

BLYDEN JACKSON

Anyone who has ever walked across our campus and received a smile from Blyden Jackson has immediately felt the better for it. This is a slight but not trivial clue as to his total impact at this University -- an impact compounded of ability, character, devotion, and a determination to maintain human values while not compromising any of the more abstract ones.

A native of Paducah, Blyden Jackson took his degrees at Wilberforce University and the University of Michigan. After more than a decade of teaching English in the Louisville public schools, he joined the faculty of Fisk University in 1945, and in 1954 moved to Southern University, where he became head of the English Department and Dean of the Graduate School. This special involvement with graduate education continued after he came to Chapel Hill in 1969 as Professor of English -- the first black person to be appointed a full professor on this campus. He was Associate Dean of our Graduate School from 1973 to 1976 and a special assistant to the Dean for the next five years, always with a portfolio of particular concern with minority students. He is an authority on black American literature, about which he has published extensively. Active also in national professional organizations, he has served as President of the College Language Association.

An ardent participant in some of the English Department's more high-spirited activities, he has represented with verve and distinction that department to the wider University, and in turn the University to the state and the region -- both of which are the better for the presence of this sturdy figure whom we take pride in making a Doctor of Letters.