

PRESIDENT ROBERT E. JOHNSON, PH.D.



Dr. Robert E. Johnson was appointed as the 6th president of Western New England University in August 2020, charged with leading the institution as it embarks on its second century.

His unyielding belief in higher education as a public good and as a path for transforming individual lives has led him to dedicate his 30-year career to preparing students to adapt and succeed in a dynamic future—

one where jobs as we know them may no longer exist, career mobility is the norm, and individuals are responsible for continuously adding and creating new value.

A future-focused thought leader and commentator on issues centering around the future of work, agile mind education, the agile university, and the sense of humanity imperative, Dr. Johnson believes students, through higher education, must develop divergent thinking skills, social and emotional intelligence, empathy, and a sense of humanity. These uniquely human capacities cannot be replicated by technology and, when paired with an entrepreneurial outlook and a value-creation orientation, are the hallmarks of success in a complex, hyper-connected world.

Recognizing that American higher education is at a unique juncture and that its role will be fundamentally different from the past because we are in a period of profound disruption, he views this as a catalyst for innovation and an opportunity to make institutions more responsive to the needs of the future.

A Detroit native, Dr. Johnson was inspired to attend Morehouse College by his late uncle Robert E. Johnson Jr., associate publisher and executive editor of *JET Magazine* and Morehouse classmate of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He encouraged Dr. Johnson's commitment to service and transforming the next generation of leaders, influencing his fundamental conviction that humanity and civility must be central to all we do. As educated and engaged citizens on a planet with more than seven billion people, we are privileged and thus have a social responsibility not only to leave the world better than we found it but to inspire others to do the same.

Dr. Johnson is a member of the Council on Competitiveness and serves on its National Commission on Innovation and Competitiveness Frontiers. He also serves on the executive committee and is vice chair of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, the board of MGH Institute of Health Professions, and the Intentional Endowments Network steering committee. He has also served on the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, as vice chair of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, and as chair of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. He is also co-founder of the Massachusetts Digital Games Institute.

Dr. Johnson's leadership career spans nonprofit colleges and universities in the Northeast and Midwest, including public, private, urban, rural, small and large institutions, with enrollments from 2,000 to more than 25,000 students. This experience includes public research universities, one of the nation's largest single-campus community colleges, a large Catholic university, a historically Black university, and a turn-around and transformation of a small private college. His career reflects several firsts—as not only an African American leader but also the youngest person holding major senior administrative roles.

A proponent of innovation and entrepreneurship, hallmarks of Dr. Johnson's leadership include elevating institutional stature and competitive market position; national recognition; enrollment growth and resource development success; fast-tracked facilities and infrastructure improvements; and innovating for social impact when leading one of the first higher education institutions in the nation to achieve a 100% social impact goal for its endowment.

He has convened transformational conversations with industry, government, and academe that stimulated growth and regional economic opportunity, such as the 2010 Mass Impact Summit that led to the creation of MassDiGI in 2011, and the annual Marine Science and Technology symposium series at UMass Dartmouth that helped launch the MERIT Center to support regional job growth and economic development for the "Blue Economy." Dr. Johnson holds a doctorate in higher education administration from Touro University International, formerly a division of Touro College, New York; a master's degree in education administration from the University of Cincinnati; a bachelor's degree in economics from Morehouse College; and a certificate in applied neuroscience from MIT Sloan School of Management. He is married to Michelle Jones-Johnson. They have two children, Jasmine and Alex.

Western New England University (WNE) is a private, nationally ranked, comprehensive institution with a focus on preparing work-ready and world-ready graduates. Founded in 1919 in Springfield, Massachusetts as a division Northeastern College, WNE's 215-acre suburban campus serves more than 3,700 students, including over 2,500 full-time undergraduates. More than 47,000 alumni have earned degrees through its 90+ undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business, Engineering, and Pharmacy and Health Sciences, and School of Law. Students come from 39 U.S. states and territories and 23 countries. Of 44,486 living alumni, 30% remain within the region, residing in the four western Massachusetts counties and northern Connecticut.

WNE is classified among nationally ranked universities in US News and World Report, and among the Top 100 Undergraduate Engineering programs, and in the Doctoral/Professional Universities category in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. WNE has been ranked fifth in the country and first in Massachusetts in job placements of its graduates.

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