



MEDIA RELEASE

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Highline College Honors University President

Dr. Tom Jackson named 2021 Distinguished Alumnus Awardee

DES MOINES, Wash. — From first-generation college student at Highline College to president of Humboldt State University in Northern California, Dr. Tom Jackson knows a thing or two about what it takes to succeed in college.

But it's his commitment to those he serves through higher education — more than 70,000 graduates — that qualifies the 1982 Highline grad as the 2021 [Distinguished Alumnus Award](#) recipient.

Jackson will be honored during Highline's Virtual Commencement ceremony on June 17.

“He is a person of character, integrity, maturity and professional aptitude with a penchant for improving student success and completion,” wrote Jackson's award nominator, Dr. Jason L. Meriwether, vice president of enrollment management at Humboldt State University. “Dr. Jackson is also a veteran who has led extensive global and domestic community and volunteer service initiatives.”

Jackson, an Arcata, California resident, has more than 35 years of experience working at a college or university. While he has held numerous positions, including graduate residence director, academic development specialist and dean of students, Jackson was vice president at two universities before attaining his first college presidency title at Black Hills State University in South Dakota and his current position at Humboldt, for which he's been president since June 2019.

In addition to his associate degree from Highline College, Jackson holds a bachelor's degree in business from Southwest Minnesota State University, a master's degree in counseling/college student personnel management from Shippensburg University and a doctorate in educational leadership from University of LaVerne.

“While at Highline College, the opportunity to find success as a first-generation student helped me find confidence to progress academically, and later succeed in higher education as a career,” Jackson said. “The advisors in student government mentored me, and the coach of the track team further mentored me as a younger person in the pursuit of a degree and student engagement.”

Jackson said he grew up in Seattle and graduated from Franklin High School.

“I chose Highline because it was in a nice area and had a track team,” Jackson said. “I wanted to continue to run track. At the time, I worked part time for an insurance firm and was also in the United States Coast Guard (USCG) Reserves. Track kept me in school. I started in philosophy, shifted to accounting, and ended in business/human resources at my 4-year alma mater. Geology and history of jazz were my two favorite classes.”

Now, Meriwether said Jackson has a sincere commitment to leveraging education to generate opportunities for students and families as well as local communities.

“Dr. Jackson often shares the story of his experience as a student and graduate of Highline College as the foundational element of his education, which yielded generational change for his own family,” Meriwether wrote. “Earning the A.A. in general studies in 1982, Dr. Jackson fervently discusses his pathway to the college presidency as impossible without the support, care, and quality education offered by Highline’s faculty and staff.”

During his time at Humboldt, Jackson has prioritized helping students who begin at a community college, as he did, continue their education by creating transfer pathway programs. This led Humboldt State University to have the “highest ever single-year transfer student growth of 14.4%, which represented 120 more students than the prior year,” Meriwether wrote.

“When speaking with HSU’s transfers, he proudly talks about Highline College, while motivating our campus leaders to offer a similar quality experience,” Meriwether added.

Jackson is the 33rd recipient of Highline’s annual award, the most prestigious award given to alumni.

Former [Seattle Mayor Norm Rice](#), who attended Highline in 1968–69, was the first recipient of the award in 1990. Other [distinguished alumni](#) include [Sandra Cravens Robinson](#), nurse and Army veteran; [Ezra Teshome](#), agent with State Farm Insurance and TIME magazine global health hero; and [award-winning author Linda Yoshida and entrepreneur Junki Yoshida](#).

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Attachment: Photo of Dr. Tom Jackson

Links within this release:

- <https://alumni.highline.edu/recognition/>
- <https://alumni.highline.edu/recognition/rice.php>

- <https://www.highline.edu/about-us/highline-profiles/sandra-cravens-robinson/>
- <https://alumni.highline.edu/recognition/teshome.php>
- <https://www.highline.edu/about-us/highline-profiles/linda-junki-yoshida/>

Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves more than 11,000 students. With over 70 percent students of color, Highline is the most diverse higher education institution in the state. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education, basic skills and applied bachelor's degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.