

# The Advantages of a Minority Attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Marilyn D. Saulsbury

**SUMMARY.** There are many reasons for Black students to attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The low student-to-teacher ratio is a definitive factor for many Black students, in which the possibility of requesting and getting individual help, if necessary, is achievable. Secondly, a feeling of unified competitiveness to succeed not only individually, but as a race, is a positive factor.

Moreover, young Black students are welcomed on the basis of their academic, social or artistic talents, with no reference to fulfilling a racial quota. Furthermore, at HBCUs, Black students have role models who perpetuate the belief that all people have the right and capability to learn and excel in all fields of study. Finally, Black students feel a renewed sense of pride in themselves when they attend Black institutions of higher learning.

There are many advantages for minorities at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This article will summarize many of the factors that are important to the writer and which were determinants for her choosing a predominantly Black university in order to study pharmacy.

One of the most important factors for non-Whites going to a historically black institution of higher learning is the low ratio of students to teacher. The small class sizes enhance the interaction between pupils and faculty. We are able to go to a professor at any time to ask questions about classes or career choices. S/He is not just a student who possesses a Social Security Card and no face, they are unique individuals with

---

Marilyn D. Saulsbury is a pharmacy student at Xavier University of Louisiana College of Pharmacy, New Orleans, LA 70125.

special talents and needs. In this way, the Black student benefits having not only an instructor, but also an advisor who cares.

Furthermore, competitiveness is viewed differently at Black universities than at majority institutions. Non-Black students at non-Black schools compete against each other with temerity and cut-throat ferocity. In this environment, some students will flourish and some will not, but overall, due to the large number of non-Black students, more will have the opportunity to complete school, get jobs and live a nice life with hard work and sacrifice. At Black institutions, even though competition is good, if you lose a student, you lose a potentially hard-working Black American who can contribute to the continued efforts to help his/her race.

Because being a minority means being small in number compared to the majority, Blacks cannot afford to lose even one individual if we wish to continue to combat the adversities of everyday life as Black Americans. For this reason, students who are excelling academically and teachers at Black institutions, generally cannot afford the luxury of basking in praise or resting on their laurels, because they feel motivated to help their brothers and sisters who are not succeeding as well. This idea of sacrificing to help others helps the motivated student and the local and national Black community.

Black students who attend Black schools also receive a feeling of belonging and welcome. They know that they will be accepted for their academic, social or artistic talents, with no reference to race. A feeling of acceptance for any individual is important. When a person feels accepted and wanted, they actively produce and complete tasks given to them. Also, if they are really motivated and impressed by those around them, they attempt to emulate what is seen and felt. Thus, going to Black institutions with other Black students and with professors who accept them and expect them to do well, offers positive reinforcement. This fosters role models who will continue this experience to other Black students of the future. When one is surrounded by positive role models, the morale and expectations of the individual reflects one's environment. Black institutions perpetuate the belief that all people have the innate right to learn and excel in fields of study that interest them.

Ninety percent (90%) of all Black professionals in America graduated from Historically Black Colleges or Universities. Attending a Black institution of higher learning prepares students to meet the challenges they will face daily. Graduates leave with confidence, self-worth, determination and a fervent desire to beat the odds. This urgency to prove their competence as trained and skilled professionals has a triad effect.

Initially, Black students have a compelling drive to succeed for their

families/guardians or ancestors who have come before them. Even though many Black students have immediate or distant family who have graduated from college, a great number of them have no relatives who have attended an institution of higher learning. For this reason, they become the first person to complete college. With these types of expectations from their parents and other relatives resting upon their shoulders, Black students strive to do well. They owe a debt to their family who helped them financially. Moreover, they feel a deep emotional and psychological commitment to excel, because when they do, their entire family excels.

Secondly, the Black student has to prove to herself that she can utilize her knowledge and talents to achieve the "American Dream." A disproportionate number of minority students do not possess the financial and social advantages of nonminority students. Thus, many Black students are not able to experience a variety of cultural and social enlightenings of their non-Black schoolmates. The ability to go to dramatic plays, operas, ballet, symphony concerts, museums, galleries, school debates and scholastic competitions is not possessed by all Black students. Additionally, for those Black students who may be financially or academically able to afford participation in these activities, the time factor is important. Managing time between school and working to cover expenses is difficult and leaves little chance for cultural outings. Yet, Black-student graduates want to be able to afford and enjoy the finer things in life, rather than just get by.

Finally, Black students wish to prove continuously to non-Blacks that they are intelligent and resourceful people who are able to perform at any job or task that they are given. They also want to show that they are worthy of their jobs, not because they are Black and maintain a quota for the workplace, but because they worked hard for their position and can produce as workers or managers.

Along with fulfilling these dreams, young Black Americans learn the extreme importance of supporting Black schools which help support Black people. They demonstrate this by giving back to Black institutions financially. This helps to continue the upkeep and maintenance of historically Black schools. Moreover, Black alumni can encourage and send their children or relatives to attend these institutions which foster the continuation of their important presence in Black America.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are many reasons for Black students to attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The first is the low student to teacher ratio.

This number is such that each student is able to have personal interactions with his/her instructors. This is most helpful for students to get assistance with their course work and to ask questions about tentative careers.

Second is the feeling of unified competitiveness that is present at Black institutions. Here, Black students and professors help not only themselves but others in the Black community who may not have the opportunity to have a better life-style.

Thirdly, young Black students receive a feeling of belonging and being welcomed for themselves. This helps them to succeed without reference to their skin color and other prejudicial stereotypes.

Additionally, at predominately Black institutions, Black students have an abundance of Black role models who help perpetuate the belief that all people have the right to learn and excel in fields of study that are of interest to them.

Finally, when Black students attend Black universities, they gain a renewed pride in the accomplishments of their peers. They also become confident and determined to prove to non-Blacks that they are worthy of their achievements, not as a quota or a number, but because of their individual abilities.