Honoring Dr. Valeria P. Fleming: FSU’s Pioneer of Science

Dr. Valeria Fleming joined the Fayetteville State University faculty in 1960. For more than 55 years, the high achievements and outstanding contributions Dr. Fleming has made to education, the field of science, and the community have been unprecedented. Dr. Fleming has demonstrated strong leadership in science education and research through exemplary teaching, scholarship, service and mentoring. Her broad knowledge and experiences have helped transform science education and the quality of graduates from public schools of Cumberland and surrounding counties, and institutions of higher learning across the nation. Additionally, Dr. Fleming has given unselfishly of her time to mentor students and faculty at various levels of their education and careers to develop highly successful and productive leaders of society. Having a long and impressive Curriculum Vitae, Dr. Fleming has been recognized as “the first” in many areas. She was the first African-American to graduate in the field of Developmental Biology at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the UNC Board of Governor’s Faculty Doctoral Study Assignment Program. Dr. Fleming was the first woman Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Provost at Fayetteville State University. Dr. Fleming was the first to lead the implementation curricular changes in the natural sciences and to develop an academic program such as the Biotechnology program through external grant funding at FSU in 1995. Additionally, Dr. Fleming has a long, fruitful track-record of community services. She served as chair and member of several boards and committees including the American Red Cross and the American Cancer Society, outreach committees at her church to aid the needy and she assisted with many military organizations.

In 2010, James A. Anderson, FSU Chancellor, ordered a campus-wide celebration in recognition of Dr. Fleming’s more than 50 years of high achievements to FSU and the state of North Carolina. Celebration activities on April 9, 2010 included the Chancellor’s Luncheon, a Science Colloquium, the Golden Jubilee Scholarship Banquet, and the Dr. Valeria Fleming Professional Round-Up, which is an event designed to showcase our alumni who are successful in STEM-related fields and an event to afford our current students to establish a Bronco network with these professionals. In its 6th year of implementation in 2015, the annual round-up has attracted an overwhelmingly large number of alumni returning as far back as the Class of 1964 who provide testimonies on how they were inspired by Dr. Fleming to pursue professional careers. Former and current FSU students have stated that Dr. Fleming challenges students academically and prepares them for real-world experiences.

Dr. Fleming’s “legacy of excellence” has been instilled in numerous generations of students and faculty whose lives she touched. In addition to mentoring FSU students and faculty, Dr. Fleming mentored the professional development of several UNC-Chapel Hill's Seeding Postdoctoral Innovators in Research and Education (SPIRE) program fellows for professorship. Today, many of these fellows are now productive faculty members at several constituent institutions of higher learning throughout the UNC system. It has been the testimony of her mentees that Dr. Fleming cares about the professional and personal development of each of them. She has helped many students and faculty overcome their fears of taking on challenges through her moral support and guidance. Dr. Fleming is often regarded as a “guardian angel” to reach out to for advice and guidance on curriculum development, strategic planning, student engagement, or just someone with whom to discuss things.
To underscore the significant contributions and extraordinary service Dr. Fleming has provided to FSU and NC, she has received numerous recognitions, honors and awards including the Chancellor’s Medallion, FSU Service Award, Richard Caswell Award, Order of the Long Leaf Pine; and Proclamations from the City of Fayetteville, and counties of Cumberland and Rowan. Beginning fall 2016, a STEM scholarship program will be launched in honor of the outstanding contributions Dr. Fleming has made to STEM education. The Dr. Valeria Fleming STEM scholarship will provide full tuition for 20 STEM students each year.

Dr. Fleming’s vision, expertise and contributions have positively transformed science education and research in public schools and institutions of higher learning. During her tenure, she has developed, through her instructions and mentorship, a seamless, pipeline of college graduates, who are now productive citizens of our society. In addition to the numerous contributions to education and research she has made, Dr. Fleming has also unselfishly committed much of her life to community improvement and empowerment. Dr. Fleming is truly an FSU Pioneer of Science.