

The top 10 student retention programs at historically Black colleges and universities

By *Ezella McPherson* September 10, 2021

While many colleges and universities are grappling with declining enrollment, historically Black colleges and universities are seeing a surge in enrollment during the pandemic. Less is known, however, about HBCUs' best practices in promoting student retention.

According to the [U.S. Department of Education Scorecard \(2019-2020\)](#), the following HBCUs ranked in the top 10 in retaining and graduating college students:

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1. Spelman College
2. Tuskegee University
3. Howard University
4. Winston-Salem State University
5. Morehouse College
6. Mississippi Valley State University
7. Claflin University
8. Virginia State University
9. Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University
10. Hampton University.

Below are some of the best retention programs at these HBCU's:

First-generation and low-income programs

- Claflin University's Leaders Learning in Communities for Success' (LinCs') "program provides resources and services that will improve persistence, academic outcomes and levels of engagement for first-generation students as they transition and matriculate during their first year of college."
- Tuskegee University's TRIO Student Support Services "offer[s] assistance to 375 undergraduate students' campus-wide who are enrolled and/or accepted at Tuskegee University, who are first-generation college students, are from a low-income family, or have a documented learning and/or physical disability."

First-year students

- Virginia State University's First Year Experience program helps students "to learn how to successfully navigate VSU's campus community and culture. This program starts with a two-credit hour seminar during the first semester, and continues with events and other immersion activities."
- Winston-Salem State University's Office of Academic Student Experiences "helps students excel holistically as they become acclimated to college life during their first two years at WSSU. This area focuses on academic and co-curricular activities that promote belonging, retention, and persistence among first-year, sophomore and transfer students."

Parent programs

- Howard University's Parent Program "engages the parents and family members of current HU students as partners in supporting student success. The Parent Program provides families with information, resources, tools, programming and leadership and volunteer opportunities."
- Tuskegee University's Parents and Family Advisory Council "helps parents and families partner with Tuskegee University as we provide ... quality educational, social and co-curricular experiences. Learning doesn't happen just in the classroom, so through our Division of Student Affairs, students develop additional leadership and life skills that will serve them during the entirety of their adult lives."

Second-year students

- Howard University Second Year Experience Program “is a university-wide initiative designed to create a community focused on the holistic success of 2nd-year students.”
- Winston-Salem State University’s Sophomore Year Experience “is committed to helping sophomore students excel, by providing a comprehensive educational experience that promotes both the academic and co-curricular success and engagement of all second-year students.”

STEM majors

- Spelman College’s “Center of Excellence for Minority Women in STEM expands on Spelman College’s effective strategies to educate Black women in STEM and strengthens and deepens the knowledge and experiences afforded to students and faculty through partnerships with industry, academia and governmental agencies.”
- Morehouse College McNair Scholars Program is specifically for STEM majors. It is “a year-round graduate school preparatory program with an eight-week summer research component designed to prepare first-generation undergraduates demonstrating the strong academic potential for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities.”

Student success programs

- Hampton University’s University College “is an innovative learning community where faculty and staff of diverse cultures and perspectives work collaboratively to educate and to motivate learners of all ages.” The goal is to “enhance knowledge, encourage problem solving, and promote critical thinking skills that will improve and enrich the lives of individuals, families, and communities in a global society.”
- Mississippi Valley State University’s University College’s mission is to be “a learning resource entity, is devoted to meeting the diverse needs of students by providing academic and social pathways to cultivate student success.”
- Winston-Salem State University’s UCaLL Student Success Workshops are “designed to help students to succeed both inside and outside the classroom. They are intended to support and enhance academic success by expanding students’ understanding of the best practices for approaches to learning as well as address critical areas of knowledge that will take students beyond classroom learning.”

Transfer student programs

- FAMU’s Transfer Academic Success Program “is committed to assisting transfer students in successfully transitioning to the university, both academically and socially.”

From the above program descriptions, it is clear that HBCUs’ leaders provide college students with the resources to succeed from the first-year to graduation. College leaders might benefit from replicating these programs to retain college students.

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