

Del Holland Dugas



Del Holland Dugas is a Louisiana native who graduated from LSU with a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering. She has been acknowledged as the first African-American female to graduate from LSU's College of Engineering.

Dugas is a Project Business Planner at ExxonMobil and is responsible for developing major capital investments. In the early 80s, she began her engineering career at the Baton Rouge Refinery and progressed through a variety of assignments. She developed expertise in engineering development/design, deployment of new technology, budget planning, economics, safety, and assessments of long-term capital investments. With her extensive knowledge of capital project management and refinery operations, she continues to effectively lead teams that are executing multimillion-dollar projects consistent with the site's business objectives. Her strong work ethic and commitment to engineering are demonstrated through numerous technical contributions over a 35-year professional career. Her influence extends beyond ExxonMobil Baton Rouge to other areas in the Gulf Coast.

Dugas has always displayed a high degree of responsibility and commitment to her work and to her community.

Often described as a trailblazer, Dugas is a champion for recruiting and cultivating the next generation of STEM leaders. She mentors countless engineering interns and newly-hired employees, providing guidance to help them achieve their personal and professional goals. In addition, she devotes efforts to promoting engineering at both the high school and college levels. She can be found speaking at high school career fairs, pre-college camps, and college seminars, offering insight to students about engineering and other science professions.

For over 25 years, Dugas has been involved with academics and diversity initiatives in the LSU College of Engineering. She served as Chair of the Engineering Diversity Advisory Board and continues to actively support it. She also serves on the LSU Diversity Scholars Program Advisory Board as the lead mentor and coordinator for ExxonMobil. Her collaboration with LSU on strategic initiatives helped to progress objectives focused on increasing student recruitment, retention, and graduation in engineering. Recently, LSU announced record increases in minority and female engineering graduates.

Dugas sees mentoring as an instrument for including others in the journey toward success. One of her most gratifying moments is realizing

Reflections of Del H. Dugas

that with each forward step, the numbers increase and opportunities multiply. Many of her former engineering protégés are now professionally employed across the US as well as internationally.

Her history of leadership, dedication, and service includes not only LSU, but extends to the greater Baton Rouge community and beyond through many social and civic endeavors. She provided leadership for nonprofit organizations, including the former Baton Rouge Speech and Hearing Foundation (now Emerge Center), Quota International, the YMCA, Junior Achievement, and Volunteers in Public Schools.

Dugas has received numerous awards and accolades throughout her career, including technical excellence

awards, the LSU Minority Engineering Program Corporate Recognition Award, the LSU Chancellor's Sesquicentennial Service Award (2010), the 2016 Inspiring Women in STEM Award by INSIGHT into Diversity Magazine, and recently the 2017 LSU Women's Center Esprit de Femme Award. She is also a member of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and the Louisiana Engineering Society.

When she isn't working or volunteering, Dugas enjoys music, travel, home projects, gardening, and spending time with family and friends.

Receiving this prestigious honor caused me to reflect upon a few things and the journey to this point in my life. Central to this journey are mentors, who influenced me in so many positive ways and made such an indelible impact.

Early on, I was fascinated with science, math, and the wonders of space exploration. On a science class field trip, I was excited to view one of the NASA Apollo capsules on exhibit at LSU. Several of my high school instructors inspired me and were instrumental in providing me with a solid academic foundation to pursue college. Admittedly, I was uncertain about future career options, but knew that science and math would be integral to my decision. That uncertainty was resolved after I attended an LSU Summer Scholars Program, where

I was introduced to chemical engineering. I was further impressed by the significance of the sugar kettle displayed in front of the chemical engineering Building, symbolizing the revolution of the Louisiana sugar industry. Based on this enlightening experience, I chose chemical engineering as my field of study.

During my first week at LSU, I met Dr. Joseph Polack, who was Chair of the Chemical Engineering Department. Shortly afterward, I was awarded a chemical engineering scholarship to support my educational pursuit. Dr. Polack became my mentor, often guiding and counseling me, so I could achieve my personal and professional goals. He always welcomed me with a smile and supported me through challenging times to ensure my success.

Reflections of Del H. Dugas

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I completed my studies, graduated in chemical engineering, and subsequently embarked upon a professional career with Exxon (now ExxonMobil). The engineering education that I received from LSU prepared me and has allowed me to develop as a leader for both my employer and my community.

At work, I began mentoring engineering interns and newly-hired employees on success strategies. This motivated me to reach out to LSU and the College of Engineering as well. Initially, I volunteered as a mentor and speaker for pre-college camps, which exposed high school students to engineering. Realizing there were greater needs, I expanded my involvement and found many opportunities to support LSU's academic and diversity initiatives focused on student recruitment, retention, and graduation in engineering.

For example, I had the privilege of becoming mentor coordinator for the Diversity Scholars Program, an active partnership between ExxonMobil and LSU that is now in its 13th year. The program began as a pilot based on the strength of the LSU engineering program. Along with financial scholarships, mentoring and oversight are included as vital components. The outcomes of the Diversity Scholars Program have been phenomenal – higher retention rates and higher graduation rates for engineering and LSU overall. The graduates have capitalized on local, national, and global opportunities. In turn, these engineering alumni are now thriving professionals, contributing to a highly-skilled, diverse workforce and reinvesting in their respective communities and LSU.

That prevalent theme of mentoring remains relevant

and impactful. I am most grateful to those who mentored and inspired me on my journey. This compels me to continue the legacy of caring and guiding others, especially aspiring scientists, technologists, engineers, and mathematicians, so they can also achieve their personal and professional goals.

