

HBCU grad rates lag behind ‘PWIs’

by L Asia Brown
Managing Editor

Upon arriving at Fayetteville State University, the class of 2015 was greeting with the theme, "Operation Graduation." An attribution to FSU's updated efforts to improve low graduation rates, the theme also resonates with the national historically black college and university (HBCU) atmosphere.

Early this year Rick Scott, the governor of Florida, made moves to cut state funding to two Florida HBCUs. Florida Memorial University and Bethune-Cookman University stood to lose more than 4 million in state assistance, though the cuts didn't end up being that large. Although the institutions are private, and private colleges and universities are not guaranteed federal or state assistance, the move has angered students, alumni, and leaders alike. It has also spewed gasoline on the low-burning flame that is the debate of HBCU relevance. Again, the argument of whether or not HBCUs are still needed despite subpar graduation rates, has exploded.

Statistically, HBCUs are graduating students at lower four-year rates than regular, public institutions, or what some call, "PWIs" (predominantly white institutions);

however, many say that the four-year graduation rate is a non-factor when compared to the position the HBCU plays in the Black American community.

"Men and women who wouldn't normally be given a chance at a regular university are given the opportunity to get an education at HBCUs. Yeah, it'll take them five years, maybe six years, but graduating in five is better than not doing it all," said Keisha Watson, graduate of Morgan

State University in Baltimore,
Maryland.

The HBCU has a reputation for accepting students who otherwise wouldn't have been able to attend a university. Historically, that was its purpose—to provide an education to those who legally couldn't attend other institutions.

Now, many HBCUs are doing virtually the same thing. The only difference is that students don't seem to be nearly as hungry for education. And these students are bringing down institutions' reputations.

tions with lackadaisical attitudes.

"We live in a time of choice now. I'm not sure that the HBCUs is trying their best to communicate that making [a] choice to do better is [an] individual initiative, regardless of where you come [from]. We have to start demanding bet-

Fayetteville State University, a public HBCU and member of the University of

North Carolina system, has graduation rates almost identical to the average UNC institution's graduation rate. FSU's most recent general four-year graduation rate is 9.3 percent, just .5 percent lower than the average UNC institution's four-year rate of 9.8 percent, according to reports from the University of North Carolina's research compilation. The most recent graduation rate for Black students at FSU is 8.9 percent, which is .2 percent lower the average UNC institution's four-year grad rate of 9.1.

percent for Black students

percent for Black students.

Although Fayetteville State University's rates are not significantly lower than UNC system's for Black students or any other demographic group, the tiny percentile has vehement debaters on both sides of the argument. If the HBCU can't graduate students at equal or higher rates, should they continue to receive equal funding?

"Well first of all, they don't receive equal funding. Fayetteville State only accounts for I think, like 18 percent of the budget, but I heard we're going to take a hit equal to around 28 to 32 percent. That is not equal and our rates are not that different," says an FSU senior* who believes HBCUs are necessary.

"Some students say having an HBCU on a resume lowers your chances of getting jobs because of the reputation. I'd hope it would depend on the job candidate, but with everybody convinced we're in post-racial America, I wouldn't be surprised if it was true," said Seleema Jones, a Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) junior.*

FAMU's most recent six-year graduation rate was 43 percent, significantly higher than any UNC institution and comparable to many non-HBCU institutions around the nation, yet FAMU students and

alumni have still expressed outrage.

"The youth are not taking their education and college experience as serious. It's not just HBCUs! Students of all races are graduating at lower rates than 10, 20 years ago because this generation has a 'don't-care' attitude. Don't make this about HBCUs," said another FAMU alumnus and current graduate student.*

With tuition rising and financial aid dwindling, many HBCUs are also facing devastating cuts and are trying to preserve the educational experience for their students.

While FSU has had to endure a 15 percent budget cut, the university only receives about 48 percent of its operating budget from the state, meaning it must utilize funding from private sources to maintain quality of life and education for students. Alumni funding to most small HBCUs doesn't rival that of small general institutions.

"Nobody donates... White celebrities donate to predominantly white universities. Black celebs do not donate in high numbers to HBCUs. We have less resources so of course the grad rates are going to be lower," says an FSU alumnus. "Only when it is equal funding will it be equal rates. That's just common sense."

COUCH POTATOES

by Jovian Turnbull

