



White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities  
2011 National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week Conference  
September 19-20, 2011

## Report on the Voting Results of the Town Hall Meeting

### A. Executive summary

Lively. Engaging. Informative. Fun. These were all words used by participants to describe an unusual Town Hall Meeting that took place at the 2011 National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week Conference, when wireless keypads allowed each of approximately 289 participants to respond anonymously to questions in three main categories: 1) **General views** about HBCUs, 2) The **most important issues** related to realizing a better future for my alma mater, and 3) **Alumni views** in general.

The main intent of the meeting was to facilitate open and frank discussion and to stimulate conversations that would continue after the session ended. Based on the audience's reactions and recorded responses, these goals were certainly met. In fact, the meeting itself received the highest positive agreement rating overall from all participants.

Included among the diverse group assembled for the meeting were approximately 60% women, 40% men; more than half (59%) were 51 years and older; and 57% had attended an HBCU as an undergraduate. Almost 50% had worked at an HBCU for 11 or more years, 28% were employed with the federal government, and 17% with the private sector.

Among the key findings and observations that emerged from the participants' responses are the following:

- Across all the demographic groups, there was strong agreement that HBCUs continue to be needed, but that these institutions are also undervalued, and their accomplishments and contributions are not well publicized.
- There were often strong differences of opinion between people who have worked for an HBCU and those who have not. For example, in responding to a statement about whether HBCUs facing serious challenges (like declining enrollments) should consider repurposing their missions or merging, people who had worked for HBCUs between 6 to 16 years or more tended not to agree with those options, while those who had never worked for HBCUs and those representing the government sector tended to agree.

- The responses of HBCU graduates suggest a strong level of support for their alma maters and satisfaction with their educational experiences. If they were choosing again, they would attend an HBCU, and they would send their children to these institutions. They also agree strongly that, alumni contributions need to be increased.
- Increasing the financial support to HBCUs and increasing financial aid to the students who attend them are seen as issues important to realizing a better future for their alma maters by all participants. Increasing the level of support from alumni is also seen as important.
- Issues of integrity and accountability, along with student graduation rates are included among the top issues of importance that must be addressed. Not far behind on the important issues list are the executive leadership and promoting academic excellence, with those who attended HBCUs and those who worked at HBCUs for 16 years or more assigning some of the highest agreement ratings on those two issues.
- The higher agreement ratings among sub-groups about the importance of student graduation rates came from HBCU alumni and individuals who had worked at HBCUs for 16 or more years.
- Some of the lower level of agreement ratings across all groups concerned the quality of academic advising at HBCUs and issues related to alumni financial support. They also indicated lower levels of agreements in response to statements about the level of academic rigor maintained at HBCUs and the promotion of academic excellence among students.
- Over half of the meeting participants (56%) reported writing a check to their alma maters during the past year, including approximately 65% of the HBCU graduates present. About 36% of all participants make regular contributions, while 41% of the HBCU graduates indicated that they contribute regularly.
- Town Hall meeting participants tended to disagree that HBCUs are doing an excellent job in the recruitment and the graduation of black males, assigning some of their lowest level of agreement ratings in the entire session to these areas.

## B. Introduction

One of the sessions at the 2011 National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week Conference took the form of a Town Hall Meeting. Using individual wireless keypads, participants responded to a series of questions related to the condition, opportunities, and future of HBCUs, in an interactive, real-time feedback session. These questions were grouped into three categories: 1) General views about HBCUs, 2) The most important issues related to realizing a better future for my alma mater, and 3) Alumni views in general. Participants also responded to a series of demographic questions, along with additional questions about reasons for choosing their alma mater and alumni financial contributions.

The main goals of the meeting were to create a forum for open and frank discussion, to be informative and data-driven, and to stimulate conversations that would continue after the session ended. A complete list of questions posed by the session hosts, and the order in which they were asked, is included as Appendix A. Ratings by participants were on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest level of importance (or agreement) and 1 the lowest, as follows:

10 – highest level of importance	5– tends to not be important
9	4
8 – mostly important	3 – mostly not important
7	2
6 – tends to be important	1 – lowest level of importance

Figure 1

## C. Town Hall participants

The Town Hall meeting attracted about 289 people, including approximately 60% women and 40% men. Almost 60% of the participants were in the age range of 51 years or older (including 24%, 61 or wiser and 35%, 51-60), while 21% were 41-50 years old, 14% were 31-40, and 7% between 21-30 years old. At the close of the meeting, there was a high level of agreement (average 8.9 out of 10) among all participants that the Town Hall meeting had been very informative.

Forty-six (46) percent of the participants are currently employed by an HBCU, 28% by the federal government, and 17% by the private sector. Sixty-five (65) percent reported having worked for an HBCU. Among that group, 42% reported 5 years or less of service; 33% reported 16 or more years of service; 14%, 11-15 years; and 10%, 6-10 years.

More than half of the participants (57%) attended an HBCU as an undergraduate and 52% reported that attending an HBCU was their first choice. HBCU graduate school attendance was reported by 21% of the participants, while another 9% attended both an HBCU and a non-HBCU for graduate school.

The two factors that participants reported as most influential in their decision to attend their alma maters were *academic reputation of the institution* (26%), and *scholarship and/or financial aid received* (25%). These were followed by *proximity to home* (14%), *other reason* (13%), *unique traditions and culture* (11%), *family tradition* (8%), and *social environment* (2%).

*Professional and personal networking* was the primary reason for attending the conference for 41% of the participants. This was followed by *professional development* which was selected by 24% of the group. *Workshop topics* was chosen by 14% and *to learn about HBCUs* by 11%.

#### **D. GENERAL VIEWS ABOUT HBCUs**

##### **Common ground**

Among the statements eliciting participants' general views about HBCUs, there were three that generated **high levels of agreement** among all groups, as follows:

- 1) *HBCUs in general are needed more than ever as an option for students in the U.S. today* (8.5).
- 2) *HBCUs are an undervalued resource within the higher education community* (8.2).
- 3) *I would send my child to an HBCU* (8.0).

It should be noted, however, that responses to the third item *I would send my child to an HBCU* showed considerable differences across the various sub-groups. For example, the rating for women was 8.3, while that for men was 7.1. There was also a significant difference between ratings of the youngest respondents (ages 21-30), who gave one of the lower ratings of 6.6, while those between 51-60 gave one of the highest, 8.5. Perhaps not surprisingly, those who attended and/or worked at an HBCU gave higher ratings (8.1 and 8.3 respectively) than those who had not (6.5 and 7.1).

There was one additional statement that generated a strong common response from participants, this time towards the **mostly do not agree** rating, namely, *In general, the accomplishments and contributions of HBCUs are well publicized* (3.4). This item in fact received by far the lowest agreement ratings among all questions in the entire session from participants.

##### **Lowest ratings**

Two related items concerning black males received two of the three lower level of agreement ratings, i.e., **tending to not agree**, among this category of general views about HBCUs as follows:

- 1) *HBCUs in general do an excellent job in graduating black males* (5.1).
- 2) *HBCUs in general do an excellent job in the recruitment of black males* (5.0).

It should be noted that the ratings were fairly consistent across all demographic groups, with the lowest ratings of 4.5 for the first statement and 4.4 for the second statement both coming from the 31-40 age group, and the highest ratings of 5.4 and 5.5 from those who had worked 16 years or more at HBCUs.

##### **Divergent opinions**

Among the 16 statements in this general views category, there are two additional items that showed considerable differences in responses across the various sub-groups:

- 1) *If I were choosing again today, I would attend an HBCU for my undergraduate education (7.8).*
- 2) *Like many other colleges that face severe financial pressures, declining enrollments, and/or loss of accreditation, HBCUs should consider repurposing their missions, merging, and/or other strategic alternatives (6.0).*

Among the more notable differences is the rating from females (8.1) and that from males (6.8) in response to the first statement, as well as the rating from the 21-30 year old participants (6.5) and the 51-60 year olds (8.3).

While government sector participants gave the highest rating to the second statement above (7.2) followed by those who had not worked for HBCUs (7.1), the three groups that had worked for HBCUs for 6-10, 11-15, and 16 or more years gave the lowest ratings of all groups of 4.6, 4.7, and 4.9 respectively.

### **Quality of education, student development and student achievement**

Participants indicated a higher agreement rating (7.5) in response to the statement that *The overall quality of education varies significantly among HBCUs*. The ratings were somewhat lower regarding the following two items concerning student development:

- 1) *HBCUs in general provide programs that foster their students' personal growth (e.g. focusing on core values such as ethics and accountability) (6.9).*
- 2) *HBCUs in general provide programs that foster their students' intellectual and professional development (e.g. workshops and programs to develop core competencies including analytical, communication, and critical thinking skills, and research training) (6.7).*

Even lower ratings were given to the statements that *HBCUs in general maintain a high level of academic rigor (6.4)* and *HBCUs in general do a good job of promoting excellence in student achievement (e.g. through academic advising programs, faculty and student awards, encouraging student applications for prestigious scholarships) (6.2).*

### **Academic and administrative leadership**

Two statements concerning the academic and administrative leadership at HBCUs in general garnered ratings as follows:

- 1) *The academic leadership (deans, department chairs, directors) at HBCUs in general is strong (6.4).*
- 2) *The administrative leadership (president and senior administrators) at HBCUs in general is strong (6.2).*

Private sector respondents gave the highest rating (7.1) for the first item, and individuals in the 61 years or wiser sub-group gave the highest rating (6.8) for the second item.

## **E. THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES RELATED TO REALIZING A BETTER FUTURE FOR MY ALMA MATER**

Town Hall participants were asked to assign a level of importance rating to 14 issues. The five items that they considered to be the most important, including three related to finances, are as follows:

- 1) *Institutional access to financial resources* (8.4).
- 2) *Increasing the number of alumni who provide financial support* (8.2).
- 3) *Issues of integrity and accountability* (8.1).
- 4) *Higher levels of financial aid for students* (8.0).
- 5) *Student graduation rates* (8.0).

The higher ratings among sub-groups for *student graduation rates* came from those who attended an HBCU (8.7), the education sector (8.5), and from the group that had worked at HBCUs for 16 or more years (8.5).

A second tier of issues of importance, receiving ratings between 7.5 and 7.9, included the following:

- 1) *The executive leadership* (7.9).
- 2) *Promoting academic excellence* (7.9).
- 3) *Faculty development* (7.6).
- 4) *Student recruitment in general* (7.5).
- 5) *Institutional governance (boards of trustees)* (7.5).
- 6) *Infrastructure/facilities* (7.5).

Statements 2, 5, and 6 all generated some notable differences in ratings among sub-groups. *Promoting academic excellence* received its lowest importance rating from the group that had not attended an HBCU (7.3) and the 31-40 year olds (7.3) and the highest ratings from the 41-50 year olds (8.4) and those who had attended HBCUs (8.3).

The highest ratings for *Institutional governance (boards of trustees)* appeared across different sub-groups: 41-50 year olds (7.8), the private sector (7.9), those attending and working for HBCUs (7.8), and those who had worked at HBCUs for one year or less (7.8), 1-5 years (7.9), and 6-10 years (8.1). Lower levels of importance were assigned to this issue by 31-40 year olds (7.2), those who did not attend HBCUs (7.2), and by the government sector (7.3). Some of the higher agreement ratings about the importance of *the executive leadership* and *promoting academic excellence* came from those who had attended HBCUs and those who had worked at HBCUs for 16 or more years.

Similarly, *Infrastructure/facilities* generated a wide range of ratings from those who did not attend HBCUs (6.4) and those who had worked for 11-15 years at HBCUs (6.6) compared

with ratings of 8.2 from those who had attended HBCUs, worked at HBCUs, and worked at HBCUs for 16 or more years.

Items rated as having the lowest level of importance among the list of issues related to realizing a better future for my alma mater included the following:

- 1) *Students who are underprepared academically when they matriculate* (7.2).
- 2) *Faculty salaries* (7.1).
- 3) *Competition with other institutions for the top students* (6.8).

*Underprepared students* and *Faculty salaries* both received a notable range of ratings. Higher ratings were given for *underprepared students* by individuals who had attended HBCUs (7.7) and those who worked for HBCUs for 6-10 years (7.7) and 16 years or more (7.6), while the lower ratings came from those who did not work for (6.6) or attend (6.5) HBCUs and the 31-40 year olds (6.6). Females also gave a higher rating to this issue (7.4) than males (6.8). The education sector gave the highest rating (7.8) to the issue of *Faculty salaries*, while those who did not attend or work for HBCUS gave the lowest (6.3).

## **F. ALUMNI VIEWS IN GENERAL**

Across all groups, participants showed strong positive agreement about their educational experiences at their alma maters, giving the highest ratings to these three statements:

- 1) *I have a favorable opinion of my undergraduate alma mater in general* (8.5).
- 2) *My higher education equipped and prepared me for the working world* (8.5).
- 3) *Overall, I had a great educational experience at my alma mater* (8.4).

HBCU graduates gave the second highest average rating among all sub-groups of 8.8 to the third statement, while the rating from graduates of other universities was 7.8.

Two items related to the campus environment received the next highest average ratings:

- 1) *Overall, most HBCUs provide a supportive campus environment (7.8).*
- 2) *Most HBCUs provide the support students need to thrive socially (7.4).*

Participants also tended to agree, albeit to a lesser degree, with the following four statements:

- 1) *Most faculty members at HBCUs foster a supportive environment for their students (7.2).*
- 2) *Most HBCUs provide the support students need to enable them to succeed academically (7.0).*
- 3) *Alumni should give financial support to the college or university they attended regardless of their experiences at that institution (7.0).*
- 4) *Most HBCUs are just as effective as most majority-serving institutions in terms of their educational outcomes (6.8).*

The statement about *alumni giving financial support* generated diverse ratings across the sub-groups. The lowest rating (4.8) came from the youngest age group, the 21-30 year olds, while the average for those who did not attend an HBCU was 6.0. The education sector, along with the 31-40 and the 41-50 year old groups gave ratings of 6.6. For females it was 7.2, and for males 6.6. The highest ratings of 8.2 came from those who had worked at HBCUs for either less than one year or more than 16 years.

The items receiving the lowest ratings in this category of statements included one related to *academic advising* and three related to *financial support to my alma mater*, as follows:

- 1) *The quality of academic advising at HBCUs in general is good (6.3).*
- 2) *I would give or give more financial support to my alma mater if I were asked directly to do so (6.3).*
- 3) *I base my decision to give to my alma mater on the quality of my experiences as a student (6.1).*
- 4) *I would give or give more financial support to my alma mater if it were better administered (6.0).*

All three items concerning *financial support* in statements 2, 3, and 4 showed considerable variation in the ratings across the sub-groups. The 21-30 age group again gave the lowest rating (5.3) to the statement about *giving more financial support* while those who had worked at an HBCU for less than a year gave the highest rating (7.5). In between, there were ratings that included 5.7 from those who had not attended or worked for an HBCU and from the 31-40 year old group, and 6.3 from both females and males.

Individuals who had worked at an HBCU for more than 16 years gave the lowest average rating (5.3) to the statement about *basing my decision to give on the quality of my experiences as a student*. The 51-60 year olds and those who had attended HBCUs also



gave lower ratings of 5.4 and 5.5 respectively. Higher ratings were given by the private sector group (7.1) and those who did not attend HBCUs (7.0).

There was a higher level of agreement (see previous page) to the statement that *Alumni should give financial support to the college or university they attended regardless of their experiences at that institution* (7.0) when compared with the statement *I base my decision to give to my alma mater on the quality of my experiences as a student* (6.1). The 21-30 year olds, however, gave the lowest average rating to the first statement (4.8) and the highest to the second (6.8).

The item that generated the lowest level of agreement (6.0) in this category of statements was *I would give or give more financial support to my alma mater if it were better administered*. Lower ratings came from those who had not attended HBCUs (5.2) and those who had worked at HBCUs for 10-15 years. Higher ratings were given by those who had attended HBCUs (6.6), and those who had worked at HBCUs for 16 years or more (6.5). The average rating for females was 5.9 and for males 6.1.

## **G. ALUMNI GIVING**

Two additional issues were raised concerning alumni financial contributions. Participants were asked to indicate whether or not they had *written a check to their alma mater in the past year*. About 56% said yes, while 44% said no. Approximately 56% of both the females and males in the session reported writing a check. The highest percentage that reported alumni contributions came from the 61 and wiser age group (65%), and the lowest from the 21-30 year olds (30%), with the other age groups falling in descending order according to age, i.e., 51-60, 62%; 41-50, 53%; and 31-40, 47%. Approximately 61% of those who attended HBCUs indicated they had written a check in the past year.

When asked to describe their financial contributions, choosing from three statements, 39% of the participants indicated that they *make a financial contribution to their alma mater occasionally*, while 36% said they contributed *regularly*, and 25% had *never made a financial contribution*. The giving percentage among females and males was similar: *occasionally* – females 36%, males 33%; *regularly* – females 36%, males 39%; and *never* – females 26%, males 28%. HBCU graduates reported contributing as follows: 41% *occasionally* 41%, *regularly* 41%, and *never* 17%.

## **Conclusion**

In his introduction to the conference program booklet, John S. Wilson, Jr., executive director of the White House Initiative on HBCUs, spoke of the role HBCUs must play in helping to meet the goal set by President Obama and Secretary Duncan to “have the best-educated and most-competitive and diverse workforce in the world by the year 2020.”

While Town Hall participants in general showed their commitment to HBCUs and affirmed the continuing need for these institutions, their responses also suggest several areas where there is need for increased attention and room for improvement. These results will be the basis for further discussion and action on the part of Dr. Wilson and his staff, in partnership with HBCUs, federal agencies and the private sector.

## **Appendix A**

### **I. Demographic questions**

- a) What is your gender?
- b) What is your age range?
- c) What sector do you represent?
- d) What is your employment status?
- e) Have you ever worked at an HBCU?
- f) If yes, number of years you have worked at an HBCU?
- g) Which of the following factors was most influential in your decision to attend your undergraduate alma mater?

### **II. Educational background**

- a) Did you attend an HBCU as an undergraduate?
- b) Was attending an HBCU your first choice?
- c) Did you receive your undergraduate degree from an HBCU?
- d) Did you receive your undergraduate degree from a for-profit institution?
- e) Did you attend an HBCU for graduate school?

### **III. Financial contributions to alma mater and primary reason for attending this conference.**

A) Which of the following best describes your financial contribution to your alma mater?

1. I made a financial contribution to my alma mater occasionally.
2. I made a financial contribution to my alma mater regularly
3. I have never made a financial contribution to my alma mater.

B) What is your primary reason for attending this conference?

1. Professional and personal networking
2. Professional development
3. Its proximity to the Congressional Black Caucus Weekend
4. The workshop topics
5. The featured speakers
6. To spend time in D.C.
7. To learn about HBCUs
8. To participate as a speaker
9. Other.

### **IV. General views about HBCUs**

Please use the 1-10 level of agreement scale to indicate your views about each statement or question (where 1 = highest level and 10 = lowest level)

- A. HBCUs in general are needed more than ever as an option for students in the U.S. today.
- B. HBCUs are an undervalued resource within the higher education community.
- C. HBCUs in general maintain a high level of academic rigor.
- D. The overall quality of education varies significantly among HBCUs.
- E. In general, the accomplishments and contributions of HBCUs are well publicized.

- F. HBCUs in general do a good job of promoting excellence in student achievement (e.g., through academic advising programs, faculty and student awards, encouraging student applications for prestigious scholarships).
- G. HBCUs in general provide programs that foster their students' intellectual and professional development (e.g., workshops and programs to develop core competencies including analytical, communication, and critical thinking skills, and research training).
- H. HBCUs in general provide programs that foster their students' personal growth (e.g., focusing on core values such as ethics and accountability).
- I. The administrative leadership (president and senior administrators) at HBCUs in general is strong.
- J. The academic leadership (deans, department chairs, directors) at HBCUs in general is strong.
- K. Like many other colleges that face severe financial pressures, declining enrollments, and/or loss of accreditation, HBCUs should consider repurposing their missions, merging, and/or other strategic alternatives.
- L. HBCUs in general do an excellent job in the recruitment of black males.
- M. HBCUs in general do an excellent job in graduating black males.
- N. I would send my child to an HBCU.
- O. If I were choosing again today, I would attend an HBCU for my undergraduate education.
- P. I would recommend that my closest friends should send their child to an HBCU.

**V. The most important issues related to realizing a better future for my alma mater.**

Please use the 1 to 10 level of importance scale to indicate the level of importance for each issue (where 1 = highest level and 10 = lowest level)

- A. Institutional access to financial resources
- B. The executive leadership
- C. Institutional governance (boards of trustees)
- D. Issues of integrity and accountability
- E. Faculty salaries
- F. Faculty development
- G. Promoting academic excellence
- H. Infrastructure/facilities
- I. Increasing the number of alumni who provide financial support
- J. Competition with other institutions for the to students
- K. Students who are underprepared academically when they matriculate
- L. Higher levels of financial aid for students
- M. Student graduate rates
- N. Student recruitment in general

**VI. Alumni views in general**

Please use the 1 to 10 level of agreement scale to indicate your views about each statement (where 1 = highest level and 10 = lowest level).

- A. Overall, I had a great educational experience at my alma mater.
- B. My higher education equipped and prepared me for the working world.

- C. I have a favorable opinion of my undergraduate alma mater in general.
- D. Overall, most HBCUs provide a supportive campus environment
- E. The quality of academic advising at HBCUs in general is good.
- F. Most faculty members at HBCUs foster a supportive environment for their students.
- G. Most HBCUs provide the support students need to enable them to succeed academically.
- H. Most HBCUs provide the support students need to thrive socially.
- I. Most HBCUs are just as effective as most majority-serving institutions in terms of their educational outcomes.
- J. Alumni should give financial support to the college or university they attended regardless of their experiences at that institution.
- K. I would give or give more financial support to my alma mater if it were better administered.
- L. I would give or give more financial support to my alma mater if I were asked directly to do so.'
- M. I base my decision to give to my alma mater on the quality of my experiences as a student.

## **VI. Conference experience**

Please use the 1 to 10 level of agreement scale to respond to these statements (where 1 = highest level and 10 = lowest level).

- A. So far, I have been pleased with my experience at this year's National HBCUs Week Conference.
- B. I have found this Town Hall meeting to be very informative.