



Juanita Johnson-Bailey studies and teaches about gender and race issues and how those issues affect adult education and non-traditional college students.

## Professor researches true picture of UGA's minority grad students

By Michael Childs

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Juanita Johnson-Bailey hopes her latest research will paint a true picture of the experiences of black students who have earned graduate degrees at the University of Georgia during the past 40 years. What did they like? What didn't they like? What helped? What didn't? "We know how they got here and we know how they left," she says. "But we don't know what they experienced while they were here. No one has ever really recorded those experiences."

The results of this study should interest UGA administrators who are seeking ways to increase UGA's minority enrollment. Johnson-Bailey's home department—adult education—has been very successful in bringing in a diverse group of students. About 20 percent of students seeking degrees in the department are African-American. Another 10 percent are international students, mostly Asian.

"I think it's because of how we present ourselves, how we've recruited, and the fact that our retention rates are very good," says Johnson-Bailey. "I also think we've been successful because we set out to be. For instance, we contacted all of our black graduates and asked them:

How do we get more?"

The answer to that question will be a valuable byproduct of Johnson-Bailey's current work. She studies and teaches about gender and race issues, and how those issues affect adult education and non-traditional college students. It is the career she has dreamed of since she was 20 years old.

Johnson-Bailey was the only black female student in her class when she graduated from a Catholic prep school in Columbus, Ga., in 1971. She applied to the University of Georgia but, although many of her white classmates were accepted, she was denied admission. "I remember my priest saying, 'Juanita, they must have reached their quota.' And I asked, 'Quota for what, father?' He looked at me and explained that UGA was gradually integrating but . . . slowly."

After graduating in just three years from Mercer University with a bachelor's degree in communication, Johnson-Bailey thought about graduate school. Instead, she went to work—in journalism, public relations, human rights and patient advocacy. But remembering her dream, she decided to return to school in the early 1990s, earning a master's degree and then a doctorate from UGA--the school that had rejected her admission some 20 years before.

"Coming back to school with a bunch of strange professors who were just a couple of years older than me made me realize just what a price I had paid for deferring my dream," she says. "But I also know that coming back and beginning my career at the age of 40 . . . I was a totally different person than I would've been at 26."

And she says her late arrival in academe gives her greater insight into non-traditional college students.

"I *was* that non-traditional college student, so I know many of the fears and doubts they face," she muses. "I try to make sure I don't forget them now that I'm on the other side."

Her dissertation became an award-winning book, published in 2001. *Sistahs in College: Making a Way Out of No Way* received the 2002 Frandson Award from the University Continuing Education Association. While Johnson-Bailey is proud of her department's diversity, she's sometimes shocked when she goes outside of her department on the UGA campus and it's not the same way. So, like a one-woman crusader, Johnson-Bailey recruits among her friends and acquaintances. That personal connection is UGA's best recruitment tool, she says.

"We know, because we've had African-American students who have graduated from the program tell their friends, tell their associates," she says. "I started wondering why that hadn't happened with other programs."

That curiosity led to her current study. She is working on the project with department head Ron Cervero and associate professor Thomas Valentine. She expects the book to be called *Struggles of Hope: The Actions of Anti-Racist Adult Educators*.