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Alumni Profile

Straight-line career

Many people wander a bit as they discover themselves and stake out careers, but Olga Bolden-Tiller, PhD '02, was not one of them. “Olga is a well balanced person who always knew just what her interests were,” says Michael Roberts, Curators Professor of Animal Science and Biochemistry. Roberts served on her doctoral committee at MU, where she studied reproduction in cattle and sheep.

As far back as high school in the tiny town of Homerville, Ga., Bolden-Tiller was interested in the science of reproduction. “I knew a lot of women were having problems becoming pregnant. I was very curious as to why that was,” she says.

Bolden-Tiller’s direction came into sharper focus during her undergraduate days at Fort Valley State University in Georgia, where she majored in animal sciences and studied livestock reproduction. “I worked with reproductive physiologists who used goats in their research. I learned about the relevance of studying livestock for the benefit of both animals and humans. So, I meshed the two.”

At Fort Valley, she also added a layer to her life plan. Fort Valley is both a historically black university and a land-grant institution. She relished the close contact she had with faculty and the school’s mission to serve the state by producing and sharing scientific knowledge and to serve black students by offering high-quality education.



Olga Bolden-Tiller, PhD '02, knew university academia was for her because she loves research and teaching. Photo by Chris Renegar/Tuskegee Institute




She decided that teaching and performing research at a historically black university would be her career as well. “Once I identified the job I wanted to have, I knew I would get a doctorate,” she says. And she was off to Mizzou.

“As a doctoral student here, Olga was so approachable and open and easy to deal with,” says Roberts, a National Academy of Sciences member who helped recruit Bolden-Tiller. “She was good at minutiae of research, but she was also someone with a broad interest in education. So it made sense for her to go the route of working at a historically black university where she could perform research and really have an impact on students as well.”

Sure enough, Bolden-Tiller landed at Tuskegee University in Alabama, where she is an assistant professor of agricultural, environmental and natural sciences. She continues her research on the reproductive system, looking at how environmental and nutritional factors affect sperm development in goats, rats and mice. In addition to serving as a mentor to students, Bolden-Tiller coordinates an animal science program of nearly 300 students, organizes a National Science Foundation student internship program and teaches several classes.

Roberts has enjoyed watching Bolden-Tiller’s career blossom. “I used to say she’d be a dean within 10 years, and I’m pleased she has done so well and that my predictions probably will be fulfilled. Now I’m just wondering when she’ll be a college president.” — *Dale Smith*

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