Isaiah George DeGrasse (1813-1841) received undergraduate and graduate degrees from Newark College in 1836 and 1839 respectively, becoming the first black graduate of the University of Delaware. Born in New York to a family of mixed black, Dutch, and possibly East Indian heritage, DeGrasse began his undergraduate education in 1832 at Geneva College, now known as Hobart and William Smith Colleges. In 1835, Richard Sharpe Mason, the president of that school, moved to Delaware to become the second president of Newark College. During the following year, several students followed Mason and transferred to Newark College to complete their degrees, including DeGrasse.

While at Newark College, DeGrasse appears to have been treated by the school’s faculty and trustees as a fully enrolled student, with no explicit recorded restrictions placed on him because of his race. He joined the Delta Phi student literary society, and gave a well-received public oration at the 1836 commencement.

After leaving Delaware in September 1836, DeGrasse attempted to enroll at the General Theological Seminary of the Protestant Episcopal Church in New York. His admission was denied because of his race, and he studied privately in order to achieve ordination as a deacon in 1838. In 1839, Newark College awarded one of its first master of arts degrees to DeGrasse in recognition of his continued studies. DeGrasse ministered to black Episcopal congregations in New York and was involved in attempts to establish black schools there. Encountering significant antipathy from the Episcopal church for his work in these areas, he relocated to Jamaica in 1841 to seek a temporary appointment there, but died of yellow fever in that same year.

Nearly all accounts written by friends of and advocates for DeGrasse commented on their perception of his light appearance and his potential ability to pass as white by those unfamiliar with his family background. While it is very unlikely that DeGrasse’s non-white identity was unknown to the faculty and trustees of Newark College, it is possible that he was not identified as black by its students or the wider community, or that he chose to explicitly present himself as non-white during the four months in which he lived in Delaware. American colleges that accepted black students during the antebellum era – especially during the 1830s – sometimes faced risks of violence directed against them and the loss of financial support. DeGrasse exposed himself to risk in attending college in what
was still a slave state and whose free black population was subject to harsh, repressive legal restrictions.

**Camille Washington Jacobs**

Camille Washington Jacobs was the first black professional employee of the university. She was hired in 1944 by Cooperative Extension as an Emergency War Food Assistant in Kent and Sussex County. Washington continued her employment with Extension in peacetime, working specifically with black families as a Home and Youth Agent in Kent and Sussex County. She left the university in 1952.

**Louis L. Redding**

Louis Redding grew up in Wilmington and attended Howard High School, graduating in 1919. He graduated from Brown University in 1923 and was the only black member of the Harvard Law School Class of 1928. Redding became the first African American attorney admitted to the Delaware Bar in 1929. For more than two decades, he was the only non-white attorney in Delaware. In 1950, Redding represented 10 black students in the case *Parker v. University of Delaware* in the Court of Chancery in the State of Delaware. The suit argued that because of the significant disparity in the content and scope of undergraduate educational offerings between the University of Delaware and Delaware State College, the black students were permitted only a separate education, not an equal education. The case was decided for the plaintiffs in August 1950, and the University was desegregated.

Throughout his 57-year career, Redding successfully handled cases that challenged discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations and education. One of Redding’s cases would be combined with those from several other states and the District of Columbia to become the landmark 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. the Board of Education*. After his death in 1998, the University of Delaware memorialized him with the Louis L. Redding Chair for the Study of Law and Public Policy.

**Cora Berry Saunders**

Cora Berry Saunders was one of two black women to receive their Master’s degrees in 1951, making them the first known African American students to receive degrees from the University of Delaware since Isaiah DeGrasse. An elementary school teacher, Saunders received her BS degree from West Chester before receiving her MEd from the University of Delaware. A resident of Newark with her husband Earle Saunders, she retired in 1969. Saunders died in May, 1983 at the age of 79.

**Kathryn Young Hazeur**

Kathryn Young Hazeur was one of two black women to receive their Master’s degrees in 1951, making them the first known African American students to receive degrees from the University of Delaware since Isaiah DeGrasse. Hazeur received her BS degree from Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) in 1945 before receiving her Med from the University of Delaware. Hazeur was employed as a teacher and an elementary school
principle in North East, Maryland. She died in 2011 at the age of 87.

**Elbert Carey Wisner**

Elbert Carey Wisner, Class of 1952, is the first known African American undergraduate student to enroll in the University of Delaware after partial desegregation in 1948. Wisner transferred to Delaware from the University of Colorado in September 1949, entering the School of Engineering. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering and was employed as a civilian electronic engineer for the U.S. Army. An active alumnus, Wisner was involved with the RISE program in the College of Engineering and served as a member of the college’s steering committee for the *Campaign for Delaware*. He was elected to the Alumni Wall of Fame in 1988, was the featured speaker at Winter Commencement in 1989, and was presented with the University’s Medal of Distinction in 2002. He passed away in 2004 at the age of 80.

**Hilda Davis**

The first full-time African American faculty member was Hilda Davis, who joined the Department of English in 1965. Davis received her bachelor’s degree from Howard University in 1925, a master’s degree from Radcliffe College in 1931 and was the first African-American woman to earn a doctorate at the University of Chicago in 1953. During her time at Delaware, Davis was instrumental in the creation and direction of the Writing Center. In 1986, she was awarded the University Medal of Distinction and inducted into the Hall of Fame of Delaware Women.

**Leonard L. Williams**

Leonard “Lenny” Williams, Class of 1956, was the first African American to compete for the Blue Hen football team. Part of the freshman football team in 1952, Williams played Center on the Delaware squad in 1953, 1954, and 1955, starting his senior year. He lettered all three years. A native of Wilmington and graduate of Howard High School, Williams graduated from the University of Delaware with a BA in English, History and Political Science. He attended Georgetown University Law School, graduating in 1959. Williams practiced law in Wilmington for over 50 years, working with Louis L. Redding on landmark civil rights cases. He also served as a Municipal Court Judge for 35 years in the City of Wilmington before retiring from the bench.

**Irvin H. “Irv” Carty, Jr.**

Irvin H. “Irv” Carty, Jr., became the first black student-athlete to earn a varsity letter for the University of Delaware athletics program in 1951. A native of Wilmington, he attended Howard High School before enrolling at the University of Delaware in 1951. Carty was a two-year member the Blue Hen men's cross country team and led the team to a 5-1 dual record and sixth place finish at the Middle Atlantic Conference championships in 1951 and a 4-1 mark and fourth place finish at the MAC meet in 1952. He earned two letters, becoming the first black student-athlete to earn that distinction at Delaware.
James Newton

James Newton led the Black American Studies Program at the University of Delaware from 1973 to 1994. Under his guidance, the Black American Studies Program gained stability, expanding its programming and course offerings. Newton also developed a minor in Black American Studies. In 1968, Newton in 1968 became the first African-American to receive the master of fine arts degree from the University of North Carolina. He received his PhD from Illinois State University in curriculum development and education research. Newton came to Delaware in 1973, hired as an assistant professor of education.

A talented artist, Newton also displayed great strength as an educator, inspiring many students and receiving an Excellence in Teaching Award from the university in 1988. During his tenure as director, Newton also received numerous awards from community, state and national associations in relation to his work in African American history, education and culture. Newton served the university on a number of committees, most notably as chairperson of the Commission to Promote Racial and Cultural Diversity. He retired from Delaware in 2005, concluding a 33 year career of teaching.

Richard A. “Dick” Wilson

Richard A. Wilson was the first full-time African American administrator at the University of Delaware. Wilson joined the university as director of the Upward Bound program in 1967. He spent ten years before this teaching in Delaware’s public schools. Wilson received his master's degree in education from the university in 1972. At Delaware, Wilson served in various capacities over the next 25 years, retiring in 1991 when he was associate director of undergraduate admissions. He was a founder of the Black Alumni Association and made enormous contributions to the life of African American students on campus, providing support and guidance. The annual Richard “Dick” Wilson Step Show, held by the Center for Black Culture and the Multicultural Greek Congress, has been named in his memory.

Vincent Oliver

Vincent Oliver was the first director of the Minority Center at the University of Delaware, later to become the Center for Black Culture. Hired in 1975, Oliver was tasked not only with creating and nurturing the programming that the Minority Center provided, but also with preparing the physical space at 192 South College Avenue for the center’s occupation.

Arva Jackson

Arva Jackson was the first African American member of the Board of Trustees of the University of Delaware. She was appointed by Governor Russell Peterson in 1969. Jackson, a native of Wilmington, Jackson, a native of Wilmington and the governor’s liaison with the Wilmington and New Castle County governments, served a six-year term as a trustee.
Luna I. Mishoe

Luna I. Mishoe, mathematician and President of Delaware State College, was the second African American member of the Board of Trustees of the University of Delaware. Nominated by members of the board in late 1969, he served two six-year terms on the board before leaving in December of 1981.

L. Eudora Pettigrew

L. Eudora Pettigrew was hired by the University of Delaware as Associate Provost for Instruction in 1981. She was the first African American to be appointed to a high-level administrative position. Pettigrew administered the Center for Teaching Effectiveness, the Instructional Resource Center, the University Tutoring Center and the University Parallel Programs, consulted on faculty development, and oversaw the student academic grievance process. In 1983, President Trabant expanded her position, asking her to take responsibility for increasing student retention throughout the university. Pettigrew also held full professorial rank in the College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy.

Akasha Gloria Hull

Gloria Hull taught in the Department of English at UD from 1971 through 1988. During this time period, she served on the Women’s Studies Committee and was one of the program’s founders. Hull is nationally recognized for her work as a Black feminist and is considered an architect of Black Women’s Studies. Her book, All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies, co-edited with Patricia Bell-Scott and Barbara Smith, is a classic in Feminist Studies, Black Studies, and Black Women's Studies. In addition to her work at Delaware, Hull has been a professor of women’s studies and literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz and at the University of the West Indies, Mona, in Kingston, Jamaica. She has published four books, a monograph, three edited collections, articles in peer-reviewed professional journals, poems in more than thirty magazines and anthologies, and two short stories. In 1992, Hull legally changed her name to Akasha Gloria Hull to reflect her personal spirituality and journey. Akasha is a Sanskrit word that means “light/luminous.”

Paul R. Jones

In 2001, Paul R. Jones, of Atlanta, Georgia, donated the core of his massive collection of African American art to the University of Delaware. The Paul R. Jones Collection is one of the oldest, largest and most complete holdings of African American art in the world. The university renovated Mechanical Hall to store and exhibit the collection, which was donated by Jones in part because of the university’s resources to preserve, conserve and display the art works. In 2004, Jones was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Delaware.