

The Relevance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Preparing Black Educators and Teachers

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Abstract

This study examines the teacher readiness of Black graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) relative to non-HBCUs. To accomplish this objective, this paper identifies several components of preparation available from the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study 2008/2009 (B&B: 08/09). Of the K-12 teaching preparation factors, significant differences were found between HBCU and non-HBCU graduates within a bachelor's degree teaching major. In addition, the study revealed that HBCU graduates maintained the highest proportion of teaching preparation across all variables, with the exception of awareness of the Teach Grant Program.

Introduction

One of the important milestones in the history of higher education in the United States was the creation of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) (Brown, 2001). Consisting of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), the creation of MSIs was essential because it represented the recognition of the country's commitment to providing educational opportunities for underrepresented populations (Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrando, 2001). Whether out of the spirit of philanthropy, necessity, or fairness, the reason why MSIs were created and have survived more than 140 years, is that they fill a void in educating many minority and disenfranchised college students (Swygert, 2004). Yet, the requisite of these institutions, particularly that of HBCUs, has consistently been challenged.

HBCUs are defined as, "Black academic institutions established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and still is, the education of Black Americans" (Roebuck & Murty, 1993, p. 3). However, the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education has also designated some institutions that were established after 1964 as HBCUs (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). The year of 1964 represents a historical marker because it was the time the *Civil Rights Act* was passed. Since the implementation of the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964, federal student aid programs, and affirmative action, there has been a shift in the number of African Americans attending HBCUs. Whereas previously a critical mass of African American students attended HBCUs, by 1973 three-fourths of Blacks were attending predominately White institutions (PWIs) (Allen & Jewell, 2002).

Although they represent roughly 4% (approximately 100 in total) of American universities and colleges, they enroll approximately 16% of all African Americans in 4-year institutions and graduate 30% of African Americans earning bachelor's degrees (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011).

Additionally, academic colleges and schools, such as Schools of Education on HBCU campuses, are especially critical as they graduate 50% of African American teachers with bachelor's degrees (National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, 2008). This is important to note that as K-12 classrooms are continuously becoming more ethnically diverse, the teaching profession has not followed the same trend, and the majority of the American teaching profession is composed of individuals from White middle-class backgrounds (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006).

Providing high quality teachers for students, regardless of background, is crucial as teacher quality is an important factor in improving student achievement (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011). However, Sleeter (2005) emphasizes that teachers with limited multicultural experiences and low expectations of culturally diverse children may have fewer successes in decreasing the achievement disparity. Research has shown that having a broader pool of well-qualified African American educators has the potential for shrinking the achievement gap between White and non-White students (Castenell, 2002, cited in Southern Education Foundation, 2006; King, 1993). For this reason, and HBCUs ability of producing graduates, HBCUs are capable of addressing the disparity of African Americans in the teaching profession. However, the legitimacy of these institutions has consistently been under fire. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the preparedness of Black students to enter the K-12 teaching profession across institution type.

Despite the past and current role of HBCUs in educating Black students, questions remain concerning their centrality and necessity, when many PWIs have extended educational opportunities to African Americans (King, 1993). Though academic availability has increased for Blacks and other students of color within the country, the limits in institutional financing have been a persistent challenge for HBCUs. Moreover, a strong body of research indicates that Black students at PWIs experience alienation, adjustment issues, academic difficulty, and a lack of faculty relationships, while research also shows that HBCUs foster an environment that provides a positive experience for African Americans (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 2001). Although more African Americans are attending PWIs, HBCUs still serve a vital purpose, for they continue to produce a large number of African American college graduates, which demonstrates their "ability to produce a sizeable share of Black B.A.'s" (Allen, 1992, p. 28).

Methods

This study seeks to uncover at what rates HBCUs are preparing Black students to enter the elementary and secondary teaching profession. In doing so, this study also compares these rates to those students with degrees from non-HBCUs. Student's t values for the difference between proportions are calculated to determine significance, by using the following formula:

Figure 1. Student's t value formula for difference between proportions

$$t = \frac{E_1 - E_2}{\sqrt{(se_1^2 + se_2^2)}}$$

where E_1 and E_2 are the independent estimates to be compared and se_1 and se_2 are the respective standard errors (Choy & Bradburn, 2008). The test statistic is significant at $p < .05$ level if its absolute value is greater than 1.960.

This study uses the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study 2008/2009 (B&B: 08/09) which draws its subsample from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:08), a

nationally representative study of approximately 128,000 students from over 1,900 postsecondary institutions (Wine, Cominole, Wheelless, Dudley, & Franklin, 2005). Students who were identified and participated in the B&B:08/09 study (n~17,000) completed their undergraduate degrees in 2007-08 academic school year. Respondents were interviewed in the 2007-08 base year and were surveyed again in 2009.

The B&B is a useful dataset to employ because it places special emphasis on experiences of new K-12 teachers regarding preparation, persistence in the profession, and their career paths. Of the students within this study, 10% identified as Black/African American (n~1700), of which approximately 100 had started teaching since completing their degree (Cataldi, Green, Henke, Lew, Woo, Shepherd, & Siegel, 2011).

Results

This study examines the teacher preparation of Black graduates of HBCUs relative to non-HBCUs. Table 1 presents the readiness proportion estimates and standard errors for Black students with an undergraduate degree from each of these institutional types. Of the K-12 teaching preparation factors, significant differences were only found between HBCU and non-HBCU graduates within a bachelor's degree teaching major. Significantly fewer HBCU graduates enrolled in a bachelor's degree teaching major. It is also interesting to note, but not of not statistical significance, is that a greater percent of HBCU graduates were prepared for a teaching career (11.1% vs. 9.8%) and employed in a teaching field in 2009 (9% vs. 6% respectively).

Table 1 Black students and teacher preparedness

| Variables | HBCU graduate | | Non-HBCU graduate | | <i>t</i> |
|--|---------------|-------|-------------------|------|----------|
| | % | SE | % | SE | |
| Applied for a K-12 position | 16.0% | 7.73 | 15.1% | 2.92 | 0.11 |
| Aware of the TEACH Grant Program | 8.4% | 4.38 | 16.7% | 2.78 | -1.66 |
| Bachelor's degree major in teaching | 1.7% | 1.01 | 4.4% | 0.85 | -2.05* |
| Certified to teach at K-12 level in 2009 | 32.6% | 9.40 | 24.7% | 3.98 | 0.77 |
| Completed a student teaching assignment | 19.3% | 7.87 | 18.3% | 3.38 | 0.12 |
| Considered K-12 Teaching in 2007-08 | 23.8% | 3.73 | 18.5% | 1.66 | 1.30 |
| Considered K-12 Teaching in 2009 | 27.4% | 6.61 | 17.9% | 1.75 | 1.39 |
| Did not apply for teaching position because needed more education | 69.6% | 7.27 | 59.9% | 4.23 | 1.15 |
| Did not apply for teaching position because did not offer enough money | 13.4% | 1.88 | 6.5% | 8.38 | 0.80 |
| Had taken Praxis as of 07-8 | 43.3% | 10.14 | 27.0% | 4.08 | 1.49 |
| Employed in a teaching field in 2009 | 9.0% | 2.64 | 6.0% | 0.95 | 1.07 |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------|------|------|------|------|
| Prepared for teaching career | 11.1% | 2.87 | 9.8% | 1.36 | 0.41 |
|------------------------------|-------|------|------|------|------|

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, B&B: 09 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study.

*p<.05

Discussion

Though there were no significant differences in the remaining comparisons (i.e., applied for a K-12 position, aware of the Teach Grant Program, certified to teach at K-12 level in 2009, completed a student teaching assignment, considered K-12 teaching in 2007-08, considered K-12 teaching in 2009, did not apply for teaching position because needed more education, did not apply for teaching position because did not offer enough money, had taken Praxis as of 2007-08, employed in a teaching field in 2009, and prepared for teaching career) it is interesting to note that HBCU graduates maintained the highest proportion of teaching preparation across all variables, with the exception of awareness of the Teach Grant Program (a federal student aid program designed to provide grants to students who will complete course work needed to begin a career in teaching). Several variables including, certified to teach K-12 in 2009, considered K-12 teaching in 2009, and had taken the Praxis in 2007-08 appear to have elevated standard errors. Increasing sample size of HBCU graduates and thus the scores within the sample would help to mitigate standard errors.

Consequently, a limitation of this study, and perhaps of many national higher education surveys, is the low number of students representing HBCUs. As with this study, only 14% of the subsample acquired their degree from a HBCU and even fewer identified as African American. Using a subsample from a national dataset may prove to be a consistent problem to conduct research, especially on minority populations. Sue and Dhindsa (2006) claim to address the sample size dilemma, researchers have resorted to oversampling. Given these concerns, research findings for small groups may be unavailable, or the extent of knowledge regarding certain minority groups may be limited (Sue & Dhindsa, 2006).

Policy Implications

Though Black students within the sample of this study received a teaching degree at greater rates from non-HBCUs than HBCUs, more participation is needed. Teachers of color are an important resource in today's K-12 classrooms; however, the limited presence of African American teachers is an ongoing challenge facing the educational climate. The National Center of Educational Statistics projects a significant increase in enrollment of culturally diverse school-aged students, and culturally diverse educators may not keep the same pace. Thus, it is imperative that the preparation of teachers and teachers of color to become effective, culturally, competent elementary and secondary educators is also addressed (Hussar & Bailey, 2013).

Minority teachers who are trained properly and are supported professionally make a significant impact on the minority students they teach. Studies indicate that these teachers can generate important achievement gains among minority students and has the potential to shrink the achievement gap between White and non-White students (Castenell, 2002; Dee, 2004; Southern Education Foundation, 2006). Given the need for increasing the number of culturally and ethnically diverse teachers, it is important to investigate ways in which institutions can support

the recruitment and retention of minority educators, and their placement into classrooms that are often heavily populated with culturally diverse learners (Brooks, West-Olatunji, Blackmon, Froelich, De La Torre, Peregrino, Quintanar, & Smith, 2012). The need for recruitment and retention policies is evident as research affirms that minority teachers have lower attrition rates than White teachers (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006).

It has been longstanding that advancing programs to increase the presence of academically adept and committed teachers remains a major challenge in the education profession. However, an important variable related to the development of successful programs is the creation of initiatives as collaborative endeavors among local schools, state departments of education, and institutions of higher education; and the development of teacher licensure programs within local school divisions. As a response, some entities, such as the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), offer programs at HBCUs to assist in recruiting minorities into special education programs and also have devised strategies in retaining them in their teaching careers. In addition, a number of other government and nongovernment organizations have implemented a variety of minority teacher recruitment initiatives including future educator high school programs, partnerships between community colleges and four-year institutions, and career ladders for paraprofessionals in schools.

Alternative pathways to the teaching profession are often considered by states, but are often met with contention. Alternative routes to teacher preparation are programs that offer individuals, regardless if they have a background in education, the opportunity to become a certified teacher (NEA, 2013). Opponents argue that alternative route programs disadvantages both the teacher candidates and the students they teach because their preparation is inadequate as compared to teachers who participated in traditional programs (Allen, 2003). However, advocates suggest that alternate routes play an important role in expanding the pool of teachers in which teacher candidates are recruited for areas where the demand for teachers are the highest (e.g., district specific) and within subjects where there is the greatest need (NEA, 2013). Allen (2003) also indicates that these programs make an important contribution to the diversity of the teacher profession as they enlist greater percentage of minority teacher candidates than do traditional programs. However, he further notes that research on the value added from these programs is limited, and warrants additional investigation.

Conclusion

Challenges overall in recruiting minorities into the teaching profession exist on many fronts. Whether the issues are centered around the attractiveness of the profession due to low salaries, low societal appreciation of teachers, or the struggle of igniting student engagement, the dilemma of preparing, acquiring, and maintaining a diverse teaching population is compounding, and there is a scarceness of research that examines this challenge. Thus, the preparation of potential teachers should facilitate the investigation into ways in which institutions and program initiatives can support the recruitment of candidates of color. Likewise, there is great need for robust educational research on teacher preparation that disaggregates analysis by institutional type. As HBCUs have historically and currently produce large numbers of Black graduates, additional research is needed to investigate their role, and the role of non-HBCUs, in increasing the presence and retention of Black teachers in the K-12 classroom.

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