

Opportunities, challenges specific to HBCUs highlighted during inaugural HBCU Advance

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By Rachel Williams, NACAC Communications

Arlington, VA (June 12, 2024) – To be well positioned for the future, historically Black colleges and universities should build systems and processes that serve their unique missions instead of caving to pressure to conform to the systems built by predominantly white institutions.

That was one of the key takeaways from NACAC's inaugural HBCU Advance on June 10 at Coppin State University in Baltimore, Maryland.

"Soul food didn't come from emulating white chefs. Good Black research won't come from imitating white researchers," said keynote speaker Ivory Toldson, chief of research at Concentric Educational Solutions and professor of counseling psychology at Howard University.

HBCU Advance was designed to build off the success of the HBCU Roundtable session at NACAC Conference 2023 and to support HBCU admission offices, celebrate their successes, and bring awareness to their challenges.

Attendees also heard from Coppin State University President Anthony Jenkins and President and CEO of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund Harry Williams. A primary theme of their panel discussion — moderated by NACAC CEO Angel B. Pérez — was change.

Regarding the upcoming demographic cliff, “we have to adjust how we recruit, where we recruit, and who we recruit,” said Jenkins. “Black students make up 75-80 percent of HBCUs, but that’s going to shift in a few years. We’re going to have to grapple with our identities as all institutions are going to be fighting for the same, smaller pool of Black students.”

Attendees of HBCU Advance also heard from speakers about access, affordability, and persistence from the HBCU perspective, and engaged in smaller tabletop exercises where they identified successful practices of HBCUs that can be scaled across all higher education, challenges in reaching prospective students, and how policymakers and institutional leadership can support HBCU admission offices.

Organizing HBCU Advance was a strategic initiative of NACAC, which has been identifying new ways to support its diverse members and communities within college admission counseling. In addition to Coppin State, Morgan State University, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Bowie State University, Spelman College, Howard University, University of the Virgin Islands, and Delaware State University HBCUs were represented at the event, as well as community-based organizations, secondary and postsecondary admission professionals, and independent educational consultants.

“HBCUs continue to occupy a unique and vibrant space within the higher education landscape,” said John Hollemon, director of diversity, equity, and inclusion at NACAC. “As we talked to the NACAC membership, it became clear that we needed to provide space to acknowledge and address the unique needs of our HBCU community, while celebrating its diverse experiences and perspectives to cultivate best practices, progression, inclusivity, and distinction.”