



## Dr. Murrell J. Duster

October 13, 1933 - February 9, 2025

Dr. Murrell J. Higgins Duster passed away on February 9, 2025. She was 91.

Dr. Duster led a remarkable life that was rich with family, friends, and her unwavering dedication to enriching the lives of others through public service.

Dr. Duster was a lifelong leader in education reform and was among the strongest supporters for growth, opportunity, and inclusion for marginalized communities in Chicago.

During her 35-year tenure at Northeastern Illinois University, she had a particularly profound impact on many young lives in the Chicago community through her relentless pursuit of ensuring equitable access to opportunities in higher education.

This passion led her to create NEIU's Angelina Pedroso Center for Diversity and Intercultural Affairs where as the Founding Dean and Associate Vice President she mentored, supported, and inspired students and faculty alike.

Upon her retirement in 2012, she was honored with the William "Doc" Speller Lifetime Achievement Award and continued her legacy by endowing a scholarship fund in her name.

Her passion for arts, culture, and community development led her to serve as

a proud member of numerous organizations, including the Chicago Chapter Links, The Women's Board of Rush University Medical Center, The Field Museum's Women's Board, The Women's Board of the University of Chicago, Delta Sigma Theta, Incorporated, and the Ora Higgins Youth Foundation. Through her work, she not only became deeply involved with the causes she cared about but also formed lifelong friendships that she treasured.

Dr. Duster was a devoted mother and grandmother who took immense pride in her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She cherished every moment with them and went to great lengths to be present in their lives.

She was preceded in death by her husband Benjamin C. Duster III, and two of her children, Karen Duster and Kevin Duster. Her legacy lives on through her three children— Alice Pennamon, Benjamin C. Duster IV (Deborah Duster), and Muriel DeVore (Matthew A. DeVore); her 11 grandchildren (Ashley Terrell (Brian Terrell), Rodney Pennamon II, Sarah Duster, Miranda Duster, Joshua Duster, Jacquelyn DeVore (Biyerem Okengwu), Matthew A. DeVore II (Stephanie Sipe), Victoria DeVore (Justin Bell), James DeVore (Kelsey Christine Greene), David DeVore, and Michael DeVore), her five great-grandchildren (Brian Terrell II, Jackson Terrell, Amaya Terrell, Zuri Terrell, and Kali Bell), and her brother William "Chico" Higgins (Ruth Higgins) and numerous nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles and cousins.

Her memory will continue to inspire those who were fortunate enough to know her, reminding us of the importance of family, faith, and unwavering love.

A memorial service will be held on Saturday, March 29, 2025 at 11 AM at the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Memorial Chapel located at 5850 S Woodlawn Ave, Chicago, IL 60637. Repast immediately following the service.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests that donations be made in her name to

any of the following organizations:

Murrell J. Higgins Duster Legacy Scholarship

Northeastern Illinois University

Angelina Pedroso Center for Diversity and Intercultural Affairs

The Links Foundation, Incorporated

1200 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC

Please express your condolences here on our website. Services entrusted to

Gregory B. Levett & Sons Funeral Home, Gwinnett Chapel 914 Scenic

Highway Lawrenceville, GA. 30045. 770-338-5558

# Tribute Wall

SD

“ I was fortunate enough to have known Dr. Murrell J. Duster. She was a source of inspiration, strength, and a leader who cared for students very deeply. She was kind and caring person and always worked hard to bring us all together and encouraged to stay focused on doing good for the university. She was part of our study tour to India in 2004 (which was my second year at NEIU) and I was lucky enough to get to know her caring and kind personality. I truly admire her for who she was. My heartfelt condolences to her family and loved ones.

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**Sundaram Dorai** - March 28, 2025 at 11:34 PM

DD

“ I was deeply honored and blessed to have worked with Dean Duster as a member of her original Pedroso Center team. She was such an amazing person -- someone who never backed down from a challenge and, in fact, relished the idea that she and her team could accomplish something that other people thought was impossible. When you worked with her, you were guaranteed to have to perform outside your comfort zone, but it was exhilarating and so gratifying to see what a tremendous impact we had on the students she so dearly loved. She had such warmth and presence that it is hard to imagine a world without her in it, but I know she lives on in our hearts and through all the lives she touched. My deepest sympathies to her family and to everyone who knew her and loved her. Love ~ Diane DiMaso and family

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**Diane DiMaso** - March 28, 2025 at 10:41 PM

CM

“ Cornell and Yetta McCullom purchased the Blue & White Sympathy Floor Basket for the family of Dr. Murrell J. Duster.



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**Cornell and Yetta McCullom** - March 12, 2025 at 01:33 PM

CM

“ Cornell and Yetta McCullom planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Dr. Murrell J. Duster.

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**Cornell and Yetta McCullom** - March 12, 2025 at 01:33 PM

DS

“ It was so sad to learn of Dean Duster's transition. She was a beautiful spirit. I appreciated her leadership and keen insights on issues in higher education. Condolences to the Duster Family.

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**Dr. Pinkey A. Stewart** - March 04, 2025 at 09:48 PM

HA

“ <https://akbari-hamid.blogspot.com/2025/02/the-loving-gate-of-our-be-loved-community.html>

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**Hamid Akbari** - February 22, 2025 at 06:51 PM

WH

“ We are sending our sincere condolences and prayers to the Duster family. My sister was an asset to the “Ora Higgins Youth Foundation”! She will be missed. Rev. William & Mrs. Ruth Higgins

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**william I. Higgins** - February 21, 2025 at 09:18 PM

DC

“ You and aunt Ora were champions regarding education. Because of you two, I completed my degree and you'd be proud to know my daughter is a doctor and grand daughter a architect.  
Thank you cousin Muriel.  
God bless you, Alice, Ben and Mimi.

Debra Crosby's - February 21, 2025 at 05:43 PM



“ Love You I know you are in a better place I remember coming to cut your Lawn and Edge to bring out the house Now you have a new home streets paved with gold and your new home is the better than any home in this world

February 20, 2025 at 09:49 PM

MS

*My dear cousin, may you rest in Heavenly Peace, Amen... Thank you for your contributions to the African American community, and the world...*

Ms. Sandra O. Smith - February 21, 2025 at 10:57 AM

TG

*Murrell your legacy is one of dignity, respect, grace, fairness and love. I hope to be as fortunate to leave such an impact on others. I KNOW you are dancing in heaven right now. I love you and so glad I got to be with you on this earth.*

*Tresa Dunbar Garrett*

Tresa Dunbar Garrett - February 25, 2025 at 11:14 PM

MH

*She always welcomed me in her home. She was a powerful person in so many ways. My heartfelt condolences to the entire Duster family.*

*Mark Anthony Hall*

Mark Anthony Hall - December 03, 2025 at 10:15 PM