

In memory of Alonzo “Al” Ashley

From Communications

October 10, 2019



Al Ashley (center) with former SLAC Lab Director Jonathan Dorfan (left) and wife Wanda Bynum Ashley (right) at the presentation of his National Science Foundation Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring, 2005. (National Science Foundation)

It is with sadness that we share the passing of Al Ashley on Friday, Oct. 4.

Al's legacy at SLAC began when he joined the lab as the minority employment and training representative in 1968. Over the next 31 years, he was dedicated to encouraging underrepresented youth to pursue STEM fields and bringing them to SLAC through internship programs and recruitment efforts. He developed several student science programs, including what later became known as the DOE's Science Undergraduate Laboratory Internship (SULI) program, and formed partnerships with the National Society of Black Engineers, the Tech Museum of Innovation, and historically black colleges and universities.

After his retirement he continued to work tirelessly on teaching and mentoring youth, and helping to place students in summer internships and research programs.

In 2005 he received the National Science Foundation Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring. To this day, SLAC runs the Alonzo W. Ashley Internship Program that was named in his honor.

Tribute from Dorian Bohler

I met Al when I was a sophomore in college at a National Society of Black Physicists meeting.

There were five of us, all physics majors and all without internships because we didn't know how to go to the booths and sell ourselves. Al walked up to us and asked us what our majors were, what we were interested in, and then told us to hand him our resumes. He said, "I'll get each of you an internship today," and immediately got on the phone.

He got four of my friends into the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and me into NASA Ames.

It was my first internship and it turned the light on for me as a young scientist: I got exposure to a lab research environment, met people who became mentors in the field, and it led to my first visit to SLAC.

I think what was special about Al was that he kept in contact with me and each of the other students over the years. Two or three times a year, he would call to check in on us. He knew exactly where we were in our careers, and when we went through graduate school you could count on him to connect you with people who had the resources to help you.

After grad school, he called for a check-in and encouraged me to apply for the Al Ashley Internship Program at SLAC. Getting accepted into the program marked the official start of my career.

His continued support over the years has made a big impact on me. In fact, we spoke not three weeks ago: We talked about how I could continue his legacy at SLAC in my own way, and he told me about the things he'd been up to and the activities coming up – he was still going strong.

His passing was a big loss to me personally and to the many individuals he mentored and helped over his career which spanned 50 years. I hope others use him as an example to create more equally represented workspaces. I would like to wish his family my sincerest condolences.

- Dorian

Al is survived by his wife Wanda and step-daughter Kia, his two brothers, two grandchildren, and numerous nieces and nephews.

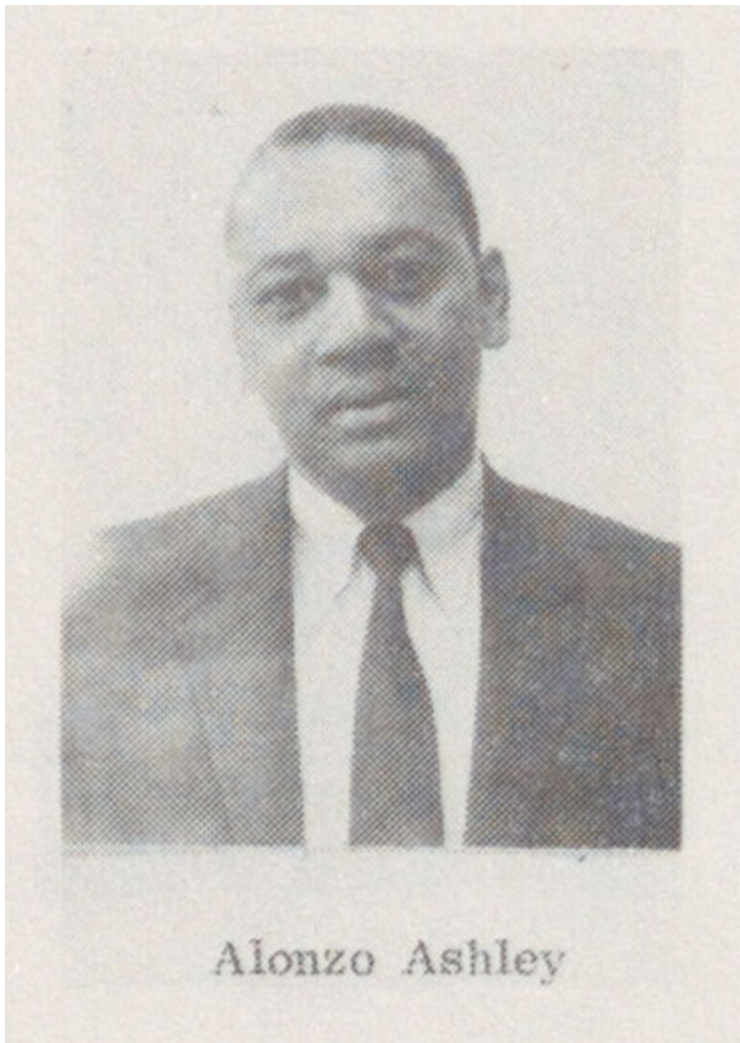
A funeral service will be held tomorrow in Little Rock, Arkansas.



Portrait of Al Ashley from the Presidential Awards in 2005. (National Science Foundation)



At the dedication of the IBM computers in 1974. (l-r): Al Ashley, Bernie Lighthouse, Pief Panofsky.



Staff portrait of Al from 1969.