

CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF

*Dr. Bertina
Hildreth Combes*

November 20, 1958 – February 19, 2021



1 p.m. Tuesday, March 9, 2021
Live streamed at
[YouTube.com/user/UniversityNorthTexas](https://www.youtube.com/user/UniversityNorthTexas)

Welcome and Introduction

Ms. Joanne Woodard, Vice President for Institutional Equity and Diversity

University Community in Mourning

Dr. Neal Smatresk, President

Remembering Dr. Combes

Friends, Colleagues and Special Guests

Words of Comfort

Pastor Beau Hughes, The Village Church Denton

Celebration and Farewell

Dr. Bertina Hildreth Combes

Dr. Bertina Hildreth Combes, 62, vice provost for faculty success and professor of special education who had worked at UNT since 1989, died Feb. 19 in Denton. She also had served as coordinator of special education programs and as associate and interim dean of the College of Education.

After earning a bachelor's degree from Oral Roberts University, she worked as an elementary school teacher specializing in learning and intellectual disabilities and emotional and behavior disorders while earning a master's degree from Southern University in Baton Rouge. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin and served as an assistant professor at Texas Tech University before joining the UNT faculty.

In UNT's Department of Educational Psychology, she focused on preparing professional educators to meet the needs of diverse students receiving special education services, including those with learning disabilities. She was the director for Project TELL: Training Effective Leaders for High-Needs Schools Through Local Partnerships, which received a \$1.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to help train future leaders of special education programs.

Her honors at UNT included being named a Student Association Honors Professor and a Mortar Board Top Prof, as well as receiving the first Ulys and Vera Knight Faculty Mentor Award and a President's Council Teaching Award. She also was honored for her leadership in supporting inclusion and diversity at UNT and was known as a guiding light and mentor to her colleagues on campus and beyond. She also was an active member of Delta Sigma Theta.

Students remember her as an understanding mentor who shaped their interest in the field of special education and encouraged them to turn possibilities into plans. She was a deeply religious person who believed in the power of education to transform lives. The child of college educators, she created the Drs. Eddie and Gladys Hildreth Scholarship at UNT, named for her parents. This scholarship is now endowed because of her dedication and commitment to it.

Survivors include her two children, Ashley ('17) and Julius ('19), both UNT alumni.

To honor Dr. Combes' legacy as an educator, a scholarship has been created in her name. Memorials to the Bertina H. Combes Scholarship fund may be made through University Advancement. For more information about the scholarship, contact Shelly Lane, senior director of development in the College of Education, at shelly.lane@unt.edu or 940-891-6860.

Dr. Combes' Service to UNT

2020-2021	Vice Provost for Faculty Success
2019-2020	Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research, College of Education
2017-2019	Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Research, College of Education
2016-2017	Interim Dean, College of Education
2015-2016	Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Research, College of Education
2015-2020	Professor, College of Education
1995-2015	Associate Professor, College of Education
2017-2019	Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Research, College of Education
1999-2002	Associate Dean for Educator Preparation & Academic Affairs, College of Education
1997-1999	Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, College of Education
1989-1995	Assistant Professor, College of Education

"Her dedication and positivity were a genuine reflection of her values"

I have never met a person who believed more in UNT, its students, its employees, and its potential to improve students' lives than my cherished colleague Dr. Bertina Combes. Bertina worked every day to help make UNT the best place it could be for all of us. Her compassion for everyone in the UNT community, especially the students; her generosity of spirit; and her belief in the institution guided all her interactions, even in the most trying of situations. Her dedication and positivity were a genuine reflection of her values and are exemplary.

– Dr. Beverly L. Bower, Professor Emerita of Counseling and Higher Education

"She was a bridging type of person"

One of the things that defined Bertina was her ability to bridge faculty and administrators. She was a bridging type of person between so many different groups. Her research was in special education, but her interests were interdisciplinary and always about helping marginalized people. When you study marginalized groups, a lot of the work is interdisciplinary. Bertina knew people not only in different departments, but across so many different groups. You wouldn't think they would come together, but she would bring them together.

– Dr. Valerie Martinez-Ebers, Director of Latina/o American Studies Program

"Always present in good times and bad times"

Dr. Combes not only survived in a white majority institution, she thrived, and she made it her responsibility to make sure that the rest of us thrived along with her. Always present in good times and bad times, Dr. Combes always made sure to acknowledge and celebrate our individual victories as collective triumphs.

– Dr. Mariela Nuñez-Janes, Professor of Anthropology and Director of Graduate Programs

"Every interaction was about inclusion"

Every interaction I had with her about UNT, how it looks and operates, was about inclusion. I think that's an important legacy of her work because there's a difference between diversity and inclusion. She was so invested in new programming, particularly programming for students with disabilities. She really cared about people being included and heard and respected. ... What she was doing with the Office for Faculty Success, trying to develop faculty wholly and ensure that UNT truly represents its philosophy — that's what she leaves behind. We owe it to her to make sure that continues, because she really loved UNT.

– Dr. Chandra Carey, Associate Dean for Academics in the College of Health and Public Service

"You could feel how important you were to her"

I've learned many lessons from Bertina but there are two that stand out the most. The first one, be gentle and listen to people – I mean really listen and hear them. Bertina had a way of listening to people and giving her undivided attention to people in a way that really made them feel seen and heard. When talking to her and being in her presence, you could feel how important you were to her. The second thing that stands out is to live life with grace and purpose. She truly made a difference and she did so in a way that was graceful and purposeful. She was intentional about all that she did (even the little things).

– Dr. Angie Cartwright, Associate Professor of Counseling and Higher Education

