

Dr. Robert J. Jones Bio

Dr. Robert J. Jones, a distinguished educator and champion of scientific discoveries, has greatly impacted the field of agronomy and crop physiology.

He displayed his passion for science early, thriving even in difficult times. Growing up in the small town of Dawson, Georgia, as the son of a sharecropper, Jones persevered in a semi-segregated society through determination and academic excellence.

Jones earned a bachelor's degree in agronomy from Fort Valley State College and went on to earn a master's degree from the University of Georgia.

In 1975, Jones came to the University of Missouri and began work on his doctoral degree in crop physiology. He finished in just three years. His exceptional work led to several professional presentations and publication of two papers while at MU. His outstanding leadership also led him to serve in the Agronomy Graduate Student Association where he assisted in teaching two undergraduate classes, leaving a legacy of scientific achievement and commitment to learning with his students. In 1976, Jones received the first George Washington Carver Fellowship from the MU College of Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources.

In 1978, Jones began his career as an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota, where he researched food production and crop science. His work brought new ideas to the development of corn kernels that protected crops from environmental stresses and global climate change.

Jones' work became internationally respected, gaining attention around the world. From 1984 to 1994, he served as an academic and scientific consultant for Archbishop Desmond Tutu's South African Education Program.

Throughout his career, Jones has worked to recruit and retain faculty of color. As vice provost at Minnesota, he oversaw the Faculty of Color Bridge Fund that assisted colleges in hiring faculty of color. A postdoctoral fellowship program that he initiated helped increase the number of individuals of color in the pipeline for tenure-track positions.

In 2013, Jones became the president of the University of Albany where he advanced the vision of the university through creative problem solving and strong leadership. As the president, he created the university's first College of Engineering and Applied Sciences along with the nation's first College of Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security and Cybersecurity. Thousands of students have benefitted from his attention to detail and dedication to creating a better intellectual environment.

The Urban Research and Outreach Center located in North Minneapolis was dedicated to Jones in May 2015 to honor his many contributions to contemporary higher education. In addition, he has earned esteemed awards such as the Western Seedsmen Award and was elected fellow of both the American Society of Agronomy and the Crop Science Society of America.

Jones returned to the Midwest as the chancellor of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2016. As the university's first African-American chancellor, he has paved the way for future educators to inspire change and create unity among students. He also serves as a vice president of the University of Illinois System.

To this day, Jones continues to be a role model for children of color and for international educational relations. In each position, he has made these passions evident through communicating with urban

development organizations about how progress happens and speaking in several foreign higher education institutes.

In 2015, Jones was elected to the Board of Directors of Campus Compact, a national higher education association committed to advancing campus-based civic engagement.

In addition to his academic career, Jones also was a singer with the Grammy-award winning Sounds of Blackness, a Twin Cities-based choir.

Jones credits his roots in Georgia and experiences at the University of Missouri for much of his educational and personal growth, and for serving as a stepping stone to his future endeavors.