Dr. Jesse Peel and his mother, the late Helen Peel, have a lengthy history of giving to East Carolina. From their funding of scholarships for ECU’s best and brightest students to creating professorships that attract top-notch faculty to campus, the Peels have been shining examples of how the generosity of supporters can have life-changing effects.
In 1986, Dr. Jesse Peel of Atlanta, Georgia, and his mother, Helen Peel of Everettts, North Carolina, established the J. Woolard Peel University Scholars Award to memorialize his father, Woolard Peel. Jesse and his mother were among the first 10 families to help establish the EC Scholars Program.

Although Woolard Peel graduated from North Carolina State University, Helen attended Louisburg College, and Jesse completed his undergraduate work and medical school at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, Jesse and Helen established this scholarship because Woolard often said ECU was the future of eastern North Carolina.

In 1995, they increased the J. Woolard Peel University Scholars Award, and Helen established a life estate to fund a distinguished professorship. When Helen passed away in June 2005, funds from the sale of her life estate were used to create the J. Woolard and Helen Peel Distinguished Professorship in Religious Studies. It was endowed in July 2007, and the first Peel Professor was named in fall 2008.

In addition, Helen’s estate made a bequest to the ECU Medical & Health Sciences Foundation to set up a Core Competencies program in the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University. Jesse has set up a retained life-estate planned gift that will create two distinguished professorships and provide funding for ECU’s Institute for Social Diversity.

The Dr. Jesse R. Peel Distinguished Professorship in Social Diversity in the Department of Sociology will attract and retain an outstanding faculty member for that department. The Dr. Jesse R. Peel Distinguished Professorship in Social Diversity in the College of Education will enable that college to attract and retain experts within the field.

Jesse’s generous funding for the Institute for Social Diversity will increase awareness among the student population about the importance of diversity and understanding within the university community. That multipronged approach will increase the ECU community’s ability to exchange ideas on these important issues, serving East Carolina’s faculty, staff, students, and region well in the future.