

HBCUs - COLLEGES OF CHOICE FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN STUDENTS

By Abdul-Hakeem Imoro, Widener University

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The phrase “African Renaissance” gained prominence in the post-colonial era when Africa repositioned itself in anticipation of the challenges ahead with identity. The search for a new identity after obtaining independence from countries such as Britain, France, and Belgium mirrors the role and missions of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in American higher education. HBCUs are educational spaces where students come to identify or reidentify themselves in history and situate themselves within the contemporary landscape, with an eye to the future.

Ghana, a West African country, still holds on to the educational models and frameworks the colonial rulers left centuries ago. Higher education institutions such as universities and polytechnics are merely replicas of the British colonial education system. While higher education in developed countries has moved away from teacher-centered ways of teaching and learning to a collaboration between teachers and students, the reverse is the case in many Sub-Saharan African countries. Education in these countries is centered on teachers and not students – the current system makes learning a one-way street. Educating the Sub-Saharan African students at HBCUs, therefore, presents an opportunity to embrace a multi-cultural identity.

Within the U.S. higher education spectrum, HBCUs are institutions that serve students from demographics with financial needs. [These institutions were created to provide education to Black students and while the missions of these colleges are supported in the Higher Education Act of 1965, HBCUs have provided and continue to provide education for all students who enroll in their programs.](#) Before the Civil War, there was no structured higher education system for Black people, so public policy and the law did not allow them an education.

As a student of African origin and higher education researcher, I seek to understand what informs the college choices of Sub-Saharan African students in the United States, often eliciting exciting anecdotes. Many African students believe there are better higher education opportunities in the U.S. Although education destinations for many students from Sub-Saharan African countries include Europe, China, and India, the U.S. is still a preferred choice because of job opportunities, English language, and the prestige that comes with the degrees awarded.

My first encounter with the term HBCU was when a classmate pointed to my shirt with the picture of Ghana’s first president, the late Kwame Nkrumah, who happens to be an alumnus of Lincoln University of Pennsylvania. My friend went on to tell me about her admiration for President Nkrumah and how his HBCU education shaped his thinking about the liberation of the African continent. Reflecting on how I came to know the acronym HBCU is precisely why these institutions need to strategically recruit some of the best brains and minds for the future from Africa. Many prospective African college students only get to understand what HBCUs represent in American higher education by chance. While I am not a graduate of an HBCU, I appreciate what these historical institutions stand for in the higher education space of scholarship.

For international college recruiters, it may be worth knowing that students from Sub-Saharan Africa make up 3.7 percent of the overall enrollment of international students in the U.S. for the academic year 2018-19. [Among HBCUs, Morgan State University enrolled the most international students with 945 students. Howard University enrolled 920 international students and Tennessee State University has enrolled 584 international students.](#)

A myriad of sources of funding informs the decision of many international students on where to study. [Historically, international students’ funding is through the following sources: private funding, U.S. government-funded Fulbright Foreign Student Program, home country government-funded scholarships, and scholarships from colleges and universities.](#) In recent times, China has introduced scholarship programs designed explicitly for Sub-Saharan

African nationals. However, the challenges that confront many African students who study in China include the language barriers and lack of job opportunities after graduation.

HBCUs are well-positioned to attract many students from Sub-Saharan African countries because of their historical significance. Sub-Saharan students are interested in HBCUs because they understand that the influence of the African Renaissance was once championed by African leaders on college choices. These historical colleges will require a strategy that aims at influencing the next generation of global thinkers from the motherland.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Abdul-Hakeem Imoro is a final year doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Administration Leadership program at Widener University Center for Education. He is a scholar-practitioner whose research interests focus on education policy, public policy, and journalism. His work addresses equity, diversity, and inclusion; curriculum development; institutional effectiveness; and student success in higher education. He lived and worked in Ghana as a journalist for five years. Feel free to connect with Abdul on Twitter at @dagbankarachi.

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