

Yolanda Cash Jackson

2022 Floridian of the Year

Unexpected Pleasures

"I am now Professor Jackson," Jackson says, with a mix of pride and fun. Fresh off teaching law students at her alma mater a compressed, one-week course on lobbying, Jackson drew energy from interacting with the next generation of lawyers.

She was able to show University of Florida law students how lobbying works — who hires lobbyists, how to work the committee process and how to diagnose a client's needs in order to develop a strategy to address them. "Law school doesn't teach you the process," says Jackson, a shareholder in the Becker law firm's Fort Lauderdale office.

She also brought in Mark Kaplan, UF's vice president for government and community relations and a former chief of staff to Gov. Jeb Bush, to talk about lobbying as a career. Many of the students seemed intrigued. Regardless of what they end up practicing, Jackson has the same



advice: "You have to show up the right way every time."

The class was "an unexpected pleasure," she says, one of many she is enjoying. The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications inducted Jackson into its Hall of Fame in 2023.

But her greatest unexpected pleasure came last spring when she watched the first class of the John Lewis/HBCU Pathway to Law scholars program graduate from UF's Levin College of Law. Meeting the graduates and their families at graduation was an "unexpected, rewarding experience."

Jackson, who has lobbied for Florida's historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) throughout her career, helped create the program, which provides privately funded scholarships to law students who earned their undergraduate degrees from an HBCU. Though there is no direct connection to Lewis, an iconic figure from the Civil Rights movement and a longtime U.S. representative, it was named in his honor after he died as the program was coming together in 2020, Jackson says.

"When you decide to do something like that, you don't know the impact," she says. To see 10 students "on their own merit thrive" and become young lawyers, especially following some of Florida's culture wars, proved to be a moving experience.

Four new scholars have started law school.

Jackson, who grew up in Miami's Liberty City neighborhood, calls herself a "politically correct disruptor." Any grand plan for life, she says, came from a higher power.

"I'm doing just what God would have me do," she says. "We are each given an assignment — some big assignments and some small assignments. To have the ability to hear what my assignment is, that I think that God has given me when he created this little girl from Liberty City. ... I think that's what gives me the most satisfaction.

"I'm just grateful that I had ears to hear it."



Lobbyist Yolanda Cash Jackson, right, attends an event with the W. George Allen chapter of the Black Law Students Association at the University of Florida.