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## Simmons, Howard L.

By: Hilton, Adriel A.

(17 Apr. 1938 – ),

educator, was born in Mobile, Alabama to Eugene Simmons, a cement finisher, and Daisy Davis Simmons, a cook, and educated in that city's public schools. He completed the first through seventh grades at Crichton Colored School, where he drew attention to himself as a standout student. After one year at Dunbar Junior High, Simmons completed the ninth through twelfth grades at Mobile's Central High School, graduating third in his class in 1956. He has stated that his commitment to learning began at a very early age.

*"I've always been interested in books, reading and words, and origins of words, which led me to the library. In high school, I would miss gym class to go to the library. I was there so often that the librarian put me to work. I processed books, accessioned them, which was exciting to see new books coming in, and the librarian let me help classify them. Because I knew where everything was in the library, I helped students, explaining to them what they should be using (National Forum on Information Literacy, [http://www.infolit.org/star\\_3.html](http://www.infolit.org/star_3.html))."*

Getting accepted to and being able to enroll in Spring Hill College was an accomplishment for Simmons, given the lack of opportunities for African Americans in the Deep South in the 1950s. As a young college student, his passion for reading intensified. He continued working in the library and helping students, even questioning the conventional system of reserving library books: "Why should anyone want to be limited to just what was on reserve? I argued with faculty that if students were to really learn, they needed to go beyond the reserve system. A few were convinced! I guess I was interested in information literacy even then" (National Forum on Information Literacy, [http://www.infolit.org/star\\_3.html](http://www.infolit.org/star_3.html)).

Simmons received his bachelor's degree in secondary education and Spanish in 1960 and began teaching at Lakeshore High School in Belle Glades, Florida, that same year. He left Florida the following year to become a Spanish instructor at his former high school in Mobile and eventually enrolled in Spring Hill College again to satisfy a desire to learn the Russian language. It was a desire that would lead Simmons to pursue a master of arts degree in teaching Slavic language and literature (Russian) from Indiana University, which he earned in 1965. After spending a summer attending the Russian Language Institute in the Soviet Union, he launched a career in higher education at St. Louis Community College in St. Louis, Missouri, and was quickly promoted to chair of the foreign language department, while at the same time teaching Russian and Spanish at a local high school.

Simmons realized a passion for certification of instructional programs in 1967 while serving on his first Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) site visit at State University of New York at Farmingdale. It was to have a profound impact on young Simmons, who would serve on a second visit held at Delaware Technical and Community College the following year, after which he relocated to an area near the MSCHE headquarters, where he landed an associate dean of instruction position at Northampton Community College in Pennsylvania in 1969.

His career took him to Washington, DC, in 1972, when he accepted a prestigious American Council on Education (ACE) Fellowship at their main office. During his year there, Simmons published a monograph and conducted a study that examined the political influence of Washington-based higher education organizations on federal public policy. Following his fellowship year at ACE, he returned to his position at Northampton Community College and enrolled in the doctoral program in design and management of postsecondary education at Florida State University. Moving within close proximity to MSCHE in Newark, New Jersey, finally paid off for Simmons in 1975, when he became its associate director. That same year, he completed his doctoral studies, earning a Ph.D.

Dr. Simmons worked at MSCHE until 1987, when he went on a year-long sabbatical to Arizona State University, also conducting research with colleagues from Temple University in Pennsylvania at that time. When he returned to MSCHE in 1988, he became the first and, to date, the only African American male to serve as the executive director of the organization. He coauthored a book that examined diversity within MSCHE, which would be the impetus for the commission's eventual clarification of the use of diversity in MSCHE accreditation standards, the measurement by which all institutions would be assessed. The standards were approved and adopted by member institutions, making diversity an integral part of each MSCHE criterion. Because he was a staunch advocate for libraries and information literacy, both became essential elements of the accreditation process under Dr. Simmons's leadership.

Simmons remained executive director of MSCHE until 1995 when he returned to Arizona State University as department chair and a tenured faculty member. It was around this time that he began consulting with various higher education institutions, including the University of the Virgin Islands, and later Sojourner–Douglass College and Morgan State University, both in Baltimore, Maryland. Named professor emeritus by the Arizona Board of Regents in 2000, Simmons began what some consider the final chapter in his long and illustrious career in higher education, taking a full-time position as professor and chairperson of the Department of

Advanced Studies, Leadership and Policy in the School of Education and Urban Studies at Morgan State University. While at Morgan, he assisted with the development of the research doctorate and master's programs in higher education. He also chaired the university's self-study assessment, which helped the institution gain reaccreditation in 2008.

Simmons served as a member of the Board of Educational Affairs Advisory Council of the American Psychological Association and as a member and past chairman of the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. Simmons completed an appointment as an Educational Testing Service Historically Black College and University (HBCU) Research Scholar for 2003–2004, with particular responsibility for studying the contributions of HBCUs to American higher education. He also served as a member of the Commission on Accreditation of the Council on Chiropractic Education. Among his awards and recognitions are honorary degrees from Kings College and Sojourner–Douglass College.

Simmons' areas of interest have primarily been information literacy, diversity and multiculturalism, accreditation, assessment, and quality assurance. He continued to write and speak on many of these topics into the twentieth century, publishing articles such as “Is It Time for a New Look at Academic Organization in Community Colleges?” (with R. C. Richardson, *Community College Review*, 1989); “External Agents Fostering Multiculturalism,” (ed. Leonard A. Valverde and Louis A. Castenell Jr., in *The Multicultural Campus: Strategies for Transforming Higher Education*, 1990); “Information Literacy And Accreditation: A Middle States Association Perspective,” (ed. D. W. Famer and Terrence F. Mech, in *Information Literacy: Developing Students as Independent Learners*, 1992); “The Concern For Information Literacy: A Major Challenge For Accreditation,” (ed. Edward Garter, in *The Challenge and Practice of Academic Accreditation*, 1994); and “Librarian As Teacher: A Personal Review,” (ed. Alice Bahr, in *Future Teaching Roles for Academic Librarians*, 2002).

## Further Reading

- Mendoza, C. M. *Dr. Howard L. Simmons: An Intellectual Biography of the First Black Executive Director of the Middle States Regional Accrediting Body* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Morgan State University, Baltimore, 2009).
- Murphy, J. B., S. R. Blanshei, J. F. Guyot, H. L. Simmons, J. Segall, R. H. Chambers III, and J. Sleeper. “The Progress of Affirmative Action: Accreditation and Diversity, the Accreditation of Baruch College by the Middle States Association.” *Minerva Journal*, 30 (1992): 4.
- Simmons, H. L., L. W. Bender, and C. L. Myers. *Involvement and Empowerment of Minorities and Women in the Accrediting Process: Report of a National Study* (1986).