Executive Profile - Jackie Jenkins-Scott

Jackie Jenkins-Scott considers herself a mission-driven professional, which makes it particularly appropriate that she is president of Wheelock College, a private college in Boston with a core philosophy of improving the lives of children and families.

Her job is not without its challenges, especially in a competitive college town, Jenkins-Scott conceded.

But Wheelock’s focus on education, juvenile justice and social work — training students who plan to spend their careers helping others — makes the college a special place in Jenkins-Scott’s mind.

“Students come here with the passion to make this a better world. They have a very focused agenda and commitment to community is a big part of that,” said Jenkins-Scott, who is in her ninth year as Wheelock’s president, and spent the previous 21 years as CEO of Dimock Community Health Center in Roxbury. “I was very drawn to that.”

Wheelock is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, an inflection point for Jenkins-Scott to consider the school’s place on Boston’s higher education landscape. Marking the anniversary milestone, Wheelock — with an endowment of approximately $43 million and 871 undergraduate students — has embarked on an $85 million fundraising goal.

One thing that has kept Wheelock going all these years, Jenkins-Scott said, is the school’s ability to communicate the importance of its mission to prospective students.

“The fields we train our students in. ... these are not fields you’re going to go and invent the next app to an iPhone and convert a business you grew in your garage into a
multibillion-dollar business," Jenkins-Scott said. "So how do we make our fields relevant in today's society?"

She has answered that question by, in part, bringing more technology into Wheelock's classrooms. To that end, Jenkins-Scott has led the construction of a new Center for Learning and Innovation, a three-story addition to an existing building on the campus.

Jenkins-Scott was born in Arkansas and grew up in Flint, Mich. Her mother worked for General Motors for 39 years and her father owned a small construction company.

"I've always been told as a child, and embedded in what's been the African American experience for so many people in this country, is that education is the way out," she said. "And if you get (an education), you have an obligation to bring that opportunity to others. ... That's the core value in my family."

Jenkins-Scott came to Boston to attend the Boston University School of Social Work. After graduating, Jenkins-Scott said, she continued to pursue her passion for work that "not only helps changes individual lives but also can help change communities."

She counts among her achievements the creation of international service learning opportunities for Wheelock students and an annual service-learning program for students to help rebuild New Orleans.

In the same vein, Jenkins-Scott has made a point of making diversity a priority at Wheelock.

Jenkins-Scott said the Boston community provided her the tremendous opportunity of a supportive environment since her arrival here in 1971.

"In those 40-plus years, you see tremendous growth and tremendous opportunity in Boston that I think, in some ways, you don't see in other parts of the country," Jenkins-Scott said.