

My Experiences at OU 1971-1972

My name is Edward H. Nelson. I transferred to OU the Winter semester 1971. We were Pioneers in those days and there were very few African - American Students on campus. I was a veteran, married and at least 10 years older than most of the students. My major was Economics and Management with a minor in Music. I have many fond memories of my time there.

I was hired as Head Resident of Annibal Hall which became the HQ for students who wanted to discuss how to make OU a better place for black students. The first discussions for the Jazz studies program started in my room with a few dedicated students.

Tutoring programs for Math and Science were implemented in Annibal Hall.

The one thing I was adamant about not doing was to put a basketball backboard in front of Annibal Hall. Coach Holley Lepley decided to give the students what they wanted. I felt the students could walk a few feet across the street to the gym.

There are many memories I have of my time there including my returning every year for several years to assist students with Black History Month activities. My contacts with the art community in Detroit provided exhibits for the students and invitations to congressman John Conyers and others who often would attend.

The one incident that stand out to me most happen during Black History Month circa 1972 at the Abstention coffee house in the student center.

A group of students (many who were involved with the establishment of the Jazz Studies Program) aksed me to perform a concert. I agreed to bring musicians from Detroit and agreed to perform for half the going rate to expose the students to jazz.

While setting up I noticed that the ABS was refusing to let the white students attend. I stopped setting up and went to speak with them outside the front door. The ABS students position was that only black students could attend. I told them that I would not perform for a segregated audience. The white students who also represented other Student groups on campus suggested they combine their budgets so they could do bigger and better activities which they agreed to do. The students later were to bring nationally known Jazz artists to campus.

Some of those students are still friends to this day. I keep in touch with a few of them who were there from the beginning.

E. Howard Nelson (AS 1972)