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Gevirtz School Dean Jeffrey Milem elected to prestigious National Academy of Education

Born in 1957, Jeffrey Milem was raised in the racially integrated and diverse community that was married student housing at Ohio State University. His dad was a student veteran on the GI Bill; his mom, a nurse, worked nights at the hospital and spent many of her days providing care, pro bono, to neighbors in need.

“My mother was engaged in social justice work long before I knew what that meant,” Milem, the Jules Zimmer Dean of UC Santa Barbara’s Gevirtz Graduate School of Education, recalled. Those early memories sowed the seeds of a scholarly career that would take root years later when Milem, working in a multicultural residence hall at UC Irvine in the early 1980s, helped teach a course in social ecology that examined issues of race, racism and community.

“In the five years that I worked with those students, numerous research questions emerged that I eventually felt compelled to pursue,” he said recently. “In the fall of 1987, I enrolled in the doctoral program at UCLA and my journey as a scholar began.”

What a journey it has been. Fast forward three decades to today, and Milem has been elected to the National Academy of Education — an exceedingly prestigious honor. Worldwide, the academy has only some 300 members.

“I am honored to congratulate Dean Milem on his election to the National Academy of Education,” said Chancellor Henry T. Yang. “This prestigious recognition from his peers is a meaningful recognition of his outstanding leadership and contributions to education research, in service to our society.”

“Quite honestly, I am still a bit numb and I’m not sure it has fully sunk in,” said Milem, who joined UCSB in 2016 after 10 years at University of Arizona, eight years at the University of Maryland, and five years at Vanderbilt University. “Being elected to the National Academy of Education is the pinnacle of success for scholars and leaders in the field of education. Something that is especially significant for me is that many NAEd members are mentors, colleagues and friends who have been and continue to be such a key part of my professional and personal journey. I am deeply honored and humbled by my election to the NAEd.”

Founded in 1965, the NAEd’s mission is to advance high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. As an honorific society, the academy consists of U.S. members and international associates — fewer than 300 professors worldwide — who are elected on the basis of outstanding scholarship or leadership related to education.

Milem brings to three the number of National Academy of Education members in the Gevirtz School, joining Professor Richard Durán, who was elected in 2022, and Professor Emeritus Russell Rumberger. Lorraine McDonnell, a professor emerita of political science, is also a member of NAEd.

In his research, Milem focuses on the ways in which colleges and universities can be organized to enhance equity, access and success for all students; the racial context within higher education; and the relationship between how colleges and universities organize themselves and student outcomes and faculty role performance.

A widely recognized expert in the area of racial dynamics in higher education, Milem has been commissioned by numerous organizations and entities to conduct scholarly research. Among them are the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, the Association of American Medical Colleges, the Harvard Civil Rights Project, the American Council on Education, the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the American Educational Research Association’s Panel on Racial Dynamics in Higher Education.

In addition to his employment in higher education, Milem has worked as a photographer, janitor, maintenance worker, house painter, landscaper, bartender, cook and hospital orderly.

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