

For Students, Communities:
Black Colleges Fill Vital Need
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Lawrenceville. Each year 105 historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) located in 24 states, Washington, D.C., and the Virgin Islands teach, challenge, nurture, and educate bright students. Each year, they award undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees to thousands of young people who make enormous contributions to America and abroad.

The true success of these institutions is characterized by a near-zealous mission and commitment from trustees, faculty, staff, and alumni to provide a quality education. This is accomplished with lower student-teacher ratios, highly individualized student nurturing processes, and a strong focus on the core curriculum and academic fundamentals.

For many, the choice to attend a historically black college or university is as important as going to college. African-Americans not only earn a higher education, but also gain a sense of identity and heritage in a nurturing atmosphere. Many young citizens have been given the opportunity to attain their full potential because of HBCUs. A significant number are from underserved communities who may never have had the chance to go to college or benefit educationally, professionally, or economically were it not for the accessibility and strong value(s) system of single-ethnicity institutions.

Originally founded to provide education opportunities for minorities who were largely left out of America's educational system, historically black colleges and universities still deliver quality educational and leadership opportunities for people of color.

Large Proportion of Graduates

While comprising just 3 percent of the nation's two- and four-year institutions, historically black colleges and universities are responsible for producing 28 percent of all bachelor's degrees, 15 percent of all master's degrees, and 17 percent of all first professional degrees earned by African-Americans.

Throughout history, HBCUs have produced many prominent African-Americans from a wide spectrum of backgrounds and professions. Alumni include Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Morehouse College), Wilma Rudolph (Tennessee State University), Andrew Young, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and former mayor of Atlanta (Howard University), actor and director Ossie Davis (Howard University), and W.E.B. Du Bois (Fisk University). Virginia, blessed with several black colleges and universities, produced the nation's first black governor since Reconstruction with the election of L. Douglas Wilder, also the product of the HBCU system of higher learning.

Today that legacy continues as HBCUs continue to deliver the next generation

of highly qualified professionals who will leave a lasting impact on our society.

Having served as president of two HBCUs - Allen University in Columbia, S.C., and now Saint Paul's College in Lawrenceville - I understand the hurdles that single-ethnicity institutions have overcome and the challenges we continue to face. Many of these challenges involve a lack of access to resources or endowment income that most major institutions draw on. Yet, against overwhelming odds, black colleges continue to meet the needs of African-American students. Such endurance proves, if nothing else, that we are a case study in adaptability and perseverance.

Founded on Faith, Generosity

Certainly, James Solomon Russell, the founder of Saint Paul's College, was prophetic when he made this statement about Saint Paul's in 1917: This institution was founded on faith in God and the generosity of its friends; for at the time the task was undertaken there was not a foot of ground or a penny in sight for its support, yet through the providence of God the work has gone forward steadily each day.

Like Russell, I have great faith and optimism in the future of HBCUs. However, the great need for enhanced academic programs and facilities, library and technology upgrades, student comforts, and major deferred maintenance issues require that we aggressively pursue and receive support from new public and private partners on an annual basis.

The U.S. government also recognizes the legacy and contributions of our institutions, and has put us on its radar screen. To that end, Congress is committed to improving America's minority-serving institutions. For example, between 1995 and 2000, Congress increased funding for capacity building at HBCUs by 36.5 percent, and for historically black professional and graduate programs by 58 percent. President George Bush has pledged to further increase funding for HBCUs from \$180 million to \$320 million over the next five years.

I also am greatly encouraged by the contributions that HBCUs continue to make. In addition to the top-notch graduates produced, HBCUs also make significant contributions to the economy of the cities and towns where they are located.

An HBCU Success Story

Saint Paul's College is just one example of a local HBCU success story. Located on 455 acres of beautifully landscaped property, SPC has been a strong partner in the growth and advancement in Lawrenceville and the nearby community.

When I became Saint Paul's president in September, 2001, I inherited an institution with a rich history of community involvement. This tradition continues today.

Like most cities and towns that are home to a college or university, the identity and culture of Lawrenceville have become intertwined with those of the college. Saint Paul's is an active community partner with enthusiastic participation from students, faculty, and staff. Although we are a small private liberal arts institution, Saint Paul's has an annual operating budget in excess of \$12 million and an annual payroll that exceeds \$3.5 million. This makes Saint Paul's a significant economic partner to Lawrenceville, Brunswick County, and Southside Virginia.

We are the fifth largest employer in the county. Our constituents generate

more than \$30 million annually in spending power, taxes, and goods purchased in Southside Virginia. At least 70 percent of Saint Paul's employees live in Brunswick County and more than 68 percent of our graduates remain in Virginia. Students, alumni, and special visitors to the campus generate \$1.5 to \$2 million annually in sales while living on or visiting the campus throughout the year.

Improves Quality of Life

Not only does Saint Paul's contribute to the economic stability of Lawrenceville, but also to the overall quality of life of its residents. Through SPC, federal grants have greatly improved the local cityscape, county recreational areas, and long-term infrastructure challenges. Students on Saint Paul's SIFE team (Students in Free Enterprise) recently won a national award for teaching participating Lawrenceville residents the principles of free enterprise. These students developed an educational lecture series, taught advanced computer skills to Lawrenceville residents, and conducted ethics training classes for Brunswick High School students.

Like other HBCUs, Saint Paul's College continues to grow and expand both its campus and academic programs. We are currently engaged in curriculum review emphasizing enhanced technological skills, advanced writing, and critical thinking skills. Also, we have aggressively partnered with a diverse group of large in-state and external institutions such as the University of Nebraska Medical Center to create faculty/student exchanges as well as graduate and professional opportunities for our students. In addition, plans are underway for a new capital campaign to provide resources for these expansion efforts.

Historically black colleges always have been on the frontline of removing barriers to opportunity. Long before discrimination was struck down as the law of the land, historically black colleges represented hope and opportunity for the African-American community. From the blood-bank to the stop-light and ironing board, many of the necessities and luxuries we enjoy as Americans come from the wearied red, white, and blue hands and ideas of HBCU graduates or their constituents. When calculated, the value and economic impact of these institutions is truly astounding.

Indeed, the struggles and successes of America's historically black colleges and universities are the struggles and successes of our great nation. Today, as we engage upon an expanded global frontier, there are serious questions of medicine, science, finance, education, law, energy, and socio-economic issues to resolve. Great God-inspired ideas, discoveries, and bold action claim no specific gender nor ethnicity.

America's 105 HBCUs stand ready and are building on their commitment to provide quality leadership for future generations. Our nation must wholeheartedly wrap the American flag around each of our institutions if we are to develop talent and grasp all of the potential this nation has to offer.

John Waddell, president of Saint Paul's College and a member of President Bush's Board of Advisers for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, is a member of the 2004 Board of Contributors.