

# SIUE's Rambsy Honored for Historic Academic Achievement

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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EDWARDSVILLE – The sound of rigorous applause and cheering filled Southern Illinois University Edwardsville’s Goshen Lounge on Thursday, March 3 as Distinguished Research Professor Howard Ramsby II, PhD, made his way into a surprise celebration in his honor.

Ramsby is the first Black faculty member to be honored with the University’s highest academic rank for scholarly excellence. While this historic achievement launched the community gathering, his tremendous impact on students, mentorship and friendship to colleagues, and acts of advocacy and accountability were also highlighted.

“It is my great fortune to witness your talents and gifts up close,” shared Earleen Patterson, PhD, associate vice chancellor for Student Opportunities, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. “Not only are you an innovative scholar, illustrious educator, culturally-based researcher and creative teacher, author of several books, and recipient of more than \$1 million in grant funding, but also you are revolutionary and radical in your approach to see, hear and understand students, while demanding and expecting their greatness to show up.”

In recognition of his incredible impact on students, colleagues, the Department of English and the field of African American literary studies, more than 100 faculty, staff, and former students and colleagues had “passed the hat.” Having collected \$8,500, a check was presented to Ramsby as a thank you for the time, money and resources he has invested into the SIUE community.

A dedicated teacher-scholar, Ramsby is a longtime supporter of the SOAR Office’s FAME (Females of African-Descent Modeling Excellence) and GAME (Goal-Oriented African American Men Excel) programs. He teaches courses in American and African American literature. Since he arrived at SIUE in 2003, Ramsby has published two books *The Black Arts Enterprise* (2011) and *Bad Men: Creative Touchstones of Black Writers* (2020).

With stories that gained rousing laughter and brought forth meaningful tears, Ramsby’s genuine character was described and celebrated during the surprise program.

“On behalf of the Department of English, I’d like to say how grateful we are to have you as a distinguished colleague and as a representative of our department and the discipline of English at SIUE and beyond,” noted Department of English Chair Tisha Brooks, PhD. “Ramsby’s students know what many of us have come to learn and appreciate

most about him, and that is his tremendous gift for creating spaces where Black folks feel seen, heard and valued. Many thanks, Howard, for graciously sharing your gifts with us.”

Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Jessica Harris, PhD, recalled the “area-specific tour” that Ramsby led her on during her campus visit while interviewing for a tenure track position in February 2011.

“We exchanged our formal, professional greetings, and then connected on a collegial and personal level as Ramsby led me on a tour to the Redmond Reading Room and SOAR Office where I met Black colleagues and students,” Harris shared. “At the end of the tour, as he walked away, I knew if he was at SIUE, I wanted to be at SIUE, too. There’s a place for me here. In that hour, he made SIUE home.”

“The same Howard Ramsby I met February 11, 2011 is the same Howard Ramsby we are celebrating today,” she continued. “He might be distinguished research professor because of his brilliance and his scholarly contributions, but his character, his heart for Black people, his humility – that’s where he really shines.”

Campus administrators went on to describe their appreciation for Ramsby’s leadership in all its forms.

“I deeply admire your commitment to our students, particularly our Black students,” said Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Denise Cobb, PhD, who joined SIUE in 2003 as part of Ramsby’s faculty cohort. “You demand excellence from your students, and you also hold administrators accountable, so that we do better. I am incredibly impressed by the impact you have on students, the innovative ways in which you teach and your relentless pursuit of your scholarship.”

“You’ve been a faculty member for nearly 20 years, and stand out as a model leader in your scholarship, teaching and as a colleague,” added College of Arts and Sciences Dean Kevin Leonard, PhD.

Ramsby concluded the program expressing with deep sincerity his gratitude and appreciation.