



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

Harold E. Cheatham '61 Edu

To Harold E. Cheatham for his groundbreaking career in multicultural counseling.

According to Harold Cheatham, his distinguished career has resulted not from plotting a course but from “doing what needed to be done next.” Whether that meant becoming a high school counselor—as an antidote to counselors who “too often trivialized students’ problems in living”—or pioneering in multicultural counseling, Cheatham rose to the challenge.

A 1961 graduate in psychology and history, Cheatham began his career and postgraduate education as the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and feminism collided in a period of political upheaval on U.S. college campuses. “All of that shaped who I am and what I have tried to contribute,” he said. The result is more than four decades of leadership in multicultural counseling—at Penn State, throughout academia, and in the larger society.

Growing up in New Kensington, Pa., Cheatham was one of seven children of a steelworker and a homemaker, whose “passionately held objective was for us to have a better life.” After high school, he joined the Navy to qualify to attend

college on the G.I. Bill. Traveling in uniform from Pittsburgh to Baltimore, he experienced his first “injurious encounter with racism” when he was refused service at a restaurant near the Baltimore Greyhound bus station. Although aware of such practices, he said, “That was the very first time that that had ever happened to me.”

Following graduation from Penn State, Cheatham taught social studies in New York and Pennsylvania while earning a master’s in counseling and higher education administration from Colgate University and a doctorate from Case Western Reserve University. His dissertation was entitled, “The Status of Counseling in the Traditionally Black Colleges and Universities of the South.”

As a professor at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Cheatham focused his research on African Americans in the military, broadening to include women in 1976, when the military academies admitted the first female cadets. This body of research led to an invitation to be a visiting scholar at Penn State to develop coursework in multicultural counseling and then to a tenured faculty appointment in 1981.

For the next 15 years, Cheatham taught the multicultural counseling courses while continuing his writing and research in

multicultural counseling theory and practice, cultural pluralism, and psychosocial development of African Americans in U.S. higher education. He also served on more than 115 master’s committees and 25 doctoral committees, paying forward the “good fortune” he had had over the years under the guidance of his mentors. “My career was never a destination nor sequence of way stations, but next steps generally suggested to me by a mentor,” he said.

At Penn State, Cheatham served on the Minority Recruitment Task Force and on the advisory board for the Office of Minority Graduate Opportunity and Faculty Development Center, was president of the Forum on Black Affairs, and chaired the College of Education Committee on Multicultural Education. He and his wife, V. Arlene Tabb Cheatham, supported construction of the Paul Robeson Cultural Center in 1999 and established an Educational Equity Scholarship.

In 1996, Cheatham resigned as head of the Department of Counselor Education to become founding dean of Clemson University’s College of Education, Health, and Human Development. Although he retired in 2001, Cheatham continues serving on dissertation committees and

in leadership roles with two fraternities—Alpha Phi Alpha and Sigma Pi Phi—in order to improve education achievement rates for African Americans, especially males. He serves on a number of community and university committees, including Clemson University Center for Research in Health Disparities.

A 1990–91 Senior Fulbright Scholar to India, Cheatham has received numerous honors including Penn State’s Howard B. Palmer Faculty Mentoring Award, the Case Western Reserve University Excellence in Education Award, and American Psychological Association recognition as a pioneer in multicultural counseling and development.

Cheatham and his wife, Arlene, are life members of the Penn State Alumni Association and have two sons: Mark, a University of Connecticut graduate, and Brian, a 1986 Penn State graduate.

