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# A Role for Policymakers in Improving the Status of Black Male Students in U.S. Higher Education

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# MEN OF COLOR

A Role for Policymakers in Improving the Status  
of Black Male Students in U.S. Higher Education

By Shaun R. Harper, Ph.D.  
and Frank Harris III, Ed.D.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

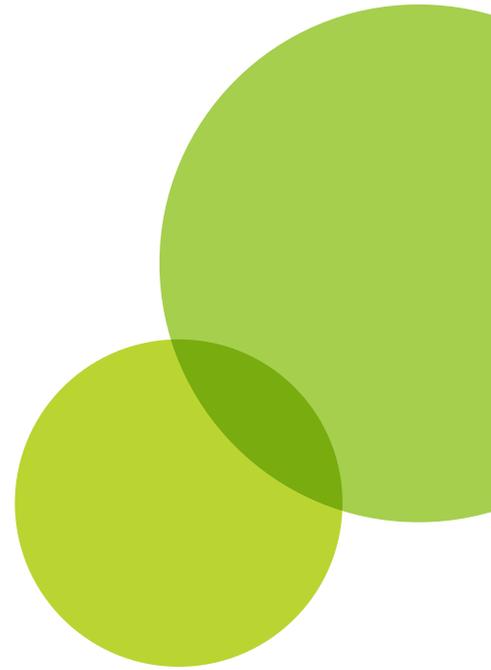
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Over the past several years, a wide variety of groups—from foundations to think tanks to national leaders—have collectively advanced an aggressive agenda focused on improving college completion and increasing postsecondary degree attainment rates among Americans. Yet goals articulated by these and other stakeholders are unlikely to be realized in the absence of a greater policy emphasis on supporting students from populations with the highest college dropout rates.

One widely recognized example is Black men: Two-thirds of Black undergraduate men who start at public colleges and universities do not graduate within six years, which is the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial groups in U.S. higher education. Researchers in the past decade have called attention to these high attrition rates and other troubling trends concerning Black male collegians. In an effort to combat these trends, educators and administrators at all levels have employed numerous strategies to improve Black men's pathways to and through postsecondary education. Several philanthropic organizations have generously funded some of these efforts; in addition, the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, the United Negro College Fund, the College Board, and numerous other groups have sponsored convenings in an effort to elevate the conversation on issues facing this population. But missing from this multidimensional landscape of

important initiatives is a complementary policy agenda that aims to improve Black men's college readiness, postsecondary educational outcomes, and degree attainment rates.

Given the systemic nature of racial achievement and opportunity gaps in education and their disproportionate impact on Black men, postsecondary institutions alone cannot close them. Participation from multiple stakeholder groups is necessary. This report calls for greater involvement by federal and state policymakers, high school counselors, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, the policy-making organization for intercollegiate athletics), community-based organizations, and other groups in ongoing efforts to improve the status of Black undergraduate men. In support of this goal, this report presents policy-relevant data from the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice, NCAA Federal Graduation Rates Database, and other sources to paint a statistical portrait of Black male students in postsecondary contexts. Also included is a summary of selected efforts on college campuses across the country that illustrate some of the promising practices that can make a difference for Black men. Nonetheless, it is clear that well-intentioned institutional activities on their own will not substantively improve the condition of Black male collegians. Thus, the report concludes with suggestions for policymakers and other stakeholders. The current imperative to increase our nation's competitiveness in the global economy is linked to the attention and resources that policymakers devote to citizens for whom college completion rates are persistently lowest, thus Black men must be a high priority.

# INTRODUCTION

A recent book, *College Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research and Implications for Practice*, points out many alarming trends and statistics about undergraduate men in a range of postsecondary institutional contexts.<sup>1</sup> As the authors note, it is common to see news headlines such as “The Boy Crisis: At Every Level of Education, They’re Falling Behind” (*Newsweek*, January 2006) and “The New Gender Divide: At Colleges, Women Are Leaving Men in the Dust” (*New York Times*, July 2006).

Across all levels of education, young men’s comparatively lower levels of educational achievement and attainment, as well as problematic behavioral trends (e.g., sexual assault, binge drinking, property destruction, suicides, campus shootings), have garnered attention from journalists, educators, school administrators, parents, and others. Conversations have included male undergraduates from a range of racial backgrounds. However, disproportionate emphasis has been placed on Black undergraduate men, a population that is repeatedly characterized as one of the most underrepresented, stereotyped, disengaged, and lowest performing students on college and university campuses.<sup>2</sup>

In the past decade, several books and research reports, as well as more than 60 peer-reviewed academic journal articles, have been written about Black male collegians.<sup>3</sup> The challenges these young men face on college campuses have been a recurring topic of discussion at annual education conferences and meetings sponsored by philanthropic foundations. Furthermore, they have been subjects of featured stories on

CNN as well as *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and other news sources. Despite the attention that has been devoted to their current condition in U.S. higher education, only recently have Black men emerged as a serious focus among federal and state policymakers. This report argues that they should be a center of attention.

### The purpose of this report is threefold:

1. To provide a summary of policy-relevant trends and issues concerning Black male college students;
2. To offer a snapshot of current initiatives that aim to address the problematic condition of college success for Black undergraduate men; and
3. To propose a role for policymakers at all levels—institutional, federal, and state—as well as other relevant groups such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and influential organizations such as foundations, community-based organizations, and higher education associations in improving Black men’s educational outcomes and postsecondary degree attainment rates.

Two key positions undergird this report. First, aggressive and intentional efforts to improve college access, success, and degree attainment among Black men contribute to the economic viability of our nation. Increasing the number of Black male students who complete postsecondary education is necessary to realize the goal of reestablishing the United States as the leader in the number of college-educated adults. Second, social programs and compensatory initiatives currently offered by U.S. colleges and universities are insufficient to improve postsecondary degree attainment and educational outcomes among Black men. A complementary policy response is urgently needed.

Unfortunately, policymakers have not been at the forefront of conversations and important efforts focused on improving Black men’s college outcomes and increasing their postsecondary degree attainment rates. Given the pervasiveness of this problem, more advocacy and action among policymakers and other governing bodies are crucial steps in moving forward the completion agenda.

1 S. R. Harper and F. Harris III, *College Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research and Implications for Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

2 S. R. Harper, *Black Male Student Success in Higher Education: A Report from the National Black Male College Achievement Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, 2012). Available online: <http://www.gse.upenn.edu/equity/content/center-publications>.

3 S. R. Harper, *Bibliography on Black Undergraduate Men: Books, Reports, and Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, 2012). Available online: [www.http://works.bepress.com/sharper/45](http://works.bepress.com/sharper/45).

# THE CONDITION OF BLACK MALE COLLEGIANS

Much has been written about Black males in P–12 schools; their educational histories and challenges have been a topic of discussion for more than a decade.<sup>4</sup> Many Black undergraduate men bring with them to college educational histories that are often blemished by low expectations for their success in school and society, insufficient exposure to Black male teachers, and culturally unresponsive curricula and teaching methods.

Their same-race male peers are also overrepresented among students who are unfairly disciplined and expelled from school, heavily concentrated in the lowest academic tracks, and misdiagnosed for placement into special education programs.<sup>5</sup> High school is a critical pathway to postsecondary educa-

tion, yet Black male students have the lowest high school graduation rates in most states. In 2008, 47 percent of Black male students graduated from high school on time with their entering cohorts, compared with 78 percent of their White male peers.<sup>6</sup> If Black males continue to face these and other challenges in their P–12 schooling contexts, fewer of them will be likely to enroll in college. Nonetheless, this report focuses squarely on Black undergraduate men in postsecondary education.

**National, state, and specific athletic conference data highlight the troubled status of Black male students on college and university campuses. These trends do not necessarily represent the worst-case scenarios, but they do convey the urgency of the problem:**

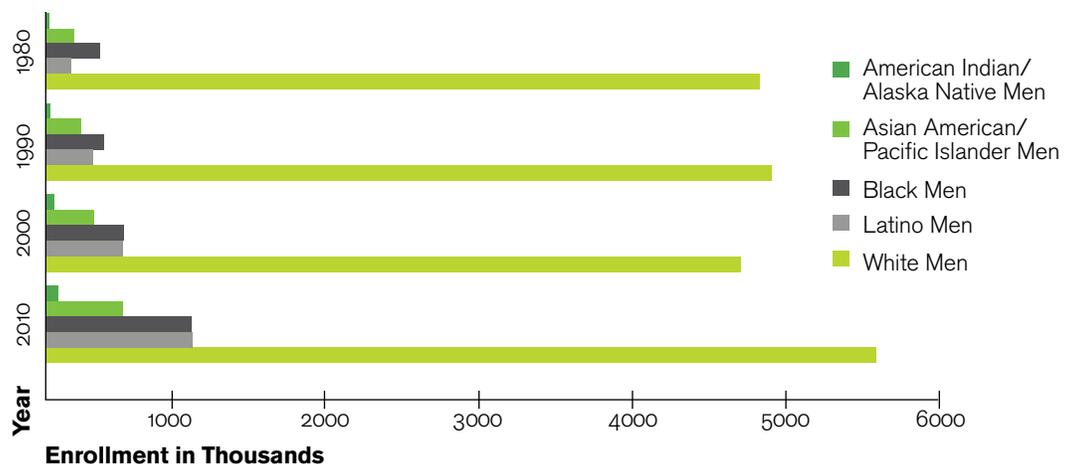
- **Low Postsecondary Enrollments:** The persistent underrepresentation of Black men is a problem in postsecondary education. Like men from other racial groups, Black male students' college enrollments increased between 1980 and 2010 (see **FIGURE 1**). Despite incremental gains over this 30-year period, the proportion of men of color to White male students across all degree levels remains disparate.

<sup>4</sup> J. F. L. Jackson and J. L. Moore III, "The African American Male Crisis in Education: A Popular Media Infatuation or Needed Public Policy Response?" *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no. 7 (2008), 847–853.

<sup>5</sup> D. E. Thomas and H. C. Stevenson, "Gender Risks and Education: The Particular Classroom Challenges for Urban Low-income African American Boys," *Review of Research in Education* 33 (2009), 160–180; I. A. Toldson, "Breaking Barriers: Plotting the Path to Academic Success for School-age African-American Males" (Washington, DC: Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Schott Foundation for Public Education, *Yes We Can: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males* (Cambridge, MA: Author, 2010).

**FIGURE 1**  
Growth in College Enrollments, All Degree Levels, 1980–2010



Note: Fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2011. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2010.

**TABLE 1****Average Six-Year Graduation Rates at Public Universities in Michigan, Cohort Years 2001–04**

Institution	Black Men %	Students Overall %	Difference
Central Michigan University	43.4	57.3	-13.9
Eastern Michigan University	20.7	38.5	-17.9
Ferris State University	17.0	39.7	-22.7
Grand Valley State University	45.1	55.2	-10.1
Lake Superior State University	50.0	36.4	13.6
Michigan State University	53.0	75.2	-22.2
Michigan Technological University	51.7	63.7	-12
Northern Michigan University	25.2	47.0	-21.8
Oakland University	20.8	43.2	-22.4
Saginaw Valley State University	13.0	36.3	-23.3
University of Michigan–Ann Arbor	66.4	88.1	-21.8
University of Michigan–Dearborn	30.0	51.2	-21.2
University of Michigan–Flint	25.9	37.8	-11.9
Wayne State University	6.4	33.4	-27
Western Michigan University	36.3	54.2	-18

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Average based on students who started in 2001, 2002, 2003 or 2004.

• **Low College Completion Rates:** In four cohorts of Black male undergraduates at public four-year colleges and universities, 33 percent earned bachelor's degrees within six years at the institutions where they started, compared with 48 percent of students overall. For example, **TABLE 1** includes data for public universities in Michigan, where Black men completed baccalaureate degree programs, on average, at a rate nearly 17 percentage points lower than students overall.<sup>8</sup> Completion gaps between Black men and the overall student population are similar at public institutions across the United States, and are of increasing concern for institutions interested in pursuing a diverse study body.

• **Sex Gaps in Degree Attainment:** Across all racial groups and each postsecondary degree level (from associate's through doctoral), women earn more degrees than men as a proportion of the total. But as shown in **FIGURE 2**, the cumulative gender gap in degree attainment is widest

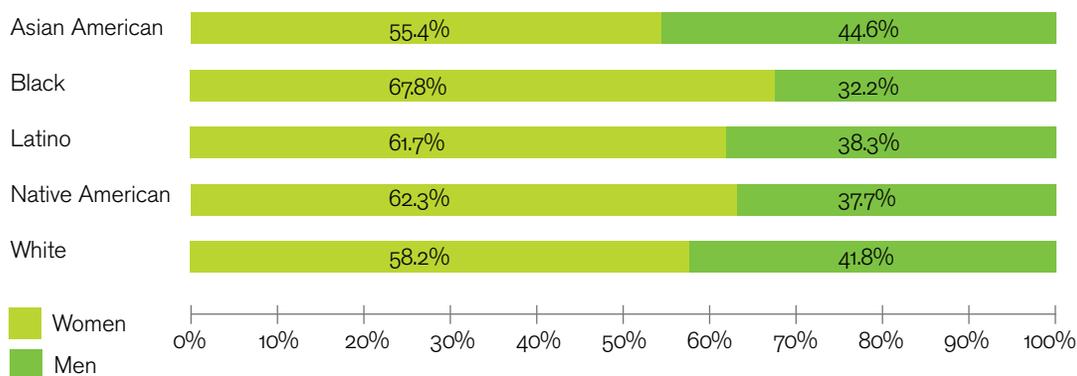
among Black students, with women outnumbering their male counterparts by more than two to one. Although many factors play into these differences, they reinforce the need to focus on Black men and the resources that may be needed to attract and retain these students.

• **Overrepresentation in Revenue-Generating College Sports:** In 2009, Black men accounted for less than 4 percent of full-time undergraduates at public colleges and universities,<sup>9</sup> but were 55 percent of football and basketball team members at public Division I institutions, the NCAA's highest and most financially profitable competition level.<sup>10</sup> **TABLE 2** illustrates Black men's overrepresentation in revenue-generating sports in the Southeastern Conference. These and similar disparities raise questions and concerns about the extent to which Black men are exploited for athletic purposes, the millions of dollars that are generated by the NCAA and its member institutions, and how those dollars are put to use.

<sup>8</sup> S. R. Harper, *Black Male Students in Public Higher Education: A 50-state Report Card* (Washington, DC: Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, 2012). Federal and other analyses frequently use six-year graduation rates; some students may graduate after this period.

<sup>9</sup> Harper, *Black Male Students in Public Higher Education*, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> S. R. Harper, C. D. Williams, and H. W. Blackman, *Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequities in NCAA Division I Revenue-Generating College Sports* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, forthcoming).

**FIGURE 2****Sex Differences in Postsecondary Degree Attainment, All Levels, 2009****TABLE 2****Black Men's Overrepresentation in Revenue-Generating Sports, Southeastern Conference 2010**

Institution	Percentage of Undergraduates	Percentage of Football/Basketball Teams	Difference
University of Alabama	4.5	69.4	-64.9
Auburn University	3.4	68	-64.6
University of Arkansas	2.4	61.2	-58.8
University of Florida	3.7	64.6	-60.9
University of Georgia	2.2	72.4	-70.2
University of Kentucky	3.2	67.3	-64.1
Louisiana State University	3.5	69.4	-65.9
Mississippi State University	8.8	81.6	-72.8
University of Mississippi	5.3	72.6	-67.3
University of South Carolina	4.1	65.3	-61.2
University of Tennessee	3.4	62.5	-59.1
Vanderbilt University	3.1	39.5	-36.4

Sources: U.S. Department of Education Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and NCAA Federal Graduation Rates Database.

• **Inequities in Student-Athlete Graduation Rates:** Across four graduating cohorts (2002–05), 46 percent of Black male student-athletes earned bachelor's degrees from public Division I institutions within six years, compared with 59 percent of student-athletes overall." **TABLE 3** highlights gaps

in six-year graduation rates across four cohorts of student-athletes at colleges and universities in the Big Ten athletic conference. These differences suggest that more resources are needed to support Black men who participate in college sports.

<sup>11</sup> Harper, Williams, and Blackman, *Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequities in NCAA Division I Revenue-Generating College Sports*, forthcoming.

**TABLE 3****Student–Athlete Six–Year Graduation Rate Inequities, Big Ten Conference 2010**

Institution	Percentage of Black Male Student–Athletes	Overall Percentage of Student–Athletes	Difference
University of Illinois	50	69	–19
Indiana University	34	63	–29
Purdue University	31	66	–35
Michigan State University	37	65	–28
University of Michigan	52	75	–23
University of Minnesota	39	64	–25
University of Missouri	48	62	–14
University of Nebraska	51	53	–2
Northwestern University	83	88	–5
The Ohio State University	43	68	–25
Pennsylvania State University	77	82	–5
University of Wisconsin	52	68	–16

Source: NCAA Federal Graduation Rates Database.

These trends are particularly policy–relevant, as they pertain to college opportunity, degree attainment, and racial inequities. In addition to these trends, scholars have also called attention to Black undergraduate men’s underpreparedness for college–level work;<sup>12</sup> comparatively lower rates of engagement inside and outside the classroom;<sup>13</sup> troubled masculinities and gender identity conflicts;<sup>14</sup> professors’ low expectations of them in college classrooms;<sup>15</sup> frequent encounters with racism and racial stereotyping;<sup>16</sup>

12 R. T. Palmer, R. J. Davis, and A. A. Hilton, “Exploring Challenges That Threaten to Impede the Academic Success of Academically Underprepared Black Males at an HBCU,” *Journal of College Student Development* 50, no. 4 (2009), 429–445.

13 Community College Survey of Student Engagement, *Engaging Students, Challenging the Odds: 2005 Findings* (Austin: University of Texas, 2005); M. J. Cuyjet, “African American Men on College Campuses: Their Needs and Their Perceptions,” *Helping African American Men Succeed in College*, edited by M. J. Cuyjet (New Directions for Student Services 80) (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 1997), 5–16; S. R. Harper, R. M. Carini, B. K. Bridges, and J. Hayek, “Gender Differences in Student Engagement Among African American Undergraduates at Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” *Journal of College Student Development* 45, no. 3 (2004), 271–284.

14 F. Harris III, R. T. Palmer, and L. E. Struve, “‘Cool Posing’ on Campus: A Qualitative Study of Masculinities and Gender Expression Among Black Men at a Private Research Institution,” *Journal of Negro Education* 80, no. 1 (2011), 47–62.

15 F. A. Bonner II, and K. W. Bailey, “Enhancing the Academic Climate for African American Men,” *African American Men in College*, edited by M. J. Cuyjet (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2006), 24–46; S. L. Fries–Britt, “Identifying and Supporting Gifted African American Men,” *Helping African American Men Succeed in College New Directions for Student Services* no. 80, 65–77 (New York: Jossey–Bass, 1997).

16 Harper, *Black Male Student Success in Higher Education*, 2012; W. A. Smith, W. R. Allen, and L. L. Danley, “Assume the Position... You Fit the Description: Psychosocial Experiences and Racial Battle Fatigue Among African American Male College Students,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no. 4 (2007), 551–578.

how they are negatively affected by the conservative ethos of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs);<sup>17</sup> and their insufficient sense of belonging on predominantly White campuses.<sup>18</sup>

In response to these problems, campus leaders and others have made a multitude of efforts to improve the status of Black male students in higher education. The next section of this report presents examples of these efforts. The range of recent institutional activities can be easily characterized as expansive. However, the lessons of these efforts do not necessarily reach a broader audience, including policymakers. Even though institutional efforts in and of themselves have been insufficient to eradicate participation and achievement gaps among Black men in postsecondary education, it is instructive to look at how some institutions are facing these issues and what promising practices might be applicable in a broader context.

17 S. R. Harper and M. Gasman, “Consequences of Conservatism: Black Male Students and the Politics of Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” *Journal of Negro Education* 77, no. 4 (2009), 336–351.

18 T. L. Strayhorn, “‘Fittin’ In: Do Diverse Interactions With Peers Affect Sense of Belonging for Black Men at Predominantly White Institutions?” *NASPA Journal* 45, no. 4 (2008), 501–527.

# WHAT INSTITUTIONS ARE DOING TO IMPROVE BLACK MALE STUDENT SUCCESS

This section presents clusters of initiatives on campuses across the country and in two public university systems. The aim is not to highlight them as exemplars or “best practices,” but to showcase myriad ways that educators, administrators, and others are working to improve Black male student success and degree attainment rates. These initiatives are among the most widely known and well established. In addition, they are representative of the scope of efforts that have been enacted nationally, ranging from single-institution initiatives to those that span multiple postsecondary education systems, and from daylong summits to multiyear programs. Key components and common elements of these efforts are described below.

## **Student Organizations**

At the individual level, student organizations are common on many campuses and can be an affirming, supportive way to help Black men navigate the process of earning a degree and provide them with a ready-made peer group. For example, Harvard Black Men’s Forum is a campus organization founded and led by students. Its purpose is to provide a venue for conversations on topics of cultural significance, including race, gender, and academic experiences at Harvard, as well as world politics. The organization also participates in campus activities and community service projects. Student-led Black men’s groups are also hosted at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Michigan, Arizona State University, Cornell University, and elsewhere. The University of Southern California,

Dillard University, Rutgers University, and several other institutions have collegiate chapters of the 100 Black Men of America. Students in groups such as these often advise each other on navigating the campus, responding productively to racism and racial stereotypes, and utilizing important institutional resources.<sup>19</sup>

Founded in 1990 on the campus of Georgia Southwestern State University, the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) has expanded to 25 community colleges and 205 four-year institutions (as well as 26 middle schools and high schools) across the nation. Although SAAB chapters vary by campus, each is united by the organization’s core principles of accountability, proactive leadership, self-discipline, and intellectual development. The SAAB model also emphasizes academic success, unity, and a collective commitment to community service. The organization has a national headquarters that offers support and guidance to chapters and individual members. SAAB also hosts an annual national conference.

## **Bringing Together Stakeholders**

Some institutions have convened internal and external stakeholders to consider the theme of Black male success. For example, the University of Akron annually hosts a Black Male Summit that brings together educators, administrators, students, and community members from across Ohio and neighboring states. The Summit includes high-profile keynote speakers and workshops with customized tracks, one for students and another for professionals and citizens who are concerned about student success. The University of Florida, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, the University of Illinois at Chicago, Princeton University, and University of California Irvine have hosted similar one- to two-day events in the past four years.

<sup>19</sup> Harper, *Black Male Student Success in Higher Education*, 2012.

### **Campus Initiatives**

Many campuses have also convened stakeholders as part of a broader initiative that includes longer-term activities. Multidimensional initiatives to support Black male students have been implemented at Philander Smith College, the University of California, Los Angeles, Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, Morehouse College, St. Louis Community College, Gallaudet University, and the University of Maryland–College Park. Activities on these campuses range from social programming to mentoring and academic support. These initiatives include a mix of programs targeted at Black male students throughout the school year. Two goals that resonate across these programs are to provide social support to make campuses more welcoming and affirming for Black men, and to share knowledge and resources needed to navigate college campuses and access campus supports.

These types of initiatives can also go beyond current undergraduate enrollment to prepare Black men for graduate school or beyond. For example, in 2009 the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania introduced an initiative to nurture and support Black undergraduate men's educational aspirations beyond the baccalaureate. The Grad Prep Academy annually invites applications from college juniors across the country who articulate career and intellectual interests that are related to the field of education. Ten Academy Scholars are selected each year. Their experience includes a four-day visit to the University of Pennsylvania campus, as well as a free three-month Kaplan course to prepare for the Graduate Record Exam. Additionally, each Academy participant is paired with a doctoral student in education who mentors him through the graduate school application process, offers feedback on essays and other application materials, and advises his selection of doctoral programs.

### **Centers and Institutes**

Some institutions have decided to integrate their efforts within a formal structure on campus. For example, the Todd A. Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male (Bell Center) at the Ohio State University and the Center for Male Engagement (CME) at the Community College of Philadelphia are offices staffed by full-time professionals. Their efforts range from outreach to Black male high school students to analyses and reporting on institutional data on trends in Black male student outcomes. Situated within a major research university, the Bell Center also conducts studies to inform social and public policy on the educational and life outcomes

of Black men. Given its location in an urban community college, CME offers a summer program that helps prepare Black male Philadelphia residents for college.

Another example is the UCLA Black Male Institute (BMI), which is directed by a tenured professor who brings together more than 20 undergraduates and graduate students to conduct practical, useful research and interventions that aim to improve the educational and social status of Black male students across all levels of education. BMI also engages educational leaders, community members, and policymakers, as well as expert scholars at and beyond UCLA. More than 500 middle and high school students have come to UCLA to participate in BMI workshops on preparing for college, and hundreds of educators and community members have attended BMI's annual Black Male Think Tank conference.

### **Credit-Bearing Courses**

Another way of formalizing a focus on Black men is to create credit-bearing courses with culturally sensitive curricula targeted toward helping Black men adjust to campus life and learning. For example, Wake Forest University, the University of Southern California, UCLA, and the University of Pennsylvania offer courses designed to facilitate learning, critical reflection, and dialogue about the status and experiences of Black undergraduate men. These courses, which are taught by faculty members and campus administrators, involve guest lectures, readings, and assignments (e.g., papers, presentations, journaling). A key activity of these courses is acquainting Black male students with institutional resources that help ensure successful transitions, engagement, academic success, and persistence toward degree attainment.

### **State/System-Level Initiatives**

Given the wide range of initiatives on individual campuses, it is often crucial to bring these efforts to the state or system level in order to be most effective and reach as many Black men as possible. The University System of Georgia (USG) African-American Male Initiative is a coordinated systemwide effort that aims to improve Black male student enrollments, persistence, and degree attainment rates in the state's public community colleges and four-year institutions. A variety of campus-based programming, services, and outreach efforts that target Black male students at critical junctures along their educational pathways have been implemented at 25 USG institutions over the past decade. The City University of New York's (CUNY) Black Male Initiative is the coordinating body for the system's efforts to improve the representa-

tion and success of Black men in postsecondary education. Faculty and administrators across CUNY campuses have implemented and currently oversee student development, academic enrichment, and mentoring programs. In addition to supporting and coordinating campus-based efforts, the initiative annually hosts a distinguished speaker series and conferences that bring together students, educators, and national experts.

### Consortia and Collaboratives

Another type of collaboration can happen across institutions or systems, sometimes in different states. Two of these initiatives unite multiple institutions to share effective educational practices, solutions for barriers to institutional change, and professional expertise. Both are governed by eight standards that Harper and Kuykendall developed to enhance the effectiveness of Black male campus initiatives (see **FIGURE 3**).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> S. R. Harper and J. A. Kuykendall, "Institutional Efforts to Improve Black Male Student Achievement: A Standards-based Approach," *Change* 44, no. 2 (2012), 23–29.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Eight Standards for Black Male Campus Initiatives**

1	Inequities are transparent and data are used to guide institutional activities.
2	Black undergraduate men are meaningfully engaged as collaborators and viewed as experts in designing, implementing, and assessing campus initiatives.
3	Actions are guided by a written strategy document that is collaboratively developed by various institutional stakeholders, ranging from undergraduate students to the college president.
4	Learning, academic achievement, student development, and improved degree attainment rates are prioritized over social programming.
5	Initiatives are grounded in published research on college men and masculinities in general and on Black male undergraduates in particular.
6	Efforts are enhanced by insights from Black male student achievers.
7	Institutional agents engage in honest conversations about racism and its harmful effects on Black male student outcomes.
8	At every level, institutional agents are held accountable for improving Black male student retention, academic success, engagement, and graduation rates.

Source: S. R. Harper and J. A. Kuykendall. "Institutional Efforts to Improve Black Male Student Achievement: A Standards-based Approach," *Change* 44, no. 2 (2012): 23–29.

- The Arkansas African American Male Initiative (AAMI) is a statewide consortium of 17 community colleges and four-year institutions (see **TABLE 4**) that convenes students and professionals for an annual conference, engages stakeholders in sharing resources and knowledge throughout the year, and requires annual reports that demonstrate how each AAMI member institution's activities align with the eight standards.<sup>21</sup> One member institution, the Univer-

sity of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), has a full-time coordinator and part-time staff members, centralized mentoring and student support resources, and a first-year experience course for the target population. The UALR chancellor, vice chancellor for educational and student services, and multiple faculty and staff members have been meaningfully involved in AAMI planning, sustainability, and assessment activities.

<sup>21</sup> The consortium is largely funded by a grant from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

**TABLE 4**  
**Arkansas AAMI Participating Institutions**

**Community and Technical Colleges**

Arbor Education and Training  
 Arkansas Technical College  
 East Arkansas Community College  
 Mid-South Community College  
 National Park Community College  
 Ouachita Technical College  
 Pulaski Technical College

**Four-Year Colleges and Universities**

Arkansas Baptist College  
 Arkansas State University—Main Campus  
 Arkansas State University—Newport  
 Henderson State University  
 Philander Smith College  
 Southern Arkansas University  
 University of Arkansas at Fayetteville  
 University of Arkansas at Little Rock  
 University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff  
 University of Central Arkansas

• Coordinated by the Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education at the University of Pennsylvania, and funded by Lumina Foundation, the *Institutional Change for Black Male Student Success Project* unites teams from five campuses engaged in strategic efforts to improve a range of Black male student outcomes.<sup>22</sup> Each campus team, which includes administrators, tenured professors, and undergraduate students, began work with an institutional self-study; members then convened on the University of Pennsylvania campus in June 2010 for a series of workshops on organizational learning, the legal parameters of race/gender-specific programming, and strategic approaches to Black male student success. The campuses subsequently launched initiatives that are aligned with Harper and Kuykendall's standards. One example is *Beyond the Game* at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, a collaborative effort among the athletics department, career services, the School of Education, and Wisconsin's Equity and Inclusion Laboratory. *Beyond the Game* focuses explicitly on preparing Black male student-

athletes for postcollege careers beyond professional sports. Another member, North Carolina Central University, offers a learning community and numerous centralized resources for its *Centennial Scholars* program, for Black male first-year students whose high school grade point averages were below 3.0. Other institutions in the project are Stanford University, the Community College of Philadelphia, and UCLA.

This is only a sampling of initiatives that colleges and universities across the country have implemented in recent years. Several other postsecondary institutions are employing a variety of approaches to enroll, engage, retain, and graduate Black male students. Despite this aggressive (and arguably impressive) slate of institutional activities, the problems concerning Black male college achievement and postsecondary degree attainment cannot be solved by one institution or one initiative at a time; a complementary policy response is also warranted. Efforts described in this section are important and should be sustained, but they must be driven by standards and accompanied by a broader set of policy activities that extend beyond a single campus.

<sup>22</sup> The project is funded by Lumina Foundation.

# SUGGESTED POLICY INTERVENTIONS

Beyond institutional efforts, federal and state policymakers, higher education associations, the NCAA, foundations, and others have several ways to respond to social, political, and economic threats to Black male student success and college completion. This is not to suggest that these efforts should replace the initiatives currently offered on college and university campuses, but both institutional and policy responses are necessary to improve Black men's educational outcomes and postsecondary degree attainment rates.

Drawing from existing research and promising practices from institutional initiatives, the following recommendations are examples of ways to complement institutional efforts with new policies, practices, and resources.

## Funding

In this era of fiscal constraints, new funding may not always be available. Nonetheless, it is important to focus new and existing funding on measures and programs targeting student populations that are least likely to enroll in college, such as Black men.

- **Increase Investments in College Preparation Programs:** Increasing the number of Black male students who graduate from high school and matriculate into college is critical. Given the key role of these programs in supporting academically-prepared students from underserved populations, federal and state policymakers, institutional leaders, and community-based organizations can play a key role by supporting and advocating on behalf of college outreach and preparation initiatives (including federal TRIO programs), particularly during times of fiscal exigency, when these resources are especially vulnerable to budget cuts or elimination. In turn, publicly funded college preparation and outreach programs must be held accountable for effectively serving Black

men and meeting measurable goals to transition these students into postsecondary education.

- **Address Funding Inequities that Disadvantage Public HBCUs:**

A 2006 study of 19 southern states revealed, "Public 4-year Historically Black Colleges and Universities are the only sector [of higher education] in which Blacks consistently approach or achieve equity in enrollment and degree completion."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, HBCUs outperform Predominantly White Institutions proportionately in graduating and preparing Black students for careers in high-need industries, such as the health professions and the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, despite enrolling a significantly higher proportion of first-generation students and Pell Grant recipients.<sup>24</sup> Yet per-student expenditures at these institutions and at community colleges are among the lowest in U.S. higher education.<sup>25</sup> These inequities have persisted since the passage of the second Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890, which aimed to establish separate but equal public systems of higher education in the United States. Funding inequities that disadvantage particular public postsecondary institutions, especially those that confer disproportionate shares of bachelor's degrees to Black men and other underrepresented racial minority students, must be corrected.

- **Increase Federal and State Financial Aid for Lower-Income Black Male Students:**

Many students who drop out of college do so because they cannot afford the cost.<sup>26</sup> Financial aid plays a significant role in Black men's persistence and academic

<sup>23</sup> L. W. Perna, J. Milem, D. Gerald, E. Baum, H. Rowan, and N. Hutchens, "The Status of Equity for Black Undergraduates in Public Higher Education in the South: Still Separate and Unequal," *Research in Higher Education* 47, no. 2 (2006), 197–228.

<sup>24</sup> J. T. Minor, "Segregation Residual in Higher Education: A Tale of Two States," *American Educational Research Journal* 45, no. 4 (2008), 861–885.

<sup>25</sup> D. M. Desrochers and J. V. Wellman, *Trends in college spending, 1999–2009* (Washington, DC: Delta Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity, and Accountability, 2009); S. R. Harper, L. D. Patton, and O. S. Wooden, "Access and Equity for African American Students in Higher Education: A Critical Race Historical Analysis of Policy Efforts," *The Journal of Higher Education* 80, no. 4 (2009), 389–414.

<sup>26</sup> W. G. Bowen, M. M. Chingos, and M. S. McPherson, *Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

success, especially at highly selective institutions.<sup>27</sup> Urgently needed are more aid initiatives that permit lower-income students to attend college without the burden of working more than 20 hours per week in off-campus jobs. Proportionately, Black students are more likely to receive Pell Grants than their White counterparts.<sup>28</sup> Hence, federal policymakers must increase, or at a minimum maintain, spending on Pell Grants (instead of reducing current levels) and other forms of financial aid that will allow Black male students from lower-income families to attend college.

• **Match Incarceration and Educational Investments:** The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that 85,600 Black men between the ages of 18 and 24 (the traditional college-age population) were serving sentences in federal and state prisons in 2010.<sup>29</sup> On average, taxpayers paid \$32,226 that year per inmate.<sup>30</sup> In Connecticut, the per-inmate cost (\$50,262) was roughly the same as the cost of tuition and fees, room and board, and books and supplies that year at Yale University, which is located in the same state. Nearly three California residents could have attended full-time and live on campus at San Diego State University in 2010 at the cost of what taxpayers spent on a single imprisoned person that year (\$49,161 versus \$47,421). These data make a case for increased state spending on schools and programs that increase postsecondary degree attainment rates. The issue of incarceration is complex and the overrepresentation of Black males in the criminal justice system cannot be simply attributed to funding decisions. However, the disproportionate amount of funding that is invested nationally toward incarcerating Black males in comparison to educating them is alarming. Thus, we recommend that state policymakers enact an investment strategy that matches taxpayer dollars spent on incarcerating 18- to 24-year-old Black men with race/gender-specific efforts that improve their pathways to and through college.

### Data, Assessment, and Information Sharing

Informing policy requires using rigorous data and assessment of initiatives focused on college comple-

<sup>27</sup> S. R. Harper and K. A. Griffin, "Opportunity Beyond Affirmative Action: How Low-Income and Working-Class Black Male Achievers Access Highly Selective, High-Cost Colleges and Universities," *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy* 17, no. 1 (2011), 43–60.

<sup>28</sup> C. C. Wei and L. Horn, *A Profile of Successful Pell Grant Recipients: Time to Bachelor's Degree and Early Graduate School Enrollment* (NCES 2009-156) (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> P. Guerino, P. M. Harrison, and W. J. Sabol, *Prisoners in 2010* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> C. Henrichson and R. Delaney, *The Price of Prisons: What Incarceration Costs Taxpayers* (New York City, NY: Vera Institute of Justice, Center on Sentencing and Corrections, 2012).

tion. In the case of Black men, many efforts exist, but it is not always clear which policies and practices are the most successful or scalable, and the information may not get to the stakeholders who need it most. However, this situation could be addressed in several ways:

• **Require Assessment in State-Funded Initiatives:** Institutions receiving state funds for any Black male initiative must use a core set of standards for alignment and assessment. In the absence of such standards, the likelihood is far greater that initiatives will fail to meet their desired outcomes and resources will be unwisely invested. In addition, the programs may be poorly understood or difficult to replicate. Consistent standards should be used as a framework for program design, reporting, evaluation, and other efforts to document effectiveness and ensure accountability. For example, systems, institutions, or programs can adopt Harper and Kuykendall's Eight Standards for Black Male Campus Initiatives (see **FIGURE 3**) to ensure that initiatives meet their stated goals and outcomes.

• **Establish Consortia in Public Postsecondary Systems:** It is imperative to establish and support consortia such as the Arkansas African-American Male Initiative and systemwide efforts such as the CUNY Black Male Initiative and the University System of Georgia's African-American Male Initiative. Such collaborative efforts can facilitate information and resource sharing among institutions and better equip them to address systemic barriers to Black men's postsecondary success.

• **Develop a National Study that Monitors College Access and Success of Minority Males:** The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 requires the U.S. Department of Education to conduct a study on the state of academic achievement for underrepresented males, with a particular focus on Black and Hispanic students. This mandated study is an excellent opportunity to conduct further research on minority male college access and success. Using existing data sources, the study could focus on the comprehensive set of issues that affect this population, and make specific recommendations to Congress and state superintendents of education on new approaches to increase the number of Black and Hispanic males preparing for college, graduating high school and entering college, graduating college, and successfully entering careers where they are most underrepresented. Additionally, data compiled from this study could be coupled with existing federal (and state) databases to monitor more accurately the status and progress of young men of color from

middle school through the latter stages of postsecondary education. Such a directive may produce a series of reports that ultimately yield policy suggestions for local, federal, and state policymakers and offer innovative research-based policy suggestions for leaders of precollege initiatives, K–12 schools, and universities.

### **Rethink How College Athletics Affect Black Men**

One cannot discuss policies related to Black men in college without offering suggestions to the NCAA, which has tremendous influence on policies that affect the college outcomes of approximately one in 10 Black men, as well as on policymakers who oversee public universities with revenue-generating sports teams. The pervasive racial inequities in student outcomes in Division I revenue-generating sports continue to be problematic, especially given the overrepresentation of Black male student-athletes on Division I football and basketball teams. The need for additional resources, advising, and support programs is clear, but other possibilities could illuminate the issues and bring them into public discussion:

- **Require Transparency in College Athletics:**

The documented gaps in graduation rates between Black and White male student-athletes and the student-athlete population overall make clear that something must change.<sup>31</sup> The NCAA collects data from higher education institutions, but the data do not always reach key audiences. State policymakers and system-level leaders should require public institutions to annually collect, analyze, and publish data concerning the overrepresentation of Black men among revenue-generating college student-athletes, as well as the racial/gender disparities in graduation rates. Institutions that show inequities from year to year should be required to submit a plan for reversing these problematic trends.

- **Consider Banning Post-Season Play for Sports Teams that Sustain Racial Inequities in graduation rates:**

In the six major Division I athletic conferences (ACC, Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac 12, and SEC), Black male student-athletes on revenue-generating sports teams graduate at rates lower than student-athletes overall, undergraduate students overall, and Black undergraduate men overall.<sup>32</sup> Given these racial inequities, the NCAA should consider a regulatory response that would hold accountable institutions that routinely sustain these inequities. For example, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has suggested that any team failing to graduate at least 40 percent of its players should be ineligible for participation in post-season play and championship

contests. A new policy intervention by the NCAA is especially important for the teams on which Black male student-athletes are most overrepresented and racial inequities in six-year graduation rates are most pervasive.<sup>33</sup>

### **Other important considerations**

Other issues that institutions and policymakers should keep in mind include:

- **Promote Policies and Practices that Advance Equity:**

Over the past decade, affirmative action policies and race-conscious practices in university admissions have been intensely scrutinized (and eliminated in some states). Consequently, the representation of historically underrepresented students in general and of Black undergraduate men in particular has sharply declined at the nation's most competitive and selective public universities.<sup>34</sup> A substantial body of empirical research confirms that institutional diversity is beneficial to the learning, growth, and development of all college students.<sup>35</sup> Thus, policymakers at all levels must be willing to defend race/gender-conscious initiatives on college and university campuses. Data concerning Black male student enrollments, academic outcomes, and degree attainment rates justify the protection of policies and practices that help ensure college opportunity and success.

- **Reclaim Near-Completers:**

In September 2011, IHEP convened policymakers and other stakeholders for a National Summit on Near Completion. The meeting focused on students who have left colleges and universities without earning their degrees, but are eligible to receive associate's degrees or, with assistance, can complete the few remaining courses required to earn bachelor's degrees. Project Win-Win is an example of IHEP's collaborative efforts to improve the associate's degree attainment of near-completers at community colleges.<sup>36</sup> A similar

31 S. R. Harper, *Black Male Students at Public Flagship Universities in the U.S.: Status, Trends and Implications for Policy and Practice* (Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2006); Harper, Williams, and Blackman, *Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequities in NCAA Division I Revenue-Generating College Sports*, forthcoming.

32 S. R. Harper, *Black Male Students at Public Flagship Universities in the U.S.: Status, Trends and Implications for Policy and Practice* (Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2006); Harper, Williams, and Blackman, *Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequities in NCAA Division I Revenue-Generating College Sports*, forthcoming.

33 <http://www2.ed.gov/news/speeches/2010/03/03172010a.html>.

34 M. J. Fischer and D. S. Massey, "The Effects of Affirmative Action in Higher Education," *Social Science Research* 36, no. 2 (2007), 531–549; P. Schmidt, *Color and Money: How Rich White Kids Are Winning the War Over College Affirmative Action* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

35 P. Gurin, L. E. Dey, S. Hurtado, and G. Gurin, "Diversity and Higher Education: Theory and Impact on Educational Outcome," *Harvard Educational Review* 72, no. 3 (2002), 330–336.

36 Institute for Higher Education Policy (2012). Project Win-Win. Retrieved from <http://www.ihep.org/projectwin-win.cfm>.

situation exists at many four-year institutions. As previously mentioned, two-thirds of Black undergraduate men who start baccalaureate degree programs do not graduate within six years—the lowest college completion rate across both genders and all racial/ethnic groups in U.S. higher education.<sup>37</sup> Some of those who stopped out or dropped out of college are near-completers. Therefore, federal and state policymakers should aim to reclaim Black men who discontinued college enrollment and help them craft plans to complete their degrees.

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<sup>37</sup> Harper, *Black Male Students at Public Flagship Universities in the U.S.*, 2006; Harper, *Black Male Student Success in Higher Education*, 2012.

This list of recommendations is far from exhaustive. As evidenced by the examples of institutional activities in this report, problems concerning Black male college success and degree attainment demand a multitude of thoughtful, aggressive, and standards-driven responses. No one initiative is likely to be sufficient on any campus at which racial and gender inequities that disfavor Black male students are numerous. Likewise, the array of policy-relevant challenges that undermine young Black men's educational attainment and social mobility require a substantive policy agenda that includes, but extends far beyond the recommendations offered in this report.

# CONCLUSION

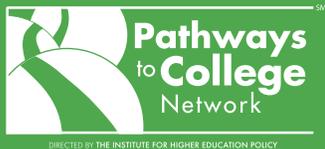
Policymakers have an important role to play in improving Black men's college opportunities and postsecondary degree attainment rates. The economic vitality of our nation depends on the effectiveness of efforts to reduce the number of college dropouts. As noted throughout this report, only one of every three Black undergraduate men who start college graduate within six years. Failure to graduate negatively affects their employability and a host of other social outcomes.

Institutional initiatives aimed at addressing this problem are indeed necessary, but insufficient. The educational challenges confronting this population are enormous and far too complex for localized responses. Policymakers at all levels must join educational leaders and others in efforts to remove barriers that cyclically undermine the enrollment and persistence of Black male students and other populations with low college completion rates.

Although this report has focused on postsecondary education, we recognize that a corresponding P–12 policy agenda aimed at improving the lives of young Black men is also required. Application and enrollment are first steps on the pathway to college completion, and so policymakers at federal, state, and local levels must do more to support (financially and otherwise) efforts in college preparatory programs, community organizations, schools, and postsecondary institutions to strengthen Black male students' pathways to higher education. But simply having these men enroll does not guarantee they will persist through graduation. Ensuring they have viable opportunities to attend and complete degree programs is an important step in meeting the U.S. postsecondary attainment goals espoused by national leaders and others. Investing more resources into efforts to better educate Black male students in P–12 schools and in postsecondary education would yield greater returns for society.



**The Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education** unites University of Pennsylvania scholars who do research on race and important topics pertaining to equity in education. Principally, the Center aims to publish cutting-edge implications for education policy and practice, with an explicit focus on improving equity in P-12 schools, colleges and universities, and social contexts that influence educational outcomes.



**The Pathways to College Network** is an alliance of national organizations that advances college opportunity for underrepresented students by promoting evidence-based policies and practices across the K-12 and higher education sectors. The Pathways to College Network promotes the use of research-based policies and practices; the development of rigorous and actionable new research; and the alignment of efforts across middle school, high school, and higher education in order to promote college access and success for all students. To learn more about the Pathways to College Network, visit [www.pathwaystocollege.net](http://www.pathwaystocollege.net).



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