

LISTENING TO THE NC10

Findings and Recommendations for Supporting North Carolina's HBCUs

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ABOUT CREED, EDNC, HUNT & MYFUTURENC

The Center for Racial Equity in Education (CREED) is a North Carolina-based nonprofit actively pursuing racial justice by closing the knowing-doing gap in the field and filling an organizational void in the state. Our mission is to center students of color, inspire institutional change, and facilitate better educational practice to transform the education system. Through the work of Research, Engagement, and Implementation, we aim to create a future where children of color in P-20 (Pre-K to postsecondary) education are flourishing academically, and race is no longer a predictor of outcomes.

EducationNC (EdNC) works to expand educational opportunities for all students in North Carolina, increase their academic attainment, and improve the performance of the state's public schools. We provide residents and policymakers with nonpartisan data, research, news, information, and analysis about the major trends, issues, and challenges bearing on education. We gather and disseminate information employing the most effective means of communication, primarily through the Internet. In addition to the content distributed, we encourage an active and connected community of those interested in education policy and practice throughout the state. Our work encourages informed resident participation and strong leadership on behalf of the students of North Carolina.

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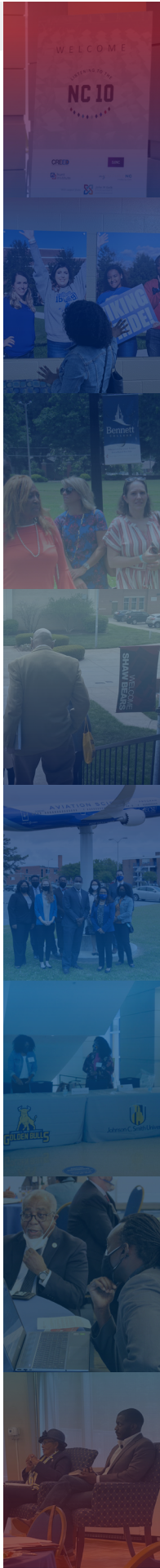
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) share a common heritage. Yet, HBCUs are not a monolith and cannot be spoken of uniformly. Beyond the traditions of marching bands and dance teams, the Black Greek Letter Organizations with their campus plots, homecoming events, and esteemed alumni are the legacies of scholarship, activism, and commitment to community. From small to large, urban to rural, land grant to independent institutions established from philanthropies and religious endeavors, the differences abound. Across the 10 fully accredited HBCUs in North Carolina, the notable distinctions and collective history are as evident as the trunk and branches of a tree. Just as evident are the shared missions and individual institutional needs.

The *Listening to the NC10 Initiative* consisted of on-site campus visits to all 10 North Carolina HBCUs during the period of April 2021 to August 2021. We spoke with students, faculty, student affairs leaders, historians, senior administrators within the executive cabinet, and Presidents/Chancellors. Ten major themes emerge from our listening tour: **1) Institutional Assets, 2) Growing Edges, 3) Faculty & Staff, 4) Governing Structure, 5) Infrastructure, 6) Student Population & Experiences, 7) Evaluation & Metrics, 8) COVID-19, 9) Funding, and 10) Structural Racism.** For those intimately familiar with HBCUs, the findings will only likely confirm their experiential knowledge. But for those less acquainted, the findings will shed light on the complexities and develop a more informed perspective of the jewels that are North Carolina HBCUs.

In order to improve educational attainment and increase the institutional prominence of HBCUs, we recommend the following to various constituencies across the state of North Carolina (i.e. the NC10, policymakers, stakeholders, and philanthropy):

- ◇ *Develop a shared agenda based on commonly held strengths and areas of need*
- ◇ *Formalize a collaborative network among all 10 institutions for mutual benefit*
- ◇ *Adopt best practices for increasing attainment*
- ◇ *Replicate federal efforts to support HBCUs at the state level*
- ◇ *Pass legislation that modernizes HBCU infrastructure and enacts restorative funding*
- ◇ *Establish a North Carolina Office of HBCUs*
- ◇ *Tell the full stories of the NC HBCUs*
- ◇ *Financially support a NC HBCU*
- ◇ *Make the economic case for supporting NC HBCUs*
- ◇ *Grant NC HBCUs unrestricted gifts*
- ◇ *Form a philanthropic giving network focused on NC HBCUs*

INTRODUCTION

The designation of Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) is defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965 as “institutions of higher learning established before 1964, whose principal mission was then, as is now the education of Black Americans.”¹ They have come to symbolize the racial pride, self-determination, and intellectual prowess of the Black community. North Carolina is home to 10 accredited four-year HBCUs, the most of any state in the country² – a prestigious and underappreciated distinction. They enroll nearly half of all Black undergraduates in the state.³

The legacy of HBCUs as engines of Black upward mobility is evident. Nationally, they educate 80% of Black federal judges, 75% of Black PhDs, 65% of Black physicians, 50% of Black engineers and 45% Black executives.⁴ Additionally, HBCUs in North Carolina produce the majority of educators of color⁵ and collectively have a \$2B economic impact on the state.⁶ In recent years, however, the relevance of HBCUs has been called into question. This contributes to deficit-based perspectives that focus primarily on challenges HBCUs face without proper appreciation for assets and how they serve the global economy of the 21st century.⁷ Despite this, HBCUs are experiencing a recent spike in applications and enrollment.⁸ They have grown more diverse, with 24% of enrollment consisting of non-Black students.⁹

As the state begins to focus more on issues of educational attainment, economic development, social mobility and teacher diversity, there is a pressing need to engage our HBCUs as authentic partners, and not just

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).

This, however, requires a more nuanced understanding of the myriad ways HBCUs facilitate the overall prosperity of the nation in general and North Carolina in particular. The purpose of this report is to provide North Carolinians with a better appreciation of the contributions and constraints of our 10 HBCUs as well as the many existing possibilities for securing their endurance for perpetuity. While the schools comprising the NC10 are historic, they are not museum pieces to speak of in the past-tense. They are alive and must be central to any vision of the future. We are compelled as a state to find ways to preserve their traditions, while building upon their legacies.

METHOD/DATA

Our Listening Tour consisted of on-site campus visits to all 10 North Carolina HBCUs during the period of April 2021 to August 2021. We spoke with students, faculty, student affairs leaders, historians, senior administrators within the executive cabinet, and Presidents/Chancellors. Our inquiry was guided by the following essential questions:

1. What lessons can be learned from NC HBCUs?
2. What assets do they possess?
3. What challenges exist?

Conversations were recorded and transcribed in tandem with copious notes and memos from all members of the visiting delegation. A thematic analysis was used to distill preliminary themes from our visits. Our initial findings were presented during our first NC10 convening in August 2021 and feedback was used to inform another cycle of revisions.

Delegation members included the following individuals at different points: James E. Ford, Kamille Bostick, & Jerry Wilson of CREED, Nation Hahn of EducationNC, Dr. Javaid Siddiqi & Allison Goff-Clark of The Hunt Institute, MC Belk Pilon and Chuck Kaylor of the John M. Belk Endowment, Cris Charbonneau, Jeni Corn, Lashika Hester, & Cecelia Holden of myFutureNC, Debra Clark-Jones of St. Augustine's University (NC10 Engagement Advisor), Minnie Forte-Brown of North Carolina Central University (NC10 Engagement Advisor), Dr. Monique N. Colclough of the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research, NC State University, and Dr. Virginia Summey, NC10 Historical Researcher.

MAJOR THEMES FROM FINDINGS

Historically Black Colleges and Universities share a common heritage. Yet, HBCUs are not a monolith and cannot be spoken of uniformly. Beyond the traditions of marching bands and dance teams, the Black Greek Letter Organizations with their campus plots, homecoming events and esteemed alumni are the legacies of scholarship, activism, and commitment to community. From small to large, urban to rural, land grant to independent institutions established from philanthropies and religious endeavors, the differences abound. Across the 10 fully accredited HBCUs in North Carolina, the notable distinctions and collective history are as evident as the trunk and branches of a tree. Just as evident are the shared missions and individual institutional needs.

Ten major themes emerged from our listening tour:

- ◆ Institutional Assets
- ◆ Growing Edges
- ◆ Faculty & Staff
- ◆ Governing Structure
- ◆ Infrastructure
- ◆ Student Population & Experiences
- ◆ Evaluation & Metrics
- ◆ COVID-19
- ◆ Funding
- ◆ Structural Racism

For those intimately familiar with HBCUs the findings will only likely confirm their experiential knowledge. But for those less acquainted, they will shed light on their complexities and develop a more informed perspective.

Institutional Assets: "There's Nothing Like an HBCU"

One of the primary themes from our Listening Tour centered on the innumerable assets HBCUs carry. Across the state, historically black institutions possess a multitude of tangible and intangible assets that are celebrated by some communities and routinely rendered invisible by others. There is abundant clarity about the various kinds of wealth embodied by these diverse and storied institutions: the research acumen, the economic impact on surrounding communities, holistic models of student engagement, culturally affirming environments, and specialty programmatic offerings. Tour participants were adamant that conversation about economic mobility for historically marginalized students must begin with recognition that HBCUs have a proven

track record of serving this demographic with over a hundred years of outcomes to show for it.

The following comments capture the sentiments about the heterogeneity of the schools, their contribution to identity development, producing a diverse talent pool and asset-based STEM approaches:

"It's the totality of our HBCUs that contributes to a vibrant North Carolina and everybody has something different to contribute. Each HBCU has a strength and a distinction."

"At HBCUs, we build your foundation. This is the reason why we have this data that says students who graduate from HBCUs go on to the PhDs, MDs. We've set your foundation. So when you go to graduate school and they tell you that you're trash and you're not going to make it and the struggle gets real, we've already built you up for that at the HBCU, because you're confident in who you are."

"When you talk about this nation and STEM, if it's not for HBCUs putting 25% of the STEM population into what we see. Hey, [the country and state] want to be leaders in STEM? It's impossible without HBCUs, and the narrative has to be, 'Well, we have to make the investment.' Not only at the publics, but the privates as well, because we're adding to that number."

"So, what happens is, business and industry, they want to go, 'Where can I find my diverse talent?' They're spending millions of dollars through organizations like National Black MBA the Consortium...Where can I find diverse talent that has the educational attainment? Schools like [HBCUs] are the engines which drive diverse talent and that's one narrative that's not told."

There is an underappreciated regard for the actual scholarship and culturally-responsive practices of HBCUs. The approach to education is grounded in a worldview situated in the African American experience. This social and political lens characterizes the research produced in ways not recognized by the various industries. Campus environments

are defined by communal climates and holistic methods of delivery that take into account the lived realities of students.

"None of this stuff is new. But I think what we will miss though, especially when it comes to these DEI, or sorry, diversity equity inclusion conversations, is HBCUs raise something completely unique to the table."

"In healthcare and technology that shows up. There's an oxygen meter that you use during the pandemic. The darker your skin tone, the less accurate. That's not about the tech skills. That's about ethics. That's about having a racial consciousness when you're designing."

"We had a class this fall on Writing to Heal was one of our classes. And then How to Develop a Wellness Recovery Plan was another class. Because you can use special topics to reinforce that holistic student perspective."

Growing Edges: "We Can Do a Better Job"

There are serious challenges faced by HBCUs. Some are influenced by historical inequities, while others deal with more structural issues in the broader landscape of higher education. Although some are more well-known, such as the low rates of student persistence and completion, others are more distinct like the lack of resources and financial shortfalls.

"We can do a better job of retention and graduation rates and all of that, but we do what we can with what we have. A lot of times, we're creating our own programs and projects and we're putting these different policies in place and we're doing it in-house."

"If we connect the dots, then that really impacts retention and graduation rating of students. So, again, it's not that the student doesn't have the aptitude. It's the other factors surrounding that are going to impact their persistence, whether we can keep those students, and how long it takes them to graduate."

In sum, we found nearly 14 different salient points of urgent and persistent challenge (Appendix 1). They do not exist in isolation of one another and often have implications for other aspects of how the schools function. Some of the more discrete but important areas of need are the inordinate amount of debt taken on by students and poor understanding in the community about the regional economic impact of HBCUs. All these factors lead to negative perceptions, stigmas and over-generalizations about HBCUs that have lasting effects on viability in the eyes of the broader public.

“We found that families of students are willing to take on the debt for an education. But when they leave, when they finish, they’re saddled with that debt, which means that they have been stymied again from realizing the full potential that they could have exercised on a debt-free experience of getting a job or going to graduate school, starting a business, whatever it might be. Because that debt is on them.”

“So, for me, it’s more about people receiving the story, accepting the story, and then valuing who we are. There’s not many places that can make a \$500 million impact on the region and people devalue it, but that’s what happens here, and I would argue, in many of our other HBCUs as well. The economic impact on the region is significant, but for some reason, that cognitive dissonance won’t allow them to accept that even a \$500 million impact is accurate.”

Faculty & Staff: “A Labor of Love”

The faculty and staff of HBCUs play a pivotal role and comprise a great deal of the institutional identity. Those who work at HBCUs are guided by a sense of mission, and exhibit extreme dedication to and investment in students that goes beyond regular work hours or job descriptions. However, they face significant hurdles that prevent them from maximizing full professional development in

the field and force faculty and staff to operate beyond capacity. Recruitment, retention and compensation remain issues when faculty and staff have extended responsibilities but are not paid on par with their peers at PWIs.

“Virtually everyone is underpaid. Our faculty is underpaid. Having some discussions with the faculty, they love the freedom and they love the students, so it becomes very difficult to leave.”

“Think about it, every department, every team at UNC, UNCG, whatever school we want to put into it, and I run one-person shops[...]But at the end of the day, the system expects the same thing from me that they get from Carolina, and I have to respond.”

Advisor/advisee mentorship plays a role in student success. The opportunity for African American students to see a person who looks like them operating at a level of high achievement is instrumental in cultivating a strong racial and academic identity. The trademark student-centered approach at HBCUs often has drawbacks to research, grant writing and ongoing professional training. Time and financial constraints restrict faculty and staff from pursuing other endeavors.

“It’s a labor of love. We’re staying late. We’re getting here early. We’re here on the weekends because we have to do what we have to do to make sure our students are not just academically successful but we at [school name], we attend to the student holistically, academically, financially, spiritually, mentally, physically. We do all those things and we try to make sure that our student is the best student that they can be once they leave.”

“I would love to speak on the national stage. But the reality is we have a four-four teaching load here. Right? So unless we have more funding that will allow course releases so we can spend more time doing research, it’s hard for me to juggle the two.”

Governing Structure: Publics and Privates Are Not the Same

How an HBCU is organized and governed speaks to the diversity of HBCUs. Whether or not the school has a large enrollment and is part of the UNC system or if it is smaller and privately run is a crucial point of distinction. North Carolina has five such schools that are public and five that are private/independent. There are both benefits and barriers associated with each governing structure. The state's obligation to fund public HBCUs leads to inherent policy inequities for privates and often places bureaucratic limitations on collaboration.

"Well, here in North Carolina the larger HBCUs are state institutions, so you do have to make that distinction[...]. And partnering public and private institutions is a little bit more difficult. I've worked in the state institutions so you can share knowledge but the fund sharing and all that is not as easy."

"If there's a way that the state could provide a match for independent colleges, I think that would be great. I think that North Carolina does a really nice job of including independent colleges and a lot of things from a state legislative perspective that we don't see in other states."

"Privates don't have any lobbyists. We can't go after the state government money and we're just not even in a position."

Even among the 16 colleges and universities affiliated with the UNC System, there are marked discrepancies in the accommodations and resources of the HBCUs. Historical funding disparities are evidenced by allocations of financial support to campus infrastructure and programs.

"North Carolina owes us and certainly [UNC system HBCUs] funding that was held back and not given to us years ago, that was given to the Predominantly White Institutions. Now we are in the process of hopefully getting those funds."

Infrastructure: "You're Going to See Some Rain Come Through this Building"

A major theme from nearly every school visited as part of the Listening Tour was the need for better infrastructure. From classroom buildings, dormitories, student amenities, technology needs, and other spaces, HBCUs across the state report infrastructure issues that impede their mission, recruitment and retention. Funding for deferred maintenance or renovation and repairs on existing facilities, some of which qualify as historic landmarks, is not sufficient for providing the quality of experience students and faculty at HBCUs deserve.

"We can't strategically build infrastructure. Technology infrastructure as well as facilities infrastructure. We're always reacting. We're always fixing something. Sewer line breaks, we got to fix it. We don't have that ability to be strategic. It's not like we don't know how to be. But we just don't have the funding to look out."

"If you want to look at it from just a purely business standpoint, when companies go to banks they try to modernize their facilities, try to get new equipment so that business can keep up and generate greater revenues and be a prosperous entity in the community. The same thing is true with these businesses we call educational institutions. We don't have the resources to do that, but we're falling behind. We can't provide the same level of experience as some of these other institutions have, when they have greater resources."

Newer, larger facilities are needed to accommodate growth and stay competitive in an environment where the aesthetics and amenities of a campus matter greatly. Technology access directly impacts student achievement. Even though these issues are common among the HBCUs, the institutional response and avenues available to correct them vary from public to private as well as regional location.

"It's hard to recruit a student that is competitive, but they come here and they walk into a building, and they see where the roof is leaking. Or they're driving around campus, and they see where there is a dorm that looks dilapidated, right? What are we selling? How do you sell that to a student that can go to NC State?"

"If you walk and look at our physical space, we look like a 100 year old campus. So there's a lot of deferred maintenance. Like infrastructure is, is not where it needs to be[...]. Public institutions have that funding from the legislatures to go into a bucket for some deferred maintenance, for us it's all upon raising our student fees or we have to figure out how to generate that revenue."

"We have a lot of deferred maintenance, which should be no shock to anyone with the age of the school and 22 years of getting no funding for capital and new buildings. So that shouldn't be a major shock to anyone. But then if you're not getting the [renovation and repair] dollars to even help patch those buildings up, it just really puts us behind."

Student Population & Experiences: Understanding Who and How to Serve

The students served by HBCUs are a unique and varied demographic. The keen ability of HBCUs to provide the nurturing and affirming experiences to usher those students to academic and personal success cannot be overstated. Student populations are mostly first-generation, federal Pell Grant-eligible students, and often rural. Additionally, there are multiple spheres of community within each campus with diversity that goes beyond just race (e.g. LGBTQIA+, religion, adult learners, etc.).

"We would put our students up against students from any university. We've done that, and they have done very well. So, as we think about first-generation, we have to think about the additional support that's required for that group and additional resources that's required."

"[T]he cost per capita is higher in our institution than it is in many other institutions because we pride ourselves on taking our students where they are, and taking them where they need to be so they can command their rightful place in the global society. So, that is an expensive proposition, but it is in the best interest of America that we have that kind of philosophy."

"I had a lot of trepidation returning to higher education because of the math requirements. When you have not taken a math class in 25 years, that can be extremely intimidating. But I have not met a faculty member at [school name] yet who has not taken the time to address an issue if I ask for feedback or follow up. I have not received anything except for a lot of grace, patience, understanding, a lot of care and concern from my professors and that's a relationship that is very cherished."

"It's not just about race and ethnicity. It's religions, it's sexual orientations, it's ability levels, educational levels. I think once we get that out there that it's more than just race and ethnicity then we can have a real conversation about diversity and inclusion at our HBCUs."

Students are intentionally choosing HBCUs because they recognize the value added by tradition, sense of belonging, culture of care, and how representation among students and faculty matters. The students themselves desire expanded inclusion of alumni resources in career development and placement to help set them on their path after graduation.

"And after going to a PWI and not liking the vibe of things, the classes, there was no community, there was no true student engagement that involved people that looked like me. So when I sat in the library and made that decision to make the transition, I knew that I was stepping into something that was much needed. I needed to get out of there as soon as possible. And the only way that I would feel at home[...] that's why I chose an HBCU whether it be [school name] or whether it be any, I know that I could get that there."

"I also think that it's important to know that 4.0 students come to [school name] [...] I think that's a very big misconception. There are people there who are competing against each other. It's healthy competition, but we want the highest GPA, we want to compete against our counterparts and you're competitive."

"It's hard to get into internships[...]a lot of our alumni already do this now, but if alumni could help create plans to help us get into those places that maybe we want to be like RedHat, Google, whatever that may be."

Despite a cultural alignment with the community offered by HBCUs, students highlighted the impact of mental health on academics and retention. They cite the necessity of various student supports (e.g. tutoring, mentorship, clinical therapy, etc.) for helping them persist and successfully matriculate. Some schools have standardized high impact practices -- an identified set of activities that prepare them for the marketplace -- as a part of the strategic approach with students. Others have broken the traditional semester into three "mini-mesters" as a way of creating space for internship experience or made teletherapy available for students to help better manage socio-emotional needs.

Evaluation & Metrics: "Imagine If Things Were Fair"

The traditional measures we use to evaluate higher education institutions can create considerable problems for HBCUs. Whether the measures represent college rankings, indicators captured by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) in the U.S. Department of Education or even accreditation agencies, sometimes the numbers don't tell the entire story. Some of our HBCUs perform well using these indices while others struggle. No matter

where the respective institution falls, what is overwhelmingly apparent is the need to interrogate what the numbers are really measuring and what should be measured. Our visits revealed consistent sentiments of inequitable standards of measurement for HBCUs. While there is no denial of the need for better performance in terms of academic outcomes such as graduation, schools note a tremendous lack of nuance in the numbers. Four or five year cohort graduation rates do not consider other factors impacting student completion or whether the students are traditional or non-traditional.

"In a four-year period, our numbers are bad. Six years are better, eight years are even better. But understanding that time to degree. When we talk about the data measurement and learning consciousness and conscience, what we also want to be able to do is say, what should we be looking at? How should we be judging success and contribution back to the economy?"

"But you've got metrics on the state level that says on an annual basis you have to perform at the same rate as University of North Carolina at 'X', but they have a different infrastructure. It's amazing that we talk about the K-12 differentiation as the importance of understanding where people are and being equitable in our response, but then we treat all of our institutions the exact same, violating every principle of equity."

Risk-adjusted metrics that present a more comprehensive student profile are needed to create equity. HBCUs often receive transfer students either from community colleges or other four-year schools whose academic performance they are not given credit for when matriculating. The inadequate evaluation and allocation systems create financial peril, which in turn negatively affects things such as accreditation.

"[Redacted name] used to say to me, 'I really think that there's a need for a...' He called it a 'risk adjusted metric.' And a risk adjusted metric, by that he meant the students that we had at [the school] are starting here and we get them in here, right? Whereas a PWI or more selective institutions start here and they kind of got them here. His idea was 'how do you have a risk adjusted metric?'"

"We have students who maybe started somewhere else and it didn't work out. So again, as you're thinking about how to make sure that we are understanding the journey of HBCU students, understand that they're not all starting out as first-time, full-time. So this is another very difficult metric."

COVID-19: Managing Unprecedented Times

Of special note during our listening was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus left an indelible impression on the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic year. It created unprecedented interruptions for particular student groups and forced alterations. It also catalyzed innovation in instruction, service delivery, and collaboration. The health crisis solidified that status of schools as community anchors and presented unforeseen opportunities for programmatic offerings.

"So, we had 1,500 people in the zip code. We had the highest rate of COVID in the entire state here in this zip code. We had a large number of Latinx population. They won't go to the city and government places to get vaccinated. They felt safe coming here because the whole immigration and all those challenges. So, we're a safe haven for the community even when it comes to those types of things."

"So the faculty, per the circumstances created by the pandemic, very, very quickly adapted, raised the bar to a new level and we are now able to offer a more diverse modality of instruction to our students which makes us more competitive to more students because we are able to provide what other institutions are providing as well. So that includes our blended, hybrid, fully online classes."

There were unprecedented implications for student safety and health needs. Each school had to discern how to adopt protocols and adapt in order to best meet the needs of all students while protecting faculty and staff. While some went fully-remote, others kept students on-campus and dedicated resources to providing services more social in nature.

"[W]e got through the first semester of in-person instruction with less than 2% cases COVID because this president put a taskforce together and we developed and employed eight critical protocols. Right? We were the first, not only HBCU, but first college in our region that said we're going to test everybody who comes. When it was unpopular, everyone said, no, it's too expensive. We're just going to do surveillance. We doubled down and said we're testing everybody and their families when they come."

"And in some cases, these students that we educate, they have better living conditions on campus than they do at home. And they took responsibility for doing the right thing in minimizing the spread of COVID because they knew how important it was to them, and to their families."

It is worth pointing out that some of the HBCUs in our state experienced increases in their enrollment during the first year of the pandemic. While there could be any number of reasons for this, it demonstrates the resilience of these historic institutions in the midst of a global health crisis.

Funding: Making Bricks With No Straw

A dominant and overriding theme of our tour of HBCUs, public or private, is funding. The lack of adequate financial resources influences every aspect of the schools. From the endowments, to scholarships, recruitment and retention of faculty, or even student services, there

is little if anything that more consistent and unrestricted funding could not help. All our HBCUs acknowledge they stand in need of more money, even as some have exceeded internal fundraising goals in the past year. However, none have relinquished the duty to provide the best possible education with what they possess. This is the unfortunate tradition of HBCUs, often forced to “punch above their fighting weight.”

“The problem isn’t that we don’t know how. It’s not that we’re not willing. But if you’re running a 400 [meter], one lap around the track but you’ve got both feet tied, everybody else is running and you’re hopping, you’re never going to catch up. So, there is no capacity building when you continue to rob Peter to pay Paul to fund the institution. If we’re taking institutional funds to make needed repairs but then we’re not buying hardware for the research labs but we still make bricks with no straw because the mission of the institution is to teach the students so that they can be competitive anyway.”

“From a financial perspective it’s a long list actually. But our endowments aren’t funded to the level. Why are they not funded to that level? We just don’t have the corporate participation and interest in us that the PWIs have, bottom line. Our loans are the primary funders of our endowment.”

The lack of financial prowess differs both by institution and in its origin. Some of it is generational, rooted in a history of structural inequality and wealth distribution. However, size and public profile also play a role, with some institutions being more or lesser known in contemporary times.

“Well, if you look at the alumni, and we love the alumni, but the alumni really have not been in a position to give a million dollars to the school as an endowment because of institutionalized inhibitions. So, if they weren’t able to get into spaces to earn the money to leave an endowment for the institution[...], whereas the other institutions had, had generations of wealth that their alumni could donate to the institutions where we’ve only had maybe two generations that could think that way.”

“Harvard has a \$40 billion endowment. It was said that they can not charge students tuition and be okay for the next 90 years. That’s somebody’s lifetime. But if we combine all the money in the endowments at the 107 (HBCUs) we don’t even compare to this one institution. I just think that’s ... It just amazes me. There’s 107 schools compared to one Ivy League institution and it doesn’t hold a candle. It’s just crazy.”

The federal and state governments’ parts in facilitating the inequitable funding structure for HBCUs is a matter of contestation. However, neither has fully met their financial obligations to these institutions, which creates additional strain on schools trying to do more with less.

Structural Racism: “It’s Educational Redlining”

It is impossible to discuss HBCUs without confronting the enduring legacy of racism. This was a cross-cutting theme and undercurrent of every aspect of our inquiry. Historically Black Colleges and Universities were established with the principal mission of educating Black people in America at a time when they were prohibited from attending white institutions. They came into existence in response to the prevailing notion of racial superiority. Therefore, it is disingenuous to broach the topic without acknowledging the foundation of structural racism. This reality is not relegated to the past, however. The continuance of more systemic forms of racial oppression was especially pronounced in conversations with leadership, faculty and students. Racial bias in the ecosystem of philanthropy fueled by stereotypes and education policymaking that fails to respond to needs of Black students were identifiable areas.

"I struggle with the fact that philanthropy and states are willing to fund predominantly white organizations to learn how to address all of these issues, but will not invest in organizations led by people of color to be able to bring that knowledge into kind of the broader conversation."

"I think that anti-blackness that we see just sort of in general in society, definitely, we feel it in a lot of different areas across the board when it comes to policy. And so I think that the giving is one area, but I also think that we feel it in a lot of areas when it comes to education policies and different expectations or lowered expectations for who our students really are."



Perhaps most insightful is the performance of HBCUs as a response to racism. Both faculty and students discussed the ways that attending or working at an HBCU serves as a buffer from the larger societal encounters with racial mistreatment.

"The five universities, this being my last university, and I'm telling you the other four were predominantly white institutions. And the Black students I worked with there and many would flock to me because there weren't that many black professors[...]their cognitive energy was consumed by the racism from handlers, the racism in the classroom, the inability of the instructor to avoid the Rosenthal Effect and actually look at them and see them as a person so that they can build agency in the classroom."



"I was an Associate Dean at a PWI. My blood pressure has dropped by 30 points without medication. And I was on medication before. I attribute that to being in an environment where I am not constantly trying to defend my humanity as a Black person."

"I was in honors classes. They were mostly white kids in there. There might be a handful of white kids, [...]I'm like the only Black male kid in my class. So that's like being in those different states, you're the only one in there. And I remember this one time, a kid even told me, "No, you're not Black. You're different. You're not like other Black people." So you know, going to an HBCU, you see other intelligent academic Black males. You fit in here. You're normal. You're not different. You're not an outlier."



RECOMMENDATIONS

"I think the thing for North Carolina is to figure out how, as a state, we get better at talking about the advantage that we have over everybody else, because of all the HBCUs we have."

What the NC10 Can Do

- ◇ Develop a shared agenda based on commonly held strengths and areas of need: Establish a mission, priorities from the data, and a set of desired outcomes that translate into actionable steps. Commit representatives of each institution to the shared agenda.
- ◇ Formalize a collaborative network among all 10 institutions for mutual benefit: Create a statewide consortium among the 5 public and 5 private HBCUs in the state modeled after similar collaboratives (e.g. [Nashville Consortium of HBCUs](#), [Atlanta University Center Consortium](#)). Embrace a comprehensive approach for collaborative strategy across institutions for activities such as research projects, collective fundraising, DEI, student recruitment, credit transfer, advocacy, and other resource sharing. Developing workgroups with specific focus areas is critical.
- ◇ Adopt best practices for increasing attainment: Make necessary institutional shifts proven to increase student persistence and completion rates. Gather more comprehensive data on student momentum and outcomes by joining the [Postsecondary Data Partnership](#) (PDP) of the National Student Clearinghouse. Join the [Complete College American Alliance](#) to help close attainment gaps for the target student population. Expand on articulation agreements between NC Community Colleges and the NC HBCUs.

What Policymakers Can Do

- ◇ Replicate federal efforts to support HBCUs at the state level: Form an official caucus in the North Carolina General Assembly focused on supporting HBCUs like the [Bipartisan Congressional HBCU Caucus](#).
- ◇ Pass legislation that modernizes HBCU infrastructure and enacts restorative funding: Provide for facilities, campus grounds and renovations at public and private HBCUs (e.g. [IGNITE HBCU Excellence Act](#)). Revise funding allocation models that reconcile outstanding debts created by perpetual underfunding and create equity by responding to the levels of need.
- ◇ Establish a North Carolina Office of HBCUs: Move the [Office of HBCU Outreach](#) out of the North Carolina Department of Transportation and establish by statute under the auspices of the General Assembly. Authorize continual funding permitting the Office to galvanize resources, advocate, and continue to provide fellowships and internships for the public and private HBCUs.

What Stakeholders Can Do

- ◇ Tell the full stories of the NC HBCUs: Consult the various works produced by this Listening to the NC10 initiative to educate others about the strengths and importance of these storied institutions. While most are not clear on the purpose or context of HBCUs, education stakeholders (e.g. students, alumni, businesses, general public, etc.) can serve as brand ambassadors for their continued relevance.
- ◇ Financially support a NC HBCU: Individuals or organizations that see the value of HBCUs should embrace a specific school in the NC10 and commit to continual financial support. Pledging monetary backing -- whether large or small -- to an adopted institution is a tangible way of showing support (e.g. [Charlotte Racial Equity Initiative](#)).
- ◇ Make the economic case for supporting NC HBCUs: The return on investment to the state when HBCUs thrive is huge. They are engines of economic growth with large regional impacts. Additionally, they outperform their PWI counterparts in [upward social mobility](#) for low-income students. Connect HBCUs with businesses and industries seeking diverse talent. The health of the state economy hinges greatly on the strength of our HBCUs.

What Philanthropies Can Do

- ◇ Grant NC HBCUs unrestricted gifts: NC HBCUs need the flexibility to be creative with funding. Resources are needed to improve infrastructure, grant faculty releases, improve student experience, and expand course offerings. Unrestricted giving provides schools with autonomy needed to manage funds how they see fit.
- ◇ Form a philanthropic giving network focused on NC HBCUs: Funders that see the value of HBCUs should convene and connect other philanthropies for the unique and specific purpose of leveraging resources to support postsecondary attainment as well as adult learners at NC HBCUs.

Endnotes

¹ Higher Education Act. (1965). Pub. L. No. 89-329. 20 U.S.C. §1061.

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⁷ William, K. L., Burt, B. A., Clay, K. L., & Bridges, B. K. (2019). Stories untold: Counter-narratives to anti-Blackness and deficit-oriented discourse concerning HBCUs. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(2), 556-599.

⁸ Adams, S. (2021, May 13). Why Applications And Enrollment Are Spiking At Historically Black Colleges. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2021/05/13/why-applications-and-enrollment-are-spiking-at-historically-black-colleges/?sh=510fd0dd2897>

⁹ NCES (2021). *Fast Facts: Historically Black Colleges and Universities*. <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=667>

Appendix I

14 Key Challenges

1. Economic impact of HBCUs is not recognized
2. Sustaining public interest and financial support
3. Underresourced/state support
4. K-12 to postsecondary pipeline
5. Federal financial aid shortfalls
6. Access to consistent marketing
7. Leadership pipeline
8. Technology and infrastructure inequalities
9. Equitable pay among faculty and administrators
10. Sustaining alumni, parent and family engagement
11. Preservation of historical HBCU legacies
12. Integration of social justice in institutional framework and planning
13. Student completion and career development
14. Student debt

LISTENING TO THE

NC10

