



## **Alicia Hughes, Texas Southern University- c/o 1996, Biology**



**Name :** Alicia Hughes

**Your HBCU :** Texas Southern University

**Graduation Year :** 1996

**Major :** Biology

**Minor :** Mechanical Engineering

### **1. Where are you from? Who introduced you to HBCUs?\***

I'm from Memphis, Tennessee. My mom and dad, Rev. & Mrs. Jerry Hughes introduced me to HBCUs. They're both HBCU graduates who met in college. All of their daughters and a granddaughter have attended HBCUs, too!



Gamma Psi Spring '94-Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

### **2. Why did you choose an HBCU over a pwi?\***

I didn't have a choice. Parents said it was family tradition and I'd follow suit. Turns out to be the best non-choice I ever made. I wouldn't have accomplished all I have without the experience. It was empowering, I developed my truest sense of self, and a greater love for and understanding of my people as a result. I remain grateful for receiving far more than I could ever give.

### **3. What is the story of your "experience" at Your HBCU given its heralded status as a stellar and prestigious institution?\***

I chased "Excellence in Achievement" the whole time and beyond. I was privileged to do research at Baylor College of Medicine while as an undergrad at TSU and as a result, became MARC/NIH Outstanding Undergraduate Researcher. I was Freshman Engineering Student of the Year. I became Student Government Association President, AKA President and Debate Team Vice President ... and yeah. The Debate Team won International Champions while I was there in 1993 and again in 1996!

### **4. "First time" experiences at your HBCU?\***

I got to tailgate and hang out away from parents. I had my first apartment freshman year. I was privileged to travel and complete a "Big Ten" research internship and in a course that altered my post-undergraduate trajectory, I completed my first congressional internship for then Congressman Bill Richardson (D-NM).

### **5. Who are the professors that have impacted your life in and out of the classroom? How did they do that?\***

Rev. Dr. T.F. Freeman; Coach Lacey Reynolds; Dr. Gayle Slaughter; Rev. Dr. Patricia Williams; and Dr. Polly Sparks Turner. Dr. Freeman has been and remains my most profound influence. As TSU Debate Team coach for 70+ years, having coached greats like the late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan and the late Congressman Mickey Leland and seeing us through multiple international championships, he's the epitome of Excellence in Achievement. That he chose me as the Inaugural Distinguished Alumnus for the Honors College remains one of my most humbling experiences. My college godfather, Coach Lacey Reynolds instilled a tenacious fierceness and provided me cover when I needed it most. He was my dad away from home and proves you must always show up for those you love. Former Associate Provost and Honors Program Director Rev. Dr. Patricia Williams believed in me, and saw my promise, even with a D in Trigonometry on my high school transcript. That confidence taught me to look past letters and seek to see the souls of people in evaluating true worth ... a life lesson I carry with me. Dr. Gayle Slaughter, the Senior Associate Dean of Baylor College of Medicine epitomizes the true meaning of steel covered in velvet. She stood up to some important people at Baylor and forced them to take a chance on and to train "a little Black girl" in a near all-white institution when they didn't want to. She inspires me to understand the power of one when acting with commanding force to bring about needed change. She continues to prove that there people of your kind who are not of your color. Dr. Polly Sparks Turner is the epitome of grace, class, service and academic excellence. She's taught me to meet people where they are, to serve and lead with humility and to act with dignity, most especially when coming under fire. All of these people believing in me inspired me to know it's impossible to fail. I wouldn't be a fraction of who I am without them.



Miss Black USA '98

**6. What is your process when you are going through a hardship that you have never faced before?**

Pull on my foundation in God and be encouraged knowing that I am not my circumstances. I am who God says I am, and because I belong to Him, I can do anything.

**7. When and how did you discover your passion in life?**

It has come through life experience. While the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, life is more of a winding road. I've learned from every seemingly unrelated experience and watched the weaving of a beautiful tapestry that continues to lead me to desire to inspire and create opportunities for children. I'm applying all of my professional skills to bring that to pass now.

**8. What's your take on life (in the philosophical sense)?**

Make the best of every opportunity, be resilient, focus and remain persistent in everything you're passionate about. Drown out the noise that doesn't support your vision, knowing God doesn't place desire in your heart without a plan for how to make it come to pass, most especially when the desires of your heart are consistent with His will for your life.

**9. If you could only speak two sentences to the youth coming after you what would you say?**

Confidence is key, so learn to be your own innate inspiration. The world is counting on your genius so keep getting up, working hard and trying until you exceed your own personal best. It's better than good enough!

**10. Entrepreneur? Tell us about your business.**

President and CEO, Latin Schools of America, LLC. I create opportunities for children through designing and providing novel education programs. I have a preoccupation with S.T.E.A.M and language immersion. America needs a pipeline of strong tech leaders fluent in foreign language to fuel our innovation pipeline and re-establish us as a leader in global innovation.

**11. How did your HBCU help you to transition into your careers workforce?**

It gave me a blank canvas, exposed me to a myriad of cultural, social, academic and travel experiences, and instilled a confidence in me that all things I desired were possible. I was taught to excel. I did so in different academic disciplines. That gave me choice to walk through many post-graduate doors. I explored, walked through the doors and excelled every time.