

## 9 Beyond Respectable

Why Earn an Advanced Degree  
from an Historically Black  
College and University

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### Introduction

Since their inception, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have served as an integral pathway for African Americans to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities.<sup>1</sup> Today, there are currently 103 HBCUs in the United States, including public and private, four-year institutions, medical schools, and community colleges.<sup>2</sup> HBCUs, unlike other colleges, are united in a mission to meet the educational and emotional needs of African American students.<sup>3</sup> Actualizing this mission has allowed HBCUs to successfully serve undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, particularly those of African descent. However, while much is known about the contributions, experiences, opportunities, and challenges facing undergraduate students at HBCUs, there remains a dearth of literature on graduate and professional students in this institutional context.<sup>4</sup>

Palmer et al. indicated that HBCUs account for a large percentage of African American graduate degree earners, despite the fact that only 10% of African American students attend HBCUs for graduate study.<sup>5</sup> For example, in 2009–2010, HBCUs accounted for 7,419 master's degree earners. Of these students, 75% (5,563) were of African descent. Most of these degree recipients were African American women, at 73%.<sup>6</sup> These 5,563 master's degree earners accounted for 7.3% of all African American master's degree earners, a large percentage considering that only 56 HBCUs awarded master's degrees during this timeframe. Even greater doctoral degree representation is seen among HBCUs. HBCUs awarded 2,079 doctoral degrees in 2009–2010. Most HBCU doctoral degree earners, 62% (1,635), were of African descent. Of these students, the balance between male–female recipients is more equitable, with 51% of doctoral recipients being women.<sup>7</sup> Given that only 10,417 doctorate degrees were awarded to African American students during this period, HBCUs accounted for 15.7% of all doctoral degrees awarded to African Americans. These data are even more impressive when considering that only 29 HBCUs awarded doctoral degrees during this

timeframe.<sup>8</sup> Given these data, it is clear that HBCUs have a large impact on the overall percentage of African American graduate and professional degree earners, despite the limited number of institutions awarding these degrees.

Given the important role that HBCUs have in graduate and professional education and the limited knowledge regarding African American student experiences in these institutions, this study set out to fill this void. In particular, this chapter documents an exploratory study of graduate degree earners from HBCUs. Using data derived from master's, professional, and doctoral degree earners from HBCUs, we discuss factors that propelled students to attend HBCUs, their perceptions of the HBCU experience, and their overall assessment of the quality of the degrees they earned.

It is our hope that the information derived from this chapter will serve to provide more understanding of both the challenges and the opportunities facing African American students who attend HBCUs to earn advanced degrees. To provide a context for this discussion, the next section addresses relevant literature on African American students and HBCUs.

### Relevant Literature

#### *The HBCU*

In general, HBCUs are defined as, "Black academic institutions established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and still is, the education of Black Americans."<sup>9</sup> Still, the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education has also designated some institutions that were established after 1964 as HBCUs.<sup>10</sup> The year 1964 represents a historical marker because it was the year that the *Civil Rights Act* was passed.

Whether out of the spirit of philanthropy, necessity, or fairness, the reason HBCUs were created in America and have survived for, in many cases, more than 140 years, is that they filled a void in this country.<sup>11</sup> Historically, African Americans were denied access to White institutions because of segregation laws that were prevalent at the time most HBCUs were created.<sup>12</sup> For instance, less than 3,000 African American students in the United States were enrolled in higher education by 1915, and most of them were men.<sup>13</sup>

HBCUs have marked their place in the history of this country. For many African Americans, HBCUs have been the door to higher education and to middle class America. HBCUs have a tradition of providing access to African Americans who otherwise might not have been given the opportunity for a college degree.<sup>14</sup> Despite the historical impact of HBCUs on the education of African Americans in this country, an imbalance remains between these institutions and their White counterparts.<sup>15</sup> The issue of disparate funding between HBCUs and predominantly White institutions (PWIs) has been the subject of litigation in America's courtrooms for years (e.g., *United States v. Fordice* 1992). Despite great differences in resourcing, these institutions

have continued to provide educational opportunities to society's most marginalized and underserved students.

#### *Prior Research on Student Success in HBCUs*

Most studies on HBCUs have been conducted based on the linear comparisons of student success at both HBCUs and PWIs. Further, the experiences of graduate and professional students are often lumped into the narrative of the experiences of undergraduate students attending HBCUs. Within the context of this chapter, the academic success of graduate and professional students attending HBCUs will be framed based on factors of socialization, particularly peer and faculty interaction. Although research has demonstrated that student success is strongly related to satisfaction, the literature does not contain many studies examining the relationship between academic achievement and socialization at HBCUs. Roebuck and Murry noted that there is a general level of satisfaction and camaraderie among students who attend HBCUs that is not typically found among African American students who attend PWIs.<sup>16</sup> Harper, Carini, Bridges, and Hayek contended that student satisfaction and camaraderie remains a significant factor for academic success, particularly for students pursuing post-baccalaureate degrees at HBCUs.<sup>17</sup>

As seen in contemporary research of African American college success, the connection between institutional support and academic achievement has become an integral component of investigation. However, research focusing strictly on factors affecting advanced degree attainment for African Americans attending HBCUs remains limited. For African American college students, the level of institutional support either from peers or faculty members has a dramatic effect on academic development and matriculation.<sup>18</sup> While African American students pursuing advanced degrees, as a whole, continue to be underrepresented in postsecondary research, the HBCU experience continues to provide available context for inquiry. Kim noted that African American students at HBCUs are significantly more engaged in college experiences and develop considerably more cognitively and personally than those at PWIs.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the Department of Education stated that the purpose of HBCUs is to strengthen the African American community by providing educational programs to prepare future generations for anticipated global challenges.<sup>20</sup> On the whole, HBCUs remain educational environments in which African American students can come and actively participate in learning and obtain the engagement, support, and acceptance needed for intellectual growth and development. Presently, there has been a shift of the number of African Americans attending HBCUs to pursue advanced degrees as result of integration and increased competition from other institutions. Nevertheless, HBCUs still produce over 30% of bachelor degrees awarded out of 103 four-year colleges in this country.<sup>21</sup> Gray<sup>22</sup> noted that a large percentage of African American political leaders, scientists, engineers, lawyers,

doctors, and doctorate recipients continue to graduate from HBCUs compared to other institutional types.

#### *Factors Impacting Student Success*

According to Patton and Bonner, "the HBCU has not only served as the exclusive avenue of access to higher education for African Americans with its promotion of a participatory ethos and an open door admissions policy, but it has also provided immeasurable benefits by way of student leadership potential and social development" (p. 18).<sup>21</sup> Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, and Bowles pointed out that African Americans pursuing advanced degrees felt a sense of avoidance outside of the classroom from their White professors, as well as unintentional racism and social discomfort that caused them to miss out on research and teaching opportunities.<sup>24</sup> Kimbrough and Harper further detailed some of the negative experiences of African Americans while attending PWIs.<sup>25</sup> For instance, African American students expressed concerns about the lack of cultural awareness at their institutions. They reported that the faculty, staff, and student populations did not view them as full human beings with distinctive talents, virtues, interests, and problems. Similar to the undergraduate college experience, graduate and professional students also need to interact with peers and have faculty support for adequate academic development throughout the course of their matriculation. In general, the cultural climate at institutions of higher education greatly impacts retention and college graduation rates. According to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, institutions that have a nurturing environment have a great impact on student success.<sup>26</sup> Typically, African American graduate and professional students who attend HBCUs academically outperformed their African American counterparts who attend PWIs.<sup>27</sup> For the most part, their increased level of performance is a result of positive and supportive peer and faculty interaction.<sup>28</sup>

#### PEER INTERACTIONS

Swail, Redd, and Perna contended that satisfied and academically integrated African American students have well-established peer relations and few interfering social or academic problems.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, these students tend to perceive the university as being nondiscriminatory, and they perform well in their courses. According to several academic researchers, college students spend a majority of their time with their peers;<sup>30</sup> therefore, peer influences significantly impact the lives and academic performance of college students. Moreover, peer cohesion among college students increases their chances of obtaining a college degree.<sup>31</sup> Astin further asserted that there is a strong link between positive peer interaction and college success.<sup>32</sup>

Peer influence among college students can be positive or negative. Singham indicated that peers can have a negative influence on educational aspirations.<sup>33</sup> Ogbu stated that academically gifted African American male

students who disengage academically do so to gain group acceptance.<sup>34</sup> Thus, high-achieving African American males must learn to reshape their self-concept and balance peer relationships to accommodate their own academic development.<sup>35</sup> Specifically, the likelihood of college success increases with students who are able to navigate the campus climate despite incongruence in social values, norms, behaviors, and attitudes on campus.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, research shows that participating in on-campus activities can foster peer cohesion.<sup>37</sup> For African American males, when compared to their White counterparts, campus involvement more often than not yielded positive effects on graduation rates.<sup>38</sup> In addition to on-campus activities, peer support plays an integral role in the process of students motivating students. African American students who engage in pre-college programs have demonstrated a positive relationship between peer interaction and academic achievement.<sup>39</sup> Still other sources of support have been noted to be important for African American college students.

#### FACULTY INTERACTIONS

African American students' interactions with faculty members are an essential element in their successful transition to the college environment. Students of color who are emotionally connected with faculty or staff members in the institutional environment have higher retention rates.<sup>40</sup> African American students often look to faculty to be mentors or to serve as role models throughout their college career. Palmer and Gasman found that models/mentors played a fundamental role in the academic development of African American male students.<sup>41</sup> Particularly, several of the participants in their study articulated that they admired their professors, and particularly those with whom they shared interests. Moreover, the participants expressed the view that having faculty members from their racial/ethnic background produced a greater sense of self-efficacy.<sup>42</sup> African American students who have faculty members who care for, support, and encourage them are more likely to report positive self-confidence in their academic performance.<sup>43</sup>

African American students who interact with faculty members who are African American tend to develop a stronger ability to cope academically with program rigor.<sup>44</sup> Frank contended that many African American students aspire to achieve the status of their African American mentors.<sup>45</sup> Thus, faculty who are mentors act as academic, social, and career guides for this student population. Grier-Reed, Madyun, and Buckley reported a correlation between social support and overall success and preservation in African American college students.<sup>46</sup> Demaris and Kritsonis consider faculty and student interactions to be one of the powerful predictors of student commitment and success.<sup>47</sup> Davis also emphasized the vitality of the student-faculty relationship for the academic development of African American students attending HBCUs.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Davis noted that the type of interaction amongst student and faculty is what affects the student's academic performance. Faculty mentors can be inspirational to African American college students by

motivating, encouraging, advising, and acting as role models.<sup>48</sup> According to Sutton, mentoring has the potential to decrease students' feelings of marginality, increase their sense of personal significance (that they "matter"), and provide important validation of belonging to the campus environment. Unfortunately, few research studies have examined the relationship between African American college students' achievement and the influence exerted by faculty members, if any, on their college success.<sup>49</sup> Future research studies should determine the role of faculty influence of motivation and encouragement as it pertains to African American college students. The next section will explain the methodology employed for this study.

### Methodology

The researchers utilized ethnographic narrative case studies to extract themes from individual experiences. Ethnography is a qualitative methodology which entreats researchers to interpret phenomena from the perspective of individuals directly involved with or affected by phenomenal events, situations, or occurrences.<sup>51</sup> Ethnographic studies are built on the premise that conceptual, behavioral, and theoretical understanding is developed inductively, from the specific to the general.<sup>52</sup> Case studies using the ethnographic approach infer from three sources: 1) what people say; 2) the way they act; and 3) the artifacts they use.<sup>53</sup>

Participants for the study were contacted initially by email from among a population of ten individuals, known to the researchers, with earned graduate and professional degrees from HBCUs. Five individuals responded to the communication and agreed to participate in the interview protocol. The group consisted of three men and two women. Fletcher Thomas and Jaylon Reed earned juris doctorate degrees, while Conrad Johnson, Joyce Gayleston, and Lynn Davis earned doctor of philosophy degrees from HBCUs. It is important to note that pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity and privacy of the participants.

The interviews were conducted via email using a nine-question protocol. The open-ended questions focused on the decision to apply to and attend an HBCU, perceptions and misperceptions about HBCUs held by self and others, experiences at the HBCU and with respective staff, assessment of training provided, and benefits of degree pursuit at an HBCU. Participants were asked to respond to each question individually and as specifically as possible. Interview transcripts were examined for completion, quality, and connection to questions asked.

### Analytic Technique

Responses were then analyzed for themes using an ideas grouping approach. Auerbach and Silverstein noted that the ideas grouping approach is an inductive research technique where narrative data are conceptually linked through the restriction of preconceived notions.<sup>54</sup> This tradition is informed

by a modified grounded theory approach, where the purpose of the research is the generation of new/revised theory.<sup>55</sup> In particular, this analytic technique is most useful when little prior research exists on a given phenomenon. The ideas grouping approach, as articulated by Auerbach and Silverstein, employs several cyclical analytic steps.<sup>56</sup> First, statements or ideas are grouped together to create a master list of recurrent comments. Then, using a constant comparison method, these recurrent ideas are interrogated to determine the robustness of the identified theme. Recurrent ideas are then grouped together and linked conceptually to better understand relationships and processes. The result of this process is the expansion, elimination, and modification of recurrent ideas. This process results in the presentation of recurrent ideas, which, through this process, illustrates the most commonly articulated concepts portrayed through the participants' comments. The next section discusses the findings that resulted from this analytic process.

### Findings

An advanced degree is a great accomplishment regardless of which type of institution attended. When asked how they had benefited academically, professionally, and personally, each of the participants noted that the aspects of relationship building and the levels of emotional connectedness provided for, fostered by, and maintained in their graduate and professional programs had been the most significant factors of all. The following themes emerged and may serve to explain the perceived respectability of HBCU graduate and professional programs and experiences in the lives of those who have successfully matriculated. We have organized the themes into the following areas: 1) students' decisions to apply to and attend an HBCU; 2) misperceptions and challenges associated with HBCU advanced degree programs; 3) assessment of HBCU quality; and 4) experiences with HBCU faculty.

#### *Decisions to Apply to and Attend an HBCU*

As with most students at any institution, for the participants of the present study, the decision to apply to and attend an HBCU rested heavily on the confluence of location, program of interest, cost, and the availability of funding. Most participants were accepted to a number of predominantly white institutions, many of which met these fundamental requirements. However, they were drawn by convenience and cost to pursue their studies at HBCUs.

Joyce Gayleston provided insight into the importance of convenience in selecting an institution. Like others, attending a college that had a close geographic proximity to their homes or work were integral selection considerations. For Joyce, the proximity to her work was a core selection factor.

I was working at an HBCU so I enrolled in a graduate program [at that same institution] after completing a bachelor's degree on a part-time

basis. No. I did not apply to a non HBCU . . . Convenience was one of the main deciding factors. Also I wanted to improve my chances at advancement in the job market.

For Conrad Johnson, attending an HBCU was a meld of several college-choice factors, primarily driven by the history of HBCUs and cost. However, Conrad was also drawn to the institutions for high-quality faculty members with extensive expertise in his field of study:

I decided to attend an HBCU because of the historical significance of the institution. I attended all HBCUs from bachelor's to doctorate. In terms of graduate study, first for the master's and it was an opportunity to go for free. It was free because I received a Florida State University System fellowship. However, I was also motivated by the national reputation of Florida A&M as a whole as well as stellar faculty within the college of Arts and Sciences. They were nationally renowned, were published researchers. For my PhD, I attended Morgan State. I selected that institution due to costs and more importantly, because of the faculty . . . they had all served as college presidents and accreditation grants, and that was my goal, to study under giants.

With respect to the importance of cost, these findings were echoed by Fletcher Thomas, who cited "cost and potential scholarships" as his primary college-choice factors. These factors also served as a driving force in college selection for other students. For instance, Jaylon Reed cited cost considerations as one reason for attending an HBCU, but also noted he attended an HBCU to benefit from a supportive learning environment. He stated, "There were many factors. The most important factor was the environment. I needed one conducive to learning and inviting. Other factors included location, cost, and history."

Based on the responses of the participants, for some participants, the ultimate decision to attend an HBCU rested on more abstract and less tangible factors. Perceptions of the availability of encouragement and support, the opportunity for fair admission based on a holistic view of the student (i.e., scores, grades, research interests), and the history of the institution were also noted as important factors in the final decision, even despite fears and reservations. Lynn Davis stated:

I received my undergraduate and first master's degree[s] from an HBCU and my second master's degree from a [PWI]. I really wanted to remain at the [PWI] to attain my doctoral degree . . . I felt that the department chair and faculty believed that I would not complete the doctoral program successfully . . . I decided to apply to an HBCU where I could interact with people of my own skin color and [be] given a fair chance . . .

Lynn's comments complement those from Jaylon Reed and Conrad Johnson, who noted that they wanted to attend HBCUs for a supportive learning environment and for the historical significance of the institution. Thus, while college selection for HBCU students is based upon more common factors such as location, faculty quality, and convenience, the college-choice process was also heavily influenced by the desire to attend an HBCU for their advanced degree.

#### *Misperceptions and Challenges Associated With HBCU Graduate Programs*

Students based their decisions to attend graduate and professional programs on a number of factors, and many of their perceptions and the perceptions of others are influenced by society, both negatively and positively. Participants indicated being concerned, at least initially, that attending an HBCU for graduate and professional education deprived them of both cultural and experiential diversity, as well as opportunities for engagement both during the course of study and after graduating. Jaylon Reed indicated that for both potential students and their future colleagues, "the overall perception of African Americans . . . often clouds the true quality of an HBCU education." He noted that many negative perceptions about the HBCU experience were erroneous. One perception is that HBCUs are not diverse; he noted that "my law school was the most diverse law school in the nation for two years. In fact, the law school was 54% Caucasian. I think this swing in numbers and the interest of those individuals to protect the values and perception of their own education is aiding to bring this stigma to rapidly increasing halt."

All participants were aware of misperceptions and stereotypes about the quality of education at HBCUs. Fletcher Thomas noted concerns about the perceptions of HBCU quality. He stated, "At HBCUs, the opportunities for high-level work and advancement are limited because most business decision makers lack the foresight or courage to hire and/or retain HBCU graduates." Conrad Johnson also echoed the comments from his fellow HBCU graduates, noting that stereotypes existed about the quality of HBCU graduates. Further reinforcing this point, Joyce, like her counterparts, stated, "People assume that the programs at HBCUs are not good programs. Professors are not good teachers and ill prepared. People also assume that a 'standard' curriculum is not taught at an HBCU." In all, most participants noted that such perceptions were ill-informed stereotypes, not indicative of the quality of education received at an HBCU.

That being said, this is not to say that HBCU graduates do not face challenges in their educational experiences. One participant, Lynn Davis pointed out her discontent with the lack of resources available on the campus of the HBCU. Davis indicated that the necessity of utilizing the library consortium and contacts at other universities to secure research materials was wildly

different from her research experience while attending a PWI. In essence, library holdings were limited, requiring students to rely upon interlibrary loans from other institutions. She noted that the time delay associated with such systems can inhibit creativity, momentum, and can lead to frustration.

#### *Assessment of HBCU Quality*

While recognizing the negative perceptions employers held about HBCU quality, Fletcher noted that such perceptions would erode: "those individuals who believe HBCUs do not produce high caliber students will become the minority as long as HBCUs maintain change at competent programming by way of funding and private and legislative financial support." Further, he noted that "many individuals who [think negatively about HBCUs] have never stepped on the campus of an HBCU or worked side-by-side with an HBCU graduate. HBCUs educate not only African American students, but students from all over the globe. In the 21st Century, many progressive business leaders understand the need for diversity."

Fletcher stated that employers who were willing to take on HBCU graduates benefited from well-educated individuals with a strong work ethic, experience in working with diverse communities, and fresh thinking. He contends that employers and colleagues that he has encountered in his career are "impressed with HBCU graduate programs mainly through [the] experience of working with an HBCU graduate and through conversations in which they gain more insight about the similarities between [PWI] and HBCU programs."

Conrad Johnson also noted that perceptions of HBCUs challenged graduates during the job search process, but that prospective employers were usually impressed with the quality of HBCU graduates once they had an opportunity to interact with them. Similar to Fletcher, he attributed the excellence of HBCU graduates to a strong work ethic, noting that they had to work harder, longer, and with higher quality than others in the workplace, but that it made them better hires.

When Joyce was asked about the quality of education she received, she commented, "Very well. I have been able to compete with others who are graduates of schools such as Penn State and University of Texas." Comparing the quality of education to highly selective PWIs was a common comparison made by the respondents; Conrad also compared his degree from an HBCU to other institutions such as Arizona State University and University of Maryland.

Lynn Davis contends that it was the training she received in her master's program that truly prepared her for her intended career path, but credits portions of her academic and professional success in her doctoral program and her decision to attend an HBCU. She stated, "I believe that HBCUs produce an excellent quality of students who are able to compete with students from [PWIs]." She explained that this quality is a result of an academic

"environment that allows African American students to establish their identities, expose them to African American culture, and provide a foundation that will allow African American graduates to make informed decisions in a world that is still filled with racism and prejudice."

In all, interviewees agreed that attending an HBCU for their graduate and professional training was a rich and unique experience. For instance, Fletcher Thomas credited his training experience with preparing him for "thinking beyond societal norms." He contends that his training "helped me understand that breaking barriers . . . [is the] most important step in succeeding." Jaylon Reed credits his experience with providing him "many opportunities for exposure" that have served him very well in his career. Overall, respondents' perceptions of the HBCU graduate and professional student experience illustrated a high regard for HBCU academic quality.

#### *Experiences With HBCU Faculty*

Respondents all agreed that the faculty they encountered during their graduate and professional studies were competent, caring, compassionate, and invested in their students both professionally and personally. Jaylon Reed had postsecondary experiences at both White institutions and HBCUs. He provided a comparison of the interactions with faculty, noting that at the White institution, "the academic venture did not extend beyond the campus or the classroom." In this experience, he noted that the only exception was limited to one African American professor who worked at the PWI but had a commitment to serving the needs and wellbeing of African American students. Jaylon noted a marked difference between faculty-student interactions at HBCUs and PWIs. In terms of his HBCU experience, he stated:

*My experience was amazing. As expected they [faculty members] cared. They were available beyond office hours and often invited us into their homes for additional interactions. They seemed to know that my future mattered and they passionately accepted their role in the development of that process.*

Joyce noted that professors took time out to establish relationships with students, stating, "I knew most of the professors." Similarly, Conrad Johnson also extolled the accessibility of faculty members at his HBCU. He noted that he had many high quality relationships with faculty. In this light, he stated the following:

*The interactions with faculty were excellent because they came with practical knowledge as having served as college presidents. They were very challenging, they challenged us to produce scholarship, be relevant thinkers, but really, they challenged us to be like, you might not be at University of Maryland or Arizona State, but you can produce quality*

work. There were a lot of engagements outside of the classroom, we had time to sit down and engage with them outside of the classroom. To meet at Starbucks, to laugh, clown, go through papers. I don't think I would have had that in another program.

Such comments were common among participants. For instance, while Fletcher praised HBCU faculty as being "competent and compassionate," Gayle stated that her interactions with faculty were "Very positive. Very good relationships. Very good instruction and preparation in the degree program." In all, participants noted that they were pleased with the commitment of HBCU faculty. Their comments illustrate that these faculty members are dedicated to their respective fields of study, to high-quality interactions with students, to encouraging students to reach their highest potential, and to communicating to them that they "mattered."

## Discussion

Overall, findings from this study contribute important knowledge to the African American graduate and professional student experience at HBCUs. This study showed that students attend HBCUs for a variety of reasons, including location, cost, and convenience. However, beyond these common rationales for college choice, respondents also indicated that they attended HBCUs as a result of their historical contribution to African American communities as well as the supportive environment fostered within these institutions. This finding is understandable, given that HBCUs have long served African American students when other institutions of higher education refused to do so. Further, these institutions are known for providing a college experience typified by a supportive environment, diversity, and dedication to serving the needs of the African American community.<sup>57</sup>

Findings also indicate that, while students often select HBCUs for graduate and professional school, because they are HBCUs they are aware of challenges associated with those decisions. Respondents noted that there are perceptions among employers that HBCU programs and faculty are not of quality. In particular, many employers also perceive that HBCUs do not teach the "standard" curriculum. These erroneous perceptions of HBCUs are obstacles to graduates in the workforce who, when vying for jobs, are often second-guessed and underestimated. It is possible that some of the negative perceptions of HBCUs are the byproduct of resourcing issues faced by these institutions. For example, one participant did note that obtaining access to library materials was more difficult, as students were reliant upon interlibrary systems to attain resources from other institutions.

That being said, respondents overwhelmingly lauded the quality of education they received at HBCUs. They noted that the programs were academically rigorous, that faculty members had exemplary qualifications, and

that the environment was affirming. Specifically, students noted that HBCUs instilled within their graduates a strong work ethic that served them well in the workforce, enabling them to overcome misperceptions of HBCUs and to excel among their co-workers. Several respondents attributed this circumstance to faculty members who were encouraging and maintained high standards for excellence. In doing so, faculty members invested in relationships with students, taking extensive time inside and outside of class to talk with students, mentor them, discuss their future goals, and to illustrate that they "matter." Research from Sutton illustrated the multiplicity of benefits derived from faculty who communicate that students have personal significance (that they "matter").<sup>58</sup> Sutton noted that this increases their sense of belonging in the institution, leads to enhanced validation, and increases their overall satisfaction with their academic experience.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, prior research has shown that faculty members who invest in such relationships better prepare students by providing them with an enhanced confidence in their abilities<sup>60</sup> and greater levels of academic preparation.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

The Historically Black College and University has long been heralded for the production of African American baccalaureates. Despite the limited number of institutions offering post-graduate educational and professional opportunities, a significant number of African American advanced degree earners have matriculated through HBCUs. As such, research specifically focused on HBCU post-graduate students and degree earners is imperative to understanding the usefulness, utility, and necessity of HBCUs in today's ever-changing workforce climate. It is important to give voice to these institutions, these programs, and the students who study there. It is equally important to allow the students to speak for themselves. Hearing the voices of individuals who have matriculated and graduated from HBCUs informs the fields of education, workforce development, leadership, and psychology as well as policymakers, legislators, and governing entities about the impact of these institutions. Furthermore, such research highlights the programmatic needs and systematic inequalities faced by HBCUs and subsequently suffered by the students who study there. Finally, studies such as this highlight the existence of stereotypes and misperceptions applied to HBCUs and their students both during matriculation and after receiving their degrees.

## Notes

- 1 Allen et al. 2007; Gasman et al. 2010; Palmer and Gasman 2008.
- 2 U.S. Department of Education 1993
- 3 Roebuck and Murry 1993; Palmer and Wood 2012
- 4 Palmer, Hilton, and Fountaine 2012
- 5 Palmer, Hilton, Fountaine 2012

- 6 Digest of Education Statistics 2010a
- 7 Digest of Education Statistics 2010b
- 8 Digest of Education Statistics 2010c
- 9 Roebuck and Murry 1993, p. 3
- 10 Roebuck and Murry 1993
- 11 Swygert 2004
- 12 *Sweatt v. Painter* 1950; *Hawkins v. Board of Control* 1950
- 13 Allen and Jewell 2002
- 14 Swygert 2004
- 15 Swygert 2004
- 16 Roebuck and Murry 1993
- 17 Harper et al. 2004
- 18 Harper 2010
- 19 Kim 2002
- 20 Department of Education 2008
- 21 Kim and Conrad 2006
- 22 Gray 1998
- 23 Patton and Bonner 2001
- 24 Johnson-Bailey et al. 2009
- 25 Kimbrough and Harper 2006
- 26 *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 2009
- 27 Hubbard 2006
- 28 Hubbard 2006
- 29 Swail, Redd, and Perna 2003
- 30 Gibson 2005; Horvat and Lewis 2003; Hubbard 2005; Newman and Newman 1999; Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky 2008
- 31 Astin 1993
- 32 Astin 1993
- 33 Singham 2003
- 34 Ogbu 2003
- 35 Barclay 2001; Brookins 2000
- 36 Astin 1993
- 37 Pascarella and Terenzini 1991
- 38 Pascarella 1985
- 39 Hubbard 2005; Palmer and Gasman 2008
- 40 Grier-Reed, Madyun, and Buckley 2008
- 41 Palmer and Gasman 2008
- 42 Palmer and Gasman 2008
- 43 Russell and Arwater 2005
- 44 Frank 2003
- 45 Frank 2003
- 46 Grier-Reed, Madyun, and Buckle 2008
- 47 Demaris and Kritsonis 2006
- 48 Davis 1994
- 49 Allen and Smith 2008
- 50 Sutton 2006; Moore, Ford, and Milner 2005
- 51 Dobbert 1982
- 52 Fetterman 1989
- 53 Spradley 1979
- 54 Auerbach and Silverstein 2003
- 55 Charnaz 2000; Glasper 1998
- 56 Auerbach and Silverstein 2003
- 57 Kim 2002

- 58 Sutton 2006
- 59 Sutton 2006
- 60 Palmer and Gasman 2008
- 61 Davis 1994

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