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JSU GRAD TO PARTICIPATE IN OXFORD ROUND TABLE

(Jackson, Miss.) A three-time Jackson State University graduate is one of 40 educators worldwide selected to participate in the distinguished Oxford Round Table in England.

Já Hon Vance, an English professor at Baltimore City Community College in Maryland, will make a presentation this summer and fall titled "The Historical, Religious and Spiritual Presence of Historically Black Colleges and Universities that Enhanced the Quality of Life for African Americans/Blacks in America."

"I want the world to know that in 2007, HBCUs are not dead, we are not handicapped, we are not in intensive care," said Vance, who received a bachelor's in English literature and education in 1993 from JSU.

"They are thriving, vibrant, intellectual institutions constantly paving the way for African Americans to enhance their lives," said Vance, who also earned two master's degrees from Jackson State, one in English literature and composition in 1997, the other in educational administration and supervision in 1998.

Since 1989, the Oxford Round Table has convened to consider major issues in contemporary educational policy in the United States, United Kingdom and other selected countries, according to its Web site. Its purpose, the site says, is to promote human advancement and understanding through the improvement of education.

Being selected to present at the Round Table is the academic equivalent of earning an Oscar or an Emmy, said Vance, who also will be a trainer and a facilitator in Oxford.

"In academia, this type of recognition is major," said the CEO and founder of JV Educational Consultants. "It gives so much credit to the individual but also to the institution that planted the seed."

The native of Detroit, Mich., said three former faculty members at Jackson State helped him develop into a seasoned scholar: the late Dr. Annie J. Sistrunk, a chair of the

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Department of English and Modern Foreign Languages; Dr. Inez Morris, who retired as chair of the same department; and Dr. E C Foster, a former history professor and associate dean of the Graduate School.

When Vance got a D on his first exam while he was pledging Alpha Phi Alpha, Sistrunk pulled him aside, peered over her glasses and said, “You’re a scholar and a leader, and this is not acceptable for you.”

“From that talk, it motivated me to prioritize what is important,” Vance said. “She would tell me everything I did wrong and how to make it better. From that, it showed me she wasn’t there just for the money; she really cared and saw the talent, and she wanted me to do better.”

Morris took Vance, then a junior, to the library when he was writing a research paper to show him how to pull the Modern Language Association journal and humanities index, as well as how to locate key books.

“They were areas I needed to know like the back of my hand as an English major,” he said. “She said, ‘As a scholar, you may not know all the answers, but you know where to find them.’ ”

Foster, whom Vance described as “well-read and meticulous,” groomed him to be an administrator when he worked as his assistant. Vance said Foster taught him how to represent his department, speak for him when he was out, build relationships with faculty in various departments, and to be an organized problem solver.

“During my first six months under Dr. Foster, everything I did was wrong, but he would never blast me before people,” Vance recalled. “He would say, ‘You are a scholar. You have the talent. It’s just not your time yet; you still have to learn.’ He taught me how to do things in a professional manner with dignity.”

Vance said the classroom and life lessons from his “three celebrities” prepared him to participate in the Oxford Round Table.

“Having that training and experience, I felt more than comfortable that I would go to Europe, do well and present well, and be invited back because of the good foundation I received at Jackson State,” Vance said. “I just want to see our university continue to shine as an institution of higher education that will continue to train men and women of color and afford them an opportunity to better themselves.”

Photo of Já Hon Vance:

<http://www.jsu.edu/~announcements/JVance.jpg>