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Gayle Williams, Assistant Dean of University College, Recognized for Her Dedication to the Success of First-Year Students

Indianapolis, IN (April 2009) – Gayle Williams, Assistant Dean of University College, was a member of the founding administrative team for University College and has helped take IUPUI/University College to the cutting edge in first-year student support. Williams' dedication to the success of first-year students and achievements in making University College a gateway for new students entering IUPUI has earned her national recognition with an Outstanding First-Year Student Advocate Award from the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition ("The Center").

Williams graciously recognizes her colleagues for this amazing achievement as she reminds us of the numerous people who have worked hard to bring the first-year programs where they are today. It is her firsthand knowledge of the difficulties many students face that has driven her in the development of these programs. Williams is devoted to engaging students, keeping expectations high, and holding everyone accountable for their success.

As a first-generation college student, Williams remembers, "I was underprepared and underachieving – but I didn't know that. I just thought I wasn't smart....Most of my professors would not say anything to me if I did poorly. Perhaps they didn't want to embarrass me. But, what they did was confirm to me that I was not very smart because I believed they did not expect any more from me than that. A few did challenge me, though, and that was the greatest gift they could give me. They told me I could do better."

Williams has indeed done better and is paving the way for others to do better as well. John Gardner, founder of The Center has said, "As Indiana goes, so goes the country." Williams believes that "IUPUI/University College is in a unique position to make a difference and be a model, nationally," but recognizes, "this can be challenging because student needs are always changing, and finding effective solutions to their problems is never easy. It takes visionaries like Scott Evenbeck to take that leap and make the difference."

When asked how she feels about winning this award, Williams smiles. "It's an unbelievable thrill! A thrill of a lifetime." She cites the best moment being when her daughter, realizing the prestige of the award, called with joy, congratulations, and pride.

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