A History of the Department of Psychology

Arguably, the founder of psychology at North Carolina College for Negroes (now North Carolina Central University, NCCU) was James E. Taylor whom Dr. Shepard hired in 1927 to teach courses in education. Taylor’s challenges as a teacher and his awareness of the expanding behavioral science literature persuaded him to incorporate psychology theories and principles into his classes. His knowledge of psychology was based largely upon what he was able to teach himself.

Dr. Taylor urged Dr. Shepard to offer more psychology courses and, later, to establish a psychology major. With the creation and offering of four psychology courses, the undergraduate psychology department was established in 1939. Dr. Shepard appointed James E. Taylor to chair this new department.

The undergraduate psychology program was established in 1939. The graduate psychology program was established in 1945.

James E. Taylor came to the University in 1927. With the establishment of the Department of Psychology in 1939, he was named the first chair of the department.

Howard E. Wright came to the university in 1946 as the department chair. In 1960 he resigned to accept the position as President of Allen University. As the second department chair, he inherited the work and unmet challenges of his predecessor, James Taylor. Wright essentially continued to build the department in an environment that was yet unaccepting and uninformed of psychology as a budding science.

George Kyle came to the university in 1945. He was the first clinical psychologist hired in the department. Accordingly, he was the major contributor to the development of a series of pioneering, applied and clinical courses in the department. He was the major architect of the design and development of the MA clinical psychology program, the only such program for many years at any Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in this State and the region. He served for a short period as the department chair after Dr. Wright resigned. He later became the Dean of the undergraduate program for the university. Toward the end of his career, he returned to the department to teach and conduct research.

Carol C. Bowie came to NCCU in 1951. She taught in both the undergraduate and graduate programs for many years. She accepted the department chair's position when Dr. Kyle accepted the position as Dean of the university’s undergraduate program.

Alonzo Davis came to NCCU as the department chair in 1962 and served continuously in that position until he retired in 1976. Dr. Davis ushered in a decidedly experimental orientation to the department that provided students with a depth of quantitative, methodological foundation. This gave students a clear competitive edge for entry into graduate programs, jobs, etc. He was known for his rigor and uncompromising high standards.

Les Brinson came to NCCU in January 1976 as the department chair and served until he resigned the chairmanship to return to teaching and research in 1996. By this time, the number of psychology majors had grown from less than 80 to more than 400; the number of MA students grew from 14 to more than 60 and the number of faculty from 3 to 9. Funded research grew from 0 to $1.5 million. Specific and enduring clinical MA-level internship partnerships with area mental health centers and hospitals had their origins during the early 90s.

Elwood Robinson came to the department in 1978, ABD. He taught in both the undergraduate and the MA clinical programs and was a prolific researcher and a successful grants person. He assumed the chairmanship position when Brinson resigned in 1996. He returned to teaching and research in psychology in 1999 and was appointed the first dean of the new school of Social and Behavioral Sciences in 2005.

Linda Pratt came to the university in 1999 and served a number of years as an adjunct faculty in psychology and the Associate Director of Institutional Research. She later earned an appointment to the department, was promoted to the professorship rank, and was appointed the Director of Institutional Research. When Dr. Robinson stepped down as department chair to return to teaching and research, Dr. Pratt was elevated to the position as chair and served in that position until 2003 when she retired from the University.
Les Brinson accepted the position as chair, again, but on interim basis for one year. That appointment spanned a 5+ year period. Three additional faculty were added during his second period as department chair, bringing the total to 12. The size of the faculty was 3 when he was first appointed to the chair's position in 1976. The building in which the department is housed is the Education Building. In 1960, it was renamed the Taylor Education Building in honor of the titular founder of the NCCU Department, James E. Taylor. Although the decision to dedicate the building in his honor was made 12 months before his death, Dr. Taylor died 3 months before the building was officially dedicated to him at the 1960 Commencement Convocation.

Early Goals, Mission, Vision Statements

…breaking gradually away from the realm of abstract philosophy and taking its place as an experimental science, psychology has become a rather necessary and important part of the liberal education” [taken from the 1928-1930 NCCU Catalog]

Three courses were taught in the early years of the department. They were as follows:
211, 221 (211 Fall and 221 Spring) General Psychology - 5 periods, 5 hours
Courses added in later years: 233 Educational Psychology - 5 periods, 5 hours
314 Adolescent Psychology – 5 periods, 5 hours.

The graduate program was established in 1945. Four courses were required; all focused on a combination of clinical and education/learning issues.

Outstanding Achievements of the Unit’s Leaders and Alumni

Al’Uqdah, Shareefah - Howard University, Ph. D Program
Anderson, Normal - Ph.D., former Director of Medical Research, Duke University; CEO American Psychological Association
Brinson, Les - Ph.D, University of Maryland, College Park, Vice Chair N. C Board of Licensing Psychologists, Chair and Interim Chair of the NCCU Department of Psychology
Green, Marquisha - Ohio State University, Ph.D. Program
Hardy, Robin M.D. - Oncologist, Duke University Medical Center
Hedgspeth, Eboni C. - ABD, UNC Charlotte, Clinical Health Psychology
Henderson; ABD, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Counseling Psychology
MacKinnon-Tucker, Dorene, - University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ph,D Program
Mills, Catherine - Psy D Program at Virginia Tech
Mizelle, Nathlie - Ph.D. - University of Wisconsin; Assistant Professor at Madison, East Carolina University
Mizelle, Richard - Ph.D. - University of Wisconsin at Madison, Associate Professor, NCCU
Pasamonte, Kim - Ph.D. - Program in Human Development at UNC-G
Savoy, Monica - Ph.D. - Program in Community Psychology, UVA
Shaw, Hollis MA - NCCU, Director of Psychology, Hartford, Connecticut
Smith, Nina - Ph.D. program in Human Development at UNC-G
Thorpe, Marion - Ph.D. - Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs at NCCU and Chancellor, Elizabeth City State University
West, Chenetta - University of Maryland, Ph.D. Program
Williams, Valarie - Ph.D., - Experimental Psychology; UNC-CH
Witherspoon, Dawn - New York University, Ph.D. Program

Prepared by Les Brinson Ph.D.
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