

Desegregation Pioneers to Be Honored During UF Constitution Day Program

Published: September 15th, 2008

Category: Feature (<http://www.law.ufl.edu/flalaw/category/feature/>), News (<http://www.law.ufl.edu/flalaw/category/news/>)



(http://www.law.ufl.edu/flalaw/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/hawkins_big.jpg) Fifty years ago one man changed the course of history for higher education in the state of Florida. African-American, academically eligible, and eager to start his instruction, Virgil Hawkins was denied admission to the University of Florida College of Law based solely on his race.

With the legal assistance of future Associate Justice of the United States Thurgood Marshall, it took nine years, five Florida Supreme Court and four U.S. Supreme Court rulings before Hawkins broke the color barrier for students at the University of Florida. As a result, more than 12,000 African-Americans have since earned degrees at the University of Florida.

"Virgil Hawkins and the other students of color who followed demonstrated remarkable personal courage and persistence," said Robert Jerry, dean and a Levin, Mabie and Levin professor of law. "Today, UF has a more diverse student body, one that more closely matches the population of Florida and the nation."

Hawkins' efforts opened the door for others, including George H. Starke Jr. who in 1958 was the first African-American to be admitted to UF's College of Law; W. George Allen, who in 1962 was the first African-American to graduate with a UF Law degree; and the Hon. Stephan Mickle one of the first African-American students to be admitted to UF for an undergraduate degree.

To commemorate UF's desegregation and its positive effects on education, the public is invited to attend the 50th Anniversary of desegregation during UF's Constitution Day Program at the Levin College of Law on Sept. 17, 2008.

The event will take place in the Chesterfield Smith Ceremonial Classroom 180 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The commemoration will include George H. Starke Jr. and relatives of the late Mr. Hawkins and prominent alumni of the College of Law, including the Hon. Stephan Mickle, United States District Judge, Northern District of Florida. College faculty will provide an academic perspective on the legal process of desegregation.

Parking restrictions at the college will be lifted for the day.

Fast Facts:

In fall 2007, 51,725 students were enrolled at the University of Florida, including approximately 4,300 African-Americans, 6,000 Hispanics and 3,800 Asian-Americans.

2008 Levin College of Law minority representation: 25.4 percent. This includes Asian, 8.56 percent; African-American, 5.79 percent; Hispanic 10.57 percent; and Native American 0.5 percent.

1946-1958 – 85 African-American students apply to the University of Florida and are denied admission.

1949 – Virgil Hawkins and William T. Lewis are denied admission to UF College of Law.

1954 – Brown v. Board of Education decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. In a companion decision, the court orders the University of Florida is ordered to admit Virgil Hawkins. The state resists the ruling. Virgil Hawkins brings his case before the Florida Supreme Court five times and the U.S. Supreme Court four times.

1957 – Florida Supreme Court upholds Virgil Hawkins' denial of admission. Justice Stephen O'Connell, who later served as UF's president, concurs in the decision.

1958 – Hawkins withdraws his application to the UF College of Law in exchange for the desegregation of UF graduate and professional schools.

1958 – George Starke is the first African-American to be admitted to UF's College of Law.

1959 – College of Law celebrates 50th anniversary.

1962 – W. George Allen is the first African-American to receive a degree from the UF College of Law.

1965 – Stephan Mickle is the first African-American to earn an undergraduate degree from UF, later earning his law degree from UF in 1970.