

Transcription for INSIDE HIGHER ED: THE KEY



Ep. 73: HBCUs Team Up to Go Digital

PROVIDED BY CAPTION ACCESS

[contact@captionaccess](mailto:contact@captionaccess)

[www.captionaccess.com](http://www.captionaccess.com) Mar 2022

DOUG LETTERMAN:

Like a lot of undergraduate focused smaller institutions, historically black colleges and universities typically went online selectively, sporadically or not at all. But that's beginning to change thanks to significant multi-college collaborations, and help from funders increasingly recognizing the value and importance of these under resourced institutions. Hello, and welcome to The key. I'm Doug Letterman, editor and co-founder of Inside Higher Ed, and host of our news and analysis podcast. Thanks so much for joining us for episode 73. In the last few months Inside Higher Ed has written about several major initiatives in which philanthropies, corporations, and nonprofit organizations are working with groups of HBCUs to strengthen their ability to reach and serve students by improving their digital infrastructures, training their faculties, and launching a joint platform for virtual courses. The efforts are designed to help historically black colleges which have lagged their peers and online education begin to catch up at a time when the COVID 19 pandemic has turned online education from a nice to have to a core part of most institutions' futures.

Featured on today's episode is Ed Smith-Lewis, Vice President for Strategic Partnerships and institutional programs at the United Negro College Fund, which is the fulcrum of many of these efforts. He discusses how HBCUs have historically approached online and digital education, why those institutions are drawing so much attention and funding now, and the opportunities and challenges of getting numerous colleges to collaborate rather than compete. Before we start today's discussion, here's a word from this week's sponsor.

SPEAKER:

This episode of The key is sponsored by Pearson inclusive access, make the change to day one access and give your students an affordable option and an equal opportunity to succeed from the start. Visit [go.pearson.com/inclusive](https://go.pearson.com/inclusive) access to learn more.

DOUG LETTERMAN:

Now on to my conversation with Ed Smith-Lewis of UNCF. Ed, welcome to the program. And thanks for being here.

ED SMITH-LEWIS:

Thank you for having me, Doug. It's a pleasure to be here.

DOUG LETTERMAN:

So, UNCF announced last week that it was launching a new online learning platform for its members and their students. And that's just one of a bunch of things that you and UNCF have undertaken, sort of in this digital learning sphere in recent months. And it's part of an even larger array of activities that HBCUs collectively have been involved in this space. So, before we drill down into HBCU V and some other specific initiatives, how would you describe what we're seeing on this digital landscape broadly when it comes to HBCUs?

ED SMITH-LEWIS:

Oh, that's a good question. You know, I'm not gonna be a bit crass, I would characterize it as by any means necessary. I think what happened in March of 2020, we're now been two years into an unprecedented pandemic, was both a blessing and a curse. In many ways, I think the push to have everyone finally signed into a piece of technology to facilitate education, not only showed some of the many disparities that we have in this country, around the digital divide, access to tech quality

technology, both the hardware and the software of it, as well as the comfort and use of it. But it also said, there's an opportunity here, there's an opportunity for us to maybe release some of those sacred cows that we've held for so long, and say, what if we use technology in the vein and possibility voice Lintz that we've delivered that sort of physical education? And what we've seen is HBCUs lean into something out of necessity. And then you've seen the field, say, and how can we support this? And how can we encourage more of it?

And so for me, what's happening today are many HBCUs are tinkering, to say the least with what the world of the possible is for their institutions. Some of them are jumping into the deep end by partnering with OPM. So, get fully online courses. Others are just helping their I like to say season faculty just understand and feel comfortable leading an engaging conversation online with their students, but in all respects, we're seeing every institution prioritize online learning as a future necessity for their institution, and they're doing it in whatever way they can.

DOUG LETTERMAN:

So, how would you characterize the state of play for the private HBCUs that you work most closely with and HBCUs generally, pre-pandemic. I had certainly had a sense that For like a lot of less wealthy institutions, which yours mostly are, they were sort of lagging in certain ways. But what had been obviously working on some of this stuff pre pandemic, so how would you what was going on pre pandemic? And how would you characterize where HBCUs were and some sense of why?

ED SMITH-LEWIS:

Here's the reality. The reality is there's always been a desire for HBCUs to be an online space. At the end of the day, there's an attack on higher education, and you're either becoming a behemoth in terms of number of students, you're enrolling, or you're concerned that your future is bleak. For HBCUs, so a bit at the bleeding edge of bleak since their founding, you know, this idea of increasing enrollment has been a number one priority. And we've seen a proliferation of online especially with your Harvard's, and your Stanford's and your Yale's finally leaning in and leaning in quite aggressively into the online space, it's opening up the possibility that, hey, this online thing might not be the second rate institutional learning opportunity, it could be not only a viable learning space for students but a new business model and revenue stream for institutions struggling to engage. And so I do think there are numerous examples of HBCUs being online prior to Hampton online being one of the most significant ones, but (UNKNOWN) offering programs, I think you saw a bit of a college moving to have an online program prior to the pandemic.

And I think it's an MBA, right. And so there were movements in this space, but nothing to the level, or closing the gap between those institutions that have leaned all the way in and where HBCUs are. And the primary reason for that is resources. Right, at the end of the day, HBCUs had to invest in the tech infrastructure, the professional development, this shifting of curriculum to decades ago. And to close that gap in just a year, it's virtually impossible to close that gap over a lifetime, when you're always operating at the margins of resources, you know, you deprioritize it. And so HBCUs there, well, you know, what everyone loves about an HBCU is that familial environment, so they over indexed on that family environment, and said, you know, what, tech snap for us? And you saw that you saw that as a not and you know, I questioned whether it's the chicken or the egg? Did they do that because they couldn't? Or did they do that? Because they had to. And I think what you would recognize if HBCUs if they had the option to be online two decades ago, they would have moved online two decades ago.

But that was a privileged opportunity for a set of institutions that, as you said, are low resources. And so we're HBCUs at the start of the pandemic 20% of HBCUs had online degree programs compared to 54% of the rest of higher education. So, we were not in the online space. And in many times when we did have an online program, it tend to be a graduate degree program and a specialized area of study, and not something that was heavily enrolling students,

DOUG LETTERMAN:

Right. A lot of the institutions that we saw experiment least with virtual digital online forms of education, were primarily undergraduate heavily residential institutions, a lot of the liberal arts colleges, and a lot of those, a lot of your members are those places, there obviously, are some institutions that have big graduate footprints as well. So, they were like some of those institutions in certain ways. Plus, you throw in the resource constraints and you know, kind of doubling down. So, obviously, we have seen the pandemic, again, sort of forced experimentation, and forced everybody, students, faculty, staff, and departments into virtual settings, etc. How do you feel like the institutions on balance handled it? And what's your sense of, again, putting aside sort of the resources that we're starting to see flow in, but putting it in terms of the interest in the willingness to play in that realm? Did it win over skeptics, to some extent? Did it whet people's appetite? What's your overall sense of that?

ED SMITH-LEWIS:

Takeaway is, I think we all know, online is not going away. Now, whether you agree with the pedagogical practices or how it's delivered, whether you're solving for the innate struggle of students in their one or two-bedroom apartment because you know, they have a family of five and they can't really study or may not have access to consistent internet, we know online is a future mandatory modality in the learning process.

DOUG LETTERMAN:

At least as an option for students.

ED SMITH-LEWIS:

As an option. We did a survey and we'll get to HBCU shortly but we did a survey of every residential student on campus 95% of them said I would love to take a class online but be on campus. Alright, and I think what you're seeing.

DOUG LETTERMAN:

Is the flexibility.

ED SMITH-LEWIS:

It's the flexibility.

DOUG LETTERMAN:

Yeah,

ED SMITH-LEWIS:

It's the flexibility of the options, it's the ability to maybe connect with a professor that you just wouldn't have would have the option to, because there are physical limitations, either geography bound or classroom size bound, that online environment just opens up in a fundamental way. So, even for your high touch residential campuses, if you're not planning an online strategy, you're missing the mark for future generations of students. I think that became increasingly clear. The second piece that I think

became clear is that students are still engaged in the learning process, that despite being online, and this fear of like losing attention, and not being able to deliver a high quality education, I myself took a whole class at Harvard. Whole Program at Harvard in the pandemic, as a full time professional. I would have never had that opportunity, had it not been for Harvard, quick shift online, what I would say is, I learned so much in that class, and I was so stressed out (SIGHS HEAVILY), that oh died that this idea that online is easier, I think, is a fallacy of thinking that we finally got to test and see itself.

Now it does come with challenges, right? Because at the end of the day, you can develop a highly engaging course, right, you can do your waterfall questions. And you can do all the unique tricks and small group discussions and all the things that I think we learned to do better in the online environment of reset. But at the end of the day, if a student's internet drops, right, or if a student goes on mute and falls asleep, or goes off camera, you don't have that extra set of accountability measures that make it difficult for students that are straight. And I think what we realized here is online works for certain student types, it may not work for all student types. And so the big question that we're asking ourselves is, what does hybrid learning really look like in the future? And how do you allow for that flexibility, but still that point of connection with an individual where that accountability has been held, where that sort of camaraderie, a sense of belonging, that hug that you just want, when things get tough?

Where does that happen? We think that can happen in wholly online programs that are just being intentional about when a student should show up to certain activities, events Connect? Right. I think the question now, and I think where the field is, I think what most faculty are is how do we use online as opposed to denouncing?

DOUG LETTERMAN:

You mentioned before, the specialness of the HBCU experience, when you think about sort of the HBCU way online, what are the elements of that? And how do you go about embedding that differentiating maybe that from other online initiatives? I don't know how important that is to what you're doing with HBCU V, but I'm guessing it's something you want to sustain. So

ED SMITH-LEWIS:

Yeah, 100% we all know differentiation matters? I think for HBCUs if you know the space well, differentiation has hurt us. Right? The fact that we were different found it for a different purpose, to educate a certain student population, the fact that we are historically and presently under resource undervalued our reputations aren't as great as some of the faculty and decision makers in that reputation space, I won't get into the rankings. You know, it's been a challenge for us. And when you see the bright spots in our community, they're often glossed over, because our whole community of institutions HBCUs are seen collectively as less than right. Now, the reality is if you disaggregate outcomes on input adjusted measures, you know, that HBCUs punch above their weight, that are critical engines of economic mobility and economic opportunity in the communities that they serve. And from a cultural standpoint, they've been cornerstones to the black community, and dare I say, the number one solution to economic mobility, closing gaps, driving justice conversations in the black community of any set of institutions in our country, past the present, right?

But all of that to discount it when you look at amount of resources, endowment levels, and ultimately graduation rates. And so we said to ourselves when we were creating this, well, how do we take that differentiation and yield it for its power? Well, one of the things that we've learned through an HBCU experience no matter how challenged the resources, how stretched the faculty or staff, if you ask any

HBCU graduate, what was the most important thing about your HBCU experience? They would say it was that familial high touch environment where I not only felt belonged, but I felt challenged to grow bigger than who I am. I mean, the Gallup USA study that came out about six years ago, they just redid it again confirmed it for the second time, that on every measure from social well-being to financial well-being to just sense of purpose, black HBCU graduates outperform black graduates from HBCUs. And so there's something special there. There's something happening. Well, we said to ourselves, as we set out to launch HBCU V, the first and only online solution developed by black colleges for black colleges, we say, well, how do we reimagine, not replicate?

Not introduce that change that improves? How do we reimagine what an HBCU experience would be like in a virtual space? What does that mean? That means first, we had to distill what we call the secret sauce, something on-campus experience. This is not the full list, but we know at HBCUs it's a safe space for Black joy and expression. How do we think about a safe space for Black joy expression in a virtual environment? We know at HBCUs it honors rituals and traditions. How do we honor rituals and traditions in a virtual environment? In many cases, we make those new rituals and traditions in a virtual environment. It's an opportunity at HBCU that you see yourself. You look across the campus and you say, hey, that person looks like me, but not like me. And that actually gives me a better self-efficacy on who I am in a world that typically puts the pressure and burden on me to be more than just myself to represent my community. HBCUs I don't have it. So, what would that be like in an online environment?

How do you build upon legacy? Right? HBCUs are very thoughtful around ensuring that you understand that legacy matters. And for many of us, 400 years ago, that legacy was cut off. How will we reimagine what it means to create legacy from afar and distant locations? How you facilitate that in an online environment? We think the tools are there, right? You think about synchronous engagement, the fact that I can see you real-time in person, I can introduce you to my home, and you never step in my state, right? The fact that we can have real conversations, we can do meetups, we can talk to each other, we can track data, right? We think there's a way if you just ask if we were to reimagine how black colleges would use these technology tools, how would that be different or not. And so what we're doing ultimately, here at UNCF, and with an engagement of nine HBCUs, at the center of the work, and I want to be clear, we are doing inclusive design with lower resource institutions, which means we're gonna go much slower than some of the big behemoth will and taking advantage of these opportunities.

But for us, at the end of the day, we think if we ask the question right, there are six things we have to do with HBCU V, that will facilitate our success and differentiation. Number one is we have to promote black excellence, we have to start speaking about what our community has done and continues to do in a way that's baked into the curriculum baked into the pedagogy of learning. We have to focus on creating black futures, which means we have to understand where students are and give them a path to where they want to go in a way that really takes into their contexts, their starting point, but also what the world of the possible is beyond what they came to college wanting to understand. And so we're looking at the different tools and mechanisms to do career exploration, understand your innate capabilities, etc. We have to focus on creating black talent, that's both ensuring that there's an employer at the end of the day. But there's also a process from the start to that employer that says Here are the skills, tools, abilities you need.

We've talked about flexibility. Our students, we learned 34% of them held full time jobs, 42% of them had part time jobs, and three-quarters of our students have other responsibilities outside of education.

So, we know we have to have flexibility. First, what that means is we think we're partnering with a bunch of institutions because we're lower resources to provide that same experience. And then the final two, and probably the most important is we have to use data in unique and novel ways that not only give feedback on the student and assess them but provide that feedback to the faculty and back to the institution. And then ultimately, we use all of those things to activate what we call collective genius. We think if we're able to utilize the galvanizing mechanism of online to bring together more thoughts, more differentiation, and more diversity of the HBCU experience, that's what's going to make the HBCU V a differentiating factor in the market. Now, ultimately, my belief is if I'm a student at the University of Michigan, and I heard about that one great professor to top that one grade class at an HBCU.

This is not just attractive to new students that want to come to HBCUs, or current students at HBCUs. This is attractive to the many students who didn't have that idea of what is it like to learn in that kind of environment? Well, now you'll have access to that.

DOUG LETTERMAN:

At the HBCUs have, as you said been historically under resourced. Then what I'm about to say doesn't meaningfully alter that. But the institutions are having what seems like a real moment. Now when you consider the Biden administration's focus, McKenzie Scott's unrestricted gifts, all the companies and philanthropies that are coming out of the woodwork to form partnerships with the colleges. I'm curious a what you think is driving it? How much do you think it's attributable to Black Lives Matter or to other factors. But probably more significant is how important to the work you're doing is that increased recognition of the HBCU's relevance and value?

ED SMITH-LEWIS:

I'll give you the short answer necessary but not sufficient. And then I'll follow up with the long answer. At the end of the day, HBCUs, as I said before, from their founding have been under resource, like getting pennies on the dollar from the federal government, from state government, even their tuition has been to the left of the bell curve of what they would consider their non HBCU peers. They also operate in rolling 75% of low-income students, and 60% of first-generation students. So, even the idea of staying competitive from a cost of tuition standpoint seems inappropriate for these mission-driven institutions. And so what happens is, we are stuck to using what we have. There's a moniker within HBCUs space doing more with less, it's a real statement, right? When you talk to faculty, when you talk to senior administrators, they talk about having 5, 6, 7 commas in their title, because they are the person if they're a doer, doing all the things is on behalf of the institution. So, then you say, Well, I wonder why this is the case, right?

Because when I look at what I like to call the uber rich University, the uber rich University, on average, 90% low-income students, probably a similar number, the number of legacy students are likely 4/5, potentially even sixth, seventh, eighth-generation college graduates. And you say, Well, why don't all those resources go on there? Well, the best thing you can do is just look at the history. Right? They got an initial investment, in some cases, 400 years ago, Harvard University, right. And I've been building on that now we're the place where resources aren't the issue. And so they make up things like free tuition for anyone that make any families that make less than \$125,000. Right, for low-income, underrepresented students. That's a great selling point. It's a selling point that HBCUs can't continue it. So, then what happens is our best and our brightest, according to academic ability, and we know that there are many enabling factors that make that very difficult statement, and I hate using it, right.

But at the end of the day, we're then taking on with our fewer resources, students who have more baggage who have a longer road to travel to get to their ultimate destination. And then we complain about HBCUs, not having the outcomes, but we don't talk about the inputs that went into those outcomes. So, I'll start there. So, then COVID hits, everyone goes into shock the country, the world is for the first time, in a long time, collectively shocked whether you are at the top of the pay scale, or the bottom of the pay scale, your life was disrupted for a moment. And it was in that moment that we were in our homes and contemplating life. And considering the relative decisions that we've tried are made or traveled that we said, 'Whoa, the world is fragile'. And then, as we all sat in our homes and watched on television, we witnessed the untimely death of George Floyd. And the people who believed post Obama or during Obama were lived in a post-racial America said, Wait a minute, even in this time of huge crisis, these things still happen.

And I think it activated in our world a heightened sense of consciousness that we haven't had for a while because we were too busy living out our individual lives. But in that moment, the world got to see collectively feel an undeniable truth. And it was in that moment, people said, well, maybe I have blinders on and other spaces. And you know, while I love MacKenzie Scott gifts, I actually think Patti Quillin and Reed Hastings, who I believe opened the floodgates. They made the first significant investment prior to Patrick wheeling and Reed Hastings 100 and 20 million, 40 million to Morehouse. 40 million to Spelman. 40 million to UNCF. Then was then distributed to our other 35 members, right? The largest single gift to any HBCU was the Spelman College for \$37 million in the mid-90s. The top 10 gifts ended with a \$5 million gift on the top 10 lists that were just three institutions, Morehouse, Spelman, and Howard. Now they continue to reap the rewards of this moment in time, but for the first time, someone said, Maybe I should look differently at the metrics I've been waiting to make investments.

And once Patty Quillin and Reed Hastings made that significant investment, I think it opened up the eyes. I think the next big move was the Community Foundation of Memphis said, hey Le Moyne College had been a pillar in this community, and we've underinvested in you another 40 million. And then MacKenzie Scott did something that none of them did. They said, do what you need with. And that I think, when you start to think about how this started to unfold, I know I suspect, because I don't know because I'm not in those meetings. But I suspect, Reed Hastings, and Patty Quillin, maybe leaned over to MacKenzie and said, Well, what are you gonna do? I'm sure MacKenzie leads her brand and said, What are you got to do? And that's how it happens. It takes that moment where you witnessed something that disruption norms, you open that aperture a bit to see there's a different way of looking at things. And I think, then things happen. Now, the big question, and the reason why I say it's necessary, but not sufficient is what does this look like five years from today 10 years, and ultimately generations ahead of us.

**SPEAKER:**

This episode of The key is sponsored by Pearson inclusive access, make the change to day one access and give your students an affordable option and an equal opportunity to succeed from the start. Visit [go.pearson.com/inclusive access](https://go.pearson.com/inclusive-access) to learn more.

**DOUG LETTERMAN:**

Part Two of my conversation with Ed Smith-Lewis, Vice President at UNCF. And getting colleges to work together seems surprisingly difficult. How key is this cross institutional work to accomplishing what you



want to get done? And what are both the advantages and the disadvantages of that sort of collaboration?

ED SMITH-LEWIS:

And important context, at least from a UNCF perspective, because I think we're known for our minds is a terrible thing to waste. We are the largest scholarship provider outside the federal government. But we were founded as a shared service. In 1944, when our presidents came together, and these are presidents in small, private, grossly underfunded, grossly under capacity, black colleges, they came together to activate fundraising shared service. They said if we pooled our resources, do we have the ability to grow the pie for all of us? And guess what the answer was now at nearly 80 years later? Emphatically Yes. And we're still working at it. And we're still working at it because at the end of the day, systems, change lives of individuals, though, we can praise Spelman, we can praise Howard and Morehouse and North Carolina a&t and Xavier and to Tougaloo and Diller all on an individual level. And we will never get to that change in outcomes for populations without looking at the strength of all of our communities.

Now, talking about HBCUs, this goes for tribal colleges, it goes for rural colleges, community colleges, any institution without an endowment above a billion dollars, you need to be thinking about this because the cost of higher education has been the highest growing price indicee, since the bubble burst back in 07-08. And what we're seeing is growth in higher education, which is on the decline overall, it's been busted or supported by low-income students. So, there is a challenge that is facing us. And we are going to hit a point where higher ed and its costs will burst. And the unfortunate pieces is going to burst for those institutions on the lower side of the resource standpoint, who are educating many more low-income students. So then you say, well, what is the solution? Well, one solution is to fix yourself, how do you make those individual improvements on your campus, and guess what that'll have an incremental impact, you will increase your retention or your graduation rates by two or three points, perhaps even four, or you may do a Georgia State and after 15 years at it closed some equity gaps, but you still won't solve for the community need.

And quite frankly, you won't solve for the need for our institutions. So, you have two options. One is to become the behemoth. And they're starting to talk about these institutions. They're calling national scale enterprises where they're enrolling 100,000 plus students all over the world, right? That's one way. The other way is to go back in time and get an endowment that's worth a billion dollars today a little bit more difficult. But find a way to make away. The other way is to reach across the aisle and say, 'How can I work smarter, not harder? And how can I let go of the things that don't fundamentally matter to me'. One of the things that we've been talking about with our institutions is they see us as a system of less than institutions. How can we to operate as a system to get the benefit of what that system what that push looks like. And at the end of the day, it doesn't mean a merger. Because you hear in the field all the time, all these schools need to close or they need to merge.

No, they need to strategically ally, because many of the processes, the approaches, the tactics in higher education are the same. What makes the institution different from the other, it's its mission and its culture. And I fundamentally believe that there are ways that institutions can work together and still maintain their mission and their culture. But you know, sign that same contract on property, plant maintenance, right, or agree to share some courses with each other, because we don't have a measure of quality and higher education. And if you look at the curriculums that nine times out of 10, mostly the

same, right, but if we start to think differently about what ownership means, what it means to differentiate yourselves, and not look at everything having to be differentiated, but look at who you're trying to serve. And one of the big things we've been pushing here at UNCF. Again, membership association shared service since 1944, is what if we focus less on institutional effectiveness and sustainability, and more on community and student outcomes.

And when you sift that lands, to the populations you're serving, you realize that a lot of those sacred cows, everyone to hold up and we had to do, actually, we could let go of, to spend more time serving that community and those students that we want it. So, we're talking about things like, as you saw on our Faculty Online development, like let's share that development practice, as opposed to building each our own teaching and learning center, let's fill one teaching and learning center that services all of us that uses the best and go back to that idea with HBCU V is the collective genius. And I say that not because it's a black only solution like this solution fits anywhere if you can be mission aligned with another body with another entity, organization, etc. There are real possibilities if you can let go of the way it's always been done. And so the hard part for us and you talk about what's going to slow us down, what's going to slow us down is the need to shift mindsets, and to shift behaviors.

Because one of the hardest lines and it hurts me every time I hear it is well, this is how we've always done it. And when you ask them, well, why have you done it that way? Very few have a reason. And when you start people that a white sheet of paper and you say is there a different way to do it, you find that you not only innovate on that solution, but you keep many of the principles and tenets of it, you're just doing it in a fundamentally more efficient and effective way. And that's what we're focused on here.

DOUG LETTERMAN:

Recognizing that this is a long game, how will you be judging your progress and success five and maybe 10 years out?

ED SMITH-LEWIS:

I used to work at Mac Kenzie, and we've worked work with Fortune 500 companies, and you know, if they change if they transformed a product, a team or organization and five years, they were taught here, right? You get into higher education just know it's longer. And I think Georgia State is always the best example. And people see that like new shiny object. But no, they've been at that for a decade and a half if not longer. So in five years, for me, it's all about like mindsets and systems and structures. We fundamentally want our institutions to start seeing each other as resources as opposed to competitors. And that's throughout higher education. Right, this idea that there's a limited stock of students needs to go away, because they're not enough students been educated adequately by our system. And so how do we flip that on its head to say, how can we be more inclusive in the learning environment, we think that that's number one, shifting that mindset of Higher Ed as an inclusive solution, as opposed to a commodity like we got, we got to kind of get out of that.

Number two, within that same five-year timeframe, is that we built in the mechanisms and the systems necessary that allow for knowledge sharing that allows for resource sharing, and the flow of information across institutions. What that means is we both set up the governance within an institution and articulated the sharing between institutions. Right, number three, and the short term is that we're seeing a new level of resources at the institution, whether that's reallocating existing resources to new activities, or new resources coming in. Like in MacKenzie Scott, we need to shift what federal government as well, we need to shift what it means to fund, the institutions that are working with our

most difficult populations. So, that was my five years just really fundamentally thinking differently about that 10 years, I hope to see double-digit increases and the actual outcomes on the campus. And that's real measures that we're tracking now. And when I say double digit increases, I should have said stained double digit increases, because throughout this last five years working with the federal institutions we've worked with, we've had blips where it's like whoa, and then you get disrupted by COVID.

And you don't know what's real, right. So, we're really struggling with that. But we're looking for a sustained impact. So, incremental shift from maybe 34%, graduation rates to 41%. But we want to hold that for as long as we can, because that's the new plateau on which we want to get so we want to achieve new plateaus, with institutions in the 10-year frame. I think institutions are fundamentally sharing resources in a way that they've never done before. Right? We, I mean, just look at any of the multinational organizations, their headquarters are in one place (LAUGHS). But they have 172 offices across the world. Right. But that we have centralized real work in a fundamental way, and that we see the benefits of sharing, because at the end of the day, we think the sharing increases the buy versus decreases in the therapies 10 years is the conversation around what's a low resource institution and are HBCUs relevant? Like, it's like a no more, right, because the outcomes are real. The proof points have been made and the students are our biggest advocates, right?

Because now we've done away with all the challenges that hold most of our students back from being an advocate for the institution today, let's take you beyond that. We're talking intergenerational things, 25 years plus, right? I hope we're disrupting poverty in this country like that's, that's the ultimate goal. We know that higher education is the number one ticket to the middle class. For most of us, it's not guaranteed, but it is number one. And we believe that we can increase the rate of graduation rate at HBCUs, who represent 3% of all higher ed institutions, and enroll 9% of all black people in college but produce 19% of the Bachelor's degrees in the world. And on most measures outperform social well-being and economic well-being and community empowerment. Imagine if we tripled that number. What does that need to shift outcomes and communities because one thing we don't talk about, and I would love for the researcher, whoever's listening out there to have access to the research, the ripple effect of HBCUs?

We're discussing this work, believe it was a Xavier University are number one producer of black medical doctors. Well, it's also interesting that HBCUs are the number one producer of all medical doctors in the aggregate for black people. But where they go is the most important part, most of them going back to low-income underserved communities, as opposed to becoming then you know, a plastic surgeon in Hollywood, right. So, there's that like ripple effect that we don't even measure in addition to the individual the outcome, and I'm really looking forward to the day, maybe a generation from now, we're talking about the community impact on the whole population, whole regions, and not, you know, the graduation rate of one individual institution.

DOUG LETTERMAN:

And that was Ed Smith Lewis, Vice President for Strategic Partnerships and institutional programs at the United Negro College Fund. Thanks to him for his thoughtful insights and to Pierson inclusive access for its sponsorship of this in the next two episodes. Today's conversation was interesting to me because a lot of the trends and themes of the moment course through it, the extent to which the pandemic has or hasn't changed the landscape of virtual learning, the tendency or disinclination of colleges to form partnerships to get stuff done, and perhaps most of all the growing recognition of the importance of

minority serving colleges, given the historical and lingering inequities in higher education. These are issues that we will continue to explore in subsequent episodes of the key and I hope you'll come back soon. For now. I'm Doug Letterman. Stay well and stay safe.