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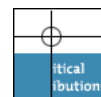
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DIVERSITY SPONSORS**Mentors at Work****Dr Fay Cobb Payton & the PhD Project**

The project helps African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans interested in doctoral programs oriented to business

Untangling the challenges of healthcare and AIDS, both in sub-Saharan Africa and the U.S., is one way Fay Cobb Payton, PhD has used her IT skills in the healthcare arena during her career.

She also makes a big difference as part of the PhD Project.

The PhD Project (www.phdproject.org) is an informational network for African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans who are U.S. citizens or permanent U.S. residents and interested in business-oriented doctoral programs. Project members include doctoral students, faculty and program directors. Established by the KPMG Foundation in 1994, the project is now an independent entity with a long list of corporate, academic and nonprofit supporters.



Fay Cobb Payton: "near and dear to my heart."

Once accepted into fulltime accredited programs, students can join minority doctoral students' associations begun by the PhD Project to foster connections among groups of students with similar interests. There are currently more than 400 minority PhD student members. Since the project began, the number of minority business school professors has tripled, from 294 in 1994 to more than 950 today.

Helping and encouraging

Dr Payton is an advisor for the program. She doesn't just help minority doctoral students get started in technology careers; she also encourages and tries to propel them toward the same types of good work she's been able to accomplish.

"The PhD Project is really near and dear to my heart," Payton says. "I'm hoping it will continue and get even more support from educational institutions and future sponsors."

Payton is an associate professor of IT at North Carolina State University. She didn't join the PhD Project as a student, because at the time, the focus was only on accounting students. The emphasis has since expanded to include IT and other technical areas. "I wish there had been that support network for me when I entered my program," she reflects.

Guiding each other

"The PhD Project has done a lot for me all the same," she reflects. Although she's an advisor now, she sometimes feels as if the students are guiding her.

"We collaborate on research, write grant proposals together and talk as friends. I was involved with the first class in 1996, and people still contact me."

Payton received her BS in industrial and systems engineering from Georgia Tech and a BA in accounting from Clark Atlanta University in 1989 under a dual degree engineering program. She received her 1992 MS in decision sciences in the computing arena from Clark Atlanta.

Then she went on to a 1997 PhD in information and decision systems, with a specialty in healthcare systems, at Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland, OH).

As an undergrad, Payton interned with IBM each summer. When she finished her undergraduate studies Payton worked for IBM as a systems engineer, and also did some research for Time Warner Inc.

Understanding healthcare

While pursuing her PhD she worked as a research consultant for various organizations: Ernst and Young/CAP Gemini's healthcare IT practice (Cleveland, OH), Akron General Medical Center and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Ohio. "I did a lot of these projects partly to help myself understand the healthcare industry," she says.

Payton's research concerns IT and the delivery of healthcare. In her AIDS research, for example,



she looked at "the story behind the numbers" of patient care for African Americans in rural North Carolina.

"I found out that a lot of things have happened that are not in the numbers. Statistics can only tell you so much. Once you uncover what's actually going on in terms of transportation, access to care, health literacy, those things really guide the research in a different way," she says.

When it came to AIDS in Africa, she was interested in how the media and communication technologies can be used to disseminate information to populations in Tanzania.

Payton recently served on the State of North Carolina's infrastructure panel for a 2009 emerging issues forum. She's also co-editor of the newly published *Adaptive Health Information Systems*.

Awards and recognitions

She has received many awards and recognitions for her work. She was a 2007 Fellow of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, working on data management and communications strategies for a breast cancer study. She was appointed the first SAS Institute Fellow in 2006 for her work in analytics and teaching, and received the 2006 and 2007 North Carolina State University alumni extension award. She was highlighted as "faculty to watch" in the PhD Project newsletter.

Besides her PhD Project work, Payton is a member of the IEEE medical technology policy committee. She's also on the Decision Science Institute international strategy planning committee. She's active in Black Data Processing Associates (BDPA), where she's working to foster the STEM pipeline in underrepresented groups and global populations. And she's vice chair of the special-interest group for healthcare in the IS conference of Information Systems International Health for America. She was recently named an American Council on Education Fellow for 2009-2010.

Running upstream

With all her professional and volunteer work, Payton still has to find time for her family. As she learned long ago, "In terms of work-life balance, there is no balance," she says with a smile.

"You do what you have to do, and most days I'm running upstream. Sometimes things just won't be completed; that's a big lesson I've had to learn. But I have a supportive spouse; I couldn't accomplish half what I do without him," Payton concludes.

D/C

Heidi Russell Rafferty

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