

AUGUST 2023

OHIO STUDENT ASSOCIATION

OHIO

BLACK STUDENT EQUITY REPORT

*Ohio's Black students—including their
voices, needs, and interests—matter.*



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

About the Ohio Student Association (OSA)

The Ohio Student Association is a statewide grassroots organization led by young people and anchored by student-led chapters on college campuses across the state. OSA brings together young Ohioans from different backgrounds and with different experiences to imagine and fight for a better future. Since 2012, OSA has been a voice and a vehicle for Black students and their communities—organizing to combat racial injustice, inaccessible higher education, police brutality, and inhumane jail conditions, among other issues.

About the Research Collaborators

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FOREWORD

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down affirmative action in college admissions. The ruling calls our work, and the work of students and advocates nationwide, into question: Do universities need to continue prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion?

As this report shows, we're nowhere near being able to treat racial equity as an optional concern. Structural barriers in higher education can't simply be waved away. In fact, in the George Floyd era, in the midst of a global uptick in racialized violence, the experiences, anxieties, and needs of Black students demand greater attention than ever.

To provosts, presidents, and trustees, we ask: In this moment, how will you work to protect and serve the needs of Black students? How will you go further, embracing the power of universities to model racial equity both for students and for the broader world?

In Ohio, our actions can set the tone for the country. In recent years, we've experienced some of the most dramatic overreach from state politicians, who've used voter suppression and extreme gerrymandering to build a partisan supermajority. We've also shown what it's like to fight back. In June, we took to the Statehouse and stopped SB 83, which would've threatened students' and teachers' free speech as we know it. In August, in a special election on Issue 1, Ohioans voted resoundingly to protect direct democracy.

So yes—even if the courts aren't watching, we will be.

Prentiss Haney
Executive Director, Ohio Student Association
Wright State Class of 2014

Prentiss J. Haney



OHIO



BLACK STUDENT EQUITY REPORT

THIS REPORT BEGINS WITH A SIMPLE PREMISE— BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS MATTER.

In this paper, we focus on how Black students matter, from their perspective, in Ohio higher education. To better support Black students, policymakers, college leaders, and organizers must understand what is happening on the ground from students themselves. The words of the essayist and thinker, James Baldwin, are pertinent here: “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” This Ohio Black Student Equity Report is our contribution to ensuring that Ohioans face the state of racial (in)equity in higher education as it relates to Black students.

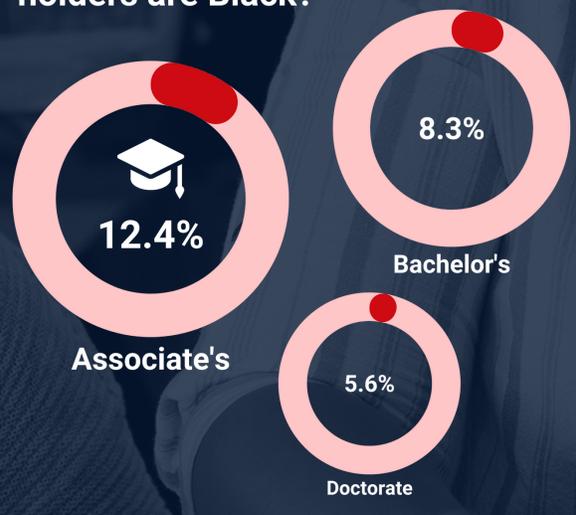
Over the past year, we have worked as a team of undergraduate student organizers, Ohio Student Association (OSA) staff and leadership, policy researchers, and education researchers to collect data and write a report that could provide a glimpse of Black college students’ experiences throughout the state of Ohio. In what follows, we provide insight with the most comprehensive report to date about Black college students’ experiences in higher education in Ohio.

MOTIVATING FORCES FOR THIS PROJECT

Black Lives Matter. The famous phrase-turned-widespread-movement has urged a generation to confront anti-Black racism and other threats to Black life across the globe. How has the state of Ohio shown that Black lives, indeed, matter? One way to examine the responsiveness of Ohio to the needs of its Black residents is to investigate how institutions of higher education are (or are not) meeting the needs of Black students.

Why study higher education to learn more about racial justice and the Black community? Consider the numbers. According to a report from Lumina Foundation, only 34.2% of Black Americans between the ages 25-64 have an associate's degree or higher, compared to 45.7% of the general population.¹ This gap is even greater in Ohio—only 28.3% of Black Ohioans attained an associate's degree or higher (compared to 42.6% of the general population).²

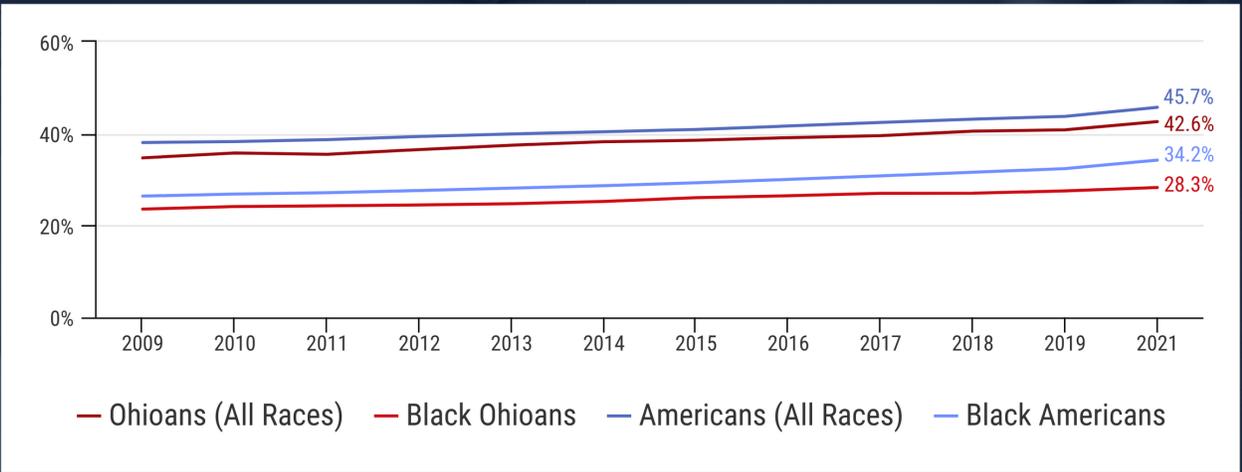
What percentage of Ohio degree-holders are Black?



Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2021

Ohio falls behind in educational attainment

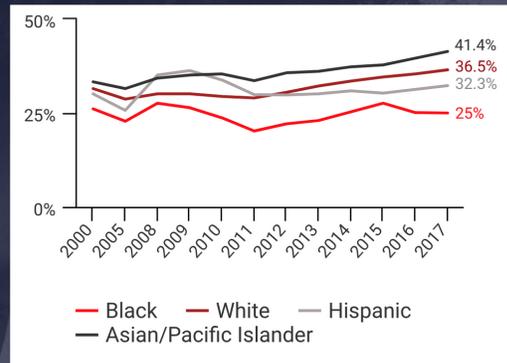
Educational Attainment Rate (an associate's degree or higher) of population aged 25-64



Source: Lumina Foundation

A close examination demonstrates that these outcomes result from structures, policies, and institutions deficient in serving Black students. For instance, Black students are more likely to be forced to drop out and, consequently, have college completion rates roughly 20 points lower than the average total at four-year institutions.³

Graduate rates at 2-year postsecondary institutions within 6 Years by race

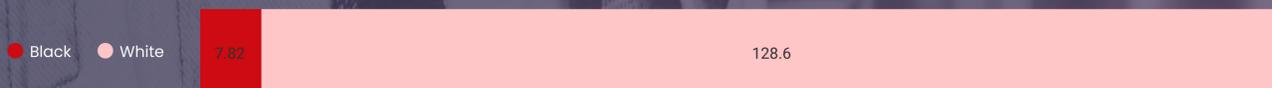


Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS),

Black students are more likely to work full-time as full-time students and depend on financial assistance.⁴ After graduating, they are more likely to take a job instead of enrolling in additional education (37.9% compared to 28.7%) and to have to take a less desirable position or one outside of their field (54.2% compared to 43.7%).⁵ These numbers are so important to analyze because outcomes in higher education contribute directly to racial inequality.

Racial wealth disparities remain a looming problem in society. Although the average Black family’s wealth has increased over the years, the racial wealth gap remains large; the average Black American household’s net worth is 70% lower than the average non-Black American household’s net worth,⁶ and the average Black American has roughly 17 cents for every dollar the average White American has.⁷ Studying higher education provides insight into different life outcomes, including those contributing to racial inequality. Indeed, those who graduate with a bachelor’s degree earn nearly 70% more, on average, than their counterparts with only a high school diploma.⁸ Over a lifetime, college graduates earn, on average, \$1.2 million more than their counterparts without a degree.⁹

The Racial Wealth Gap: How much in total assets are owned by Black families compared to White ones? *In trillions of dollars (Q1 2023)*



Source: [Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System](#)

Given the potentially crushing weight of student loan debt, higher education certainly is not a quick fix for disparities in wealth. However, a college degree can lead to higher-paying jobs and income that could increase the potential of building wealth and a better quality of life. This might also lead to greater overall well-being, from access to food, to health insurance, to housing security. Racial justice in college impacts racial justice off campus, and studying how higher education in Ohio is or is not serving Black students is essential to improving the well-being of Ohio's Black community.



POLICY CONTEXT

Across the nation and in Ohio, we have seen a barrage of attempts to censor the classroom and restrict universities' ability to support underserved populations. In the past several years, school boards, policymakers, and legislators have debated and put forth laws banning teaching so-called 'divisive concepts,' effectively placing an educational gag order on discussing systemic racism, among other topics. In 2021 and 2022, according to a UCLA Law analysis, 563 anti-CRT (Critical Race Theory) measures were introduced, and 241 were enacted across the nation.¹⁰

Through this movement, certain lawmakers aim to remove meaningful discussions about race, racism, and racial inequality from classrooms—consequently erasing identities and whitewashing history. With the threat of draconian bills stifling critical thinking and an honest education, the words and voices of Black students are even more essential to amplify.

An extensive history of research shows that glossing over race and promoting ‘colorblindness’ does not mitigate racism in our schools and in reality, can significantly hurt minority students.¹¹ Teaching and learning in Ohio without attention to race negatively affects all students but especially impacts Black students, given the Black community’s long and complex history in the state. For instance, consider the ramifications of teaching a history course with a

curriculum that does not engage with Black history or English courses that ban books by certain Black authors.

WILL THE NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON OR THE POETRY OF PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR— BOTH BLACK OHIOANS— BE REMOVED FROM CLASSROOMS?

Indeed, in 2022 we saw a record number of calls to ban books, which according to data from the American Library Association (ALA) was almost doubled nationally and tripled in Ohio compared to the year prior—most of which were written in the perspective of LGBTQ+ or racial minority groups.¹²

Efforts to evade race-consciousness have not stopped at class content and curriculum but have also extended to programming and policy. At least 22 states introduced legislation in 2023 that would attack diversity, equity, & inclusion (DEI) programs and initiatives,¹³ including Senate Bill 83 in Ohio, which was introduced back in March.¹⁴





In June, the United States Supreme Court overturned race-based affirmative action in admissions, which according to one estimate, would mean a 10% fall in the enrollment of Black and Hispanic students in select universities nationwide.¹⁵ Meanwhile, other forms of affirmative action, such as legacy admissions, which tend to disadvantage students of color who disproportionately make up first-generation college students, continue. Given this policy context, including an attack on inclusive support systems, our findings are that much more relevant.

WHY BLACK COLLEGIANS IN OHIO?

Race relations are a perennial problem in Ohio's predominantly White university contexts. Consider, for example, well-documented and publicized hate crimes at institutions such as Ohio State University¹⁶ and Ohio University.¹⁷ It is key that we learn more about Black student experiences and the nuances of them beyond the headlines.

This report focuses on Black students for a few reasons. First, consider the proportion of Black people in Ohio: at 13.2%, Black people are the second largest racial group in Ohio.¹⁸ Despite their numbers, evidence suggests that the state of Ohio has not prioritized investing in Black people's educational outcomes. Across racial groups in Ohio, Black people are the least likely to earn a college degree. According to the Census, 19% of Black Ohioans have a bachelor's degree or higher. This percentage is lower than that of their White (31%), Latinx (23%), and Asian (58%) counterparts.¹⁹ Furthermore, according to the Ohio Department of Education, only 15.7% of Black students graduated from college within 6 years compared to 44% of their White counterparts.²⁰

Black students succeed best when they have the resources and financial support essential for any college student. Black students are more likely to have more financial obligations to their families, making completing a degree more difficult. Black students also face unique racialized challenges in higher education across different types of universities. Across the country, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are chronically underfunded.²¹ Black students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) of higher education face racialized issues of navigating campuses with poor race relations and interacting with faculty, peers, and staff who might express anti-Black racism.²²

We believe that by making higher education more equitable for Black students, higher education can be more responsive to the needs of students across races. Our research suggests that when more Black students are given the chance to succeed, they can change their lives for the better and give back to their communities. Finally, our findings affirm the importance of accessible education and its vital role in moving Ohio forward.



HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Black students are not a monolith. We approached this research with the understanding that Black students are not all the same, have different experiences, and have unique identities that will shape their college experience. For example, gender will play a role in how they navigate and experience college. Additionally, other identities shape college experiences, such as sexuality, socioeconomic status, high school experience, and so on. In this report, however, we prioritize race in our analysis. The diversity among Black student respondents will also be seen throughout our findings.

Creating a more equitable higher education system for Black students will take great work and investment. Yet we must first have a better pulse on what is going on, on the ground, from students themselves. This project is the largest of its kind in the state of Ohio. The primary intent of this report is to amplify many of Ohio's Black Students' diverse voices. This project is not generalizable, but with 361 respondents, this paper can tell us more about various Black students' experiences in Ohio than any other report.

METHODS

Our research team developed a survey using student success, race, equity, and college access literature. Our research team developed a survey using student

success, race, equity, and college access literature. The survey was based on practitioner and theoretical literature, included 53 items, and employed a Likert-type scale in most cases. We used a snowball sampling technique to increase the likelihood of student participation on each campus.

This approach to data collection is a non-probability sampling technique. The first set of questions asked for general information about students' current status at their institution, such as whether they were first-year students or seniors or if they transferred from another campus. The second section of questions asked six specific questions about campus policing. Section three included eight items about financial aid. Section four addresses campus environment and support and covers sub-topics such as college leadership and administration, faculty, student relationships, mental health, basic needs, and policy.

SITES

About the Universities

Ohio is home to 14 public universities and 23 community colleges. In this report, we highlight the experiences of Black students at nine public four-year universities and three private universities. Institutions were selected based on OSA's presence on each campus and, therefore, the ease of distributing the survey to Black students on their respective campuses.

Note. Responses were received from students at Case Western Reserve University, Central State University, Cleveland State University, Kent State University, Ohio State University, University of Akron, University of Cincinnati, University of Dayton, University of Toledo, Wilberforce University, and Wright State University. A very small number of respondents (n=2) listed Tri-C as an additional institution they attend.

About the Students

Institutional Type

Historically Black College or University (HBCU)	108 students
Predominantly White Institution (PWI)	253 students

Percentage of First Generation College Students: 49.7%

Gender Composition

Gender	Percentage
Woman	55%
Man	39.5%
Non-binary	4.5%
Prefer not to stay	1%

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings and analysis provide a comprehensive overview of the results of our research. This section aims to provide analyses of data and offer insights about the research questions and the variety of responses from Black students who agreed to be interviewed and complete the survey. The study identifies patterns and trends among Black students. It draws meaningful conclusions about their experiences with several campus actors and internal and external pressures often disproportionately consequential for Black people.

The initial steps in the study involved analyzing descriptive statistics from data gathered to summarize the survey data collected over the past year. For this exploratory study, we highlighted key findings about the perceptions and experiences of Black students. Still, we caution readers not to interpret these baseline findings as generalizable. The descriptive analysis provided a snapshot of the perceptual data, enabling a better understanding of respondents' experiences.

ON BELONGING AND ENGAGEMENT

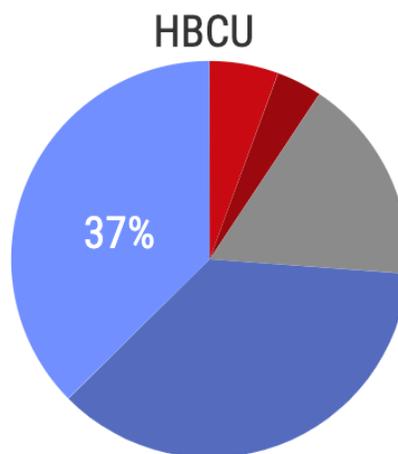
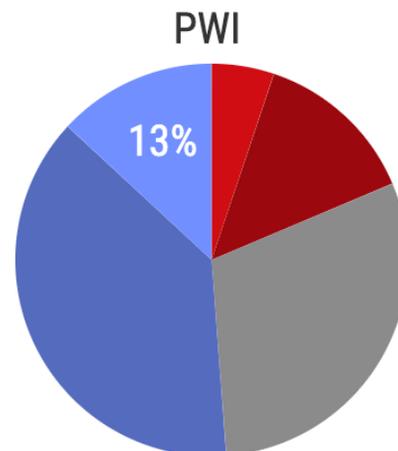
- Students attending HBCUs reported less discrimination not only in reference to their race, but also in reference to gender and sexuality.
- 46% of Black respondents at PWIs said that their racial identity led to added stress
- 67% of Black respondents at PWIs were either unsure or disagreed with the sentiment that their university valued Black students

In different ways, we asked students how they felt about being Black at their institutions. We were interested in whether they felt like they belonged and how race, and other identities, shaped their experiences on campus. We asked students, plainly, if they felt like they belonged at their universities. Across universities, 57% of respondents feel they belong at their schools. However, this metric varies quite dramatically when looking specifically at HBCU respondents compared to PVI ones. At HBCUs, 74% of Black students reported feeling like they belong, 17% were unsure, and 9% disagreed. At PWIs, 51% reported feeling like they belong, 30% were unsure, and 19% disagreed. We saw a similar trend across institutional types in our data. While 76% of HBCU respondents said they would recommend their school to a Black high school senior, only 59% of PVI respondents said they would do the same.

We also asked students if they agreed with the statement: "I believe that the university administration at my institution values Black Students." Across PWIs, 40% of Black students were unsure, and 27% of respondents disagreed with the statement. Across HBCUs, however, only 18% were unsure, and 15% disagreed with the statement.

Do Black students feel like they belong at their universities?

- 1 (Strongly Disagree) ● 2 (Disagree)
● 3 (Undecided/Unsure) ● 4 (Agree) ● 5 (Strongly Agree)



Although our study prioritizes race, we acknowledge that people have multiple intersecting and marginalized identities. We did, however, note that gender also impacted Black students' experiences across institutions. At PWIs, 53% of Black students reported feeling discriminated against or singled out because of their gender. At HBCUs, 18% of Black students reported feeling discriminated against or singled out because of gender. Further, Black students at HBCUs were less likely than Black students at PWIs to feel like gender added extra stress to their college experience.

16% of HBCU respondents reported feeling discriminated against because of their sexuality at some point in college, and 3% reported they regularly experience discrimination because of their sexuality. At PWIs, 24% of respondents reported feeling discriminated against because of their sexuality at some point in college, and 5% reported they regularly experience discrimination because of their sexuality. These findings concerning HBCUs' relative inclusivity across lines of gender and sexuality compared to PWIs are worth noting and exploring in further studies.

Students at PWIs also reported unique racial stressors. Nearly half of respondents (46%) who attended a PWI said that their racial identity led to added stress as students at their institutions, and only 26% of students disagreed with this statement. Further, while 62% of PWI respondents said that they never or rarely felt discriminated against because of their race, 25% responded sometimes, and 10% responded often or always.

ON CAMPUS POLICE

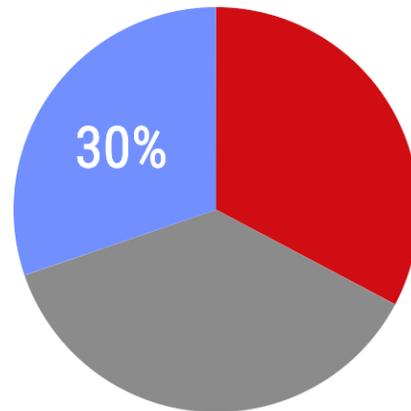
- 17% of Black students experienced a negative interaction with campus police
- 32% of Black students did not feel safer with the presence of campus police
- 21% of Black students were made to feel unsafe by campus police

Campus police are seen as a normal part of college campuses and the campus experience. Yet, increasingly, social justice-oriented scholars and activists have questioned the need for police on campuses.²³ Beyond the history of campus police violence aimed at Black people,²⁴ scholars have noted how campus police can create negative campus experiences and a hostile racial environment for Black students.²⁵ In this vein of research, we asked students about their experiences with campus police.

The perceptions of campus police were mixed. Interestingly, we found a three-way split in response to whether campus police made Black students feel safer, with 30% responding yes, 32% responding no, and the last 37% affirming that they sometimes feel safe. Further, the majority of Black students (83%) did not report having a negative experience with campus police. Despite the mixed results, the exceptions to positive experiences are worth highlighting.

Nearly one in five, or 17%, of Black students across universities reported negative experiences with campus police. Less than a third of Black students felt safer with campus police, and the findings also note that 21% of Black students reported feeling unsafe because of campus police. Also, 6% of Black students reported being detained by campus police, and 17% of Black students, nearly 1 in 5, had been asked for their ID by campus police. Although the negative experiences are fewer, quantitatively, their qualitative impact on many Black students' college experiences is worth noting and a concern.

Do Black students feel safer with police on campus?



● No ● Sometimes ● Yes

ON FINANCIAL AID AND EDUCATION DEBT

- 89% of students received financial aid
- 60% of students, at some point, were worried about their enrollment because of financial aid/money concerns
- 49% of students were worried about paying back student loans
- 35% of students stated that they did not receive help from their institution to understand their financial aid packages

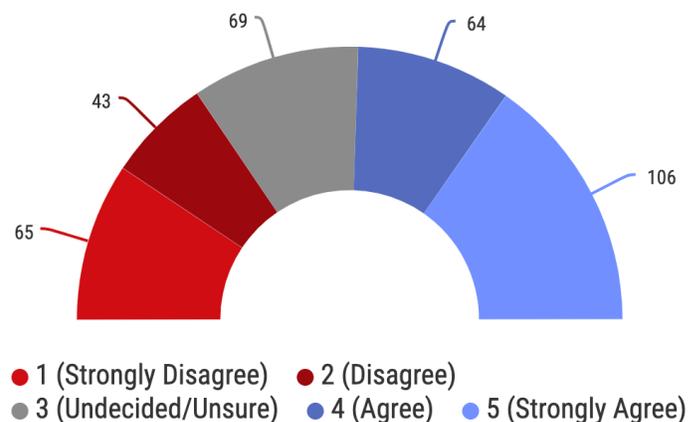
Financial aid plays a central role in the Black collegian's experiences. Nearly all of the students in the survey, 89%, received some form of financial aid from their institution. About three-fourths (76%) of the students in the survey received some need-based financial aid. These results speak to the importance of continuing to provide aid to Black students and the state of Black families' wealth in Ohio.

Financial background continues to matter for Black students. We asked students if, at any point during their higher education experiences, they were unsure if they would have enough financial aid to stay enrolled in their institutions. At 60%, most students replied in the affirmative—financial concerns are a pressing concern for Black students' persistence. And 30% of student respondents felt like their socioeconomic class and identity created added stress as a student.

But what of the role of financial aid offices? Encouragingly, 70% of students felt that their school's Office of Financial Aid was readily available to them. However, it is worth noting that more than a third of students (35%) reported that their institution did not assist them with understanding their financial aid package. This suggests that university enrollment and financial aid offices might invest in ensuring that Black families and students have access to institutional representatives that can help them understand the specifics of financial aid packages both as prospective and current students.

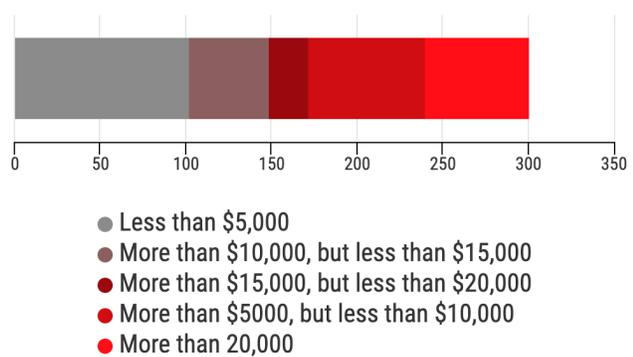
We also explored students' perceptions of student loan debt. Much research highlights how Black students, especially, are burdened by student loan debt and how such debt impacts their life outcomes and experiences.²⁶ The vast majority of Black students across Ohio, at 84%, agreed that student loan debt should be canceled. Among Black students who attended a PWI, 60% have taken on debt related to the cost of college. Among Black students who attended an HBCU, 46% have taken on debt related to the cost of college. Like many higher education institutions, HBCUs are not immune to the student debt crisis. Enhancing accessibility to higher education remains an important public policy problem to address, and within this policy perspective, it is critical for a more equitable society. This report's findings suggest that outreach programs, need-based aid, and scholarships should remain prioritized for both HBCUs and PWIs.

Are Black students worried about paying back student loans?



Nearly half of the respondents reported worrying about paying back their student loans. Further, less than half (42%) of respondents believed their institutions were worth the tuition cost and financial investment. This finding aligns with similar responses from students more broadly across institutional types.²⁷ This statistic, in particular, suggests that university costs are simply too high. In increasingly difficult financial conditions, institutions must continue reflecting upon how their degrees might translate into stable employment and security for students, particularly Black students.

How much education debt did Black students report having?



ON CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT & BASIC NEEDS

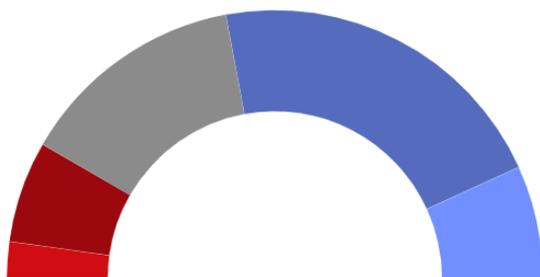
- Only 13% of respondents gave their current institution an “A” grade on how they are doing to support Black students.
- Approximately 33% of students gave their institution a B, and another 33% gave their university a C.
- Nearly 25% of students affirmed that there are indeed places that Black students should avoid on campus.

Campus environments impact collegiate life for Black students. The location of buildings and who facilitates or even dominates space are a part of belonging. Perhaps the most interesting dynamic of the findings was how students graded their institution versus their generally positive responses toward their knowledge of available resources. Some responses were indeed mixed. For example, 52% of students admitted that at some point during the school year, they had to skip meals because they did not have enough money, while 47% said that they had never had this experience. Nearly 71% of students were never unsure about housing or where to live during the semester at any point during the school year. However, 49% of students responded “yes” to not buying a required book for a class because it was too expensive, while nearly the same percentage of students (51%) responded “No” to the statement.

There is a dichotomy of experiences and perceptions of students' institutional environments and available resources that meet basic needs. Another example of generally mixed responses is that 53% of students said that they knew where to go on campus for free food, and 30% reported that they did not know where to go. Yet, the majority of respondents (75%) felt comfortable visiting a mental health professional who worked at their institution. At the same time, a quarter of students frequently listed White fraternity houses, White fraternity parties, and Greek Row as places to avoid in their campus community, suggesting that they are unsafe spaces for Black students.

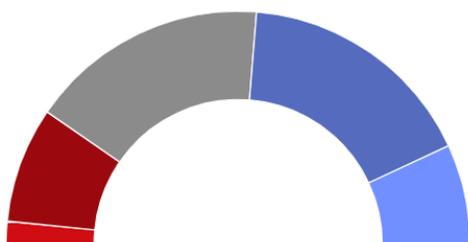
Respondents answer whether their university is a good higher education institution for Black Students

● 3 (Undecided/Unsure) ● 2 (Disagree) ● 1 (Strongly Disagree) ● 5 (Strongly Agree) ● 4 (Agree)



Respondents grade their campus for how well it supports Black students

● F
● D
● C
● B
● A



Student responses suggested that Ohio universities have an opportunity to improve campus environments for Black students and, at the same time, continue to promote the availability of resources like food pantries and funds for emergencies related to academics or personal needs. The survey responses also suggest that Black places, such as Black Cultural Centers and Black affinity organizations, matter to students.²⁸ While the role of university staff is partly to consider how the university can help foster and support safe place-making for Black students, student governing bodies (e.g., Student Government Associations) can also play an active role in encouraging and developing a more inclusive space for Black students. Student governing associations consider, discuss, and vote on various topics.²⁹ Student governing bodies and the university staff who supervise them can hold organizations that fall under their purview or work closely with others accountable for how they might perpetuate unwelcoming or unsafe spaces for Black students.

ON FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION

- Nearly 35% of respondents said they did not know where to go if they had issues with faculty members related to their identity, such as race, gender, and sexuality, and more than 25% of respondents were unsure.

• • •

- 42% of respondents believed that their institution’s administration values Black students. Another quarter of students did not agree with this sentiment, and a third were unsure/undecided.
- 54% of students believed at some point they were discriminated against because of their race, with perceptions ranging from “rarely” to “always.”
- More than half of students (57%) agreed/strongly agreed that it was difficult to find a faculty advisor.
- 45% of students were unsure whether mental health support staff on their campus were equipped to support Black students.

What did we learn about Black students’ perceptions of faculty and administration? Nearly half of the students who responded to the survey felt valued or seen by their institution. Easily identifying a faculty mentor, a typical expectation for many students, was reported as an obstacle for 57% of respondents. Also, other areas of student life, like mental health support, were a concern. For example, 61% of students confirmed they knew where to go for mental health support. However, only 31% believed mental health support staff were equipped to help Black students, and only 43% would feel comfortable actually seeing a counselor. An opportunity to support mental health awareness among Black students, including sharing where to go for assistance, is evident.

Institutional leaders can learn from Black students about their experiences inside and outside the classroom. Investing resources into Black student engagement could be a first step toward improving student perceptions of the institution. The Division of Student Life should lead these efforts. Despite the role of the Dean of Students becoming more administratively oriented over the years, engaging with students and building relationships with the students on campus is a hallmark characteristic of the role.³⁰ Working closely with the Division of Academic Affairs and entities like the faculty senate, the senior student affairs officer is perhaps one of the best persons to lead efforts to ensure Black students receive engaging academic and co-curricular experiences and reassure a healthy learning environment for Black students on campus.

STUDENTS SOUND OFF ON POLICY

We asked students about various critical issues shaping higher education from student loans to “Anti-CRT” legislation. It is relevant to note, however, that the survey was started before certain developments, notably the introduction of SB 83 and overturn of race-based affirmative action. Given increased media attention to such issues, students might have responded differently if we administered the survey now. Below are some of the key findings.



- 72% of students were confident that their university would not be affected by “Anti-CRT” legislation and policies.
- Yet, 74% said that they did not understand the context and purpose of an “Anti-CRT” bill.
- Also, 65% of students were unsure of whether “Anti-CRT” bills could negatively impact their higher education experience. Nearly 63% of students said that they learned about or discussed race/racial identity in some capacity in more than one of their courses.
- 63% strongly agreed student loan debt should be canceled.
- 36% of Black students who attended a PWI agreed or strongly agreed that racial identity should play a factor in admissions decisions, and 30% were undecided.
- Among Black students who attended PWIs, 31% were not confident that their university would find creative ways to recruit Black students if affirmative action was banned, and 37% were unsure about this statement.

The survey responses about student perceptions of public policy decisions for higher education show that policy matters to Black college students. However, some survey responses suggest that students did not fully understand institutional and state policies for higher education. These public policy decisions have potentially dire consequences for the conditions of Black college students. For example, the recent Supreme Court decision to restrict affirmative action in college admissions is a step toward limiting Black students' access to selective and highly-selective universities. Also, the Court's recent decision directly influences higher education policymaking and could negatively impact Black student enrollment and perpetuate fostering less racially diverse university campuses.



Altogether, we see that public policy decisions for higher education directly influence institutional policy development and management. Colleges and universities often respond to public policy decisions that impact their operations and lobby for change to benefit their position. Their work extends to the campus environment they want to promote and address students' needs. Therefore, higher education institutions are responsible for maximizing a welcoming and well-resourced student environment for the historically underserved and underrepresented.

Across universities, we found that Black students in Ohio looked at their institutions with only moderate favorability. Most students who participated in the study gave their respective universities a B or C. These responses are implicitly connected to the other less positive or mixed survey responses reported throughout the study. For example, data suggested that race and gender negatively impacted Black students' experiences. Sexual orientation and socioeconomic status appeared less of a factor in discriminatory experiences.

Students seemingly reported positive responses towards their perceptions and direct experiences with campus police. At the same time, for the quarter of students who had interactions with campus police, the majority of them reported being asked to identify themselves to campus police officers on multiple occasions. These experiences can be harmful and make Black students feel under surveillance and unsafe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We hope this report inspires creative ideas of action and policy for readers across higher education contexts. In what follows, we offer four high-level recommendations.

DEVELOP A STATEWIDE COLLABORATIVE FOR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Institutions of higher education in Ohio should not feel alone in their work of developing innovative and impactful strategies for supporting Black students. Consider the new and important work of the Level UP National Panel—a 26-member national coalition of organizations, researchers, professors, and leaders invested in increasing Black student enrollment.³¹ The state of Ohio might invest in a statewide collaborative, beginning with a convening of community organizations, higher education institutions in Ohio, advocacy organizations such as OSA, and faculty with expertise and interest in supporting Black collegians.

BUILD A SYSTEM OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CAMPUS POLICING

Especially in recent years, students at universities across the nation have called for divestment in campus policing and even the abolition of university police forces entirely.³² Recognizing these sentiments

from students, researchers and policymakers, including those from higher education institutions themselves, should reconsider the role of campus police. Confronting issues regarding policing, however, requires more than an email to the campus community or the creating a task force. Campus statements without action are often empty gestures toward racial justice.³³ Task forces without timely policy are just mechanisms to quell organizing, offering a facade of progress.³⁴

Research shows that students have varying opinions of campus police but consistent with our findings and other research,³⁵ Black students in particular tend to have higher incidences of negative interactions and lower trust in police. This may be worsened by a lack of transparency around processes following police misconduct as well as when administrations neglect student experiences and voices. For instance, among students, there seems to be a popular demand for increased student input in how funds are distributed—especially when institutions see ever-increasing police budgets while, at the same time, student services and centers experience significant cuts. For this very reason, OSA chapters have conducted their own research over the years, one of which is highlighted below.

2022 Student Survey from the Ohio Student Association (OSA)

**This survey had 218 respondents, mostly from Cleveland State or Case Western Reserve University, 17% of whom identified as Black.*

- 75% of respondents thought that the police budget should be impacted by student input.
- 55% of students did not know if campus police were adequately trained.
- 89% supported the idea of campus police wearing body cameras.
- 32% of students thought the police budget should be reduced, 6% thought it should be raised.
- 32% thought police are not equipped to handle mental health crises (44% didn't know either way).

ENSURE ALL OHIOANS HAVE ACCESS TO AND COMPLETE HIGHER EDUCATION

Many students in the survey reported struggling with basic needs and expressed concern about being able to afford college. As a remedy to this issue, we echo the recommendations of Policy Matters Ohio, a non-profit and non-partisan research think tank, on making college more accessible and affordable.

Policy Matters Ohio recommended the following: state-level leaders should; (1) increase the state share of instruction to at least 3% to better keep up with inflation and decrease tuition costs, (2) implement and fund programs such as the access challenge, which would have provided higher education institutions funding to support students in need and students historically excluded from institutions of higher education, and (3) increase funding for the Ohio College Opportunity grant program or OCOG (Ohio’s primary need-based aid program) and restructure the program to better include students attending more affordable higher education institutions.³⁶

Furthermore, many students reported concern about loans and being saddled with education debt. Given the prevailing disparities in racial wealth, higher education institutions should offer more opportunities for marginalized students to pursue student loan debt forgiveness—for instance, if they work in Ohio for a set number of years after graduation. If universities are not mindful of better financially supporting Black students, then they are also culpable for reproducing racial wealth disparities. The state of Ohio, similarly, must prove its commitment to racial equality in higher education by investing in different initiatives and better funding higher education as a whole.

**PROTECT BLACK STUDENTS
FROM HARMFUL ANTI-
CRT/ANTI-DEI LEGISLATION**

The Ohio Senate recently passed legislation, SB 83, that if made into law, would prohibit institutions of higher education from creating or implementing any mandatory programs or DEI curriculum (unless a DEI course is required for a certain purpose and an institution receives a special exemption).³⁷ It would also prohibit institutions from asking for diversity statements from potential hires and even block universities from making any stance on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs since they are deemed “controversial.”

Although this report did not focus on anti-DEI initiatives, it is clear that those who support Black student success in higher education should challenge these kinds of bills. Why? Defunding DEI efforts is a way to defund initiatives, programs, and staff that directly support Black students. Black students continue to be underserved by institutions of higher education in Ohio. The answer to this problem is not to defund and deconstruct what infrastructure currently exists to support them.

Most Black students who participated in the study said they did not fully understand the dynamics of anti-CRT legislation. It is essential that Black students, and students across races, are informed of legislation, gubernatorial executive orders, and other policies that are anti-CRT/DEI in nature coming out of the statehouse that can directly impact them and their experiences in college.

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