The Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Journalism Education

A Supplemental to the 1999 Annual Surveys of Journalism and Mass Communication

By

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Introduction

For more than a decade, research has been conducted that evaluates size and scope of journalism education at colleges and universities throughout the country. Recent research shows that enrollments in journalism and mass communication programs in the United States have been steadily increasing for the past five years to an almost unprecedented level (Becker et al., 1999). Such research has been vitality important to journalism and mass communication educators and administrators in evaluating the progress and effectiveness of journalism programs, schools, and colleges across the country.

While this research has looked at journalism education as a whole, there has been no in-depth exploration of any subsegments of that population. This research project examined the role and contribution of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to journalism education. There is some research that has explored the evolution and impact of HBCUs in higher education in general, but there has been no research that has specifically examined the role of these institutions as they relate to journalism education.

Methodology

In order to examine the role and contribution of journalism programs at historically black colleges and universities, existing data from the Annual Surveys of Journalism and Mass Communication were used. Data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and data from the 1998 U.S. News & World Report College Guide also were utilized in this study.

Each year, the Cox Center at the University of Georgia collects data about journalism programs using two survey instruments, the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Enrollments and the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates. The methods used to gather the enrollment data have been used for more than 10 years. This involves conducting extensive surveys with administrators of journalism and mass communications programs nationwide. Schools listed in either The Journalism & Mass Communication Directory published by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) or The Journalist's Road to Success, A Career and
Scholarship Guide, published by The Dow Jones Newspaper Fund Inc., are included in the population of surveyed schools. All degree-granting senior colleges and universities with courses organized under the labels of journalism and mass communication are invited to be listed in the AEJMC. To be included in the Dow Jones guide, the college or university must offer at least 10 courses in news-editorial journalism, and those courses must include core courses, such as an introduction to the mass media and press law and ethics, as well as basic skills courses, such as reporting and editing.

A combination of these two directories produced 451 listings for the 1998 enrollment survey (Becker et al., 1999). Each year, in October, a questionnaire is mailed to the administrator of each of the journalism and mass communications programs. A second mailing of the same questionnaire is sent to the nonresponding schools in December. A third mailing is sent to the nonresponding schools in January. In February, the administrators are sent a fourth mailing. The administrators who do not respond by the beginning of April are contacted and asked to provide the requested information via telephone. The questionnaire asks the administrators to provide information on total enrollments in the fall, enrollment by year in school, enrollment by sequence of study, enrollment by gender, and enrollment by racial and ethnic group. In addition, administrators are asked to indicate the number and type of degrees granted during an academic year, degrees granted by sequence of study, degrees granted by gender, and degrees granted by racial group.

The Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates is designed to monitor the employment rates and salaries of graduates of journalism and mass communication programs in the United States, including Puerto Rico. In addition, the survey tracks the curricular activities of those graduates while in college, examines their job-seeking strategies, and provides measures of the professional attitudes and behaviors of the graduates upon completion of their college studies.

Each year a sample of schools is drawn from those included in the population of schools in the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Enrollments. Administrators at the selected schools are asked to provide the names and addresses of their spring bachelor's and master's degree recipients. For the 1998 survey, a questionnaire was mailed in November or December of that year to all spring graduates receiving either a bachelor's or a master's degree from the selected programs. A
second questionnaire was sent to nonrespondents in January or February 1999. A third mailing was sent in April to graduates of schools with return rates of less than 45% after the first two mailings. The questionnaire asked about the respondent's experiences both while a student and in the months since graduation. Included were questions about university experiences, job-seeking and employment, and salary and benefits.

In 1998, the survey was mailed to 5,996 individuals whose names and addresses were provided by the administrators of the 97 programs in the population. A total of 2,691 returned the questionnaires by the end of May of 1999. Of the returns, 2,391 were from students who reported they actually had completed their degrees during the April to June 1998 period. The remaining 300 had completed their degrees either before or after the specified period, despite their inclusion in the spring graduation lists. A total of 442 questionnaires was returned undelivered and without a forwarding address. Return rate, computed as the number of questionnaires returned divided by the number mailed, was 44.9%. Return rate, computed as the number returned divided by the number mailed minus the bad addresses, was 48.5%. Of the usable questionnaires, 2,235 (93.5%) were from bachelor's degree recipients and 156 were from those who received a master's degree.

The first step in this study was to determine the racial/ethnic composition of the journalism and mass communication graduating class for the 1997-98 academic year for each of the 451 schools identified in this project. The racial/ethnic classification used in the Annual Surveys and in this study is: Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, White, Other, and Foreign/International.

Of the 451 journalism and mass communication programs in the 1998 enrollment survey sample, 169 classified their bachelor's degree recipients for the 1997-98 academic year by race and ethnicity. For each of these 169 schools, the numbers of students in each of the racial/ethnic categories were added together in order to produce a total number of undergraduates degrees granted for each school based on racial composition figures. As part of the enrollment survey, each school was asked to provide a total number of undergraduate degrees granted for its program, but this was independent of their racial composition. The two totals were checked against each other for each school, as a measure of ensuring accuracy in reporting. The estimates of undergraduate degrees offered for each of the
racial/ethnic groups were next converted to percentages.

It was then necessary to compile information for the remaining 282 of the 451 schools that did not provide the racial composition for their 1997-98 graduating classes. To estimate this information, enrollment figures from the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Enrollments were utilized as a first step. There were 72 schools in the 1998 Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Enrollments that gave the racial composition for the student enrollment in their journalism programs but did not provide the racial composition for their graduating classes. These enrollment figures were used to calculate a percentage for the racial/ethnic composition of the student population at those 72 journalism programs. It is expected that the racial composition of the entire student population in the journalism programs would closely correspond to the racial composition of their graduating classes. First, the enrollment numbers from each of the racial/ethnic categories were added together to give a total number of students in each of the 72 journalism programs. That number was then compared to the total number of undergraduates that each program provided in response to an earlier question in the survey. This was used as a measure of consistency of the data. The enrollment figures for each racial/ethnic group were then converted into percentages. Using the enrollment data for those 72 schools increased the information about the racial/ethnic composition of the 1997-98 journalism graduating classes from 169 to 241 schools. This left 210 schools without appropriate data about the racial/ethnic composition of their 1997-98 journalism graduating classes.

Information from the 1998 U.S. News & World Report College Guide was used next to fill in those gaps. Each year, the magazine publishes a guide, which provides information about all the four-year colleges and universities in the country. The magazine asks schools to provide the racial composition for its entire student population as part of that information. Many – but not all – of the schools provide this information. The magazine’s data yielded information, in percentages, for an additional 16 of the 451 schools used in this study. This information was used as the best available estimate of the racial and ethnic classification of the journalism and mass communication graduates and was used to that end. This left 194 schools out of 451 in this project without adequate information.
Data gathered by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, was then utilized to fill in some of the gaps. The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, each year gathers information about enrollment and graduation figures for all post-secondary institutions in the country. Included are measures of the gender, race, ethnicity, and other demographic components for each college and university. Included are data about the numbers of degrees granted at each school in just about every discipline, by race and ethnicity.

For this study, only the schools that listed communications as an undergraduate major were included. This category includes the following subcategories: communications, general; advertising; journalism and mass communications; public relations and organization communications; radio and television broadcasting; and communications, other. There also was a code for communications technologies, but those majors were not included in this study.

Several points must be made about this Department of Education data. First, the most recent year available from the U.S. Department of Education was for 1996-97, one year earlier than the Annual Survey data. Also, there was no specific code for speech communication majors. For some schools, those majors might be included in English departments under rhetoric. For other schools, those majors could be included with the communications majors, but there was no way of determining this. Therefore, some speech communications graduates might be included with journalism and mass communications graduates in this study.

From the U.S. Department of Education, it was determined that 1,031 colleges and universities offered some sort of undergraduate journalism and communications degrees. The information for the 451 schools used in this study were separated from the remaining 580 schools, which were analyzed separately.

First, the issue at hand was determining the racial/ethnic composition of the graduating classes at the remaining 194 of the 451 colleges and universities used in this study. Information about these schools was taken from the U.S. Department of Education data. All of the communications majors included in the education data were combined for each school. The racial/ethnic composition for the journalism and mass communications graduates coincided with the racial categories used by the Annual
Surveys. The number of Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, White, Other, and Foreign/International graduates was converted into percentages. This procedure yielded information for 189 of the remaining 194 schools. This left only five schools remaining for which there was no information about the racial composition of their journalism graduating classes.

The total enrollment data for these five programs provided by the U.S. Department of Education were then used to compensate for the missing data at these five programs. The data listed those enrollments, in percentages, for the racial categories used in this study, and those estimates were used as the best available for these five journalism and mass communication programs.

As a final step in these procedures, the percentages obtained were multiplied by the number of journalism graduates for each of the journalism and mass communication programs based on the 1998 Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Enrollments. The number of degrees granted was available for 416 of those programs. For the 35 cases where these data were not available, the number of graduates was estimated based on the enrollment data report. Those enrollments were divided by four to obtain an estimate of the size of a graduating class, unless the program reported that only enrollment was calculated for fewer classes, such as only for juniors and seniors. In that case, enrollments would be divided by the appropriate number of classes. Through these procedures it was possible to estimate the racial and ethnic composition of the 1997-98 graduating classes for all 451 colleges and universities identified in this study.

As stated earlier, the U.S. Department of Education listed another 580 schools that offered some course of study in communications. Since these schools were not listed by either the AEJMC publication or the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund’s The Journalist’s Road to Success, these schools were analyzed separately in this study. A similar procedure was used to determine the racial composition for the graduating classes at these 580 schools.

For all the data from the various sources used in this study, one final procedure was taken. Each of the schools in the study was either identified as a historically black college of university (HBCUs) or as a predominantly white college or university (non-HBCUs).
Data from the *Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates* were used to compare the job experiences of black graduates of HBCU programs and black graduates of other journalism and mass communication programs in the country.

**Findings**

From the 451 colleges used in this study from the 1998 *Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Enrollments*, it can be estimated that in 1997-98, those journalism programs graduated 33,875 undergraduate students. There were 26,033 white students (76.9 percent), 3,210 black students (9.5 percent), 1,936 Hispanics (5.7 percent), 1,039 students of Asian descent (3.1 percent), 294 American Indians (0.9 percent), and 763 international students (2.2 percent). Six hundred of the students (1.8 percent) in the sample classified their race or ethnicity as “other” (Chart 1).

Of those 3,210 black students, 33.3 percent attended HBCUs. Therefore, it can be stated that from the 451 schools in the study, one-third of the black journalism graduates in 1997-98 attended historically black colleges and universities. Of the 451 schools used in this study from the Annual Survey, 28 of them were historically black colleges and universities. If the historically black colleges and universities were not counted, then the percentage of black graduates receiving journalism degrees dropped to 6.6 percent in 1997-98 for the 451 schools included in this study (Chart 2).

Of the 451 schools used in this study, 147 provided enrollment and graduation figures about the racial composition of both their journalism programs and their journalism graduating classes for 1997-98. The research shows that the black student enrollment in the journalism programs at HBCUs was 97.3 percent in 1997-98. The percentage of black students in the graduating classes at those schools was 97.9 percent (Chart 3). Therefore, the percentage of black students in the graduating class at those HBCUs exceeded the black population for the entire schools. White students accounted for 0.6 percent of the students enrolled in journalism programs at the HBCUs, and comprised 0.8 percent of journalism graduates at those schools. At these HBCUs, the percentage of black students that withdrew from school – or dropped out – was lower than the percentage of white students at HBCUs.

Black students at predominantly white (non-HBCU) institutions accounted for 6.6 percent of the overall student enrollment in the 147 journalism programs used in this portion of the study. Black
students declined to 5.2 percent of the graduates from these schools in 1997-98. White students accounted for 77.2 percent of the students enrolled at non-HBCUs in the study, and comprised 80.5 percent of the graduates at non-HBCUs in 1997-98. When numbers are compared, it can be inferred that black students tended to have a greater propensity to leave school when they attended predominantly white colleges and universities compared to the black students at HBCUs.

While this paper primarily exams data from the 451 schools included in the 1997-98 Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communications Enrollments, it must be noted there are approximately 580 additional programs offering some sort of communications training in the United States. Those schools yielded 18,217 communications graduates in 1996-97, according to data from the U.S. Department of Education. Of those graduates, 1,415 (8 percent) were black, compared with the 9.5 percent of black graduates from the Annual Surveys schools. Of those 580 programs, only nine were located at historically black colleges and universities. The number of historically black colleges and universities offering communications training increases to 37, when Annual Surveys schools and non-Annual Survey schools were combined.

Merging data from both Annual Survey schools and non-Annual Survey schools allows for a more complete examination of all journalism and communication programs across the country (Chart 4). In all, there are 1,031 colleges and universities across the country offering degrees in journalism and communications. It can be concluded that about 9.4 percent of the students who graduated from those schools in 1996-97 were African American, with 77.8 percent white, 5.7 percent Hispanic, 2.0 percent Asian, 0.8 percent American Indian, 2.4 percent international, and 1.7 percent classifying their race or ethnicity as “other”.

In order to compare how black students performed in the job market six to eight months after graduation, depending of whether they attended an HBCU or not, the graduation data from the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates from 1987 to 1998 were analyzed. There were 26,365 respondents to the graduate survey who provided information about their race and ethnicity in this period. Of that number, 1,635 were African American. There were 755 black students who attended HBCUs and 880 who attended non-HBCUs. (Chart 5).
Exactly 58 percent of the black graduates who attended historically black colleges and universities were working full time about six to eight months after graduation. Slightly but not significantly more – 60.7 percent – of the black graduates from predominantly white schools were working full time (chi square = 3.0; p<.10.) (Chart 6). Exactly 11.5 percent of the HBCU black graduates were working part time in journalism, compared to 12.7 percent of the black graduates from predominantly white schools. More of the black graduates at historically black colleges and universities – 13.9 percent – had enrolled in graduate school, compared to 11.8 percent of the black graduates from predominantly white schools. About 16.6 percent of the black graduates at black schools were still looking for employment six to eight months after graduation, compared to 14.8 percent of the black graduates who attended white colleges.

In the 1998 Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates, one question addressed this topic of whether students receiving journalism training were more content with their educational experiences at HBCUs, compared to black students at predominantly white colleges and universities. The graduates were asked: Do you wish now that you had prepared for a career other than in journalism/communications? Of the students at HBCUs, 20 said “yes,” they wished they had selected another career besides journalism, while 30 answered “no” to this question, and four said they never planned to enter the journalism profession. For black students at predominantly white schools, the results were very similar. Twenty-six of the students answered “yes” to the question, while 38 said “no,” and six stated that they never planned a career in journalism. (Chart 7).

**Conclusion**

Comparing the journalism and mass communication programs at historically black colleges and universities to the programs at predominantly white institutions has produced some intriguing findings that might be beneficial to journalism educators in the future.

Historically black colleges and universities still serve an important role in the education of African Americans. Their role and contribution to journalism education is now documented. While the establishment of journalism programs at HBCUs is a relatively new phenomenon, many of these
programs have been able to prepare their black graduates for the labor market at the same rate as predominantly white colleges and universities, as this research has shown.

What is impressive about the contribution of historically black colleges and universities to journalism education is their ability to do so with fewer resources. Previous research has shown that at least 25 percent of 100 black colleges surveyed did not have student newspapers (Reisberg, 2000; Stewart, 2000). Of those that did, most printed only monthly. Yet, black colleges produced one-third of the black journalism graduates in 1997-98 of the 451 schools used in this study. Considering that of the 451 schools surveyed, only 28 of them were historically black colleges and universities, it is impressive that they pull more than their own weight when it comes to the education of black journalism students.

This study also showed that black journalism programs are able to graduate black students at a better rate than predominantly white colleges and universities. The method used in this study that tried to look at retention rates was not the best method, yet it can be tentatively inferred that black students in journalism have a better chance of graduating if they attend black colleges.

What is probably the most compelling finding in this study is the fact that there is no significant statistical difference in the success rate for black journalism graduates entering the job market, regardless of whether they attended a historically black college or a predominantly white institution. This study – at least initially – shows that blacks colleges and universities are able to successfully compete in many ways with their white counterparts. Black students from both institutions are finding jobs in journalism. And in one respect, this study suggests that black students from historically black colleges are seeking advanced degrees at a higher rate that black students who received journalism training at black colleges.

One important finding from this thesis is the fact that it corroborates data produced by the Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Enrollments. The 1998 Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Enrollments estimated that 33,375 students earned journalism and mass communications degrees at the same 451 schools used in this study. Many of the schools in the Annual Survey did not keep or were unable to share information about the gender, race or ethnicity of their students. Only 245, or 54.3 percent, of those program administrators provided data on the gender
of their undergraduate students, and only 194 (43 percent) provided data on the race and ethnicity of the undergraduates (Becker et al., 1999). Projections were done for those schools that did not provide adequate information.

This study was able to fill in some of the gaps in the data from the enrollment survey, and yet, the results were remarkably similar for both studies. This strengthens the validity of the projection methods used in the enrollment survey. The projection technique used in the enrollment survey indicated that 10.3 percent of the graduates from the 451 schools surveyed in 1997-98 were African American. The technique used in this paper estimated that number to be 9.5 percent of the graduates were African American. Estimates for the other racial and ethnic groups also were even more related (Chart 8).

**Future Research**

There are many opportunities to study journalism education at historically black colleges and universities. This study utilized existing data from several sources. Researchers in the future could design survey instruments that specifically addressed the quality of education of journalism programs at historically black and predominantly white colleges and universities. These survey instruments also could provide the opportunity for open-ended questions, as well, as a way for students to more freely express their feelings and concerns about the quality of their education. Future research also could use some qualitative methods of gathering data. In-depth interviews with black college students at HBCUs and predominantly white institutions could be conducted. Focus groups with black students enrolled at HBCUs and predominantly white institutions also could be conducted to produce a wealth of data that was not able to be obtained in this project. Also, this study only focused on data gathered from one academic year (1997-98). Future research could be used from several years, which would show any trends in the education of black students in the area of journalism and mass communication. This study has been a positive first step in gathering data about the role and contribution of historically black colleges and universities, but this is just a beginning.
References


