



JACK THOMAS, PH.D.

Dr. Jack Thomas is the ninth president of Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. He brings a long history of success and insights from a broad range of experiences in higher education.

From 2011 through 2019, Dr. Thomas served as president of Western Illinois University. As president, he successfully managed an annual budget of nearly \$224 million during a period of unprecedented state fiscal challenges.

Prior to becoming a president, Dr. Thomas also held a broad range of senior leadership and academic positions at Middle Tennessee State University, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, (*interim president*), South Carolina State University, and Johnson C. Smith University.

Upon arriving at Central State, Dr. Thomas established a Blue Ribbon Taskforce charged with conducting an exhaustive review of University operations and structure and providing recommendations for improvement rooted in University best practices. Dr. Thomas introduced his nine (9) strategic priorities for the University:

1. Continue to meet and enhance the 1890 Land-Grant mission;
2. Increase enrollment (globally and in diversity);
3. Improve retention and graduation rates;
4. Develop a marketing and rebranding campaign;
5. Launch a multimillion-dollar capital campaign;
6. Develop an Honors College to recruit high-achieving students;
7. Increase degree offerings, offer graduate studies, and provide flexibility in course delivery;
8. Build a new learning and living environment; and
9. Update the University's strategic and master plans.

In partnership with the University Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community stakeholders, he has worked to develop the next university strategic plan under the University

mantra, “Innovation is in our DNA.” In a short period, Dr. Thomas’ energy, leadership, and focus have resulted in the development of a campus-wide mentoring program, the launch of a University Honors College, record-breaking fundraising results, and an increase in overall student enrollment of 97%.

Nationally, Dr. Thomas graduated from the Harvard Leadership Program, served as an American Council on Education Fellow, was a National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO) Kellogg Fellow, participated in the Salzburg Seminar in Salzburg, Austria, and participated in Leadership Middle Tennessee. He also served as the chair of the NCAA Accelerating Academic Success Program Selection Committee. In addition, Dr. Thomas served as the chairperson of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Christa McAuliffe Award Presidential Selection and as a committee member of the Middle States Visitation Team.

Dr. Thomas’ influence on the academic community extends to his service on several distinguished boards, including the Marguerite Casey Foundation Board of Directors; Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland (Equity and Inclusion Council); Dayton Area Chamber of Congress; Dayton Daily News Community Advisory; Strategic Ohio Council for Higher Education Board; the Illinois Board of Higher Education; the Stillman College Board of Trustees; the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education Board; the American Council on Education Council of Fellows; the NCAA Presidential Forum; the Illinois Campus Compact Board; the Heart of Tennessee Chapter of the American Red Cross Board; and the Rutherford County YMCA Board.

Dr. Thomas is a published researcher, and his research focus has been on Black males in literature. Additionally, he is the author of numerous publications and professional presentations, including his most recent book titled “Within These Gates: Academic Work, Academic Leadership, University Life, and the Presidency.” Dr. Thomas has been a committed advocate for diversity and inclusion. He has been recognized by Minority Access, Inc. and others for his work helping to provide meaningful and transformative opportunities for minorities through mentorship and access at various universities. Dr. Thomas’ current body of work includes research on public institutions that have had to make transformative programmatic and human capital decisions due to decreased federal and state financial support and declining enrollment. He is a noted scholar and lecturer, as well as a highly sought-after keynote speaker presenting his research and inspirational messages locally, nationally, and internationally.

Dr. Thomas received his bachelor’s degree in English from Alabama A&M University, a master’s degree in English Education from Virginia State University, and a doctorate degree in English Literature and Criticism from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania. In addition, he has done further graduate work in theological studies at Liberty University. Dr. Thomas is an ordained Baptist Minister.

He is a native of Lowndes County, Alabama. Dr. Thomas and the First Lady Dr. Linda Thomas have two adult sons, Patrick and Darius Thomas, and a grandson, Patrick Micah “Eli” Thomas.