

In Memoriam of Professor David Williams II

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I first met Professor David Williams in the Fall of 1986. It was my second year of law school at the Moritz College of Law. It was his first year as an Assistant Professor at Ohio State. Prior to his arrival, there had only been one African American faculty member in the law school at that time, Professor LeRoy Pernell. As a Black male, first generation college student and law student, I was ecstatic to learn that he had joined the faculty. Professor Pernell was the Black Law Student Association (BLSA) Advisor, so all of BLSA was anxious to see what David's role might be and what kind of person he was.

David was a tall and physically imposing figure. His serious face was a bit intimidating. He exuded confidence and strength. We could not help but to admire him. Of course, those who knew him will attest that he was in fact a warm, caring, engaging man. At the time, he was single and had not yet met his wife, Gail, so his gracious hospitality as a single man was surprising. One of my fondest memories was how he would routinely open his home in Victorian Village to us. He was close friends with local lawyer, Michael Coleman, before Coleman became Columbus's long-standing accomplished mayor. On one occasion, he and Michael Coleman were hosting BLSA at his home. David was in his kitchen cooking food for us. In fact, I learned a very special recipe from him that day, which I still prepare regularly! We spent an entire Saturday relaxing, talking, laughing, and watching movies. David mentored all of us in the most profound ways. He made us feel at home, valued, and special. He truly cared about us and nurtured our futures. Moreover, his care and concern extended to all his students. He was not a respecter of persons. He was a teacher and mentor at heart, and he was willing to give to every student who crossed his path.

David was also an extraordinary teacher. The Moritz College of Law is not only known for the exceptional scholarship of its faculty, but also for the high quality of classroom instruction. David was no exception to this rule and contributed to this sterling reputation. During my law school tenure, Federal Income Tax was still on the Ohio bar examination, so we were all advised to take Tax while in law school to prepare. I confess that I was intimidated by this course and dreaded the notion of taking Tax. However, David was a renowned Tax professor and expert. Though terrified, I enrolled in his Tax course. Yes, I hated the subject matter as much as I had suspected. Albeit, the clear, concise, and effective way David taught the course made it possible for me to thoroughly grasp the material and post one of my highest law school grades! It is no surprise

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that David was voted Outstanding Professor of the year on multiple occasions throughout his tenure at Ohio State.

After graduating and practicing law for several years, I returned to OSU to work. Throughout my tenure as an Assistant Dean in the law school, David became a supportive colleague, still mentoring and nurturing. When his career continued to advance and he moved to Vanderbilt University, he always made time for his former students. I could go without communicating for a couple years and then suddenly reach out to him for advice. He would always return my calls and emails. Most recently, we had been in touch because my son was in college in Nashville, so I was often in town. My undergraduate alma mater, Lipscomb University is in Nashville, so I would always cover the law school recruiting events there—in my role as Dean for Admission at Moritz, and then later as an alumni volunteer, when I assumed the role of Assistant Vice Provost in the Office of Diversity & Inclusion at Ohio State. Last year, I had begun to interview for Vice President positions at universities around the country, so David made time to sit down with me to talk about his experiences as a VP and share lessons he had learned. Weeks before his passing, he invited me to his home to meet his Vanderbilt colleagues to network and expand my circle of contacts. He wasn't cooking this time. Gail oversaw the event details at their home, but he was ever the gracious host as usual. He was creating an opportunity for a newly hired Vice Chancellor at Vanderbilt to meet the community. My last memory of David mirrors my first: a caring, giving, generous soul who opened his home as a tool to help others grow, develop, and connect. There is no doubt that this world is a much better place because of David Williams. I know I am, and I am eternally grateful that he touched my life in countless ways over the past thirty-four years.

Recently, I assumed my new role as Vice President for the Office of Inclusion Diversity and Equal Opportunity at Case Western Reserve University. I have no doubt that David's example and mentorship helped to make this next step a reality. Rest well my friend. Your legacy is thriving and still touching lives through all the people you touched through your amazing life.