

Increasing Massachusetts-HBCU Transfer Opportunities and Institutional Collaborations Through Statewide Policy Changes

Author: Leah Pires, HBCU Policy Fellow

Introduction

During my time conducting research as an HBCU Policy Research Fellow, I have been committed to identifying ways Massachusetts can improve pathways for students in the Commonwealth to attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Massachusetts is one of the best states for effective higher-education transfer systems for students in the United States, through programs such as the Mass Transfer program and the Massachusetts Guarantee. Nevertheless, there is a major policy gap: the state of Massachusetts has no statewide partnerships with HBCUs.

In my research, I studied programs available in other states, such as California, to determine how we can create similar opportunities in Massachusetts without starting an entirely new education system from scratch. By leveraging our existing transfer system and adopting the successful system in California, I think Massachusetts can increase institutional equity and workforce development, and link our local students with national centers of Black excellence.

Models from Other States: California Case Studies

The Cal-HBCU Transfer Grant Program

The Cal-HBCU Transfer Grant Program in California is the only documented program providing financial assistance for students in California to access HBCUs, since there are no HBCUs in California. The Program provides eligible students enrolled at California Community Colleges with a non-repayable grant worth up to \$5,000, which will be used for paying their tuition fees, housing expenses, textbooks, and costs incurred while traveling to attend an HBCU.

The requirements include: being a student of California Community College, having attained an Associate's Degree to Transfer (ADT), showing financial need by completing either FAFSA or CADAA, intending to enroll or being enrolled in a qualifying HBCU, and having the intention of returning back to California after graduating from HBCU.

The California Community Colleges Transfer Guarantee to HBCUs

The California Community Colleges Transfer Guarantee to HBCUs program is the state-wide program introduced in 2015 through the collaboration of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office with some specific Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This program provides qualifying students of California community colleges with the chance to be transferred and admitted into the designated institutions. Some advantages include assured admissions, advice and planning for transferring, waiving of the application fees at the Common Black College Application, preferential treatment in housing, and scholarships for those who have better GPAs.

The UC-HBCU Initiative

The UC-HBCU Initiative was formed in 2014 at the University of California and involves increasing interactions between the HBCUs and the UC institutions through the means of research collaboration, mentoring, and preparing for graduate schools. The aim of this initiative is to address the problem of underrepresentation of Black scholars in the pursuit of doctoral degrees and academic careers.

Applying Transfer Frameworks to Potential Mass Transfer Partners

Currently, I have not found any statewide agreements established by the state of Massachusetts that would allow automatic transfer of the MassTransfer General Education Foundation Block into Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). However, three universities involved in the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) can be taken as examples:

- **North Carolina A&T State University:** An articulation agreement established between Massachusetts and North Carolina A&T will allow admitting students with completed MassTransfer General Education Foundation Block without taking additional general education courses.
- **Morgan State University:** Operating within the NC-SARA framework, the collaboration will allow students studying at community colleges in Massachusetts to transfer their general education courses to Morgan State University.
- **Delaware State University:** Being a university that has the necessary systems for evaluating transfer credits, it can also be viewed as another partner for Massachusetts to make interstate agreements according to the MassTransfer General Education Foundation Block.

In any future transfer agreement from Massachusetts community colleges to HBCUs, there is a need to provide that a student who successfully completes the MassTransfer General Education Foundation Block will be transferred to those institutions as already satisfying all general education requirements for associate's degree and can enroll directly in major-related courses.

Policy Recommendations for Massachusetts

To overcome this policy failure and follow suit with national trends, it is recommended that the State of Massachusetts take advantage of its established framework to set up a Massachusetts-HBCU Partnership Initiative:

1. **Establish a Statewide Massachusetts HBCU Consortium:** Form a consortium including state and private universities, private colleges, HBCUs, businesses, and agencies to serve as a central platform for student exchanges, research collaborations, internships, and recruitment.
2. **Develop Joint Admissions and Dual-Degree Agreements:** Encourage public and private institutions of higher learning (such as UMass Boston, UMass Amherst, Northeastern, and Boston University) to conduct joint admission or dual-degree programs with HBCUs.

3. **Create a Massachusetts HBCU Exchange Program:** Adopt a semester-based exchange system between four-year colleges in Massachusetts and HBCUs, promoting cultural exchange and leadership development.
4. **Expand Research and Workforce Development Partnerships:** Provide grants requiring Massachusetts universities and research industries to partner with HBCUs in key areas like biotechnology, artificial intelligence, healthcare, education, and law.
5. **Create Dedicated Scholarships and Financial Incentives:** Combine transfer guarantees with financial aid and scholarships to assist students facing out-of-state tuition and travel costs.
6. **Hire HBCU Transfer Coordinators:** Station special HBCU transfer coordinators at all community colleges to guide students through transfer credit agreements, fee waivers, and application steps.

Final Reflection and Conclusion

This fellowship period has made me understand how certain factors can limit access to education for students and how policy-making can be used to counteract these factors. Massachusetts does not need to reinvent the wheel. By leveraging established structures like MassTransfer and the Massachusetts Guarantee, I believe we can scale our system to include HBCUs. Implementing these targeted policies will provide students with greater educational choice while positioning Massachusetts as a leader in educational equity.