

CELEBRATE PURDUE WOMEN

# EVELYN M. SIMIEN



## DISTINGUISHED PURDUE ALUMNI SCHOLARS AWARD ACCEPTANCE REMARKS

I was a first-generation college student. When I came to Purdue, I didn't know anyone. I also came unfunded and didn't know how I was going to fund my education. There was one other African American Ph.D. student. I looked at Maya as a role model and told myself that if she could do it, so could I. The fact that she existed mattered to me. Within one semester, I secured funding, and I graduated debt free. I got my master's degree and Ph.D. from Purdue because of Dwight Lewis, Maya Rockey Moore, Rosie Clawson, Floyd W. Hayes III, and William Schaefer, former Dean of College of Liberal Arts, Department Head of Political Science and Major Advisor. I didn't realize at the time how fortunate I was to have such good mentors. Today I am the only African American woman at the rank of full Professor in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Connecticut. I am thankful for this honor and appreciate being in the company of such wonderful trailblazers.

Evelyn M. Simien is Professor of Political Science, and the Interim Director of the Africana Studies Institute for the 2023-2024 academic year. She is also affiliated with the following academic programs: Africana Studies, Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, and American Studies. Her first book, *Black Feminist Voices in Politics* (SUNY Press, 2006), examined black feminist consciousness and its effect on political behavior using national survey data. Her second book, *Gender and Lynching: the Politics of Memory* (Palgrave/Macmillan, 2011), focused on African American women who suffered racial-sexual violence at the hands of lynch mobs in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Her third book, *Historic Firsts: How Symbolic Empowerment Changes U.S. Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2015), considers whether candidates like Shirley Chisholm in 1972 and Jesse Jackson in 1984 as well as Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama in 2008 mobilize voters through emotional appeals while combating stereotypes and providing more inclusive representation. Her fourth book, *Historic Firsts in U.S. Elections* (Routledge, 2022), extends her theory of symbolic empowerment to the Trump era and focuses on barrier-breaking gubernatorial, congressional, and mayoral campaigns. A nationally recognized teacher, Professor Simien was awarded the 2006 Anna Julia Cooper Teacher of the Year Award from the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, and the 2007 Teaching Promise Award from the American Association of University Professors. She was also recognized as the 2017 Faculty Member of the Year by the UConn chapter of the NAACP. More recently, Professor Simien was selected as a Purdue University 2024 Distinguished Purdue Alumni Scholar. The award is intended to recognize the doctoral alumni of Purdue who have made significant scholarly contributions within their chosen field and in doing so have contributed extensively to the advancement of women in academia.