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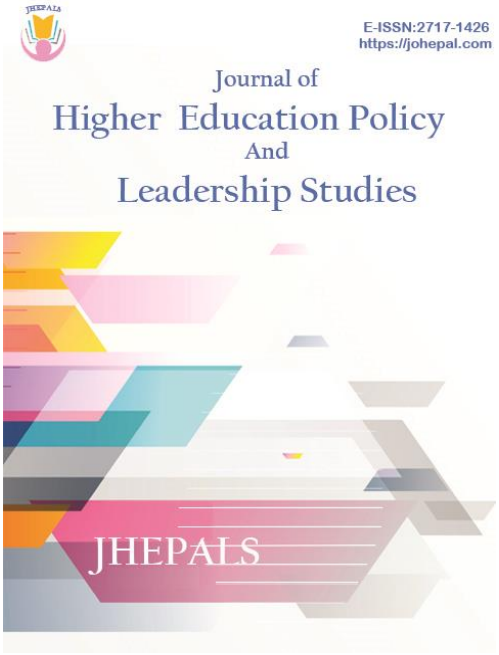

Philanthropic Support of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the 21st Century

Marybeth Gasman [1]

Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, USA
Email: marybeth.gasman@gse.rutgers.edu

Andrés Castro Samayoa [2]

Department of Educational Leadership & Higher Education, Lynch School of Education & Human Development, Boston College, USA
Email: andres.castrosamayoa@bc.edu
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9547-8482

Kemuel Benyehudah [3]

Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, USA
Email: kemuelb@gse.upenn.edu

Anthony Fowlkes [4]

College of Education, The University of Texas at Austin, USA
Email: anthony.fowlkes@austin.utexas.edu

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Marybeth Gasman *
Andrés Castro Samayoa
Kemuel Benyehudah
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Abstract

This paper focuses on philanthropic donations to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, from 2003 to 2021. We examine these years to capitalize on the census of available years in our data source and to also examine the shifts in foundation giving over time. We offer a descriptive overview detailing which philanthropic organizations have provided the largest share of support, the HBCUs receiving these gifts, and the areas for support targeted through these donations. In doing so, our manuscript offers a novel contribution to scholarship on philanthropic giving to HBCUs using an original database of major U.S. philanthropies' annual reports joined with secondary data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Keywords: Philanthropy; Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Fundraising; Corporate and Foundation Giving

***Corresponding author's email:** marybeth.gasman@gse.rutgers.edu

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Introduction

In 2020, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) experienced a renaissance in terms of their philanthropic support. Many HBCUs received the largest donations in their history because of groundbreaking contributions from individuals such as McKenzie Scott (Amazon), Reed Hastings and Patty Quillin (Netflix), Michael Bloomberg, and a range of corporations, including Tik Tok, IBM, Dominion Energy, Capital One, Blue Cross-Blue Shield (Gasman et al., 2021; Williams-Pulfer & Una Osili, 2020). In a year that shined a spotlight on racial and economic injustices throughout the nation – especially for systemic anti-Blackness – HBCUs were finally noticed on the national level in ways unlike the past. For decades, philanthropists and foundations have given in small amounts to HBCUs, saving their signature donations for 'elite' colleges and universities that already boast large endowments and plentiful operating budgets (Gasman, 2007; Gasman & Drezner, 2008).

In this paper, we focus on philanthropic donations to HBCUs during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, from 2003 to 2021. We examine these years to capitalize on the census of available years in our data source and to examine the shifts in foundation giving over time. Our focus offers a descriptive overview detailing which philanthropic organizations have provided the largest share of support, the HBCUs receiving these gifts, and the areas for support targeted through these donations. In doing so, our manuscript provides a novel contribution to scholarship on philanthropic giving to HBCUs through our use of an original database of major U.S. philanthropies' annual reports joined with secondary data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Scholarship focused on philanthropy in higher education regularly makes use of CASE's Voluntary Support of Education (VSA) survey, often regarded as the definitive source for a nationally representative sample of postsecondary philanthropy (Shaker & Borden, 2020). Though the most recent wave of the survey boasted almost 900 institutions within its sample, it only included 21 HBCUs. Proportionally, the inclusion of this number of HBCUs is appropriate given that HBCUs make up 3% of postsecondary institutions in the United States. However, such issues foreclose researchers' opportunity to better understand the nuanced trends in philanthropic giving across all HBCUs. Instead, our paper makes use of a uniquely curated database that allows us to examine the patterns of philanthropic giving to over 96% of all HBCUs.

Literature Review

Philanthropy is an often-neglected domain of research inquiry amongst higher education researchers, yielding a "distinctively discontinuous" body of work dispersed across various disciplinary homes (Walton, 2019). In recent years, there has been increased interest, and even the establishment of the *Philanthropy & Education* journal. Regarding foundations and their interest in education, three articles informed our understanding of the literature. Reckhow and Synder (2014), in their work "The Expanding Role of Philanthropy in Education Politics," explore the ever-changing role of foundations in the political issues that cross paths with educational institutions. They found, using network analysis, which we also employ, that foundations have been investing in national-level advocacy groups and, in fact, a myriad of foundations are supporting the same organizations. The authors conclude that foundations, once accused of being sporadic in their approach to fundraising, are now

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leveraging their donations to maximize their impact and their voices. Although they do not talk about HBCUs specifically, we see, and depict below, similar trends in foundation support of HBCUs.

The second article that informed our research, and that is related to the work and investments of foundations overall is McClure et al's (2017) "Philanthropic Giving by Foundations to Higher Education Institutions: A State-Level Network Analysis." Their work is also a network analysis and is similar in nature to Reckhow and Snyder (2014). Recognizing the scarcity of empirical research related to foundations and higher education, the authors sought to explore foundation giving to colleges and universities in North Carolina. The authors argue that when institutions of higher education are part of a larger network (e.g., research universities), that they have an advantage in terms of position for securing foundation donations in comparison to bachelor's degree-granting institutions, such as HBCUs. They found that over half of the HBCUs in North Carolina cluster at the bottom of a list of colleges and universities receiving foundation donations – in terms of number of donations received. They credit HBCUs having less social capital – which is consistent with the tenets of social network theory – for their lack of success in pursuing funding. Of importance, McClure et al (2017) argue that many of the higher education institutions that receive the most foundation support are already well resourced and perhaps foundations would have more of an impact if they gave to HBCUs and other institutions that educate more low-income and first-generation students.

A third article by Jung et al (2018) also explores the work of foundations albeit not in relation to HBCUs. Their research is focused on creating a typology that differentiates between the various foundations given their focus, characteristics, and contributions. They argue that it is important to have a typology of foundations given the increased role that foundations are playing in sociopolitical issues. Based on a highly complex classification system, they propose a new framework of foundation types, including 13 categories of foundations that cut across context, organization, and strategy. Although we do not employ their typology, we were informed by their ideas when thinking about the categories of support provided to HBCUs by foundations.

Philanthropic scholarship focused on HBCUs remains siloed. The extant literature on HBCU philanthropy can be categorized into three broad domains: individuals' philanthropy focused on student and alumni giving (Cohen, 2006; Drezner, 2010; Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003; Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Hunter et al., 1999; Williams, 2010), corporate and foundation giving (Gasman, 2010; Gasman & Drezner, 2008), and historical examinations of philanthropy's role in the development of HBCUs (Anderson, 1988; Anderson & Moss Jr., 1999; Freeman, 2010; Gasman, 2007; Peeps, 1981; Williamson, 2017).

Student and Alumni Giving

Most of the research related to student and alumni giving is based on qualitative interviews, with a few surveys and all but a few have relatively small samples. Cohen (2006) surveyed a sample of 1,0000 alumni from four HBCUs, finding that the 12% response rate revealed the lack of engagement and a skew in responders' high regard for their alma maters while also expressing concern for their institutions' financial health. Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins (2003) also conducted a survey, in addition to interviews, and found that HBCU alumni were hesitant to give if they ascribed negative attributions to institutional staff throughout the

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university, from financial aid representatives to the registrar's office. Alumni recollected these negative experiences as explanations that undermined their potential interest in financially supporting their institutions through donations. They also expressed that their strongest reason for not giving or giving to their alma mater was not being asked.

Hunter et al (1999) and Drezner (2010) conducted qualitative interviews with HBCU alumni and students, respectively, about their giving habits and future giving habits. Both studies include a small number of interviews and point to education around philanthropic giving as one of the most important strategies that HBCUs can use to increase alumni giving.

Although not focused entirely on alumni giving or philanthropic giving, Gasman and Bowman (2011) and Williams (2010), discuss engaging alumni and non-alumni donors as well as foundations in giving. Both studies involve qualitative interviews with presidents. Gasman and Bowman analyze the strategies and unique approaches that HBCU presidents use to develop relationships with donors and to engage alumni who may have disengaged due to negative experiences. Williams (2010) discusses the entrepreneurial leadership styles of presidents as they raise money for HBCUs, finding that most HBCU presidents use traditional approaches and have little fundraising background.

Corporate and Foundation Giving

Our study focuses on corporate, foundation and individual philanthropic giving to HBCUs. Scholars have summarily overlooked the topic with two exceptions. Gasman (2010) wrote an overview of the various funding streams that support HBCUs; however, the overview does not include original research. Instead, she brought together existing research across private, state, and federal funding to help interested parties to understand how HBCUs are funded and where they need to diversify funding sources. In addition, Gasman and Drezner (2008) traced the rise of corporate philanthropy to HBCUs, demonstrating how philanthropists gave substantially less to HBCUs than PWIs in the same regions and discussing the relationships between HBCU presidents and corporate donors.

In studies on HBCUs' financial conditions, researchers have drawn inferences from datasets where HBCUs represent a modest proportion of the institutional sampling (Osili et al., 2013). Others have focused explicitly on individual foundations, such as Deng et al.'s (2020) study of the absent positive impact of the Koch Foundation's support for HBCUs and their increased economics research productivity. These works have offered important insights into the general condition of HBCUs' financial health and the role of philanthropic giving, while also leaving an opportunity for researchers to investigate the role of specific foundations and the accrual of gifts with sufficient granularity to compare distributions of philanthropic gifts amongst HBCUs.

Historical Role of Philanthropy in the Development of HBCUs

The area of literature that is most robust in terms of philanthropy and HBCUs is historical in nature. The most prominent historical investigation of philanthropic support of HBCUs is Anderson's (1988) book *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 1860-1935, which delves deeply into the hegemonic tendencies of White philanthropists as they attempted to control the curriculum and students' actions at HBCUs beginning with their establishment and through the mid-1930s. Anderson demonstrated how philanthropists used the White presidents of a select group of HBCUs as puppets to develop a semi-skilled workforce for

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their industries. Anderson and Moss Jr. (1999) and Peeps (1981) also explored the role of White philanthropists, arguing that they were more benevolent and more complex in their support of HBCUs and African Americans than Anderson (1988) gave them credit for in his history. Freeman (2010) urged readers to consider the role of African Americans in the creation of HBCUs as well as their philanthropic support. He shifted discussions of philanthropy and HBCUs from Whites to African Americans, focusing on the role of African Americans in the creation and support of Wilberforce University.

Lastly, Gasman (2007) explored the relationships between White philanthropists and HBCUs between 1940 and 1980 through the lens of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). She demonstrated that individuals, such as John D. Rockefeller Jr. and John D. Rockefeller III, had immense oversight and control over the private HBCUs that were members of the UNCF even up until the mid-1970s – the same kind of control that Anderson (1988) found earlier in the century. Unfortunately, scholars have not examined the philanthropic contributions to, relationships with, or support of HBCUs in the current day with any depth.

Rather than comprehensive accounts of HBCUs as a sector of higher education in the United States, these prior studies have focused on select institutions to build in depth cases describing the conditions of philanthropic giving for given colleges and universities. Most of these studies rely on archival data, qualitative interviews, or institutional dashboards for their analyses.

Given the extant literature's inability to describe the landscape of philanthropic contributions to HBCUs across institutions longitudinally, we were guided by the following questions: 1.) How much has each accredited HBCU received in philanthropic contributions between 2006 and 2018? 2.) Which HBCUs have received the largest amounts of philanthropic contributions between 2006-2021? 3.) Which funders have given the largest financial support to HBCUs between 2006-2021? 4.) Which programmatic areas receive the greatest support at HBCUs?

Research Methodology

Our study follows a descriptive overview of the philanthropic trends specific to HBCUs. Following Murray's (2013) approach examining philanthropy's role in university-based STEM research, we adopt a descriptive review of philanthropic trends in HBCUs by constructing an original dataset of philanthropic giving to HBCUs and supplemental secondary data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

We derived a unique dataset through two sources. First, we retrieved data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). From IPEDS, we extracted institutional attributes for HBCUs, including their type (public/private; two-year/four-year), state, city, and basic Carnegie classification (as of 2018).

Additionally, we manually retrieved the contributions by individual philanthropic organizations to HBCUs.* Using the names of HBCUs listed on IPEDS (n=102), we examined Candid's Foundation Directory to locate foundations that provided donations to any HBCU

* Special thanks to the team of undergraduate and graduate level research assistants at the Center for Minority Serving Institutions who supported beta data collection efforts from 2017-2019 as part of their paid assistantships. These data were not used in this paper but tested and provided a foundation for this work.

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between 2003 and 2021 (these are all the years included within the directory). For each HBCU, we retrieved all their records of donations, including the name of the granting foundation, the year it was first disbursed, and the general description for the grant (if available).

Prior to answering our guiding research questions below, we offer a descriptive overview of our dataset and describe the rationale for our decision to exclude certain data from our analytic sample. There are 19,943 donation records within our dataset, where each record represents a specific Foundation's donation to a given HBCU during a year between 2003-2021. We only retained information for donations that listed a non-zero amount, thus removing 55 entries that did not include the total amount given by the philanthropic organization. This resulted in a total of 19,888 records in our sample. Though the records in the database include donations since 2003 and as late as 2021, almost half of the records of donations (9,124 or 46%) are registered within a four-year span: 2015-2018. In turn, the donations during this time account for 30% ($464 million) of the cumulative total donated to HBCUs between 2003-2021.

There are 2,396 unique foundations in our dataset. We retained foundations with regional branches as distinct entities (e.g., The Community Foundation has 8 distinct records given that the foundation's name is listed as 'The Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham" or The Community Foundation of Tennessee" which supported HBCUs in separate regions of the United States. Collapsing these under a parent code would have eliminated our dataset's ability to distinguish such regional differences.

From the census of 102 HBCUs within IPEDS, 96 of them (94%) have at least one record of donation within our dataset. The institutions without a record of donation included: Southern University at Shreveport, Central State University, Clinton College, Denmark Technical College, St. Phillip's College, and the University of the District of Columbia (though its law school, the David A. Clarke School of Law, does have records receiving over $4 million during the specified time).

Positionality

As researchers committed to equity and justice in educational systems, we approached this descriptive overview of HBCUs' philanthropic trends through perspectives attentive to our individual social locations. Attentiveness to authors' positionality is important for descriptive studies of financial data (i.e., this manuscript), as it is for research drawing from interpretive qualitative traditions. Researchers' understandings of social realities mediate the iterative processes of data construction, interpretation, and description. Amongst the five authors in this paper, one is a current trustee of two HBCUs and serves as an affiliate faculty member at three HBCUs, and one is an HBCU graduate; all authors save one are people of color. For all authors, understanding how structures of classism, racism, and sexism frame the fiscal health of postsecondary institutions aligns with opportunities to advance a more equitable future for educational opportunities. All four authors deem it paramount to describe the landscape of gift-giving for HBCUs through a lens that does not ascribe differential patterns of gift accrual as indicative of institutional deficiencies. Thus, we aim to challenge symbolic and material harm that has often resulted from research that presumes that disparities in fiscal outcomes at HBCUs are caused by institutional shortcomings. On the contrary, our

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intent is to chart opportunities for further work that can more closely examine the mechanisms accounting for the patterns and differences emerging from our overview.

Limitations

We make note that there are limitations informing the types of claims we can make from our data. We have made every effort to construct a census of reported data for HBCUs by private foundations between 2003-2021 using the Candid's Foundation Directory (Candid is data partnership between the Foundation Center & GuideStar). Foundations without consistent records within this database would then result in potential omissions beyond our data collection strategy. Similarly, data derived from IPEDS requires care to avoid errors in joins across multiple years (Jaquette & Parra, 2014). Manual extraction of data is known to be subject to data entry errors (Paulsen et al., 2012) and we took caution to develop a protocol for data entry, as well as verifying the data entry by replicating the process for a random subset of collected data at multiple intervals of our data collection process. Our analysis only includes HBCUs that were listed within the list of grantees (n=96). These limitations notwithstanding, we find that our longitudinal overview of HBCUs' receipt of philanthropic gifts offers an important contribution to the literature on philanthropy in higher education.

Findings

Our findings are organized by our research questions. They are based on our data and are contextualized and interpreted using the literature.

1.) How much has each accredited HBCU received in philanthropic contributions between 2003 and 2021? And 2.) Which HBCUs received the largest gifts during this period?

Forty-nine (49%) of HBCUs have received donations every year between 2003-2020 (excluding the most recent year given that not all institutions have reported their 2021 donations). Indeed, the ten HBCUs with the highest cumulative amounts in their donations have received donations every year.

During this time, HBCUs collectively received over $1.5 billion (CIP adjusted) in philanthropic gifts (See Table 1). Table 1 shows the number of individual foundations that gifted to at least one HBCU every year, with the cumulative total for every year and the total number of HBCUs that received a gift that year. Additionally, Table 1 shows the HBCU that received the largest gift each year, with the total amount for that gift shown next to the institution's name. For example, Johnson C. Smith University received the largest gift of any HBCU in our database, with a gift of just over $43 million (adjusted for inflation) in 2011. That year, 73 HBCUs received donations from 658 foundations totaling over $70.7 million in gifts.

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Table 1
Annual Overview of Foundation Donations to HBCUs with Top HBCU Recipient – by Year (CIP Adjusted)

Table 1. Annual Overview of Foundation Donations to HBCUs with Top HBCU Recipient, by year (CIP Adjusted)					
Year	**Individual Foundation Gifts**	**Total Gifts**	**Total HBCU Recipients**	**Largest Gift Recipient**	**Largest Gift Amount**
2003	519	$ 67,687,583	65	Morehouse School of Medicine	$ 16,748,025
2004	639	$ 53,199,006	73	Morehouse School of Medicine	$ 7,089,634
2005	753	$ 84,221,324	77	Xavier University of Louisiana	$ 13,181,276
2006	784	$ 35,308,670	77	Dillard University	$ 5,121,889
2007	786	$ 84,634,842	81	Morehouse College	$ 11,263,591
2008	685	$ 45,076,713	76	Xavier University of Louisiana	$ 4,785,255
2009	706	$ 60,826,371	72	Meharry Medical College	$ 15,083,131
2010	723	$ 56,045,102	80	Morehouse College	$ 10,768,955
2011	658	$ 70,752,510	73	Johnson C. Smith	$ 43,520,375
2012	815	$ 46,883,432	81	Spelman College	$ 12,320,989
2013	1,017	$ 50,458,888	82	Morehouse College	$ 7,910,813
2014	1,578	$ 62,019,317	84	Spelman College	$ 11,305,066
2015	2,827	$ 103,932,915	89	Johnson C. Smith	$ 7,088,704
2016	2,393	$ 119,711,767	90	Morehouse School of Medicine	$ 10,142,740
2017	1,843	$ 112,086,125	91	Morehouse College	$ 9,442,631
2018	2,060	$ 128,511,639	89	Johnson C. Smith	$ 11,783,674
2019	884	$ 74,810,055	87	Johnson C. Smith	$ 13,112,770
2020	191	$ 221,360,943	64	Howard University	$ 44,475,360
2021	27	$ 54,462,657	15	North Carolina A & T State University	$ 12,599,125
Grand Total	*19,888*	*$ 1,531,989,860*	*96*	-	-

Examining the HBCUs that have received the largest cumulative donations over time shows a pattern of giving that favors private institutions (see Table 2). When we look more closely at these ten institutions, some are outliers, including Johnson C. Smith University, which receives a regular, deeded contribution from The Duke Endowment (The Duke Endowment, n.d.; Oakwood University, 2020). Of these ten HBCUs, four of them – Spelman College, Morehouse College, Xavier University of Louisiana, and Howard University are ranked in the top ten in U.S. News and World Report's (2020) ranking of HBCUs. Two of these are postbaccalaureate Medical Schools (Morehouse School of Medicine and Meharry Medical College). And, notably, the top 10 only represents private HBCUs and the cumulative gifts received by these ten institutions (over $880 million) accounts for over 58% of the $1.5 billion gifts received by HBCUs between 2003-2021.

Table 2.
Top 10 HBCY Recipients of Philanthropic Gifts (2003-2021, CIP Adjusted)

Table 2. Top 10 HBCU Recipients of Philanthropic Gifts (2003-2021, CIP Adjusted)					
Institution	**State**	**Total Donations**	**Enrollment**	**Type**	**Carnegie Classification**
Johnson C. Smith University	North Carolina	$145,411,994.41	1,000 - 4,999	Private, 4-year	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus
Morehouse School of Medicine	Georgia	$119,106,424.07	Under 1,000	Private, 4-year	Special Focus Four-Year: Medical Schools & Centers
Morehouse College	Georgia	$116,031,341.37	1,000 - 4,999	Private, 4-year	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus
Howard University	District of Columbia	$110,932,970.09	10,000 - 19,999	Private, 4-year	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity
Spelman College	Georgia	$107,001,712.04	1,000 - 4,999	Private, 4-year	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus
Meharry Medical College	Tennessee	$ 77,215,673.94	Under 1,000	Private, 4-year	Special Focus Four-Year: Medical Schools & Centers
Xavier University of Louisiana	Louisiana	$ 64,299,829.65	1,000 - 4,999	Private, 4-year	Master's Colleges & Universities: Small Programs
LeMoyne-Owen College	Tennessee	$ 52,756,510.39	Under 1,000	Private, 4-year	Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields
Clark Atlanta University	Georgia	$ 44,050,176.36	1,000 - 4,999	Private, 4-year	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity
Dillard University	Louisiana	$ 43,924,967.11	1,000 - 4,999	Private, 4-year	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus
Total		*$880,731,599.43*			

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3.) Which funders have given the largest financial support to HBCUs between 2006-2016?

Drawing from our review of the annual reports from the 2,396 foundations that have gifted support for HBCUs, we present a table with the 10 organizations, which disbursed the largest cumulative total in gifts to HBCUs between 2003-2021 (see Table 3).

The funders that gave the most financial support to HBCUs between 2003 and 2021 (in decreasing order of gift size) include: The Duke Endowment, Bloomberg Philanthropies, United Negro College Fund (UNCF), The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, National Collegiate Athletic Association, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, Lily Endowment, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation. Notably, most of the Andrew W. Mellon's Foundation's investments in HBCUs took place prior to the Great Recession of 2008, with a cumulative donation of over $15 million (CIP adjusted) in 2007 to six HBCUs (Xavier University of Louisiana, Spelman College, Morehouse College, Johnson C. Smith University, Fisk University and Dillard University). Of these, Spelman College received the largest award ($3.8 million, CIP adjusted) to "to support faculty positions in the Computer and Information Science department and the Africans in the Diaspora and the World program." In contrast, other foundations (e.g., Lily Endowment) have disbursed smaller amounts each year (slightly over $1 million each year) but have done so with greater annual consistency than foundations that gift larger sums. Of note, the UNCF is a pass-through organization as individual donors, corporations, and foundations give to the UNCF and it redistributes funds. Still, the UNCF if a major contributor and funder to HBCUs (Gasman, 2007).

Table 3
Top 10 Foundation with Largest Cumulative Donations to HBCUs, 2003-2021 (CIP Adjusted)

Table 3. Top 10 Foundation with Largest Cumulative Donations to HBCUs, 2003-2021 (CIP Adjusted)

Foundation	Amount
The Duke Endowment	$ 125,533,683
Bloomberg Philanthropies, Inc.	$ 97,748,210
United Negro College Fund, Inc.	$ 84,227,182
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation	$ 78,457,086
National Collegiate Athletic Association	$ 60,064,367
W.K. Kellogg Foundation	$ 49,791,129
Community Foundation Of Greater Memphis	$ 49,059,681
Lilly Endowment Inc.	$ 42,611,815
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	$ 38,709,798
Robert W. Woodruff Foundation	$ 28,163,757

To depict shifts in Foundations' support over time, we show the trends over ten years, between 2006 and 2016 to demonstrate how the network of HBCUs and philanthropic organizations has changed over time. Figures 1 and 2 shows an abridged network of HBCU grantee recipients (grey circles) and foundations (red circles). For visualization purposes, we have omitted depictions of the full network to enhance readability. The size of the foundation's red circle is proportional to their total amount of funds given that year. The thickness of the arrows shows the proportional amount of the gift received by the HBCU, with private HBCUs depicted with green arrows and public HBCUs depicted with purple arrows. In 2006, foundations have fewer edges with multiple HBCUs, whereas in 2016, the

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network shows more connections between an individual foundation and multiple HBCUs. This shows how foundations have diversified the number of HBCUs to which they confer gifts. Indeed, as previously suggested in Table 1, 77 HBCUs received grants in 2006, with 90 HBCUs receiving grants in 2016. However, there are fewer public HBCUs receiving larger gifts, despite their representative increase in the network between these two points in time.

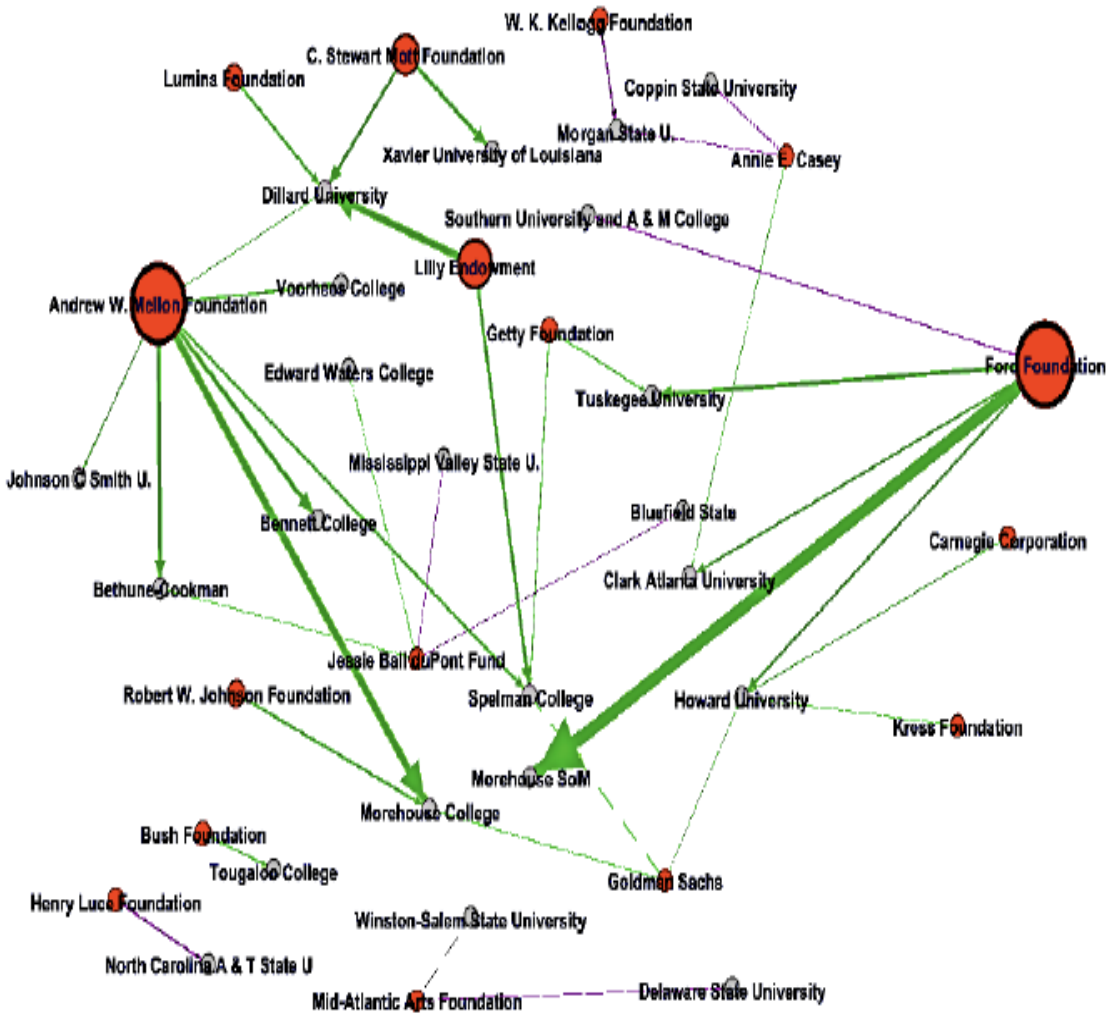

Figure 1. 2006 Network of HBCUs and Foundations (select institutions)

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Philanthropic Support of HBCUs

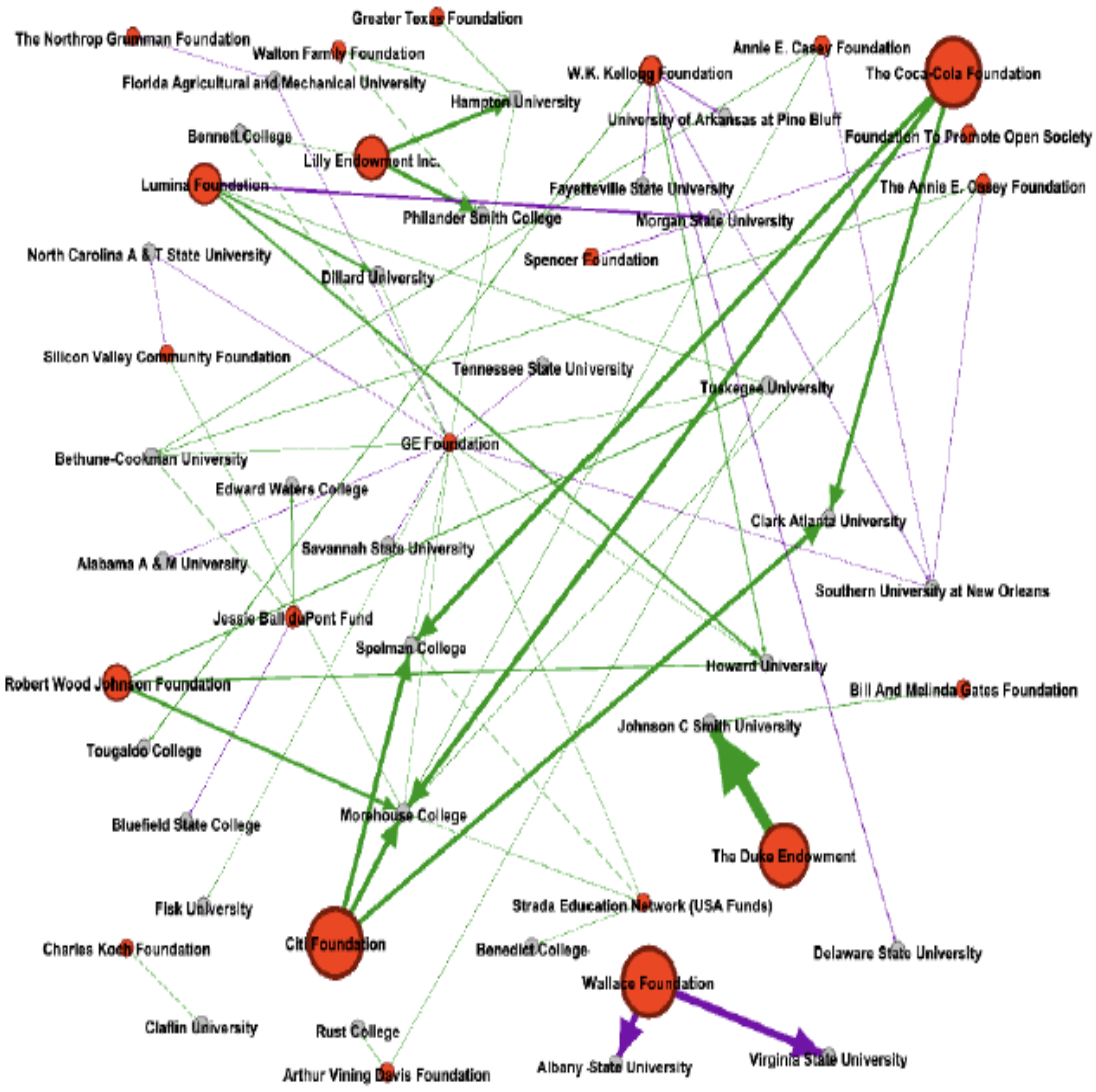

Figure 2. 2016 Network of HBCUs and Foundations (select institutions)

4.) Which programmatic areas receive the greatest support at HBCUs?

The programmatic areas that received the greatest support at HBCUs over this ten-year period include STEM or health programs, arts and museums, academic research centers and programs, student success programs, scholarships, college-public school partnerships, international research, community outreach, undergraduate research, and faculty development in order of support level. Some examples of contributions include a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to Claflin University to conduct research related to disease prevention and health promotion around childhood obesity ($100,000); a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to Morehouse College to support student success initiatives ($100,000); a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to Tougaloo College

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to support community outreach around K-12 STEM education ($200,000); and a grant from the Lilly Endowment to Howard University to support the training of pastors and leaders in the institution's divinity school ($250,000).

Discussion and Conclusions

Our retrospective scan of philanthropic gift-giving to HBCUs offers multiple implications for researchers, institutional leaders at HBCUs and philanthropies alike. For researchers, our data show individual philanthropic organizations' gifts to specific HBCUs over time, which offers a more granular insight into the sources of external support for HBCUs. However, we note that the undercount between the total gifts disclosed by institutions through IPEDS totaling over $4 billion are magnitudes larger than the documented $1.5 billion million obtained from our data. These varying definitions of what constitutes gifts across databases warrant further examination to create a more comprehensive overview of HBCUs' philanthropic ecosystem.

The manual extraction of foundations' support for HBCUs is a resource-intensive endeavor that requires investments to ensure that data are updated every fiscal year. Our research demonstrates how HBCUs could benefit from a comprehensive strategy that collects information on philanthropic giving to their sector of higher education that extends beyond the available data from federal repositories (e.g., IPEDS). For institutional leaders, we note how—much in the same way that foundations have a history of supporting clustered institutions and intermediary organizations — foundations themselves can benefit from collective grantmaking targeted to HBCUs as an effort to coordinate the funding priorities and capacity for sustainable impact.

Foundations should familiarize themselves with the motivations of past philanthropists, which were often controlling and hegemonic in nature. There were considerable strings attached to foundation gifts, which made it difficult for HBCUs to have autonomy (Anderson, 1988; Gasman, 2007). The most recent donation by philanthropist Mackenzie Scott offered a no-strings-attached model of injecting capital to HBCUs' development (Gasman et al., 2021). This donation might prompt a trend that forces foundations to reconsider their approach to philanthropic giving to HBCUs, including more effort to support their operating budgets, especially given the evidence of the precarious conditions that HBCUs fare with federal and state support.

HBCUs themselves, given that they often lack the infrastructure needed to secure large-scale philanthropic contributions, might benefit from pooling resources. Not only would sharing resources cost less, but philanthropic organizations often focus on having the largest impact and 'scaling up' their investments through grants given to multiple institutions. Much like colleges and universities in general, wealth at HBCUs is concentrated in a small group of HBCUs (see Table 1). These HBCUs are also more likely to attract the attention of future philanthropic contributions given that wealth begets wealth – that is, the more money you have, the more money you will earn or receive in the future (Ashenfelter & Rouse, 2000; Piketty, 2017). In addition, philanthropists and foundations want to be associated with successful institutions and as such, the most well-known and successful HBCUs will continue to be supported at higher levels (Gasman, 2004; Gasman, 2007; Gasman & Epstein, 2004).

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Philanthropic Support of HBCUs

The data from this paper reveal the trends in philanthropic gift-giving to HBCUs in the early decades of the 21st century. As we move further into the new century, institutions of higher education have been forced to readapt to the upheaval of a novel coronavirus, political turmoil in the United States, and a looping drop in undergraduate enrollments. These contextual factors will exacerbate the conditions that HBCUs face to support the education of their students. Foundations and institutions can turn to this retrospective account to better understand the institutions that can benefit from continued support and the areas for subsequent growth.

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Dr. Marybeth Gasman is the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Endowed Chair & a Distinguished Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. She is the author of 33 books including *Doing the Right Thing: How Colleges and Universities Can Undo Systemic Racism in Faculty Hiring* (Princeton University Press, 2022).

Dr. Andrés Castro Samayoa is an Assistant Professor in the Education Leadership & Policy Department in the Lynch School at Boston College. His work enhances experiences for students of color from under-resourced communities—specifically focusing on Hispanic-serving institutions. His expertise includes the social history of large-scale datasets in post-secondary education; educational researchers' use of data to explore issues of diversity; and the institutionalization of services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and transgender students.

Mr. Kemuel Benyehudah is a doctoral student in higher education at the University of Pennsylvania. His work focuses on African American curators in college and university art spaces.

Mr. Anthony Fowlkes is a doctoral student in higher education at the University of Texas. His work focuses on equity issues in higher education.

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