Ronald L. Mangum

More than a career, social work is a calling — a desire to reach beyond professional due diligence to achieve what is personally meaningful. For 20 years, Ronald L. Mangum’s calling has been the highest and most perfect expression of University outreach. Face-to-face, he turns academic thought into thoughtfulness, new knowledge into knowhow. “Ron Mangum is the visible manifestation of Carolina for many who know little about Chapel Hill,” wrote a colleague. “He makes the state and the University better through the work he does and the way he does it.”

Ron joined the University in 1998. A Clinical Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work, he also holds state licenses in clinical addictions and employee assistance. Much of his career has been spent on the highways and byways between Murphy and Manteo, linking the University to citizens in all 100 counties. In his first project for the Jordan Institute for Families, he mobilized and trained county officials and behavioral health practitioners to address juvenile justice recidivism. In 2004, the School of Social Work tapped him to train staff in county offices of Child Protective Services on issues of abuse and neglect, substance use and how to work with the State Bureau of Investigation to help methamphetamine’s youngest victims: children living in home-based labs.

Most recently, Ron helped build and implement North Carolina’s Certified Peer Support Specialist credentialing program, now considered a national model. As he explained in Contact, the School of Social Work’s online magazine: “I don’t know
what it’s like to live underneath a bridge … to live on the streets and never know where my next meal is coming from. … But that peer support specialist does. And if you put that person … on a team with people who are academically trained, it enhances the chance for improved assistance.” In recognition of his work, Ron serves as a peer support advisor to the state and federal government and represented the University in a federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration work group. “Across all of his work, Ron’s achievements are in developing people,” wrote a nominator. “While his University position gives him a platform, it is his style and personality that make him so effective. … He sees potential in people. … Most of all, he connects (them) with opportunities to maximize their potential. More than 3,000 (North Carolinians) are engaged in meaningful volunteer or paid employment — rather than being ‘disabled’ — due in part to the opportunities Ron has helped to create.”

His personal experience joins professional expertise in a lecture Ron developed for campus classrooms. His life as a black man growing up in segregated Durham and his work with vulnerable, marginalized and oppressed populations inspire thought and gratitude. “I wanted to send a note of thanks,” wrote a student. “It’s a rare moment when someone presents their story in such an open, direct and coherent way. I appreciate your candidness and generosity. It is an inspiration.”

For empowering, motivating and encouraging potential in the vulnerable and those who work to help them; for being a teacher-scholar of distinguished resolve on behalf of this University and humanity at large; and for modeling the best and highest purposes of the University’s outreach to the state, nation and world, Ronald L. Mangum receives the 2018 C. Knox Massey Distinguished Service Award.