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HBCUs make up just 3% of U.S. colleges but produce 28% of Black STEM graduates

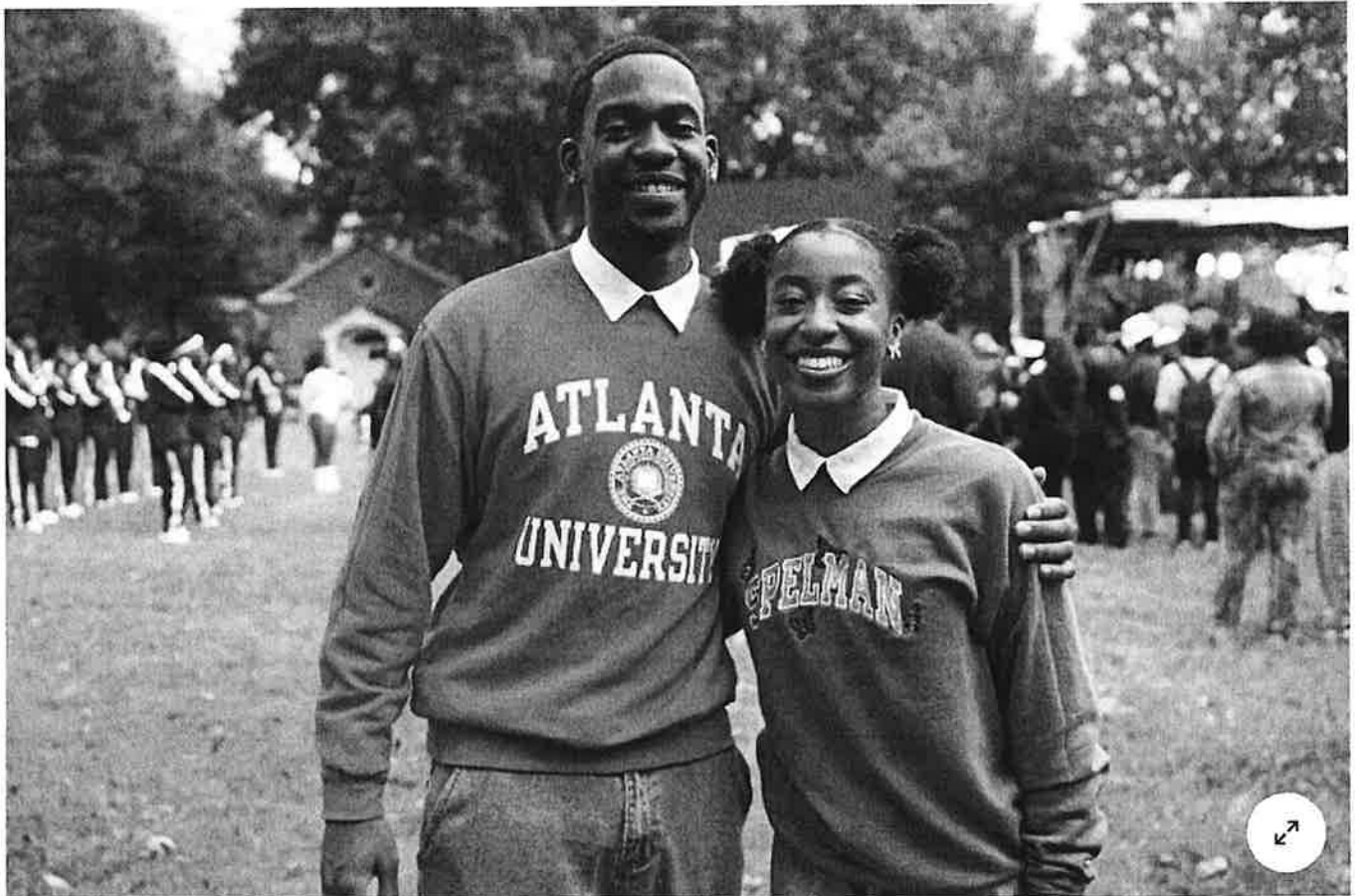
Odafe Oghen

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A new UNCF report highlights HBCUs' outsized STEM impact despite decades of underfunding.

Historically Black colleges and universities continue to produce an outsized share of Black STEM graduates despite representing only a small portion of American higher education, according to a new UNCF report. The findings build on recent evidence that HBCU graduates outperform national benchmarks in well-being, workplace engagement and college belonging while the institutions continue confronting longstanding historical underfunding. The HBCU STEM impact is at the center of UNCF's latest analysis.

UNCF announced the report, "HBCUs Still Punching Above Their Weight," on Aug. 13 during the National Association of Black Journalists convention in Atlanta. The research, commissioned by UNCF's Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, analyzes the nation's 101 HBCUs and focuses heavily on their contributions to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The report says HBCUs represent about 3% of all U.S. higher education institutions. Among four-year institutions that grant bachelor's degrees, however, they make up 9% while enrolling 23% of Black undergraduates pursuing bachelor's degrees in fall 2022.

Their share of Black STEM graduates is even larger. HBCUs awarded 28% of STEM bachelor's degrees earned by Black students, according to the report. UNCF also found that 20% of Black women who earned STEM degrees in 2022 graduated from HBCUs.

UNCF cited earlier National Science Foundation data showing that seven of the eight institutions producing the largest numbers of Black undergraduates who later earn doctorates in science and engineering are HBCUs.

The new report updates UNCF's 2019 "Punching Above Their Weight" analysis, which examined how HBCUs enroll and graduate Black students at rates exceeding what their institutional size and resources might suggest.

UNCF argues those outcomes are especially significant because HBCUs have historically operated with fewer resources. The organization is calling for full funding of the federal Strengthening HBCU Program, investment in campus

infrastructure through the IGNITE HBCU Excellence Act and a doubling of the maximum Pell Grant to at least \$13,000.

The findings also arrive amid broader concerns about facilities and research capacity. UNCF said in July that roughly 84% of HBCUs remain underfunded and estimated their collective infrastructure deficit at more than \$13 billion.

For UNCF, the HBCU STEM impact shows that increased investment is not simply about preserving historic institutions. The organization argues that strengthening HBCUs is also a workforce strategy as the country seeks more scientists, engineers and technology professionals.

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