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Former student Jeff Blackman establishes fellowship honoring WSU dean Ron Matson

As a sociology professor, Matson inspired and guided Blackman to a successful career

When Jeff Blackman heard the news that Ron Matson recently was named dean of the Wichita State University Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences after serving as interim dean for two years, he decided the time was right to pay tribute to Matson in a special way.

Blackman, one of Matson's sociology students 25 years ago, is saying thank you by establishing a fellowship in Matson's name.

"My experience at Wichita State was largely driven by Ron's leadership in the sociology department," Blackman says. "His impact on me as a young student shaped the direction of my life, not to mention gave me a skill set that has been very important to my career."

Blackman's donation will fund the Ron Matson Fellowship, targeted at graduate students who need financial assistance to complete their studies. Blackman hopes that others who hold Matson in the same high esteem will contribute to the fellowship.

Matson, who was chair of the sociology department from 1999 to 2012, said he cried when he learned of Blackman's act.

"I felt so humbled and so honored by that generosity," he says. "Jeff is one of those people whose life is guided by profound values. He is someone who makes decisions almost always for the benefit of other people."

Blackman, who lives in Dallas, recently founded a company called Bedford Lodging that develops hotels. He also has minority interest in a hotel management company called Pillar Hotels and Resorts. Prior, Blackman was an employee for Wichita hotel developer Jack DeBoer, then moved to Dallas in 2001 to work for Marriott hotels before starting his own company two years ago.

Wichita State has played a big role in his life and in his family's life, Blackman says. His father, Doug Blackman, has served Shocker athletics for many years as a team optometrist.

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Media note: A photograph can be found at www.wichita.edu/foundationphotos

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