



Iowa Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators

THE INFORMER



In honor of Black History Month, IASFAA would like to take time to recognize the contributions of Black Americans in our profession.

Genevieve Watson was IASFAA's first African American President in 1986. Prior to that she had served as Secretary (1982-83) and as Vice President (1984-85).

The following is what she wrote when asked to share her story with us.



"You are no less than anyone and you are no better than anyone." These words, repeated by my parents to their eleven children, are the guiding principle for my humble and respectful being. I grew up in a very rural (farm) town in northeast Louisiana during the 1950s and 1960s. Living the sharecropping farm life, my father often shared that "knowing your place" was viewed as the necessity for survival in a White-controlled environment where racism was openly displayed. Having been educated in the welcoming environment of all Black elementary, high school and college settings, the teaching was to "always remember that because of the color of your skin you are expected to know more and do more than others to be successful in life".

When my husband was invited to earn his Masters degree in Education from Drake University, it was a cultural shock relocating to a predominantly White environment in Des Moines, IA. Recently graduated from Grambling State College (one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities), it was a challenging transition to operating within an environment where "hidden" racism was displayed. The survival tactics from the South were resourceful; to reconnect with one of the local Black churches, associate with the Black Greek organizations and develop friendships with persons within the Black community.

The summary of experience included working in the cotton fields and tutoring college students in an on-campus work-study job. With such limited experience, it just seemed fitting that Drake University was the designated place where I should be employed. Even so, the audacity to refuse to take the skill assessments offered by Human Services for entry into the clerical assistant field seemed the right thing to do. Yet, the VP of Student Affairs, Dr. Donald V. Adams took a chance and hired me to work in the Federal Trio Special Services program. A few years later, Dr. Mary Haldane, Director of Financial Aid offered the opportunity for me to change positions and work as one of the Assistant Directors in her office.

As a mentor, Mary provided resources and opportunities to learn federal financial aid regulations, guidelines and processes. She supported my involvement in state, regional and national student financial aid associations, to interact with other financial aid colleagues. I was elected to serve office for a number of IASFAA positions, including President. I enjoyed active participation with MASFAA and NASFAA, especially the opportunity to connect with Black colleagues from other states and the Federal Department of Education.

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In 1986, I began work as the assistant director and later promoted to associate director of Student Financial Aid at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Racial strife for equality seemed to be openly displayed between racial minorities, especially Hispanics and Blacks. And racism was blatantly exhibited by Whites. Nine years afterwards, I accepted and was pleased to assist students as Director of the Financial Aid Office at Phoenix College until retirement in 2012. In Arizona I continued to be actively involvement with and elected to leadership positions in the Arizona Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, including the President. Participation was maintained through committee involvement and elected office positions with the Western Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators and NASFAA. I also embraced the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in the American Association of Community Colleges and the National Council on Black American Affairs. Post retirement, I served three years at the Maricopa County Community Colleges District Office assisting clients for three years while the Identity Theft prevention department was initiated.

Currently retired, I relax by designing and sewing five layer face masks for family and friends. My spare time now is devoted to trying to improve my 156 average by bowling in three leagues each week.

