

Dedication of the Helen Bass Williams Academic Success Center

Purdue is a rich campus, full of history and achievements. We are proud of our impact to further innovation, break down doors, and prepare students for bright futures. However, Purdue would not be what is it today without Helen Bass Williams, an extraordinary African American woman who embodied what it means to be a pioneer. She was influential, courageous, and a beacon of light for students, especially African Americans on our campus. Today, we pay tribute to Helen and her accomplishments.

Even before arriving at Purdue, Helen was a leader, as she was heavily involved in the Civil Rights movement. She endured being “beaten, gassed, and jailed” all for the fight against injustice and inequality of African Americans. She also worked in the public health field and as a teacher. Her love of education ran deep, as she achieved not one, but two master’s degrees.

In 1968, Helen’s passion for education led her to Purdue, as she served as “the first African American professor”, teaching French as an assistant professor. She was committed to the success and advancement of Purdue students, as she was also an “academic counselor for minority students in the School of Humanities, Social Science, and Education” and sought to increase African American attendance on campus. She was a kind woman, who graciously opened her home to African American students in need of counsel and fellowship.

Helen’s presence on campus from 1968 to 1978 remains with us, as she was instrumental in the development of our Black Cultural Center, African American studies program, and Academic

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Success Center, where we stand today. Renaming the Academic Success Center in her honor is only fitting, as she was an “educator, mentor, and advocate”, a true definition of a Boilermaker.

We are forever grateful for Helen Bass Williams’ diligence in her pursuit to bring African American culture and education to Purdue. Let today be a reminder that we shall continue to celebrate diversity and the great strides we have made on this campus.

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References

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