGE.’”



Much of what she has achieved can be traced to Dr. Spence’s ability to identify and deploy the resources needed to actualize a particular vision. In 2011, she galvanized the College’s academic and administrative assets to create the social justice fellows program. The ambitious project was designed to spur student engagement with scholarship on race, gender, class, and the various identity markers that cause those in power to place limits on individuals’ abilities to exercise their full rights as citizens.

During its inception, the program was able to offer prospective participants an appealing package of incentives, including tuition assistance, semester stipends, international spring breaks, faculty and alumnae mentoring, and community-based social justice advocacy internships. Students were soon lining up to participate, and Dr. Spence found herself juggling the considerable demands of a highly-successful program.

“Students started coming to my office, saying ‘I want to be a social justice fellow, as well,’” Dr. Spence said. “I only had money for 10 students, so we created an associates program. I wanted students to understand that in addition to acquiring internships, we were going to meet monthly and we were going

to offer colloquial experiences so that they can understand the true meaning of a living and learning program that takes place outside of the classroom. In addition, social justice fellows would come together outside of a classroom to discuss texts and to be engaged with a faculty member or with social justice community advocates.”

Despite its success, the program has often strained under the weight of its own spirited inclusiveness, attracting students from across majors while struggling to find the money to support their participation. The \$500,000 Atlantic Philanthropies grant that funded the program’s inception and early operation has long since been exhausted. A subsequent \$250,000 grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and a more recent \$200,000 grant from the Commerce Club Foundation “have helped,” said Dr. Spence, but the program’s purse strings remain tight.

“We don’t have the bells and whistles we had in our first few years,” said Dr. Spence, “but we continue to attract amazing students interested in engaging with faculty mentors, community social justice activists, invited scholar activists, social justice entrepreneur projects, and book discussions. In the future, when I move on, I want to leave

certain legacies in place, things that people can carry on, and I think the social justice program will be that.”

In fact, it will be part of a legacy that also includes Dr. Spence’s leadership of the initiative that served as a template for the social justice program – The United Negro College Fund/Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program.

The idea for the fellowship dates to 1990 when the Mellon Foundation developed a partnership with UNCF and provided funding to support a Ph.D. pipeline program for UNCF undergraduates. The UNCF/Mellon Mays Undergraduate Program became part of the MMUF that primarily supports students throughout the private historically white institution community. The program found its way to the dean’s office at Spelman where Dr. Spence, who earned her own Ph.D. from Rutgers University, had recently been appointed assistant dean for Academic Affairs. Excited by the prospect of working on a fellowship program that would provide both students and faculty the financial and academic support to complete doctoral studies, Dr. Spence agreed to become Spelman’s MMUF campus coordinator. Six years later, she was named national director.

The MMUF currently has a budget of more than \$3.4 million

(renewed every three years) and has provided fellowships for 553 UNCF undergraduates and awarded stipends that helped 82 faculty members from UNCF schools complete their Ph.D.s. Dr. Spence is very proud that a total of 118 MMUF fellows have attained a Ph.D. and are currently teaching at colleges and universities across the country. Structurally, the MMUF also served as the model for what later became Spelman’s social justice program, said Dr. Spence, noting that when she conceived the program, she “didn’t want to reinvent the wheel.”

Under Dr. Spence’s leadership, the MMUF has done far more than serve as an effective template for other ideas; it has become a way for the sociologist to find and encourage talented, but overlooked, students and faculty.

“With our undergraduates attending UNCF institutions, we spend a lot of time trying to identify schools that don’t necessarily nominate students who might be diamonds in the rough,” she said. “The bright shiny ones, will be engaging the professor all the time. But I also know that there are those kids, the ones who aren’t talking much, who have ability but need to be shepherded through.”

If Dr. Spence has a strong affinity for the quiet achievers of the world, it’s because she regards herself as one of them. As a young child, she was shy, conforming and studious, and as a Spelman undergrad, she often left campus between classes. Now, in the classroom and in her various leadership roles, Dr. Spence keeps watch for the quiet students whose work demonstrates their commitment to learning. She recognizes that she might be the one to ignite their very reticent interest in intellectual engagement.

“Sometimes, you’re going to have that student who didn’t say a word in class, but then the student gives you this beautiful exam,” said Dr. Spence. “You call them in and say ‘Give me your story,’ because they don’t raise their hands. Just because a student does not raise her hand in class, does not mean that the student has nothing to offer. I see that student often because that student reminds me of myself. That’s the beauty of the classroom.”

Dr. Spence also sees herself in faculty members whose lack of engagement conceals their capabilities

and mitigates their potential contributions. Dr. Spence said she looks for ways to showcase these talented outsiders.

“At Spelman, we have faculty members who have so many intellectual talents, but they may not be well known beyond the courses they teach, they’re not the people on the faculty who raise their hands and say anything in faculty meetings,” Dr. Spence said. “But if you talk to them, one-on-one, you end up saying, ‘Wow, this person is really good and would be great in a given position or we, the UNCF/Mellon Programs, may need to offer support for their intellectual work.’”

Dr. Spence recalled the support, encouragement, and “tweaking” she received in the challenging and often uncertain years following her arrival on campus as an instructor in 1981. There was the late Harry Lefever, Ph.D., a long-time Sociology Department chair and one of Dr. Spence’s first advocates; and former Spelman sociologist Diana Danner, Ph.D., who took an interest in her as a young colleague, helping cultivate her for success; and of course, Dr. Simmons, always ready with blunt advice and powerful support (as provost, she allowed Dr. Spence time to complete her dissertation for her Ph.D. in criminal justice).

Dr. Spence looks back with gratitude on those who helped her and with pride on those she has helped. And while she is in no hurry to abandon her hard-won position as a campus and national educational leader, she does anticipate a time “in five or 10 years” when she will “move on.” Perhaps then, someone will create a new mural, one that depicts the complex interconnections evident in the life and leadership of one Dr. Cynthia Neal Spence.

“All my work has been about transformation in the academy and social justice, so as crazy as it seems, it all is connected,” she said. “That’s why I tell my students, ‘Don’t just pick up this and that. Try to have a theme for your life. Then, the craziness will be a little bit easier to manage.’”



As we continue to elevate the Spelman difference, we lift up the accomplishments of our faculty in the many ways that they manifest excellence. In our inaugural Faculty Excellence at Spelman College publication, we highlighted innovations in research and creative endeavors. This issue uplifts various forms of faculty leadership in the College and beyond.

Our next publication on faculty excellence at Spelman will focus on student mentoring—one of the College’s distinctive strengths.

Thank you to the faculty who gave of their time to participate in this process, and a special thank you to our editor, William Macklin.

Myra Burnett, Ph.D.
Vice President for Institutional Research,
Planning And Effectiveness



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