

Arnita Howard

Senior Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, School of Nursing

Tell us a little about the work you've done at Emory throughout your career.

I have enjoyed a pretty amazing career at Emory University. My earliest memories of being connected to such a remarkable place started at The Carter Center in the executive offices of former President Jimmy Carter. When I was hired for the position, I had no idea that I would be working in the offices of a former U.S. President. It was both a humbling and very exciting experience. I've never met anyone quite like President Carter. I had the once in a lifetime opportunity to serve both the President, Mrs. Carter, and their entire family both administratively and personally for about 7 1/2 years. To say that President and Mrs. Carter are amazing individuals is certainly an understatement. Their work ethic, compassion for others, sacrifices for our country, lives of humility, faith, minimalism, and generosity have stayed with me to this day. They will forever be two of the most remarkable and wisest people I've had the pleasure to work for and it is an experience that I will never forget.



What are some of your favorite memories of your time at Emory?

Fast forward 30 years and I have some wonderful memories! I spent a brief amount of time working for the Task Force for Global Health's Mectizan Donation Program, providing administrative support to a program that prevented the debilitating river blindness disease across the world (because of a lack of clean water). I spent 12 years at the law school, and the last 11 years at the School of Nursing. My favorite memories are of the numerous humanitarian efforts championed by faculty, staff, and students in all the divisions that I had the good fortune to serve. One of my favorite memories was my work with the Atlanta Project (a project of the Carter Center) where we canvassed neighborhoods in metro Atlanta, door to door, in search of children under the age of two that had not been vaccinated. In many cases, the living conditions of those we encountered were subpar, but there was something special and heartwarming about their reaction to knowing that someone in their community cared about the well-being of their children. More recently, the tireless efforts of our nursing workforce, nursing students, and nursing faculty and staff offered a stark reminder of how individuals put their lives on the line everyday as part of their job and perhaps part of their calling, to make sure that others are okay, are healthy, are safe, and stay alive. Other favorites memories include my first rock-climbing experience at Staff Fest, especially as someone who is afraid of heights. One could never forget meeting Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan or Gladys Knight and one of the Pips! There are so many favorite memories of my time at Emory that it is truly difficult to pick out just a few.



Arnita with her daughter, a double Eagle!

What are some of the most significant changes you have witnessed over the course of your career?

In my 30 years at Emory, I have witnessed a significant shift in the university's commitment to employee health, well-being, and overall care. There is an emphasis on community engagement and well-being and a level of sincerity that I don't recall in earlier years. Professional development has always been encouraged and for that I am very grateful. I think the experience is oftentimes what you make it, both the good, and the not so good. The growth of the campus community has been significant as well, with an emphasis on providing every possible resource that students might need to be successful in their academic careers. We don't always get it right, but the commitment to shifting and adjusting to make it right is more evident than ever.

Is there anything you miss from "back in the day"?

I miss the Transforming Community Project. It was one of the most impactful experiences during my time at Emory that sought to bring the entire campus community together by inviting uncomfortable conversations about race, difference, culture, and Emory's unfortunate racial history. The level of vulnerability and transparency was refreshing and many endearing friendships were established because employees had permission to be vulnerable.

What do you hope for the future of Emory?

It is my hope that Emory exceeds its goal for 2036. The idea that there are research projects, initiatives, solutions, cures, and innovative ideas yet to be revealed means that there is still quite a bit of work to do for the remarkable minds that grace Emory's campus. I hope that issues of race and difference can be reconciled and that the community's level of respect for one another can wipe out its painful past. I hope that those that make up the community continue to build relationships that bridge the cultural gap and I hope that Emory continues to make a difference.

Anything else you would like to share?

My colleagues and "work" family are something that I've treasured deeply over the last 30 years. Mentors, mentees, colleagues, and friends have come and gone, retired, and moved on from higher education. Emory is a community that cares, we collaborate without hesitation, and we blaze trails for those that will come after us. My Emory journey hasn't always been easy, but I am forever grateful for the many things I've learned along the way.

One of the divisions that I have the deepest respect for within the university community is Campus Services. The individuals who are often seen and not necessarily heard are the foundation of what keeps the community afloat. Whether in the academic buildings, residence halls, physical education facilities, grounds, labs, clinics, libraries, cafeterias, you name it, the university would be at a loss without their tireless efforts. I am grateful for the amazing students that I've met-- some several thousand by now--that I've either recruited when I worked in admissions, or seen graduate in my role in student affairs. Our Students and our Campus Services team members are vital to the future and well-being of the university. I hope that we can identify ways to honor our Campus Services team members much like we honor and celebrate our students and graduates.