



Dr. John Leon Graham

July 5, 1964 - November 27, 2021

Dr. John Leon Graham was born on July 5, 1964, in Baltimore, MD the son Nancy Jackson Hill and John Leon Graham. Having lost his parents at the age of 6, he and his siblings relocated to Harlem, NY where he was raised by his aunt and uncle Martha and Johnny Goble.

John Leon attended the A. Phillip Randolph Campus High School in Harlem, NY where he was awarded a basketball scholarship to attend Eastern New Mexico University. He later transferred to the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, where he earned his BA degree in Business Administration in 1989 and a master's degree in Agricultural and Extension Education in 1991. Dr. Graham received his doctorate degree in 1996 from Michigan State University in Agricultural and Extensive Education. He has post-graduate certificates in leadership from the American Association for State Colleges and Universities' Executive Leadership Academy, State University of New York Executive Leadership Academy, Millennium Leadership Initiative, Institute for Educational Management and Executive Education at Harvard University.

In 1984 he met the love of his life Arlene Bentley who he later married on July 12, 1997. It was through this blessed union he became the very proud father of the couple's only child Palesa Clair Graham.

John Leon is survived by his wife Arlene Bentley Graham, daughter Palesa

Graham; brothers: James Hill (Barbara), Torrence Hill (Teresa), Nathaniel Hill (Felicia), Milton Hill and Curtis Wilson; sisters: Bobbie Jean Hill, Delores Graham, Veronica Hill, his beloved nieces, nephews, cousins, maternal aunts, his mother-in-law Clair Bentley, father-in-law Ray Bentley and brother-in-law Richard Bentley, his childhood friend Gerald Jordon and college roommate and friend Darek Robinson, a host of other friends, colleagues, professional and spiritual mentors. He was preceded in death by his sister Patricia Green, his mother Nancy Jackson Hill, father John Graham, beloved aunt and uncle Martha and Johnny Goble.

On September 1, 2021, Dr. John Leon Graham was appointed as Officer-In-Charge (Campus Leader) to State University New York at Postdam University located in Potsdam, NY. Prior to that he was the Advisor to the SUNY Chancellor and Student Advocate, Dr. Graham provided systemwide leadership in furthering SUNY System Administration's academic priorities and campus efforts to improve access, retention, and success of all SUNY students. He served as a member of the Chancellor's Executive Leadership Team and was the principal spokesperson for SUNY initiatives and efforts related to student life including policy development, review and consultation with SUNY Administration partners, campus leaders, and Chief Student Affairs Officers. This collaboration includes the Student Voices Action Committee representing every sector; University Centers, Comprehensive Colleges, Technical and Community Colleges to advise on critical issues and advance student centric priorities. He also worked closely with Student Assembly and served as the liaison on the Student Life Committee for the Board of Trustees. Dr. Graham provided oversight for all systemwide Educational Opportunity Programs including the Educational Opportunity Centers for Academic and Workforce Development.

Dr. Graham facilitated the coordination and sustainability of the Systemwide Student Mental Health and Wellness Task Force and the Food Insecurity Task

Force to ensure a safe living and learning community for all students. He served on the Steering Committee of the SUNY COVID-19 Re-Opening Task Force and Chaired the Student Wellness Working Group and the SUNY Systemwide Athletics Working Group. His administrative team provides coordination and support for students with Disabilities, Diversity and Adult Learners, Mental Health, Veteran and Military Affairs, Child Care Services, and Substance Abuse Services.

Previously, Dr. Graham served as the Vice Provost and Associate Provost for Student Affairs and University Life. He also served as a Provost Fellow for Academic and Strategic Development at System Administration. As Provost Fellow, he supported the implementation of SUNY's priority Completion Agenda and worked with campus leaders to advance the SUNY Excels Performance Improvement Plan goals and the refinement of the student effectiveness and the strategic Enrollment Planning Process.

Over the past twenty-five years, Dr. Graham has held faculty appointments and senior administrative positions at public universities in both urban and suburban environments. A consistent thread in his work has been a strong commitment to and focus on development of all students. He served as the transitional Vice President for University Advancement and External Relations at Cheyney University of Pennsylvania from 2015 -2016 and developed a comprehensive five-year fundraising plan to stabilize the institution for new leadership. He also served as the Chief Executive Officer from 2012- 2014 at the State University of New York – Manhattan Educational Opportunity Center he prepared adult learners for college-readiness. He was Interim Dean in the School of Business at Medgar Evers College – City University of New York from 2009-2012. He worked at Delaware State University from 1999 – 2008 as Assistant Vice President for International Affairs and Director of Study Abroad Programs and serving as Associate Dean in the College of Agriculture and Related Sciences.

Earlier in his career, Dr. Graham worked as a Foreign Service Officer with the United States Department of State and served as a member of the Negotiation Team - Commission on Sustainable Development at the United Nations. Dr. Graham lived and worked in Uganda for Africare, as the county representative. He completed his masters research in Zimbabwe and his doctoral research in Lesotho. His professional travel extends to more than sixty countries on six continents.

Reflecting on Dr. Graham's professional attributes and global explorations, he loved fellowshiping with family, friends, colleagues, and checking in with his boys from the heart of Harlem where it all began and remained until he answered the call into eternity. Other than family, friends, education, and youths his other love was basketball. From the playgrounds of Harlem to basketball tournaments in Michigan, pick-up games in Zimbabwe and Uganda to the Dover Air Force Base and the YMCA in Albany, NY, he enjoyed playing basketball immensely. It was his connection with people that made him enjoyed playing the game. He could and has named every player that he has ever played with. Over the years he has built close friendship with these players, and they have become a part of his family. A lifelong New York Knicks fan, "lose or lose", he has never missed cheering them on and was a walking billboard for the Knicks.

In the words of a great Gospel song, "When I look back over my life, and I think things over, I can truly say that I am Blessed, I have a testimony." John Leon accomplished in 57 years what many spend a lifetime aiming for and was far from completion. One of his main points expressed was, "we have come a long way." Dr. Graham was extremely gracious of how much he achieved, and he enjoyed assisting others with fulfilling their dreams. Leaving so many beloved memories to cherish, John Leon loved much and gave much. It is great joy to embrace what he was to so many people.

John Leon Graham was adored by family, friends, and coworkers and will be

immensely missed by all. You will remain forever in all our hearts. May you sleep in eternal peace until we meet on the other side of glory.

Previous Events

Visitation

DEC 11. 9:30 AM - 10:00 AM (ET)

ST. Andrews Lutheran Church (Dover DE)
425 North Dupont HWY
Dover, DE 19904

Visitation

DEC 11. 10:00 AM - 10:30 AM (ET)

ST. Andrews Lutheran Church (Dover DE)
425 North Dupont HWY
Dover, DE 19904

Funeral Service

DEC 11. 10:30 AM (ET)

ST. Andrews Lutheran Church (Dover DE)
425 North Dupont HWY
Dover, DE 19904

Interment

DEC 11 (ET)

Lakeside Cemetery (Dover)
558 North State Street
Dover, DE 19901

Tribute Wall

KL

“ I had the utmost pleasure to work with Dr. Graham. He saw me and my whole humanity as other's struggled to see us as black professionals in a predominately white institution. his leadership, humility, and pressence paved the way for many. He was/is a genuinely good human. One time we drove all the way from albany tandem to harlem unplanned. just two humans on parallel journeys i saw him a couple of times on 87 then when we gott off the west side high way. rest in power, we are so grateful to have shared a planet with you.

klarisse - April 07, 2025 at 05:13 PM

FB

“ To my beloved Baltimore cousin. I was unaware of your passing. The last time we had spoken to one another was 2020. We made a pack the we, the next family generation is to get together and enjoy one another. Days, weeks months now years has passed. The phone calls were unanswered. You have moved to your new Home. I will be my best to go onward upward. Thank you for the love and friendship. You were one smart and intelligent dude. I was always proud of you. Rest, my dear cousin. To God be the Glory!!



Floyd Brice - April 30, 2023 at 04:55 PM

KH

“ He was always gracious and very kind when he came to the Regional Food Bank.

My sincere condolences to the family and friends of Dr. Graham.

His life was well lived. One can do not better than to say, "Well done good and faithful

servant".

Kathleen Hayes



Kathleen Hayes - December 13, 2021 at 11:02 AM

PA

“ Leon was that student with the never ending questions, infectious smile and a life long prankster. He always lit up the gym when he arrived. I'm so proud to say I was one of his Teachers and see that he has given back so much to the future leaders of the world. God bless him and his family, Sleep in Paradise .

Phyllis Graham Anderson

Phyllis Anderson - December 11, 2021 at 05:33 PM

DF

“ Arlene and Palesa awesome service today. Leon had such an impact on my life and so many others. Love and Prayers

Derrick Fooks

Derrick Fooks - December 11, 2021 at 05:06 PM

JT

“ *To The Graham Family,*

I first met Leon at UMES and though we did not hang out much each time I saw him he always had a big smile on his face, a basketball in hand, and a profound thought or idea he wanted to share. I enjoyed our visits as I remember them to be refreshing for me. I am happy to have known him and so very proud of his accomplishments!

Expressing heartfelt condolences and prayers to the family. Joyce L. Terrell, PhD, ATC

Joyce Terrell - December 11, 2021 at 10:52 AM



“ *RIP Dr. Graham, thank you for leading and showing us the way!!!
You are missed, however, we will see you in the morning!!!
Hiram Ratliff*

Hiram Ratliff - December 11, 2021 at 10:39 AM

ST

“ *Brother Lee,*

There are many places I can start to share memories and happy times we've shared over the years through college, New York City and throughout our Careers as well as the advice and positive and wise advice that you always provided. I remember the time I drove after work straight from Virginia Beach, VA to Michigan State University when you obtain your Ph.D. It was just one of your Great accomplishments and it represented so much to so many people that you touched over the years. I had to be there for you.

As you always shared, the statistics showed that we weren't supposed to make it out of NYC or graduate high school and college and obtain career success. Brother Leon, you destroyed negative statistic and assisted many along the way to do the same.

You are a Dear Friend, Brother and inspiration in life and that will remain through all eternity.

It is truly hard to say Goodbye, so I will just say until we meet again! Until then, I will miss you greatly.

My thoughts and prayers will remain with Arlene, Palesa and the entire family!

*Sherwin C. Turner
Friend, Fellow UMES Alumni*

Sherwin Turner - December 11, 2021 at 09:03 AM

JO

“ *RIP John. Thank you for the guidance and friendship at DSU and beyond. You will be missed....*

James Overton

James Overton - December 11, 2021 at 07:10 AM

MD

“ This news come with much sorrow, but the light you possessed has not flickered. We became friends at MSU. What I remember most is your energy, your laugh, your smile and that crazy little dance you used to do. After graduating you went to capture all of your dreams. I would always hear your name from our mentor, on all the wonderful things you had accomplished. He was so proud of you. The time has come where we will not meet again on this path, but I know with your character we will meet again on a different path.
Your friend Melanie

Melanie Dukes - December 11, 2021 at 06:58 AM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Dr. John Leon Graham.



December 10, 2021 at 08:23 PM

JA

“ RIP Dr. Graham it was always a pleasure working with you. Your humor and intelligence you shared so selflessly will live on forever. You showed me so all the many challenges I could meet as you named me your MVE (Most Valuable Employee lol you may have told a few of us that:-)) Your dedication to serving others is priceless. I feel like I know Arlene and Palesa because of our many conversations about our families and the priority and importance of family. God bless you and your family. Gone but never forgotten. God bless you and your family.
Sincere regards Dr. Graham,
Jamie aka MVE

Jamie - December 10, 2021 at 07:36 PM

DB

“ To my college teammate and one of my dearest friends, Rest in Peace. I will miss our countless conversations and encouragements one to another as we moved on our career paths. I am blessed for our friendship and is motivated to continue building my family legacy as you so demonstrated your place in this world.

I remember meeting you on day one to UMES right off the bus with your trunk of clothes and beat street radio with your collection of NYC mix tapes, listening to you about your dreams of obtaining your Ph. D, traveling to Africa, and eating a lot of curry chicken.

Thank you for encouraging me to pursue my Doctoral degree and to stay the course with my career with all of your professional tips and strategies. You were and is a blessing to me. Your memory will continue to live in my Spirit as I live one day at a time and Loving my friends and family along the way.

*Love you and Miss you my Brother!
Your friend - Dr. Marvin L. J. Blye*

Dr. Marvin L. J. Blye - December 10, 2021 at 06:11 AM

DF

Words well spoken my friend. Truly a man before his time, full of ambition and always positive. He was a true great and a giant when it came to Encouragement for others. Rest Easy my friend. Leon you came along at a time when I needed a push to believe in myself. Thanks for all you have done. My heart is truly broken because you are gone but you will live on in our hearts forever.

Derrick Fooks - December 10, 2021 at 10:50 PM

AM

“ Dr. John Graham not being here on earth is a huge loss to all of humanity. Especially those who have not had the opportunity to meet this giant of a man who brought people together to get things done. My heart aches for his wife Arlene and daughter Palesa. My husband and I are very sorry for your loss. I will miss John's jokes and i will never forget his sincerity when he told me he would be my friend for life. See you on the other side my dear friend. Thank you for being my friend and bringing the best out of everything.

Anita Paley McLaughlin - December 09, 2021 at 04:24 PM

LO

RIP Mr. Graham ... a job well done ...!

Lorenzo Yoing - January 04, 2022 at 05:32 PM

LG

“ I am still in shock! What stands out in my mind about John was his unbridled enthusiasm for life and his commitment to others. Conversations with John were never superficial; they always ran an eclectic gamut of issues and topics. The void left by John's silence is mammoth. Gone way too soon!

Larry Green, formerly of Cheyney University

Larry Green - December 08, 2021 at 06:29 PM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Dr. John Leon Graham.



December 08, 2021 at 11:16 AM

DH

“ *Rev Ricky and Denise Hardy*



Denise Hardy - December 05, 2021 at 12:14 PM

DH

Praying for you

Denise Hardy - December 05, 2021 at 12:16 PM

CG

“ *CHERRITA D GIBBS-SLOAN lit a candle in memory of Dr. John Leon Graham*



CHERRITA D GIBBS-SLOAN - December 05, 2021 at 08:25 AM

CG

*Praying for the Graham family.
R.I.P. Dr. Graham!! Gone to soon. 🙏🙏🙏*

CHERRITA D GIBBS-SLOAN - December 05, 2021 at 02:54 PM

KP

John we met on the day you came for your interview at MEC, for the position of the dean for the school of business. When you realized that I am Jamaican your face lit up! We talked about Jamaican culinary dishes, music and such delights. You told me once you will be my friend for life and you were! My sincere condolences to your lovely wife Arlene and your beautiful daughter Palesa. Gone too soon my friend!

Kara Pearson - December 28, 2022 at 02:33 PM

JM

“ June E. Porter MSN,RN lit a candle in memory of Dr. John Leon Graham



June E. Porter MSN,RN - December 04, 2021 at 08:55 AM

JM

Rest Well Dr. Graham. You are gone too soon. Condolences to the Graham family. May your sorrow be lessened by the memories you have of your departed.

June E. Porter MSN,RN - December 04, 2021 at 08:59 AM



*So sorry to hear about the passing of Dr. Graham. I will remember our days at UMES and long talks. Rest in Peace my friend.
Dr. Nicole' Gale*

Nicole Gale - December 10, 2021 at 10:09 AM

SP

I am at a lost for words, I just recently saw you . My High School Buddy you will truly be missed. Rest Easy friend.

Sharon Pendergrass

Sharon Pendergrass - December 11, 2021 at 06:54 PM