Chapter 9
Where Do We Go From Here?
Exploring Retention and Engagement at HBCUs

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ABSTRACT

For over 150 years, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have played a significant role in providing a quality education to millions of families. The nation’s HBCUs add a rich texture to the fabric of higher education in the United States. Their legacy is one of access and opportunity. In order for HBCUs to continue their legacy, they will need to continually examine their retention and engagement strategies, particularly when there are major factors that contribute to an institution’s credibility and financial stability at a time when greater emphasis is being placed on these indicators in higher education in the United States. It is critically important HBCUs to address the challenges surrounding student retention and engagement, especially for traditionally underrepresented groups, and start a dialogue to embrace change and improvement in their efforts to increase retention and student engagement.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7021-9.ch009

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INTRODUCTION

For over 150 years, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have played a significant role in providing a quality education to millions of families. In doing so, they continue to be a proud tradition and vibrant center of intellectual inquiry for many students, faculty and alumni. These institutions add a rich texture to the fabric of higher education in the United States. Their legacy is one of access and opportunity. However, in order for HBCUs to continue their legacy, they will need to continually examine their retention and engagement strategies, particularly when there are major factors that contribute to an institution’s credibility and financial stability at a time when greater emphasis is being placed on these indicators in higher education in the United States.

Because retention and engagement are constant factors that many institutions of higher education continually try to improve, this chapter on Where do we go from here? Exploring retention and engagement at HBCUs will contribute to the body of knowledge and existing research by offering practical methods as case studies used to increase retention and engagement at select institutions and how these programs may be adapted at HBCUs. Before we present the case studies, it is important to provide some context related to enrollment, student characteristics, and current efforts towards retention and student engagement already utilized by HBCUs. This will be done in the context of the historical traditions typically found at HBCUs including the role of Greek Life at HBCUs, engagement, and mentoring by HBCU faculty.

Following, this chapter will provide some best practices according to existing research that have yielded positive results towards improving retention and student engagement nationally, such as First-Year Experience programs in hopes that these types of programs may also benefit HBCUs. Of course, we must also include challenges that institutions have faced in trying to move the needle on retention and student engagement in an effort to lessen the obstacles faced for institutions seeking to implement similar programs. Lastly, in this chapter, an attempt will be made to try and answer the question for HBCUs, “Where do we go from here?”. In answering this question, practical implications will be offered on how to apply existing knowledge and research to further increase retention and student engagement at HBCUs, who often serve historically underrepresented populations.

THE IMPACT OF HBCUS AS ICONIC INSTITUTIONS OF HOPE

While many individuals may already be familiar with HBCUs, it is important to establish the historical context of why these institutions were founded and how its history may still have an impact on present day enrollment, retention, and student
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