

IMPACT

Dr. George T. French, Jr.: A Man on a Mission



When much of the world shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic, CAU's president kept his focus.

During his first two years as president of UNCF-member Clark Atlanta University (CAU), Dr. George T. French, Jr. stayed focused on helping his students, even amid the pandemic that brought much of the world to a near stand-still. Many students were already dealing with financial and social challenges, and the pandemic added new levels of difficulty. French concentrated on providing ways to help his students during the unprecedented crisis, establishing partnerships to provide free laptops for online learning, paying down student debt and creating a platform so students' concerns could be immediately heard and addressed while dealing with the stress and uncertainty of COVID-19.

When asked during an interview with *The Atlanta Voice* about recruitment challenges facing HBCUs in today's economy, French said, "Within the landscape of HBCUs, we are not monolithic. We have different classes,

different missions, we have different capacities. If your choice is between Howard and Clark, truth of the matter is that you don't have to sell those schools. The question is what kind of financial aid package can you offer the best and the brightest. It's not that they don't want to come to CAU; it's how can we make it advantageous to them financially.

"We know we are in an environment where national debt is up, and student loan debt is increasing exponentially. But the fact of the matter is that when you graduate from a top tier HBCU like Clark Atlanta University, you are going to see the natural return on your investment. We try to keep the dollars down as much as we can. We can't lower tuition, so we have to increase aid to our students. That is the main challenge when it comes to recruiting," French added.

When asked for his opinion whether HBCUs are changing fast enough to keep pace with a forever changing workplace, French said, "It is a challenge. We adjust based on the marketplace. We have done well. We need to do better.

"Currently, CAU is keeping up very well with the marketplace in all aspects, whether it's mass media arts from a journalistic perspective, whether it's a digital approach, expanding our scope in business to entrepreneurship and innovation; so, we aren't just training our students to get a job. In education, we have the latest teaching and learning mechanisms. We've done well," he said. "We can do better in the STEM disciplines and in some of the hard research areas, and we will do better with more financial support from the federal government."

French's outstanding leadership and dedication, and his steadfast commitment to HBCUs and their students, has been highly regarded, from his current post at Clark Atlanta University, to his former post at UNCF-member Miles College. In October 2022, French began his tenure as Chair of the UNCF Institutional and Individual Members.

Clearly, a man on a mission.