

An Epic Mission

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Shaw University

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For some students, intellectual curiosity and leadership are innate. For many, it must be nurtured. The Shaw University Honors College is an academic center of encouragement, interaction, and care for a diverse population of students. Many of them would otherwise never conceive of the marvelous opportunities and experiences they share during their college sojourn and later in their adult lives. Even though the hundred or more historically black colleges and universities do not all have honors programs, Shaw University has made this commitment to transform the lives of its scholars.

Support of the honors college initiative and affirmation from the university's leadership are crucial to its success. As the new president of Shaw University, I believe strongly in honors education and work collaboratively with our faculty and staff to extend its mission. As one of my first actions, I have recommitted the university to tangible financial support of students who show their commitment to the honors college, providing significant scholarships for them so that students who demonstrate academic excellence can once again be the heart of our program. I have taught many of the students

who have participated in the program and know firsthand the value of the experiences from which they have benefitted. One such experience has been the university's Shaw in Jamaica Minority Health International Research Training Program, which is part of the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities Project (Jamaica MoN Project). This ten-week residential internship at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, in Kingston, Jamaica, allowed students to spend the summer researching the attitudes and behaviors of Jamaican men. Research ranged from studying the population's awareness, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and risk perceptions related to prostate cancer and screening.

For over 150 years, Shaw University has provided opportunities for promising students, and since 2001 the honors college has created a sense of community and belonging among such students. The college has supported, challenged, and encouraged students to think outside the box and seek opportunities that lead to strong networks of support. We know that finding a niche and a sense of belonging in college leads to student success, commitment, and perseverance; it positively influences our ability to recruit, retain, and graduate students who are invested in their own educational experience from the beginning of their college career. With eleven years at the helm of the program, our director has worked tirelessly to keep students and graduates connected to one another and the university. Stability in and commitment of the leadership of the program has provided a connection to the university that provides multiple dividends: a commitment of our younger alumni to the university, their persistent participation in the life of the university, and their support of students following in their footsteps. Social media have allowed alumni of the program to share their accomplishments, connect with current students, and provide new opportunities for current students, essentially paying it forward.

A wide diversity of activities is found especially within HBCU honors programs that, on the surface, would seem to be different from typical honors offerings. These activities are geared towards strengthening and expanding necessary life skills for college students who may need social reinforcement. Underlying our program are the "five wells" expressed by Robert M. Franklin, former president of Morehouse College: well-balanced, well-dressed, well-read, well-spoken, and well-traveled (if even virtually, understanding world dynamics). Several of our honors colloquia emphasize African American philosophy and ethnography, providing a cultural grounding and milieu that awaken students to their heritage. Shaw University has a natural linkage to

this heritage, being the place where the civil rights organization SNCC—the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—was founded in 1960. While we focus on heritage, we also look to the future. We work collaboratively with the Center for Experiential Learning and Career Development to extend opportunities for personal preparation for graduate and professional school, internships, and the job market. We continue to value NCHC’s guiding principles and the advice, support, and ideas of countless members of the honors community to give our students our best efforts.

Our students are expected to be involved in campus life at every level and in many dimensions. Students are taught the five practices of exemplary leadership: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. They are expected to enact these practices through opportunities to study and exhibit transformational, servant leadership, starting with leadership of the honors college through the Honors Scholars’ Association. Their activities are educational, service-oriented, entrepreneurial, practical, and fun, providing motivation for the entirety of the campus.

We are proud of the dimensions of leadership our students have exhibited, particularly our young women, as ambassadors of the university spirit in recent years. Eight of the last eleven women to serve as Miss Shaw University have been honors college members. While serving as Miss Shaw during 2013–2014, Dominique Lewis made history, becoming the first Shaw University female student commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant in the United States Air Force. Two have served as Miss Homecoming. Student Government Association President LaMarcus Davis distinguished himself as a leader during his tenure and completed a master’s in surgical assisting at East Virginia Medical School. He is now pursuing a doctorate in health services and health care administration from Waldon University. Another of our honors graduates, Rachel Oliver, was singled out by coach Noel Myricks as one of the best students he had worked with in his many years as the coach of the University of Maryland’s legendary mock trial teams. She went on to earn her juris doctorate at Chicago–Kent College of Law and is a practicing attorney. She credits her support through the Shaw University Honors College and mock trial experience for her preparation for law school and continued success.

The ultimate result has been the transformation of lives. We have many success stories of students who, regardless of their circumstances, have reached heights of academic achievement, social involvement, and career possibilities. Many students have moved out of their comfort zones to challenge themselves

and seek life-changing experiences. Na'eem Wilkins, a senior majoring in education, received the 2015 U.S.-China Student Summit "Best Delegate Award" from among four hundred college students nationally. Senior computer science major Lionel Morgan did an internship at Fidelity Investments that led to an invitation to their LEAP program upon graduation. Senior chemistry major Jordan Galloway's co-op with NASA at Langley Air Force Base is leading to multiple possibilities for the future, including the pursuit of a PhD.

Our students are able to compete at major universities across the country. More than one student who dreaded the infamous senior project has been thankful for the experience, feeling far more prepared for graduate study. Many of our students are following the example of Shaw faculty and choosing academia as a profession, providing diversity in higher education. Oyindamola Oki received her doctorate from North Carolina State University in bioinformatics. Serign Lowe, while completing his PhD at the University of North Carolina Greensboro in nanoscience, is now teaching physics and mathematics at Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University in Saudi Arabia. Kimberly Kitchens, who majored in international relations and traveled to Japan and the Netherlands while at Shaw, completed her MPA in international affairs at the Andrew Young School of Public Policy at Georgia State University and is now serving in the Peace Corps in Moroni, Comoros. We are exceptionally proud of Evingerlean Blakney, who has returned to Shaw University as the director of first-year programs and who is already beginning to mold and shape new scholars; she is the first in her family to graduate from college and will be the first in her family to receive a doctorate. We have numerous other PhD, MBA, JD, MDiv, MSW, and master's recipients, and even more students are currently in graduate or professional school fulfilling their dreams. Their trajectory of excellence was cultivated in the honors college and by a dedicated faculty and staff.

Shaw University's mission is straightforward: "Shaw University exists to advance knowledge, facilitate student learning and achievement, to enhance the spiritual and ethical values of its students, and to transform a diverse community of learners into future global leaders." The Shaw University Honors College is a tangible demonstration of our commitment to fulfilling this epic mission.

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