



# **How does diversity, mentorship, and funding at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) versus predominantly white institutions (PWI's) impact the success of Black medical students?**

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## **Abstract**

This report explores the impact of diversity, mentorship, and funding on the success of Black medical students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities versus Predominantly White Institutions. The historical and current exclusion of Black individuals in medicine, and the vital role HBCUs have had to play for centuries in creating opportunity for rising Black physicians, makes it vital for Black medical students to prosper. Studies have found that these variables contribute to the academic and professional outcomes of Black medical students. For example, medical school acceptance, residency matriculation rates, and career satisfaction. Through the review of primary and secondary literature, this report aims to understand the experiences of aspiring Black medical students and can allow institutions to invest in programs that aid the success of Black medical students. This study addresses the disparities between HBCUs and PWIs through the lens of racial cohesion, mentorship, finances, and resources to address the barriers aspiring Black medical students face when trying to pursue a career in the medical field. Understanding these barriers can aid institutions in developing a framework to support the educational needs of aspiring black medical students.

## **Introduction**

Out of the approximately 1.1 million active physicians in the United States, only 5.7% of those physicians identify as Black, despite the fact that in 2023 Black people accounted for about 12% of the population (Howard, 2023). This highlights the underrepresentation and historical exclusion of Black individuals in medicine. There are a multitude of reasons why the lack of representation for African Americans in medicine is skewed, whether financial, historical, social or cultural. This report will focus on the significant impact the choice to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) vs. a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) has on the success of Black college students pursuing a future in the medical field.

## **What is the difference between an HBCU vs PWI**

Having originated before the Civil War, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were founded in the 19th century to allow African Americans to pursue higher education. The period in which HBCUs were founded African Americans' weren't able to attend Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) due to the outcome of the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court case, legalizing segregation (Obas, 2018). This allowed politicians to ensure funding for PWIs and overlook the financial and resource needs of HBCUs (Obas, 2018). This disproportionate distribution of funding meant that Black students pursuing higher education had scarce access to resources (Obas, 2018). It wasn't until the Brown versus Board of Education supreme court case in 1954 that African Americans were allowed to attend Predominantly White Institutions (Masterclass, 2022). In the present day, PWIs are much more welcoming, and Black students pursuing higher education can apply and be admitted into PWIs; however, within PWIs, Black students are still the minority. Comparing a Texas HBCU vs. a Texas PWI, Texas Southern University, an HBCU, has a student population that is approximately 81.5% Black or African American, while at Rice University a PWI, Black students made up only 7.37% of the student population (Data USA, 2021). HBCUs have evidently continued to hone in on making higher education more accessible for marginalized groups and continue to have very diverse demographics. While HBCUs do admit students who are not racial/ethnic minorities, they are centered around providing opportunities to Black people and other people of color. The difference in demographics between HBCUs vs PWIs is drastic; however, it is not the only factor that sets PWIs and HBCUs apart. As mentioned earlier, because of prejudice prominent when HBCUs were placing their roots, funding at HBCUs was scarce, and unfortunately lack of funding is still an issue for HBCUs today (Nguyen et al. 2022).

### **What is the impact?**

This report explores the institutional differences between PWIs and HBCUs and how these differences impact student success. These findings can allow universities to implement the changes that may be needed and invest in Black college students pursuing a career in medicine. Supporting students already pursuing a career in the medical field as well as supporting Black students to pursue a career in medicine could potentially cause the representation of Black individuals in medicine to increase drastically. The amount in which Black students enrolled in medical school increased 2.8% in the 2024- 2025 year, however the amount of matriculants declined 11.6% (AAMC, 2025). The decline raises questions about the factors contributing to student success, including the effectiveness of success of diversity initiatives across the United States and across medical schools and colleges at both PWIs and HBCUs. It also underlines the need to analyze the lack of accessibility and bias Black students may face when applying to HBCU or PWI medical schools. There is a projected shortage of 86,000 physicians by 2036, which is

especially alarming considering the expected 8.4% population growth (AAMC, 2024). The dire need for Black physicians is going to increase drastically as the diverse population of the United States is expected to grow. The continuation of hardship for Black students in STEM hinders the inclusion of people of color in medicine, and could negatively affect the health and wellness of the Black population.

## **Methods**

This report is based on literary findings to examine how HBCUs and PWIS currently support aspiring Black medical students. This study will compare factors between the two types of institutions to understand what will allow Black medical students to thrive at these types of institutions using a review of primary and secondary published literature.

## **Factors impacting student success**

### **Environment/sense of belonging - Racial cohesion & Diversity**

One major factor that influences the success of Black college students that may want to pursue a career in medicine is racial cohesion and diversity (Mincey et al. 2023). In this context how one's racial identity affects one's desire to engage, uplift, and associate with that racial identity (Hughes, 2024). If they feel connected to their mentors, fellow classmates, and are able to express themselves without fear of judgement or bias. Black students that attend PWIs have reported limited racial cohesion and higher amounts of racial stress compared to those at HBCUs (Hughes, 2024). This lack of racial cohesion can allow some Black students to experience feelings of loneliness and isolation, which can affect their willingness to network with peers and mentors.

### **Mentorship**

Mentorship plays a pivotal role in shaping the academic and professional trajectories of Black medical students. Mentors can provide guidance, emotional support, and connect students to potential internship opportunities. At HBCUs connections between mentors and students can be stronger because connections are more likely to foster between students and mentors with similar experiences (Doughty, 2024). HBCUs usually have an incredibly diverse staff, overall HBCUs have about 56% Black or African American faculty (Gasman, 2021). Black students are more likely to connect with mentors who are also Black or another person of color because it affirms the student's identity (Doughty, 2024). From this, mentorship at HBCUs is very effective and Black students are able to connect deeply with their mentors



due to these shared traits and experiences. On the contrary, mentorship connections at PWIs can be a little dismantled. Overall, PWIs have approximately 5% Black and Hispanic faculty (Gasman, 2021). Possibly making the abundance of strong personal connections made at HBCUs through shared racial experiences scarce at Predominantly White Institutions.

### **Financial/resources/funding**

College resources and funding also play a vital role in potentially altering the success of Black college students. There is a significant difference in the amount of funding PWIs get versus HBCUs. The funding gap between Historically Black Colleges and Universities versus Predominantly White institutions is approximately 12.6 billion dollars (Jeffery, 2025). The Trump administration's plan to close down the U.S Department of Education poses an even more significant financial threat to HBCUs. Federal student aid programs, specifically Pell Grants, are used by approximately 75% of HBCU students, dismantling these programs will impact HBCUs dramatically and potentially lead to their closure (Jeffery, 2025). On the contrary, PWIs receive large endowments and more state funding (Brown, 2024). That being said, the impacts of the Trump administration's plan to dismantle the Department of Education may not have much of an impact. Allowing PWIs to continue to have more resources, newer facilities and even stronger pre-med support for aspiring Black medical students.. While HBCUs have been severely underfunded since their inception, which means older facilities, limited scholarship opportunities, and limited/ and outdated research equipment and/or labs, and because of today's political climate these conditions may get worse. These financial factors can directly impact a student's ability to succeed within the institution but also discourage them from applying in the first place due to limited scholarship availability for Black students of low-income backgrounds.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this report highlight how factors that make up an institution's environment, whether at an HBCU or PWI, can affect the future of aspiring Black medical students. While HBCUs environment create stronger senses of racial cohesion, these institutions face underfunding resulting in the lack of resources. Lack of resources can potentially be detrimental to a Black medical student's success by possibly limiting potential research, lacking prep material for exams, and having outdated labs. On the contrary, PWIs have more funding and more resources, but fall short making their schools a welcoming and inclusive environment for Black students, possibly discouraging them from pursuing careers in medicine.



Within my research I mention that there is a decline in the number of Black medical school matriculants despite the rising number of applicants (AAMC, 2025). This leads me to believe that even though the diversity within institutions is growing, factors like diversity, mentorship, and funding needed to include these students are possibly being overlooked. Which is detrimental because if this decline in the matriculants of Black students continues it will have long-term consequences for health care especially as the U.S faces a growing physician shortage (Howard, 2023). The health care field needs all the help it can get at a time like this. If PWIs commit to enhancing and investing in programs that promote racial cohesiveness and mentorship and HBCUs commit to petitioning for funding and begin to offer better resources, we can start to put an end to the physician shortage by supporting Black medical students. The success of Black medical students shouldn't depend on them overcoming obstacles and should instead depend on institutions to get rid of them.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this report shows how diversity, mentorship, and funding within HBCUs and PWIs shape the success of Black medical students. Hopefully, this report holds these institutions accountable for the hurdles Black students must overcome while attending due to the factors within this report lacking. As the U.S faces a growing physician shortage and an increasingly diverse population, the success of Black medical students must become an urgent priority. By committing to promote the betterment of mentorship, funding, and diversity, both HBCUs and PWIs could possibly have the power to transform the status quo, and encourage Black students to thrive within their field and become the leaders of the medical field.

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