

11 Emerging Themes, Questions, and Implications for Professional Education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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Researchers have touted that Minority-Serving Institutions, especially HBCUs, empower, encourage, and push their students to fully participate in American society.¹ This rhetoric is especially evident regarding the HBCU's role in graduate education, particularly in professional programs of study. The primary objectives of this monograph are to: (1) provide a critical review of the historical nature of professional programs at HBCUs and the programs' impact on a global society; (2) provide context about the experiences of Black doctoral students in professional programs, outcomes for professional degree enrollment and attainment, student-faculty relationships, research opportunities, and the role of faculty in socialization processes for promoting positive Black doctoral student development and professional growth; and (3) address the future of professional education at HBCUs and what fundamental aspects are needed to ensure their survival, competitiveness, and growth. Given the historical sociopolitical policies and practices in the US higher education system, which at one time deemed Black men and women unworthy of postsecondary education and training and excluded them from full participation,² this volume is particularly noteworthy, as it examines the historical and contemporary significance of HBCUs, especially in producing Black doctorates. In its analysis of professional education, this work further confirms the continued relevance of and need for HBCUs in the 21st century and their global impact. The remainder of this final chapter recaps the monograph's salient points on areas of study including law, education, medicine, and social work, the experiences of Black doctoral students in professional programs at HBCUs, and HBCU advocacy. Implications for the future of professional education at HBCUs are offered.

The Elite Professions

HBCUs have long been at the forefront of shifting and creating societal change, and their law schools are no exception. HBCU law schools do not just produce lawyers but generate leaders who are primed and ready to

advance the cause of civil rights with the same passion and commitment of previous generations of graduates, faculty, and administrators. Many social advancements that have been made by African Americans can be credited, in large part, to HBCUs and their graduates. Just one example cited is Thurgood Marshall, a Howard University alumnus and the first African American appointed to the US Supreme Court.

Regarding HBCU education doctoral candidates, this volume argues that expanding the current model of recruitment, mentorship, development, and retention of the education doctoral candidates could potentially result in more teacher educators who serve as role models, leaders, and eventual policymakers. Today's 21st century K-12 classrooms are microcosmic representations of the increasingly diverse population that characterizes much of the nation. It is imperative that Black teacher educators train future teachers to create learning environments that enable student members to engage in a dialogue reflective of the unique sociocultural experiences that they bring to the setting.

In the field of medicine, this text maintains HBCUs have played a critical role in leading the charge of meeting the nation's goal to create a minority health professional pipeline to guide the future of America. HBCUs are uniquely equipped to foster the academic growth and success of culturally aware premedical, medical, and allied health professionals. While their academic rigor may mirror those of mainstream graduate medical education institutions, their missions often reflect meeting the needs of medically underserved communities of color. This monograph also raises the issue that historically Black health professional schools need to be cognizant of developing new models of sustainability and partnering opportunities in order to be strategic and proactive, rather than reactive. The traditional approach to leadership selection, which has too often been internal and relationship driven, needs to balance with retention of institutional memory by bringing in personnel with new experiences and concepts of innovation in a rapidly changing world. One such successful model cited of a merge creating a novel partnership of an HBCU with a research-intensive institution is the Emory University/Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia.³

One of the more salient concepts this composition suggests is that social work education at HBCUs should be considered in the elite professional degree category (MSW/PhD), necessitated in the demands of the profession and the needs of individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds. HBCUs are in the forefront in establishing programs that not only make education and training available to Black students, but have developed a curriculum that makes them specifically knowledgeable and competent in Black issues. A particular point made is that HBCUs are able to position fieldwork opportunities for their graduate students directly within the urban and rural Black communities they hope to serve. For example, social work students at Howard University concentrate in Community, Administration, and Policy Practice and are required to take a required Resource

Development course that "provides students with knowledge and skills in strategic planning for resource development, program planning, grant proposal writing, financial management, entrepreneurship, and community and institutional capacity building and multi-level fundraising . . . [with] special attention given to the unique experiences and challenges faced by organizations in African American communities and other communities of color."⁴

Researching the HBCU Doctoral Student Experience

Presented in this work are research study findings, personal narratives, and theoretical analyses about the experiences of Black doctoral students in specific disciplines, outcomes for enrollment and degree attainment, relationships with faculty and advisors, research opportunities, and the role and socialization processes in promoting positive Black doctoral student development and professional growth. By paying particular attention to the HBCU setting in the more elite professions, it attempts to inform the reader of Black student trends in this area, including outcomes and experiences at HBCUs that could prove critical to matriculation and completion of professional advanced degrees for future students. This work also offers an understanding of some of the personal and professional challenges with which current and future Black students must contend, as well as strategies and best practices for faculty and administrators to best support these students.

Given the limited research on graduate students at HBCUs, this text showcases Black students' unique experiences attending professional degree programs at HBCUs. It highlights the essential support structures that might ultimately aid in retention and persistence, a better organizational fit, appropriate career decisions, and better expenditure of individual and institutional resources these students need to succeed. Hard to reach subgroups at HBCUs, including Black men, often succeed because faculty members take time during and after class to mentor scholars. Faculty do not simply work with students within the confines of the classroom but take time after class, including weekends, to support their efforts—acting as surrogate parents, confidantes, and academic advisors—playing a critical role in the lives of graduate and professional students.

Support during and after graduate and professional school is also important, particularly for Black students who depend on faculty members to help chart and catapult their career paths. These aspiring physicians, dentists, and pharmacists need access to individuals from similar ethnic and racial backgrounds in order to discuss how to navigate homogenous workspaces where they may encounter stereotypes and misconceptions. After graduation, relationships between HBCU faculty and former students continue to foster conversations on professional development and future goals and aspirations. Without positive feedback and support from faculty members, HBCUs could struggle to retain Black graduate students. For instance, Fountain's study on Black graduate and professional students and faculty

relationships determined that doctoral student-faculty engagement was positively linked to student persistence and a best predictor for positive experiences.⁵

Similar to faculty-to-student relationships, peer-to-peer relationships play an equally significant role for students at HBCUs. In school settings, students encourage each other to set high expectations and meet academic benchmarks. Researchers have confirmed that these peer relationships have helped graduate students overcome school-related challenges that impact attrition rates and can alleviate stressors associated with meeting academic benchmarks.⁶ In addition, student cohorts provide opportunities for students to develop interpersonal skills, learn to work in small groups, and collaborate on research opportunities. Partnering on research projects may be particularly important for graduate and professional students that attend HBCUs because of limited departmental and university funding. Overall, HBCUs offer these students competitive and nurturing settings that encourage students to work together before and after graduation.

In regard to research training and research mentoring at HBCUs, this monograph stresses the importance of accentuating the relationship as well as the method utilized to increase research self-efficacy through appropriate research training. Such emphasis motivates HBCUs to find additional analytical methods designed to increase diverse researchers, as well as researchers with diverse cultural perspectives. This monograph distinguishes itself from other works; it neither makes efforts to reveal disparities between doctoral student achievements at HBCUs versus predominantly White institutions, nor does it compare the experiences of students at one HBCU over another. The editors and contributing authors collectively recognize that the influences that promote (or challenge) success among HBCU Black doctoral students in professional programs, independent of comparisons, are important and necessitate continued examination and visibility of HBCUs in the larger higher education conversation.

Advocating for HBCUs

Finally, this book addresses the future of professional education programs at America's HBCUs. An underlying objective of this work is to serve as a champion of advocacy for the continued necessity and relevance of the HBCU. The HBCU has and continues to serve as a bold catalyst in the development of Black advanced professional degree holders, thus adding to the success of higher education, the economy, and to the civic and social order of future generations in America.

While we can continue to see some progress, with HBCUs graduating more Black doctorates over the last 30 years, such progress has been relatively slow. Between 1977 and 2000, there was a 1% increase, from 3.8% to 4.8%, respectively.⁷ And, even as late as 2010, Blacks' share of earned doctorates was 7.4%, considerably lagging behind that of White students,

74.3%.⁸ Additionally, much of the research that actually has examined Black doctoral students has not necessarily investigated the implications of an HBCU setting.⁹ And, even when it has, the aforementioned research often concentrated on Blacks in traditional PhD programs of study and less on professional programs, such as medicine, law, and social work.¹⁰

Moreover, today's HBCUs actually face lower Black student enrollments. Prior to the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, 90% of Black college-going students attended HBCUs.¹¹ However, after the passing of the *Brown* decision, Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) began extending admission to more and more Black students. And, by the early 1960s, the number of Black college students attending HBCUs had decreased from 90% to 70%. This continued and by 1980, only 20% of Black college-going students were enrolled in HBCUs.¹² By 2000, that share had declined to 13%, and it stood at approximately 9% in 2015.¹³

Notwithstanding, recent data suggest that HBCUs continue to play an important and substantial role in the educational achievement of Black college students. For example, 50% of all Black public school teachers graduated from HBCUs, and more than a third of all Black college students who graduate with degrees in the natural sciences receive their degrees from HBCUs.¹⁴ The statistics are even more noteworthy when considering production of Black doctorates, especially in professional disciplines. Thirty-three percent of all Blacks with a PhD in either science or engineering received their undergraduate degrees from HBCUs.¹⁵ And, in 2016, HBCUs served as steadfast leaders in producing professional doctorates in general (i.e., medicine, law, veterinary medicine, etc.); Howard University, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Meharry Medical College, Texas Southern University, Southern University Law Center, and North Carolina Central University ranked first, second, third, fifth, seventh, and eighth, respectively.¹⁶

Implications for the Future of Professional Education at HBCUs Future Research

Despite years of minimal funding, HBCUs continue to play a significant role in expanding Black academics and professionals. In addition to exploring student experiences, future research should focus on institutional and programmatic efforts at HBCUs. For instance, what policies, programs, and practices do graduate and professional schools at HBCUs offer that foster student engagement and a sense of community on campus? How do HBCUs build partnerships with community organizations so their students have the opportunity to apply their coursework in a real-world context while simultaneously contributing to their community? Also, as an emerging global society, what aspects of Black doctoral and professional students' experiences impact or foster global learning?

Another implication that has emerged from this volume is a deeper and more robust discussion about professional education at HBCUs. Indeed,

while there has been research on doctoral education at HBCUs, albeit limited, and a stronger body of research on Black undergraduate student experiences at these noble institutions, there is scant literature that has documented the impact of professional education at HBCUs. In fact, to our knowledge, to date, this is the only volume that has focused exclusively on professional education at HBCUs (i.e., law, medical, and education) and the students enrolled in these critical professions.

Strategic Planning and Policy Considerations

The findings from this text also have implications for strategic planning and policy. For example, HBCU leaders and professional program administrators must consider how the mission of the HBCU has changed over time. Though the historic mission of these institutions was to educate Black men and women—who racism and segregation often excluded from participating in postsecondary educational opportunities in the same manner as Whites—one must consider how the HBCU is currently situated within today's higher education landscape and what that means with respect to Black people. A recent study revealed Black graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities felt more supported while in college and are thriving afterwards than are their Black peers who graduated from predominantly white institutions.¹⁷ That tells us that the unique mission and commitment of these schools to the education of Black people must not be overlooked, but examined critically within today's society. HBCU presidents have agreed that contemporary missions for today's HBCUs should communicate HBCUs' responsibility to provide access and opportunity to Black students, as well as offer opportunities to prepare students for leadership.¹⁸ This sentiment should then be emphasized in shared goals and learning outcomes associated with graduate professional programs of study at HBCUs.

Furthermore, HBCU leadership and graduate professional program administrators must consider how their missions align with a need to move forward in an ever-changing national, as well as global, context, including the global marketplace. They must examine their respective abilities to attract talent from a broad range of educational and ethnic backgrounds. By no means does this suggest that HBCUs stray from their core mission of providing educational opportunities for Black people. Rather, it's a call to action to continue building diverse student bodies that reflect changes in the current cultural landscape.

Another recommendation for strategic planning and policy is for HBCUs to explore institutional partnership opportunities for their graduate professional programs. This model has seen some success. For example in 1995, North Carolina A&T State University and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) entered into an agreement to begin a Joint Master's of Social Work Program supported by both universities. Similarly, in August of 2010, faculty and administrators at the two institutions launched

a joint School of Nanoscience and Nanoengineering program. This text also highlights a partnership between Emory University and Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia. Such multiple dual degree and exchange programs that HBCUs have established and continue to establish with PWIs function as critical components for HBCU efforts to strengthen their programs and ensure the long-term success of their schools.¹⁹

Intentionality on appropriate use of current research also has implications for strategic planning and policy. It is critical that HBCU policymakers and stakeholders maximize utility of research on HBCUs to ensure they are adequately funded. For example, researchers have noted that without improvements in fundraising, HBCUs will continue to struggle to provide supportive learning environments that encourage the pursuit of academic excellence.²⁰ Thus, leadership and graduate professional program administrators must think critically about how to involve donors and alumni in ways that encourage increases in both short-term and long-term philanthropic support. Such support is very much consistent with alumni of doctoral professional programs; essentially, as Blacks continue to make strides in education, they, likewise, gain the economic resources to make significant contributions to support the educational missions and upward mobility of their HBCUs and their programs of study.

Lastly, policymakers at the state level need to work with higher education commissioners and chancellors to prevent duplicate programs at PWIs, which have had adverse implications for HBCUs, and pursue legal action if necessary. The Coalition for Equity and Excellence in Maryland Higher Education, representing four Maryland HBCUs, sued the State's Higher Education Commission alleging that Maryland has failed to dismantle the vestiges of segregation from its prior de jure system of higher education. The Coalition has claimed that the state's continuing failures to Maryland HBCUs span the areas of funding, capital improvements, and unnecessary program duplication—including a graduate professional program in business—and have resulted in hampered efforts to recruit students.²¹ The Court ruled that Maryland had in fact violated the constitutional rights of students at Maryland's four HBCUs by unnecessarily duplicating their programs at nearby predominantly White institutions. At the time of this printing, negotiations to provide remedy to the plaintiffs remained underway. Policymakers must be aware of the legal avenues they may have to take in order to equalize funding and prevent harmful policies and programs.

Conclusion

As the nation continues to transition under the Trump Administration, particularly given that there has been no explicit commitment to additional funding for HBCUs, the leadership and the administrators at HBCUs stand at a crossroads. It is remarkably evident that HBCUs continue to be a fundamental part of the nation's higher education landscape. Their importance

to the success of the Black community, and to the nation, cannot be understated. While it is imperative that HBCUs remain true to their unique missions, it is also critical for them to consider, and even rethink, their role in American higher education. The HBCU is essential to Black professional degree attainment; that has broader implications for the nation's preservation and continuation of its role as a global leader. In order to advance the nation's agenda for global competitiveness, HBCUs must be proactive in addressing criticisms, often unfounded, of their continued existence. The HBCU legacy confirms that matriculation at and graduation from these institutions has increased the social capital of numerous Black students, especially those earning advanced degrees in the professions. But, these institutions cannot afford to rest on legacy alone; they must attend to the dynamic changes taking place in our society and showcase their importance and continued relevance.

Researchers have pointed out several factors that serve to restrict the capacity of professional education at HBCUs, including undeveloped missions implied by historical contexts for HBCUs, differential funding patterns for HBCUs and PWIs, and the continuing legacy of systemic racial discrimination by state governments in the treatment of HBCUs.²² Each of those factors alone is sufficient to hinder the growth and opportunity of graduate professional programs at HBCUs. Notwithstanding, many HBCUs still manage to do more with less, standing poised to meet the needs of their students and ultimately producing significant numbers of Black doctorates in professional programs—Howard University, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Meharry Medical College, Texas Southern University, Southern University Law Center, and North Carolina Central University, to name a few.²³ Ultimately, there will likely continue to be struggles grounded in the aforementioned factors as well as others. However, this realization should be acknowledged, but not be considered a deterrent. The contemporary economic, political, and social impact that HBCUs offer through production of Black doctorates tell us that we need more settings like HBCUs, not fewer. Thus, leaders and administrators of graduate professional programs at HBCUs enjoy a remarkable opportunity to counter narratives that lend to discounting the HBCU and continue transforming deficits tied to a legacy of compensating for a system of education that has far too often failed Black students.

Notes

- 1 Albritton 2012; Gasman et al. 2008
- 2 Albritton 2012
- 3 Ofili et al. 2013
- 4 Howard University, para. 16 2017
- 5 Fountain, 2012
- 6 Ross et al. 2011
- 7 Nettles and Miller 2006

- 8 National Center for Education Statistics 2012
- 9 Palmer, Hilton, and Fountain 2012; Nerad and Miller 1996; Nettles and Miller 2006.
- 10 Fountain 2012; Palmer, Hilton, and Fountain 2012.
- 11 Roebuck and Murry 1993, p. 43
- 12 Freeman and McDonald 2004
- 13 Anderson 2017
- 14 United Negro College Fund, n. d., "Our member colleges: About HBCUs"
- 15 Burrell and Rapoport 2008
- 16 *Top 100 Degree Producers 2016: Graduate and Professional*
- 17 New, 2015
- 18 Ricard and Brown 2008
- 19 Albritton 2012
- 20 Albritton 2012
- 21 Palmer, Davis, and Gasman 2011
- 22 Taylor 2012
- 23 *Top 100 Degree Producers 2016: Graduate and Professional*

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