

MODELS OF SUCCESS

How Historically Black Colleges and Universities Survive the Economic Recession



Shametrice Davis &
Walter M. Kimbrough, Editors

A VOLUME IN
CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES IN RACE AND
ETHNIC RELATIONSHIPS

Models of Success

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A Volume in
Contemporary Perspectives in Race and Ethnic Relationships

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How Historically Black Colleges and Universities Survive the Economic Recession

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FOREWORD

Charlie Nelms

The American system of higher education, comprised of nearly 5,000 institutions, is a richly diverse tapestry. We are fortunate to have such a wide array of options, including research universities, 2-year colleges, and for-profit institutions. Students and scholars come from around the world to the United States to attend our outstanding universities and colleges. Within this colorful tapestry, a cohort of institutions, the historically Black colleges and universities, affectionately known as HBCUs, occupy a unique position. They have transformed and continue to transform our society in myriad ways.

The honor roll of African American leaders who have graduated from HBCUs is impressive and cannot be recounted in all its fullness here, but it includes civil rights activists, presidential candidates, pioneering scientists, enterprising entrepreneurs, champion athletes, Nobel Laureates, Pulitzer Prize winners, Oscar, Grammy, and Tony recipients, and many presidents, chancellors, deans, and other HBCU graduates who have chosen to give back by serving in leadership positions. HBCUs have also educated numerous community leaders and organizers, preachers and teachers, countless citizens who make our lives better each and every day by their quiet heroism wherever they live. These graduates are at the heart of the HBCU success story, one that still remains largely underreported and unknown in the mainstream media. I've always believed that leadership is the art of

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creating opportunities. HBCUs have been leaders in cultivating talent by offering opportunities, and this has greatly benefitted the world at large.

Even so, contemporary media is replete with misconceptions and erroneous information regarding HBCUs. Many have even questioned their relevance in the tapestry of 21st century American higher education. Unfortunately, the media focus is often largely on what is wrong with HBCUs. Yet, HBCUs are not a monolith. For every wrong example of “what not to do,” there are a wide variety of examples of what is being done right, best practices, and the enormous difference HBCUs are making in the lives of their students, faculty, staff, and communities. My personal journey is but one example.

It was a special honor to be invited to write the foreword for this groundbreaking volume by young and dynamic scholars. As a graduate of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, the first African American to serve as chancellor of IU campus, the chief advocate for inclusive excellence while a vice president at IU, and former chancellor of North Carolina Central University, HBCUs have long played a formative part in my personal and professional development, and I have an unabashed commitment to their continued success. My journey from the cotton fields to university president would have been impossible without the opportunities afforded me by HBCUs. In a sense, I’ve come full circle, and perhaps this offers me a special lens through which to view HBCUs and their inimitable contribution to the tapestry of higher education.

During my leadership at NCCU, I wrote *A Call to Action*, in which I argued that the future of HBCUs would be determined by their continued relevance, responsiveness, and competitiveness.

Recent events in our world have only confirmed my unshakeable conviction that HBCUs should play a pivotal role in reshaping American education. HBCU’s outperform other institutions in graduating students with economic and academic challenges, and their leadership in doing so should be acknowledged with greater investments in their success. President Obama’s Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, has called the goal of regaining world leadership in per capita college graduates “the North Star for all of our education efforts.” HBCUs should be among those institutions taking the lead in educating more first-generation or low-wealth students.

In order to meet the challenge of reshaping American higher education, HBCUs must be the subject of evidence-based research that is free from bias or hidden agendas. The chapters in this volume strive to achieve this worthy goal. At the forefront of scholarly analysis is leadership stability and effectiveness. HBCUs that have difficulty attracting and retaining visionary leaders will have trouble staying the course, much less leading as change

agents. Institutions risk failure when they choose executives who preside rather than lead.

Among the many factors that create a successful higher education institution, such as enrollment stability, persistence and graduation rates, and accreditation status, the vital issues of fiscal solvency and debt are among those that cannot be ignored. There is no substitute for fiscal solvency: either you are or you aren't. Rising debt levels threaten fiscal solvency. On the other hand, alumni support helps support fiscal solvency. If an HBCU doesn't have the support of its graduates, whether in financial terms, referring and mentoring students, or advocacy on its behalf, its sustainability will usually be under threat. The quality and competitiveness of academic programs goes a long way in creating that all-important alumni support.

Philanthropy also plays a powerful role in maintaining sustainability. The more visible face of philanthropy is an endowment. Clearly, those HBCUs with healthy endowments will have greater options for sustainable growth than those without. And those HBCUs with high quality trustees who grasp the importance of philanthropy and fiscal solvency rather than trying to micromanage, can make or break an institution.

Philanthropy has long been the foundation of fiscal solvency of HBCUs. With exceptions, HBCUs are not the recipients of major gifts from high net worth individuals, but rather the recipients of community-based philanthropy. This is comprised of smaller gifts from men and women whose passion for education has led them to be philanthropists. Many of these donors will never see their names emblazoned on buildings, on plaques or benches. Yet, they continue to be the backbone of community philanthropy. They continue to give with the true spirit of philanthropy, a word that means "the love of humanity." Everyone can be a philanthropist in the context of one's capacity. It doesn't do us much good to deplore the gifts of some African American celebrities to wealthy, predominately White institutions. Authentic community philanthropy does not trickle down; it rises up from the roots, and it is what we mean when we say that genuine fundraising is actually "friend-raising."

To reach their fullest potential, HBCUs must learn to improve their diversity. This means the diversity of their leadership, their curriculum, their student body, and their alumni engagement. However, this diversification does not have to come at the price of compromising the mission of HBCUs. In fact, the chapters in this book all provide examples of how this is so. A new generation of scholars is using critical frameworks and an assets-based model of analysis, and their research is presenting substantive scholarship that also draws upon the early leadership of HBCUs. This kind of research is critical to the future of HBCUs, providing best practices for greater sustainability, visionary leadership, and an education that emphasizes giving back.

In the words of the legendary Morehouse president Benjamin Mays, “The tragedy of life is often not in our failure, but rather in our complacency; not in our doing too much, but rather in our doing too little; not in our living above our ability, but rather in our living below our capacities.” HBCUs have inspired so many to give so much. By fighting complacency and striving for the fullest use of their capacities, HBCUs will no doubt continue to lead as models of success and to contribute to the bright tapestry of American education for generations to come.

INTRODUCTION

James T. Minor

Never in the history of higher education has earning a college degree been so tightly linked to the economic well-being of our nation, the ability to meet workforce demands, national security, or an individual's ability to access the middle-class. Yet, the fastest growing groups of young people in America are among the least likely to graduate from college. The nation's model of higher education was originally designed to educate the elite. It must now, as a necessity, educate the masses which means a greater number of low-income students, those who will be the first in their family to attend college, and many who may be underprepared academically for college-level course work. Although the higher education enterprise has significantly broadened access, students from low-income families are still three times less likely to earn a college degree. Numerically it is virtually impossible to achieve the nation's higher education goals without improving completion rates among these students attending college in every postsecondary sector.

This reality requires a greater focus on the role institutions play in determining the chances of completion for so many students who begin college each year. Nationally, 41% of students who begin a 4-year institution do not earn a degree after 6 years; 66% do not complete at 4-year institutions with open admission policies. Today, virtually every sector of higher education operates under increased scrutiny to ensure the quality of degrees

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conferred, to connect those degrees to gainful employment opportunities, and to improve graduate rates. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are not exempt from the expectation to improve student success or the judgment associated with institutional performance as an important correlate. This volume focuses on successful leadership approaches, operational tactics, and environmental variables that contribute to success at HBCUs. Although some chapters explore historical aspects few, if any, institutions can simply rely on the past as a barometer for success today.

HBCUs have always occupied rarified air given their history, their unique institutional diversity, and because of their reputation for providing access and opportunity for students where it otherwise may not have been present. Consequently, some argue that because of the historical foundations, HBCUs should be considered a protected class of institutions deserving of ongoing support from federal and state agencies. Others, while acknowledging their historical significance, argue that HBCUs should be held to the same performance and accountability measures as any other postsecondary institution. What lies in the middle are a host of nuanced historical, political, economic and institutional variables that are not always easy to sort. What is clear is that there are fewer than 50 four-year public colleges in America with graduation rates over 50% while enrolling a student body of which at least 40% are Pell recipients. This data point alone clears a path for conversations about the contemporary role HBCUs must play as degree providers and the operational innovations that are likely to lead to dramatically improving student outcomes.

I hope this volume invites the higher education community and HBCU proponents to rethink success. Success is not necessarily an HBCU community with some high performing institutions and some struggling to remain solvent. Instead, success might be thought of as a community of institutions effectively serving a greater number of students—in diverse ways, in diverse environments, and with distinction. Success is not being over-reliant on subsidies based on institutional designation but creatively refining the blueprint for how to effectively educate students for the 21st century. This volume is about the way forward but it rightfully accounts for lessons from the past while considering new possibilities. In the national conversation that surrounds this text, two themes ring especially clear. One, almost every contextual variable in which HBCUs operate is considerably different today compared to just 15 years ago. And two, it is virtually impossible to realize significant gains in degree completion by simply teaching and learning and offering degree programs the same way we have for the last 50 years. College-goers today are nearly as likely to be 28 year-old returning veterans as 18 year-old high school graduates. Many more college students work more than 20 hours per week and now seek degree opportunities that fit their lives. Yet, the majority of campuses still

offer courses Monday to Thursday between 8 A.M. and 3 P.M. No data point is more telling than the fact that the University of Phoenix, a for-profit institution, is the top producer of African American baccalaureates while graduating only 12% of Black students 6 years after enrolling.

The challenges and opportunities are equally present for HBCUs. Looking ahead, I am always reminded of the founding of many HBCUs and the remarkable ingenuity required to build a university from such humble beginnings. Mary McLeod Bethune's story, as narrated by Shaun Harper and Tyran McMickens, is compelling. Institutions like Kentucky State University began with a \$1,500 donation and three teachers. Others began in the basement of churches, teaching under candlelight and inspiration fueled by an incredibly strong sense of purpose and mission. Arguably, HBCU leaders today have far more access to capital, technology, federal support, and significantly stronger protection of the law. This does not suggest that HBCUs do not continue to struggle for institutional equity. Yet, the future of HBCUs will depend much more on what happens internally than any external factor.

The authors contributing to this volume highlight how HBCU leaders, past and present, have summoned a strong sense of mission and exhibited exemplary leadership on behalf of students in need of a college education. The authors also take up a set of operational principles considered important for addressing common but critical contemporary challenges. Reforming developmental education programs intended to accelerate college-readiness for academically underprepared students, refining fundraising strategies, and reconsidering institutional identity are just a few. This book comes at a time when higher education conversations at the national level center on innovation, institutional transformation, and stronger accountability as important levers for radically improving student success. There is plenty of space for HBCUs on the frontier of this movement, an opportunity to lead, and an occasion to demonstrate to all institutions what has always made HBCUs great.

