

The HBCU Registered Apprenticeship Toolkit



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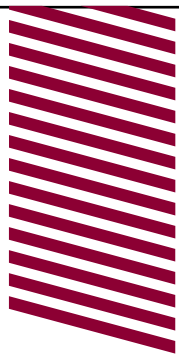
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Making Learning and Earning Work Together

Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs are one of the most promising, yet underused, models for student success and workforce development (Gasman et al., 2022; Mills, 2020; National Governors Association, 2021; National Skills Coalition, 2021; Reed et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). They offer an opportunity for students to gain hands-on, paid work experience while completing their education. However, for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), these programs are more than just practical. They are mission-aligned, equity-driven, and transformative (Hawkins et al., 2022).

HBCUs have always prioritized the holistic development of students academically, socially, and professionally (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Gasman & Esters, 2024; Gasman et al., 2015). They have done so with fewer resources, more constraints, and greater expectations. Despite these barriers, HBCUs have produced generations of Black leaders in every field (Gasman, 2025; Gasman & Esters, 2024). Registered Apprenticeship programs allow HBCUs to build on this legacy by integrating structured work-based learning into the academic experience, providing students a real chance to thrive economically while advancing their education (Hawkins et al., 2022).

This toolkit is designed to walk you through building, registering, and sustaining a RA program at your HBCU. It draws from our work with HBCUs across the country, listening to what works and what does not, and learning from their faculty, students, and staff who make these institutions succeed daily (Jobs for the Future, 2022; Jobs for the Future, 2023; Gasman et al., 2022).

Understanding Registered Apprenticeship

RA is not just a new label for internships or co-ops. It is a structured, federally recognized program that combines classroom instruction with on-the-job training, resulting in an industry-recognized credential. Many institutions also have pre-apprenticeship programs, which are shorter, introductory programs that provide initial preparation and pathways into full-apprentice programs (Karmel, 2010; National Employment Law Project, 2021).

RAs include:

- Paid employment from day one.
- Structured mentorship and training under the supervision of a qualified professional.
- Related Technical Instruction (RTI) that can be offered by the HBCU and aligned with degree requirements.
- A wage progression model which means students receive raises as they gain skills.
- Wrap-around services such as transportation, childcare, and career counseling.
- Flexible course times and venues to align with work requirements.
- A portable, nationally recognized credential upon completion (Allison, 2023; Jobs for the Future, 2022).

These programs are registered with the U.S. Department of Labor or your state's Apprenticeship Agency and must meet specific standards. That said, the structure is flexible enough to reflect the unique strengths and academic traditions of HBCUs (Gasman et al., 2022).



Why Registered Apprenticeship Is Critical for HBCUs and Their Students

For HBCUs: Advancing Institutional Mission and Expanding Impact

RA programs align powerfully with the historic mission of HBCUs (Hawkins et al., 2022). These institutions were founded to provide educational and economic opportunities where none existed. They have long focused on preparing students for degrees, meaningful work, and community leadership (Gasman & Esters, 2024; Gasman, 2025). RA programs continue that tradition, benefiting from formal structures, federal support, and scalable design.

RA programs give HBCUs a platform to:

- **Deepen** employer engagement through mutually beneficial partnerships with businesses, nonprofits, and public agencies.
- **Enhance** institutional visibility by showcasing innovation in workforce development and student success.
- **Strengthen** academic programs by aligning curricula with industry needs, making learning relevant and applied.
- **Boost** enrollment and retention by offering a compelling value proposition: students can earn a wage, gain experience, and stay in school.
- **Diversify** student enrollment, including non-traditionally aged students, paraprofessionals, and professionals looking to change careers.
- **Secure** new funding from federal and state workforce initiatives, private foundations, and industry partners investing in apprenticeships and equity-focused education (Allison, 2023).

When HBCUs launch RA programs, they do not just add another initiative. They expand their ability to uplift students, connect with communities, and lead in national conversations about equity, access, and the future of work (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Gasman & Esters, 2024; Hawkins et al., 2022).

Facts:

In 2021 – 3 HBCUs had registered apprenticeship programs

In 2025 – 22 HBCUs have registered apprenticeship programs

For HBCU Students: Paid Experience, Pathways to Careers, and Economic Empowerment

Many HBCU students face economic pressures that make it challenging to take on unpaid internships or participate in extracurricular opportunities that wealthier peers can afford (Gasman & Esters, 2024). They often work many hours in unrelated jobs to pay tuition or support their families. RA programs offer a better path.

Students benefit from RA programs by:

- Earning while they learn, reducing the need for loans or unrelated part-time jobs.
- Gaining real-world experience that connects directly to their field of study and future career.
- Building professional networks and receiving mentorship from industry professionals who are invested in their growth.
- Graduating with a resume full of accomplishments, not just coursework.
- Achieving national credentials that employers across the country recognize (Allison, 2023; Jobs for the Future, 2022).

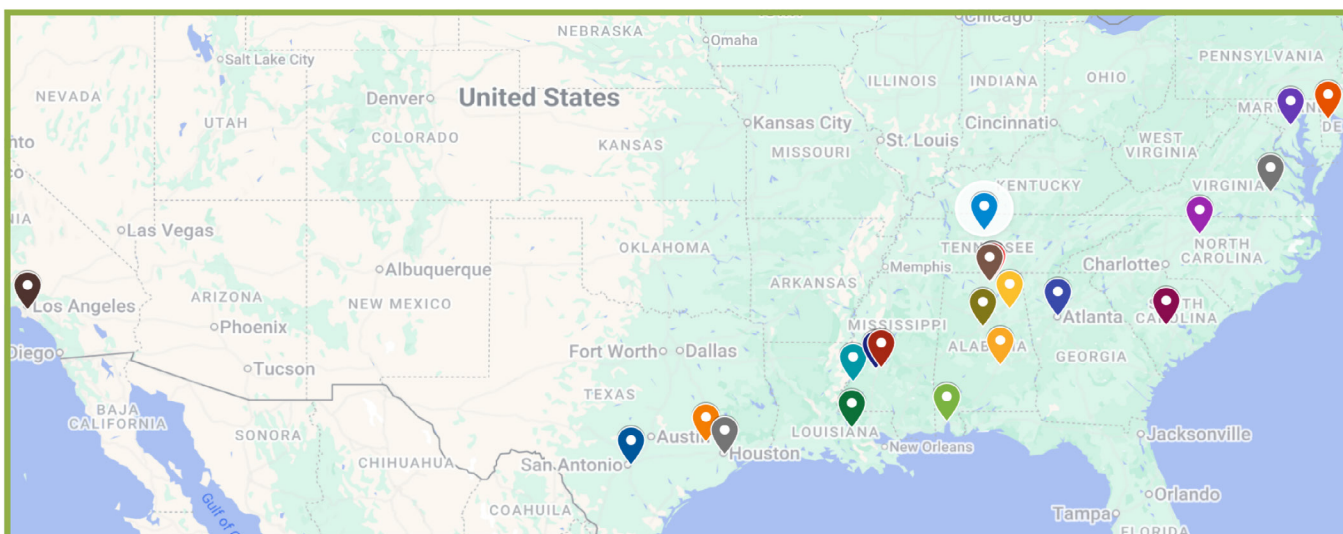
For students historically locked out of elite professional pipelines, RA programs provide an alternative route that is structured, paid, and based on mentorship.

How Employers Benefit from RA Programs

- Expands and diversifies the pool of job applicants
- Reduces overall recruitment and retention costs
- Allows for employers to train future employees to specific, local, and industry needs
- Creates greater loyalty in future employees (Kuehn et al., 2022; Lerman et al., 2016)



HBCUs with Registered Apprenticeships



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alabama A&M University Alabama State University Alcorn State University Bishop State Community College Bowie State University Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science Delaware State University Gadsden State Community College Hinds Community College J.F.Drake State Community & Technical College Jackson State University | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lawson State Community College Morehouse School of Medicine North Carolina A&T State University Oakwood University Prairie View A&M University South Carolina State University Southern University and A&M College St. Philip's College Tennessee State University Texas Southern University Virginia State University |
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View full map, [here](#).

Steps to Build a Registered Apprenticeship Program at an HBCU

Step 1: Build the Right Team on Campus

To succeed, RA programs need a campus-wide approach. Assemble a team that includes:

- A faculty leader to align the curriculum and help students develop individualized learning plans, enabling them to reach their academic and professional goals.
- A career services representative to support employer outreach
- A workforce development or grants administrator to identify funding
- A strong external partnerships coordinator who will oversee advertising the program, answering students' questions, working with employers to ensure alignment and common goals, and who will track program data and train successors.
- A senior administrator (e.g., dean, provost, or VP) who can align the effort with strategic planning

You are not starting from scratch—HBCUs already have pieces of this structure in place. The key is bringing them together around a common goal (Gasman & Esters, 2024).

“I just hit the road and met with superintendents. I asked, ‘What is it that you want? What is it that you need? Moreover, what can TSU do for you?’ Moreover, it always came back to ‘We need minority teachers. How can we recruit them?’”
— Jeri Hanes, former Dean of Teacher Education, Tennessee State University.

Step 2: Identify Industry Partners

Find employers looking to diversify their workforce, grow their talent pipeline, and invest in long-term employee development. Many HBCUs strategically reach out to employers in areas with an urgent gap in the existing workforce and community needs. For example, Alabama A&M created a RA program in social work to help address the local opioid-affected families in local communities. Tennessee State University created an RA program in teacher education to help diversify the local teaching profession (Gasman et al., 2022).

Focus on sectors where HBCU students already excel:

- Healthcare and Nursing
- Information Technology and Cybersecurity
- Green Energy and Environmental Science
- Business, Finance, and Accounting
- Education and Social Work
- Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering

Reach out to alumni who are working in these fields. Engage local businesses, nonprofits, and public agencies. Do not be afraid to educate potential partners on what an RA is and why it benefits them – reduced turnover, increased productivity, and a more skilled workforce.

“Due to a lack of services, residents of Alabama must travel far distances to get treatment, including over state lines. We have had four counties in Alabama that have the highest opioid prescription rate of any other area in the United States. This is where being an HBCU has come in. We want to be able to meet that need.”

— Katrina Lang-Lindsey, Associate Professor of Social Work, Alabama A&M University.

Step 3: Align Curriculum with Industry Needs

RA programs must include Related Technical Instruction (RTI), which can be delivered as part of your existing academic offerings. Work with faculty to:

- Embed employer-suggested skills and competencies into courses
- Offer flexible class schedules (evening, hybrid, or online)
- Grant credit for on-the-job learning wherever possible

This step deepens the academic-industry connection and ensures that apprenticeships reinforce, not compete with, student coursework.



Step 4: Register the Program

Registering your program unlocks access to state or federal support and legitimizes your model in the apprenticeship ecosystem. Registration involves:

- Writing up program standards (training outline, wage scale, competencies)
- Partnering with an employer (or a consortium of employers)
- Submitting documents to the [Department of Labor \(DOL\)](#) or your [State Apprenticeship Agency](#)

State Apprenticeship agencies, the DOL and many intermediaries offer technical assistance at every stage, so use them. They want HBCUs to have robust RA offerings.



Step Five: Publicize the Program

Many RA programs are difficult to find or absent from HBCU websites, and/or are unclear as to the expectations for the program and the application process.

- Ensure that comprehensive and robust information about the RA program is easily searchable and accessible on your institution's website.
- Include detailed descriptions of the skills and credentials apprentices will gain, along with potential career outcomes after completing the program.
- Post testimonials or success stories from current or former apprentices and employer partners to build credibility and student interest.
- Make application deadlines and required materials highly visible and provide reminders through multiple platforms.
- Provide contact information so students know who to contact to ask questions about the program and, if needed, receive career counseling and guidance.
- Collaborate with student organizations, faculty, and career services to promote the program and reach diverse student populations.
- Use social media channels, email newsletters, and campus events to maintain ongoing engagement and visibility of the program.

Sustaining and Growing Your Apprenticeship Program

Secure Long-Term Funding

There are several funding sources available to support RA programs at HBCUs, including:

- Department of Labor Apprenticeship Grants
- Perkins Career and Technical Education Funds
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds
- Title III HBCU Strengthening grants
- Philanthropic grants focused on racial equity and workforce development

Apply for multiple streams of support. Frame your program as a model for equitable workforce development because that is precisely what it is.



Hire a Dedicated RA Coordinator

This person is critical. They will manage employer relationships, student support, compliance, and data reporting. Do not make this someone's "extra duty." Invest in a position that will ensure the program's success.

An intermediary entity can also manage the administrative responsibilities of an apprenticeship program, including employer relationships, compliance, data reporting, and student success

A recent posting for an Apprenticeship Programs Specialist position at Bishop State Community College highlighted the following responsibilities:

Apprenticeship Programs Specialist Bishop State Community College

APPLY NOW

- Maintain and execute processes, procedures, and documentation for apprenticeship and work-based learning programs.
- Develop and implement a detailed timeline for apprenticeship recruitment to meet performance expectations.
- Create and maintain comprehensive project documentation for internal review and external audits.
- Support the Experimental Learning Coordinator with high school visits and college/career fairs to promote apprenticeship programs.
- Establish an Apprentice Tracking System (ATS) database to track apprentice information and data.
- Conduct frequent program assessments and share results with stakeholders.
- Deliver presentations on apprenticeships and work-based learning as needed.
- Ensure compliance with state certification for apprenticeship programs and applicable requirements.

Support Students Holistically

RA students are balancing work and school. Many are caregivers. Some are first-generation. All of them need support. Ensure students have access to:

- Academic advising
- Financial aid counseling
- Transportation and meal support
- Emergency funds
- Mental health resources

HBCUs already lead in wraparound services – bring those assets into the RA ecosystem.

Track Results and Tell Your Story

Collect data on:

- Retention and graduation
- Employment and wage outcomes
- Student satisfaction and career progression
- Employer return on investment (ROI)

Use this data to improve your program, apply for more funding, and advocate for apprenticeships as a strategy for racial and economic equity.

Anticipating Challenges and Moving Through Them

Challenge	Strategy
Faculty buy-in	Start small, offer pilot stipends or course releases, and share early wins.
Employer Skepticism	Educate with national data; highlight HBCU student strengths and reliability.
Student Uncertainty	Market RAs as paid career pathways with mentorship and long-term benefits.
Administrative complexity	Map internal processes early. Use existing models and consult an apprenticeship agency for guidance
Employer requirement that apprentices have needed skills to be on frontlines.	Frontload necessary coursework and strategically design it to align with sequential skill development.

Common Misconceptions about Registered Apprenticeship

Misconception	Reality
RA Programs are only in the trades – such as manufacturing and construction.	Many HBCUs are creating successful RA programs in fields like social work, teaching, and cybersecurity.
Students have to forfeit other forms of financial aid to be paid in a RA program.	Quite the opposite: RA programs enable students to save their financial aid and scholarships for tuition and other living expenses.
Students in RA programs will receive an academically less vigorous education.	RA programs intentionally make sure that students' complete core disciplinary coursework and graduate with high academic knowledge and standards.
Students need prior experience in the field to qualify for the apprenticeship program.	Most apprenticeship programs will accept any student interested in that career path, regardless of prior experience. In fact, RA programs are an excellent opportunity for professionals who want to reskill and change careers.



Types of Registered Apprenticeships at HBCUs



- Social work
 - Cybersecurity
 - Human Resources
 - Early childhood education
 - Management
 - Manufacturing
 - Industrial maintenance
 - Information tech
 - Nursing
- Trucking
 - Medical equipment repair
 - Machinist
 - Community care worker
 - Medical assistants
 - Clean energy
 - Agriculture
 - Teaching
 - Automotive

Registered Apprenticeships Are a Path to Power

At their core, Registered Apprenticeships are about power. Power to learn without going into debt. Power to enter industries that have historically excluded students of color. Power to graduate with a degree, real work experience, and credentials that matter (Gasman et al., 2023).

HBCUs are uniquely positioned to lead in this space. These institutions have always been innovators, community-rooted, and focused on student transformation. Now is the time to bring RA into that tradition and ensure every student has a pathway that leads to a future they can be proud of.



Models of MSI and Employer Collaboration

Model 1: Co-Designed Curriculum & Job Pathway Alignment

How It Works:

- The college and employer jointly develop a curriculum based on industry needs.
- Employers provide detailed occupational skill frameworks, and faculty map coursework to RA competencies.
- Employers commit to hiring apprentices upon completion, ensuring clear job pathways.
- Apprentices receive dual credit for classroom instruction and on-the-job training (OJT).

Model 2: Intermediary-Facilitated Partnerships

How It Works:

- Denmark Tech partners with Apprenticeship Carolina to broker relationships with regional employers.
- The college partners with an intermediary to broker relationships with regional employers.
- The college provides academic coursework, and employers offer structured OJT.
- The model allows the small HBCU to scale RA without a complete in-house infrastructure.

Model 3: Graduate-Level Behavioral Health Apprenticeship

How It Works:

- The university incorporates a Department of Labor-registered apprenticeship focused on behavioral health and substance use disorders.
- The apprenticeship is competency-based, integrating classroom learning with structured, supervised field placements at regional behavioral health agencies.
- Apprentices gain hands-on experience with real clients while fulfilling academic requirements toward their MSW.
- The university works closely with employers to align the RA program with workforce needs and ensure quality mentorship and supervision.
- Apprentices receive financial support in the form of stipends and scholarships.



Spotlight



Denmark Technical College (DTC), a historically Black technical college in South Carolina, offers many RA programs through its Workforce Development Division. These programs are designed to provide students with practical skills and hands-on experience in various high-demand industries.

DTC's RA programs span multiple sectors, including skilled trades, cybersecurity, and energy. Key programs include:

Electrician Apprenticeship: This program combines classroom instruction with hands-on training, preparing students for careers in the energy industry. Developed in partnership with industry leaders, it ensures that apprentices receive relevant, real-world training aligned with current workforce needs.

Fusion Cybersecurity Apprenticeship: In collaboration with Cisco and Fusion Centers, this program offers an "earn-as-you-learn" platform, creating a pipeline of highly trained talent for the evolving field of cybersecurity. Apprentices gain practical experience while expanding their core competencies, providing a pathway to in-demand careers.

Line Worker Program: A 16-week program covering academic training, field training, and certifications, preparing students for careers in the electrical line work sector. The program emphasizes practical training approaches to equip students for successful employment.

Savannah River Site (SRS) Production Operator Apprenticeship: An eight-month program developed in partnership with Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS), Aiken Technical College, Apprenticeship Carolina, and the Lower Savannah Council of Governments. It allows students to alternate between classroom instruction and on-the-job training at SRS, earning competitive wages while gaining valuable experience.

Student Learning Objectives for Denmark Technical College's Electrician Apprenticeship:

- ✔ Preparing and planning a residential wiring job
- ✔ Residential workplace safety, hardware, and materials used in residential wiring;
- ✔ Determining branch circuit, feeder circuit, and service entrance requirements
- ✔ Residential service entrances and equipment
- ✔ Introduction to residential service entrances; service entrance equipment and installation
- ✔ Residential electrical system rough-in
- ✔ General nec® requirements for rough-in wiring, installing electrical boxes, cables, switching, and branch circuits
- ✔ Residential electrical system trim-out basics
- ✔ Maintaining and troubleshooting a residential electrical wiring system
- ✔ Greenhouse wiring techniques
- ✔ Effective customer service
- ✔ Understand the fundamentals of solar energy, solar thermal, and wind energy.
- ✔ Understand the principles of solar and wind systems sizing
- ✔ Understand safety basics
- ✔ Understand electricity basics
- ✔ Understand hydrogen technology
- ✔ Identify and develop skills applicable to photovoltaic (PV) and wind markets and applications.
- ✔ Develop skills in site assessment for solar electric and wind energy systems.
- ✔ Develop skills in selecting solar and wind energy designs, and explain how these systems work to end users or consumers.
- ✔ Understand applicable safety requirements for installing solar and wind energy systems.
- ✔ Develop skills necessary to perform system checkout and inspection
- ✔ Develop skills necessary to maintain and troubleshoot solar and wind energy systems

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