

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR A NEW SCULPTURE



1501 MERCER UNIVERSITY DRIVE
MACON, GA 31207
WWW.MERCER.EDU

DEADLINE
February 15, 2021

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR A NEW SCULPTURE CELEBRATING MERCER UNIVERSITY'S INTEGRATION



Project Description and Vision

Mercer University seeks an artist or artist team to create and install a new permanent outdoor sculpture to commemorate the University's integration, a process that began in 1963 and continues to this day and into the future.

About Mercer University

Mercer University is one of America's oldest and most distinctive institutions of higher learning, offering rigorous programs that span the undergraduate liberal arts to doctoral-level degrees. Mercer is a growing private research university, with more than 9,000 students enrolled in 12 schools and colleges, on major campuses in Macon and Atlanta; medical school campuses in Macon, Savannah and Columbus; and at regional academic centers in Henry and Douglas counties, an engineering research center in Warner Robins, as well as a growing network of rural medicine clinics. Mercer is ranked among the top tier of national research universities by U.S. News & World Report. Our nearly 84,000 alumni are making important contributions to their professions and communities throughout Georgia, the Southeast and the world. While offering a breadth of programs found at much larger universities, Mercer maintains an intimate, student-focused culture more characteristic of smaller liberal arts colleges. Mercer's mission is to teach, to learn, to create, to discover, to inspire, to empower and to serve.

STORY OF MERCER'S INTEGRATION

Mercer was founded out of a conviction that religion and education are best when in conversation with each other. An existing sculpture prominently positioned in the center of campus depicts **Jesse Mercer**, a Baptist minister and founder of the University, sitting on a bench engaged in conversation with whoever joins him on the bench, be it a teacher or student. Rather than serving as a tribute to a man, this sculpture represents an idea at the core of Mercer University's reason for being.



Mercer's early founders aspired to train future Baptist ministers and lay leaders, all of whom were white males at the time, and purposefully educated them in both religion and a classical curriculum. The imperative of sending Baptist missionaries as representatives of the faith to convert the unsaved at home and abroad began roughly a decade after Mercer's founding. An early issue that divided Baptists and ultimately led to the creation of the Southern Baptist Convention was whether a slaveholder could be commissioned as a missionary. The issue of racial inequality—connected in this example to human bondage—became inextricably tied to the denomination.

In the decades prior to Mercer's integration, faculty began expressing views in classes that were counter to social, and often denominational, norms. They influenced their white students, which included women beginning in the early 20th century, subtly, but in meaningful ways. In *The Stem of Jesse: The Costs of Community at a 1960s Southern School*, Will Campbell describes as follows the faculty who helped lay the groundwork: "Men and women who never rose to prominence in the world of education, never introduced a new philosophy, nor decided the fate of their post, but who, on some unsuspecting day, uttered something that snapped the fetters of intolerance in a farm or milltown boy or girl, opening their minds forever." (p. 95)

As former president of Tulane University, **Rufus Harris** thought that he had the trustee votes to desegregate Tulane in the late 1950s. He resigned when they voted against it. That experience steeled his intent to integrate Mercer, a Baptist university in the Bible Belt, when he became president in 1960. Harris wanted the decision to be grounded in morality and ethics, but he pragmatically understood that financial arguments could persuade some of Mercer's trustees. As a lawyer by training and former dean of both Mercer's and Tulane's law schools, he knew that because Mercer received federal grants, despite its private status, integration was the right and perhaps legally necessary thing to do.

In December 1962, **Sam Oni**, a Nigerian who had been converted by Southern Baptist missionaries to Ghana, applied for admission to Mercer. Many in Mercer's administration considered Oni an ideal candidate because of his academic credentials and because they felt sure Baptists would fully support opening the doors of learning to someone who had been converted by Southern Baptist missionaries and recommended by Harris Mobley, a Southern Baptist missionary and Mercer alumnus. However, President Harris and Harris Mobley underestimated the passionate objections of the Georgia Baptist Convention as well as the Macon community. Nonetheless, in April 1963 the University's Board of Trustees voted 13-8, with three abstentions, to admit Oni. That fall he and two other Black students, **Bennie Stevens** and **Cecil Dewberry**, enrolled at Mercer—formally breaking the color barrier at the University.



Sam Oni (1964)

This is only the beginning of the story of Mercer's integration, however. As dean of men, **Joe Hendricks** was first an administrator and right-hand man of President Harris and later a full professor at Mercer. Hendricks recruited various allies to ensure that Mercer's desegregation was not a mere token gesture, but one that would lead to authentic integration. With Bill Randall, a powerful local Black politician and mortuary owner, Hendricks helped organize to desegregate Macon's city buses.



Joe Hendricks (1967)

After getting Sam Oni, Bennie Stephens and Cecil Dewberry enrolled at Mercer in fall 1963, Hendricks knew he had to create a pipeline and provide supplemental instruction for local Black students. He and Randall developed a plan to tutor select high school students at Mercer at night and during the summer. This program, which later became a model for the federal **Upward Bound** program, provided a college preparatory curriculum for students in separate but decidedly unequal schools. It was a way to address inequity and provide a hand up. Other faculty, including **Dr. Mary Wilder**, worked in the program. In recent years, she recalled that they didn't know what they were doing, but they kept showing up and teaching the subjects they knew. The work was more literal than

philosophical and was all about perseverance—in coming back day after day and keeping faith in the end result, even if it was uncertain. Part of keeping the faith was believing that any rough spots in the path might be forgotten when one reaches his/her ultimate destination. Likewise, some of the pioneers “never forgot the bridge that brought them across.”

The fact that Mercer integrated voluntarily, without the legal mandates that were required at flagship state institutions in the South, is worth noting, even if it happened nearly a decade after the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case. Mercer was not content to merely admit a handful of Black students and claim victory or consider the job completed. The easy choice would have been to go slow, which was the mantra of the day in the South, but there was something special in Mercer's character that made a difference. Through active recruitment and college preparatory training efforts they, in the words of Will Campbell, turned "a little Southern Baptist college into the most integrated educational institution in Georgia" (*The Stem of Jesse* p. 147). By the fall of 1968, five years after the first three students enrolled, there were 50 Blacks in the freshman class, with more than 100 in the entire student body.



Mary Wilder teaching *Upward Bound* (1966)

All of the early integrators and pioneers were selected because of their intellectual ability and their grit, as the job of desegregating a historically white Southern school was not for the faint of heart. Many expressed that their parents were frightened for them or that they were frightened. The institution had little to fear. The first Black students had much to fear. Just because Mercer's process was voluntary and peaceful did not mean it was easy. The work of integration is about more than putting students together in a classroom.

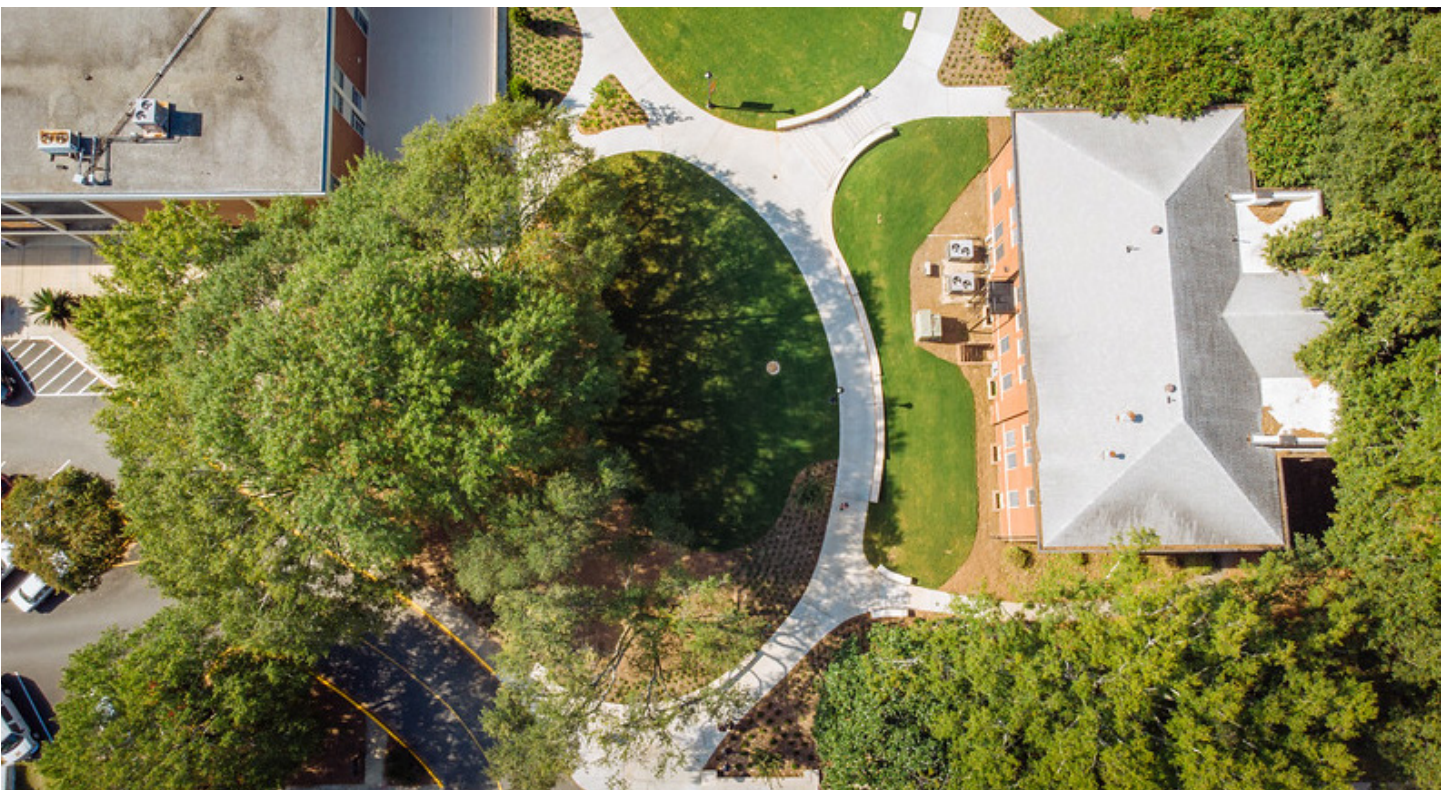
Though the Black students came to earn college degrees, they simultaneously and generously educated their white professors and peers. Formal learning happened in the classrooms and libraries, but lifelong cultural lessons that changed perceptions and belief systems occurred around tables in the cafeteria and in the homes of professors who welcomed the new students. Their unique lives and experiences were tributaries flowing into a shared stream of humanity.

Whether informed by a moral, ethical, legal or financial motivation, Mercer University exhibited the institutional courage to do the right thing with respect to integration in the 1960s. The groundwork and foundation laid by the pioneers has allowed Mercer to become the diverse institution it is today. The institution continues to cultivate the local populations through a thriving Upward Bound program and numerous service projects. Mercer's undergraduate student population is 28.3% African-American, compared with 7.8% at Emory University, 7.1% at University of Georgia and 7.0% at Georgia Tech. African-Americans make up 31.6% of the population of the state of Georgia, making Mercer's student demographics much closer to the state's overall makeup than any of its in-state peer institutions. Equally impressive is the fact that Mercer's African-American student population is three to four times that of private schools we consider peer institutions. Students enroll at Mercer because when they tour the campus, they see students who look like them and feel comfortable and welcomed.

The sculpture is envisioned as a way to celebrate the remarkable story of Mercer's integration in a way that highlights both how the students felt and what they did. As doors of opportunity were finally opened to them, the pioneers of the 1960s took the first steps in a relay race for equality in education. The baton is repeatedly passed to the next emerging generation and the work continues.

Placement on Macon Campus

The sculpture will reside near the historic Quad of the Macon campus. It will be in close proximity to residence halls, academic buildings and the student center, which houses the main cafeteria. It will be visible to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The photos below show the oval greenspace, which measures 120 feet long by 60 feet wide.



Budget

The maximum art budget includes all expenses and fees related to design, project management, materials, fabrication, artist's time, installation, liability insurance and travel for interview and site visits. Payments will be made in installments concurrent with timeline/deadlines.

Timeline of Work

December 2020	Request for Qualifications (RFQ) announced
February 15, 2021	RFQ closes
Spring 2021	Committee considers submissions and selects finalists
	Finalists invited to campus for site visit and interviews
	Committee selects artist
Summer 2021	Artist notified
Summer 2021 - Fall 2022	Fabrication of sculpture
Fall 2022	Art installation and public dedication/celebration

How to Apply

- Concept statement for proposed piece (500 words)
 - Why are you interested in proposing artwork for this project?
 - Why should Mercer University choose you?
 - What is the inspiration for this concept?
 - How will you accomplish this work?
- Drawings/sketches/renderings of proposed original artwork that include or address
 - Materials
 - Scale and dimension
 - Views from four sides
 - Color
 - Additional equipment needed to make it work (lights, electricity, water, etc.)
- Proposed budget
- Proposed fabrication methods
- Resume/CV/bio (if team, one per member)
- Photos of previously completed public art
- Artist website and/or social media
- Three professional references

DEADLINE to apply is **February 15, 2021**. Please email application packet as a PDF to Shawna Dooley at dooley_sr@mercer.edu. The opportunity is also posted at sculpture.org.

