



Cedric O. Buckley (1969-Present)

Headmaster Awakened Academy

Early Learning Center

“Keep your eyes open for possibilities; don’t assume that they are the same ones you’ve always heard about.” Cedric Buckley, 2006.

Overview

Dr. Cedric Buckley is currently the headmaster at Awakened Academy-Early Learning Center, and formerly was an associate professor of Biology at Jackson State University. Dr. Buckley is an educational entrepreneur with a passion for research and learning. He excels in exposing adult learners to the life sciences. Dr. Buckley is also a law enforcement officer with the Hinds County Sheriff's Office. He believes in finding effective ways to model responsible citizenship within the communities he serves.

Early Life and Education

Dr. Cedric Buckley is an associate professor of Biology at Jackson State University. As a young child, Buckley was always interested in the natural sciences, and he excelled at biology in high school and college. A native of Jackson, Mississippi, Buckley attended Jackson State University as an undergraduate—a school which was to have a tremendous influence on his future career. While at Jackson State, Buckley participated in summer internships arranged through the College of Science, Engineering and Technology to expose students to various fields of research around the country. Buckley’s participation in several Department of Energy internships, at both Los Alamos and Lawrence Berkeley National labs, allowed him to “see and engage in research first hand.” He knew then that he wanted to pursue life science research as a career. “Jackson State set the stage for me to be exposed to these kinds of ideas,” Dr. Buckley says.

Importance of Mentoring to Career

After receiving his Bachelor’s degree in biology from Jackson State, Buckley wanted to move on to graduate school. A faculty member at Jackson State, Dr. Joseph Cameron, suggested Michigan State University (MSU). “As it turned out, Dr. Cameron was part of a program at MSU that would invite minorities to see the campus,” Buckley says. Buckley visited the school as part of that program and filled out an application while he was there. He was accepted soon thereafter. Buckley maintains a close relationship with Cameron now that he is also a faculty member at Jackson State. “Dr. Cameron is still teaching in the biology department and is pleased to know that he introduced me to the school from

which I obtained my Ph.D.," Buckley says. "He's still there to see me continue to grow as a researcher and teacher in the department I grew up in."

Buckley has had many other mentors who have helped advance his career. At Michigan State University, Dr. Julius Jackson in the Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics introduced Buckley to studies in genome evolution, which he has incorporated into his present research in evolutionary viral genomics. He also studied viral DNA replication, and was introduced to the world of viruses while working on his dissertation in the lab of his graduate advisor, Dr. Michele Fluck. "What I study now is a result of what I learned in both labs—I've combined the two experiences," he notes.

Two other individuals at Jackson State have also been particularly influential in Buckley's developing career. Buckley has known the outgoing Dean of the College of Science, Engineering and Technology, Dr. Abdul Mohamed, since Buckley was an undergraduate in the college. "Dr. Mohamed was instrumental in preparing me for those summer internships, and encouraged me to consider research once it was clear that I did not want to pursue a career in the health sciences," Buckley says. Buckley also mentions Dr. Mark Hardy, current Dean of the College of Science, Engineering and Technology and director of the JSU-RISE program, who was his undergraduate advisor and with whom Buckley did his early research. "These two individuals have watched me from undergraduate to graduate school, and back to Jackson State as a member of the faculty," Buckley says.

Mentoring Others

Dr. Buckley has endless opportunities to mentor other minority students at Jackson State, a historically black university with a majority African American student population. He currently mentors three undergraduate students, and he is currently conducting summer research with one of them, Stephanie Hughes, at the Broad Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "Working there will give her greater exposure to the genome sciences," Buckley explains. "I am also developing professionally and learning to ask more focused research questions that will help improve my scholarship and grantsmanship."

Challenges

Working with students has been the most rewarding part of Dr. Buckley's career, followed closely by the research experience he continues to gain at places like the Broad Institute. "It's enriching and valuable work," he says. The most challenging part of his career so far has been his publication record and grantsmanship. Buckley says this is due primarily to the fact that he did not allow much time between his post doc and current faculty position. "I probably would have more quickly established a record in those areas had I done a more extensive post doc," he says. "The average is three to five years, and mine was only one, so I'm still getting up to speed. I probably would be further along at this point had I 'incubated' a little longer, but I have always wanted to teach at my undergraduate institution. When the opportunity arose, I just could not resist the chance to return to my alma mater." Buckley has also been involved in a number of diversity programs. He currently serves as a research mentor with RISE, a program funded through the National Institute of Health that is geared toward increasing the number of minorities pursuing research careers in the biomedical sciences.

When asked where his commitment to the biological sciences comes from, Buckley replied “I see a lot of potential in the students I interact with”. Jackson State has a great track record of graduating African Americans with biological science degrees; in fact, a study published in the 2006 issue of *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* (Borden and Brown) found that Jackson State is second nationally in that category. “I’m in a great environment to have a positive impact, by exposing more African Americans to a wider variety of options in the science,” he notes. “If I can do, say or interact with students in a way that will expose them to potential careers that they have not thought of, that’s what keeps me motivated to stay in this area.”

Advice to Young Professionals

Dr. Buckley has a lot of advice for minorities who are interested in pursuing a career in the biological sciences. “Keep in touch with faculty that are doing research, and ask them about careers,” he advises. “Also, constantly ask yourself as you go through your coursework: ‘what do I like about the course I’m taking now, what do I not like?’ Begin to understand your own likes and dislikes, strengths and experiences so you can choose the career that you are best suited for.”

“Do a lot of up-front research in terms of what careers exist,” Buckley continues, “because those that exist now and those that are coming online in the near future do not look, feel, or sound like what many students have recognized as being “traditional life science careers”. Many students may miss out on novel careers in which they would flourish because they are not aware of their existence— bioscience is moving at such a rapid pace. It’s a challenge to keep up with where things are going and the types of things that are out there. Keep your eyes open for possibilities; don’t assume that they are the same ones that you’ve always heard about.”

For More Information

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This interview was conducted in 2015.