Faculty and Staff Highlights: Faite Mack Professor of Education

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**Colleagues:** What brought you to Grand Valley State University and why did you stay?

**Mack:** President Lubbers and Art Hills recruited me in 1972. At the time, I was the chief evaluator for Compensatory and Migrant Education at the Michigan Department of Education. Prior to that, I was a special education teacher in the Chicago Public Schools.

I was appointed an assistant professorship in the Urban Studies Institute and Public Administration with a charge of using my contacts in Lansing and the Washington area.
to pursue grant funding necessary to expand the mission of teacher education at Grand Valley. Within one year, I was appointed co-director of the Educational Studies Institute and had nearly $1 million in funding to begin graduate training for 200 teachers in the Grand Rapids Public School District.

As I look back over 40 years, it is just amazing that at the age of 29, President Lubbers had the faith in a young African-American scholar to grant him the authority to initiate the funding and proposal development of a graduate program in teacher education.

**Colleagues:** What have been some of the most important accomplishments you have achieved during your time at Grand Valley?

**Mack:** I was assigned the task of obtaining the grant funding, writing of the proposal, developing the curriculum, and receiving the approval to initiate graduate teacher education at Grand Valley. The federal awards were granted to assist the GRPS teachers with the issues of school desegregation and the other award was to establish one of 10 federal training centers to initiate preprimary impaired special education. The federal funding permitted the Graduate School of Education to operate for two years without GVSU general fund support.

I was the first African-American at Grand Valley promoted to the rank of full professor and the first faculty member to obtain a Fulbright Award. My Fulbright professorship allowed me to teach educational psychology and special education at the University of Cape Coast. My tenure in Ghana led to the initiation of Grand Valley’s formal commitment of a faculty exchange program.

**Colleagues:** What people, programs and partnerships have enriched students and the university?

**Mack:** All of the first grant proposals which led to graduate programming were made in collaboration with the Grand Rapids Public Schools, Muskegon Public Schools, Holland Public Schools, and Muskegon Heights Public Schools. This resulted in their support for a residential graduate in-service program for their teachers.

The Graduate School of Education is one of 10 Preschool Special Education Centers in the United States. We were charged with researching best methods and pioneering training for preschool special education throughout the State of Michigan.

Originally invited to Thailand as the keynote speaker for a national conference in special education at Srinakharinwirot University, I was challenged by rural educators in Nong Khai Province to start a foundation in Thailand for the many orphaned and abandoned children who could not attend school. Working with five different schools, the foundation has supported nearly 600 children over the past 15 years by providing the resources required for school attendance — uniforms, books, school fees, transport, medical support, etc.

**Colleagues:** What are your hopes and dreams for the future of the College of Education?

**Mack:** It is just amazing that for many of my students, I am the first African-American instructor they have experienced throughout their full educational history. This year’s public school enrollment presented minority children as the majority of all public school pupils.

In the College of Education, six percent of our new teacher population is minority and only 23 percent are males. Preparing minority teachers and males for classrooms must not be just for the urban schools but suburban and rural schools. Without sufficient exposure to minority teachers and professors throughout their education, students tend to characterize the teaching profession, and the academic enterprise in general, as better suited for white Americans.
The dilemma for minority students is that high-caliber students are often attracted to higher paying professions. For many minority and male students, teaching is no longer perceived as a way out of the lower class. If our nation’s schools are to reflect the model of a “just society,” minorities and males will have to be empowered with an equitable representation of teachers and school administrators, and a guarantee that teacher education is inclusive rather than exclusive. I would hope that in the near future, the figures for minority and male enrollment in the College of Education and faculty representation are representative of the enrollment in the schools.