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Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Caretakers of Precious Treasure



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What are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)?

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are institutions founded primarily for the education of African Americans, although their charters were not exclusionary. In 1907, African Americans rarely had other options for higher education except a historically black college or university. In 2008, HBCUs are still predominantly African American and thriving because these institutions are successfully educating and graduating African-American students.¹

There are 105 HBCUs in the United States of America as displayed in Table 1. HBCUs enroll 14 percent of all African-American students in higher education, although they constitute only three percent of America's more than 4,000 institutions of higher education (US Department of Education, White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities). Although sometimes overlooked, HBCUs are an important option for high school students in the college search. These colleges offer benefits minority students may otherwise not receive. According to Fleming (1985), success and the feeling of belonging are intimately connected. Fleming's research showed that African-American students at historically African-American colleges and white students at predominantly white institutions experience similar rates of academic growth. Fleming indicated that African-American students at white schools achieve at only half the rate. One theory to explain this lack of progress is that African-Americans are left out of the informal networks that help others thrive academically and professionally. Both high school counselors and admission offices should work to highlight this option to potential students. An HBCU provides a student with faculty and staff role models, student peer role models and alumni role models for excelling during and after college.

African-American College Student Enrollment

Over the past 25 years the number of African-American students in college has more than doubled from 1,101,000 in 1982. In 2005, the majority of the 2,214,600 African-American students attended public institutions with 826,300 attending public four-year schools and 826,300 attending public two-year schools. As indicated in Table 2, the

Table 1. Summary of HBCUs

Type Institution	Number of Institutions Per Type	Percent of Total HBCUs
4-Year Public	40	38.09%
4-Year Private	49	46.66%
2-Year Public	11	10.48%
2-Year Private	5	4.76%

Source: US Department of Education, White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities

enrollment of African-American women in college was almost double the enrollment of African-American men. The number of African-American graduate degree earners has more than doubled since 1992.

African Americans in Institutions of Higher Education

Since 1990, the percent of African-American high school diploma earners and associate degree earners has increased. As noted in Table 3, the percentage of bachelor's degree earners has dramatically increased but still lags behind all groups combined.

About 14 percent of all African-American college students are enrolled in HBCUs. HBCUs awarded one in six master's and professional degrees earned by African Americans in 1999. Nearly 24 percent of the country's African-American students graduate from HBCUs with undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees each year. (US Department of Education, White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities).

¹ The authors would like to note that while many schools, including predominately white institutions, offer programs geared towards African-American or minority students, this article addresses the benefits and results associated with attending a historically black college or university.

Table 2. African-American Student College Enrollment by Selected Years

African-American Students	2005	1992	1982
All	2,214,600	1,393,000	1,101,000
Men	774,100	537,000	458,000
Women	1,440,400	856,000	644,000
Public	1,580,300	1,101,000	873,000
Private	634,200	292,000	228,000
Undergraduate	1,955,400	1,281,000	1,028,000
Graduate	233,200	94,000	61,000
Professional	26,000	18,000	13,000

Source: US Department of Education

Positive Campus Environments

Students that attend HBCUs benefit from increased levels of engagement with peers and faculty and faculty diversity. As a majority on the campus, students at HBCUs do not have to cope with assimilating in addition to other collegiate pressures. Racial minorities on predominately white campuses experience a greater range of problems in their efforts to adapt socially, psychologically and academically than do non-minorities (Fleming 1985; Paterson 1979). African-American students at many predominately white institutions (PWIs) commonly view campus climate as “chilly” (Allen, 1992; Bennett & Okinaka, 1990). Black students have found PWIs to be isolating because of the lack of a critical mass of black students, faculty and administrators (Britt & Turner, 2001). A myriad of research seems to credit increased levels of student learning and engagement to the nurturing environment of HBCUs (Flowers, 2002; Newby, 1982; Watson, 1998). Although African-American students at HBCUs find their academic environment to be more rigorous (Seifert, Drummond, & Pascarella, 2006) they are able to excel as a result of the increased support they receive. Research conducted by Seifert, Drummond, & Pascarella indicates that students at HBCUs interact with peers both in and out of the classrooms more often (2006). African-American students gain significantly more in cognitive and personal development from attending HBCUs (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Fleming, 1984; and Flowers, 1999). As a result they tend to have higher GPAs, higher career aspirations and more positive student-faculty interactions (Cokely, 1999). Bennett & Xie note that HBCUs promote African American graduation, with graduation rates higher than those for blacks at PWIs (2003).

Table 3. Educational Attainment of US Population by Racial and Ethnic Group

Highest Level Reached	All 2006	All 1990	African American 2006	African American 1990
8th grade or less	6.1%	10.4%	5.8%	13.8%
Some high school, no diploma	8.4%	14.4%	13.5%	23.2%
High school diploma	31.7%	30.0%	35.6%	27.9%
Some college, no degree	17.0%	18.7%	19.0%	18.5%
Associate degree	8.7%	6.2%	7.7%	5.3%
Bachelor’s degree	18.3%	13.1%	12.6%	7.5%
Graduate or professional degree	9.7%	7.2%	5.8%	3.8%

Source: US Department of Education

Increased Levels of Engagement with Peers and Faculty

In addition to academic success, HBCUs help cultivate strong bonds between peers and their community. Research conducted by Redd 1998; Roebuck and Murty 1993 suggests that HBCUs provide campus environments designed to nurture black students. Brown (2001) goes on to note that these colleges facilitate the preparation and participation of African Americans in society. Curricula at HBCUs include a greater integration of black history and culture than at PWIs (Bennett & Xie, 2003). Black students at HBCUs are more integrated into campus life, enjoy closer relationships with faculty and participate more fully in campus organizations and activities (Redd 1998; Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

Two annual national competitions demonstrate the strength of the HBCU bond. The Honda Campus All-Star Challenge (HCASC) event convenes the best student-scholars from all HBCUs in the US for a competition of the minds. A venue to demonstrate academic and cultural excellence, the annual Honda Battle of the Bands held in Atlanta (GA) features 10 HBCU bands. HBCUs also promote personal responsibility and self worth. University pageants that select a Ms. Morgan State University or Ms. Howard University or Mr. & Ms. College of Education are all designed to highlight the talents of students. The National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame Foundation Competition of Black College Queens’ criteria is based on the best creative thinking, public speaking, poise and grace among students elected by their peers. The mission of the National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame Foundation is to be a catalyst and partner for ensuring the stability, strength and excellence of the nation’s historically and/or predominately black colleges and universities.

Faculty Diversity

Students at HBCUs receive additional support as they are surrounded by a higher percentage of black faculty and administrators as compared to other institutions. At most PWIs, black faculty members often make up less than two percent of the full-time faculties (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2002). In 1999, blacks were 58.2 percent of all faculty at HBCUs. Additionally, whites made up 27.8 percent and 14.2 percent were other races (US Department of Education, 1999).

Within the ranks of full-time faculty members, African Americans represent five percent of all full-time faculty and half of these are employed at HBCUs. The proportion of African-American faculty in white institutions stands at 2.3 percent, the same as it was 20 years ago. For example, 48 percent of African-American faculty members compared to 58 percent of white faculty members were tenured in the fall of 1992 (US Department of Education, 1992-93).

The largest representation of African-American faculty is at public two-year institutions where in 1998, approximately 12 percent identified themselves as persons of color, an increase of seven percent since 1972. The lowest representation is among private four-year colleges and universities, where less than eight percent of the faculty identified themselves as members of an underrepresented ethnic/racial group in 1998, an increase of only five percent (Sax, L. J.; Astin, A. W.; Korn, W.S.; Gilmartin, S.K., 1999). See Table 4.

What do HBCUs Offer Students?

Cultural Affirmation

HBCUs have a rich history and tradition. Following in the footsteps of family members, there is history and prestige that particular HBCUs offer. There are several HBCUs that are internationally known, such as Hampton University in Hampton (VA), Howard University in Washington (DC), Morehouse College in Atlanta (GA), Spelman College in

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Table 4. Employees in Colleges and Universities by Racial and Ethnic Background, Fall 2005

Employees	All 2005	African American 2005
Professional executive, administrative, managerial	196,324	18,353
Faculty members	1,290,426	76,445
Instructional and research assistants	317,141	12,405
Other	655,994	63,060
Nonprofessional	919,202	158,452
Total	3,379,087	328,715

Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Background Characteristics, Work Activities, and Compensation of Faculty and Instructional Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, 2005

Atlanta (GA) and Xavier University in New Orleans (LA). This international recognition allows HBCUs to utilize resources of nationally-acclaimed guest lectures and speakers and host events that students may not have the opportunity to experience elsewhere.

HBCUs offer unique experiences of exposing African-American students to role models in their profession such as the Black Executive Exchange Program (BEEP) sponsored by the Central State University (CSU) College of Business and Industry in Ohio. The Exchange brings numerous African-American executives to campus to interact with and provide feedback to students. In addition, university convocation is held monthly as a university-wide forum for dialogue. CSU students, faculty and staff benefit from the wisdom of international and nationally-known convocation and commencement speakers.

Student Organizations

Students must experience a congenial atmosphere with the freedom and opportunity to interact with persons he/she chooses. Organizations based on personal development and academic majors such as NAACP, National Association of Black Journalists, National Technical Association, National Society of Black Engineers, National Community Pharmacist Association, and the Student African American Brother Organization can offer African-American students much needed support and social interaction with others who have common experiences, interests and goals. All CSU students are encouraged to become involved in at least one student organization or activity outside of classes. These student organizations enhance the campus community and provide students with the opportunity to develop responsibility and leadership outside the classroom. All student organizations are asked to hold one service project per semester.

HBCUs remain the institutions that demonstrate the most effective ability to graduate African-American students who are poised to be competitive in the corporate, research, academic, governmental, and military arenas.

Traditionally black fraternities and sororities provide an outlet for social and community service needs. Black fraternities and sororities are among the strongest political, social and cultural forces in the African-American community. The history of these organizations is rich with purpose and achievement (Stewart, G., Russell, R. B. & Brown Wright, D. A., 1997).

Showcasing Leadership Achievement

HBCUs offer many opportunities for students to test their leadership skills. CSU, for example, has more than 300 formal leadership roles for the more than 2,000 students who attend the institution. Student government, residence hall council and student organizations provide leadership roles for students to learn and lead at CSU. All CSU students are challenged to be prepared for leadership and service in an increasingly complex and rapidly-changing world.

Fulfilling workforce needs

HBCUs graduate far more than their share of African-American professionals. While the 105 HBCUs represent just three percent of the nation's institutions of higher learning, they graduate nearly one-quarter of African Americans who earn undergraduate degrees. HBCUs remain the institutions that demonstrate the most effective ability to graduate African-American students who are poised to be competitive in the corporate, research, academic, governmental, and military arenas. More than half of all African-American professionals are graduates of HBCUs (US Department of Education, White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities). Nine of the top 10 colleges that graduate the most African Americans who go on to earn Ph.Ds are HBCUs. More than 50 percent of the nation's African-American public school teachers and 70 percent of African-American dentists earned degrees at HBCUs. UNCF members Spelman College (GA) and Bennett College (NC) produce over half of the nation's African-American female doctorates in all science fields. HBCU Xavier University (LA) is ranked number one nationally in placing African Americans into medical school.

The first Time Magazine/ Princeton Review College of the Year, Florida A&M University, is an HBCU. It is the number one producer of African Americans with baccalaureate degrees. The June 3, 2004 issue of *Black Issues in Higher Education* shows how HBCUs dominate the upper echelon in terms of numbers of African-American graduates per school for the 2002-2003 academic year:

- Seven of the top eight producers of African-American baccalaureates overall were HBCUs.
- The top three producers of African-American baccalaureates in health professions were HBCUs.
- Eight of the top nine producers of African-American baccalaureates in mathematics and statistics were HBCUs.
- The 12 top producers of African-American baccalaureates in the physical sciences were all HBCUs.

Assisting HBCUs

UNCF, TMCF & NAFEO: Dedicated to access and opportunity

Although HBCUs are a major force in the academic world, they benefit from the support of other organizations. Three nonprofit organizations provide critical assistance to maintain HBCUs.

As the nation's oldest and most successful minority higher education assistance organization, the United Negro College Fund's (UNCF) mission is to provide financial support to its 39 member institutions, increase minority degree attainment by reducing financial barriers to college, and serve as a national advocate for minority education. UNCF institutions and other HBCUs are highly effective, awarding 25 percent of African American baccalaureate degrees. UNCF administers more than 400 programs, including scholarship, internship and fellowship programs, mentoring, summer enrichment, and curriculum and faculty development programs. Today, UNCF supports more than 65,000 students at over 900 colleges and universities across the country.

Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) is the only national organization to provide merit scholarships,

programmatic and capacity building support to 47 public HBCUs. More than 80 percent of all students enrolled in HBCUs attend TMCF member schools.

The mission of the National Association for Equal Opportunity (NAFEO) is as follows: to champion the interests of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and predominantly black institutions (PBIs) with the executive, legislative, regulatory and judicial branches of federal and state government and with corporations, foundations, associations and non-governmental organizations; to provide services to NAFEO members; to build the capacity of HBCUs, their executives, administrators, faculty, staff and students; and to serve as an international voice and advocate for the preservation and enhancement of historically and predominantly black colleges and universities and for blacks in higher education.

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) should take the important step of reaching out to

HBCUs that overall have low representation in the association. This increased collaboration will strengthen the college admission practices skills of HBCU admission professionals and the increased diversity among professionals will benefit NACAC membership overall.

Conclusion

HBCUs have a rich history and tradition. Research shows African-American students at HBCUs are more integrated into campus life, enjoy closer relationships with faculty, and participate more fully in campus organizations and activities. In 2008, HBCUs are thriving because these institutions are successfully educating and graduating African-American students, but additional support will only further strengthen HBCUs. There is evidence of excellence that supports the belief that HBCUs will be serving a diverse group of students for the next one hundred years.

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