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A Precarious Future

The Uncertain Fate of International
Students in the United States



Building Bridges, Not Barriers



For decades, Indiana University has worked diligently to build a campus community where people from all backgrounds have access to the tools and support they need to thrive throughout their college journey and beyond.

“Creating a diverse student body is paramount to student success. When you interact with people from different backgrounds who have different perspectives, viewpoints, and cultures, profound learning can take place. This is an important part of what it means to be a student at Indiana University,” says Rashad Nelms, interim vice president for the Office of the Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. “And it’s why we are so committed to building an equitable and inclusive campus community.”

IU’s work has again been recognized by *INSIGHT Into Diversity*, the country’s largest, oldest, and most respected national diversity- and inclusion-focused publication in higher education. This year, for the tenth consecutive time, the magazine honored IU Bloomington with the **2024 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) award** and the **Diversity Champion Award** for the eighth consecutive year. Known for visionary leadership, Indiana University is considered an institution that sets the standard for inclusive excellence and for implementing efforts to promote student success for all.



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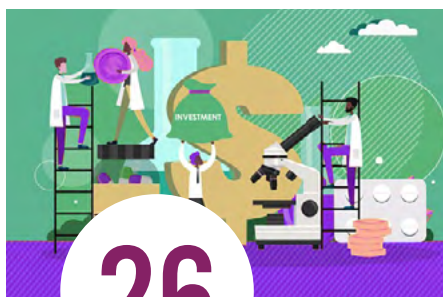
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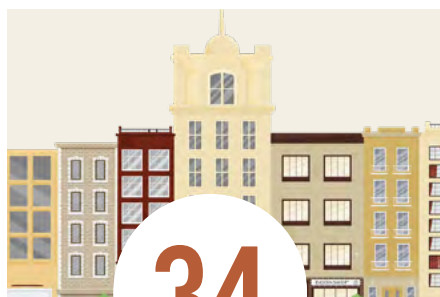
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FROM OUR EDITOR

Dear Readers,

In this issue, we spotlight two sectors at the center of higher education's most urgent challenges and boldest breakthroughs: historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and law schools.

At a time when federal funding gaps persist, DEI programs face political attacks, and student success models are under pressure, HBCUs continue to lead with boldness and clarity. From the ambitious aims of the HBCU Transformation Project to tech-forward initiatives and a groundbreaking archival partnership with Ancestry.com and Getty Images, these institutions are proving—again—that legacy and innovation go hand in hand.

Law schools, meanwhile, are navigating legal education in a post-affirmative action, post-truth era. With race-conscious admissions overturned and ABA diversity requirements on pause, we examine how institutions are adapting—through new pathways, advocacy efforts, and reimagined admissions strategies. At the same time, rising law school applications and AI-integrated curricula are reshaping an already complex landscape.

Beyond those core features, this issue also highlights stories of systems-level change: how universities are stepping up to protect international students amid visa uncertainty; veteran students are leading the design of programs that bridge wellness and academic transition; colleges and cities are co-creating housing, equity, and economic resilience strategies; and faculty are increasingly turning to public support to fund research left behind by traditional systems.

Higher education may be at a crossroads—but the path forward is being charted by those who refuse to accept the status quo.

All the best,



Kat Castagnoli
Managing Editor
Insight Into Academia Magazine

Congratulations to these higher education administrators on their new roles!



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Pennsylvania Debuts Special Education Apprenticeship to Combat Teacher Shortage

By Kat Castagnoli

Amid a persistent statewide shortage of special education teachers, a pioneering apprenticeship program aims to change the game in Pennsylvania. Gwynedd Mercy University (GMercyU), the Bucks County Intermediate Unit (Bucks IU), and Bucks County Community College have launched the Commonwealth's first undergraduate pathway focused on training and certifying Pre K-12 special education teachers.

Approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry and the Department of Education, the initiative combines college coursework, on-the-job experience, and teacher certification—all while participants remain employed full time.

"This apprenticeship creates a sustainable pipeline for special education teachers by making certification more attainable for individuals already working in our schools," said Deborah E. Schadler, PhD, PRSE, coordinator of undergraduate education at GMercyU. "It's a direct response to the urgent need for qualified special educators and a continuation of our mission to transform lives through education."

A Learn-and-Earn Approach

Participants—primarily Bucks IU paraprofessionals—begin by earning 60 credits at Bucks County Community College, and then go on to complete the remaining 60 through online courses to receive their degrees at GMercyU. Student teaching occurs within the Bucks IU system, fulfilling field experience requirements.

"This is about meeting future teachers where they are—financially, professionally, and logistically," Schadler said. "The traditional pathways aren't working."

Apprentices earn a full-time paraprofessional salary with structured pay increases as they progress academically. Bucks IU employees also receive a 10% tuition grant toward

GMercyU coursework and may qualify for additional federal or state aid.

Since 2019, GMercyU graduates have earned more than 850 education-related certifications, including over 500 full teaching credentials.

A Timely Solution to a Growing Crisis

The partnership comes as Pennsylvania faces a severe teacher shortage, particularly in high-need areas such as special education, math, and science. While the state issued more than 6,600 teaching certificates in the 2023–24 school year—up slightly from the previous year—it still reports more than 5,500 vacancies, according to the Department of Education. Attrition is also a concern, with about 7% of teachers leaving the profession annually.

Experts cite low pay, burnout, declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs, and challenging working conditions as key drivers of the crisis.

But new approaches like the GMercyU program could help reverse the trend.

"The apprenticeship model for teaching is a really promising one," said Laura Boyce, Pennsylvania executive director of Teach Plus, a national teacher advocacy organization. "The learn-and-earn model—where apprentices are on the job while earning a wage and working toward their undergraduate degree and certificate—is a model from the trades that has a lot of promise."

Reimagining the Pipeline: A Nationwide Push

Pennsylvania's apprenticeship is part of a growing national trend to reimagine how to recruit and prepare the next generation of special education teachers.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of Pre K-12 students nationally receiving special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act grew by

3.4% between fall 2022 and fall 2023—now totaling more than 7.5 million nationwide, or roughly 15% of all public school students. In Pennsylvania, that number is even higher at 21%.

Other states have launched similar apprenticeship-style programs that combine employment, academic coursework, and structured mentorship, including:

- **Missouri:** Missouri State University's pathways for paraprofessionals offers educators a tuition-free route to certification while they stay employed in their current districts. More than 350 were enrolled as of 2024.
- **Washington:** The Washington Education Association created an apprenticeship residency in teaching designed for paraprofessionals with bachelor's degrees. Initially funded by federal relief dollars, it now operates on competitive grants, with a focus on special education.
- **California:** National University in San Diego became a federally recognized sponsor of a registered apprenticeship program for K-12 teachers. Its flexible, mentorship-driven model aims to expand the special education workforce.
- **Connecticut:** At Quinnipiac University, a new program places graduate teaching students in East Haven and West Haven schools for a full academic year, targeting district-level special education shortages. The initiative is supported by a state grant.

Collectively, these programs—including the GMercyU apprenticeship—are redefining how special education teachers are trained and certified by removing barriers for in-service educators and directly addressing the nation's chronic teacher shortages. ●



A Pipeline for Change:

Meharry and Wharton's Joint MD/PhD Program is Reshaping Health Care Leadership

By Erik Cliburn

A groundbreaking partnership between Meharry Medical College and the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School is opening new pathways for future physician leaders committed to reshaping health care from both the bedside and the boardroom.

Established in 2021, the joint MD PhD program allows students to earn a medical degree from Meharry—one of the nation's four historically Black medical schools—and a PhD in health care management from Wharton, the country's top-ranked business school. The initiative is the first of its kind for both institutions and reflects a shared mission: to expand representation in health care leadership and policy research.

Together, the schools are preparing students to navigate the complex intersection of clinical care, organizational leadership, and health policy reform. Graduates of the dual-degree track will be equipped not only to treat patients but also to address systemic challenges in access, costs, and quality through research and strategic leadership.

"The goal is ultimately to increase the number of health service research scholars from underrepresented communities who bring broader racial and ethnic perspectives to the work that underpins so much of today's health care delivery policy," Claudio Lucarelli, PhD, Wharton professor and coordinator of the program, said in a press release.

Students selected for the program begin their medical training at Meharry before taking a leave of absence to pursue full-time doctoral study at

Wharton. The PhD curriculum covers health economics, management science, and policy analysis, with participants engaging in original research under the mentorship of faculty at Wharton and Penn's Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics (LDI).

After completing their PhD, they return to Meharry to finish clinical training and graduate with both degrees. This sequencing allows them to gain a deep understanding of the health care system from multiple vantage points.

between Meharry and LDI, including student and faculty exchanges and Meharry's participation in Penn's Summer Undergraduate Minority Research (SUMR) program. By creating a formal dual-degree track, the institutions aim to build a pipeline of scholars trained to influence health care delivery, finance, and public policy.

The program includes the Escarce-Kington Scholarship, named in honor of José Escarce, MD, PhD, and Raynard Kington, MD, PhD, MBA—

"The goal is ultimately to increase the number of health service research scholars from underrepresented communities who bring broader racial and ethnic perspectives to the work that underpins so much of today's health care delivery policy."

Claudio Lucarelli, PhD

"Meharry is focused on expanding the presence and influence of underrepresented minorities to improve the country's health care system," A. Dexter Samuels, PhD, MHA, senior vice president at Meharry and director of its Center for Health Policy, said in a press release.

The program grew out of more than a decade of collaboration

both distinguished alumni of Wharton's doctoral program and nationally recognized leaders in medicine and policy. Funded by Wharton professor Mark Pauly, the scholarship supports students in the joint program and underscores the institutions' commitment to mentorship and long-term investment in future scholars. ●

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VETERANS FIND NEW PATHS AND PURPOSE THROUGH CAMPUS SUPPORT

By Erik Cliburn

As universities nationwide work to better serve military-connected students, a growing number of programs are placing them at the center of campus innovation. From dedicated first-year courses to hands-on sustainability initiatives, three institutions are demonstrating what it means to invest in student veteran success.

At the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), a newly launched course is helping veterans transition from military to college life with greater confidence. The Academic Introduction & Strategies (AIS) class, designed specifically for first-year student veterans, offers a tailored version of UTSA's broader first-year experience curriculum. The new section emerged after student veterans voiced concerns about relating to younger classmates in standard AIS courses.

"Veteran students often find themselves in a different stage of life, which can make it difficult to connect with peers who are just beginning their college journey," said Brian Rendell, senior director of academic credentialing and a retired Air Force colonel. Rendell, who teaches the new veteran-focused course, added, "This new AIS curriculum will offer a classroom environment where veteran students can learn how to capitalize on their military experiences and connect with others who share similar backgrounds and life aspirations."

The course is part of UTSA's broader commitment to serving its sizable military-affiliated student body, which makes up nearly 16% of enrollment. The university was recognized as a top military-friendly institution in 2024.

At Fordham University, support is expanding in both scale and scope. In May, the institution announced a bold

commitment to double its enrollment of veterans and military-connected students over the next five years through the Fordham Veterans Initiative.

"Simply put, you are our finest students, and we want more of you," said Fordham President Tania Tetlow during the announcement at the university's annual Yellow Ribbon Medallion and Victory Bell Ceremony. "From hands-on guidance through admissions to career placement and community connection, we are building a network that fosters belonging, honors sacrifice, and supports success at every stage."

"Veteran students often find themselves in a different stage of life, which can make it difficult to connect with peers who are just beginning their college journey."

Brian Rendell

As part of this effort, Fordham will expand its Office of Military and Veterans' Services, enhance career development resources, and open a new Military Family Center at its Rose Hill campus. This facility will mirror the successful model already in place at Lincoln Center, providing a hub for community and support in the Bronx, where nearly 24,000 veterans reside.

Fordham has also lifted its cap on the Yellow Ribbon Program, ensuring eligible veterans and dependents can attend tuition-free under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. The changes have already had an impact—enrollment increased 131% last fall, with more than 470 student veterans, active-duty service members, and military family members now part

of the university community.

Meanwhile, at Ohio State University's Marion campus, two Marine Corps veterans are transforming both the landscape and student life through an innovative beekeeping project. Todd Lee and Eric Bailey, who met through the Central Ohio Beekeepers Association's Veteran Beekeeping School, installed two beehives within the campus's 11-acre prairie restoration site this spring.

"Todd had brought up the idea of, 'why don't we have bees at the prairie?' The idea kind of took off from there," said Bailey. The project quickly evolved from a class outreach idea to a sustainable initiative with both environmental and personal benefits.

"Each person faces unique struggles and challenges, and bees can impact these differently," said Lee. "For me, I can say that confronting and overcoming my fears gives me a sense of confidence. Once you realize that you can tackle something again, you begin to rebuild your confidence and boost your self-esteem."

The two hope the program can eventually be scaled up, producing honey for local use and creating hands-on learning opportunities for students across disciplines. They also see it as a long-term resource for fellow veterans.

"We want to incorporate as many veterans as possible who are interested in engaging with bees and learning about beekeeping," said Lee. "It's something that we can use as a platform to help multiple people who may be struggling."

Together, these three programs reflect a shift in higher education. Through academic support, community-building, and student-led innovation, colleges across the country are recognizing the value student veterans bring and ensuring they thrive in their post-service journeys. ●

Proud to Serve Those Who Served

Northern Illinois University is proud to have earned a **2025-2026 Military Friendly® School** Silver designation and been named a **Spouse Friendly School**. This honor is another recognition of our work to make all students feel valued, respected and supported.

Our Office of Military and Veteran Services works every day with partners on and off campus to serve all veteran, active duty, reservist/guard members and their families. We offer student-centered programming and support services to create a meaningful learning environment. Our military-affiliated students benefit from unique opportunities designed for their needs. We are committed to ensuring their success in the classroom and beyond.



Northern Illinois University



Northern Illinois University is proud to be recognized as a **Diversity Champion** and four-time recipient of the **Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award**.



MULTIPLE ORGANIZATIONS LEAD THE CHARGE TO SAFEGUARD HBCU HISTORY

By Kat Castagnoli

“There were so many stories that needed to be told.” That’s how Cassandra Illidge, executive director of the HBCU Grants Program at Getty Images, describes the growing urgency behind a groundbreaking initiative to preserve and digitize the legacy of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Now, thanks to a first-of-its-kind partnership with Ancestry.com, that mission is expanding beyond rare photography to include thousands of documents, artifacts, and student records—many of which have never been accessible to the public until now.

Launched in April, the initiative will support ten HBCUs in digitizing archival collections—everything from century-old yearbooks and bulletins to handwritten ledgers and deteriorating photographs. These materials will not only be preserved for institutional use but will also become available through Ancestry’s global platform, connecting alumni, descendants, and researchers to long-overlooked stories.

“Our partnership with Ancestry enhances our commitment to preserving the valuable history of HBCUs and increases access, visibility,

and awareness of untold stories for a global audience,” Illidge said. “By connecting students, alumni, and institutions through genealogy, we aim to create a richer context for historical research and foster a deeper understanding of family history.”

Beyond Imagery: A Broader Vision

Originally launched in 2021, the HBCU Grants Program began by focusing on photographic preservation. But during visits to partner institutions,

“Our partnership with Ancestry enhances our commitment to preserving the valuable history of HBCUs and increases access, visibility, and awareness of untold stories for a global audience.”

Cassandra Illidge

Illidge and her team quickly recognized the need to expand its archival scope. “Vital records and historical documents also need attention, as they significantly contribute to the important legacy of HBCUs,” she explained.

This shift comes as Black institutional memories face growing threats—from underfunded archives to political pushback against any efforts that might be considered related to DEI.

The Getty–Ancestry collaboration positions HBCUs at the forefront of telling their own stories on their own terms.

Participating institutions retain full copyright ownership of their materials. Digitization occurs collaboratively and on-site, with all digital files returned directly to the HBCU. Getty and Ancestry also provide campus-wide access to Ancestry’s genealogical research tools.

“By combining the vast archives of these historic institutions with Ancestry’s cutting-edge technology, we’re protecting these important documents and opening the door for families to uncover untold stories,” said Dr. Lisa Pearl, Ancestry’s head of U.S. content and philanthropic initiatives.

HOW GETTY IMAGES' HBCU GRANTS PROGRAM GIVES BACK

100% of revenue from the licensing of HBCU content on GettyImages.com directly benefits the HBCU community.

Lincoln University Leads the Way

The first institution to formally join the Getty–Ancestry collaboration is Lincoln University in Pennsylvania—the nation's first degree-granting HBCU. Already home to more than 700 digitized photographs on GettyImages.com, Lincoln is now expanding its archive to include 19th- and 20th-century documents, student publications, and fragile ledgers.

“We're not just talking about Black history—we're talking about American history,” said Harry Stinson III, interim vice president of institutional advancement at Lincoln. “These records show what African Americans have been able to achieve when given the space and opportunity to learn and to thrive.”

Students at participating HBCUs will also gain hands-on archival training through the project, supported by Denny's Hungry for Education stipend. They'll help digitize materials, apply metadata, and interpret the records—making history tangible while gaining practical skills.

HBCU Week NOW Joins the Archival Effort

The digital preservation effort doesn't end there. In May, HBCU Week NOW, an online media platform on YouTube and Instagram, announced a new initiative to build a digital archive of HBCU commencement speeches and recruitment videos.

With more than 11,000 YouTube subscribers and a growing multimedia presence, the platform is calling on HBCUs nationwide to submit recordings of keynotes and recruitment spotlights. These often-overlooked moments will be curated into a shareable, searchable library—amplifying messages of achievement, tradition, and institutional pride.

“Recruitment and commencement are two important highlights on a student's HBCU journey,” said Travis E. Mitchell, founding executive of HBCU Week NOW. “Through cinematically

produced, compelling video storytelling, we're creating a vibrant and inclusive community that honors the power and depth of HBCU experiences.”

The video archive will offer alumni a chance to reflect and help prospective students and families visualize the energy and legacy of HBCU life. Submissions will be featured as both full-length speeches and highlight reels—bringing local moments into the national spotlight.

Resisting Erasure and Empowering the Future

As debates over “patriotic education” and curriculum censorship escalate,

HBCUs and their advocates are sending a clear message: the legacy of education at Black colleges and universities is not up for revision.

“Regardless of administration, or any other changes, we're not changing our goals and mission,” Illidge said. “This amazing material that's coming from HBCUs is just another line of history we can share with the world.”

Together, Getty Images, Ancestry.com, and HBCU Week NOW are transforming the future of archival access—ensuring the full story of Black academic excellence is not only preserved but made powerful and public for generations to come. ●

50%

of royalties go directly to the HBCU represented.

30%

supports student scholarships via the Thurgood Marshall College Fund.

20%

is reinvested into the Grants Program to digitize and preserve additional HBCU archives.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE

HBCUs interested in submitting commencement speeches or recruitment content can contact Christina Royster, project manager at HBCU Week Now, at christina.hbcuweeknow@mpt.org.

Explore the Getty HBCU Collection or inquire about joining the HBCU Grants Program:





Scaling Success

The Movement Driving a New Era for HBCUs

By Erik Cliburn

A large-scale initiative is quietly reshaping the future of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Through the HBCU Transformation Project, 40 institutions—public, private, rural, and urban—are working together to improve enrollment, graduation rates, and student success, while building models that could influence the rest of higher education.

The project, launched in 2021 and led by the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCFF), United Negro College Fund (UNCF), and Partnership for Education Advancement, is grounded in the idea that collaboration can achieve more than competition. Rather than working in isolation, participating schools are sharing systems, strategies, and lessons learned—creating what organizers call a “networked approach” to institutional improvement.

The primary goals of the project are to increase enrollment and graduation rates at HBCUs by 40% and 54%, respectively, and in doing so create more and better economic opportunities for Black communities. That vision has drawn significant support from the philanthropic community. Blue Meridian Partners, a New York-based funder focused on scalable solutions to social challenges, invested \$60 million to help launch the initiative and committed an additional \$124 million in 2023 based on early progress.

“This very significantly scaled grant from them signals to the philanthropic community that this is a really good investment to make,”

said Michael Lomax, president and CEO of UNCF, in an interview with the Associated Press.

Some of the early results are promising. South Carolina State University used part of the first round of funding to modernize its enrollment and financial aid systems, replacing

A recent study found that in 2019 alone, eight Ivy League universities received \$5.5 billion from top U.S. foundations, while 99 HBCUs received just \$45 million. Between 2002 and 2019, foundation support for HBCUs declined 30%—even before adjusting for inflation.

a patchwork of disconnected tools with a unified platform that improved communication with prospective students. As a result, first-year enrollment climbed from 371 students in 2019 to 1,200 in 2023.

Other institutions are adopting tools like InsideTrack’s student coaching services, which provide one-on-one support to students and staff, and Mainstay’s AI-powered chatbot, which helps campuses engage students through real-time text and web communication. A shared customer relationship management (CRM)

platform—referred to as HBCU Dx—is streamlining administrative workflows and freeing up staff to focus on student-facing work.

The collaborative approach is particularly important in a sector that has long faced structural barriers. A recent study found that in 2019 alone, eight Ivy League universities received \$5.5 billion from top U.S. foundations, while 99 HBCUs received just \$45 million. Between 2002 and 2019, foundation support for HBCUs declined 30%—even before adjusting for inflation.

“It’s long overdue,” Rutgers professor Marybeth Gasman, an expert on HBCUs, told the Associated Press. “Sharing services is a great idea for financially under-resourced institutions—frankly most colleges and universities benefit from sharing services.”

While progress has been strong, the HBCU Transformation Project is still in its early stages. Participating schools must meet benchmarks around enrollment, graduation, and post-graduation employment to sustain funding.

Still, leaders are embracing the challenge. Blue Meridian’s Jim Shelton said the organization would rather see schools “set ambitious goals and miss them” than aim too low.

As the project expands and more funders join, organizers hope the model will not only transform the 102 HBCUs nationwide but will also demonstrate what’s possible when institutions work together to meet the needs of today’s students. ●

Clark Atlanta University's HBCU Executive Leadership Institute Prepares the Next Generation of HBCU Leaders



By Andriell M. Dees, JD, vice president of Executive Search, Greenwood Asher & Associates

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have been the backbone for many African Americans to create opportunity and legacy. My grandmother Ella Olivia Taylor Buggs was the first person to graduate from college in my family. She graduated from Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina in 1912. I proudly have her picture (see below) and her degree posted in my office as a reminder that this accomplishment was no small feat for a family rooted in Abbeville, South Carolina.

In this picture is William David Chapelle, who served the university as president and a chair of the board of trustees. He, along with other brave men and women, had the courage and fortitude to ensure that African Americans would have the opportunity to become educated leaders impacting society at local, national, and global levels.

This legacy of leadership lives on through the HBCU Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) at Clark

Atlanta University. The program, now in its fifth year, is led by Dr. Phyllis A. Dawkins, former president of Bennett College, and Dr. Cheryl Davenport Dozier, president emerita of Savannah State University.

A selective cohort of leaders come from both academic and non-academic careers to persevere through a rigorous yearlong program, which dives deep into core leadership and executive competencies customized for the unique challenges facing HBCUs now and in the future.

With the average tenure of HBCU presidents at just over three years, setting up the leadership bench is critical. Furthermore, while higher education is filled with continuous landmines, making the road difficult for all institutions, the stakes are higher for HBCUs, whose mission it is to educate the communities that need and deserve access to higher education.

The HBCU ELI cohort receives mentorship from current and past presidents as well as executives that are

leaders in their fields. More importantly, they come away with a family of peers and colleagues that are rooting them on to fulfill their dreams, as well as those of their ancestors. Having the privilege to meet this year's cohort as a panelist for executive search firms was a warm and inviting experience. Collectively, my fellow colleagues in executive search the profession emphasized the importance of networking and staying connected to us as well as each other.

The result of this program speaks for itself. In its first five years, six fellows have entered executive ranks as college presidents, and more than half have been promoted to new roles.

Creating leaders in higher education is essential but taking the mantle to lead HBCUs into the next generation is crucial. On behalf of my grandmother, my grandfather (Allen University class of 1921), and my family's four generations of college graduates, thank you to HBCU ELI for developing our future HBCU leaders. ●



Left: HBCU Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) 2025 Community Fellows. Right: Allen University students with university leader William David Chapelle sitting in the middle. My grandmother, Ella Olivia Taylor Buggs, is the 6th person from the left wearing an Allen flag.

The Fight for Funding Equity for HBCUs

By Misty Evans



Historically Black colleges and universities are stepping up advocacy efforts to address long standing inequities in federal and state funding, exposing a gap that advocates say undermines the sustainability of these institutions. Heads of state-supported HBCUs, lawmakers, and civil rights organizations have highlighted a long-running funding deficit and ongoing underinvestment that remains chronic.

“Public and private HBCUs have been suffering from funding disparities for decades,” states a 2023 report from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), noting that perennial financial shortfalls have limited these institutions’ capacity to deliver on their mission and provide equal educational opportunities.

A Legacy of Unequal Investment

The roots of the financial disparity trace back to the Morrill Act of 1890, which extended land grant status to Black colleges in southern states. Although these institutions, including Virginia State University and Lincoln University, were entitled to the same federal resources as their White counterparts under the original 1862 and 1890 Morrill Acts, states systematically failed to honor those obligations.

A 2025 *HBCU Buzz* feature noted that Lincoln University was owed nearly \$362 million in land grant funding by 2020. This debt underscores a wider pattern: Black land grant institutions have habitually not received equitable funding, undermining their ability to support research, improve infrastructure, and enhance student services.

Meanwhile, HBCUs contend with far smaller endowments compared to predominantly White institutions (PWIs). According to a 2021 Century Foundation report, public HBCUs average just \$7,265 in endowment per student, compared with \$25,390 at PWI public colleges. Private HBCUs fare slightly better at \$24,989 per student, but still trail the \$184,409 per student average at private PWIs, a striking imbalance.

Growing Advocacy and Federal Response

This has triggered renewed advocacy at multiple levels. The NAACP adopted resolutions calling for the

restoration of allocated monies and equitable federal and state support, including future litigation to demand relief for years of underfunding.

Experts also argue that private philanthropy alone cannot compensate for the shortfall in public funding. A 2021 Century Foundation analysis affirmed that strong alumni engagement and major gifts, including those from donors like MacKenzie Scott and the Lilly Endowment, remain insufficient to fill the gap left by public investment.

In response to advocacy pressure, the federal government made significant investments in recent years:

- The Biden administration allocated over \$17 billion to HBCUs since 2021, including \$1.3 billion in new grants unveiled at the 2024 HBCU Week Conference.
- In 2021, Congress passed legislation providing \$250 million in annual, permanent federal funding for HBCUs.
- In 2022, the American Rescue Plan added \$2.7 billion in emergency support for these institutions, and in 2024, the figure rose to \$17 billion in allocated federal grants overall.

In addition, in April, President Donald Trump signed an executive order establishing a White House initiative on HBCUs, “to enhance HBCUs’ capacity to deliver high-quality education to a growing number of students.” This specifically included a goal of working on addressing barriers to HBCUs receiving certain federal and state grant dollars and improving their competitiveness for research and development funding.

But despite federal action, advocates argue that equity also demands equitable treatment at the state level. Lincoln University’s hundreds of millions of dollars of debt underlines how states have fallen short. Across the country, numerous public 1890 land grant institutions are pursuing similar accounting for years—or even decades—of missing dollars.

The Human Toll

Funding inequities carry serious consequences. NBC News reports that reduced federal support and looming

threats to the U.S. Education Department have prompted leaders at several HBCUs to prepare for life “without government funding.”

NBC also notes a “culture of concern” among HBCU administrators, who fear that broader political shifts and institutional instability could hamper their ability to recruit top faculty, maintain student services, and invest in campus infrastructure.

“Colleges across the country are facing battles with the federal government over funding, but similar cuts may be existential for historically Black colleges,” NBC reported.

An absence of resources can exacerbate student debt burdens: a 2021 UNCF study found that more than 87% of Black students at HBCUs strongly supported debt cancellation, tying the issue to the legacy of underinvestment.

What’s Next

HBCUs are pushing for advocacy on multiple fronts:

- Calls for Congress to issue back payments under the Morrill Act.
- Pending litigation to compel states to remedy funding neglect.

- Continued lobbying for inclusion in federal research and infrastructure funding.
- Private sector investment to augment but not substitute foundational public funding.

“There has long been bipartisan support for these colleges,” Rep. Terri Sewell of Alabama told the Associated Press. “But there will be new vigilance of their federal support in light of the administration’s record on programs serving minorities.”

Although federal investments since 2021 represent a significant shift, advocates note that true equity means addressing enduring state-level responsibility for underfunding, particularly for 1890 land grant HBCUs. Absent that, foundational financial disparities will persist.

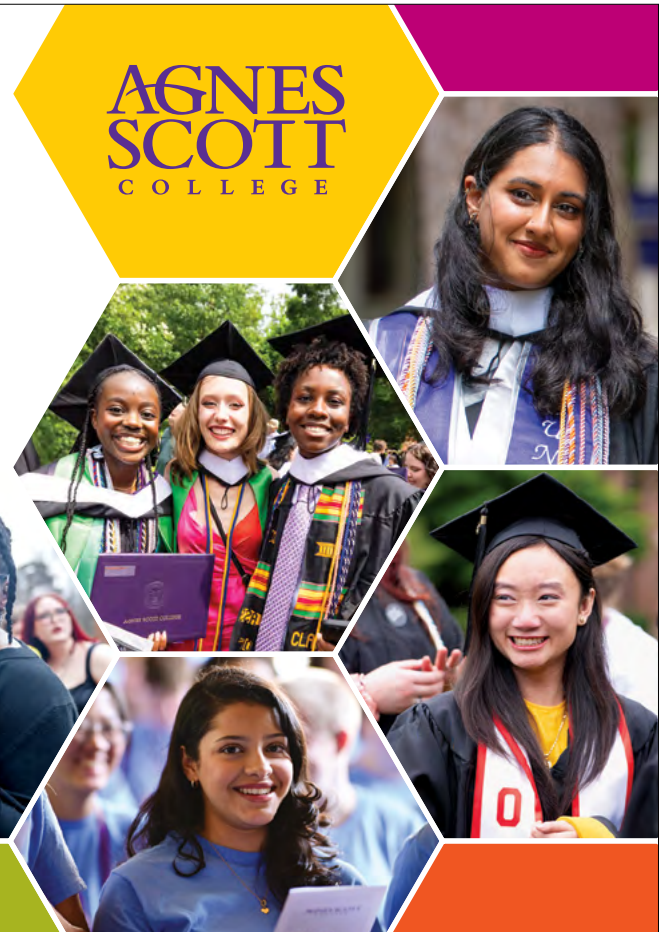
Necessary funding is more than symbolic: adequate endowments, capital spending, and operational support are necessary to sustain HBCUs’ role in elevating Black students, reducing debt burdens, driving community development, and fostering leadership.

“Even robust private giving cannot adequately sustain HBCUs,” the Century Foundation analysis concluded. As advocacy efforts intensify, HBCUs and their allies will keep pushing until the public funding they’ve long been owed becomes a lasting reality. ●

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Rooted In Legacy, Rising With Purpose

How HBCUs are Sustaining Belonging Amid Uncertain Times



The Central State University chorus performs during the 2025 commencement ceremony. (Photo courtesy of Central State University)

At a time when higher education is under immense scrutiny financially, politically, and culturally—historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) remain steadfast in their mission to serve, uplift, and innovate.

These institutions, long anchored in principles of access, justice, and excellence, are not just weathering the storm—they are reshaping what belonging looks like on today's college campuses.

Insight Into Academia reached out to HBCUs, and asked them to reflect on how they are maintaining inclusive, welcoming environments while navigating the shifting landscape of American higher education. Their responses highlight deeply rooted institutional missions, community-centered partnerships, and bold new strategies to support students and faculty alike.

From reimagining the college-to-career pipeline to building whole-community support models, these institutions are taking creative, mission-driven approaches that center on student success. Their efforts show that fostering authentic inclusion is not just about campus culture—it's about leadership, innovation, and a refusal to compromise on the values that have guided them for generations.

How does your institution's history and mission uniquely contribute to your approach in cultivating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all?

Savannah State University

Founded in 1890, Savannah State University (SSU) holds the distinction of being Georgia's first public Historically Black College and University—and the first institution of higher education in the city of Savannah. For 135 years, SSU has been a beacon of excellence. Rooted in a mission to prepare productive members of a global society through rigorous instruction, scholarly research, meaningful service, and civic engagement, SSU has remained steadfast in its commitment to student success. Its unique location—nestled within Savannah's coastal salt marsh—offers a living laboratory for innovation and exploration, enriching generations of students through transformative, hands-on learning experiences.

Paul Quinn College

As the nation's first and only Urban Work College, Paul Quinn College is imagining, re-defining, and creating what higher education in America looks like. The college's approach brings whole families and students from an early age to be exposed to college life with the assumption that they will pursue higher education—regardless of their family background or

economic situation. Additionally, Paul Quinn is developing an innovative housing model and companion mixed-use community on campus—a city within a city—where housing, retail, and even service members like police and teachers will live. U.S. Census data show the surrounding area has a 25.2% poverty rate and more than 30% of those living in poverty are 18 or younger. Paul Quinn's campus community will allow children and families to thrive in a safe environment with quality schools, housing and opportunities.

Morehouse College

Morehouse College's legacy as the only institution founded to educate men of color shapes its unwavering commitment to inclusion and equity. Since 1867, the college has championed social justice, intellectual rigor, and servant leadership. With a student body where 60% come from low-income households, Morehouse fosters upward mobility through a nationally ranked core curriculum and robust support systems. Its record of producing Rhodes Scholars,

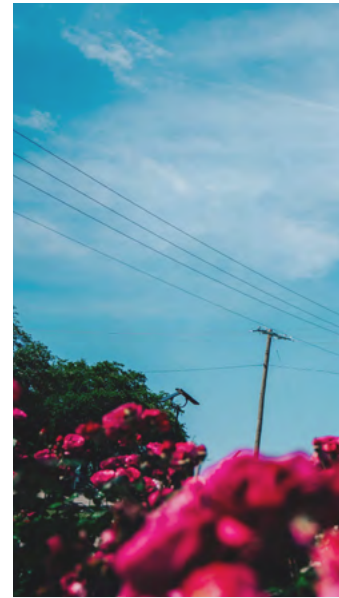
What is a Work College?

Work Colleges are a small but distinct group of four-year liberal arts institutions where all resident students participate in a structured work-learning-service program throughout their enrollment. Federally recognized and student centered, these colleges integrate academic study with meaningful work experiences and community service, aiming to develop responsibility, reduce educational costs, and enrich the overall college experience.

Unlike traditional institutions, Work Colleges require every residential student to hold a job—either on campus or through approved off-campus placements—as part of their education. The model is built on the idea that combining work with learning fosters practical skills, strong work ethics, and a commitment to community.



Lane College students participate in the Pink Out Breast Cancer Awareness Walk & Prayer event on Oct. 14, 2024. (Photo courtesy of Lane College)



Fortune 500 recruits, and top doctoral candidates reflects a mission rooted in empowering marginalized communities. Morehouse’s environment cultivates belonging, purpose, and excellence, while addressing systemic inequities through education, advocacy, and leadership development.

Lane College

Lane College’s history, founded in 1882 to educate newly-freed slaves, is deeply rooted in the pursuit of access, equity, and empowerment through education. This legacy informs a mission centered on developing the “whole student” in a supportive, faith-based environment. The college embraces belonging and equal opportunity as foundational values, fostering a campus culture where every student feels seen, heard, and valued. Through intentional mentorship, culturally responsive teaching, and a strong sense of community, Lane College creates a welcoming space that honors its past while preparing all students to thrive in a global, interconnected world.

How does your institution create spaces where students and employees feel seen, heard, and supported?

Claflin University

At the center of everything we do is a system of values informing and guiding all policies and programs. These values, expressed through our decisions and actions, are defined by five overarching guiding principles: commitment to excellence: we strive for excellence through creativity, innovation, and efficiency that allow for optimization of resources. Commitment to valuing

people: we value people by providing a safe, wholesome, and healthy environment that fosters mutual respect, diversity, and inclusion. Commitment to being student centered: we focus on all aspects of student life including student-centered education by embedding skills that foster life-long learning and independent problem solving. Commitment to exemplary educational programs: we provide exceptional programs and an effective learning community by ensuring the highest standards of academic excellence. Commitment to fiscal accountability: we promote and foster a culture of compliance, integrity, and fiscal responsibility throughout the university.

What new partnerships or recent ventures have been impactful in advancing your mission or serving your community?

Central State University

Central State University (CSU), Ohio’s only public HBCU and a proud 1890 land grant institution, has earned the prestigious Carnegie R2 designation, recognizing its growing impact in research. Recent advancements include launching a federally funded semiconductors and microelectronics internship program and joining the national HBCU-Chips Network to expand opportunities in emerging technologies. Rising senior Kayvon Adderley was honored for research excellence through this initiative. Additionally, Dr. Colin Lasu was selected for the Fulbright-Hays program in Ghana, further strengthening CSU’s global academic reach. These milestones reflect our deep commitment to innovation and shaping the future of higher education.



Paul Quinn's Health & Wellness Center
(Photo courtesy of Paul Quinn)

Drake State Community and Technical College

Drake State's LPN Launch Program with Huntsville Hospital gives students hands-on training and guarantees them a job with the hospital upon completion. The program is a win for students who get experience working in their future place of employment and learn the standards of the organization first-hand. It's also a win for the employer who has a pipeline of quality LPNs to join their ranks. Additionally, becoming a member of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund has helped students earn scholarships and access professional development opportunities.

North Carolina Central University

North Carolina Central University (NCCU) has built strategic partnerships to advance its mission and support student success. A \$1 million grant from Google aids the nation's first AI institute at an HBCU, offering mentorship and workforce training. IBM and the IBM-HBCU Quantum Center provide training in emerging technologies, while Cisco's \$9.4 million gift enhances cybersecurity infrastructure. Intel's \$5 million investment supports a tech law and policy center. NCCU also partners with Project Kitty Hawk to expand flexible online pathways for adult learners. These collaborations offer hands-on experience, certifications, and access to innovation, aligning with NCCU's focus on academic excellence and transformational growth. ●



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The Tech Boom at HBCUs: Bridging the Gap in STEM and Tech Careers

By Misty Evans



As tech companies grapple with the glaring underrepresentation of Black professionals in STEM fields, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are not waiting for change—they’re engineering it. Through bold partnerships, innovative programs, and community-rooted strategies, HBCUs nationwide are becoming launchpads for the next generation of tech talent.

In Alabama, Charisse Stokes is at the forefront of this transformation. As president of Tidal IT Solutions and leader of The Alabama Collective and TechMGM, she works closely with all 14 of Alabama’s HBCUs to embed students in real-world innovation ecosystems.

“For us, it’s all about the four E’s: education, exposure, engagement, and empowerment,” Stokes says. “We visit every campus, run training in cybersecurity, data analytics, and entrepreneurship, and host hands-on events where students connect directly with tech professionals.”

Those connections often translate into tangible outcomes. The Alabama Collective hosts multiple pitch competitions each year—one in the fall during the Magic City Classic and another in the spring focused on app development—distributing nearly \$40,000 annually in startup capital. The group also co-hosts an annual Innovate Alabama Entrepreneurship Hackathon. Winners gain not just seed funding but also ongoing coaching and entry into national-level builder programs.

“We’re not just handing them cash and walking away,” Stokes says. “We want to equip students with the mentorship and industry connections to turn those ideas into sustainable companies or careers.”

Stokes points to the app build-and-pitch competition as a personal favorite. “It’s amazing to watch technical students pitch in everyday language. They’re solving real-world problems—from how to support the elderly to

streamlining digital consent forms,” she says. “You see their creativity and technical chops, but also their ability to collaborate and communicate. That’s what industry is looking for.”

Across the South and beyond, similar efforts are gaining ground.

In June 2021, Google awarded Howard University a \$5 million unrestricted grant as part of a \$50 million package to ten HBCUs. The funding is used to strengthen STEM infrastructure, scholarships, curriculum, and career services.

Morgan State University in Baltimore has emerged as a national leader in cybersecurity. It received a \$9 million grant from the Office of Naval Research to expand AI, machine learning, and cybersecurity research. In partnership with IBM, the school also launched a Cybersecurity Leadership Center offering free access to cloud software and simulated attack training. And through its Cybersecurity Assurance and Policy Center, fully funded Ph.D. candidates benefit from internships and research opportunities under the National Science Foundation’s CyberCorps initiative.

Morgan’s influence also extends into financial technology. A recent \$1.05 million Ripple grant supports the university’s National FinTech Center, enhancing blockchain research and fintech programming.

While these large-scale efforts show the national momentum behind HBCU tech partnerships, Alabama’s model offers a unique statewide blueprint.

The HBCU Innovation Experience—a collaboration between Innovate Alabama and The Alabama Collective—trains students and faculty in coding, app development, business management, and entrepreneurship. Students participate in hackathons, pitch competitions, networking events, and leadership roundtables. So far, the program has seen more than 1,000 participants across Alabama, awarded over \$40,000 in prizes, and helped

more than 20 students achieve Apple certifications.

For Stokes, exposure to STEM and tech should start young. “It’s about ensuring our children don’t just consume technology but become digital innovators,” Stokes says. We want to teach them to build, create, and problem-solve—not just swipe a screen.”

That early mindset shift is key, she notes. “It starts with exposure. A lot of kids think, ‘I don’t like math, so I can’t be in tech.’ But STEM is much broader than that. When we introduce coding, cyber, app building—when we show them the variety—something clicks.”

Programs like Code.org are one tool in Alabama’s early pipeline strategy. The state is the only one in the country to meet all of Code.org’s foundational goals for K–12 computer science education. Since the launch of the Alabama Computer Science Advisory Council, which Stokes co-leads, the percentage of schools teaching computer science has grown from 18% to more than 80%.

“We aim to reach every student, from elementary through high school,” Stokes says. “In December, we encourage schools to celebrate Computer Science Education Week by hosting an Hour of Code using age-appropriate, hands-on activities.”

According to the Pew Research Center, Black workers comprise about 11% of the U.S. labor force but hold just 9% of STEM jobs, including only 5% in engineering and 7% in computing. HBCUs are working to close that gap, not just by enrolling students, but by equipping them for competitive, cutting-edge careers.

Although HBCUs account for only about 9% of Black undergraduates, they produce nearly 18% of all Black bachelor’s degrees in STEM, according to the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics. Between 2010 and 2020, 25% of Black students earning research doctorates had completed their

undergraduate degrees at HBCUs.

But success requires more than individual effort—it needs policy support.

“About 18 months ago, I’d have told you we were making real progress,” Stokes says. “But there’s been a disruption. Some federal STEM scholarships were paused, and programs were halted. We’ve seen a reshuffling of priorities.”

Still, she sees signs of hope. “There have been recent executive orders that prioritize AI and HBCU involvement. We have some committed partners, both in and out of government, who understand the talent that exists at HBCUs and are all in.”

To scale this momentum, Stokes emphasizes the need for statewide collaboration. “We can’t be territorial. Alabama has a state STEM council, a computer science advisory council, and regional STEM ecosystems. We each have different focuses but shared missions. That allows us to build something bigger together.”

Her advice to other states and institutions? Start with your local ecosystem.

“Find the organizations already doing the work. Connect your HBCUs, public agencies, and industry partners. Build relationships. Align missions. And don’t try to own it all—collaborate.”

The formula, she notes, doesn’t have to be complicated. “It’s about opening doors, staying current with industry needs, and giving students real-world tools to walk through those doors confidently.”

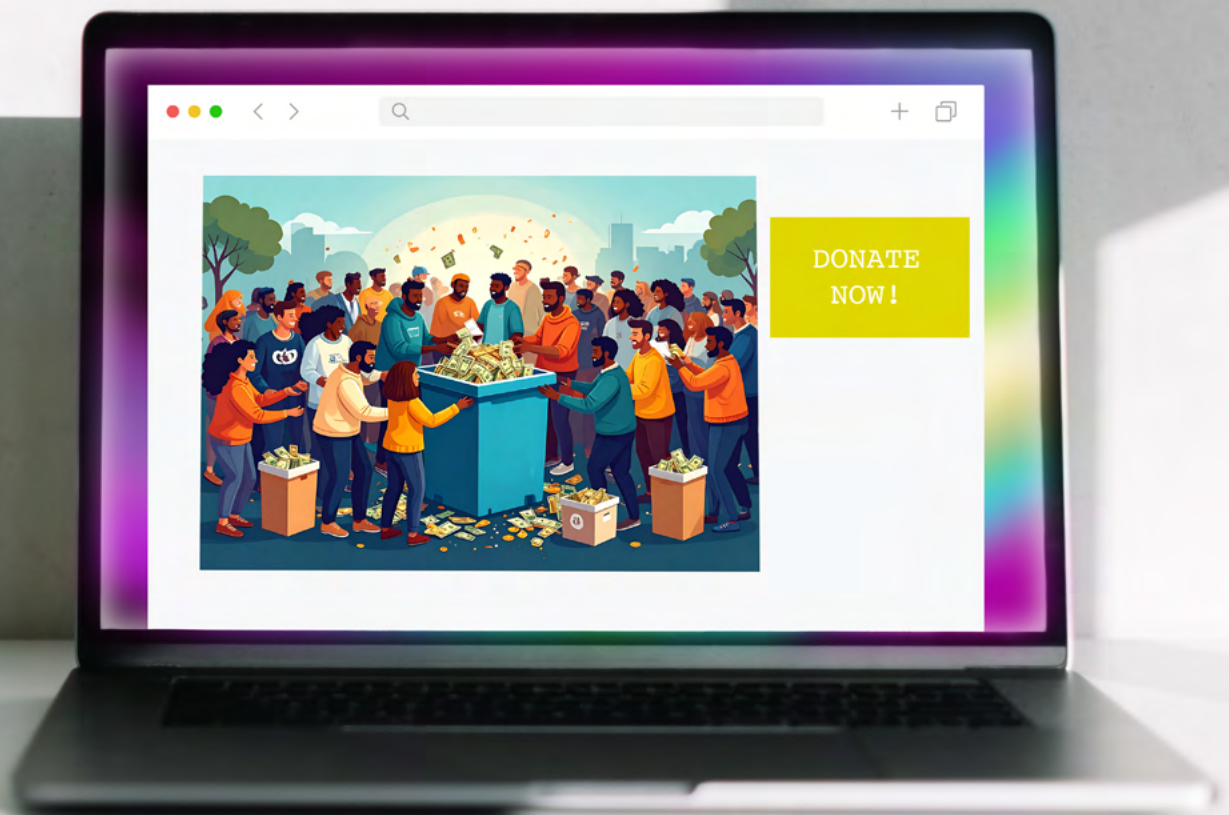
And that, she adds, is what makes the Alabama Collective model work. “We complement the curriculum, not replace it. AI might take years to get formally added to a degree plan, but we can pop up on campus today and run a workshop. We can meet students where they are and prepare them for what’s next.”

From Google’s grant to Howard to Montgomery’s hands-on hackathons, one thing is clear: HBCUs aren’t waiting for tech’s future—they’re building it. ●

Crowdfunding Research: The New Trend?

As traditional funding sources grow more restricted, scholars and universities are looking to the public to power progress.

By Misty Evans



In a small lab at the University of Washington, evolutionary biologist Dr. Emily Lescak is sequencing salmon DNA with a modest but meaningful budget—not from the National Science Foundation or a major pharmaceutical sponsor, but from hundreds of strangers on the internet. Her research is one of many funded through Experiment.com, a platform where the public can directly donate to support scientific discovery.

As traditional funding avenues face increased politicization, scrutiny, and budget cuts, researchers and institutions are rethinking the question that has long dogged academia: Who pays for knowledge?

From GoFundMe campaigns to alumni giving circles, a growing number of scholars are turning to people-

Engineering Statistics, federal research and development funding peaked at 2% of GDP in the 1960s and has since fallen to around 0.7%. Meanwhile, the approval rate for research grants through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) hovers around 20%, with even lower success rates for early-career scholars and interdisciplinary projects.

At the same time, public universities in states with politically conservative legislatures have seen increased oversight of research funding. In Florida, for example, Governor Ron DeSantis signed a 2023 law that restricts the use of state funds for diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, leading some researchers to lose support for studies perceived as “ideological.”

“A lot of early-stage or high-risk research just doesn’t get funded by federal agencies,” said Experiment.com Co-Founder Cindy Wu in a 2022 interview with *Nature*. “Crowdfunding gives researchers a shot at proving their idea is worth exploring.”

Outside of science-specific platforms, Kickstarter has funded archaeological digs, educational tools, and open-source hardware linked to academic labs. For instance, in 2019, a team from the University of Cambridge raised more than \$20,000 for a public archaeology project in Jordan through the platform, according to reporting from *Ars Technica*.

More urgent or community-based projects often land on GoFundMe. In 2021, residents of Richmond,

“A lot of early-stage or high-risk research just doesn’t get funded by federal agencies. Crowdfunding gives researchers a shot at proving their idea is worth exploring.”

Experiment.com Co-Founder Cindy Wu

powered funding models to keep their work alive. As government support is often delayed or denied for studies in politically-sensitive areas such as climate change, racial equity, reproductive health, LGBTQ+ well-being, crowdfunding, and micro-philanthropy are emerging as vital lifelines.

Federal support for research and development in the U.S. has been declining as a share of GDP for decades. According to data from the National Center for Science and

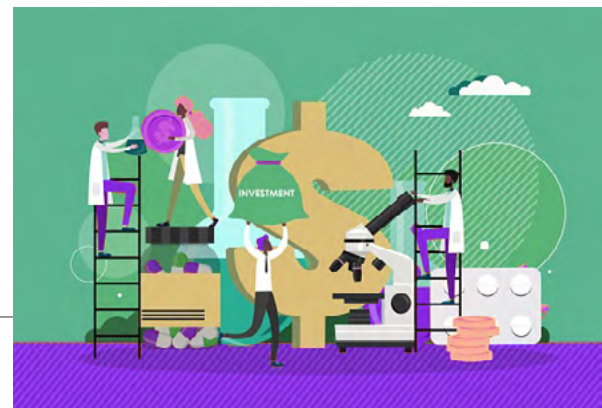
This climate has prompted a shift: if governments and corporations won’t foot the bill, maybe the public will.

Founded in 2012, Experiment.com now hosts hundreds of projects across fields like biology, astronomy, and environmental science, with researchers from institutions including Stanford, MIT, and Harvard. Unlike traditional grants, the platform allows scientists to pitch directly to the public. Backers receive regular updates, creating transparency and public engagement.

California, raised over \$10,000 for independent air quality monitoring near Chevron’s oil refinery, as reported by *Grist*.

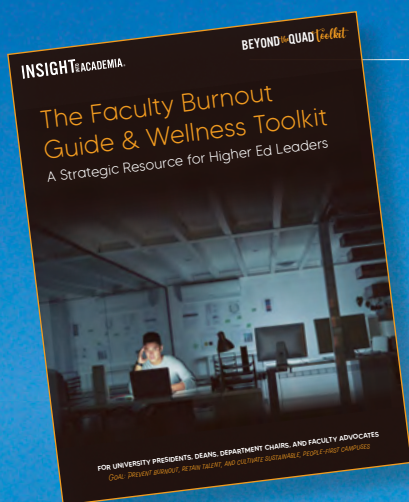
New Models of Collective Giving

Beyond individual crowdfunding campaigns, universities and scholars are experimenting with collective giving and micro-philanthropy. Research4Impact, a nonprofit founded in 2017, connects community groups with researchers and volunteer



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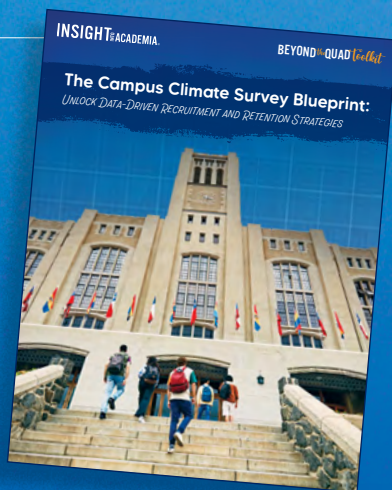


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analysts to co-produce studies around issues like environmental justice or public health.

Similarly, giving circles—groups of donors pooling funds to support shared causes—are increasingly used for university-based or adjacent research. According to a report by the Collective Giving Research Group, giving circles have grown significantly, with over 2,500 groups contributing more than \$1.3 billion since 2000. Many are now backing hyperlocal or equity-driven research projects.

Some faculty members have even created accounts on Patreon, a platform better known for supporting artists and content creators. There, researchers share exclusive content, lab updates, or educational resources with subscribers who chip in a few dollars monthly. While it won't replace a multimillion-dollar NIH grant, it can bridge gaps or pay for open-access publishing fees.

Democratizing Innovation

Supporters say this shift is democratizing science by making research more accessible and accountable to the public. It allows communities to invest in areas that matter to them—and scholars to stay in conversations with those they aim to serve.

Still, the model has limitations. As noted in a 2020 *Science* article, crowdfunding often favors projects that are “media-friendly,” emotionally compelling, or easily understood by the lay public. Groundbreaking but abstract theoretical work may struggle to gain traction.

Yet the appetite for alternative models is growing.

As federal funding stagnates and ideological battles target academic freedom, people-funded research may no longer be a fringe experiment. It might be the future.

Universities are beginning to formalize support. Some, like the University of California, Berkeley, have launched their own internal crowdfunding platforms to help faculty and students connect with donors. Others are building networks of alumni and parents to support innovation microgrants.

At a time when trust in institutions is eroding, there's a poetic twist to the public taking the reins. The democratization of research funding—warts and all—might just keep innovation alive.

As Dr. Lescak puts it: “When people believe in the work, they'll show up. And sometimes, they show up with their wallets.” ●

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A top-down view of various items on a light-colored surface. In the top left is a white spiral-bound notebook. To its right is a red book or folder with a white page sticking out. Further right is a tan straw hat. Below the hat are white earbuds with orange tips. In the bottom right is a white tablet with a black screen. In the bottom left is a pair of white leather sneakers. In the bottom center is a bright blue paper airplane.

A Precarious Future: The Uncertain Fate of International Students in the U.S.

By Erik Cliburn

As the 2025-2026 academic year approaches, thousands of international students face an unclear and increasingly inhospitable landscape in the United States. In a sweeping series of federal actions, the Trump administration has suspended visa processing, revoked student visas, and issued travel bans affecting nearly 20 countries.

For international students and the institutions that rely on them, the repercussions are immediate and far-reaching—legal, financial, cultural, and academic.

“This time in our country is a deeply uncertain one,” Boston University President Melissa Gilliam said in a recent interview. “Rapid changes to federal policies are calling into question many of the very foundational values and missions of colleges and universities nationwide.”

Boston University (BU), which hosts students from nearly 150 countries, has responded by expanding legal and immigration support. The university now offers free consultations with immigration attorneys, regular updates via webinars, and walk-in support through its International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO).

BU is not alone. Institutions across the country are scrambling to assist non-U.S. students amid evolving restrictions. At the University of Connecticut (UConn), new federal policies have prompted the launch of a centralized webpage to aid international students, scholars, and employees.

“These include a reported pause in expanding visa appointment availability, executive vetting procedures for biometric data, and a presidential proclamation limiting travel and entry from 19 countries,” UConn officials wrote in a June 12 statement. The university will also host webinars and coordinate with departments like human resources and the Center for

International Students and Scholars to offer timely guidance.

Harvard University has taken its fight to court. A June 5 letter from Harvard President Alan Garber decried a White House proclamation suspending entry to any international student at the university on an F or J visa.

“Singling out our institution... is yet another illegal step taken by the administration to retaliate against Harvard,” he wrote. The university has amended its lawsuit against the federal government and is urging the courts to immediately block the measure. Harvard leadership is simultaneously developing contingency plans to support impacted students and scholars.

The situation is even more precarious for smaller institutions. Gannon University, a private Catholic school in Erie, Pennsylvania, is preparing for a potential drop in international student enrollment this fall.

“Like every other school that has international students, this is a new reality that we're all wrestling with,” Doug Oathout, chief of staff for Gannon's president, told *The Erie Times-News*. “If it's significant, it could result in us having to adjust our staffing.”

The timing couldn't be worse. The state department's suspension of visa interviews—alongside heightened screening protocols and new bans targeting 19 nations—could derail fall enrollment plans for thousands. “This comes right at the time of year when students, after filing all their paperwork... have to sit down and have interviews,”

said Oathout. “If this pause is short-lived, it will be just an ill-timed bump in the road. But if it stretches out, it could really be disruptive for enrollment.”

Some students at Gannon have already been impacted. Earlier this spring, five had their visas revoked, though many have since been reinstated or won legal appeals. The university currently has seven students from the countries listed in the most recent travel bans—including Afghanistan, Venezuela, and Yemen—and is advising them to avoid international travel during academic breaks.

Beyond legal jeopardy, the potential economic consequences are enormous. According to the NAFSA: Association of International Educators, international students contributed \$43.8 billion to the U.S. economy and supported over 378,000 jobs in the 2023-2024 academic year alone. And many study in high-demand fields: More than half of all international students in the U.S. pursue STEM degrees, and many remain to attend graduate school, conduct research, or enter the tech sector.

“They play an incredibly important role for moving research forward,” Dick Startz, professor of economics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, told NPR. “These are also the people who are probably most likely to end up staying in the United States, raising their families here, contributing to high tech, often becoming entrepreneurs.”

Despite the Trump administration's focus on elite institutions like Harvard,

Why International Students are Critical to U.S. Higher Education's Future

As domestic enrollment declines and workforce gaps widen, international students are increasingly seen as vital to the future of U.S. higher education and the national economy. According to the Institute of International Education's (IIE) May 2025 Outlook 2030 Brief, over 1.1 million international students studied in the U.S. in the 2023–2024 academic year—a record high—and their numbers are expected to keep growing.

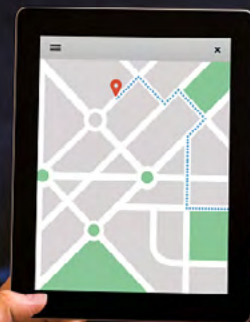
While these students currently make up only 6% of total enrollment across America's 4,000 colleges and universities, they offer disproportionate financial value. International students contribute more than \$50 billion annually to the U.S. economy and support nearly 400,000 jobs. In 11 states, including California, New York, and Texas, their economic impact exceeds \$1 billion.

Their academic role is just as significant. Over half of all international students pursue STEM fields, helping to drive research, innovation, and competitiveness in sectors like health care, tech, and manufacturing. A growing number also participate in Optional Practical Training (OPT), gaining up to three years of work experience and contributing directly to U.S. industries.

Global mobility is expected to exceed 9 million students by 2030, with much of the growth concentrated in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa—regions where demand for higher education outpaces local capacity. The U.S. has a unique opportunity to meet that demand, particularly as its domestic college-going population shrinks.

But seizing this opportunity will require adaptation. IIE recommends that U.S. institutions expand outreach efforts and increase support for international students across all types of institutions—including community colleges—and build more pathways for academic and career development.

Ultimately, international students do more than fill classrooms—they enrich campuses, foster diplomacy, and serve as long-term ambassadors for the U.S. Their continued presence will be essential in shaping a globally competitive, economically sustainable future for American higher education.



public universities host the bulk of international students—and often depend on their tuition revenue to support other critical areas.

“The tuition that’s brought in by international students is incredibly important,” Startz noted. At schools like the University of California or the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, international students can comprise up to a quarter of the student body. Their out-of-state tuition helps subsidize in-state enrollment and fund essential programs.

Meanwhile, the chilling effect of these federal policies is already visible. According to NAFSA Executive Director Fanta Aw, “Universities understand the value of those students and their contributions culturally, socially, [and to] research.” But early indicators show a sharp decline in

international interest in U.S. schools.

At Boston University, vice president and associate provost Willis Wang emphasized the role institutions must now play. After discovering that SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) records were being terminated without warning, BU’s ISSO began daily monitoring and initiated direct outreach to affected students.

“As soon as the ISSO team identified a termination, they would contact every impacted individual personally,” Wang said. “ISSO continues to regularly monitor SEVIS and communicate with students on many related matters.”

Wang also warned students against leaving the country until the visa situation stabilizes. “The recent presidential proclamation about entry to the U.S. and state department plans

to revoke visas support a concern that traveling internationally may be risky,” he said. Instead, he urges students to consult with ISSO advisors and use resources like the BU Support Pathways and travel advisory flow charts, which list potential hangups for international students re-entering the U.S. and urge preparedness.

Despite the fear and confusion, higher education leaders remain resolute in their support. “You matter deeply to us,” President Gilliam affirmed. “Boston University would not be what it is without you.”

It’s a sentiment echoed across institutions now scrambling to uphold their international commitments. But unless federal policy changes course, U.S. universities—and the students who dream of attending them—may face a much narrower future. ●



How Universities are Fostering Belonging in an Anti-DEI Climate

By Misty Evans

In states where diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) offices have been defunded or banned, many universities aren't backing down—they're rebranding.

Across the country, public colleges and universities are responding to political pressure by stripping "DEI" from signage, job titles, and office names. But the mission to support student belonging, wellness, and access for all continues; it just looks different.

In Utah, a 2024 law known as HB 261 prohibits the use of DEI-related terms in public institutions. At Utah Valley University (UVU), the "Office of Inclusion and Diversity" was renamed and its signage removed. But according to UVU President Astrid Tuminez, the university remains committed to ensuring all members "are seen, valued, welcomed, respected, included, represented, and heard," as quoted in *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

It's part of a larger trend. In states such as Florida, Texas, and Virginia, public universities are adopting new frameworks to ensure all students feel welcome and can be successful. "Wellness," "access," "student success," and "community care" are now common areas of focus instead.

At the University of Central Florida, the former DEI office is now the Department of Access and Community Engagement. According to Central Florida Public Media, the change was accompanied by eliminating the vice president of DEI role and restructuring under a broader student engagement model. The approach is strategic and critical.

Messaging as a Tool for Continuation

As of March 2025, more than 30 state legislatures had introduced, voted on, or enacted legislation to limit DEI offices, programs, or training in public higher education. Some of these laws

restrict the use of race or identity in scholarships, support programs, hiring, or employee training, forcing universities to find new avenues to continue this work.

George Mason University in Virginia recently renamed its DEI division the Office of Access, Compliance, and Community after state-level scrutiny. According to *The Washington Post*, the university is also reviewing whether to end all race-based student programming not explicitly required by federal law.

Rice University, a private institution in Texas, rebranded its office as the Office of Access and Institutional Excellence. The office now supports areas such as religious inclusion, student access, and LGBTQ+ thriving, according to its updated mission statement and reporting by *The Texas Tribune*.

"Belonging is created in the classroom, in the dorms, and in every office that listens first and labels second. Language helps, but what students feel is what sticks."

Dr. Rashida Green

From Language to Impact

Although some critics accuse these moves of being purely cosmetic, experts argue that language—while important—isn't the most critical part of building campus belonging.

According to a 2023 Gallup and Lumina Foundation study, students with a strong sense of belonging are twice as likely to report positive well-being, academic success, and persistence toward graduation. These outcomes are shaped

less by office titles and more by campus culture and individual experiences.

"Students aren't asking what our office is called," said Reed. "They're asking if someone on campus knows their name, understands their experience, and has their back."

Programs that focus on peer mentorship, relevant pedagogy, inclusive teaching, and cultural student organizations remain essential to this mission—even when bundled under new language.

"Belonging is created in the classroom, in the dorms, and in every office that listens first and labels second," said Dr. Rashida Green, a higher education consultant and former DEI director. "Language helps, but what students feel is what sticks."

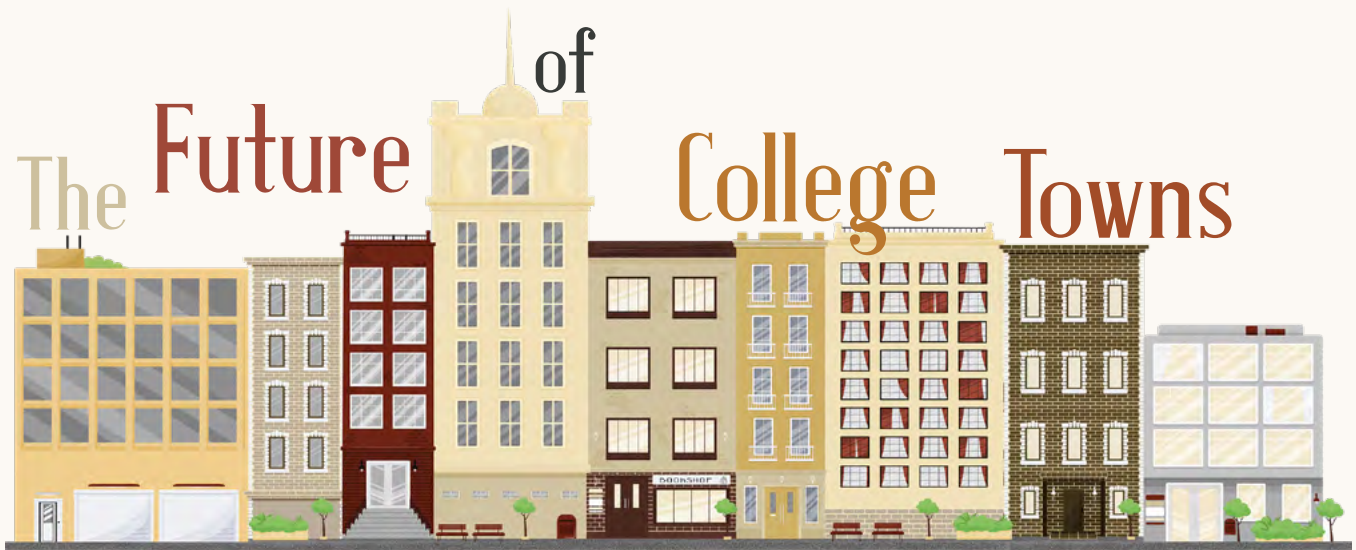
Balancing Risk and Responsibility

Many administrators are walking a tightrope between institutional values and political realities. For public colleges dependent on state funding or fearful of federal scrutiny, these changes are more than aesthetic.

At the University of Michigan, concerns over possible funding loss prompted leadership to end its longstanding diversity commitment and shut down its DEI central office. But in a public memo, the university said it would invest instead in expanded financial aid, multicultural student spaces, and inclusive events—channels through which belonging could still flourish.

"I know that naming it something else can be the difference between serving students—or not serving them at all," said Green.

As students continue to seek safety, support, and connection, universities are finding creative ways to answer that call, no matter what the sign on the door says. ●



How Universities are Reinventing Local Economic Partnerships

By Misty Evans

Once defined by local bars, bookstores, and the seasonal rush of students, America's college towns are undergoing a seismic shift. Housing shortages, inflation, and the rise of remote work are forcing universities and municipalities to rethink their relationships with each other—to one that's increasingly as economic as it is educational.

From bold new housing developments to public-private business incubators, universities across the country are working hand in hand with city councils, developers, and local nonprofits to reshape the fabric of their communities.

Rising rents and student overcrowding have been persistent challenges in college towns, but some universities are taking matters into their own hands. For example, the University of Utah signed a long-term land-lease agreement with American Campus Communities in October 2024 to build a 1,455-bed student housing project, according to *The Salt Lake Tribune*. The high-end development will include retail space, a café, ski storage, and even a bouldering wall.

The goal, according to the university, is

to relieve pressure on local rental markets while avoiding financial risk by working with private developers. "This public-private model limits the U's financial exposure," university spokesperson Chris Nelson said in the report, adding that it also generates long-term revenue through land lease payments.

Other universities are following suit. According to a 2023 report from the Urban Land Institute, higher education institutions are increasingly forming housing task forces, zoning reform committees, and public-private trust partnerships to tackle affordability without taxing city services.

Anchor Institutions Drive Urban Renewal

The idea of universities as "anchor institutions"—immovable entities with the power to revitalize their surrounding areas—is gaining traction. According to the Brookings Institution, colleges are leveraging their purchasing power, land holdings and research funding to act as economic engines for their towns.

Rice University's Ion District in Texas exemplifies this shift. Built in partnership with the city of Houston,

the \$100 million innovation hub opened in 2021 and includes labs, co-working spaces, and classrooms aimed at jumpstarting local tech businesses. According to *The Houston Chronicle*, Rice Management Company and the city negotiated a \$5 million community benefits agreement to ensure local hiring, workforce training, and affordable housing investment.

"Universities are stepping up to be not just educators but co-developers of their cities," said Amy Liu, a Brookings senior fellow in urban economics.

The startup economy is also redefining town-gown ties. According to Brookings' "Rise of Innovation Districts" report, more than 100 U.S. universities are partnering with local governments to form walkable innovation hubs that combine housing, research, entrepreneurship, and transit.

In Charlotte, North Carolina, University City Partners, an alliance of UNC Charlotte and local stakeholders, has helped build a support ecosystem for small businesses and local entrepreneurs. According to the organization's 2024 annual report, the partnership launched 15 new businesses in the last year alone, in part due to university-sponsored

training and city-funded microloans.

Meanwhile, Stanford University's Cardinal Ventures and MIT's The Engine serve as national models for combining entrepreneurship with regional impact, especially through university-catalyzed venture capital and incubation.

In the past, college towns operated on the predictable rhythm of academic calendars. But with post-pandemic inflation and remote workers moving to small towns, universities are under pressure to preserve affordability and relevance. According to the American Council on Education (ACE), tuition costs are rising as state funding wanes, and students are increasingly choosing colleges based on housing costs and job proximity.

“Universities are stepping up to be not just educators but co-developers of their cities.”

Amy Liu

Local Governments Get a Seat at the Table

Universities no longer plan in isolation. Many city councils are pushing for joint planning processes, shared zoning oversight, and enforceable community benefits agreements. In Houston, the Ion District included formal agreements requiring job training and affordable housing investment to be approved by city council.

In Ithaca, New York, Cornell University now sits on a joint city-university planning council that sets guidelines for housing, transit and economic development, according to the *Cornell Chronicle*. This collaborative model is being replicated in college towns from Boulder to Bloomington.

Institutions Involve Students in Local Concerns

Some universities are embedding local needs into their core curriculum. At the University of Georgia, every undergraduate must complete an experiential learning component that often involves working on local business or civic projects. According to the university's Office of Experiential Learning, over 1,200 students participated in community-facing projects in 2023 alone.

In rural Texas, West Texas A&M University has shifted focus to programs in agriculture, public health, and hybrid education to better serve surrounding counties. “We’re redesigning our academic model to fit our geography,” President Walter Wendler told *The Texas Tribune* in late 2023.

Salt Lake City is watching this trend unfold in real time. The University of Utah's plan to add 5,000 beds over five years aims to stabilize rent prices citywide. According to the *Deseret News*, Salt Lake's city council is working closely with the university on transit-oriented development and mixed-use zoning to ensure long-term community impact.

“The university is one of our most important partners,” said Salt Lake City Council Chair Victoria Petro during a March 2025 meeting. “But we’re setting clear expectations that community impact must be part of the plan.”

Experts say the next evolution of the college town will be measured not by stadium size or ivy-covered walls, but by the strength of university partnerships with their surrounding communities.

According to a 2024 report by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, the most successful institutions will be those that “integrate educational outcomes with workforce needs, expand housing options through innovation, and forge reciprocal civic relationships.”

In other words: if you want your town to thrive, your university can't just teach change. It has to live it. ●



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Legally Generative: Law Schools Race to Fold AI Into Curriculum

By Misty Evans

As generative AI (artificial intelligence) upends traditional legal workflows, law schools are racing to adapt education accordingly, with institutions such as Yale Law School and Suffolk University Law School emerging as leaders in the charge.

Why now? Tools like ChatGPT are increasingly employed in legal research and reporting, prompting law schools to overhaul their curricula rapidly.

A 2024 survey by the American Bar Association's (ABA) Task Force on Law and Artificial Intelligence of 29 law schools revealed that 55% offer AI-specific courses, and 62% integrate AI into first-year classes. It also found that 83% provide practical experiences such as clinics or intensives using AI, while 69% have adjusted academic integrity policies to address generative tools.

At Yale Law, the spring 2023 launch of "Artificial Intelligence, the Legal Profession, and Procedure" signaled a curriculum shake-up. Co-lecturer William Eskridge Jr. emphasized that new models are accelerating changes in

court procedures and the legal practice itself. Students not only explore AI's technical workings but also simulate its use in litigation and ethics exercises.

Under Dean Andrew Perlman, a member of the ABA task force, Suffolk Law has introduced AI tools into core courses and rolled out an online LL.M. in Legal Innovation and Technology. Perlman has also experimented with ChatGPT in scholarship, co-authoring papers on the future of legal scholarship generated in part by AI.

Harvard Law School offers a formal "AI and the Law: Navigating the New Legal Landscape" program with its Center on the Legal Profession stresses AI's sweeping impact. Professor David Wilkins cautions that while errors—such as fabricated case citations—are real risks, generative AI ultimately has the potential to "transform the practice of law."

Yet integration into education remains uneven. A mid-2025 Reuters report notes that only about 5% of law

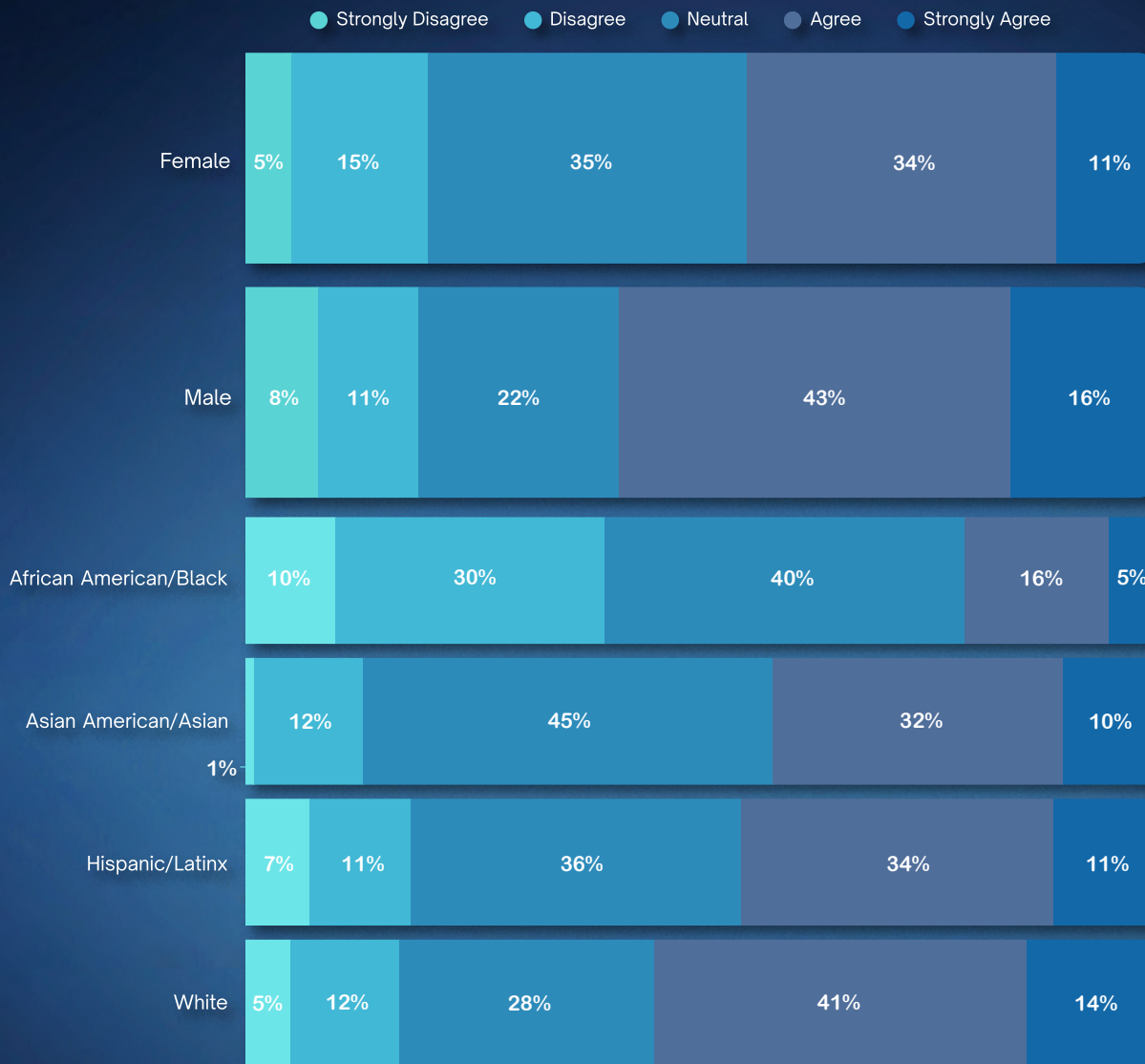
faculty are teaching generative AI in standalone courses, although many are weaving it into legal writing or clinic work. Certificates in legal tech and informatics are emerging at schools such as Berkeley and Arizona State.

Ethical and pedagogical considerations are front and center. A 2024 ABA white paper urges educators to expose students to AI tools, not just for efficiency, but to develop skills in evaluating AI outputs, maintaining academic integrity and addressing equity in technological access.

The road ahead: as AI tools become ubiquitous in legal practice, from e-discovery to contract drafting, law schools confront the dual imperative of equipping students with technical fluency while reinforcing core legal judgment.

Dean Perlman sums it up: "We will be worried in the future about the competence of lawyers who don't use these tools," he told the Associated Press, reflecting a sentiment that resonates across academia. ●

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Law Schools Take the Lead in Preserving LGBTQIA+ Rights

By Erik Cliburn

As LGBTQIA+ rights face renewed political pressure at the federal level, law schools across the country are stepping up to educate, organize, and advocate. Through high-profile symposia, expert panels, and revamped curricula, legal education institutions are becoming increasingly visible in the national discourse around civil rights. These efforts not only serve to support marginalized communities but also prepare the next generation of lawyers to face an uncertain legal landscape.

Two recent events—one at Western New England University School of Law (WNE Law) in Massachusetts and another at Fordham Law School in New York—offer a snapshot of how law schools are responding to current threats and leveraging their platforms to advance campus belonging.

At WNE Law, Massachusetts

Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell partnered with the school's Center for Social Justice on April 16 to host a public discussion titled "Equality for All: A Community Conversation About Initiatives to Protect LGBTQ+ Rights." The event, held at the Blake Law Center, gathered legal experts, advocates, and members of the public to explore both the challenges and protections that currently define the LGBTQIA+ rights landscape.

"Sadly, despite Massachusetts' strong legal protections, LGBTQ+ individuals still experience hate, discrimination, and other harms across our state," Campbell said during the discussion. "In the face of the Trump administration's increasing attacks on transgender rights, my office will continue to serve as a champion for the LGBTQ+ community—enforcing our laws, educating residents on their

rights, and supporting legislation to protect them from harm."

Panelists included Jennifer Levi, professor at WNE Law and senior director of transgender and queer rights at GLAD Law, and Tanya Neslusan, executive director of MassEquality. Together, they emphasized the urgency of legal education in the current climate and praised the collaborative power of state officials, advocacy groups, and academic institutions.

"I am proud to be a part of Western New England University School of Law, which remains dedicated to educating future legal professionals to uphold the rule of law—the foundation upon which justice for all communities, including LGBTQ+ people and families, ultimately depends," said Levi.

While Massachusetts offers some of the nation's strongest state-level

protections, the event highlighted that legal vigilance and civic engagement are still essential, especially in light of national judicial trends.

At Fordham Law School, similar themes emerged during a symposium held as part of the school's 2025 Week of Abolition. Sponsored by Fordham's LGBTQ+ student group, OUTLaws, the April 8 event focused on "LGBTQ+ Rights in the Trump Era" and brought together students, legal professionals, and activists to confront legal and political threats to queer rights.

"If you think for a moment you're not doing enough, or that you're not doing the right thing, I want you to think again," Fordham Law Dean Joseph Landau told attendees. "You're doing everything right by preparing for a career in which you advocate, counsel, speak up, and fight."

Much of the conversation focused on the Supreme Court's increasingly

conservative composition and its implications for LGBTQIA+ rights. Dominic Cigna, a student and event co-chair, warned that "passive existence is not enough" and urged attendees to "actively engage in elections at every level to protect all of us."

Panelist Alexia Korberg, executive director of Her Justice, was blunt in her assessment: "I think it's a farce that we're doing rule of law on constitutional issues," she said, referring to what she sees as the Court's declining role in upholding civil rights.

Lauren Zimmerman, a partner at Selendy Gay PLLC, echoed these concerns. "The gloves are off in terms of the reasoning for why books can be removed," she said, referencing recent court decisions around book bans and educational censorship.

Gabriella Laros of the New York Civil Liberties Union discussed efforts to defend trans athletes'

participation in sports, even in a state with relatively strong LGBTQIA+ legal protections. Panelists emphasized that law students must be politically aware and civically engaged if they hope to effect lasting change.

"There's so much more that we can do," said Filament Kind, an intern with the New York State Assembly. "Engaging in your community and assisting your community is also incredibly valuable."

As rights for LGBTQIA+ individuals face escalating challenges in the courts and legislatures, law schools are increasingly seen as both sanctuaries and springboards—training grounds for legal professionals ready to uphold civil liberties in a volatile era. Through dialogue, education, and action, institutions like WNE Law and Fordham Law are reaffirming their commitment to justice while helping shape the next generation of advocates. ●

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ABA's Law School Diversity Requirement Remains on Hold

By Erik Cliburn

The American Bar Association

(ABA) has voted to extend its suspension of a long-standing diversity requirement for law schools, signaling a dramatic shift in how legal education may be governed amid escalating political pressure from President Donald Trump and Republican-led states.

On May 9, the ABA's Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar unanimously agreed to keep Standard 206—which requires law schools to demonstrate a commitment to diversity in student recruitment, hiring, and programming—on hold through August 31, 2026. The rule was initially suspended earlier this year following a barrage of federal directives aimed at dismantling DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiatives across American institutions.

“In light of these developments, the council determined that extraordinary circumstances exist in which compliance with [the diversity standard] would constitute extreme hardship for multiple law schools,” the council said in its official statement.

The ABA's decision comes as Trump intensifies his crackdown on DEI efforts. In January, he issued a series of executive orders directing the Department of Education to reassess accreditation bodies, including the ABA, for allegedly promoting race- and sex-based standards. One of those orders specifically called for prioritizing “intellectual diversity” and warned that accreditors using demographic data could lose federal recognition or funding.

Attorney General Pam Bondi followed suit in March, warning that the ABA could have its role as the federally recognized accreditor of U.S. law schools revoked unless it rescinded Standard 206.

“Any requirement that law schools demonstrate ‘a commitment to diversity’ is deeply problematic,” Bondi wrote in a letter to ABA leadership. “The standard must be repealed in its entirety.”

For decades, the ABA's accreditation

status has been crucial; in most states, students must graduate from an ABA-accredited law school to sit for the bar exam. Now, that once-stable authority is facing both federal scrutiny and legal threats from multiple states. High courts in Texas and Florida have recently announced reviews as to their state's requirements that bar applicants must graduate from ABA-accredited schools, citing the now-suspended diversity requirement.

The campaign against the ABA's inclusion of DEI in its accreditation policies is part of a broader political

The campaign against the ABA's inclusion of DEI in its accreditation policies is part of a broader political strategy targeting all of higher education.

strategy targeting all of higher education. Trump's April executive order directing Education Secretary Linda McMahon to reevaluate accreditors' recognition cited the ABA by name. In the weeks that followed, 21 Republican attorneys general joined the fray, asserting that Standard 206 violated constitutional protections by favoring race- and gender-based metrics.

Originally adopted to address historical exclusion in the legal profession, Standard 206 called on law schools to “demonstrate by concrete action a commitment to diversity and inclusion” among students, faculty, and staff. The ABA has long argued that a diverse academic environment “promotes cross-cultural understanding, helps break down stereotypes, and enables students to better understand persons of different backgrounds.”

Yet the political and legal headwinds have proven too strong for the association to ignore. A February resolution issued by the ABA urged the Trump administration to amend its DEI directives, arguing that the executive orders infringed on the

organization's First Amendment rights. But rather than softening its stance, the administration doubled down. The Department of Education has since issued guidance barring colleges from considering race in any decision-making, a directive that is already the subject of multiple lawsuits.

For aspiring attorneys—particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds—the rule's continued suspension raises concerns about access and representation in the legal field. Many worry that the rollback of DEI efforts may limit pathways into

law school and, by extension, into the profession itself.

Still, the ABA maintains that its core mission has not changed. “The Council's commitment to ensuring access to legal education for all people, including those who have been historically excluded from the legal profession, has not changed,” the organization said in a February 22 statement.

Looking ahead, the ABA is expected to revise Standard 206 and reintroduce it under a new title: “Access to Legal Education and the Profession.” The proposed revision would maintain the goal of promoting diversity, but also include explicit language clarifying that compliance would not require law schools to use race or identity in individual admissions or employment decisions.

Whether this revised standard will be enough to satisfy both federal authorities and critics of DEI—while preserving a commitment to broad access for all parties—remains to be seen. For now, legal education finds itself squarely at the center of a national battle over the future of diversity in the field of law in America. ●



After the Ruling: The Changing Face of Ivy League Law School Admissions

By Erik Cliburn

Nearly two years after the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark decision in *Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) v. Harvard*, elite law schools are grappling with how to maintain diverse student bodies without using explicit race-conscious admissions. The initial demographic shifts in Ivy League law schools suggest a complicated, institution-by-institution response shaped by new reporting standards, targeted outreach, and evolving legal interpretations.

The American Bar Association’s (ABA) revised 509 reports for the 2024-2025 admissions cycle have painted a nuanced picture. Though early internal estimates at schools like Yale University Law School suggested steep drops in students of color post-SFFA, the finalized ABA numbers were more stable—albeit not without notable demographic swings.

At Cornell University Law School, diversity among the incoming JD class of 2027 technically rose, with students of color making up 37% of the class, a six-point increase from the prior year. But disaggregated data tells a more layered story. Hispanic enrollment fell dramatically, from approximately 13% to 7%, while Black enrollment grew modestly from 4% to 6%. Asian enrollment saw the most significant jump—from 12% to 20%. Notably, Native American enrollment remained stagnant at roughly 1%, mirroring trends across other elite institutions.

At Yale Law, the number of Native students dropped to just two in the most recent incoming class, a decline that Hannah Terrapin, co-president of Yale’s Native American Law Students Association, calls “heartbreaking.” Still, Terrapin remains cautiously hopeful. She described increased recruitment efforts and collaborations with affinity groups following the end of affirmative action.

“I’m optimistic that this cycle will help to bounce back our Native population,” she told the *Yale Daily News* in January.

The revised ABA methodology further complicates year-over-year comparisons. For the first time, in 2024, nonresident (international) students were included in U.S. race and ethnicity categories, rather than being listed separately. An ABA spokesperson acknowledged that this change “makes it difficult to know the impact of affirmative action on law schools,” as reported by the *Yale Daily News*.

of Asian students rose from 103 to 132.

“The drop is greater than anyone expected,” David Wilkins, JD, Harvard Law School’s vice dean for global initiatives on the legal profession, told *The Harvard Independent*, adding that it undermines decades of progress. “Harvard is a far more interesting and exciting and an excellent place than it has ever been because of its diversity.”

The ABA’s national statistics suggest overall diversity in legal education remains mostly steady. Black students accounted for 7.7% of JD students in

International Students in the Crosshairs

Recent changes by the American Bar Association now group international students into U.S. race and ethnicity categories—a shift that muddies year-over-year diversity data. But looming political forces may complicate things even further. The Trump administration has repeatedly pushed to limit the presence of international students at U.S. institutions, threatening visa programs and proposing enrollment caps. If such efforts gain traction, not only could law school demographics shift again, but the already-blurred picture of the impact of discontinuing using race in admissions could become even harder to determine.

This reclassification may partially explain Yale’s apparent demographic stability. According to the ABA, the school’s latest JD class includes 13% Hispanic/Latino students, 17% Asian, 12% Black, and 49% white. In contrast, internal school data had previously cited a 12% decrease in students of color. “This individual year at Yale is extraordinarily encouraging,” said Kevin Brown, professor at the University of South Carolina School of Law and Yale Law alum. “The [decrease] that I would have anticipated has not occurred.”

At Harvard University Law School, however, the decline was unambiguous. The school enrolled just 19 Black students in its incoming class of 461—down from 43 the previous year. Hispanic enrollment also plummeted, from 63 to 32. Meanwhile, the number

of 2024, compared with 7.8% the year prior; Hispanic students held at roughly 14%, though some of these students may have been enrolled prior to the Supreme Court’s decision on race-conscious admissions. But these broad figures mask what experts like Brown call a redistribution: underrepresented students are moving from top-tier “quad one” schools to lower-ranked institutions.

As the legal profession continues to contend with its legacy of exclusion and the role of elite institutions in shaping future leadership, the post-affirmative action era has raised more questions than answers. Institutions are now navigating how to legally foster diversity, ensure opportunity, and meet their public commitments—without triggering legal challenges or eroding hard-won progress. ●



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The Law School Rush

Political Activism and Economic Outlook
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By Kat Castagnoli



Law school admissions offices

are experiencing a full-blown applicant avalanche—one that’s raising eyebrows, expanding waitlists, and rewriting what it means to be “competitive.” According to the Law School Admission Council (LSAC), applications to ABA-accredited law schools are up 20.5% year over year, with more than 63,000 individuals seeking entry. At Georgetown Law, 14,000 applicants are competing for just 650 seats. At the University of Michigan Law School, the flood of more than 8,900 applications marked the highest volume in the school’s 166-year history.

“When I shared the numbers with faculty,” said Michigan Law Admissions Dean Sarah Zearfoss, “the whole room gasped.”

A Perfect Storm

The legal education boom is being fueled by a volatile mix of economic anxiety, political activism, AI-driven career fears, and post race-based admissions.

Aaron Taylor, senior vice president at the AccessLex Institute, notes that strong employment outcomes for law graduates over the past five years have helped solidify a positive perception of the value of legal education. “Median

salaries have broken records,” he said. “These numbers have affirmed the ‘investment’ value of legal education.”

For many students, the promise of a six-figure starting salary—now \$225,000 at top corporate firms—is hard to ignore, even if only a small fraction of graduates will secure those positions.

Yet the interest isn’t just about money. According to Mike Spivey, founder of Spivey Consulting Group, the usual trifecta that pushes people toward law school—elections, economic stagnation and civic disruption—is, in his words, “on steroids right now.”

The political chaos of the 2024

election, a sluggish job market, and the nonstop churn of legal news on social media are all fueling a new wave of civic-minded applicants. Spivey also points to President Trump's legal entanglements as part of the phenomenon.

"People see instability—political, economic or legal—and they want to understand it, engage with it and shape it," he said.

LSAT Testing Changes

One unexpected accelerant is a change in the LSAT. Following a lawsuit by blind test-takers, the exam's infamous "logic games" section was eliminated—a move that led to a spike in early 2024 test-takers. Many prospective students, including those who had long put off applying, jumped in before additional

more students from historically underrepresented backgrounds to enter the legal field, not fewer.

Growth Across the Map

The surge in applications isn't limited to the nation's most elite institutions. Regional law schools across the country are also seeing dramatic increases. Creighton University School of Law in Nebraska reported a 25% spike. Drexel and Temple Universities, both in Philadelphia, saw jumps of more than 38% and 42%, respectively. The Great Lakes, Northwest, and New England regions saw the most dramatic increases, outpacing nationwide growth trends.

What's more, the applicants themselves are changing. Spivey reports that this year, more students are

too aggressively and the job market contracts, a new cohort of graduates could be left with limited opportunities and significant debt.

"My hope is that law schools are cautious in setting enrollment targets, remaining cognizant of the risks of near-sighted optimism," Taylor said.

Despite the uncertainty, many law schools are viewing this surge as a rare opportunity—not just to fill seats, but to be more selective, intentional, and mission-aligned.

Strategic Moves for Higher Ed

For higher education leaders, the implications are clear. The coming years will likely bring continued uncertainty, especially as the political landscape and generative AI continue to shift perceptions of

"When I shared the numbers with faculty, the whole room gasped."

Michigan Law Dean of Admissions Sarah Zearfoss

changes could take hold. More than 33,000 individuals registered for the November 2024 LSAT, a significant increase over the 23,798 who registered the year before.

There was also widespread concern that the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to strike down race-conscious admissions would negatively affect the number of law school applicants from underrepresented backgrounds. But that fear didn't materialize. In fact, applications from Black students rose by 25.8%, and applicants identifying as nonbinary increased by more than 32%.

"We were worried that the ruling would chill applications," said Susan Krinsky, LSAC interim president. "But it appears that has not been the case."

Instead, the ruling may have inspired

entering law school with a clear sense of purpose. "We estimate that about 90% of our clients know exactly what problem they want to fix with their degree," he said.

Concerns for the Future

While law schools are eager to meet demand, some experts are urging restraint. Taylor points out that although current job numbers are strong, students starting law school today won't graduate until 2028—when the job market could look very different. Some law firms are already pulling back. The National Association for Law Placement recently reported that summer associate hiring has fallen to its lowest level in more than a decade.

If law schools increase class sizes

career security. Regional and mid-tier institutions may benefit from the application overflow, but they'll need to strengthen their student support infrastructures and outcomes-tracking to keep pace.

Law schools must also expand alternative career pathways, build resilience into curricular design, and think years ahead—not just cycle to cycle.

"This isn't just a bump—it's a recalibration of how students see the role of law in society," Spivey said.

Long viewed as gateways to status and stability, law schools are now being reimagined as engines of civic change—and the students leading this surge aren't just along for the ride. They're here to steer. ●



Who Gets To Be A Lawyer Now?

The Cost, the Test, and the Fight for Rural and Low-Income Access to Legal Education

By Misty Evans

As law school tuition climbs and the landscape of legal education shifts, a fundamental question looms: who still gets to become a lawyer in America?

Access to working in the legal profession has long been out of reach for many rural and low-income students. But now, rising tuition costs and changes to the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) threaten to deepen that divide. In response, a patchwork of programs and reforms across the country is attempting to redefine how the next generation of legal professionals enters the field.

According to the American Bar Association (ABA), the average law school graduate leaves with more than \$145,000 in student loan debt. That figure can climb even higher when factoring in undergraduate loans. For many rural or economically disadvantaged students, such debt is not just daunting—it's disqualifying.

"Increasing cost is the most significant barrier to law school access for students from low-income backgrounds," said Bill Adams, managing director of ABA accreditation and legal education, in a 2022 statement to Reuters.

Beginning in August 2024, the LSAT no longer included the logic games section, long considered a stumbling block for students without expensive test prep. While some see this as a move toward greater equity, others worry it won't go far enough.

According to a Law.com report, the changes aim to make the exam more accessible, especially for students with disabilities who have historically struggled with the games section. But the test's cost, along with the rising number of schools now requiring the GRE instead of or in addition to the LSAT, can complicate decisions and increase financial pressure.

Programs Offering a Path Forward

Despite these barriers, several initiatives across the country are working to

expand access to legal education for underserved communities.

California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) Fellowships

CRLA, a nonprofit offering legal services to farmworkers and rural low-income families, runs fellowship programs that place young lawyers and law students in underserved parts of California. The organization's Rural Justice Fellowship, for example, places attorneys directly in rural communities where access to legal support is scarce.

"This fellowship is a game-changer for rural communities and for first-generation lawyers who want to serve where they're most needed," CRLA Executive Director José Padilla told *The Fresno Bee*.

Rural Summer Legal Corps

Run jointly by Equal Justice Works and the Legal Services Corporation, the Rural Summer Legal Corps places law students in rural communities across the country each summer to address issues like housing, family law, and access to benefits.

In 2023, 40 law students were selected from over 300 applicants, according to Equal Justice Works. These students not only gain experience but also receive a \$5,000 stipend and professional mentorship.

University of Dayton's Online Hybrid JD

In 2019, the University of Dayton School of Law launched one of the first ABA-accredited hybrid JD programs, combining online coursework with occasional in-person sessions. According to the school's website, the program is designed to accommodate working adults, caregivers, and rural students who may not be able to relocate.

"By removing the need to uproot lives or jobs, we're opening the door to law school for students who never thought it was possible," said Dean Andrew Strauss in an interview with *The National Jurist*.

Apprenticeship Models in Washington and California

A lesser-known pathway into the legal field is the Law Office Study Program (LOSP), available in states like California, Washington, and Virginia. These programs allow aspiring attorneys to study law under a judge or practicing attorney instead of attending law school.

Kimberly Bennett, a California-based lawyer and LOSP advocate, told the ABA Journal that, "the apprentice model is the most radical access-to-justice tool we're not using enough."

Though only a handful of people successfully complete the program each year, fewer than 200 in California in 2022, it remains a powerful, debt-free option for motivated candidates.

Some legal educators are also calling on schools to rethink admissions policies entirely.

In a 2023 Harvard Law Review essay, professors Anna L. Zaret and Aaron Tang argued that law schools should adopt need-blind admissions and prioritize applicants who demonstrate community engagement and service over elite credentials.

Meanwhile, the AccessLex Institute, a nonprofit focused on legal education, has been funding research and grants to explore tuition assistance and pipeline programs for underrepresented students. Their MAX Pre-Law program provides free financial education to pre-law students, with a focus on building economic readiness before enrollment.

The legal profession is meant to be a guardian of justice—but that ideal falters when its gates are closed to all but the most privileged. From tuition-free apprenticeships to rural legal corps fellowships, a growing ecosystem of programs is working to make legal careers attainable for students once locked out of the system. Still, without more widespread policy change and institutional support, the question remains: Who gets to be a lawyer now—and who still doesn't? ●

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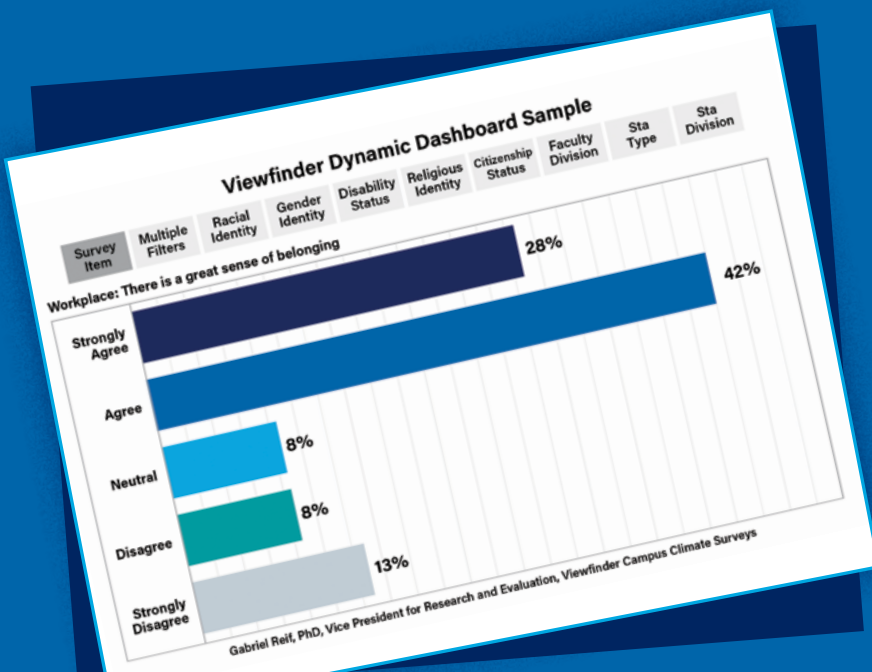
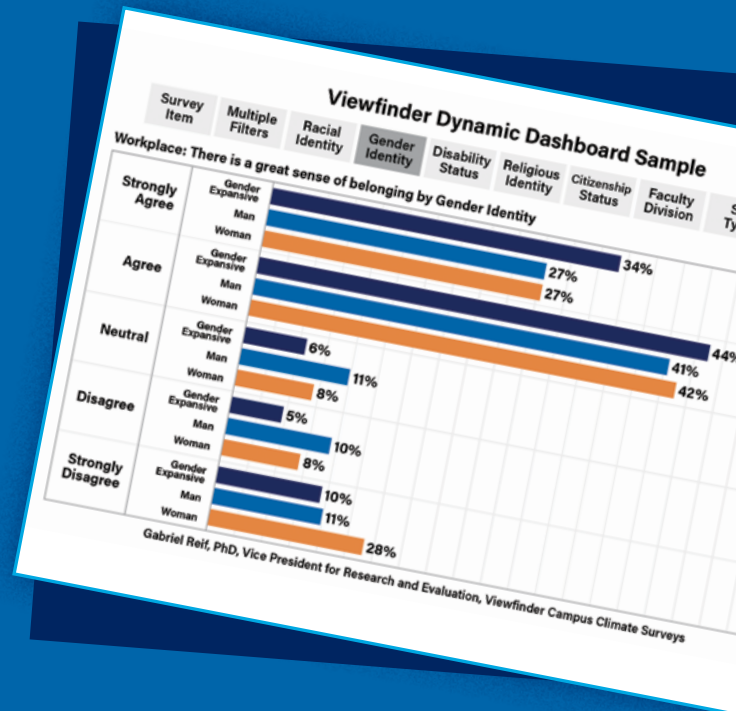
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BEYOND^{the}QUAD^{cast}

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Making Surveys Matter: Using Campus Data to Drive Change

Beyond the Quadcast is a higher education podcast from *Insight Into Academia*, where hosts Kat Castagnoli and Misty Evans interview leaders, researchers, and changemakers tackling today's most pressing campus issues—from equity and enrollment to leadership and innovation.

In this episode of Beyond the Quadcast, our hosts sit down with **Gabriel Reif, PhD, vice president of research and evaluation for Viewfinder® Campus Climate Surveys**, and a leading expert in institutional research, to explore the essential—but often overlooked—role of campus climate surveys in higher education.

The conversation dives deep into how strategic survey design and implementation can illuminate campus climate, support equity efforts, and inform major institutional decisions. Dr. Reif emphasizes the importance of intentionality in survey research, offering insight into how well-executed data collection can catalyze real change. From overcoming survey fatigue to increasing response rates, the episode offers practical strategies for improving data quality and building a culture of continuous feedback.



Key Takeaways:

- **Data-driven decision-making is vital to effective leadership**
- **Survey data must be acted upon to improve outcomes and resource allocation**
- **Less is more: streamline and prioritize impactful surveys**
- **Many colleges miss student retention signals due to a lack of data**



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