

"If you can *read*,  
you can do  
*anything*."



Advice from Nondace Campbell, who for 37 years as the director of the Reading Center at UF encouraged students to pick up a book or two (or 10) and helped them develop the confidence they needed to succeed in life.

By Brianna (Martin) Patterson '03, M'07

Nondace Campbell began her career as a ninth-grade English teacher – a job she loved – in the late 1960s in Huntington, Ind., but was soon inspired to apply for the Vista (now known as the AmeriCorps Vista) program.

After training with a group of other volunteers in Denver, Colo., Campbell was sent to the Oconoluftee Job Corps Center in Cherokee, N.C., in the Great Smoky Mountains national park, where she taught reading and math. Her students – all men, ages 16-21 – would spend one week in the classroom and the alternating week learning a vocational trade.

"That's when I became interested in how to teach reading," she said. "The fellows in North Carolina all had less than a fifth- or sixth-grade reading ability when I started. We began with the alphabet and worked through to the G.E.D. level."

After her Vista experience, Campbell moved to northwest Ohio to pursue a master's degree at the University of Toledo. Upon completion of that degree, a contract to teach at a U.S. military dependents' school in Greece fell through, and a friend mentioned a new grant-funded position available at The University of Findlay. "On my way to Greece," said Campbell, "I stopped at Findlay for a year and stayed for 37!"

Campbell arrived at the University in 1972, and for that first year, the grant required her to spend one-third of her time at Defiance College and two-thirds of her time at Findlay. Dr. Richard Gebhardt, who was the chair of the English department at the time, believed the reading classes should be kept small, and according to Campbell, that set the tone for the next 37 years in the Reading Center.

While Campbell's position at UF continued to be a grant-funded position, she recalls having the luxury of 10 hours of secretarial help from Bernice Shuder, who had taught business education and typing classes at Findlay College. Campbell remembers the tiny woman sneaking into the office on the third floor of Old Main to work extra hours, using her own typewriter and typing station, even though there were no additional grant funds to pay Shuder for the extra work.

As the Reading Center became a permanent fixture at the University, it moved from Old Main into Shafer Library and recently to the UF Village.

The center holds books of all genres and includes classics by Shakespeare, the Harry Potter series, Stephen King novels and the Anne of Green Gables series, to name a few.

Within the past several years, Campbell also began incorporating poetry into her classes. "I've insisted that we read a poem or two, or five or six, at the end of every class ... the poems usually speak to the soul," she said.

Both domestic and international students who were enrolled in Campbell's classes either needed to improve their overall college reading skills or they were education students learning about young adult literature to teach in their own classrooms one day. Campbell did require students to read outside of class – thus the wide selection of titles on her Reading Center shelves.

All types of students have spent time in the Reading Center. Campbell laughed as she told a story about a student from the country of Oman. He was expected to take back many American gifts to his family at home, but he was most concerned about being able to find hair dye – Grecian Formula 44 – for his uncle.

Recently, two of her former students returned to campus as Visiting Executives within the College of Business. Another student was so appreciative of his UF

education that he eventually paid for the UF education of all of his nieces and nephews. Campbell even has had the pleasure of teaching children of her former students.

Outside of her own classroom, Campbell also was adviser to both the yearbook and newspaper staffs. And while Campbell spent much of her time on campus helping students, she also found time to pursue some other interests.

Campbell also has been involved with the American Association of University Women, the honorary teachers' honor society Delta Kappa Gamma, the Three Arts Club in Findlay, the Board of Mental Health in Findlay, the Black Studies Library Association and the College First Church of God in Findlay. She also is a Read for Life tutor.

In 1974, Campbell ran as a Democratic state representative against Republican Michael Oxley, who later became a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Ohio's 4<sup>th</sup> district. Campbell's campaign staff included several University friends, including Dr. Shiv Gupta, a UF business professor, who helped Campbell with economic policy.

Campbell retired from the University in May 2009, and hopes that with new leadership in the Reading



Campbell during the early years of Findlay's Reading Center

Center, the program will continue the challenge and opportunity of working with students to improve their reading skills.

One thing is for sure – Campbell will continue to "discover the power of words" through books and poetry, just as she's helped many students do for themselves.