

DR. JANET E. HELMS RECEIVES ELIZABETH HURLOCK BECKMAN AWARD

NATIONAL HONOR RECOGNIZES THOSE WHO HAVE INSPIRED STUDENTS TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Janet E. Helms, PhD, Boston College Augustus Long Professor and founding Director of the Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture (ISPRC), is the recipient of the prestigious 2011 Elizabeth Hurlock Beckman Award. The award was created to benefit current or former academic faculty members who have inspired their students to create an organization which has demonstrably benefitted the community at large. The trust, founded in honor of Dr. Beckman, an educator and pioneer in the field of psychology, recognizes the benefits of what an extraordinary professor can produce.

Dr. Helms was one of 15 notable professors who received a \$25,000 cash award. The award ceremony took place in Atlanta, Georgia on January 7, 2012. Each of the distinguished award recipients motivated their students to create real-world success because of his or her inspiration. *“Student affiliates often come with ideas about how they would like to change communities of interest to them for the better. I try to mentor them to think about community interventions with*



Dr. Helms, front row second from left, with other award recipients

some complexity and to value the communities as well as themselves as scholar-practitioners with relevant life experience,” explained Dr. Helms. “Often my racial identity theories give them a language for understanding and communicating about the racial experiences they have in these settings as well as designing effective interventions.”



Dr. Maryam Jernigan (nominator) with Dr. Janet E. Helms

Dr. Helms was nominated by former student, Maryam Jernigan, PhD, Yale University School of Medicine. *“Through Dr. Helms’ role as a mentor and teacher, she inspired myself and many others to understand our ability to take our knowledge and skills gained in a formal setting and use them for the greater good of society to benefit those around us. One person cannot do all of the work needed to promote social justice; they can, however, pass on to others to help facilitate the process of us taking responsibility to take on and tackle larger social issues,”* said Dr. Jernigan.

Dr. Jernigan founded the Jernigan Sankofa Program (JSP), a group intervention for Black and Latina adolescent girls who were identified by their school system as at risk for dropping out because of academic, behavioral, and disciplinary concerns. The school-based intervention offered in-school and after-school groups for students transitioning from 8th grade to high school. Since 2005, JSP has worked with an entire cohort of Black and Latina 9th grade girls each academic year. Participants have consistently provided feedback about negative experiences in school related to racial and gender discrimination. As such, the curriculum of JSP, based on Helms’ People of Color Racial Identity theory, is designed to assist youths in voicing their experiences and empowering them to work collectively to understand the impact of such experiences. The group format assists youth in developing individual and systemic strategies for addressing discriminatory interactions and resisting racial marginalization in the educational setting. JSP participants have reported increased engagement in school, improved grades, and self-reported psychological improvements (e.g., self-esteem).

Dr. Jernigan explains: *“The Jernigan Sankofa Program (JSP) was born from the many conversations I had with Helms in her office. When I faced challenges or resistance from others who did not believe I was capable of building the program or that students and families of color would want to be involved, it was Dr. Helms who offered words of empathy and support for moving forward. With her practical guidance and wisdom, I worked to move my thoughts and ideas into action.”*



Dr. Janet E. Helms accepting award

In addition to her work at Boston College, Dr. Helms has also authored "A Race is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being a White Person or Understanding the White Persons in Your Life," which is a major text in many social justice curriculums around the country. Her methods for assessing racial identity have been emulated in psychological research and are cited by many governmental health and human services agencies. *"Janet Helms has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to the promotion of race and culture, and the pursuit of social justice,"* said Interim Dean Maureen Kenny. *"As a long-time colleague of Janet's I have witnessed her commitment and impact in inspiring the new generation of social justice learners. I am delighted that she will be honored for her dedication to mentoring students at the Lynch School and beyond."*

While Dr. Helms has received numerous awards and recognitions as a pioneer in her field, the Elizabeth Hurlock Beckman Award is particularly gratifying to Dr. Helms: *"I have always been a student-oriented educator. My focus with these students has been to encourage them to become involved and give back to some community that needed their skills. Neither focusing on students nor investing in communities is typically evaluated as worthwhile work in the academy. The Beckman Award is important to me because it signifies that someone thinks my priorities are important and is willing to demonstrate that support in a substantive way. The Beckman Award will allow me to continue my work."*

The Gail McKnight Beckman Trust was founded in 2008 under the will of Gail McKnight Beckman in honor of her mother, Elizabeth Hurlock Beckman. Since its inception, the Beckman Trust has donated more than \$150,000. The trust is administered by Wells Fargo.