

**NANCY OLA
RANDOLPH
DAVIS**
1926-2015



**EDUCATION
PIONEER
AND
TRAILBLAZER**

Nancy Davis took a courageous step when she paved the way for future generations of students of color to enter higher education programs. Against a national, historical backdrop of legalized segregation, the great-granddaughter of slaves became the first African American to enroll at Oklahoma State University in 1949.

Nancy Randolph and her family migrated to Sapulpa in 1919, where they quickly discovered segregated schools, theaters, and water fountains. Eating in a public restaurant was taboo. Black patrons either stood to the side of the counter or took food to go through a back window.

She graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in 1944 and Langston University in 1948 with a bachelor of arts in home economics, becoming a teacher at the all-black Dunjee Public School in Choctaw. She married fellow Dunjee educator Fred Davis in 1953.

After the U. S. Supreme Court allowed Ada Sipuel Fisher to enter the University of Oklahoma Law School, Davis enrolled at Oklahoma State University. She initially was required to sit in the hallway, but after making the second highest score on a test, her white classmates complained to the professor and she joined the other students in the classroom. The professor allowed Davis to sit in the back of the classroom as long as a higher-ranking University official didn't come in the classroom because Oklahoma was serious about segregation. Classmates were willing to study with Davis and offer her transportation when completing class projects.

Prior to the Sipuel case, black students seeking higher education were often sent to nearby states to support segregation. "I wanted to attend OSU for my master's degree, since OSU had one of the best Home Economics programs. I shouldn't have to leave the state to accomplish that."

In 1968 in the midst of closing black schools, Davis was transferred from Dunjee to predominantly white Star Spencer High School. Long noted for her excellence in developing student leaders, Davis observed the discriminatory practices against Dunjee students. White staff and students neglected to tell the Dunjee students about certain activities so that they would not be included.

While working hard to help maintain positive relations within the school, Davis overcame her own prejudice from the state white supervisor who didn't want her selected to teach a newly-created childcare class, preparing students to work at local daycare centers. Davis again demonstrated her natural talents as a leader and used her ability to develop an outstanding childcare program.

Davis retired from teaching in 1991 after 43 years of service, 20 years at Dunjee High School and 23 years at Star Spencer High School. She influenced the lives of thousands of students she taught over the years. In 1999, Davis received the OSU Distinguished Alumni Award and OSU named a residence hall after her in 2001, even though she wasn't permitted to live on campus as a student. OSU even offers three scholarships bearing her name.

In 1999, a statue of Davis was unveiled in front of the College of Human Sciences. The bronze figure depicts a young student in a graduation cap and gown crossing a threshold and looking ahead to a bright future. Davis passed away in March 2015 at age 88. In 2020 the Board of Regents renamed the Human Sciences building in her honor.