

Preface

In the 21st Century, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are competing more directly with Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) for African Americans and students from the African diaspora. Until the 1970s, HBCUs provide the primary and often the only option for African American and other Black students to obtain an affordable education. Until now, HBCUs had nearly a guaranteed pool of students with competition mainly among themselves. Now many PWIs have aggressive campaigns to recruit and financially support this diverse pool of students. PWIs often have more resources and stronger infrastructures than many HBCUs. Most PWIs are not meeting the cultural, psychological and social need of their African American and other Black students. Thus a conundrum exists.

Institutions of higher learning must continue to strive to improve retention and graduation rates while being more financially efficient. The need to improve the efficiencies at HBCUs is often greater in order to maintain their records of strong graduation rates and entrance into graduate and professional degrees. Therefore, the need to rethink HBCUs' operations to ensure sustainability, retention and delivery to better serve their historic and new markets becomes even more critical. First, how do we expand HBCUs or enhance them physically, academically and financially? Secondly, how can HBCUs innovate to stay competitive?

One of the main problems with some HBCUs is that they struggle with balancing progressive approaches verses historical approaches, which at times are considered antiquated in a number of different areas including recruitment, academic offerings, professor's pedagogy and classroom environments. Market forces are causing many funders and politicians to rethink the classification of HBCUs and the impact of what this means for this group of institutions. Do HBCUs still need this institutional classification and/or do the requirements to keep the classification need to be redefined? These questions have implications on a number of different levels from private and public support, to degree attainment and financial stability.

Forthrightly addressing these questions should help HBCUs improve and more importantly better serve their students, faculty, staff and communities. HBCUs must continue to build strategic plans that capture the true essence of their missions

through forward thinking and innovation. While academic leaders, often from the Baby Boomer and World War II Generations, steeped in the history of HBCUs, have led the discussion, it's time for new voices, particularly Millennials and GenXers to set the agenda for determining how these institutions should innovate to stay relevant in today's society. These younger generations are known for constantly looking for ways to be efficient and innovative without compromising quality. Not only are Millennials and GenXers the next set of leaders, but they also come with diverse and meaningful experiences. They are the next generation of college executive administrators, i.e. deans, provost, and presidents. HBCUs and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) must deal with these issues now, but they must seek new voices to guide this process and invite these younger cohorts to help fix these problems. The need for such a call from millennials and GenXers makes the level of discussion presented in these chapters more pertinent than ever before.

This book is necessary because of the need to produce more research and engaging dialogue that will impact the success of HBCUs. Since the inception of this book in the winter of 2014, HBCUs have been receiving mixed reviews. Equally, PWIs have been facing protests because failure to meet the needs of Black students and to provide an environment for them to excel. Regardless of the institution, HBCUs are relevant and continue to produce leaders, scholars and professionals across disciplines. This book is not here to address HBCUs' relevance – though relevance is a reoccurring topic of conversation. This book specifically addresses student engagement and retention and the support systems and philosophies needed to help HBCUs thrive and deliver on their positive legacy.

As administrators at Howard University, we found it difficult to find benchmark studies and best practices from an HBCU perspective that would provide important information for implementing strategic university-wide initiatives. We know from our personal experiences that HBCUs have innovative and effective programs at departmental and university-wide levels. Yet, many HBCUs do not effectively tell their stories. The reporting of information as it relates to student engagement, persistence, retention and graduation rates is also scarce. It is easier to make assumptions about the issues and problems these institutions face when the information is ambiguous and left up to a variety of interpretations.

An example of disheartening interpretation of success of HBCUs was from the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who to some was considered one of the most important legal minds of a generation. Yet, his statement regarding the *Fisher v. University of Texas*, which relates to its affirmative action admissions policy, set off a storm of controversy. He said:

There are those who contend that it does not benefit African-Americans to get them into the University of Texas, where they do not do well—as opposed to having them

go to a less advanced school, a slower-track school where they do well ... One of the briefs pointed out that most of the Black scientists in this country don't come from schools like the University of Texas. They come from lesser schools where they do not feel that they're being pushed ahead in classes that are too fast for them. (de Vogue, 2015)

His comments can be interpreted in several ways, and many feel his comments are racist for attacking both Black students and most likely HBCUs. But he is also criticizing University of Texas' inability to support Black students holistically. Scalia is correct in one point that disproportionately, Black students excel at colleges and universities like HBCUs which are very different from University of Texas, a flagship state school. Likewise, University of Texas has a poor track record of graduating African American or Black students. However, his criticism that HBCUs are "lesser" is problematic. Are they under-resourced? Often yes, but so are many PWIs leading to recent closures of some. Can they improve their approach to teaching and learning? Yes, but so can PWIs. Are they lesser schools? No, and the image of such needs to change. Do they have different missions than University of Texas? Yes, most HBCUs are not comprehensive, research doctoral granting universities, and those that are still do an outstanding job graduating undergraduates in multiple disciplines who obtain employment, in addition to producing a disproportionate number of Blacks with doctorates in various disciplines and to producing research that addresses issues of the Black diaspora that go unexplored in most universities.

On the one hand, Scalia's statement is very racist. However, the statement is quite clear. There is nothing surprising about this statement since the Justice was referring to other reports that have made the same assertion. Aren't African American students better off at HBCUs? African American students can excel anywhere. However, having worked at PWIs and an HBCU, the evidence is clear with a few exceptions. Something is special about the nurturing and support students receive at HBCUs that can't be found at PWIs. The pride and confidence of HBCU alumni and the professional success rates of HBCU alumni outpace blacks from PWIs. The problem magnified here speaks to the larger issue that HBCUs do not do a good job, compared to other institutions, of telling their story and really showing not only their necessity, but achievements and outcomes. We must control our narrative, share our narrative and continue to improve our narrative through demonstrated progress to meet our missions.

Therefore, HBCUs need to start out the same way that the editors and authors of this book have decided to do. We need to share more of "the secret sauce" and share how new ingredients can and have been added to improve the recipe for success for the next generation of African American students. The need to start this dialogue is more important now than it has ever been. This book is a call to action. All HBCU

alumni, faculty, students and administrators need to find the opportunity to promote HBCUs. Find ways through recruitment, social media engagement and research to tell the story of the good that HBCUs are doing and have done. This call to action is very critical. It is clear that something needs to be done and must be done with immediacy. This book is not the end game; innovations happen daily. Many issues exist that need to be addressed by a format like this book. One of the most important aspects of all of these issues is persistence, retention and graduation. Hence the title being specifically targeted to student engagement and retention.

Student engagement is important because one of the main tasks of a university is to provide a service to students through meaningful engagement inside and outside of the classroom. Engagement is used broadly since it comes in multiples forms from mentorship, advising, university programming, student support services and classroom management. Particularly, students need various types of support for different aspects of the college experience. First-year students need different types of engagement compared to sophomore students. Students who are preparing for medical school versus those preparing for graduate school need different types of engagement. Regardless of the type of engagement the fact remains that students need to feel a part of a community that is invested in their development. This community involves all aspects of the institution from recruitment, admissions, faculty, staff, alumni, administration and university communication working collectively to evoke positive innovative change to not only engage students but to retain them.

Retention is another key component that is a major issue that must be addressed. With all of the scrutiny and new evaluation systems honing in on the number of students that enter, persist and graduate, retention has become a hot topic in the field of higher education. Therefore, it was important that the book addresses this particular issue as most HBCUs' rates vary greatly. If HBCUs not only want to stay relevant but be competitive, then they must work very hard in this area on their campuses. While retention isn't new, it now has been put on a bigger stage, where accreditations and funding are being tied to it. When this happens, there is a ripple effect that takes place because policy makers, legislatures, consultants and other stakeholders start to figure out ways to attach financial incentives to address the issue. With HBCUs, financial support and funding is key and cannot afford to be impacted negatively.

Ultimately, this book is a product of the call to action for HBCUs. The following chapters represent only a fraction of the ideas that are currently being generated. There are so many more ideas that need to be published, and they need more platforms like this one to do it. It is just a start. The process for having a call for chapters for this book yielded a mass influx of interested authors who want to publish their works. It is imperative that there be more opportunities to publish works about HBCUs.

This book is the beginning of more projects to come, and as editors, we hope that this will make an impact at various institutions across the country. The book may state for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, but these kinds of ideas can be used with Minority Serving Institutions, and the insights can be helpful in making PWIs more inclusive and supportive to all students, especially those from the Black diaspora. Through this larger body of institutions, comes a common reality that is experienced by all – student engagement must improve and retention efforts need to increase in order for any college or university to not only survive but thrive.

THE BOOK

This book examines the way HBCUs can use their administrations, organizational change and leadership to impact student engagement and retention. Its companion volume, *Setting a New Agenda for Student Engagement and Retention at HBCUs*, examines how retention can be improved at HBCUs focusing specifically on the academic affairs component. Each of these books have one goal in they are both trying to achieve sustainability through student engagement and retention. Both of these topics are very important to the field of higher education. It can be argued that for HBCUs, it is one of the most important priorities. Organizational leadership, structure and culture can have a significant impact on student engagement and retention. From the president, to the senior staff, to the administrators, to the policies and institutional culture, each of these components play a role in achieving the goals and objectives of improving student engagement and retention.

The HBCU Experience, especially for those who attended one, is often considered inspirational. Alumni and students consider these colleges and universities their homes, the places where their identities, especially as Black leaders and intellectuals, were nurtured. HBCUs are where their sense of commitment to uplifting the Black community and giving back to help others as they progressed in their own academic and professional pursuits was nurtured; where excellence was an expectation, but the support of the faculty, staff and administrators provided the tough love and encouragement necessary. Therefore, the first couple of chapters of this book explores the HBCU experience through the lenses of alumni and faculty teaching at HBCUs. The first chapter starts out with Drs. Stewart and Bryan, sharing through an autoethnography how the mission, vision and traditions of HBCUs are as relevant today as they were when founded. The importance of developing Black identity in which students understand who Black people are and offering a sense of belonging equips students to use that identity in situations where racist undertones and microaggressions without causation would otherwise tear someone down. The

character development in which principles of “each one teach one” and “reaching back while reaching up” are more relevant today when economics and class separate America including Black America more than ever.

The chapter from Dr. Tia Tyree and Christopher Cathcart (Chapter 2) allows the voices of alumni to be heard. The stories of the alumni provide a deeper understanding of the need for HBCUs to exist. So many politicians and educators do not understand the traditions of HBCUs, but the authors showcase from the alumni themselves that going to an HBCU is a life lesson about the diversity of the Black experience, the privilege of attending one and the support that goes into helping students stay and graduate. Dr. Kehbema Langmia (Chapter 3), an HBCU alumnus and an HBCU professor, makes a strong case for Debunking the Myth of Dependency. In other words, the discussion about the future of HBCUs is being framed wrong; it must be grounded in its original legacy. The purpose and function of HBCUs is not to be measured in terms of Western ideals, but they should be grounded and measured on their own terms and be true to their unique positioning. They must be fully grounded in the historical awareness in the African diaspora whether teaching science, math, engineering or technology or the arts, social sciences or professional programs like law and medicine or communications.

Whether organizations are built to be top-down or bottom-up, organizations must find ways to collaborate and engage all stakeholders. The biggest aspect of organizational leadership is the necessity to ensure that institutional goals are defined, clear, concise and achievable. It is necessary to explore how leadership can play a significant role to enhance student engagement and retention. In Chapter 4, Dynamic Leadership, Myron White uses a theoretical approach to engage the reader about using leadership to constructively align the strategies, goals, objectives, organizational culture, and effectiveness. Without these aspects, then changing organizational culture to impact how the institution enhances student engagement and retention cannot be accomplished. Chapter 5, Delineating Challenges and Opportunities for HBCUs: Why Continued Diversification is a Competitive Strategy, looks to use a specific goal of HBCUs to impact the student body that will change organizational culture. A goal of this magnitude takes specific organizational leadership that will transform institutional culture. Chapter 6, Benchmarking HBCU Efficiency, looks more closely at how to ensure the efficiencies improve at HBCUs. The chapter focuses on how HBCUs can and must maximize what is possible through what is available, efficiency. At the same time, HBCUs must ensure their investments return quality in student outcomes including financial indicators such as students paying back loans. A method which can be used is benchmarking through a combined quantitative and qualitative approach to discover colleges and universities who are both effective and efficient and are similar in mission. Chapters 7 and 8 discuss very specific ways institutions can leverage specific tools and resources to improve student engagement

and retention. Good leadership leverages important resources that provide a benefit rather than a hindrance. Specifically, faculty are important as they are the backbone of the university. It is important to find ways to share governance with them as they are key stakeholders. They have just as much invested as the students. In addition to faculty as a resource, the use of social media as an office tool is valuable to the way we need to communicate with students.

Financial support daunts many conversations and initiatives because without it, it can be impossible to make significant changes to institutions. These financial conversations happen at a variety of levels. On the one hand, finances are a major aspect to improving student engagement and retention. This is especially important when trying to scale programs to impact a larger audience. It can also hinder whether or not certain goals and initiatives will even be a priority. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 focus primarily on how HBCUs should use their internal and external financing options to impact persistence, retention and graduation rates. Institutions need to get ready for States to change their funding requirements for HBCUs. There is a new trend of performance-based funding that legislatures in various states that will have a major impact on HBCUs. As mentioned before, some HBCUs have low graduation and retention rates. If funding is based upon these rates, versus current standard, recruitment, then HBCUs will struggle as institutions with less state support. The Impact of Performance-Based Funding on HBCUs will explore this very issue. Performance-based funding has already impacted some HBCUs, but that number will grow over time. The chapter College Dollars and Sense examines the financial aid innovations that HBCUs have implemented to retain students. Financial support can be a significant reason for a student to attend or continue at an institution. This chapter is written by an HBCU alumna who runs one of the most successful scholarship consulting firms and non-profits in the country. The chapter Creating a Scientific Workforce Outta Fifteen Cents has information about what HBCUs have been doing to increase Science, Technology, Engineering and Math graduates on small budgets. External foundations have also been providing funds to institutions to conduct various research projects that benefit the faculty and the institution. These funds can also help impact undergraduate education, faculty development and organizational development. Each of these aspects have a direct connection with increasing student engagement and retention.

Case Studies serve a very important part of the book. Through all the information that is presented, there are still intrinsic issues that must be addressed and are unique to specific disciplines, fields, knowledge and outcomes. Chapters, 12 and 13 conclude the book by providing specific examples of efforts towards improving student engagement and retention from an organizational perspective. The chapter Establishing a Media Literacy Cognate at HBCUs explores how institutions can increase media literacy at their institutions. Each generation is more and more

inclined to use technology as their main source of information. This generation needs to be more prepared and skilled in media literacy. Therefore, to ensure that the next generation gets a better understanding of how information should be used and interpreted. Campuses must find ways to ensure that media literacy is incorporated in the academic sector. The chapter Strengthening HBCU College of Education proposes strategies for change in Colleges/Schools of Education. Students in teacher preparation programs need specific supports that include faculty, student input, high quality academic programs and faculty or professional mentors. These particular cases have ideas that might be piloted in other disciplines or incorporated across the board for all students to experience.

The hope is that these chapters both collectively and independently will not only spur discussions, but will encourage faculty, administrators and staff to take an active role in trying to implement the ideas put forth and share feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses posited here. Let the dialogue begin; this is a call to action.

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REFERENCES

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