



# “Black Male Students at Public Flagship Universities in the U.S.: Status, Trends, and Implications for Policy and Practice”

## FACT SHEET

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### Dellums Commission

*The Dellums Commission, chaired by former Congressman and Mayor-Elect Ronald V. Dellums, was formed by the Health Policy Institute of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies to analyze policies that affect the physical, emotional and social health of young men of color and their communities and to develop an action plan to alter public policies that limit life paths for young men of color. To understand the issues more fully and to inform its deliberations in formulating an ambitious but realistic action plan, the Dellums Commission asked experts in various fields to prepare background papers on specific issues.*

### BACKGROUND

In *The Future of the Public University in America*, James Duderstadt and Farris Womack contend that public institutions of higher education are among our nation’s most significant social establishments. They argue that public colleges and universities have been chiefly responsible for democratizing and extending higher education to “all citizens.” They also suggest that the missions of these institutions reflect one of society’s most cherished goals: access to equal opportunity through education. Throughout the book, Duderstadt and Womack describe a social contract between public higher education and the citizens it is intended to serve. Similarly, other scholars have characterized higher education as a public

#### ***The Way Forward: The Dellums Policy Agenda***

*The Commission’s recommendations are based on the view that systematic problems must be addressed with systematic solutions. During the past 12 months, the commission analyzed national, state, and local policies in the areas of health and mental health services, education, juvenile justice and criminal justice, family support and child welfare, and the media. The Commission’s policy agenda and policy recommendations listed are designed to ignite reforms that would enhance the well-being of ailing American communities, and individuals can apply commitment and logic to solve even the most intractable social problems.*

good with widespread social benefits through which individual participation yields positive outcomes for the larger society—crime and poverty reduction, increased civic engagement, social cooperation and cohesion, the ability of college-educated persons to create and adapt to new technologies, and so on.

Most agree that public universities can and should uphold the social contract by offering equitable access and distributing resources to ensure success among diverse groups of American citizens. As evidenced throughout this report, the social contract as it relates to access and equity for black men at public colleges and universities has been breached. This brief reviews the status of black men in higher education, with an emphasis on public flagship universities in each of the 50 states. Analysis of multiple data sources reveals the following national trends and disparities:

- In 2002, black men comprised only 4.3 percent of all students enrolled at institutions of higher education, the same as in 1976.
- Across all racial/ethnic groups, gender gaps in enrollment are widest among black students, with black women outnumbering their male counterparts by 27.2 percentage points.
- Between 1977 and 2003, black male degree attainment increased by an average of 0.2 percentage points. The most significant gains were at the associate’s degree level. Only 147 more doctorates were awarded to black men in 2003 than in 1977.

- Across all degree levels, white men earned more than ten times the number of degrees awarded to their black male counterparts.
- Nationally, more than two-thirds (67.6 percent) of black men who start college do not graduate within six years, which is the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ ethnic groups in higher education.
- In 2004, 10.4 percent of male undergraduates in higher education were black. Yet, black men represented 30.5 percent of all male student athletes in Division I sports, the National Collegiate Athletic Association's highest level of competition. They comprised 54.6 percent of football teams and 60.8 percent of men's basketball teams at Division I institutions.
- Across four cohorts of college student-athletes, 47 percent of black men graduated within six years, compared to 60 percent of white males and 62 percent of student-athletes overall. The averages across four cohorts of basketball players were 39 percent and 52 percent for black men and white men, respectively. Forty-seven percent of black male football players graduated within six years, compared to 63 percent of their white teammates.

In each section of the report, these inequities are examined more closely within the context of public flagship universities in each state. Some key findings include the following:

- In 2000, black men represented 7.9 percent of the 18- to 24-year-olds in the U.S. population. Across the 50 flagship universities examined in this report, they comprised 2.8 percent of undergraduate student enrollments in 2004.
- In 44 states, there were disparities between the enrollments of black males at the public flagship institutions and their representation among 18- to 24-year-old citizens within those states.
- In 2004, 30 of the 50 flagship universities each enrolled less than 500 black male undergraduates.
- The mean six-year graduation rate for black men at flagship universities was 44.3 percent in 2004, compared to 61.4 percent for white men and 53.2 percent for black women.
- At 21 flagship institutions, more than one out of every five black men on campus was a student athlete in 2004. At 42 institutions, more than one of every three football players was black. Fifty percent or more of the basketball teams were comprised of black men at 38 public flagship institutions. Only at three universities did black male student-athletes comprise less than 20 percent of the men's basketball teams.
- At 43 public flagship universities, six-year graduation rates were higher for white male student-athletes than for their black male teammates. The average gap was 18.9 percentage points.
- Only 12 flagship universities graduated more than half of their black male student-athletes within six years; 13 institutions graduated less than one-third of these students.

A more elaborate presentation of these findings is offered in the full report which can be found at (<http://www.jointcenter.org/hpi/>). Several statistics will confirm that higher education is a public good that benefits far too few black men in America. Moreover, the need to strengthen the social contract between public institutions of higher education and black male citizens will be made painstakingly clear. It seems important to emphasize that this is a status report. Thus, historical, socio-cultural, and sociopolitical explanations for the trends and inequities reported herein, though important, are beyond the scope and intended purposes of this document.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS/ IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

Unarguably, attention and resources must be devoted to reversing the plight of the black male collegian. The extent of his underrepresentation in the general student body at public flagship universities; the magnitude of disparities between him, his same-race female peers, and his white male counterparts; and the problematic extent to which he is overrepresented among Division I student-athletes (especially football and basketball players) all signify an immediate need for institutional and external accountability. Based on the evidence of disparities presented throughout this report, several recommendations for policymakers and university administrators are offered in this section.

### **Expanding College Access and Participation**

- There is an obvious need to maintain affirmative action and race-sensitive college admissions policies. The fact that black men represent 7.9 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds in America, but only 2.8 percent of undergraduates at public flagship universities confirms the continued necessity of racial intentionality in recruitment and admissions. Until equity in enrollments and in-state population representation is reached, affirmative action should be preserved not just as a policy, but also in practice.
- Public institutions, as well as state and federal policymakers, must invest more financial resources in college readiness programs and initiatives to increase black male student representation at all stages of the postsecondary educational pipeline. In addition to providing increased levels of financial support to existing programs that seek to improve college-going rates among racial/ethnic minority students (e.g., TRIO and GEAR UP), funds should be allocated to create access improvement programs specifically for black male students.
- Legislators should hold public flagship institutions more accountable for demonstrating effort and effectiveness in closing the gaps between in-state population representation and enrollments among

*“What particularly alarms African American leaders and higher education officials is that while black women are scoring big [quantitative] gains in education, particularly at the college level, the progress for black men has either stagnated or increased only slightly from year to year over the past decade.”*

*(R. Roach, 2001)*

black men. Consequences need to be articulated and consistently enforced, and rewards should be offered to high-performing public institutions that make quantifiable progress.

- Enrollment managers and college admissions officers should engage stakeholders across the campus in collaborative strategic planning processes to increase black male student enrollments. Faculty, black male undergraduate student leaders, and staff from black culture centers, multicultural affairs offices, and athletics (to name a few) should be invited to participate in this strategic planning process. These team members could also ultimately assume leadership in executing the plan they create.
- Admissions offices should hire a full-time staff person whose primary (or perhaps even sole) responsibilities are recruiting black male students and creating pipeline initiatives in middle and high schools throughout the state.
- Using state and federal support in combination with institutional resources, public institutions should foster

stronger P-16 collaborative partnerships and focus a portion of such efforts specifically on preparing young black males for college.

### **Improving Graduation Rates and Degree Attainment**

- More than two-thirds of all black men who start college do not finish—and worse yet, there is virtually no accountability for this level of institutional mediocrity. There should be accountability. Retention and graduation rates must be tied to standards by which institutional performance is assessed and used in accreditation. Those institutions that fail to graduate a certain percentage of black males (or any other groups for whom inequities exist) should be sanctioned and held accountable for creating, implementing, and documenting improvement plans.
- Public flagship institutions must take affirmative steps to hire additional black male faculty members, as black male students seek out same-race male faculty mentors who are currently missing. As previously mentioned, black men comprised only 1.1 percent of all full-time faculty members at the 50 flagship institutions in 2004. A pool of funds should be created specifically for black male faculty recruitment, and institutions should target black male scholars who are completing Ph.D. programs. An institutional commitment must be made to cultivating, hiring, and retaining cohorts of black male faculty who can provide culturally desirable mentoring for students.
- More resources (financial and otherwise) should be devoted to supporting programs and student organizations that strive to engage and retain black male students. The effectiveness and sustainability of such efforts are largely dependent upon the provision of financial resources and advisory support.

- A team of institutional stakeholders including, but not limited to, faculty, student affairs professionals, and black male student leaders, should be formed to develop campus-specific initiatives to improve black male retention and graduation rates. Similar to the aforementioned admissions team, these stakeholders should work collaboratively to construct a strategic plan for investigating, illuminating, and reversing problematic trends and inequitable outcomes.
- Flagship institutions might consider forming consortia with other large universities to collaboratively design and share innovative approaches to retaining black male undergraduates.

### ***Eradicating Racial Disparities in College Athletics***

- It seems appropriate to suggest that the NCAA create a policy requiring that racial representation on any sports team should minimally correspond to a certain percentage of undergraduate student enrollments at the institution. The introduction of this policy will surely compel university admissions officers to more aggressively recruit black male students who are not brought to the institution to play sports.
- Aligning team compositions with graduation rates is another policy the NCAA might consider. If an institution graduates 32 percent of its black male football players within six years, for example, it is reasonable to implement a rule that no more than 32 percent of the football team the following season can be comprised of black male student-athletes.
- The NCAA should insist that institutions with racial disparities in graduation rates commit a certain percentage of athletic revenues to academic enhancement initiatives for the disadvantaged group (e.g., black male student-athletes).
- Institutions with graduation rates below a certain percentage for any racial/ethnic group should not be permitted to compete in NCAA championship tournaments, BCS games, or other national championship contests. Eligibility should not be based on aggregate graduation rates for all student-athletes, but instead on rates across all racial/ethnic groups. This policy would have the greatest effects on the two largest revenue-generating sports (football and men's basketball), where black men comprise more than half of the teams, but graduate at disproportionately lower rates.

### **CONCLUSION**

In 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois argued that “the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men [and women]. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the talented tenth; it is the problem of developing the best of this race.” Accordingly, the “talented tenth” are to emerge as college-educated citizens who will lead the social, economic, and political advancement of the race—those who will use their access to higher education for the public good. As evidenced throughout this report, public flagship universities contribute minimally to the preparation of black men to assume the societal roles Du Bois envisioned. Instead, these institutions approach the recruitment and retention of black male collegians haphazardly and with little accountability. Recruiting them for athletic participation appears to be easier and a higher institutional priority than expending the energies and resources requisite for exterminating disparities in access, achievement, and attainment for black men at public universities. These institutions, like others that were not considered in this report, are doing far too little to respond to the crisis concerning black male students in higher education, let alone developing “the best of the race.”

University of Pennsylvania Professor Laura W. Perna and her colleagues explored the status of equity for black undergraduates (women and men) at public universities in southern states in America. Consistent with their findings, evidence of persistent inequities in enrollments and degree completion rates are furnished in this report. The difference here is that while gaps appear to be widest in southern states, disparities that disadvantage black male students clearly exist all over the country. The positionality of black men at public flagship universities is clear: they are insufficiently represented and least retained. The evidence presented in the full report should compel university presidents, other administrators and educators, trustees, and legislators to initiate immediate calls for accountability and strategic efforts to reverse problematic trends and outcomes among black male students in each of the 50 states. Given the magnitude of the inequities highlighted here, continued institutional negligence and acts of nothingness would be a morally unjust contradiction to the rhetoric regarding equitable access to the public good—flagship universities and all others must be immediately moved to action.

