

RESEARCH BRIEF



Achievement in the Face of Adversity: South Carolina's Historically Black Colleges

Yoruba T. Mutakabbir, M.S.

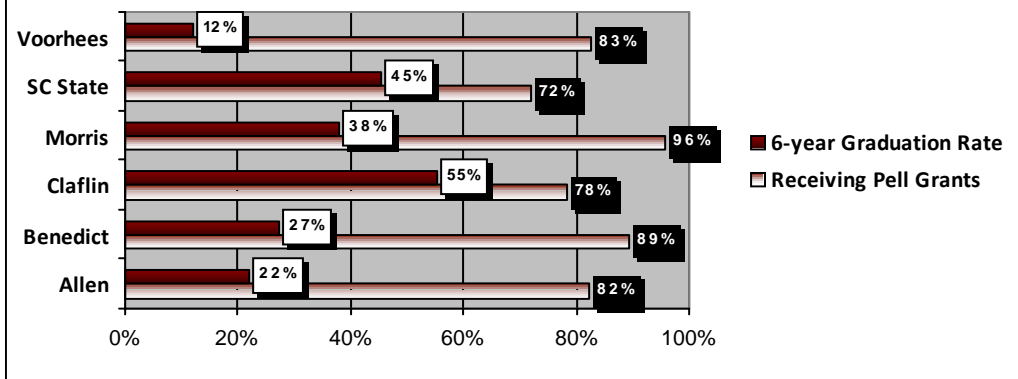
SPRING 2010

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), as defined by the United States Department of Education, are institutions founded before 1964 with the principal mission of educating African Americans. There are HBCUs represented among all of the Carnegie classifications. The Freedmen's Bureau, private philanthropists, and religious organizations all contributed to developing these postsecondary institutions for African Americans (Jackson & Nunn, 2003).

HBCUs contribute significantly to the educational attainment of African Americans. These institutions comprise 3% of all postsecondary institutions, yet enroll 16% of all African American college students (Jackson & Nunn, 2003). Also, nine of the top ten colleges that graduate African Americans who go on to earn doctoral degrees are HBCUs (Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, 2004). In all, it is estimated that over 19% of African American college graduates earned their baccalaureate degree from an HBCU (United States Department of Education, 2009).

Approximately 80% of HBCU students are first-generation college students (Jackson & Nunn, 2003). At four-year institutions, first-generation students are twice as likely as students whose parents have a bachelor's degree to leave before their second year (Tym, McMillion, Barone, & Webster, 2004). Since HBCUs enroll a large percentage of first-generation students, there is great potential for graduation rates to be adversely affected.

Figure 1
Percentage of Students Receiving Pell Grants, 6-year Graduation Rates, 2007-2008



HBCUS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

African American students constitute 22% of the student enrollment at all four-year institutions in South Carolina (See Table 1). Though there are HBCUs with large populations of White and other non-Black students, African American students comprise 96% of the student enrollment at South Carolina's HBCUs. Comparatively, African American students constitute 36% of all African American students enrolled at four-year institutions in South Carolina (South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, 2009a).

HBCUs in South Carolina play a significant role in admitting transfer students from South Carolina's technical college system. According to recent data, approximately 14% of students moving to a four-year college transferred to a South Carolina HBCU (South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, 2009b). However, considering the low graduation rates at some of these institutions, the success of these transfer students needs further research.

IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR SOUTH CAROLINA'S HBCUs

The low graduation rates at HBCUs are well-documented (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2005). Similarly, South Carolina's HBCUs are also plagued by low graduation rates. The average 6-year graduation rate at South Carolina's HBCUs in 2007-2008 was 33%. The graduation rate for predominately White 4-year colleges in South Carolina was 53.6% in 2007-2008 (The Education Trust, 2009). Low graduation rates at South Carolina's HBCUs must be considered in light of open enrollment policies and the fact that these institutions enroll a large percentage of students from low-income families or whose parents do not have a bachelor's degree (See Figure 1).

The retention rate at South Carolina's HBCUs was 57% for first-time freshman entering in fall 2007. This is lower than the average retention rate of 68.9% for predominately White South Carolina four-year colleges (South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, 2009a). McDaniel and Graham (2001) examined 25 variables to explore the effects of student characteristics on student retention at HBCUs. Their results showed that returning students study more hours a week and require one or less developmental courses. Financial aid also plays a role in retention in that retained students are more likely to receive grants or scholarships instead of loans (McDaniel and Graham, 2001).

The majority of students at HBCUs in South Carolina come from low-income families, indicated by the high percentage of students receiving Pell grants. Eighty-three percent of HBCU students in South Carolina received Pell grants in 2007-2008 while only 43 percent of all four-year college students in South Carolina received them (The Education Trust, 2009). Additionally, more than 50% of UNCF (formerly the United Negro College Fund) students come from families making less than \$25,000 annually (Lum & Mathews, 2009).

UNCF raises money for 39 privately controlled HBCUs. This organization was founded in 1944 by Dr. Frederick Patterson, then President of Tuskegee Institute. World War II left Black colleges in need of male students and financial resources. UNCF was founded as a collaborative fundraising effort to help ease this shortage. Allen University, Benedict College, Claflin University, Morris College, and Voorhees College are all members of UNCF. The Thurgood Marshall College Fund, founded in 1987, raises money for 47 public HBCUs and minority serving institutions. South Carolina State University is a member of the Marshall Fund. The Marshall Fund and UNCF also administer scholarships to minority students (Thurgood Marshall Fund, 2009; UNCF, 2009).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOUTH CAROLINA'S HBCUs

South Carolina's HBCUs can increase their enrollments by recruiting students of other racial backgrounds. Increased enrollments may bring needed financial stability to these institutions. Retention rates can be increased by early identification of at-risk students, integrating retention interventions into the institution's mission, and focusing faculty development on student outcomes (Nettles, Wagener, Millett, & Killenbeck, 1999).

One way South Carolina's HBCUs can achieve in the face of adversity is to form a consortium. According to (Hughes, 1992), "Consortia in higher education are associations of colleges and universities organized to pursue common goals and objectives" (Hughes, 1992, p. 539). Specifically, a consortium of HBCUs in South Carolina could focus on increasing graduation rates and endowments by allowing leaders of these institutions to collaborate on solutions to their collective problems. Allen University, Benedict College, Claflin University, Morris College, South Carolina State University, and Voorhees College share similar traditions and missions of educating low-income, first-generation, and African American students. These commonalities make forming a consortium more feasible.

CONCLUSION

As policy efforts to increase educational attainment become more pronounced, South Carolina's HBCUs, with their large numbers of low-income and first generation students, will become primary candidates for research and program development efforts. Also, lessons learned from HBCUs could aid in understanding minority and underserved populations at other institutions.

References

- The Education Trust. (2009). College Results Online. Retrieved November 18, 2009 from www.collegeresults.org.
- Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute. (2004). *Importance of HBCUs*. Retrieved November 18, 2009 from <http://pattersonresearchinstitute.org/importanceofhbcus.htm>
- Hughes, C. E. (1992). A case for the formation of strategically focused consortia among HBCUs. *Journal of Negro Education*, 61(4), 539-552.
- Jackson, C. L., & Nunn, E. F. (2003). *Historically Black colleges and universities: A reference handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Journal of Blacks in Higher Education. (2005). Among Black colleges, Fisk and Spelman are producing the highest student graduation rates. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 47, 40-41.
- Lum, L., & Mathews, F. (2009). Thinking outside the fundraising box. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, 26(14), 24-26.
- McDaniel, C., & Graham, S.W. (2001). Student retention in an historically Black institution. *College Student Journal*, 35, 143-158.
- Nettles, M. T., Wagener, U., Millett, C. M., & Killenbeck, A. M. (1999). Student retention and progression: A special challenge for private historically Black Colleges and Universities. In G. H. Gaither (Ed.), *Student retention and progression: A special challenge for private historically Black Colleges and Universities (New Directions for Higher Education, No. 108, pp. 51-67)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. (2009a). *Academic year 2007 enrollment reports*. Retrieved November 18, 2009 from http://www.che.sc.gov/New_Web/Rep&Pubs/Enrollment/2007-08.htm
- South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. (2009b). *Transfer matrix 2007*. Retrieved November 18, 2009 from <http://www.che.sc.gov/Finance/CHEMIS/Fall2007/TransferMatrix2007.xls>
- Thurgood Marshall Fund. (2009). *Facts*. Retrieved November 30, 2009 from http://www.thurgoodmarshallfund.net/v1/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=78&Itemid=217
- Tym, C., McMillion, R., Barone, S., & Webster, J. (2004). *First generation college students: A literature review*. Research and Analytic Services, Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation.
- UNCF. (2009). *About UNCF*. Retrieved November 18, 2009 from <http://www.uncf.org/aboutus/index.asp>.
- United States Department of Education. (2009). Strengthening our nation's historically Black colleges and universities. Retrieved November 18, 2009 from <http://www.ed.gov/about/inits/list/whhbcu/strengthening-hbcus.pdf>

Correspondence regarding this report may be sent via e-mail to: houston@clemson.edu

To access a Research Brief > <http://www.clemson.edu/centers-institutes/houston/researchandscholarship/researchbrief.html>

Suggested Citation: Mutakabbir, Y. T. (2010). *Achievement in the face of adversity: South Carolina's Black colleges*. (CHHC Research Brief, Spring 2010, No. 8) Clemson, SC: Clemson University, Eugene T. Moore School of Education, Charles H. Houston Center for the Study of the Black Experience in Education.

Submission Guidelines

The Charles H. Houston Center accepts manuscripts for review and publication consideration for the *Research Brief* series. Submitted manuscripts should not exceed 1,000 words and must conform to the guidelines outlined in the 5th Edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. All manuscripts will undergo a blind review and refereed process. The review process takes approximately 3-4 weeks. Manuscripts can be submitted for review via e-mail to Cindy Roper (cgroper@clemson.edu), Research and