

Delta State's Alumni Association announces 2010 Inductees into the Alumni Hall of Fame

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Induction into the Delta State University Alumni Hall of Fame is the highest honor bestowed upon an individual by the DSU Alumni Association. Established in 2007, the Alumni Hall of Fame is extended to alumni and friends who have achieved professional distinction and made significant community service contributions at the local, national and/or international level and who have thus brought honor and distinction to Delta State. As part of the Homecoming activities planned for Friday, October 15, Delta State University Alumni Association will recognize this year's Alumni Hall of Fame Inductees, Dr. Wayne Blansett of Cleveland and Dr. Joe B. Whitehead of Hattiesburg.

Wayne Blansett, EdD, vice president for student affairs and associate professor of education in the Division of Behavioral Sciences at Delta State, received the highest honor for a Delta State alumnus, along with Joe Benjamin Whitehead Jr., PhD, dean of the College of Science and Technology and a professor of physics and astronomy, and chemistry and biochemistry at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Wayne Blansett, EdD



Wayne Blansett

Blansett, whose higher education took place entirely at Delta State—from a social science degree in 1973 to a doctoral degree in professional studies in 1988—initially learned about the university during a high school football game. While playing on the Statesmen home field, he was impressed with the facilities and the environment.

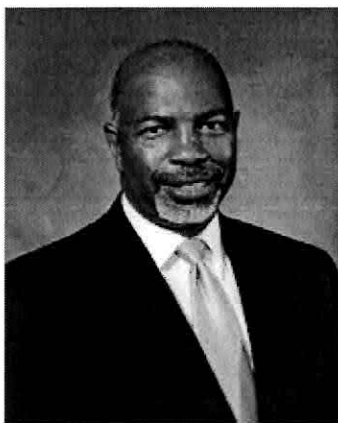
“On my only other visit, I was overwhelmed by the genuine kindness and compassion of the staff and the people in recruiting,” recalled Blansett, a first-generation college student from Chickasaw County. “They seemed to treat you like a family member and that proved to be very true in my undergraduate experience. Delta State transformed this country boy into a person capable of meeting the challenges of society. It’s a place that provides great role models and personal experiences that prepare you to be a better person.”

Blansett rose through the university system via student affairs, and coached the first Delta State women’s softball team while working on his thesis. In 1987, he was named associate dean of student affairs. Three years later,

“associate” was deleted from his title and he joined the President’s Cabinet. In 1993, he was named vice president for student affairs. He took a brief break in 1998, when he joined 95 institutional representatives from around the world at the Institute of Educational Management at Harvard University. Graduating from the program and relishing the camaraderie of his classmates was “one of the coolest things I’ve ever done,” he said.

Delta State’s familial influence has had a ripple effect. In 1973, Blansett married Diane Woods, a Delta State alum, now director of academic support services for the university. Their children, Melanie B. Hebert and Brian, graduated from Delta State and married fellow alums. “We have 11 Delta State degrees in our immediate family,” said Blansett, a grandfather of three—Melanie’s daughters, Anna, 4, and Mary Neal, 2; and Brian’s son, Jackson, 9 months. “We truly bleed green and white!”

Joe Benjamin Whitehead Jr., PhD



Joe Benjamin Whitehead Jr.

A Picayune native, Whitehead traveled some 300 miles north to tour Delta State based on the recommendation of his high school principal, Samuel Billingsley. Impressed by the student-centered environment at the university, Whitehead walked on to play football for the Statesmen and initiated a lifelong career in higher education.

“The science faculty went beyond the call of duty to help students succeed,” he recalled. “I was challenged every day. I learned discipline while juggling academic challenges and athletic responsibilities.”

After earning a degree in physics from Delta State in 1983, Whitehead enrolled at Kent State University as a graduate student and earned a doctoral degree in physics in 1989 while conducting research in the Liquid Crystal Institute at Kent State. The title of his dissertation: “Light Scattering from Polymer Dispersed Liquid Crystals.” He spent a year as a research scientist for the Energy and Materials Sciences Laboratory at the Georgia Tech Research Institute after graduating from Kent State.

Whitehead joined Southern Miss in 1990 as an assistant professor of physics and astronomy, and spent the following summer at the John C. Stennis Space Center as a NASA/ASEE faculty fellow. In 1993, he received a joint appointment in chemistry and biochemistry. In 1996, he was promoted to associate professor and to professor in 2007. He was named chair of the Department of Physics and Astronomy in 1998, associate dean of the College of Science and Technology in 2004, interim dean in 2009, and dean in 2010.

Even though he has been a Golden Eagle for nearly two decades, Whitehead remains a Statesmen fan through and through. “Delta State is special because of the relationships formed with faculty, staff, and students that helped me appreciate opportunities rather than focusing on obstacles,” he said. “In a nutshell, if one works long

enough and hard enough, one can achieve any goal.”

Strong family support has also been a common thread for Whitehead. He learned patience through fishing on the Gulf Coast with his father, Joe Sr., and a strong work ethic combined with the importance of educational achievement from his mother, Rosa Lee. Whitehead and his wife, Sonia Gayle, are teaching the same principles to their two children—Alyssa, a junior at Samford University, and Nickolas, a junior at Oak Grove High School.

Even though his job entails a serious nature, Whitehead also indulges a lighter side. “People would be surprised,” he said, “that I listened to Art Bell on Coast to Coast AM.” The medium, he explained, is better known as late night paranormal radio.

Tickets for the Alumni Awards and Gala Dinner are on sale now for \$20 per ticket. For more information or to purchase a ticket, please contact the alumni office at 662-846-4660 or email alumni@deltastate.edu. The Gala Dinner will take place Friday, October 15 on the campus of Delta State University at Walter Sillers Coliseum. The social starts at 6:00pm leading to the dinner at 7:00pm. Visit the Delta State alumni website, by clicking on the Alumni & Friends tab off of the main Delta State webpage for the full schedule of events for Homecoming 2010.