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Dwight W. Allen

*Eminent Scholar, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA*

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## **The University of Massachusetts School of Education: A Successful Experiment In Combating Institutional Racism**

### **Abstract**

*In 1968 the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts created a school with its prime focus on combating institutional racism. UMass graduates of color have served as presidents and deans, professors, teachers, international consultants, diplomats and ambassadors, more than validating this grand experiment.*

### **Dwight W. Allen**

Eminent Scholar, Old Dominion University, Norfolk VA.

The University of Massachusetts created a bold experiment in higher education when it encouraged the School of Education to pursue its stated goal of combating racism in the context of extensive educational reform.

Of the 800 doctoral graduates, 200 were people of color, in a state with about 5% minority population at that time. Only half of the doctoral students met traditional standards for graduate admission. An informal documentation of the career achievements of its graduates confirms the validity of these alternative admission requirements.

The process of education, itself, was transformed. All courses, degrees and programs were discontinued after a year of study, inaugurated with a week long retreat where the entire faculty of 51 professors and lecturers and 90 doctoral students developed alternatives to the traditional content and structure of graduate and undergraduate education. New courses and degrees were identified, with flexible requirements. A year later, these new courses were discontinued and the entire school went to a portfolio system to document learning.

Doctoral students were made voting members of the faculty and participated fully in the governance of the school. In its ten year experimental history there never was a vote which aligned students against faculty .

The alternative admissions criteria did not result from any shortage of applicants. The School of Education at UMass was more selective than the Harvard School of Business.

Worries about accreditation proved unfounded as the school passed its accreditation review with flying colors.

The basic structure of doctoral study required the student to select a committee of three faculty and the course of study was mutually agreed upon by the student and faculty, including criteria to gauge the success and completion of study. Dissertations commonly focused on real problems of education and became the focus for doctoral study.

Off campus urban education sites in Brooklyn, Chicago and Boston at the doctoral level, and in Springfield, Harlem, and Marion, UMass offered undergraduate alternative teacher education programs

Many racial tensions developed, but along very unexpected lines. Accusations of racism were

levied against school administration by radical black students, accusing the school of creating "Oreos" who were brain-washed into a white culture. Accusations of hypocrisy were leveled by radical white students, accusing the school of giving only lip service to "real reform." But the school and its programs flourished until it was brought down by false accusations of scandal, later proved to be false. But by then it was too late, a grand and successful experiment had come to an end, to be celebrated years later as a hallmark of success in the history of the University of Massachusetts.

This session will describe the school and its programs, and discuss lessons learned with implications for the design of future programs.

### **Presenter**

**Dr. Dwight Allen** is currently Eminent Scholar for Educational Reform at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. He recently co-authored a book on American education with actor, entertainer, and educator, Bill Cosby, who was also his doctoral student while Dwight was the Dean of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He has won numerous awards for teaching, including The Virginia State Council for Higher Education award for outstanding teaching in the State of Virginia (2001). He has many published books and consulting experience across the world, particularly in developing nations. While consulting with UNESCO in Namibia in 1990, he developed the basic concept of 2+2 to provide a framework for training Namibia's teachers after independence. He's been to China 25 times, and is now serving in his third contract with the United Nations Development Program and the Government of China. His book on Micro Teaching, which has been translated into several languages including Chinese, is widely used by teachers and administrators in a number of countries around the world. His new book, co-authored with his son, Douglas, is "Formula 2+2, published by Berrett-Kohler, San Francisco, 2004.