



## THE ROLE OF MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS IN NATIONAL COLLEGE COMPLETION GOALS

By Noël Harmon, Ph.D.

One of the most pressing issues in our nation today is the educational attainment of our citizens. The United States has long made education a priority, not only as a means of individual opportunity, but also as a pathway for the economic and social stability of the nation. However, providing greater access to and support for a postsecondary credential or degree for all students remains one of our most important challenges.

Those working in the areas of college access and success are driven by ambitious national completion goals set by the Obama administration: That, by 2020, all adult Americans will have committed to at least one year of higher education or career training and America will have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

The only way to achieve these goals will be to focus on underserved students who are the fastest growing U.S. demographic, but whose rates of college attainment are the lowest. The percentage of people of color in the United States is projected to increase from 31 percent today to 40 percent by 2020 and to 52 percent by 2050. Given this increase, we must focus on educational equity to transform our

educational system, meet workforce demands, and bolster the economy.

### **Minority-Serving Institutions: Critical Partners in the Completion Agenda**

A central component in the dialogue on how to accomplish national college completion goals is the role of minority-serving institutions (MSIs).

MSIs include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal College and Universities (TCUs), and most recently Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) **TABLE1**. Their motivation is rooted in a history of desire to serve low-income, first-generation, and under-represented students. Thanks to their unique understanding of the students they

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1. National Center for Education Statistics. 2009. *Digest of Education Statistics*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

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serve, they are positioned to move the college completion agenda forward in distinct and innovative ways. Emerging research suggests that the institutional role matters.

developmental education, Black male retention, and mobility and transfer. A fifth brief will summarize the project and will highlight each of the eight grantee teams.

**The only way to achieve college completion goals and close the equity gap will be to focus on underserved populations, such as students of color, who are part of the fastest growing demographic groups in the nation.**

In recent years, MSIs have been invited to participate in a number of different initiatives to develop and implement data-driven programs and practices with potential to affect the national college completion goals. Funders such as Lumina Foundation for Education have recognized MSIs’ unique contributions and perspectives on the factors that affect persistence and degree attainment. These institutions are sharing ideas and results from work that is focused specifically on those factors, with broad implications for all institutions.

We hope this series will help situate MSIs within a national context and be useful to practitioners and policymakers alike as we continue to pursue our national completion goals.

**Models of Success Practice Briefs**

Over the next year, the Institute of Higher Education Policy (IHEP) will release four additional briefs featuring emerging themes from the Lumina MSI Models of Success project: Data capacity,

**TABLE 1**

| <b>Minority-Serving Institutions</b>  | <b>Total Number of Each Institution Type</b> |
|---|--|
| <b>Historically Black Colleges and Universities</b>                         | 105  |
| <b>Tribal Colleges and Universities</b>                                     | 36   |
| <b>Hispanic Serving Institutions</b>  | 275  |
| <b>Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions</b> | 15   |

## GRANTEES\*

### **American Indian Higher Education Consortium, Alexandria, Va.**

### **California State University Monterey Bay, Monterey, Calif.**

- Hartnell College, Salinas, Calif.
- Cabrillo College, Aptos, Calif.

### **Florida International University, Miami, Fla.**

- Miami Dade College, Miami, Fla.

### **Jackson State University, Jackson, Miss.**

- Alcorn State University, Alcorn, Miss.
- Dillard University, New Orleans, La.
- Hinds Community College, Utica, Miss.
- Miles College, Fairfield, Ala.
- Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, Miss.

### **Salish Kootenai College, Pueblo, Mont.**

- Fort Peck Community College, Poplar, Mont.

### **Southern Education Foundation, Atlanta, Ga.**

### **University of North Carolina System, Chapel Hill, N.C.**

- Elizabeth City State University, Elizabeth City, N.C.
- Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, N.C.
- North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, N.C.
- North Carolina Central University, Durham, N.C.
- University of North Carolina-Pembroke, Pembroke, N.C.
- Winston-Salem State University, Winston-Salem, N.C.

### **University of Texas El Paso, El Paso, Texas**

- El Paso Community College, El Paso, Texas
- Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, Texas
- Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

*\*Those in bold indicate the lead institution or organization.*

## Lumina MSI Models of Success

The program began in fall 2009 and will conclude in fall 2012. Seeking to dramatically increase college completion, especially among first-generation students, low-income students, and students of color, the Lumina MSI Models of Success project is partnering with more than 25 MSIs and other organizations to improve and document increased postsecondary attainment. Participating institutions and organizations embrace a collective MSI success agenda.

### **The Lumina MSI Models of Success program has five objectives:**

1. To improve the capacity of MSIs to collect, analyze, and use data to inform decisions that will promote student success;
2. To create a collective voice for policy advocacy on behalf of MSIs;
3. To strengthen policy and practice to improve developmental education;
4. To increase MSIs' commitment to transparency and effectiveness in improving student learning outcomes; and
5. To increase the postsecondary completion of traditionally underserved students, especially men of color.

As the key intermediary for the initiative, IHEP provides technical assistance and support for the eight other grantees. IHEP also assists with the documentation and dissemination of the project findings to inform the higher education success policy agenda at the federal, state, and institutional levels.

## Minority-Serving Institutions: Mission and Goals

Most MSIs in the United States are public two- and four-year institutions, located in the Southeast, Southwest, and West. Together they enroll more than 2.3 million students, or close to 14 percent of all students, including Black, American Indian, Hispanic, and Asian American Pacific Islander American students.

MSIs graduate a substantial number of minority students. In 2007–08, MSIs awarded almost 187,000 degrees and certificates to students of color, indicating MSIs' promise as contributors to the nation's completion goals.

HBCUs represent 3 percent of all postsecondary institutions, but enroll 16 percent of Black students; TCUs represent less than 1 percent of postsecondary institutions, but enroll 19 percent of American Indian students; HSIs represent only 4 percent of postsecondary institutions but enroll 42 percent of all Hispanic students.<sup>2</sup>

While MSIs vary in type, make-up, and history, they are tightly connected to the complex racial and ethnic histories of the United States and have a long history of investing in students who may not otherwise go to college. Their years of experience educating underrepresented students are one of their greatest strengths. MSIs often provide the best fit for students of color, thus improving their chances of graduating.

First, MSIs celebrate diversity. Contrary to the belief that MSIs promote homogeneity, they are leaders in providing meaningful interactions between people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, often leading to open conversations that foster greater exploration and understanding of our collective similarities and

## Minority-Serving Institutions invest significantly in students with need.

differences. Additionally, many MSIs have an institutional commitment to hiring faculty and staff of color, creating potential for mentoring relationships with students, a practice that significantly affects the likelihood of student success.

## A Closer Look at MSIs

### Historically Black Colleges and Universities

HBCUs in the United States date back to 1837 and pioneered today's concept of the MSI. While these institutions were founded primarily for the education of African Americans, their charters were not exclusionary. Currently around 214,000, or 16 percent, of all Black higher education students in the nation, are enrolled at HBCUs, which comprise 3 percent of all colleges and universities nationwide. Most HBCUs are four-year public or private institutions, though a few are two-year institutions. Most are located in the South or Southeast.

### Tribal Colleges and Universities

The Navajo Nation created the first Tribal College (now known as Diné College) in 1968 in Arizona to provide affordable and culturally specific education to American Indians. American Indians 18 years old and younger are the fastest growing population per capita in the United States, and TCUs enroll approximately 19 percent of all American Indian students. There are currently 36 TCUs, with 78 campuses, in more than 15 states, and representing more than 250 federally recognized tribes. TCUs are predominantly public two-year institutions and traditionally are located on reservations or other tribally controlled lands, many of which are in extremely rural areas.

Second, MSIs are committed to a holistic comprehensive approach to educating students by creating and fostering cultural traditions within communities. They recognize that not all students learn in the same way and they actively seek new ways to address the educational needs of their students. They challenge and support their students through culturally sensitive and relevant curricula, and programs that address both students' cognitive and psychosocial development. Many MSIs have strong

2. Gasman, M. 2008. *Minority-Serving Institutions: The Path to Successfully Educating Students of Color*. Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation for Education.

## A Closer Look at MSIs, Cont'd.

### Hispanic Serving Institutions

HSIs are defined as accredited degree-granting colleges and universities with Hispanic students accounting for 25 percent or more of the undergraduate enrollment, hence with only a few exceptions, they are not institutions formed for the specific purpose of educating Hispanic students. HSIs are one of the fastest growing MSI designations. Today, HSIs represent almost 4 percent of all post-secondary institutions. They enroll approximately 42 percent of all Hispanic college students. HSIs grant more associate's and bachelor's degrees to Hispanic students than all other American colleges and universities combined, and the majority of HSIs are community colleges (53 percent) located in California, Florida, New Mexico, and Texas.

### Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions

AANAPISIs are the most recent MSI designation, and were first recognized in 2008. There are currently 15 AANAPISIs in the United States with a population of students that encompasses over 48 different ethnicities. Disaggregated data on the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) population reveal a complex demography. Wide disparities exist within the AAPI population relating to poverty, educational attainment, and employment; several ethnicities show higher poverty rates than some other ethnic minority groups. AANAPISIs are two- and four-year public institutions located primarily on the East Coast or West Coast.

cultural and ethnic studies programs, with leading scholars teaching and leading the departments. Students have opportunities to participate in activities derived from their specific cultural traditions. Additionally, many students at MSIs are part of learning communities that bridge in-class and out-of-class learning experiences to foster interactive and applied learning.

Third, MSIs encourage students to explore and develop their identities, key to a sense of self-worth. According to sociological research dating back to the

1980s, MSIs excel in increasing students' self-esteem and solidifying their cultural identities. MSIs promote student engagement and involvement on their campuses, which are key factors for student success.<sup>3</sup> Students at MSIs are encouraged to develop their leadership skills and to engage in a variety of leadership opportunities and positions both on campus and in the surrounding communities. Many MSIs serve communities that face a number of challenges. Their contributions to the communities in which they are located not only cements the relationship between the institution and the community, but also instills a sense of civic engagement in the students, crucial to sustaining a thriving social and economic vitality.

Fourth, MSIs invest significantly in students with need. Students at MSIs are more likely than those attending predominantly White institutions to have lower levels of academic preparation for college. Almost half of all MSI students are the first in their families to attend college, compared with only 35 percent of students at predominantly White institutions. MSIs also enroll a disproportionate number of low-income students. Around 98 percent of Black and American Indians who attend HBCUs or TCUs qualify for federal, need-based aid. Nearly half of all students enrolled at MSIs receive Pell grants, compared with 30 percent of all college students.<sup>4</sup>



3. Astin, A. W. 1993. *What Matters in College?* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

4. Institute for Higher Education Policy. 2004. *Serving the Nation*. Washington, DC.

## Accomplishments of MSIs

MSIs' continued commitment to broadening opportunities for underrepresented students is not only key to advancing completion goals, but essential to closing the achievement gap. Previous accomplishments of MSIs in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM); teacher preparation; and transfer between two- and four-year institutions are notable.

## STEM

STEM undergraduate education is a critical component in building a globally competitive American workforce. During the past several years, MSIs have made significant contributions in STEM preparation and continue to help further America's ability to compete globally and increase equity, especially among minority students. For example, the HBCU community is proud to award approximately half of all degrees held by African Americans in mathematics, and to educate 40 percent of all African Americans who earn doctorates in physics.<sup>5</sup>

The Institute for Higher Education Policy's 2009 report, *Diversifying the STEM Pipeline: The Model Replication Institutions Program*, describes practices and policies that have enhanced the STEM offerings at nine MSIs.<sup>6</sup> The institutions participated in the National Science Foundation's Model Replication Institutions initiative, which builds on best practices in STEM undergraduate education identified previously by an NSF- and NASA-supported, 11-year-old program called "Model Institutions of Excellence." The institutions set an example of how to increase student enrollment and graduation rates while remaining committed to expanding and diversifying the STEM workforce and closing the achievement gaps in the STEM fields among students of color.

## Stories of Success

### Amy Stiffarm

A descendant from the Gro-Ventre, Cree, and Blackfeet tribes, Amy Stiffarm enrolled at Salish Kootenai College (SKC) thanks to guidance from her family, despite being unsure of her academic and college readiness. Amy immediately felt at home on the predominantly American Indian campus.



During her first year she became interested in diabetes and heart disease, which affect her family and community. Since that time, Amy has taken advantage of the many opportunities offered by the strong science programs at SKC. She has been a student intern in the Cellular and Molecular Biology Lab, and presented her research at numerous events including the 2009 Society for Advancing Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science Conference, where she won a Poster Presentation Award for her research about the presence of multidrug-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* on Seattle beaches.

Following graduation, Amy hopes to eventually pursue a Ph.D. in an area related to genetics.

### Mathew Friedlander

A great-grandson of Kootenai Ksanka Chief Baptiste Mathias, Mathew Friedlander was born into modest circumstances on the Flathead Reservation in



1975. Defiant in his youth, he struggled through his elementary and secondary education, graduating high school with low marks. Mathew recalls, "The material wasn't difficult—just being there was difficult." In 2004, after a decade away from the classroom, Mathew enrolled at Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Mont. Until then, he had managed his livelihood by contracting and working construction. "I reached a point that the work I was performing simply became too taxing on

5. Gasman, M. 2008. *Minority Serving Institutions: The Path to Successfully Educating Students of Color*. Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation for Education.

## Stories of Success, Cont'd

my body. I resolved to retrain myself for the long term," he explains. Today Mathew is a senior working toward a Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering. Throughout his experience at Salish Kootenai College, he has seized many opportunities made available by the college. He has conducted paid research since 2005, which has helped counter the costs of his education. "I've been given a sense that attaining my education is my 'job. It is validating that someone is willing to cut me a check to learn and organize my findings."

He is a student lead on three NASA-funded projects: The Wide Field Camera project, which will occupy two payloads on the upcoming launch of the 2012 High Altitude Student Payload; the Solar Spectrograph project; and the CubeSat project, which consists of developing a pico-satellite with a dual camera system to image the Earth and space from orbit.

### **James Aaron Pierre, Jr.**

James Aaron Pierre, Jr., is a sophomore business administration major, with a minor in biology at Miles College in Alabama. He is vice president of UNCF Pre-Alumni, junior class president, a member of the Destination Graduation Policy Initiative Retention Advisory Board, and an intern assistant at the Institutional Planning Development Project.



James volunteers at Habitat for Humanity and the Haiti Relief Fund, for which he raised more than \$2,000. His future plans include becoming CEO of a non-profit that focuses on Black male college retention.

***“Tribal colleges are a place where we can celebrate and preserve our heritage. We get quality education given by instructors who are sensitive to the issues faced by American Indian students. We get a sense of belonging and a level of comfort that allows us to grow, collaborate, and aspire toward a better tomorrow.”***

*~Mathew Friedlander*



## Teacher Education

At a time when nine out of 10 teachers nationwide are White, while students of color represent more than 37 percent of elementary and secondary students, it is imperative to fight for the diversity of our nation's teachers. The shortage of teachers of color deprives minority students of role models and

economic climate, have made many students who aspire to attain four-year degrees turn to two-year programs. Traditionally retention and degree attainment at two-year institutions are well below those of four-year institutions, making strong articulation agreements between two- and four-year institutions vital to ensuring that students who enter

## Based on data driven decision making, grantees are implementing initiatives and programs on their campuses to increase degree completion.

denies all students the benefits of a truly diverse educational experience.

MSIs produce nearly half of all minorities with teaching degrees nationwide. A report commissioned by the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, the leadership organization that represents HBCUs, HSIs, and TCUs, indicates that despite receiving 36 percent less funding than other colleges, MSIs' award 46 percent of teacher education bachelor's degrees for African-American students, 49 percent for Hispanics, and 12 percent for American Indians, far higher levels than the proportion of all minorities that these schools enroll (MSIs educate one-third of all minority students).<sup>7</sup> In subject areas of high national need, such as in the STEM fields, these institutions produce 54 percent of bachelor's degrees for Hispanic students and 41 percent for Blacks. According to the report, MSIs' unique success in educating low-income, educationally disadvantaged students to be teachers, is the result of keeping tuitions low, providing open admissions access, and offering unique cultural experiences in community-based settings. Students in teacher preparation programs at MSIs are often trained in culturally relevant and sensitive curriculum and pedagogy, with special attention to different learning styles.

## Transfer

Graduation rates are associated with many factors, including first-generation status, preparation, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, and adjustment to college. Those factors, coupled with the current

two-year institutions complete their degrees in a timely manner. Because low-income and underrepresented minorities are increasingly entering two-year institutions, it is important that the retention and graduation rates at these institutions follow suit to increase the graduation rates among these groups.

Encouraging students to continue their education through transfer is perhaps MSIs' most significant contribution. Fifty-six percent of two-year tribal college graduates go on to attend four-year institutions, a considerably higher transfer rate than that of community colleges in general.<sup>8</sup> Two-year HSIs and HBCUs also encourage their students to transfer to four-year institutions. Additionally, many MSIs are working with state-systems and across campuses to create clearer pathways that benefit both the institutions and the students as they move through their college careers often at several different institutions.

## Impact of MSIs

Achieving college completion goals will take more than maintaining the status quo. Higher education will need to be innovative and open to alternative and diverse ways of approaching this issue. MSIs are already contributors to the national college completion goals and should be considered experts in the education of low-income, first generation, and under-represented students.

The Lumina MSI Models of Success project seeks to celebrate the successes and innovations of a nation-

7. Institute for Higher Education Policy. 2000. *Educating the Emerging Majority*. Washington DC. The brief was written by IHEP, which served as the convener and facilitator of the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education from 2009.

8. Gasman, M. 2008. *Minority Serving Institutions: The Path to Successfully Educating Students of Color*. Indianapolis, IN.



wide sample of MSIs that are providing the best possible college experience to their current and future students.

Over the next year, we will highlight the work of the institutions selected to be a part of the Lumina program, specifically in the areas of data capacity, developmental education, mobility and transfer, and Black male retention. These topics are crucial to ALL institutions of higher education. MSIs and non-MSIs share the same motivations for educating our nation's youth.

In this time of economic stress and rapid demographic shifts, we will need to turn to MSIs, which are experienced in doing more with less and are recognized leaders in educating and graduating students of color. MSIs are one of our greatest resources as we press forward to accomplish our national completion goals. It is not an "us or them" but a "we" that will vault us into a new era of educating all of our citizens.

### **Jessica Archuleta**

Jessica Archuleta lived in five foster homes between the ages of 11 and 18. Through a waiver made possible by the Texas Senate Bill 1652, Jessica enrolled at El Paso Community College in 2004, transferring to the University of Texas at El Paso in 2008.



While in school, Jessica was named Role Model of the Year 2005 for PAL-Preparation for Adult Living and received the Pride Center highest achievement award, the 2011 Preparation and Resources for Independence through Determination with Excellence.

Today Jessica is an outreach specialist at the Foster, Homeless, Adoptive Resources program, where she assists foster, homeless, and adoptive individuals with their education.

**MSIs should be considered experts in the successful education of low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students.**



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