Dr. Rodney Gonzales Higgins was born in Statesville, North Carolina on March 30, 1911. His parents moved to St. Louis, Missouri when he was 5 years of age and attended public schools there. He received the B.Ed. from Southern Illinois Teachers College in 1935 and the M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from the State University of Iowa in 1936 and 1940, respectively. His teaching experiences were at Stowe College in St. Louis, A&T. College of North Carolina and Southern University in 1946 and was later appointed head of the Department of History and Political Science in 1948 until his death in 1964. He also served in the U.S. Army in 1943 and in the American Red Cross 1944-1946. He was a contributor of articles in the University of Iowa Studies and the Quarterly Review of Higher Education among Negroes.

Dr. Rodney Higgins enjoyed a reputation as a dynamic young teacher who hit the Southern University campus by storm. Truly “a free spirit”, he was a builder and administrator of unusual talent and skill. He developed not only a strong Political Science program but also viable programs in History, Sociology, Economics and Geography. Among the political scientists trained and influenced by Dr. Higgins were Twiley W. Barker, Lucius J. Barker, Oliver Wilson, Clinton Jones, Shelby Faye Lewis, Jewel Limar Prestage, Alex Willingham, Carolyn Sue Williams, and Hoyt King, all of whom hold the Ph.D. in Political Science and were active participants in the profession.

Dr. Higgins along with his wife Mildred started a program of political education training for Black youth in Louisiana, Bayou Girls State and Bayou Boys State¹. These programs brought to Southern University hundreds of boys and girls each summer to engage in political experiences simulating the real political arena.

Dr. Rodney Higgins, or “HIG” as he was fondly known, was a most generous and caring person. This was especially obvious in his relationship with departmental faculty members.

In the Baton Rouge community, he had hundreds of close friends, as he worked in numerous community organizations. At Southern University he was a moving force in most of the significant developments not only in academic affairs, but in student life and community relations, from honors programs and freshman orientation to adult education for the community. He was a great facilitator. As department chairperson, he assisted in the identification of outlets for professional participation, research opportunities and other forms of faculty development in all disciplines which were a part of the Social Science Department. While a large number of students went on to complete the Ph.D. in Political Science than in other disciplines, several earned the Ph.D. in economics, history and geography as well.

¹ Bayou Boys State – Boys State began in 1935 in Illinois as a sponsored program of the American Legion and came to Louisiana five years later. Under the segregated system of the time, Louisiana originally had two separate programs – Pelican Boys State, founded in 1940 for white students and Bayou Boys State, founded in 1949 for all others. The programs integrated in the 1960s to form Louisiana Boys State program.

The objective was to educate the youth in the duties, privileges, rights and responsibilities of American citizenship. It is a wholly plan for training in the practical mechanics of government. Applications of the principles of democratic government were made in every possible way. The Constitution and the statutes of the State of Louisiana were the pattern from which the fundamental law of Bayou Boys State was developed.

In Boys State, citizens were to organize their own city, parish and state governments. They choose their own officials in accordance with regular election procedures. Participants learned the duties of the various city, parish and state officers.
Dr. Higgins was particularly interested in having students attend professional meetings in the social sciences and used his own vehicle to carry students on many occasions, driving as far as Jefferson City, Missouri. In addition, he served as advisor to numerous student organizations directing them in activities as diverse as mock presidential nominating conventions, picnics on the Gulf Coast, and moot court sessions focusing on judicial issues current at that time.

As an academian, Dr. Higgins adopted a teaching style involving independent study and mastery of writing and research techniques. His course, “Bibliography and Methods,” was an excellent introduction to graduate study type settings and was frequently cited by former social science majors who went on to graduate school in the social sciences.

During his tenure as chairperson, several social science honor societies were established in the Department—Sigma Rho Sigma, Pi Gamma Mu and Gamma Theta Upsilon [Geography]. Faculty members who did not hold the doctorate were encouraged to return to graduate school and were supported for sabbatical leave by Dr. Higgins.

Along with his wife, Mildred, and his two children, he provided a level of hospitality at home which remained unmatched. He frequently organized social hours for students and faculty. Voter registration, voter education, and court action in opposition to discrimination were among the areas in which he was a leader in the community.

Dr. Rodney Higgins wife, Mildred DiPieto Higgins served the Southern University community as Bursar, Financial Aid Administrator for 40 years before retirement. Mrs. Higgins was a consultant for the U.S. Department of Education for many years helping the financial aid community. A fierce administrator who expected and demanded nothing but the best, Mrs. Higgins celebrated her 99th birthday on August 28, 2018 and departed this life on September 4, 2018 in Baton Rouge, LA.

**Rodney Higgins Best Faculty Paper**

This award is named in honor of Dr. Rodney Higgins (1911-1964), the longtime chair of the Department of Political Science at Southern University in Baton Rouge, LA.

**National Conference of Black Political Scientists** (NCOBPS). Established in 1969, NCOBPS is the leading organization of black political scientists in the country. The majority of the members are faculty members at U.S. colleges and universities, and also count a sizeable number of graduate students, elected politicians, and policy analysts among its ranks.

Dr. Rodney G. Higgins died in 1964.

The “Rodney G. Higgins Building” on Southern’s campus is named in his honor.

Higgins, Rodney G.  *Personal Papers*. Archives and Manuscripts Department, John B. Cade Library, Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.


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