

# FEF FOCUS

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## President's Message

The ability to adapt to change is a true hallmark of excellence. So, for the past several years, we at the FEF have supplemented our support system to ensure we continue to prepare our Doctoral Fellows for a changing job market, in which earning the Ph.D. is no longer sufficient to secure employment. To be competitive, today's doctoral graduate must demonstrate the ability to develop and teach courses, present a manageable and cutting edge research agenda, and publish articles in respectable journals prior to graduation.

Before they publish, however, our Fellows must develop significant material to write about, and so we require and help them to conduct research that addresses important issues affecting our nation. You will read here about Rhoda Moise, a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Miami, whose research on chronic diseases, with specific focus on cervical cancer, will play a role in preventing the disease and ensuring underserved communities have access to adequate relevant medical care.

You also will read about Dr. Teresa Benitez-Gregory, a recent McKnight graduate from the University of Florida's Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering. Dr. Benitez-Gregory researches in the field of thermodynamics and shares her expertise by teaching courses at the University

of Florida that will enhance the ability of students to pursue engineering careers.

As we continue to help our Fellows refine, pursue, and share strong research agendas, we also now focus on preparing them for changes influencing workforce needs. While it is projected that, between 2018 and 2025, about 2.8 million jobs in the business, government and nonprofit sectors will require advanced degrees, few doctoral programs aim to prepare students to fill these workplace needs. Indeed, traditionally, few doctoral students have aspired to fill those needs either, most seeking instead to land tenure track positions in higher education. With fewer tenure track appointments available, however, today's market now forces many doctoral students to pursue careers outside of academia. Thus, the newer non-academic career path must be mapped and made clear to doctoral students.

You will read in this edition of the *Focus* how we work to do just that. You'll learn how FEF connects Fellows to leading researchers and administrators from universities, corporations and governmental agencies, such as Dr. Chandra Baytop and Dr. Mark Lawson, who can help them adjust to today's career planning challenges.

Our quest to help students meet today's challenges does not end with our Ph.D. program. This edition of the *Focus* demonstrates how we strive to prepare our pre-college

students to thrive in an increasingly technological-driven society. That means ensuring they develop essential skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and now computer programming—coding. That's why we have added a coding contest to our statewide Brain Bowl Competitions and continue to devise ways to help students learn even while they compete, this year training a new Tech Squad to guide them as they create their contest apps.



Dr. Lawrence Morehouse  
President & CEO

Even more significant, to address the shortage of certified coding teachers in underserved areas, FEF now offers training to secondary school teachers to help them learn to teach coding, first to students in our summer camps and then to classes in school districts throughout Florida.

In closing, although our environment continues to present usual and unanticipated challenges, we rise to the occasion to address our most pressing concerns with experience, imagination, and the will to prepare students to succeed. We continue to survive and achieve because of our commitment to excellence.

## Annual Meeting Speakers Urge Fellows to Forge Pathways to Impactful Careers

Opening the October 2017 Annual McKnight Doctoral Fellows Meeting (AFM), FEF President and CEO Dr. Lawrence Morehouse pressed Fellows to develop strategies for pursuing careers that positively impact communities. Two AFM keynote speakers, Drs. Chanza Baytop and Mark Lawson, reinforced More-



Dr. Chanza Baytop

house's directive, offering advice based upon their own experiences in private industry and academia.

Friday's speaker, Dr. Chanza Baytop, originally planned to become a physician and earned bachelor's degrees in pre-med and anthropology from the University of Notre Dame. However, she proceeded to earn a master's degree from Boston Univer-

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## MDF Alumna Dr. Teresa Benitez-Gregory

On a clear, sunny August day in 2017, “one of the best” days in her life, Dr. Teresa Benítez-Gregory accepted her doctoral diploma in engineering at the University of Florida (UF) Commencement. Later, she would note that she seemed to be the only Hispanic woman earning a Ph.D. from the College of Engineering.



Dr. Teresa Benitez-Gregory

That day in Gainesville was the culmination of an extended journey for Dr. Benítez-Gregory, who described her childhood self as a “major nerd” who was very good at math and writing, not technical writing but more artistic endeavors such as poetry. When she was a fifth grader, her school tested Benítez-Gregory and proposed moving her to the tenth grade, but her parents wouldn’t allow it because of their concern for her social development. They did, however, allow the school to advance her by a year. Although education was important in her family, her father and mother, a professor of engineering and a pharmacist respectively, didn’t pressure their four children.

As a young adult, Dr. Benítez-Gregory earned a bachelor’s degree (*summa cum laude*) in engineering from the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), followed two years later by a master’s from Stanford University and then an appointment, which would last four years, as a lecturer at UPR. In 2012, she gave birth to her daughter Teresita, and by 2013, Benítez-Gregory was pursuing her doctorate at UF as a McKnight Fellow.

In June 2017, she would advise an audience of new McKnight Fellows that the Ph.D. is very different from a bachelor’s or master’s, “not only academically.” During the four years of her program, she had balanced her academic life with being a single mother, transferred universities, changed advisors, and survived financial challenges.

“Trying to plan everything in advance does not always work out.” Nonetheless, she encouraged students to be flexible and creative when plans derail, work hard, and know that sometimes important decisions are reversible. “There are many people who want to help, even if it is not obvious in the beginning.” She advocated multiple

mentors, choosing one’s advisor wisely, and not being afraid to change if necessary.

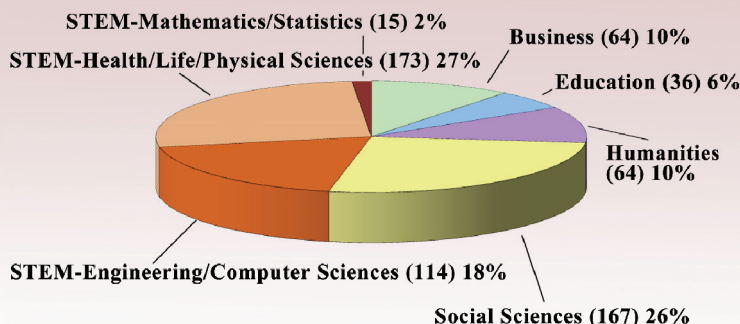
Dr. Benítez-Gregory is particularly interested in the teaching aspect of her career. Before graduating, she won the Knox Millsaps Graduate Teaching Assistant award in the UF Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering. Students rave about her. One student described her as one of UF’s best professors, an “incredible talent” who “understands the material so well that she is able to answer any question!” Currently a Lecturer, Dr. Benítez-Gregory cares about all of her students. She is also sensitive to students of color. Benítez-Gregory observed that some students of color, especially athletes, seem hesitant to ask for help when they need it, while others, especially some girls, excel because they feel they have to prove themselves.

Universities need more teachers as dedicated as Dr. Benítez-Gregory if they are to correct the underrepresentation of minorities in STEM. Consider these facts documented by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics:

- In the years 2010-2020, overall employment in STEM occupations will increase 17%.
- Not enough students are pursuing degrees and careers in STEM to meet this growing demand.
- Hispanics were 16% of the population in the U.S. in 2010, but accounted for only 8% “of all certificates and degrees awarded in the STEM fields” in 2009-2010. Hispanics now are only 2% of the STEM workforce, even though close to 20% of the U.S. youth population is Hispanic.
- The Initiative’s study called on the country “to develop, recruit, and retain 100,000 excellent STEM teachers over the next 10 years.” President Obama also asked colleges and universities to graduate an additional million students with STEM majors.

Since 1984, the McKnight Doctoral Fellowship Program (MDF) has awarded 1,215 Fellowships to African American and Hispanic students. Since the first Fellow graduated in 1988, an unprecedented 633 Fellows have earned Ph.D.’s. This achievement is all the more remarkable, given that the National Research Council reports the average time for doctoral degree completion as 7 years and 3 months, while MDF graduates boast an average completion time of just 5 years and 6 months.

### 633 MDF GRADUATES



## Annual Fellows' Meeting Keynote Speakers

*continued from page 1*

sity followed by a doctorate in public health from Johns Hopkins University. Since then, for 17 years, she has designed, implemented and evaluated public health research, programs and initiatives. She spent thirteen of those years at global research firm Abt Associates before transitioning to Booz Allen Hamilton, a global management and information technology consultant, where she is a Senior Lead Scientist. Dr. Baytop has published in peer-reviewed journals and is a peer reviewer for the *AIDS and Behavior* and *AIDS Care*.

"Don't let having a Ph.D. limit the way you see yourself," she urged Fellows, as she acknowledged their dilemma of choosing between academia and industry. With diversity paramount in our global society, "you are a hot commodity in the private sector." Citing her own trajectory, Dr. Baytop dispelled negative perceptions about non-faculty careers. It is possible, she said, to have intellectual freedom, to publish, and to present negative as well as positive research.

Whether in the private sector or academia, scholars must accumulate certain skillsets

in addition to accomplishments. Dr. Baytop recommended shadowing experts to learn project management, budgeting in particular, and team management, two skills that can boost one's value to an employer. Prove your value, manage your expectations, and keep your ego in check, she urged. Additionally, she advised the audience to find multiple mentors they can trust to help them navigate the politics of their organizations and specific situations. According to Dr. Bay-



*Dr. Mark Lawson*

top, "What matters most is your skill set, your network, and your experience," and that you continue to build upon your skills.

Saturday's speaker, Dr. Mark Lawson, is Professor in Residence of Reproductive Medicine at the University of California (UC) San Diego, Director of the UC President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, Faculty Director of Postdoctoral Training and Education, and Chair of the Embryonic Stem Cell Research Oversight Committee. He holds a bachelor's degree in microbiology from San Diego University and a Ph.D. in biological sciences from UC Irvine.

Among several fellowships and postdoctoral appointments, he was a UC President's

Postdoctoral Fellow in the program he now leads. Initially, he chose the private sector, a biotech company, after completing his doctoral training, but he returned to UCSD in 2000 and has been there since. He credits his time in biotech with teaching him critical skills—experimental design, rigor, and reproducibility—that have helped him succeed at the University.

His biggest challenge in the transition to academia was understanding how the University worked and how he fit into its overall plan. In becoming a professor, he was struck by his responsibility for others—students, staff, and postdoctoral appointees—who need guidance, mentoring, and support to succeed.

Like Dr. Baytop, Dr. Lawson recommends having many mentors; he described mentoring as a "collective experience" which should include faculty, your committee, colleagues, family, and friends. Similarly, your networks can be informal as well as professional. "Everyone needs to be mentored and can be a mentor, even in a small way. We all learn and benefit from our experiences and from those around us. If we don't share experiences, then we are losing out on the chance to progress from shared knowledge."

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2017 ANNUAL FELLOWS' MEETING



*From left to right: Dr. Kenyatta Rivers, UCF; Dr. Mark Dawkins, UNF; Dr. Debra Reinhart, UCF; Dr. Guillermo Prado, UM; and Dr. Jaffus Hardrick, FIU, on the Pathways to Becoming College and University-Level Academic Administrators Panel.*



*Students and panelists discuss Strategically Planning Research to Maximize Career Opportunities.*



*A Fellow interacts with Exhibitors from the University of Miami.*



*MDF Fellows attend one of the AFM's discipline-specific roundtable discussions.*

## Building Community: Profile on MDF Fellow Rhoda Moise

Rhoda Moise was born in Philadelphia, the second of two siblings in a family that immigrated from Haiti. She grew up in Pennsylvania and remembers visiting Haiti at least twice in her childhood, as a toddler and again when she was eight or nine. As a result, she is, in her own words, “globally inclined” and multi-lingual, able to speak Spanish, Haitian Creole, and French Senegalese in addition to English.



MDF Fellow Rhoda Moise

Her parents stressed education early. Moise recalls her father hand-writing blocks of numbers for her to add, which helped her learn to make quick calculations. He also bought a tape recorder to record her brother while reading, so he could listen and improve. Throughout her life, Moise remembers seeing these cultural values—education, preparation, and hard work—demonstrated in her family and community. When she was young, her mother worked in banking, but being paid on commission was a source of stress. As both Moise’s mom and grandmother had health issues, her mother became interested in health, switched to a nursing career, and is now wrapping up her master’s degree in nursing.

In high school, Moise was always in honors and AP courses, but lacked the know-how and confidence to enter the collegiate honors program until she received advice from her mentor, Roberta Harding. It was a gateway

process for her. A bio behavioral health major, as a junior Moise applied and was accepted into Schreyer Honors College at Penn State. Despite her late entry into the Honors College, by the time Moise earned her bachelor’s degree in 2015, she had accumulated five independent research experiences, some through the McNair Scholars program. She credits McNair with grooming her for the GRE and the rigors of graduate work through these research experiences.

That same year, FEF awarded her a McKnight Doctoral Fellowship to attend the University of Miami. The transition to Florida challenged Moise, who felt the loss of her community and academic connections acutely. Moise began to rely on her McKnight network, and with six other McKnight Fellows, including graduating students, established the UM McKnight Doctoral Fellows student organization in 2016. As president of the organization, last year Moise spearheaded development of a program that matches Fellows with mentors to establish more comprehensive support in concert with the students’ advisors. This year, the organization is encouraging interested students to apply for McKnight with a

goal of increasing the number of McKnights at the University.

“I really have difficulty imagining the Ph.D. experience without this family.” Moise is grateful to the McKnight Fellowship as well as the McNair Scholars program before, for providing resources and support and embracing her in a caring community.

Now, Moise’s research interest is broad, less about specific diseases than the social determinants that contribute to the proliferation of chronic diseases such as cervical cancer. She is a passionate advocate for community-based participatory research (CBPR), the practice of including people in the community, ordinary people as well as leaders, in the research process from conception to the conclusion of research, so

that everyone has a seat at the table in developing and disseminating ideas. Her ambition for her research is that it translates into

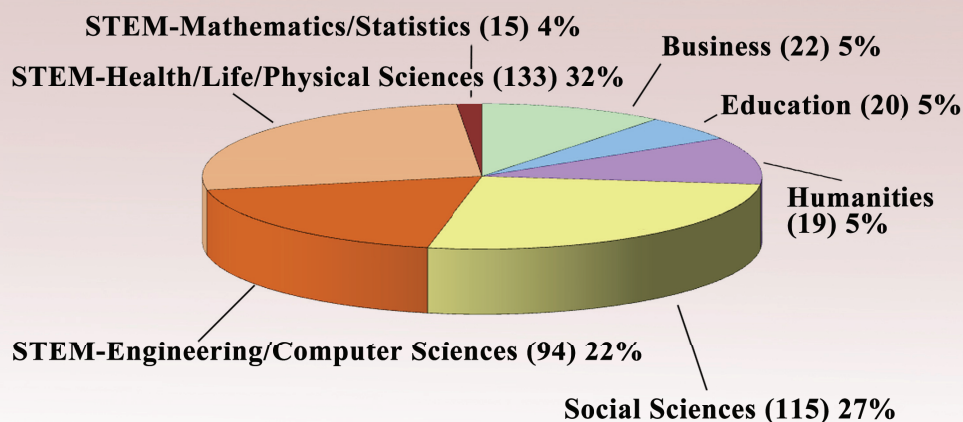
policy solutions, empowering communities and promoting wellness for all, especially the underserved.

In fact, this emphasis on community is truly Moise’s vision, as reflected in the African proverb she loves to quote: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to get far, go together.”

*“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to get far, go together.”*

*-- MDF Fellow Rhoda Moise*

### 418 MDF MATRICULATING FELLOWS



## Tech Squad Trains to Mentor FEF Coding Challenge Teams

For years, FEF has hired Engineering Computer Systems (ECS), led by engineer Mr. Michael Torres, to bring a team of Tampa high school students, referred to as the “Tech Squad,” to McKnight and Pre-College conferences. The Squad provides technical and other support, sets up laptops and projectors, assists presenters, facilitates attendee sign-in, and collects evaluation forms.

For the 2018 State Brain Bowl, FEF has engaged ECS to recruit a team equipped to do even more. The Squad not only will provide routine tech support, but also will assist competitors in FEF’s day-long State NAS Codes Challenge, as they develop mobile apps for the contest.

The Brain Bowl Tech Squad consists of four students—Nathaniel Dash, 12th grade; Victor Forero, 11th grade; Tyshawn Gittens, 12th grade; and Jordan Glover, 10th grade. All are enrolled in STEM magnet programs.

They have logged hours after school and on Saturday working with FEF’s Executive Vice President and General Counsel Lyra Logan, learning to create apps with MIT App Inventor (AI), the platform students will use during the March 23 coding Challenge. By developing and conceptualizing several apps of increasing complexity, the Squad has become skilled at navigating the platform. The training should enable them to provide guidance to and answer questions from Challenge participants.

At the end of the State competition, the Tech Squad will receive certifications recognizing their dedicated hours of training and service.



From left: Brain Bowl Tech Squad members Nathaniel Dash, Victor Ferero, Tyshawn Gittens and Jordan Glover spend Saturday training to help NAS Codes Challengers.

## Achiever Jackson Destine Wins National High School Heisman Award



Jackson accepts the 2017 National High School Heisman Award.

The most prestigious award program in high school athletics has named Jackson Destine, a wrestler from Atlantic High School in Delray Beach, Florida, the 2017 male national winner of Wendy’s® High School

*“I made the decision to not become a statistic, and instead to become a success.”*  
 -- Jackson Destine

Heisman® Scholarship. Chosen from high school seniors at more than 30,000 schools around the country, Jackson will receive a \$10,000 award.

A member of FEF’s National Achievers Society (NAS) for two years, Jackson is proof that life’s circumstances do not define a person; grit and determination do. Despite a challenging upbringing, Jackson pursues excellence in his studies, sports, music and service.



Jackson wrestling an opponent to the floor

When a lack of discretionary income threatened his ability to keep playing sports, Jackson started his own candy business to raise money for the athletic fees. He has set fifteen school records in wrestling, track and football while maintaining a 4.0 GPA and working twenty hours a week to help his grandmother with bills. He also finds time to volunteer in NAS and other community service projects and is president of his class.

In addition, Jackson composes original raps with a powerful message: all young people have choices, even if they grow up surround-

ed by crime, violence, and drugs. He wrote his school’s official song and a song that praises Florida’s Math Nation program, a free math tutoring software tool created by the University of Florida’s Lastinger Center for Learning. Jackson credits the software for helping him raise his math grade from an F to an A.

During his two years in NAS, Jackson has inspired several peers in the Delray Beach area to apply for membership and work to maintain high grades.

Prior to naming Jackson the High School Heisman winner, Wendy’s flew him and nine other National Finalists to New York City for a stay at the Marriott Marquis in Times Square. While in New York, Jackson toured Central Park and the National 9/11 Memorial Museum, skated at Rockefeller Plaza, enjoyed the Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular, and saw snow for the first time.

He also attended the Heisman Dinner where Tim Tebow spoke and was a VIP for the live taping of the Heisman Awards on Saturday, December 9, 2017. Jackson’s award announcement aired on ESPN 2 on December 21. He is now a member of

the Heisman family and, as an alumnus, will receive an all-expense paid trip to Heisman week every year.



Jackson performs his Math Nation rap for the Palm Beach County School Board.

## 2018 Laws of Life Essay Contest Finalists Overcome Challenges and Excel

Each year, students in grades 3 through 12 compete in FEF's Laws of Life Essay Contest, which requires them to exercise writing and critical thinking skills as they communicate the principles that guide their lives. Each contestant selects a quotation that expresses a key value and explains in the essay why she or he feels the chosen value is important.



**Brianna Higgins, South Florida COE, 4th Grade**

*In a world filled with hate, we must still dare to hope. In a world filled with anger, we must still dare to comfort. In a world filled with despair, we must still dare to dream. And in a world filled with distrust, we must still dare to believe. – Michael Jackson*

Michael Jackson's words—Hope, Comfort Dream, and Believe—inspire me to believe that good will happen in bad situations. They also help me to stay strong and resilient when things do not work out for me the way I would like them to. For instance, in school, when some children tried to intimidate me, I stayed positive and asked how they would feel if someone did that to them. But, when I used the word "intimidate" in the question, they mocked me and jeered because I could not pronounce the word properly due to a speech defect.

As I went on through my everyday life, I realized the defect was impacting my school and social life. No matter how hard I worked, I could not pronounce certain words correctly. Eventually I decided to see a speech therapist, but the doctor said I just had to keep practicing and then would be able to pronounce the words. So I practiced and practiced until I finally succeeded.

Because of my determination to overcome my speech defect, I have been able to help others with the same problem. I feel very proud that I was able to overcome my defect. I can see how important it is not to give up when people try to intimidate you, but instead to endure when things do not start out right.

**Xavier Woodley, Tallahassee Coalition COE, 9th Grade**

*Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world. – Nelson Mandela*

In life, there are certain goals you must set for yourself. You also must live by certain laws that limit distractions and make you hold yourself accountable. The Law of Life I live by is from Nelson Mandela—"Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world." If I get my education and I care about my future, I will have options. I can go to college, graduate, earn a degree, and land a decent paying job. Education is the foundation for where I want to go in life.

As an athlete, I want to graduate with the highest grade point average possible. I play basketball, and I know coaches and scouts



*will be looking at my educational record. I realize I must put at least an equal amount of time and work into my education as I do in basketball practice and games. I understand that, if you play sports, you should always have your education to fall back on. That is why I want to earn my bachelor's degree in both history and music education.*

*I have hydrocephalus; it is a condition that causes a lot of fluid on the brain. When I was a baby, I had problems walking, talking, and learning. When I was one year old, Dr. Benjamin Carson, the current United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, placed a shunt on my brain to drain the excess fluid. After the surgery, people helped me learn. Thanks to health care workers, tutors, and my parents, I am a high achieving 9th grader who values education. The world needs scholars to change this world. I am and will continue to be a scholar, and I will succeed and do great things in this world.*

**Toniyah Ashanti' Washington, South Florida COE, 10th Grade**

*You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them. – Maya Angelou*

In life, we are guaranteed to experience trials and tribulations, many of which will knock us off our feet and make us want to quit. Through our faith in God and a strong support network, we learn that these experiences are only temporary, and, in fact, are designed to make us stronger. I know this all too well because, at the age of 13, I collapsed on the basketball court and had to undergo open-heart surgery in order to play competitive sports again. This experience changed my life forever.

On the surface, my recovery was better than anyone could have imagined; 6 months post-op, I was training at Nike's Elite Basketball Camp. Little did I know that, in the months ahead, I would experience the lowest point of my life. I began having panic attacks every time I stepped foot on the court, became stressed and depressed, and even had thoughts of suicide.

This past summer, I began to understand God's purpose for my life and reflect on the fact that I am a walking miracle. My diagnosis, commonly referred to as sudden death syndrome in athletes, is usually not detected until an autopsy. It was at this point that I made the conscious decision to change my mindset from victim to survivor. I understand that life is short, and we have to dedicate every second of every hour to achieving our goals, because tomorrow is not promised to any of us.



## Center of Excellence Director of the Year: Ms. Gloria Bradley

Center of Excellence (COE) Director of the Year Ms. Gloria Newsome Bradley was raised by two strong, hard-working parents who valued education and the principles of Christian living. Her goal is to pass those values on throughout her community by providing access to educational opportunities not widely available in Florida's Columbia and Hamilton Counties.



Ms. Gloria Bradley

For the past thirteen years, Bradley has achieved this goal as the North Florida COE Director, where she has instituted academic enrichment programming that includes the FEF's Brain Bowl Competitions and National Achievers Society (NAS). In addition to overseeing five active NAS chapters, Bradley has conducted annual summer standardized test preparation and coding camps and encouraged hundreds of middle and high school students to participate in county and regional Brain Bowl contests in History & Culture, Mathematics and Coding.

from Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Bradley worked two years as a waste water treatment lab technician and then taught for 36 years in her native Lake City. Before retiring from the school system in 2015, she won the Sunshine State Scholars Region II Scholar's Distinguished Teacher Award in Science, earned the Ida S. Baker Distinguished Minority Educator of the Year Award for

Columbia County, and was named Columbia High School Teacher of the Year. Although she has "retired," she continues to work with children as the North Florida COE Director and as a tutor and substitute teacher. As a result of her ability to motivate students, many who have benefited from her tutelage have reached the pinnacle of success in their respective fields.

Bradley's skills as an educator span the religious arena as well. She conducts workshops and training sessions across



Ms. Bradley accepts the Best NAS Online Chapter Award during the 2016 National Achievers Society Summit.

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*"I would like to be remembered as one who made a difference in the lives of young people and all those I came in contact with. And, although I can be tough, I always add a cup of compassion as I urge students to reach their fullest potential."*

-- Ms. Gloria Bradley

This year, she hopes to bring home the state championship in Coding and regain the Center's dominance in History & Culture and Mathematics that has led to first place state wins in 1987, 1993, 2004, 2013, 2014, and 2016. She also is working to raise the stature of NAS to the same level of distinction as the National Honor Society and Beta Clubs on high school campuses in north Florida.

Her long term goal is to create a system to monitor students from third grade through high school to ensure they stay on the college track. "I would like to see all Achievers qualify for academic scholarships, enabling them to complete at least a bachelor's degree," Bradley states.

After receiving her own bachelor's in Chemistry with a minor in Mathematics

her church district and serves as the Dean of Christian Education for the First Central Missionary Baptist Association. In the role of Dean, she organizes and directs Christian Education classes for the congregants in her area. She also serves as a Sunday school teacher at Columbia County's Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist, the church she has attended since the age of 14.

Gloria is married to Mr. L. C. Bradley. With this marriage, she has embraced two daughters, Dekela and Charyll, and four grandchildren.

### Upcoming FEF Events

June 29-30, 2018	MDF New Fellows' Orientation, Tampa
July 29-August 1, 2018	MDF Summer Research and Writing Institute, Tampa
November 2-4, 2018	MDF Annual Fellows' Meeting, Tampa

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*The FEF's mission is to strengthen the larger community by creating and implementing programs and services that lead to greater educational advancement for historically underrepresented groups.*

For information on how you may support FEF programs, please call 813-272-2772.

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