

Opportunities and Challenges of Soliciting
Gifts from African Americans for Higher Education

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Background

This study was made possible by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to the Southern University Foundation. The grant was designed to be used by the Valdry Center to explore the economic, historical, and philosophical rationales for voluntary action in the local, national, and international arenas.

This paper examines factors related to financial support given to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the United States by their alumni. After initially developing a plan to study alumni giving to a cross-section of different HBCUs, the decision was made to narrow the scope of the study to one HBCU, Southern University (SU). This decision was based on the fact that there is not an abundance of research studies available on this topic. Since the grant was given to the Southern University Foundation, it was felt that it would be easier to collect data from SU alumni and use those findings to develop a larger study, including other universities, at a later date.

The Southern University A&M College System is the only HBCU system in the United States. The system includes five campuses in Louisiana. It is also the only HBCU with an academic unit focused on non-profit management and philanthropic studies. Founded in 2019, the Valdry Center for Philanthropy was established by the Southern University Foundation. Academic issues related to non-profit fundraising, philanthropy, non-profit leadership, etc., in the Valdry Center curriculum historically have not been a part of degree programs at minority educational communities. The Valdry Center is designed to attract students interested in degree programs in non-profit management and philanthropic study. Courses are offered through the Nelson Mandela School of Government and will be offered through the Southern University Law Center to provide training and education on the legal aspects of non-profit management.

The research question for this study is: What opportunities and challenges exist for soliciting gifts from African American higher education alumni who attend HBCUs? The study focused on alumni who have contributed time and money to Southern. The alumni who volunteered to participate were questioned about how they give and why they give.

The History of Higher Education Institutions Founded for the Education of Black People in the United States

Before discussing the study design, findings, and implications, the study needs to be placed in a historical context. It is not widely known that some higher education institutions for Black people were founded before slavery was abolished in the United States. None of these institutions was founded by the Federal or any state government. The need for institutions of higher education for Black people was first recognized and acted upon by philanthropists and religious organizations. In 1837, the first and oldest HBCU was founded in Pennsylvania with the bequest of Richard Humphreys. Humphreys was a Quaker philanthropist who left one-tenth of his estate to establish a school to educate people of African descent who had been captured and brought to the United States to work as slaves. He wanted to prepare them as teachers. In 1854, Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, was founded by a White Presbyterian minister at Ashmun Institute.

The first Black higher education institution founded and funded by Black people was Wilberforce College, which was founded in 1856 by the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, a Black church denomination. The AME Church established other Black higher education institutions, including Allen University, Morris Brown College, Paul Quinn College, Edward Waters College, Kittrell College, and Shorter College. In her dissertation, Butler-Mokoro (2010) argued that the AME Church saw the creation of these educational institutions as a way of uplifting the Black race at a time when education for Black people was outlawed in some states.

In addition to the AME Church, other Black and White religious institutions helped to found and support Black higher education institutions. These institutions included Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, and others who provided financial support for the colleges, financial support for students, and teachers who volunteered their time.

Why did Black people become so engaged in founding Black higher education institutions? They became engaged in creating and supporting higher education institutions because they viewed education as a liberating factor for free African Americans. They were also concerned about the failure of the government at the federal and state levels to provide free public education for Black people.

Often conversations about the engagement of African Americans in efforts to financially support higher education for African Americans start with the work of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). It should, however, start with a recognition of the work of African Americans during the period before the abolition of slavery. In 1856, the AME Church, a Black church denomination, founded Wilberforce College (now Wilberforce University), the first Black owned and operated college in the United States. The AME Church saw higher education as a liberating factor for free African Americans before the abolition of slavery. Later, the AME Church and other Black churches founded or assisted in the founding of other HBCUs because they saw education as a liberating factor for newly freed African Americans after their enslavement.

In addition to support from the national religious denominations and local churches, African American individuals, particularly church members, contributed to the support of HBCUs. Black churches affiliated with national denominations or conventions had Black college offering days that devoted special offerings to the support of schools with a connection to religious organizations. Some of the small, private HBCUs founded by religious groups or private philanthropists did not survive because the original founder(s) died and the college administrators were not able to sustain the costs of running a college without endowments, guaranteed yearly appropriations and/or a wealthy donor base.¹

There have been as many as 120 HBCUs, but in 2023, there were only 101. At least seven of the closed colleges were affiliated with African American churches. Even though Black church leaders had the desire to promote higher education opportunities through Black colleges, the cost of operating colleges was much greater than estimated by some denominational boards. The philanthropic donations for some colleges were one-time contributions that lacked plans for how the colleges might continue operating. Special collections from individual churches could not raise enough money to run four-year accredited colleges.

In 1860, U.S. Senator Justin Morrill from Vermont introduced a bill that he hoped would provide higher education to all citizens through the establishment of public institutions. President Buchanan vetoed the bill, but President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act in 1862. There were appropriations for states to establish predominantly Black colleges because

¹ <http://urbanintellectuals.com/11-historically-black-colleges-universities-that-have-closed/>

the colleges and universities in the South were segregated. The Morrill Act gave states 30,000 acres of federal land to be sold to support the opening of public higher education institutions for the education of farmers, scientists, and teachers.

White people in the South did not create institutions for Black citizens. Consequently, Congress passed the second Morrill Act in 1890 to establish state land grant colleges specifically for Black citizens. This was during the Jim Crow era when states in the South enforced separate educational institutions for Black students or demonstrated that other institutions were not discriminating against Black students. Southern University was established as a land-grant institution through the second Morrill Act.

Initially, alumni, Black organizations, and private philanthropists were less likely to give to public, state-supported colleges because there was a perception that the state colleges did not need the extra money. Although there were threats to close some state-supported schools after the implementation of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, none closed at that time. A private school, Storer College, was said to have closed in 1955 because the state of West Virginia stopped all state funding to it after the Brown decision.

The United Negro College Fund (UNCF)

One of the biggest enhancements to giving to and by African Americans for higher education was the creation of UNCF in 1944. UNCF was established after William Patterson, the president of Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University), frustrated by the challenges of raising adequate funds for his university, reached out to his fellow presidents at 27 private HBCUs. He was able to convince all the presidents to join him in forming an organization that would raise money to be divided between each of the institutions.

The first year of fundraising success brought significant positive results for the member organizations and encouraged other donors to contribute. UNCF was able to raise \$106,000 from Black individual donors. Eighty-four percent of the contributions from Black individuals came from new donors. The public knowledge of contributions from Black donors seemed to promote contributions from wealthy White individuals. John D. Rockefeller was one of the prominent wealthy contributors in 1944. College enrollment at the member HBCUs increased, perhaps due to Black veterans taking advantage of the GI Bill. In addition, income from church boards increased by 45 percent.

Several U.S. Presidents were strong supporters of UNCF, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt and George H.W. Bush. The public support for UNCF by Presidents, wealthy Americans, and corporations encouraged the federal government to provide additional financial support to HBCUs.

Today, UNCF provides over \$100 million in scholarship assistance to college students attending private HBCUs. Its support of Black colleges has expanded from 27 to 37 HBCUs. In addition to its national office in Washington, DC, it operates regional offices across the country that provide information and assistance to Black students interested in attending college.

Thurgood Marshall College Fund

In 1987, the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) was founded by Dr. N. Joyce Payne to fill some of the void in supporting Black college students who were not attending the private HBCUs represented by UNCF. TMCF (2019) is now the largest organization that exclusively represents the Black college community. Its scope has expanded beyond offering scholarships to capacity-building, upskilling and equity programs, and career opportunities with top-tier organizations. TMCF receives funding from corporations, individuals, and foundations.

The Aftermath of Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court Decision

The legal grounds for separating students by race were established by the Supreme Court in the 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). The “separate but equal” test allowed segregated education to remain the law until the Supreme Court overturned the *Plessy* ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

When the 1954 Supreme Court issued its decision in *Brown*, many observers felt that the ruling would lead to the end of HBCUs. They felt that the ruling outlawed separate but equal educational institutions, which meant that operating HBCUs violated the principle of the ruling. Some HBCU donors, including foundations and White philanthropists, withdrew their giving because they predicted the closure of HBCUs. The southern states where most HBCUs were located merged their HBCUs into their state university systems and limited the majors available at the HBCUs. Enrollment declined at some HBCU institutions as

Black students began enrolling in predominantly White schools (PWI) that had more courses of study available and facilities that were more extensive and modern. Additionally, some Black students felt that degrees from PWIs would guarantee them better job opportunities across more industries.

More Black college students are now enrolled in PWIs than HBCUs, but their enrollment has been increasing at some HBCUs. There were upticks in HBCU enrollment after the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in 2013 and the killing of George Floyd in 2020 in Minneapolis. Black students looking for educational institutions where they can feel comfortable, accepted, and valued tend to prefer to attend HBCUs. Black students who want to be engaged in student life and have professors who are invested in them also tend to be attracted to HBCUs.

Giving to at least the larger and more prominent HBCUs increased during the years after the death of George Floyd. However, Mackenzie Scott, a first-time donor, gave more than \$550 million to HBCUs, including colleges that were not well known. Some of the less prominent HBCUs that received gifts from Scott are Claflin University, Voorhees College, and Elizabeth State University. In selecting the colleges, her team of advisors looked at factors such as an increase in the number of first-time college students, higher tuition and fees, higher retention and graduation rates, and consistent leadership.² (Adedoyin, 2021)

According to Philanthropy News Digest (PND, 2023), not only have giving pledges increased from corporations and wealthy White individuals, but wealthy African Americans have also made substantial contributions to HBCUs. PND identified some noteworthy contributions from tennis star Serena Williams, actors Michael B. Jordan and Kevin Hart, football player and coach Deion Sanders, and film producer Will Packer. Giving by wealthy Black individuals has been ongoing because Bill and Camile Cosby and Tom Joyner, for example, consistently gave to HBCUs over many years, and other Black individuals like Oprah Winfrey, billionaire Robert F. Smith, and media executive Cathy Hughes have given at least one large gift. In addition, Black alumni like Leon and Warren Valdry (real estate investment) from Southern University and Eddie and Sylvia Brown (asset management)

² <https://www.chronicle.com/article/mackenzie-scott-donated-560-million-to-23-hbcus-these-are-the-other-things-they-have-in-common>.

from Howard University have made gifts that are not well known beyond the universities to which they have contributed.

Philanthropic giving by Black people is not restricted to gifts made by affluent Black individuals. Singletary (2020) of the Washington Post reported that "Black Americans give a larger share of their wealth to charities than any other racial group in America" (para. 10). Similarly, the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy reported in November 2023 that except for White Americans, Black Americans donated a higher percentage of their income to religious institutions and secular causes (Osili et al., 2023).

The first HBCU alumni organization was founded at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. The organization was established more as a support system to recruit students for Lincoln rather than to raise money for the university. Over time, alumni organizations have become fixtures at HBCUs and have local chapters in large cities or areas with large concentrations of alumni. Many HBCUs have come to rely on their alumni organizations for recruitment, fundraising, and assistance in connecting with government officials regarding issues affecting these institutions.

Alumni Giving to Black Colleges and Universities: The Literature

Until recent years, academic studies of Black alumni giving to colleges and universities had been largely confined to dissertation studies at Black universities. As more Black people have entered the middle class, the number of studies on giving by Black college alumni has increased. (Gasman, 2002) The findings of the dissertation studies are not regularly cited in mainstream academic journals and other publications. However, some of the dissertation research has contributed to the body of knowledge with new and complementary findings. For example, in a recent dissertation study focused on giving by millennials at an HBCU, Tatum-Frederick (2024) concluded that personal experiences are related to the giving behavior of alumni after graduation.

Some HBCU alumni associations' leaders confirm that one of the stories they hear from the alumni who do not make contributions to their alma maters is that alumni had unpleasant experiences in college, influencing their refusal to make any contributions. College development staff report hearing stories about hardships or negative undergraduate experiences that prevent graduates from making contributions as alumni. At HBCUs, some other stories relate to issues with financial aid offices. Some nongivers state

that they do not know how their money will be used. Others say they do not trust the leadership of the college or university. Sometimes negative experiences happened 20 years or more in the past.

Reasons Given by HBCU Alums for Not Giving

Bad experiences
Have not been asked
Cannot afford to give (other obligations such as children's tuition)
Why contribute to a public institution

Even though the alumni have had successful careers because of their HBCU education, they have chosen to live in the past by holding on to a negative experience with a particular professor or a remembrance of almost getting expelled from school because their student payment was late. The findings of Tatum-Frederick (2024) about giving by millennials mirror an earlier dissertation study by Van Horn (2002), who concluded that satisfaction with undergraduate college experiences was related to the likelihood of making contributions as alumni. (Van Horn, 2002)

Student engagement in college activities, such as athletics and student organizations, has been found to be a positive factor in determining whether former students will likely return to their alma maters after graduation to participate in university activities, such as homecoming. Participation in university activities after graduation has been found to increase the likelihood of alumni contributing to their alma maters.

Different from survey findings restricted to HBCU alumni, in a 2016 survey reported in the Chronicle of Philanthropy, Stiffman found that college alumni did not give because they did not think their colleges needed the money as much as other charities. This lack of need is not the case for HBCUs. Nonetheless, researchers have found that graduates of state universities feel less need to financially support their alma maters than graduates of small private schools with little to no money in their endowments.

One of the often-cited studies on giving by Black college and university alumni focused on the need for more contributions to HBCUs by their alumni (Cohen, 2006). The author argued that with a decline in foundation support for HBCUs, alumni giving can help fill the void. Cohen's (2006) study needs to be updated by collecting and analyzing data collected since the death of George Floyd in 2020.

Some observers say that HBCU alumni need to give more to their universities if they want corporations and other donors to invest in the institutions. Donors like to see college administrators, faculty, staff, alumni, and students financially invested in their HBCUs.

There are models of how alumni and supporters have raised money for HBCUs, especially to support students. Many college alumni chapters sponsor scholarship programs to provide yearly scholarships and endowed scholarships. Scholarships sponsored by alumni often support students who do not qualify for the larger, nationally advertised scholarships. Money is often raised through annual events such as galas, cookouts, and receptions.

Some giving projects founded by alumni offer ways for people who did not attend HBCUs to contribute in a meaningful way. In 2017, Black women technology entrepreneurs, led by a Howard University alumna, created the "I Heart My HBCU" app where donors could donate "spare change" to any HBCU. Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) Sorority, led by its national president, Dr. Glenda Glover, also the president of an HBCU, created an annual HBCU Impact Day. AKA members and other donors raised more than \$2 million dollars in 2021, the last year of a four-year fundraising effort.

Some alumni do not give because their universities have never asked them. PWIs tend to have the ability to keep abreast of their former students regardless of the many times alumni move. The alumni offices at PWIs have more resources to invest in database technology to document the movement of their alumni over time. With the expansion of technological resources, HBCUs are adopting innovative technology and using novel approaches to reach and maintain contact with more of their alumni.

The development of social media communications has facilitated HBCUs' ease of maintaining contact lists of alumni, allowing them to communicate with alumni more often to stay in contact with them (Bell, 2024). Social media can be game-changing by providing HBCU fundraisers with tools to enhance their ability not only to develop and maintain mailing lists but also to reduce the cost of communicating with alumni. Technology can provide many avenues of communication and can be tailored to suit different interests.

The Study

This study was inspired in part by the interest generated in HBCUs after the death of George Floyd in 2020. George Floyd was a Black man whose killing by Minneapolis, Minnesota police officers was recorded on May 20, 2020, by a civilian bystander and was broadcast around the world. The killing took place during the COVID-19 pandemic when large numbers of people were confined to their homes. Demonstrations were held in cities throughout the United States, with White people joining Black people in expressing outrage about not only the killing of Floyd but also the disparate treatment of Black people across the nation, especially by police officers. Even though the slogan "Black Lives Matter" existed since 2013, people from all walks of life began to embrace it. The Mayor of Washington, D.C. had a two-block section of the street leading up to the White House renamed Black Lives Matter Plaza on June 5, 2020.

The increased interest in the plight of Black Americans led to increased interest in HBCUs. As a result, giving by private entities—individuals, corporations, and foundations—to HBCUs increased. UNCF received a \$100 million gift from the Lilly Endowment, the largest unrestricted gift it had ever received. Likewise, Spelman College (2024) received a \$100 million gift from a member of its board, its largest-ever gift (New York Times, January 18, 2024).

In 2022, MacKenzie Scott, co-founder of Amazon and ex-wife of Jeff Bezos, who had not been active in philanthropic circles, announced \$400 million in gifts to 23 HBCUs, including some of the lesser-known HBCUs (Adedoyin, 2021). Some of the less prominent HBCUs that received gifts from Scott were Claflin University, Voorhees College, and Elizabeth State University. In selecting the colleges, her team of advisors looked at factors such as an increase in the number of first-time college students, higher tuition and fees, higher retention and graduation rates, and consistent leadership.³ Bloomberg Philanthropies (2024) donated \$600 million to four historically Black medical schools and to a new medical school that was being built at Xavier University in New Orleans.

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/mackenzie-scott-donated-560-million-to-23-hbcus-these-are-the-other-things-they-have-in-common>

There is no record of a similar increase in large gifts to HBCUs by Black donors, but a year before the Floyd murder, Robert Smith, a Black billionaire, promised the Morehouse 2019 graduating class he would pay all their outstanding debt to Morehouse College. Later in that year, he committed to paying any outstanding educational loans owed by the graduates' parents for about \$34 million.

After initially planning to study alumni giving at a cross-section of Black colleges and universities, the study was narrowed to one institution, Southern University. As mentioned earlier, the decision to limit the study to Southern University was made because the grant was given to Southern, and it was easier and less costly to collect data from one university. Additionally, the SU Foundation made the commitment to assist in gaining access to alumni, especially to its databases. The insights and lessons learned from this single-institution study could inform the design of a larger multi-institution study. The data were collected using an anonymous online survey as well as virtual focus groups.

Increasing Giving by Alumni and Others to HBCUs

After a decline in enrollments and the closing of some HBCUs, many HBCUs have seen increases in inquiries from potential students, more positive media coverage, and an increase in student enrollment. There is a heightened sense of HBCU pride being shown by alumni, families, friends, and local communities. The schools have gained recognition for the roles they play in graduating a high percentage of African Americans with college degrees.

In 2020, for the first time in history, a graduate of an HBCU was nominated and elected to the second highest elected position in the U.S. government—Vice President. Even though Kamala Harris was a graduate of Howard University, her accomplishment among students and graduates of HBCUs was an achievement for all HBCU students and graduates. In 2024, the national HBCU community witnessed the nomination of Vice President Harris for the highest U.S. elected position—President of the United States. The members of the national HBCU community demonstrated excitement and pride whether they were attending the Democratic convention in person or watching it on television.

Some HBCU development and alumni office personnel took advantage of "HBCU Pride" to promote giving. They recognized that the internal assets of their institutions could be leveraged to expand giving initiatives and campaigns. Some HBCUs have internal entities that have become nationally recognized. The recognition goes beyond individuals who attended and/or graduated from the university. Using name recognition can generate funds from alumni and from the public. For example, Fisk University's Jubilee Singers have performed worldwide and were nominated for a Grammy Award. The Morgan State University Choir has great name recognition, allowing it to be invited to sing at venues around the world, including the White House. The Southern University Human Jukebox Marching Band attracts alumni and other fans to football games, even fans who may not understand football. The Human Jukebox has performed at 10 Super Bowl games and the Rose Bowl and Presidential Inauguration parades.

Some alumni from schools in the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) and other HBCU athletic conferences, such as Doug Williams of Grambling State University, the first Black starting quarterback in a Superbowl game, have made names not only for themselves but also for their universities. Financial contributions may come from people who want to help another Doug Williams enter the NFL, or Robert Covington make it to the NBA.

Students are attracted to HBCUs for their athletics and social activity, but they are attracted by other factors. For example, Howard University is known for its student activism. Students apply to Howard because they have heard about the activism of the students on and off campus. People who did not attend Howard admire the activism that they feel is cultivated at Howard. Some HBCUs are known for their heavy emphasis on the sciences, while others have good engineering programs. Young women who want to study in an all-women's environment select Spelman or Bennett. Similarly, young men interested in studying in an all-male environment select Morehouse.

Southern University

Southern University, the only HBCU system in the United States, has an enrollment of more than 12,000 students at its Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Shreveport locations and its

law school. To improve its fundraising abilities, SU created the Southern University Foundation in 2012. The foundation's mission is "to encourage, solicit, receive, and administer gifts and requests of property and funds for scientific, educational, and charitable purposes". Every college in the SU System, as well as every campus has a director of development who oversees the raising of funds for their colleges or campuses.

The SU Foundation has a robust fundraising program that not only reaches out to foundations, corporations, and governmental entities for assistance but also engages its alumni in giving back to the university. One of its most engaging programs involving alumni is the annual Million Dollar March campaign. All alumni in its database receive a mailer about the March and the 1880 Society annual fund. Alumni volunteers are recruited as active partners in the March. The foundation takes advantage of social media to publicize and reach a broad range of potential donors throughout the country. At the kickoff, the foundation streams programming featuring students and alumni from all of the SU System campuses to encourage constituents to give to the various university programs.

The 1880 Society has been pivotal in transforming advancement at Southern. Founded in 2012, its mission is "to create a culture of philanthropy at Southern University and a culture of giving among its Alumni, to expand its network of supporters and donor base, in order to form a mechanism for Southern University to become financially self-sustaining" (Southern Foundation, n.d., para. 2). Prior to 2012, the university system had no general annual fundraising program. The 1880 Society funding has provided the flexibility necessary to grow giving to the university and it leads the Million Dollar March campaign. An 1880 Society mailer that is sent to everyone in the SU Foundation's database, provides information about the impact of the 1880 Society on growing SU's philanthropy.

Online Survey Findings

The research team for this study decided that data would be collected through two methods: (1) an online survey open to any Southern University alumnus who was in the 8,000+-person database of the SU Foundation; and (2) virtual focus groups. An alumnus was defined as anyone who had attended the university, regardless of their graduation status. The online questionnaire was designed to garner information from givers and alumni who had not given to the university. It was anticipated that some of the non-givers would provide information on why they have not and do not give. The author, in

collaboration with SU Foundation staff and a Southern University researcher, drafted the survey questions using prior research and questions that would help in designing various fundraising campaigns for the system.

All alumni in the SU Foundation database received notifications about the survey and invitations to participate. Despite advertising the survey through the alumni association outlets over several months, only 120 alumni completed and submitted the survey. It is not known if any online respondents also participated in one of the focus groups.

The research questions in the online survey were designed to answer the following questions: (a) "Why do Southern University alumni give back to their alma mater?" "What makes alumni give and keep giving?" and (c) "What factors discourage giving?"

Some of the findings from the online survey are reported below. A larger number or percentage of the respondents was expected to be alumni who had not contributed to the university. Conversely, the findings showed that over 90 percent of online participants had made a financial contribution to the university. Not only had they had given to the university (Table 1), but more than 20 percent had contributed for 15 or more years (Table 2). Based on this finding, the data collected from the online survey were not valuable in answering the questions about alumni who had not given to the university. The two tables are presented below to demonstrate the survey responses to the questions, "Have you ever made a financial contribution to Southern University?" "How many years have you contributed?"

Table 1: Contributed to Southern University

Response option	%
Yes	93.1
No	6.9

Table 2: Years Donated to Southern University

%	%
32.4	32.4
26.1	26.1
18.9	18.9
22.5	22.5

One of the survey questions asked what prompted the respondent to give to the university. Table 3 shows the responses. The two main reasons selected were support for specific programs or departments and personal satisfaction. Some studies of alumni giving have concluded that alumni giving is often tied to an expectation of reciprocity—their children will be admitted to the university. (Meer & Rosen, 2018) The expectation of reciprocity seems to be less of a driving force for giving to HBCUs.

Table 3: Motivation to Give

Reason for Giving	%
Annual Fund	10
Support for specific programs or departments	50
Personal satisfaction	50
Tax Benefits	30
Influence on the future of the university	40
Other	10

Note: Respondents could check all options that applied to this item.

Close to one-third of the respondents in this study chose tax benefits. This finding could have two implications. First, donors should be aware of the university’s federal tax-exempt status and the likelihood that their contributions may be tax-exempt. Second, respondents should monitor changes that are being discussed regarding changes in tax-exempt status for certain charitable organizations. Will charitable giving decline if HBCUs lose their tax-exempt status?

College alumni often say that they do not give because they do not know where their money is going. Some may assume that alumni want to give and that they feel comfortable with the university using their gifts wherever they are needed. Based on the experience of the researchers in working with alumni chapters, it was decided that a question regarding the importance of knowing how their contributions are used should be included in the survey (Table 4).

Table 4: How Important is it to You to Know How Your Donation is Used?

Importance	%
Very important	68.8
Important	17.0
Neutral	10.7
Not important	0.9
Not at all important	2.7

Most of the respondents in this study stated that it was very important to know how their donations are being used (68.8 percent). Alternatively, less than three percent responded that knowing how their contributions were used was not important at all.

The respondents were also asked about their preferences for programs to support (Table 5). It was not surprising that over 80 percent of the respondents prefer to support scholarship and financial aid programs.

Table 5: Which areas would you prefer your donations to support? (Check all that apply)

Area	%
Athletics	21.7
Capital Projects	27.5
Faculty research	20.8
Infrastructure and technology	42.5
Scholarships and financial aid	81.7
Student programs and activities	45.0
Other (please specify):	9.2

Athletic programs serve as an attraction for HBCU recruiters, but the programs are underfunded. Top basketball and football players are recruited by the larger, better funded PWIs. Thus, coaches are underpaid, equipment is outdated, and athletic scholarships are much less than scholarships and financial support at larger institutions. Despite the popularity of athletic programs, less than one-fourth of the respondents answered that they would prefer that their contributions go to athletic programs. Scholarships and financial aid are the top areas to which Southern alumni respondents would like to have their contributions support. Even capital projects ranked higher than athletics. The respondents may have been thinking that they support the athletics department by attending the games and other sports events.

Focus Groups Findings

The focus group methodology was initially selected as a complementary information gathering process to the online survey. After the slow and small response rate from the online survey, the focus group became the primary data collection method.

Focus groups are a popular method of collecting data when time is limited. It was felt that focus groups would provide the type of information needed in the time frame available for the study. The focus group method provides an opportunity to collect in-depth data when designing fundraising campaigns. The data gathered in focus groups would be richer than the information collected from individual interviews.

A comment made by a focus group participant can trigger ideas that an individual respondent might not conceive while answering questions during a written or a one-on-one interview. Unlike a written questionnaire, in a focus group, a good facilitator can probe the group members to generate clearer, well-developed responses across group members that are richer than what one respondent may say without group members building their ideas with each other.

Virtual focus groups were selected because they offered several advantages over in-person focus groups. First, they allowed the facilitator to have a more diverse group of participants.

Participants who lived throughout the country, including in rural or more remote areas, could participate. Virtual groups require less expense than conducting in-person focus groups because there is no need to rent a meeting facility, and no travel expenses are required for the facilitator and the participants. Virtual groups are less time-consuming because travel time did not need to be factored into the cost.

All the focus group participants in this study were alumni who were active in their local SU Federation chapters and/or at the national level. Recruitment was primarily executed by advertisements through the Southern University Alumni Federation. People interested in participating completed an online application. The participants selected were those who volunteered to participate. The volunteers had to represent one of the following categories: (a) strong, regular contributors to Southern University; (b) graduates who have maintained a connection to the university through their alumni associations; and (c) leaders from local chapters and alumnus who have participated in homecoming, football games, and other activities sponsored by the university.

Since all the participants were active alumni, time was saved during the focus group sessions. The facilitator did not have to provide the focus group participants with much background information on Southern University's giving programs during the focus group sessions.

The project staff, in consultation with fundraising professionals, drafted the focus group questions. The responses were reviewed and analyzed by project staff. The preliminary findings and analysis have been presented to development professionals, Southern University Foundation staff, and Southern University alumni. Additionally, this article will be submitted for publication.

What Comes to Mind When You Think of Southern University?

Participants were asked about the words that come to mind when they think about Southern. Participants talked about the lifetime friendships they developed. Some said Southern provided a family atmosphere. Others reported following their parents, siblings, and other family members to Southern, so it was a family affair." "Legacy" was one of the commonly cited words. The participants also cited the excellence that Southern instills in

the students as they go forth from Southern to do "amazing things." Some participants spoke about the friends, classmates, professors, and staff members that combined to make it a community.

"To me, all of that speaks to excellence." "When I think of Southern University, the tradition, the heritage, all of that."

- Family
- Education
- Excellence
- Community
- Legacy

Why spend your discretionary time volunteering for Southern?

Paying it forward and giving it back were the two common themes from the respondents concerning why they volunteered their time for Southern University activities. Participants mentioned the scholarships or student aid that they received. Others talked about current students or the university needing their time. One alumnus stated, "I feel as though I'm obligated to give back."

- To Give Back
- Show Gratitude
- Support Students
- Gifts Needed

Time spent by officers on volunteering for university-related work.

The alumni who serve as officers in their local chapters or as national officers devote a great deal of time to volunteer service for the university. On average, they estimate that they spend eight hours or more per week doing volunteer work for their chapter or the national federation.

Why do you give of your finances to SU?

“Pay it forward” was a common response to this question. The participants see financial giving as a way of helping because the university needs the money. One respondent said they must improve the situation if they are going to complain.

Why do you go to the Foundation website?

The officers go to the website for information that they can pass along to their chapter members or to stay abreast of things happening at the university. Others go to the website to make contributions.

Is it easy to give to Southern?

Most participants agreed that it is easy to give to Southern because there are many options for giving. A few felt overwhelmed by the number of options. Nevertheless, after group discussion, the participants agreed that the options keep donors from complaining that the foundation does not offer their preferred giving option, e.g., check, electronic means such as Cash App, or credit cards. One person stated that there are "lots of different ways to meet people where they are."

Can changes in giving methods increase giving?

There were more complaints and disagreements in the discussion of this question than any other question. A West Coast alumna complained about virtual meetings not taking into consideration the time differences. One person felt that the office was not good at responding to questions and concerns. Another felt that better communication is needed regarding how their contributions are spent. Other participants pushed back noting that there were many options for designating a particular project to receive a gift.

Communication

There were compliments by participants regarding how the SU Foundation effectively asks for money. Some of the officers said that they had some chapter members who complained about hearing from the PWIs they attended, but they did not hear from Southern. This complaint seemed to come from older members who may have been

reflecting on their experiences before the foundation was created and before the invention of technology options. The participants, however, were interested in knowing how their money is spent.

Giving Day

There is some confusion regarding the major giving campaigns--SU Give Day and the Million Dollar March. Some feel overwhelmed by the many requests for contributions.

Conclusion

Many HBCUs began as underfunded institutions. Created in the Jim Crow era when separate was unequal, the state-supported Black institutions like Southern University were not funded and still are not funded at levels equal to their predominantly White counterparts. Nevertheless, Southern has survived and thrived for 125 years, educating many first-generation Black students whose parents did not complete high school. Starting with the vision of the first African American Governor in the U.S., P.B.S. Pinchback, it has thrived to become the first predominantly Black university system in the United States.

Notwithstanding financial challenges, Southern has survived and expanded its curriculum, outreach, and fields of study. The university has graduated students who have excelled in many walks of life, professions, lines of work and civic and political activities. The challenge that serves as the theme for this article is soliciting and gaining financial gifts from African Americans. Southern University is meeting that challenge by soliciting gifts from its alumni network. Some impediments have been addressed in this article. Unlike most Southern students who attended 40 or 50 years ago, families are smaller, and students are less likely to have a sibling attending college at the same time. Even though most still need some type of financial assistance, today's alumni are generally in a better financial situation to give back to their alma mater. Southern now has a generation of graduates who have the resources to share beyond their immediate families. This study has focused on how to promote a culture of giving that can be spread to other alumni and be infectious and spread throughout the community.

Technology was identified as one of the resources that was not available 50 years ago. Development officers and other fundraising staff operated with outdated mailing lists and did not have the money to pay the post office to keep the lists updated. Now, with new social media options, it is hard for a person to hide, especially if they work, subscribe to a social media platform, or are active in any way in society.

Technology has also introduced new fundraising tools where excuses such as "I don't have any money on me" and "I don't have my checkbook" can be dismissed because almost everyone has a cell phone with immediate access to bank accounts and credit cards. Gifts can be collected at events through the convenience of a QR code. Regardless of the giving preferences, fundraisers can use "snail mail" or any of the myriad of communication methods.

Increased alumni giving will help HBCUs expand and maintain some programs. Nevertheless, colleges and universities cannot survive and thrive on contributions from alumni alone. States, the federal government, and foundations must recognize the need for higher education and the importance of educating people of all races and nationalities. HBCUs have contributed and continue to contribute greatly to the education of American students, and students from other countries. HBCUs have helped to increase the number of Black professionals in many fields of study. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are not negative terms, American leaders will be successful if they recognize that the United States is a diverse country, and it is becoming more diverse. Some of the basic tenets of democracy that the US proclaims are freedom, respect for minority opinions, recognition of human dignity. The nation will survive by acknowledging the value of all human beings without regard for skin color, language spoken, or ethnic background.

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