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Colleges Step Up for 2024 Election



At RIT Our Goal is Seeing You Succeed



Enrolling and retaining a diverse mix of talented students is the goal of the Division of Enrollment Management at Rochester Institute of Technology. We know choosing a college or university is a big decision. Once you're here, we'll help you create your own educational journey that reflects your own curiosity and passions.

Kathleen Davis, vice president for Enrollment Management says this kind of individualized, holistic educational experience helps enrich student's lives.



"Our exceptional academic programs, combined with extensive experiential learning opportunities, clearly set us apart. However, the RIT experience is just as important. RIT provides many unique and notable extracurricular offerings, such as performing arts, ArtEx, e-sports, athletics, residential life, and our rich traditions which enhance the world-class academic experience."

More than 20,000 students are enrolled at RIT including our global campuses in China, Croatia, Dubai

and Kosovo. You'll find enrollment, financial aid and scholarship support with a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

Davis says, "We start by making sure we "meet where students are." Whether it is a program to help build a bridge for college accessibility or creating a strategic plan to engage with international students, we use all of our resources to make those connections, share our story, and offer support for students who choose RIT."

One of those connections is Destler/Johnson Rochester City Scholars. Since its launch 15 years ago by former RIT President Bill Destler and his wife Rebecca Johnson, 351 students have received full-tuition scholarships.

Sally Douglas, senior associate director, Office of Undergraduate Admissions helps to recruit for that program. She is passionate about and proud of the work she and her colleagues are doing.



"RIT's AALANA enrollment for the 2024-2025 academic year is incredible. We have

already exceeded the AALANA goals outlined in the current Strategic Plan, but the increase this year is expected to be larger than could be predicted. Pending the final enrollment numbers confirmed at the 21-day mark of the term, the entering AALANA population is expected to be approximately 27% higher than last year, making it the largest class of AALANA students in RIT's history. That statistic includes 30 Rochester Urban League Black Scholars."

Kathleen Davis says engaging with community-based organizations, offering initiatives to support women in technology fields and international students enhances the diversity of RIT's student body.

"The challenges in higher education require enrollment leaders to be nimble, innovative, collaborative, and diligent. I am eager to find the right mix of strategies—the science and art—to help RIT meet enrollment goals."



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The Insight Into Diversity Library Excellence in Access and Diversity (LEAD) Award is a measure of an academic library's programs and initiatives that encourage and support DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) on their campus. These include, but are not limited to, research, technology, accessibility, exhibitions, and community outreach.



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FROM OUR EDITOR

Dear Readers,

I have seen too many headlines this year about states' efforts to criminalize schoolteachers who use a student's preferred pronouns or refer to them by their chosen name rather than what's listed on the enrollment roster.

According to a report from the Williams Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, School of Law, 40% of the transgender youth in the United States – nearly 121,100 students ages 13-17 – live in states that have passed or have introduced laws restricting or prohibiting the use of gender-affirming pronouns.

While America's public school system isn't exactly a beacon of progressive policy reform, in the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education it is more important than ever to recognize and honor the diverse identities of students.

As college admissions processes adapt to better serve all students, especially in light of the Supreme Court's ban on race-based affirmative action in admissions, it's essential that we expand the ways in which students can self-identify – not only in terms of race and ethnicity but also in gender identity and naming.

Common App, the nonprofit organization that simplified applying to a collective of over 1,000 colleges and universities, has updated its application portal to include options for students to share their affirmed name, personal pronouns, and gender identity.

This is a meaningful step in the right direction.

The change reflects an understanding that identity is multifaceted and deeply personal. The names and pronouns students use are not mere preferences; they are core to who they are and how they navigate the world. These identifiers should be respected and used consistently in all aspects of the admissions process and beyond.

However, as we celebrate these advancements, we must also remain vigilant in ensuring that all institutions follow suit. The language we use in our admissions processes, in our classrooms, and across campus life must affirm each student's identity.

By embracing terms like "lived name" and "personal pronouns," schools send a powerful message: every student deserves to be seen and respected for who they are.

It's not just about inclusivity; this is also about student success.

When people are allowed the safety to present themselves authentically, they are more likely to thrive academically, socially, and professionally. Colleges and universities have a responsibility to provide all the tools at their disposal to foster environments where every student feels valued and supported, beginning with the admissions process.

If your school's enrollment application, student database, and faculty management dashboard don't yet offer these identity options, I encourage you to push for changes and help ensure that your institution not only accepts but celebrates the full spectrum of student identities.

By doing so, you are not just filling seats – you are building communities where every individual has the opportunity to succeed and flourish.

Katy Abrams



‘Serving’ Solutions to Urban Health Disparities

The Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health (AAIUH) has been collaborating with local and international organizations for more than 30 years to tackle health disparities in Brooklyn, New York, and the surrounding communities.

Through their after-school program, AAIUH Health Science Academy, the institute provides advanced instruction and career exploration in health sciences to students in grades 6-12 who have limited access to such opportunities, exposing the next generation to the possibility of becoming health care professionals.

Continuing their work beyond the academic calendar, AAIUH runs summer health sciences programs designed specifically for students of color. This year, more than 65 people enrolled across programs of instruction in anatomy, physiology, and health disparities, with initiatives including the Brooklyn Health Disparities Summer

Internship Program for high schoolers, the Cabrini Health Science Workforce Development Program for college students, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation partnership that offers clinical research experiences to foster diversity in biomedical research.

AAIUH also convenes conferences, produces documentaries, and publishes articles, books, and newsletters.

However, the most unique demonstration of their commitment to “meet people where they are” is their partnership with over 170 Brooklyn-area salons and barbershops to deliver essential health information to underserved communities in the spaces they frequent and trust.

Additionally, they work with more than a dozen local middle and high schools to provide training programs in health care and STEM fields.

Efforts also focus on areas of Brooklyn that have some of the highest rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and

HIV, exploring ways to deliver health care services more effectively. AAIUH addresses key social factors affecting health such as race, socioeconomic status, and environmental conditions by developing and managing community-centered programs focused on finding real solutions.

AAIUH’s namesake, former tennis star Arthur Ashe, announced the creation of the institute in December 1992 — just two months before his death. Ashe recognized that the disproportionate incidence of morbidity and mortality from preventable diseases within ethnically diverse communities was inextricably linked to inadequate health care and health education in vulnerable urban districts.

Now, more than three decades later, AAIUH carries out the vision of its founder, whose words grace the institute’s homepage: “To achieve greatness, start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can.” ●

Stimulating Student Voting

Institutions of higher learning have long promoted voter registration and participation.

In June, The American Council on Education released the Student Voting and College Political Campaign-Related Activities 2024 report with tips for colleges to continue upholding and encouraging their students’ participation in the democratic process.

The report suggests that institutions be proactive in addressing potential barriers and offering solutions, engaging in issue advocacy where feasible and permissible, and conducting voting information sessions.

Providing robust, nonpartisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts are also recommended.

They recommend establishing multiple locations on campus for distributing absentee ballot applications, stamps, and

stationary, and clear summaries of state registration and voting requirements.

Some evidence even suggests that providing information about other states’ laws, not just those of the institution’s home state, may influence would-be student voters hailing from out-of-state.

The report also notes that colleges and universities can use federal work-study funds to establish voter registration positions at their own institutions, collaborate with local election offices, or partner with nonpartisan organizations to enhance voter registration and participation.

A thriving democracy begins on campus. In this era of increasingly crucial civic engagement, the ACE 2024 report supplements nonpartisan institutional efforts to bolster a more engaged and representative electorate.

New Home for Naval Research at UM

The U.S. Navy, an internationally renowned military powerhouse with its own research branch — the Office of Naval Research (ONR) — employs top experts and engineers in maritime sciences. Academics have operated in the background, collaborating on much of the research that informs the branch’s practice, until now. The University of Michigan (U-M) is slated to house the new Center for Naval Research and Education, bringing these important academic partnerships to the foreground.

According to their website, ONR “has been a pioneer in the public support of science and technology research that benefits both the naval services as well as the nation ... for more than 75 years and counting.”

In May, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro visited the U-M campus and announced the \$14.5 million project, which will connect professional researchers, undergraduates, and postdoctoral students with cutting-edge maritime technologies.

The center’s marine and maritime research will focus on some of the most pressing issues in modern naval development, such as harnessing energy from waves, experimenting with more effective maneuverability and performance methods, and analyzing damage patterns for tougher hull design. ●



Recent Studies and Discoveries |

Addressing Overdose Risks for Women



New research from the **Pennsylvania State University (Penn State)** reveals that women with opioid use disorder, particularly those involved in the criminal legal system, face significant barriers in accessing harm reduction tools and treatment. Interviews with affected women and professionals highlighted the need for increased accessibility to overdose prevention resources, such as naloxone and fentanyl testing strips, and the importance of expanding harm reduction education, according to the study's lead author, Eric Harrison, a Penn State graduate student. The study also found that stigma, especially among women who are mothers, deters many from seeking help. The findings suggest a shift away from "abstinence-only" approaches in treatment programs, emphasizing the importance of meeting women where they are to reduce overdose risks. To learn more, visit bit.ly/3T9oecG



Mapping Environmental Justice Needs

Federal agencies seeking to address environmental justice issues now have a new set of guidelines to identify communities most in need of support, thanks to a comprehensive report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. The report, "Constructing Valid Geospatial Tools for Environmental Justice," was developed by an 11-member committee co-chaired by Harvey Miller, PhD, a geography professor at **The Ohio State University**. It provides recommendations for creating geospatial tools that combine health, social, environmental, and economic data into a single index score to determine which communities should receive federal funding. The study emphasizes the importance of including economic measures beyond poverty levels and considering the impacts of systemic racism in environmental justice assessments. To learn more, visit bit.ly/471ocJB

Disparities in Colonoscopy Follow-Ups



A recent study, led by Oguzhan Alagoz, PhD, a professor and researcher at the **University of Wisconsin-Madison**, assesses the impact of racial disparities in follow-up colonoscopy rates and adenoma detection rates on colorectal cancer (CRC) outcomes for Black Americans. Based on the CRC-Adenoma Incidence and Mortality model, findings indicate that Black Americans have significantly lower follow-up colonoscopy rates and adenoma detection rates than White Americans, contributing to higher CRC incidence and mortality rates. Simulating various scenarios, the study predicts that eliminating these disparities would reduce CRC incidence by 14.6% and mortality by 18.7%, while improving life-years gained by 7.1%. The results highlight that improving follow-up colonoscopy rates and the quality of screening could substantially mitigate CRC disparities between Black and White Americans. To learn more, visit bit.ly/3Yyehcb

Racial Gaps in ER Testing



A cross-sectional analysis of emergency department data by **Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine** researchers — led by Michael I. Ellenbogen, MD — has revealed significant racial disparities in diagnostic testing for common conditions, with White patients more frequently receiving tests for nonspecific symptoms like nausea, abdominal pain, chest pain, or syncope compared to Black patients. The study, which reviewed over 3.6 million encounters from 2016 to 2018 across hospitals in four states, found that Black patients had 26% lower odds of receiving related diagnostic tests than their White counterparts. This discrepancy raises concerns about possible overtesting in White patients and undertesting in Black patients, potentially leading to missed diagnoses. The findings underscore the need for further investigation into these disparities and their impact on health care equity in acute care settings. To learn more, visit bit.ly/4dCSmFy



STEM - Coaching and Resources for Entrepreneurial Women (CREW) is an MUSC initiative to address gender inequity in entrepreneurship.

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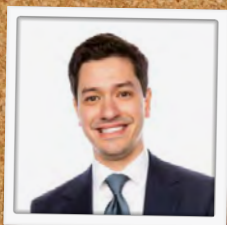
In 2024, the advancement of women can be seen and felt in programs that increase women in the hiring pool, thoughtful retention and promotion practices, and the provision of training, coaching and support to achieve stunning career growth.

CREW program at the Medical University of South Carolina uses an innovative approach combining mentoring, coaching, and skill-building activities to address gender inequity and promote an entrepreneurial mindset among women.



Find out more: <https://redcap.musc.edu/surveys/?s=RDMJXTEWXYJ3T>
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Project 2025: What Does It Mean for Education?

By Katy Abrams

Project 2025: Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise, is a 900 plus page outline written by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank that influences U.S. public policy. It is technically a nonpartisan document, though it is led by two former Trump administration officials and is widely accepted as a conservative platform of initiatives the group deems are necessary for the next conservative administration to enact. The document provides its position on nearly every aspect of our government, including the judicial system, the Department of Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, the Department of Education, and more.

We spoke with Paulette Granberry Russell, JD, president of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, to get her thoughts on how Project 2025 suggests the federal government approach the role of the Department of Education and the impacts those positions would have on higher education.

On page 322, as part of the list of core principles by which Project 2025 feels the next presidential administration should operate, the document reads: “Enforcement of civil rights should be based on a proper understanding of those laws, rejecting gender ideology and critical race theory.” And on page 331, it suggests that the Office for Civil Rights rescind the Biden administration’s proposal that alongside “male” and “female” categories, a “nonbinary” category be added to required student data collection. How do you anticipate these positions on gender identity would affect education and/or student wellbeing?

The Biden administration has issued guidance that clarifies the expectation that protection from discrimination and harassment extends beyond the “male”

and “female” binary. The inclusion of a “nonbinary” category for data collections allows the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to monitor complaints where certain behaviors target nonbinary students, or individuals perceived to be nonbinary.

It is essential for colleges and universities to understand nonbinary student experiences, and it is just as important for state and federal regulatory entities to be aware of the complexities associated with the experiences of nonbinary students in secondary and postsecondary education. While research is limited on the experiences of nonbinary students, to the extent that data exists, we know that such students are “more likely to be verbally threatened, stalked, and sexually assaulted than their peers” (Marx, R.A., Maffini, C.S., Peña, F.J. (2024), *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 17 (3), 330-345). Discriminatory behavior that targets individuals based on gender is currently prohibited by law.

Including a “nonbinary” category for required data collection not only allows OCR to monitor such behavior and report on it as they do for such protected categories like race, ethnicity, national origin, and gender, it also informs institutions on the importance of disaggregating data and tracking internally the experiences of nonbinary students so that they can cultivate more supportive learning environments for these students.

Another reference to civil rights falls on page 330: “[The Office for Civil Rights] should move to the Department of Justice. The federal government has an essential responsibility to enforce civil rights protections, but Washington should do so through the Department of Justice and federal courts. The OCR at DOJ should be able to enforce only through litigation.” What do you see as the

potential impact(s) of this mandate for post-secondary institutions?

The impacts vary. Federal agencies, in this case the OCR, have specialized knowledge and resources that are currently dedicated to understanding the nuances of discrimination in education. The OCR is also more readily accessible to those who may not have the resources to pursue litigation, or who may find the legal system intimidating and inaccessible. The agency not only provides regulatory guidance that is often a preventive resource to institutions, it also can often resolve complaints through investigation and mediation more quickly, and relief to individuals facing discrimination or harassment may also occur more quickly.

The OCR also works proactively through issued guidance, including Dear Colleague Letters to educate institutions about compliance with civil rights and to help prevent discrimination and harassment in higher education. The agency addresses systemic issues with colleges and universities, influencing policies and practices that affect not just individuals who bring complaints, but a larger number of students. Court cases typically center on individuals’ complaints, which may not lead to widespread changes.

Having both systems in place allows for a more comprehensive approach to addressing discrimination and harassment and can also foster system change in institutions.

Project 2025 makes several references to aspects of Title IX, one of which is on page 333: “Commence a new agency rulemaking process to rescind the current Administration’s Title IX regulations; restore the Title IX regulations promulgated by then-Secretary Betsy DeVos on May 19, 2020; and define ‘sex’ under Title IX to mean only biological sex recognized

at birth.” And on page 334: “The next Administration should abandon [the Biden administration’s] change redefining ‘sex’ to mean ‘sexual orientation and gender identity’ in Title IX immediately across all departments.” If implemented, how might institutions of higher education be impacted?

The impact will be significant. Currently the expanded definition provides protection for students who identify as LGBTQIA+, and the removal of those protections could lead to increased discrimination and harassment and affect current efforts in higher education to protect such students from a hostile learning environment. As noted in the research study cited earlier, absent

Of particular interest in the section titled Higher Education Act is the mandate that would “prohibit accreditation agencies from leveraging their Title IV gatekeeper role to mandate that educational institutions adopt diversity, equity, and inclusion policies,” on page 352. What are the potential ramifications of this if it were enforced?

As noted by the U.S. Department of Education, “the goal of accreditation is to ensure that institutions of higher education meet acceptable levels of quality.” The elimination of accreditation agencies’ role to ensure equal access and inclusive excellence would lead to reduced accountability in addressing systemic barriers to opportunity, inequitable

If we want to foster an inclusive campus culture, if we want to recruit and retain a diverse faculty, if we want to strengthen institutional trust and support the success of all students, we must continue to empower accreditation agencies to ensure institutions of higher education meet acceptable levels of quality with respect to advancing and supporting diversity and equity.

On page 356, “Mandate” authors state that that “Congress should wind down so-called ‘area studies’ programs at universities (Title VI of the Higher Education Act), which, although intended to serve American interests, sometimes fund programs that run counter to those interests.” How would this alter the student experience and/or availability of interdisciplinary degree programs?

Eliminating area studies will reduce access to in-depth knowledge of cultures and languages both within this country and beyond its borders. This seems to be an intended goal of Project 2025, and we have seen this playbook in Florida, where students in the state university system can no longer take sociology to fulfill core course requirements.

Project 2025 further advocates that “the next Administration” Secretary of Education allocate “at least 40 percent of funding to international business programs that teach about free markets and economics and require institutions, faculty, and fellowship recipients to certify that they intend to further the stated statutory goals of serving American interests.” How is this not a form of a forced ideology litmus test or loyalty test?

The elimination of area studies will limit students’ understanding of complex global issues and cultural competencies, all of which are important in a globalized world and workforce. That may be the goal of Project 2025, but such a goal is inconsistent with what should be the 21st-century mission and values of higher education. ●



“Legislation passed in certain states dismantling diversity, equity, and inclusion offices and programs... has led to the elimination of gender and sexuality centers and resources. Students will have fewer legal avenues to challenge discrimination.”

Paulette Granberry Russell, J.D.

such protections, feelings of isolation, concerns about campus safety, poor mental health outcomes, and low involvement in extracurricular activities will be exacerbated.

Legislation passed in certain states dismantling diversity, equity, and inclusion offices and programs — legislation in line with the goals of Project 2025 — has led to the elimination of gender and sexuality centers and resources. Students will have fewer legal avenues to challenge discrimination and less protection in cases of harassment and bias.

Institutions may alter their policies, roll back protections, and eliminate programs and education resources, which could lead to varying levels of safety and support across higher education and secondary education as well.

outcomes, reduced participation of historically marginalized groups in higher education, impact on research opportunities, reduced access to and participation in STEM fields, and less inclusive educational environments. Does that sound like a quality educational experience?

Title IV currently provides federal funding for student financial aid. Institutions have an incentive to implement programs and initiatives that support all students; if they don’t, they risk losing eligibility for federal student aid, which impacts access to education, particularly for those from marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds. Absent these incentives, colleges and universities may struggle to enroll, retain, and graduate students from these backgrounds.

Are Anti-Abortion Laws Scaring Off Future Physicians?

By Misty Evans



Following the U.S. Supreme

Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, those states that subsequently passed stringent abortion bans have seen a notable decline in medical students seeking residencies.

Recent analysis from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) highlights the concerning trend: a 6.7% drop in OB-GYN residency applications in abortion-banning states compared to a 0.4% increase in those where abortion remains legal. This trend is not limited to OB-GYNs; internal medicine programs in these states have also experienced a substantial decrease in applicants.

Atul Grover, executive director of the AAMC's Research and Action Institute, wrote, "It should be concerning for states with severe restrictions on reproductive rights that so many new physicians — across specialties — are choosing to apply to other states for training instead."

This decline likely reflects medical students' concerns about restrictive abortion laws impacting their training, resulting in inadequate education in reproductive health.

Additionally, the legal and ethical challenges of practicing medicine in states with new abortion laws can significantly impede a doctor's ability to treat patients effectively. Without comprehensive training, physicians may not be prepared to treat complications like ectopic pregnancies and

hemorrhaging, potentially posing a risk to themselves and their patients.

"We're physicians," said Kousalya Siva, an obstetrics and gynecology resident at MedStar Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C., in an interview with NPR. "We're supposed to be giving the best evidence-based care to our patients, and we can't do that if we haven't been given abortion training."

shortage of physicians in rural and underserved areas will be exacerbated.

In the meantime, medical schools and residency programs in states with restrictive abortion laws must navigate these challenges.

In response, some institutions are exploring alternative ways to support and train students and residents, including providing out-of-state training opportunities. Organizations like the



"It should be concerning for states with severe restrictions on reproductive rights that so many new physicians — across specialties — are choosing to apply to other states for training instead."

Atul Grover, executive director for AAMC's Research and Action Institute

In its analysis, the AAMC said an ongoing decline in new doctors could eventually result in limited access to overall health care in those states with abortion bans.

Debra Stulberg, chair of the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Chicago, voiced in an interview with NPR that she is worried that as medical students increasingly factor in state laws on abortion when choosing where to apply for residency programs, the

Kenneth J. Ryan Residency Training Program in Abortion and Family Planning train OB-GYN residents in more than 100 programs at hospitals throughout the U.S. and Canada.

As the landscape for reproductive rights continues to change, the medical community is facing a heightened need to adapt to ensure that future generations of health care providers are well equipped to meet the needs of all patients, regardless of where they practice. ●

HEALTH CARE PROGRAM PIPELINES

BY COURTNEY MULLINS

The Association of American Medical Colleges reports that just 5.7% of medical doctors in the U.S. identify as Black or African American.

Health care schools and programs, already struggling to recruit more underserved students, are fine-tuning their post-affirmative action efforts to increase diversity and provide more accessible avenues for those interested in pursuing degrees in health care fields.

SIDNEY KIMMEL MEDICAL COLLEGE AT
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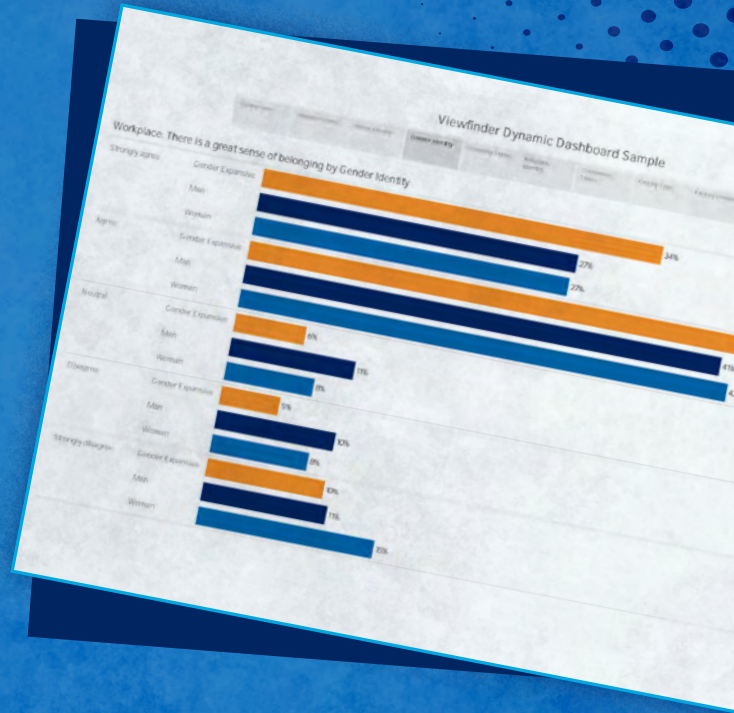
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New Law Institute Elevates Tribal Sovereignty Education

By Erik Cliburn

Situated in the heart of a state with the largest Native American population in the U.S., Oklahoma City University's newly launched Tribal Sovereignty Institute stands at the forefront of a vital movement.

Housed within the Oklahoma City University (OCU) School of Law, this trailblazing institute is dedicated to reshaping the landscape of legal education and advocacy for Indigenous communities in Oklahoma. Its mission is to deepen the understanding and development of laws and policies that profoundly affect Native American rights and lives.



(From left to right) Osage Nation Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear, Chickasaw Nation Gov. Bill Anoatubby, and Oklahoma City University (OCU) School of Law Dean David Holt are pictured at the 36th annual Sovereignty Symposium at OCU in June. (Photo courtesy of OCU)

Native Americans make up more than 14% of Oklahoma's population — the highest rate among all states — according to U.S. Census data.

“We are going to be the only kind of institute in the state and region that is really focusing on tribal sovereignty issues, as well as a place for research and support for sovereignty,” Jennifer Stevenson, JD, assistant dean at OCU School of Law, said in a statement announcing the institute.

The formation of the institute was announced by OCU President Kenneth

Evans, PhD, and OCU Law Dean and Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt, JD, in June at the 36th annual Sovereignty Symposium, hosted at the law school. The event drew nearly 600 attendees, including tribal and state leaders, and provided a platform to discuss legal and policy issues relevant to Oklahoma's 39 Indigenous tribes and those in the broader region.

At the symposium, Evans expressed excitement about the expansion of OCU's partnership with Native American communities, emphasizing the institute's role in spotlighting the critical issue of tribal sovereignty, with the support and cooperation of the state's tribes. Tribal leaders in attendance — including those from the Chickasaw Nation, Choctaw Nation,

and Osage Nation — lauded the institute for its potential as a valuable tool in the furtherance of Native American legal rights.

“Anytime people can be more knowledgeable about tribal sovereignty and as well as state law and how those come together and how we can unify and build better relationships and better law, that's going to be the key to success,” Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton said at the symposium.

OCU's institute joins the work of several other similar sovereignty-focused centers at universities in Arizona, Arkansas, California, and Minnesota.

The new institute will further education related to Native American legal issues for both current students and practicing

attorneys. Aligned with other Oklahoma City University initiatives, the Tribal Sovereignty Institute will also extend its efforts beyond legal advocacy to include supporting cultural preservation, revitalizing Native languages, and promoting economic development within tribal communities.

OCU's institute will be able to distinguish itself from other tribal law programs in the state, Holt said at the symposium, by leveraging the law school's status as a private institution, allowing it to independently underwrite and promote sovereignty initiatives.

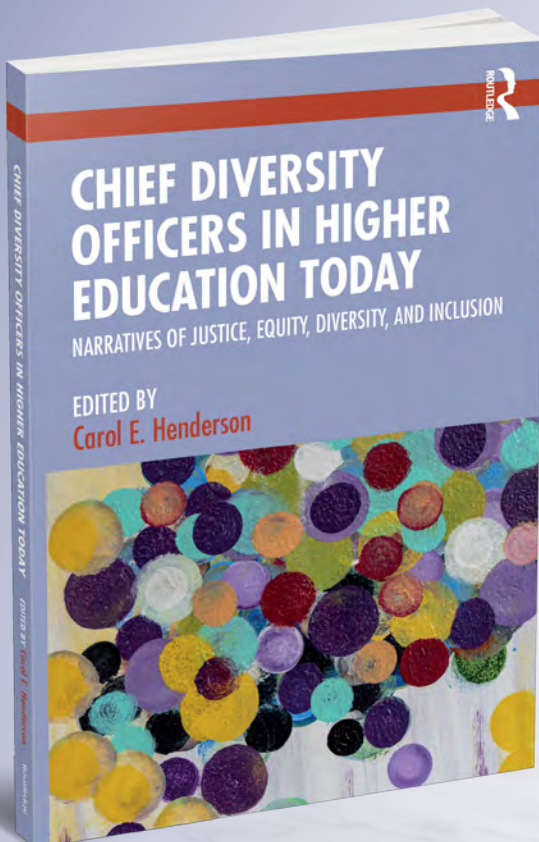
"Policymakers need more independent, credible information on this topic. All government entities, law firms, and tribes need attorneys who are knowledgeable in these areas," Holt said. "We have an advantage that public schools don't have. We can stand strongly for sovereignty, choosing where to invest our funding, because we are not owned by the state or any of the tribes."

This unique position enables the institute to play a critical role in advancing the understanding and practice of tribal sovereignty, benefiting not only legal professionals but also lawmakers, tribal leaders, and the broader community. ●

Native Sovereignty-Focused Centers in Higher Education

The American Indian College Fund notes the following centers and institutes at colleges and universities — outside of Oklahoma City — as others that focus on the advancement of tribal sovereignty:

- California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center at California State University San Marcos
- Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative at the University of Arkansas
- Indigenous Research Center of the Americas at the University of California, Davis
- Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals at Northern Arizona University
- Tribal Sovereignty Institute at the University of Minnesota, Duluth



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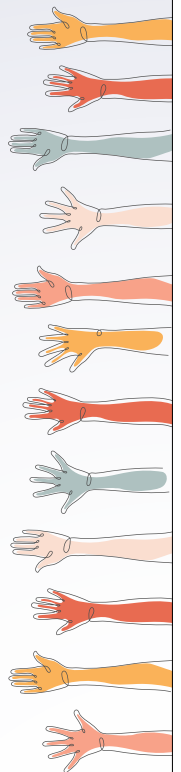
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Presidential Possibilities

How the 2024 Election Could Shape the Future of DEI in Higher Education



By
Misty
Evans



As the 2024 presidential election draws near, former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris have released contrasting platforms, particularly concerning the future of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) programs in higher education.

The Trump Platform: Rolling Back DEI

Donald Trump openly opposes DEI initiatives, viewing them as an exercise in governmental overreach. During his presidency, Trump made moves to curtail related efforts, most notably through his administration's Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping executive order.

This order, signed in September 2020, sought to limit diversity training in federal agencies and for contractors, labeling them "divisive" and "against American values." If elected, Trump aims to revive and expand this approach. His platform suggests a significant rollback of federal support for DEI programs, which could have a ripple effect on higher education.

"Every institution in America is under attack from this Marxist concept of 'equity,'" he said during a speech last year.

Colleges and universities, particularly public institutions, might experience federal government scrutiny and retribution for continuing their DEI initiatives. This could lead to

withheld government funding, stricter regulations, and a reduction in efforts to foster inclusive environments.

According to his re-election website, Trump has vowed to reverse the Biden administration's "woke equity" programs and wants Congress to compensate those "unjustly discriminated against by these destructive policies." In May of this year, Trump said he would "end" the Biden administration's Title IX protections for transgender students, during an appearance on *Kayal and Company*, a conservative talk radio show in Philadelphia.

Additionally, Trump's stance on immigration led to stricter policies during his first term. If he is re-elected, universities could face challenges related to federal funding, international student enrollment, visa regulations, and potential impacts on first-generation students and other campus groups.

The Harris Platform: Expanding DEI Efforts

Vice President Kamala Harris has been a staunch advocate for DEI initiatives throughout her career. During her term as vice president, she has supported policies that promote diversity in education, and her campaign for the presidency emphasizes the importance of expanding these efforts.

"In spite of those who in certain parts of our country want to attack DEI, we understand that you can't truly invest in the strength of our nation if you don't pay attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion," she said during a visit to Atlanta in April.

Harris' platform includes proposals to increase federal funding for DEI programs, particularly in higher education. She has called for a significant investment in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and Minority-Serving Institutions, recognizing their critical role in providing access to education for underrepresented communities.

Harris also supports strengthening Title IX protections and ensuring that universities uphold policies addressing discrimination and promoting equity.

Under a Harris administration, DEI programs could see a significant boost in both resources and visibility, potentially translating into more comprehensive support systems for students from diverse backgrounds, expanded curriculum offerings that reflect a broader range of perspectives, and increased accountability for institutions that fail to meet DEI standards.

A Harris presidency would likely foster an environment where DEI initiatives are supported and seen by many as essential.

Potential Impacts on Higher Education

The debate over DEI is not just about funding and policy; it's also about the values that colleges and universities espouse.

DEI initiatives help recruit and retain students and faculty from underrepresented groups, not just based on race and ethnicity but also including military veterans, students with disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, and others. A 2018 study showed a strong relationship between faculty diversity and the graduation rates of minority students.

For many students, faculty, and staff, DEI is central to the overall

objectives of higher education, which include developing students as individuals and global citizens as much as preparing them for their future careers.

The candidates' contrasting approaches could lead to vastly different futures in higher education, resulting in completely opposing cultures and climates on campuses.

The Department of Education

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has a host of responsibilities: managing student loans, investigating complaints against schools, and tracking education progress across the country.

In August, Trump spoke of closing the ED to allow state governments to "run the education of our children."

Republicans, including Trump during his previous term in the White House, have advocated for closing the ED

since its inception in 1979. In the event of a shutdown, the ED's responsibilities would fall on other departments, be eliminated entirely, or be managed at the state level.

Although Harris has not yet released a plan for the ED, she supports free two-year college tuition for most students and free four-year college or trade school tuition for lower- and middle-income families. Under the Biden administration, student loan forgiveness has been prioritized, with the ED outlining options in July for roughly 25 million borrowers to have some or all of their debt canceled.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Both Trump and Harris have supported funding for HBCUs.

In 2019, Trump signed the bipartisan FUTURE Act, securing

\$255 million annually for HBCUs and directing over \$100 million to scholarships and research at HBCU land-grant institutions.

Harris, during her first presidential run, proposed increased HBCU funding, particularly for Black educator training.

The Road Ahead

As voters consider their options in the 2024 election, the future of DEI in higher education and the outlook for higher education itself hang in the balance.

Trump's plan promises a return to a pared-down, noninclusive approach to education, while Harris envisions a more inclusive and equitable future. Whoever wins, there is no doubt that the outcome will have far-reaching implications for colleges and universities across the country. ●



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23-1164

Stark Transitions From High School to College for Students With Learning Differences

By Courtney Mullins

For students with learning differences and disabilities there is an added layer of complexity to the excitement and anticipation of preparing for college, as the academic supports that were available to them throughout primary and secondary school will alter significantly when they arrive on campus.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, established in 1990, provides K-12 students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that outlines specific provisions tailored to their precise needs. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ensures civil rights protections for all individuals with disabilities in federally funded programs, providing a 504 plan that guarantees disabled students an equal opportunity to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities.

Both pieces of legislation exist to address the physical, medical, and cognitive needs that impact a child's educational experience, and place the responsibility on school personnel to identify those with needs and then determine and provide the necessary accommodations. Although Section 504 continues to protect students from discrimination in college, they will not receive a 504 plan or IEP as they did in high school.

Obligations under Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to all campus programs, services, activities, and facilities. But the process for accessing these services and the extent of available accommodations vary among institutions, and students are expected to actively seek them out and advocate for themselves.

As adults, their responsibility for managing accommodation requests is



protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Finding resources requires that students reflect on their specific learning challenges, identify areas where they may need extra support, and directly contact the campus accessibility office at their institution. Some offices may require documentation, such as a previous IEP/504 plan or a letter of diagnosis from a licensed clinician.

Even without a formal diagnosis, some campuses like East Los Angeles College and Santa Monica College, offer free on-campus assessments for learning disabilities. Individuals might qualify for extended exam time, assistive technology, priority registration, accessible formats of textbooks, or tutoring services; in certain instances, they may be eligible to receive interim or short-term support through the appropriate on-campus office.

Offerings vary widely and are dependent on several factors that can change from institution to institution. Consistent across campuses, though, is an ongoing interactive process required by law to establish

accommodations, starting with a formal meeting after enrollment.

Students must initiate the meeting by reaching out to their campus accessibility office. Open discussion about their needs, concerns, and expectations are necessary to effectively determine appropriate supports, and this dialogue should continue to adapt throughout a student's academic journey depending on specific needs for various classes or roles.

While the formal accommodations process usually happens after the student has been admitted and enrolled in classes, some universities may offer informational sessions prior to enrollment that provide details about the accommodation process, what to expect, and how to prepare.

For example, the Office of Access and Equity at Appalachian State University created an informational webinar for admitted students focused on successful transition and connection to the office. And the Office of Accessibility at Fairfield University is partnered with the Office of Undergraduate Admission to offer information sessions for those admitted

According to a 2022 National Center for Education Statistics report, only approximately 30% of college students who have a disability took steps to inform their college about it. Two-thirds of those who did report their disability received assistance from a school office or department.



who want to learn more about the accommodations process.

The assistance a disability office provides can extend beyond academic reinforcement; they may offer guidance on campus accessibility, connect students with peer support networks, or recommend workshops on study skills and time management.

Disability support centers and staff play a crucial role in the experiences of students with disabilities. They bring attention to discrimination and ableism and promote campuswide initiatives to amplify the voices and prioritize the experiences of these students.

In 2022, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that approximately two-thirds of students who had a disability while attending college did not inform their institution.

Students who work with an accessibility office typically receive accommodations or academic support; however, many may not be aware of what is available or may feel uncomfortable divulging their needs due to concerns about being stigmatized. Building a relationship with accessibility staff can help students seamlessly transition and get the services they need to thrive throughout their academic career.

Navigating the college process with learning differences or disabilities demands careful preparation and understanding. George Marcopulos, lead learning disabilities specialist at Santa Monica College, told LAist that he encourages students to “become the expert in [their] own learning difference.” As colleges continue to acknowledge the unique needs of all students, including those with disabilities, they create increasingly inclusive environments where every person can achieve their full potential. ●



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Q&A With Puget Sound

By Katy Abrams



The University of Puget Sound, a private liberal arts school in Tacoma, Washington, has been nationally recognized as a campus with among the highest rate of voter turnout in the nation. For President Isiaah Crawford, PhD, who became the first African American president of Puget Sound in 2016 and also serves as a professor of psychology, this important distinction is the result of passionate engagement and intentional planning. Insight connected with Dr. Crawford, who shared his thoughts on their success and motivation.

College students have traditionally low turnout at the polls, even in presidential election years. What has made Puget Sound students such a civic-minded group?

Institutionally, we prioritize the work of preparing our students to meet the highest tests of democratic citizenship, and believe it is a core part of providing a holistic liberal arts education. Our dedication to this endeavor was the driving force behind our decision to join the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge in 2016, where I currently serve on the Presidents' Council. We have been intentional about cultivating a culture of non-partisan student democratic engagement and this philosophy guides the work of our Student Affairs team in their efforts to drive voter registration, which has been key in motivating students to participate in the electoral process, leading to impressive voter turnout rates.

Puget Sound's commitment to civic engagement is deeply rooted in our mission ["to develop ... capacities for critical analysis, aesthetic appreciation, sound judgment, and apt expression that will sustain a lifetime of intellectual curiosity, active inquiry, and reasoned independence"]. We believe that preparing our graduates to be active and informed citizens is essential for a healthy democracy. By encouraging civic engagement, we are not only empowering our students but also contributing to the betterment of our society.

Casting my vote in a presidential election for the first time in the late 1970s was an incredibly powerful and emotional experience. Growing up in a family and community deeply rooted in the civil rights movement, I felt the weight and significance of the moment, knowing that my right to vote was secured through the immense sacrifice and relentless efforts of those who came before me. Even today, I never take this right for granted, always remembering the journey and struggles that made it possible.

“Puget Sound’s commitment to civic engagement is deeply rooted in our mission. We believe that preparing our graduates to be active and informed citizens is essential for a healthy democracy.”

We know that out-of-state students can have a more difficult time with the process of accessing and returning ballots. How are you helping solve that problem?

One of the primary obstacles for out-of-state students is the sometimes complex process of registering to vote in their home state. To address this, we created a dedicated voter engagement specialist position to assist them with the voter registration process, and this year we will implement a series of initiatives. One such effort is to include voter education and registration information in our residential curriculum. We will also conduct personalized email outreach to students, providing them with instructions on how to register in their home state.

Why is it important to you, and to the institution, that students participate in the voting process?

What steps can other college leaders take to make their campus a voter-friendly space? What challenges do they face in doing so?

Creating a voter-friendly campus requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders. College leaders can start by establishing a dedicated office or team to oversee voter engagement initiatives. Collaborating with local election officials is also crucial to ensure that students have access to the necessary resources. Additionally, providing students with voter education opportunities and making the registration process as easy as possible are essential. However, challenges such as limited resources, varying state laws, and student apathy can hinder these efforts. Overcoming these challenges requires a sustained commitment to civic engagement and a willingness to adapt to changing circumstances. ●

Preserving HBCU History and Heritage

By Erik Cliburn

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but those words can only be conveyed if the image withstands the test of time.

This sort of preservation is the primary goal of a new collaboration between the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) and the HBCU Library Alliance. They will work together to digitize and archive historical records and materials at five historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Supported by \$85,000 in donations from 78 sponsors, this collaboration will help preserve the rich cultural heritage of these institutions.

"This collaboration touches deeply both heart and mind," CLIR President Charles Henry wrote in a statement announcing the collaboration. "Making accessible the compelling stories previously hidden in these libraries and archives brings grace and vitality to our cultural heritage as they inspire a more

just and accurate telling of our history."

The initiative recognizes the deep historical and educational significance of HBCUs, which have been pivotal in educating students of color since the mid-1800s. Despite their profound contributions, many HBCUs face financial constraints that can make it difficult to maintain their archival collections.

This effort was established following a 2022 CLIR study, "Creating Access to HBCU Library Alliance Archives: Needs, Capacity, and Technical Planning," focused on the challenges that HBCU archives face, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The obstacles created by that historical event shined a spotlight on the importance of digital access to records for research and online learning, as well as general accessibility, CLIR and Alliance researcher Sharon Ferguson Freeman, DPS, wrote in the study.

"Significant talent and funds will be required to assess, house, describe, and digitize 'hidden' materials so that they are widely discoverable and useful," Freeman wrote. "Furthermore, increased national recognition of the importance of HBCUs in American life and culture has underscored the need for digitized special collections and archives that are broadly representative and accurately and authentically contextualized."

Among the beneficiaries of the project is Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, founded in 1837 as the nation's first HBCU, which will use its portion of the funds to buy database subscriptions to provide educational and research resources to the campus community. The university's Leslie Pinckney Hill Library — named for a 20th-century community leader, writer, and educator — will purchase access to databases that focus on careers, film, and African American history and studies.

Federal Grant Supports Afro-Latino Heritage Project

The University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) has secured a grant from the Library of Congress (LOC) to create an innovative digital story map highlighting Afro-Latino heritage. Titled "Discovering Afro-Latino Heritage: A Reflective Story Map Project to Enhance Student Belongingness and Learning," this initiative is a collaboration between UHD's Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE), faculty, and students. The grant comes from the LOC's Connecting Communities Digital Initiative (CCDI).

The CCDI, part of the LOC's Of the People: Widening the Path program, is supported by the Mellon Foundation. This four-year program funds projects that use the LOC's digital collections to highlight Black, Indigenous, Hispanic or Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and other communities of color across the United States and its territories. The Grant for Higher Education specifically supports Minority-Serving Institutions in developing projects centered on these communities.

UHD's digital story map will integrate original student content — including narrative text, videos, podcasts, and digital maps — alongside resources from the LOC's digital

collections. It will delve into the trans-Atlantic slave trade's impact on Latin America, the experiences of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean, and the migration of Afro-Latino communities to the United States, particularly Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and the Garifuna people.

"Our goal is to improve student success through innovative learning strategies," Gregory Dement, PhD, CTLE Director said in a press release. "By focusing on storytelling, we hope to build a stronger campus community and enhance students' sense of belonging. This project will also provide valuable research and communication skills to participating students."

The project also aims to connect with the broader Houston community by encouraging students to interview local Afro-Latino community members and incorporate their stories into the digital map.

"I'm excited to receive this grant. It will not only help our students participate in and learn about Afro-Latino communities but will also bolster their academic and intellectual confidence," Raquel Chiquillo, PhD, a professor of Spanish and a project leader, said in the release.

In Tennessee, Lane College is using the funds to create digital archives of a wide variety of materials related to the history of the community, including newspapers, photographs, family books, yearbooks, and college reports, among other documents, to help preserve local culture.

Through the CLIR partnership, the Langston Hughes Memorial Library — dedicated to the famed poet, social activist, and notable figure in the Harlem Renaissance — at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania will improve numerous aspects of its existing archives and special collections. As part of the Securing the Block project, the library will bolster its infrastructure and security measures and develop systems that make finding information easier and more accessible.

At Oakwood University, the Eva B. Dykes Library — named in honor of the renowned educator and one of the first Black women in the U.S. to be awarded a PhD — is launching the Preservation and Digitization of Oakwood's Sounds & Visuals: Beginning with Our Music project. The Huntsville, Alabama, university will use the alliance funds to preserve and digitize its audiovisual assets — with an initial emphasis on music recordings and performances — by utilizing conversion equipment and creating metadata for archival purposes. Once the process is complete, the library will unveil a new digital repository that celebrates the recordings and the history tied to them.

The Keepers of the Flame project at the Texas College D.R. Glass Library, named after Dominion Robert Glass, the college's eighth president, focuses on protecting and rebuilding the library's archives. This will involve restoring portraits of college leaders, hosting alumni events, and digitizing and enhancing accessibility of historical records. Selections will include yearbooks, photographs, letters, newspaper clippings, and other historical documents related to the college and its initial founding by members of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

Looking ahead, CLIR is already gearing up for the next round of fundraising to support projects in 2025. Additionally, the organization plans to allocate funds to subsidize sponsorship benefits for 102 HBCUs, ensuring wide participation in their programs and amplifying support for other HBCU-related initiatives.

This collaboration not only addresses immediate financial challenges but also ensures the preservation and accessibility of the rich historical legacies of these colleges. Experts agree that by providing the necessary resources, this initiative will contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of these institutions' impacts on society, ensuring their stories are told and celebrated for generations to come. ●



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Expanding the Demographics of Future Tech Professionals

By Katy Abrams

Open any newspaper's business

section and you'll read about how rapidly the tech sector is growing — reporting faster than average growth in 2024 — but the demographics of tech professionals have remained largely unchanged. Some colleges, like the University of Maryland (UMD), are dedicated to changing that.

The Iribe Initiative for Inclusion and Diversity in Computing (I4C) at UMD is actively creating a more diverse and inclusive tech sector. Launched with a \$1 million gift from UMD alumnus Brendan Iribe,

students from underrepresented groups, collaborating with primary school communities, and offering a safe space for faculty, staff, and students to connect.

I4C supports a variety of programs that engage K-12 and university students alike, including the Creative Computing Program, which introduces computing concepts to elementary and middle school students, and the AI Summer Program, where high school students explore artificial intelligence. I4C also offers workshops for Girl Scouts to earn their Coding for Good, Cybersecurity, and Robotics badges.

programs, including hackathons like Technica, the world's largest all-women and non-binary hackathon, and STEM/Robotics workshops.

Other significant initiatives include the NCWIT Aspirations in Computing



In 1965, only 87 college graduates earned a bachelor's degree in computer and information science. In 2022, that number had increased to more than 108,000.

Men continue to make up a disproportionate share of computer and information science majors. In 2022, women represented just 22.6% of these majors.

Nearly every tech occupation reports positive job growth projections. Web and software developers both predict strong expansion, as do information security analysts and computer systems analysts.

co-founder of Oculus, I4C seeks to break down barriers in computing by increasing the involvement and success of individuals from historically marginalized populations.

I4C's vision is to build a vibrant community of students, educators, and researchers who work together to foster inclusion across intersections of gender identity, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and disability status. Their efforts include mentoring

Through partnerships with organizations such as Break Through Tech, I4C is working to increase the number of women graduating with tech degrees by at least 12% by 2026. Their impact extends beyond the university with additional outreach

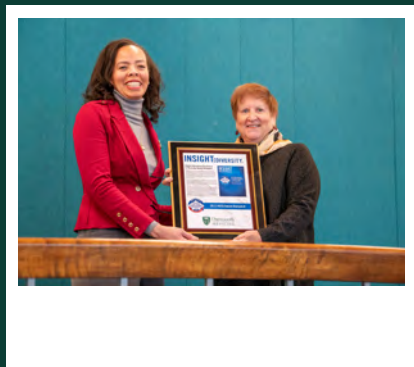
Award, which recognizes high school students who identify as women, genderqueer, or non-binary for their achievements in technology.

I4C's efforts are crucial in addressing the underrepresentation of various populations in the computing workforce. By providing educational opportunities, tutoring, mentorship, and community-building programs, it is equipping the next generation of tech leaders with the skills and resources needed to make the computing field more inclusive and equitable. ●



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CREATE-ing a More Accessible World Through Technology

By Misty Evans

The Center for Research and Education on Accessible Technology and Experiences (CREATE) at the University of Washington (UW) is leading a transformative movement in higher education and technology. With a mission to make technology more accessible and build an inclusive world, CREATE fosters interdisciplinary cooperation and research that prioritizes the needs of people with disabilities.

Founded in 2019 through gifts from Microsoft and private donors totaling \$5 million, the center's mission is to advance accessible technology and

together experts from computer science, rehabilitation medicine, and the information school, illustrating the center's interdisciplinary approach," she explains.

One standout initiative is Project Sidewalk, led by member Jon Froehlich. It provides critical information about sidewalk accessibility. Deployed in over ten cities, the project uses AI to scale its impact, exemplifying how technology can extend the reach of accessibility research.

The center also supports initiatives like Go Baby Go, which offers custom mobility devices to children with disabilities at no cost while challenging

such as slides used in a presentation.

The center's influence also extends to public policymaking; a CREATE article on mobile app accessibility was cited by the Department of Justice's proposed ADA rules on digital technology.

The center is committed to reshaping STEM education to be accessible to students with disabilities and equipping all graduates to create accessible technology. And Mankoff believes other universities can learn from CREATE's inclusive approach.

Despite rising anti-DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) legislation, CREATE remains steadfast in its mission.



Advocacy and representation at all levels are equally important to true inclusion.”

Jennifer Mankoff, Director, CREATE

ensure that people with disabilities are active participants in shaping the future by uniting faculty, students, and staff across disciplines.

Director Jennifer Mankoff highlights their commitment to inclusive teamwork. “All the projects we fund are structured on principles that emerge from multidisciplinary collaboration and are informed by disability studies and perspectives,” Mankoff says. A recent grant, for example, “brings

outdated perceptions of having a disability and empowering children, even toddlers, to engage fully in play, learning, and community life.

CREATE faculty are pioneering work in augmented reality to improve real-time captioning for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. By allowing users to manipulate captions in a 3D space, this innovative approach enhances visual contact with speakers and access to other visual information,

Mankoff emphasizes that accessibility-driven innovation is here to stay.

“Accessibility has a long history of leading to cutting-edge advances that benefit everyone,” she says. “Speech-to-text technology, for instance, was used by disabled people long before it became ubiquitous. These innovations, inspired by accessibility needs, and often designed and developed by disabled leaders, are essential to our future.” ●

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MSIs Forge Pathways In Tech Growth

By Erik Cliburn

As the U.S. ramps up efforts to bolster its tech workforce, there's a rising focus on the talent pool of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) to build more inclusive and diverse career pathways. This strategy is especially crucial in booming industries like semiconductor production, where the demand for skilled professionals is soaring.

A key development in this effort is the establishment of the HBCU CHIPS Network, launched by the U.S. Department of Commerce in conjunction with Georgia Institute of Technology. The network aims to coordinate the efforts of several HBCUs to develop a robust talent pipeline in semiconductor production. Semiconductors, or chips, are essential components in a wide array of modern technologies, from consumer electronics and automobiles to data centers and military systems.

This initiative follows the passage of the CHIPS and Science Act, a bipartisan bill signed into law by President Biden two years ago, which allocates \$50 billion to revitalize America's domestic semiconductor industry. The act was designed to create hundreds of thousands of jobs and secure the nation's technological future.

One of the stipulations for receiving funding under this act is that projects must contribute to economic security while also investing in workers and communities, with particular attention to small businesses and historically disadvantaged communities.

"The network is going to help ensure we have the talent and



Principal investigators of NASA's Minority University Research and Education Project Partnership Annual Notification gathered at the 2023 NASA Better Together conference in San Jose, California, where NASA announced \$1.2 million in awards to enhance research and technology capabilities at Minority-Serving Institutions. (Photo courtesy of NASA)

innovation we need while also bridging gaps in access and opportunity for Black Americans," Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo told a group of business and university leaders when announcing the HBCU CHIPS Network earlier this year. "I want you to keep thinking about how your HBCUs can work together with private companies to ensure graduates are ready to start working on day one."

Despite these investments, the semiconductor industry faces a significant labor shortage. By 2030, it is projected that the U.S. will be short

300,000 engineers and 90,000 technical workers. The HBCU CHIPS Network is poised to address this by providing students from historically underserved communities with opportunities to enter and succeed in these high-demand sectors. HBCUs, which currently award 24% of all bachelor's degrees in STEM fields among African Americans, are expected to play a crucial role.

In early July, NASA granted \$1.2 million to 23 MSIs to advance research and technological innovation through its Minority University Research

and Education Project Partnership Learning Annual Notification (MPLAN) award. Each institution will receive up to \$50,000 for a six-month period, enabling them to collaborate directly with NASA experts on cutting-edge STEM projects. These initiatives aim to enhance the research capabilities of MSIs, focusing on critical areas such as space exploration, robotics, bioengineering, and advanced materials.

By engaging with these institutions' diverse talent pools, NASA is ensuring that the next generation of scientists and engineers contributes to the

but NASA is known to make the impossible possible," Shahra Lambert, NASA's senior advisor for engagement and equity, said in a press release. "By funding partnerships such as MPLAN, and tapping into all pools of STEM resources, including MSIs, we are ensuring the future of our missions are in good hands."

In addition to the semiconductor and space industries, other programs are also targeting the broader technology landscape at HBCUs. The PROPEL Center, an innovation hub, recently launched the HBCU Faculty Fellows

collaboration aims to equip HBCU students with AI-driven educational tools and certifications, positioning them for success in the digital age. The initiative kicked off at Barber-Scotia College, which is also working toward regaining its accreditation. The college has integrated Skilldora's AI-instructed courses into its curriculum, offering students certification opportunities in various technological fields.

Overall, these programs highlight a concerted effort to integrate HBCUs and MSIs into the nation's technological advancement, ensuring that these



Left: U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo recently announced the launch of the HBCU CHIPS Network, a partnership between several HBCUs and the Georgia Institute of Technology, to diversify and expand the semiconductor manufacturing industry in the U.S. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of Commerce) Right: Assistant Secretary of Defense for Science and Technology Aprille Ericsson delivered the keynote address at the U.S. Department of Defense's Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority-Serving Institutions Opportunities Workshop and Intern Seminar in July. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense)

agency's ambitious goals, including lunar exploration and the eventual mission to Mars. The program not only equips students with practical experience and advanced skills but also positions MSIs as key players in the development of technologies that will drive future space missions and benefit society.

"It's a daring task to return to the Moon then venture to Mars,

Academy, which provides yearlong professional development for faculty members. This training focuses on enhancing teaching skills, integrating Apple technology, and expanding professional networks, all with the goal of improving student success.

Moreover, Skilldora, a Black-owned AI tech company, has partnered with the Roberts Innovation Group to launch a 2024 HBCU Initiative. The

institutions and their students are well positioned to contribute to and benefit from the growing technology sectors. By creating more inclusive pathways into these fields, the U.S. is not only addressing labor shortages but also promoting greater diversity and equity in the workforce. ●



Stanford Students Create AI Tool to Assist Veterans

By Erik Cliburn

Building on their institution's commitment to leveraging technology and legal expertise, a team of Stanford University students has developed an AI (artificial intelligence) tool to streamline the disability benefits application process for veterans, aiming to simplify complex systems and empower vulnerable populations.

Named Vet's Claim, the tool addresses a critical issue within the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs' (VA) disability benefits process, in which nearly 75% of initial applications are rejected due to unclear instructions or technical errors in the submission process. The tool — designed during a 48-hour CodeX Hackathon held at Stanford in early May — utilizes AI to create tailored claims that meet the VA's requirements more accurately.

The initiative was inspired by the personal experiences of team members, including Army veteran and graduate business student Matt Champion, who had faced numerous difficulties and delays when applying for VA benefits. It took 26 in-person meetings over the course of three years for Champion to finally obtain disability benefits related to a back injury sustained during a tour in Afghanistan. His brother faced similar challenges, spending nearly \$20,000 on professional help to file a first-time benefits claim.

"I have personally navigated the VA benefits program and I learned first-hand how challenging, emotionally demanding, and time consuming the process is," he says. "We wanted to help the 18 million veterans who are eligible for first-time benefits have an outcome and experience that is easier, faster, and better than mine."

Vet's Claim addresses these issues by guiding applicants through the process with the help of a chatbot, which uses

a conversational approach to collect the necessary information. For example, veterans can click on a part of a human body diagram to indicate where they are experiencing pain and describe their condition in their own words. The tool then translates this information into the specific language and format required by the VA, ensuring that their application is comprehensive and meets all regulatory standards.

"It was easier for me to get into Stanford than it was to receive VA benefits," Champion says. "Veterans know where they hurt. They don't know the words that the VA is looking for when they're looking to approve or process an application."

Camila Chabayta, a Stanford law student and hackathon participant, highlighted the potential of AI to bridge numerous gaps in legal access, especially related to instances of regulatory compliance needed to receive VA benefits.

"We used the latest regulations, 20 years of VA case findings — which are all publicly available online — and AI tools to design, write, and provide a tailored claim that helps veterans get their application for disability benefits

What is a hackathon?

A hackathon is an event where individuals from various disciplines, including programmers, designers, and subject matter experts, come together to collaboratively develop innovative solutions to specific problems within a set timeframe, often 24 to 48 hours. Participants work in teams to brainstorm, design, and prototype new applications or technologies, with the goal of creating functional and impactful projects. Hackathons foster creativity, rapid development, and cross-disciplinary collaboration, often resulting in practical solutions to real-world challenges.

right the first time," Chabayta says.

By incorporating these resources, the tool provides veterans with a significantly improved chance of having their claims accepted on the first submission. This not only saves time and reduces frustration for applicants but also helps to democratize access to legal resources, making the process more equitable.

The introduction of Vet's Claim represents a significant step toward ensuring that veterans can more easily and efficiently receive the benefits they have earned through their service, alleviating some of the bureaucratic burdens they face. Although the AI tool is not yet publicly available, the team received investment interest from venture capital firms attending the hackathon. If funded, the project could be scaled up for more widespread use. ●

As of 2022, approximately 30% of veterans had a service-related disability that qualified them for VA disability benefits. More than 2 million veterans also had service-connected disability ratings — a measure of their disability's severity — of 70% or higher.

Per U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs data

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Colleges Step Up for 2024 Election

By Erik Cliburn

As the 2024 general election approaches, some colleges and universities are ramping up their efforts to bolster student engagement and education in democracy. With an increasingly polarized political climate and a multitude of legislative challenges throughout the country, campuses are leveraging innovative strategies to encourage voter participation and civic involvement.

ACE Brief on Student Voting

A recent survey by the Campus Vote Project (CVP) reveals that while nearly three-quarters of college students are enthusiastic about voting, about one-third remain skeptical about the impact of their vote. Schools are working to dispel this notion by highlighting examples of significant youth influence, such as the 2020 election's impact on Congress.

Logistical hurdles also pose a barrier, with many students facing complex voting processes. To address this, campuses are enhancing accessibility by offering detailed voting plans, disseminating absentee voting information, and setting up ballot drop-off boxes.

Specific demographics, such as first-year and Black students, show heightened doubts about voting efficacy. To combat this, universities are incorporating targeted messaging into orientations and classes, focusing on issues like mental health and climate action for first-year students and collaborating with Black student groups and historically Black colleges and universities to address concerns such as college affordability and police brutality.

Efforts to connect students with candidates and provide nonpartisan information are also crucial. Colleges are hosting candidate visits, virtual town halls, and educational sessions

to bridge electoral process knowledge gaps, ensuring that students are well informed and motivated to participate. These initiatives are especially critical given certain state legislatures' attempts to restrict voting, says Mike Burns, the national director of CVP.

"While we are seeing an alarming number of state legislatures introduce and pass legislation aimed at making it harder to vote, it has been reassuring to see the effort higher education institutions are showing to help their students cast their ballots and get engaged in democracy," he said. "It is so important that students are able to make their voices heard and get civically involved early. Young voters make up the most diverse generation our country has ever seen and therefore making campuses voter friendly is how we make our elected leaders more representative of the population they serve."

Amid these efforts, the Voter Friendly Campus designation program, spearheaded by CVP and NASPA — formerly the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators — released its 2022 report highlighting how higher education institutions are combating state-level attempts to hinder student voting. The report showcases 262 campuses that have excelled in fostering voter engagement.

In June, the American Council on Education (ACE) released an updated issue brief addressing student voting and campus political campaign activities for 2024. As college students represent a significant portion of the electorate, with many voting for the first time, the brief emphasizes the importance of ensuring they can exercise their right to vote in the county where they reside during their studies.

Given the complexity and myriad of state-controlled voter registration requirements, the brief highlights steps that colleges and universities can take to support student voting, while stressing the need for these efforts to remain nonpartisan. It also provides guidance on permissible and impermissible political campaign-related activities on campus. The document, prepared by ACE's Vice President and General Counsel Peter McDonough and the law firm Hogan Lovells U.S. LLP, serves as a resource for institutions navigating the intricate legal landscape of political engagement on campus, encouraging them to tailor their approaches to their specific contexts.

To learn more, visit bit.ly/3yMFwVR.

For example, Montclair State University has addressed previous confusion caused by its campus spanning across two congressional districts by implementing personalized voting information systems — detailing students' polling locations, ballot information, and voting options based on their location.

University of North Carolina at Pembroke boasts an 89% voter registration rate by prioritizing registration at major campus events, while Florida A&M University integrates civic engagement into its campus culture through alumni involvement and voter education.



People Power for Florida, a civic engagement organization, recently partnered with student groups at Florida A&M University to register college students in the state to vote. (Photo courtesy of People Power for Florida)

Measuring Civic Engagement on Campuses

Research consistently shows that higher education significantly influences civic engagement and democratic attitudes. Individuals with college degrees are more likely to vote, engage in civic activities, and possess greater political knowledge, while being less inclined toward authoritarian views. Although the specific elements of higher education that drive these outcomes — such as critical thinking, service learning, or economic stability — are not fully understood, the overall impact on democracy is undeniable. However, recent concerns have emerged about the lack of civics-focused courses in college curricula.

Addressing this, Ithaka S+R, in partnership with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, conducted a study exploring how higher education shapes civic engagement and democratic behaviors. Their review examines the definitions and measures of civic engagement, its impact across different groups, and the effectiveness of related programming, offering insights and future research directions for educational institutions.

“Against the backdrop of growing polarization, the rise of anti-DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, and access) initiatives, and growing distrust in public institutions including higher education, the need for universities to recommit to civic investment emerges as more pressing than ever,” Ithaka S+R researchers Ioana G. Hulbert, PhD, and Deirdre Harkins wrote in the report. “Historically, particularly in the U.S., the university has been an institution dedicated to strengthening democratic principles by championing social mobility, producing knowledge, promoting pluralism, and fostering citizenship education.”

Key findings reveal a lack of uniform definition for civic education in research studies, with many only measuring the total number of civic engagement activities on campuses, rather than the actual content and concepts being discussed. Additionally, research often overlooks underserved groups, including students of color, rural students, and those attending regional public universities. Moreover, the residential status of institutions plays a critical role in fostering civic engagement, suggesting a need for targeted strategies for nonresidential and online learners.

To learn more, visit bit.ly/3TwyT12

In addition, several universities, including Brown University, Old Dominion University, West Virginia University, and The George Washington University (GW), have designated Election Day as a university holiday. This move, aimed at encouraging voting by closing offices and canceling classes, underscores their commitment to civic participation.

“Every four years, this process ignites the innate passion for democracy and civic engagement

Louis further illustrates a campus commitment to democracy. The series includes nonpartisan events including debate watch parties and speaker panels designed to enhance voter education and civic engagement.

Additionally, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ American Democracy Project is offering virtual workshops throughout 2024 to prepare campuses for elections and increase



As part of the ALL In Campus Democracy Challenge, the Gephardt Institute for Civic and Community Engagement at Washington University in St. Louis works to register voters on campus and educate them about the upcoming election. (Photo courtesy of Washington University)

that defines our university,” GW President Ellen M. Granberg wrote in a statement to the university in July. “From canvassing and campaigning to providing expert commentary, engaging in debate, and voting, our faculty, students, and staff are involved in every aspect of the democratic process. ... This is an important moment in our nation’s history, and the George Washington University stands at the epicenter of critical political discourse and action.”

The Engage Democracy 2024 series at Washington University in St.

voter engagement. They equip faculty, staff, and administrators with strategies to foster a culture of civic participation and open debate.

As campuses continue to adapt and innovate, they play a crucial role in shaping an engaged and informed electorate. By addressing barriers to voting and promoting civic education, colleges and universities are reinforcing their commitment to democracy and ensuring that students are prepared to make their voices heard in the upcoming election. ●



INCREASE VOTING ACCESS



Offer free, handicap accessible campus-based transportation to the polls during early voting and on Election Day.



Make it a Holiday

Adjust the academic calendar to cancel class on Election Day or plan it as an asynchronous learning day.

ABSENTEE BALLOTS



Give out-of-state students information about requesting absentee ballots, and provide licensed notary publics to certify their signatures when students are ready to vote.

11/05

Have Federal Work Study students set up voter registration events, complete with nonpartisan information about state voting laws, early voting, and completing ballots.



Voter Registration Drives



OFFER INCENTIVES

Create a raffle for registered voters, or offer free gifts to those who register on campus. Recognize groups that register the most students.



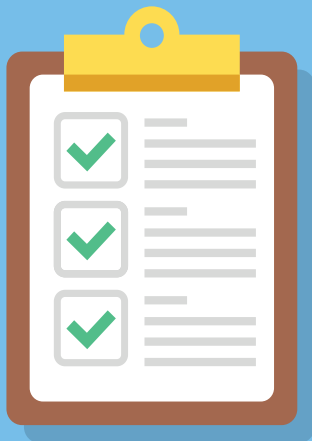
In states requiring voter identification, offer students a temporary voter compliant ID card that includes any state mandated information like expiration date.

Got ID?



HELP Your Campus VOTE

An Insight Into Diversity toolkit to help colleges and universities encourage campus civic involvement



Movement to Ban Legacy Admissions Gains Momentum

By Erik Cliburn

In the year since the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the consideration of race-conscious admissions, a growing number of lawmakers, advocates, and higher education leaders have called for banning legacy status as a potential factor in the admission process.

Opponents of legacy admissions — a preference given to students who have family ties to an institution — argue that it provides an unfair advantage for applicants who are already disproportionately wealthy. This policy is most prevalent among selective private nonprofit institutions, of which 42% incorporate legacy status into their admission decisions, according to a recent report from the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP).

For example, approximately one-third of Harvard University's class of 2027 had some family connection to the institution, according to data compiled by the Harvard Crimson, the school's newspaper.

Among these legacy students, nearly 65% had an annual family income greater than \$125,000 and 29% came from households earning \$500,000 per year or more — the highest income tier included in the data. In contrast, for the entire class, only 46.6% and 13.4% of students, respectively, had family incomes above \$125,000 and \$500,000.

Meanwhile, first-generation students comprised only about 16% of Harvard's 2027 class. Of these, 80% came from households making less than \$125,000 and 64% from under \$80,000.

Unlike the highly polarized debate over race in admissions, the growing movement against legacy admissions has received bipartisan support at both federal and state levels. For example, U.S. Senators Tim Kaine, a Democrat from Virginia, and Todd Young, a Republican from Indiana, co-authored the Merit-Based Educational Reforms and Institutional Transparency (MERIT) Act, which would end “preferential treatment” for prospective students who have personal relationships or ties to donors or alumni.

affiliations with donors and alumni.

“A student's acceptance into a college should not hinge on whether their parents attended that school or donated a large sum of money,” Kaine said in the release. “This legislation would help bring more fairness to the higher education admissions process, and ensure that first-generation and low-income students are not put at a disadvantage because of their parents' educational histories or incomes.”

So far, lawmakers in three states — Colorado, Virginia, and Maryland —

“To diversify student populations, enrich learning communities, and deliver educational excellence to all students, institutions should stop considering legacy status when making admissions decisions and instead consider whether students are the first in their family to go to college.”

Institute for Higher Education Policy

“America is a land of opportunity, not a land of aristocracy,” Young said in a press release announcing the bill. “Legacy admissions restrict opportunities for many bright and talented young Americans and provide unmerited advantage to the most connected individuals in our society.”

In addition to ending legacy admissions, the MERIT Act would require the U.S. Department of Education to enhance its data collection on the admissions process specifically regarding students'

have banned legacy preferences, with Colorado doing so in 2021 and Virginia and Maryland ending the practice this spring.

Legislators in California, Connecticut, Minnesota, and New York have introduced bills aimed at improving transparency within admissions and eliminating advantages related to family ties. Those proposed in northeastern states would be particularly impactful on the nation's most elite institutions, given the concentration of Ivy League schools in the region.

Legacy Admissions: Questioning Merit and Socioeconomic Fairness

A 2023 study — *Diversifying Society’s Leaders? The Determinants and Causal Effects of Admission to Highly Selective Private Colleges* — led by Harvard University economists Raj Chetty, PhD, and David Deming, PhD, examines legacy admissions as one of the factors that contributes to disparities in high-level leadership positions throughout society, such as CEOs, senators, and federal judges. It challenges the thinking that legacy applicants are inherently more qualified and questions whether their higher admission rates are justified by their upbringing and preparation.

In examining data from multiple institutions, the researchers found that the admissions advantage for legacy applicants is limited to the college their parents attended and does not extend to other prestigious schools. This finding suggests that legacy admission policies have little correlation with merit and, in fact, perpetuate socioeconomic disparities, Chetty said in an interview on PolicyCast — a podcast run by the Harvard Kennedy School.

Diversifying Society’s Leaders? The Determinants and Causal Effects of Admission to Highly Selective Private Colleges: bit.ly/4glArVI

In addition to perpetuating wealth disparities, legacy admissions also exacerbate racial and ethnic inequities, according to the IHEP report. Data show that schools that do not consider legacy status enroll more Hispanic, Black, and Indigenous students. IHEP researchers urge both lawmakers and institutions to eliminate the consideration of donor and alumni relations and instead bolster support for low-income and first-generation students.

“Students who are the first in their families to attend college are particularly disadvantaged by legacy admissions policies because their parents have not earned a degree,” Marián Vargas, a senior research analyst at IHEP, and Sean Tierney, IHEP’s director of research and policy, wrote in their summary of the report. “To diversify student populations, enrich learning communities, and deliver educational excellence to all students, institutions should stop considering legacy status when making admissions decisions and instead consider whether students are the first in their family to go to college.” ●

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Transforming Rural Access to Higher Education

By Erik Cliburn and Courtney Mullins



Rural students face unique challenges when pursuing higher education. Despite making up a significant portion of the country's K-12 population — one-third of schools are designated as rural — these students are far less likely to enroll in college compared to their urban and suburban peers.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, only 29% of rural residents aged 18 to 24 are enrolled in higher education, a stark contrast to the 48% and 42% of those from urban and suburban areas, respectively, in the same age group. This disparity has been attributed to several factors, including geographic isolation, limited access to college-preparatory resources, and financial constraints.

A key issue these students face is the lack of nearby postsecondary institutions. The American Council on Education (ACE) reports that 13 million Americans live in “education deserts,” areas where no colleges or universities are within a reasonable commuting distance. This geographic barrier can make attending college a less viable option, particularly when coupled with the high costs associated with relocation or long-distance travel to campus.

The recent closures of rural colleges threatens to exacerbate the issue further. Since 2020, more than a dozen private institutions serving rural areas have shut their doors.

Federal Support

In response to these challenges, various initiatives are being implemented to

support rural students in accessing higher education.

One of the most significant efforts is the Rural Postsecondary and Economic Development (RPED) grant program, a \$44.5 million investment from the Biden administration. This summer, the grant was awarded to 22 institutions throughout the country to create pathways for students in rural regions to pursue education in fields that lead to in-demand, well-paying careers.

“Rural communities face unique challenges in educating, training, and developing high-skill workers—yet they are also home to students with unique skills and potential,” Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said when the grant funding was announced in June. “These dedicated funds will ensure that students in rural areas have access to postsecondary credentials and other resources that lead to high-quality career pathways and economic success.”

To add further support, experts at EAB — an education research and consulting firm — recommend that colleges offer additional financial aid and resources, such as on-campus summer programs that can help students envision themselves in a college setting. Flexible funding that covers commuting and transportation

costs, mentoring programs, and dual enrollment opportunities can also make a significant difference.

“We have long been hubs in our communities, but now is really the time to start focusing on developing partnerships with community-based organizations to make sure that all of your students’ needs are being met,” Christina Hubbard, a senior director in research advisory services at EAB, said during a recent roundtable with several rural community colleges. “Whether your partners focus on basic needs, child care, or job preparation, these are services that are going to make it feasible for your students to stay enrolled until they reach their goals.”

Community Colleges Step Up

Northwest State Community College, Pueblo Community College, and Seminole State College are among the institutions making significant contributions to the educational landscape through their unique initiatives and programs, particularly for students from rural and small-town communities.

Northwest State Community College (NSCC) has been a pivotal player in providing accessible education to rural students in and around Archbold, Ohio.

In addition to offering a range of low-cost associate degree and certificate programs designed in partnership with local industries, the college facilitates numerous apprenticeship programs in conjunction with labor unions. These curricula provide both hands-on training with employers and college credits through NSCC. The college has also established a fund that covers the cost of books, course fees, and small student loans for those in need.

Pueblo Community College (PCC), based in Pueblo, Colorado, serves a diverse student body, including a large number of people from rural areas across southern Colorado. PCC is known for its strong emphasis on technical education and health care programs, which are critical to the region's workforce needs. The college's Rural College Consortium, a collaborative initiative, allows students from surrounding rural communities to access PCC's programs without the need to relocate. This approach not only makes education more accessible but also helps to retain talent in these areas, contributing to the health of local economies.

Seminole State College in Sanford, Florida, is recognized for its innovative approach to education in creating pathways for students to transition from community college to four-year institutions. The college's DirectConnect to UCF is a standout initiative, providing guaranteed admission to the University of Central Florida for Seminole State graduates.

The program is particularly beneficial for students from rural areas, offering a clear and affordable pathway to a bachelor's degree. Seminole State also emphasizes workforce development, offering a range of vocational and technical programs that cater to the needs of local industries, ensuring that graduates are well prepared for the job market.

Some institutions have found unique ways to continue supporting rural students despite severe challenges. For example, Chatfield College in southwestern Ohio transitioned into a nonprofit organization called The Chatfield Edge after closing in 2022. The Chatfield Edge provides volunteer mentors, career counseling, and financial aid application support to help students navigate the complexities

of higher education.

Schools and organizations serving rural areas will be crucial in supporting the workforce development of their communities, given the ongoing shifts in both agriculture and manufacturing industries in recent decades, according to Ty McNamee, EdD, assistant professor of higher education at the University of Mississippi.

"Industries that are common to rural spaces, including agriculture and manufacturing, are declining in modern society; as a result, it will be easy for some to condone leaving rural areas and rural ways of life behind," McNamee wrote in a discussion paper for ACE. "This thinking is detrimental to people from all walks of life, who need such industries to power and feed an ever-growing world."

Strategic Collaboration: STARS College Network

Serving as one of the most prominent examples of interinstitutional collaboration, the Small Town and Rural Students (STARS) College Network — which launched in April 2023 — is making significant strides in expanding college

STARS College Network Members

FOUNDING MEMBERS:

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California Institute of Technology
Case Western Reserve University
Colby College
Columbia University
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Northwestern University
The Ohio State University
University of Chicago
University of Iowa
University of Maryland
University of Southern California
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Vanderbilt University
Washington University in St. Louis
Yale University

NEW MEMBERS:

Amherst College
Auburn University
Dartmouth College
Duke University
Georgia Institute of Technology
Southern Methodist University
Spelman College
Stanford University
University of Alabama
University of Arizona
University of Arkansas
University of California, Berkeley
University of Denver
University of Notre Dame
University of South Carolina
The University of Texas at Austin



Several schools in the STARS College Network have hosted fly-in programs, which pay for rural students to travel to prestigious urban institutions like the University of Chicago, Columbia University, and Brown University. (Photo courtesy of the STARS College Network)

access for students from rural communities.

By focusing on strategic partnerships and substantial financial investments, STARS aims to break down barriers in the college admissions process for this population. In just over a year, the network has reached 1.6 million students, families, educators, and community leaders, directly engaging with over 700,000 students and adding more than 288,000 new members.

This summer marked a pivotal moment for STARS as it grew from 16 to 32 schools, including flagship state universities, historically Black colleges and universities, Minority-Serving Institutions, and Ivy League colleges. This expansion enables STARS to extend its reach across more regions as well as assist with concerns such as limited access to college-related resources, financial constraints, and inadequate preparation for standardized tests.

To combat these obstacles, STARS has undertaken a range of initiatives.

The network visited 1,100 rural high schools across 49 states, bringing valuable information directly to students and

educators. It also facilitated opportunities for prospective students to experience STARS campuses firsthand through free trips, including those to summer programs designed to prepare them both academically and socially for college life.

Additionally, STARS hosted monthly virtual panels with admissions staff, offering tailored advice for various stages of the college search process.

Recognizing the importance of academic preparation, particularly in math, STARS partnered with Khan Academy and Schoolhouse to provide free courses and tutoring. The network also collaborated with businesses to create internships and job opportunities. Beyond these efforts, STARS has inspired philanthropic initiatives and has forged partnerships with college access organizations, including the College Board and the Ayers Foundation, contributing to a broader movement to enhance college access for rural and small-town students.

The impact of STARS extends beyond immediate educational opportunities;

it has sparked national discussions, academic research, and advocacy efforts focused on improving college access for rural students.

Addressing the barriers that rural students face is crucial for ensuring that they have equal opportunities to pursue higher education and achieve economic stability. As these efforts continue to expand, they hold the potential to significantly increase college enrollment and completion rates, ultimately contributing to the long-term success of rural communities across the country.

“It is clear from decades of postsecondary research, practice, and policy that a higher education degree offers individuals and society a variety of educational, economic, health, and social benefits,” McNamee wrote. “Including more rural institutions, and thus the rural populations who benefit from such colleges and universities, in scholarship, practice, and policy efforts will contribute to the betterment of rural populations, their communities, and also the country.” ●

Vote HBCU Launches Say It Louder Tour

Photos courtesy of Vote HBCU



Kicking off the fall semester, Vote HBCU — a nonpartisan voter advocacy and civic engagement project — launched its monthlong Say It Louder Tour to increase voter registration and promote civic education and engagement at 10 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

“HBCU students and alumni have always been at the forefront of change, from the civil rights movement to today’s demands for justice, equality, and representation,” Tevon A. Blair, co-founder of Xcleader, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting leadership development and mentorship among HBCU students, said in a video announcement in July. “Building on this legacy, Xcleader’s Vote HBCU program — merging civics and HBCU culture — exists to educate, mobilize, and empower HBCU students to be informed and active voting participants at the local, state, and federal levels.”

Since Vote HBCU was first created in 2021, the program has registered more than 2,500 voters at historically Black institutions. ●



Virginia State University marked the start of Vote HBCU’s 10-college 2024 Say It Louder Tour.



More than 20 campus organizations at Howard University participated in the Say It Louder Tour during Vote HBCU’s visit to the campus.

Vote HBCU returned to North Carolina A&T State University — its first ever stop in 2021 — as part of the Say It Louder Tour.





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DISCOVER LEADERSHIP IN RETAILING AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT



At the University of Kentucky Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment, Min-Young Lee, chair of the Department of Retailing and Tourism Management, is leading the way in preparing students for success.

Originally from South Korea, Dr. Lee is passionate about breaking stereotypes and empowering women in leadership roles.

"Leadership is not only about choosing a path and having others follow, there are all different styles," Lee said.

With advanced degrees in communication and management science, her research is helping businesses thrive while staying connected to their communities.

"Obviously businesses must make a profit," she said. "But consumers are interested in more than just a product. They want to buy from a company that is investing in its audience and their community."

Dr. Lee's innovative work spans retail, tourism and the growing trend of medical tourism, making the program a unique and comprehensive study of the business side of agriculture. Under her leadership, the program is providing students with the most current application of technology and professional strategies used in service industries.

Learn more about UK's retailing and tourism management program at

rtm.ca.uky.edu.

