Science Societies

In memoriam: Ketia Shumaker

March 17, 2026



Dr. Ketia Shumaker, Professor of Biological and Environmental Science at the University of West Alabama (UWA) for 16 years and subsequently a faculty member at the

University of Alabama at Birmingham, died on Feb. 9, 2026 following a sudden illness. Shumaker received her B.S. and M.S. in Biology from Alcorn State University and Ph.D. in Environmental Science from Jackson State University. Throughout her career, Shumaker combined research on phytoremediation and plant genetics with her passion for teaching and mentoring. Her life was defined by service, faith, and a deep commitment to lifting others through education.

As a teenager, Shumaker became excited about college opportunities while participating in the Upward Bound program. In college, she actively pursued summer research internships at Baylor College of Medicine/Rice University, North Carolina State University, and the University of Mississippi's Ronald E. McNair Scholar Program. She pursued a Ph.D. as a recipient of a Bill and Melinda Gates Millennium Scholarship. After graduate school, Shumaker accepted a tenure-track faculty position at UWA in Livingston, AL, where she taught undergraduate and graduate students in biology, plant science, environmental science, and toxicology.

Shumaker was truly dedicated to enriching career possibilities for her students by mentoring through diverse programs and securing vital grant funding to support and retain underrepresented students in STEM. Through research collaborations with colleagues at Penn State and Virginia Tech, she opened further opportunities for undergraduate interns to engage in and present hands-on research and contribute to scientific articles. To quote one colleague, "Ketia's excellence as a mentor is reflected in the high number of her mentees who are in leading positions within environmental science all over the nation!"

In 2020, Shumaker moved to the Greater Birmingham area, became a foster parent, and worked as adjunct biology instructor at Samford University for a few years before accepting a full-time teaching faculty position at The University of Alabama at

Birmingham.

A student-led effort to recognize Dr. Shumaker's legacy is underway at the UWA to create an environmental science award in honor of her.

More people news

Back to current issue

Back to home

Text © . The authors. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Except where otherwise noted, images are subject to copyright. Any reuse without express permission from the copyright owner is prohibited.