

# CMSI RESEARCH BRIEF

## Faculty Recruitment and Retention Practices at Private Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Latrice Johnson is a native of Oklahoma City, OK. She received her B.A. in English with a minor in Pre-Law from Tougaloo College in 2020. Latrice is a graduate student in the M.A. in English program at the University of Mississippi where she holds a Graduate Teaching Assistantship in the Department of

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*This research brief seeks to understand how certain institutional investments can improve faculty recruitment and retention practices at private<sup>1</sup> Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Issues with faculty employment packages such as salary, workload, mentorship, and scholarly development are prime reasons for consistent downward trends in faculty recruitment and retention at HBCUs (Conway & Mutisya, 2018; Jackson, 2002; Elliot, 2013; Rozman & Roberts, 2006). This brief also highlights the differences between the average salaries of professors at private HBCUs and the average salaries for faculty at public HBCUs or Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). As existing studies suggest, the areas for improving faculty recruitment and retention at HBCUs include competitive employment packages that provide a substantial salary, scholarly development opportunities, and mentorship (Conway & Mutisya, 2018; Jackson, 2002; Elliot, 2013; Rozman & Roberts, 2006). The guiding questions for this brief were:*

- 1. What are the current faculty recruitment and retention efforts at private HBCUs?*
- 2. To date, what is the overall impact and success of these efforts at private HBCUs?*
- 3. How does lack of visibility and support for lesser-known private HBCUs translate to ongoing issues with faculty recruitment and retention?*

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## INTRODUCTION

As the COVID-19 pandemic heightened in 2020, colleges and universities saw a significant financial strain on their faculty, staff, and students. A report in the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* revealed that there was an array of pandemic-induced economic strains within higher education. For example, universities were forced to announce furloughs, temporary layoffs, salary cuts, and eliminate many faculty positions (Clery, 2021).

The pressure to not only remain open and retain students, but to retain faculty added to the growing financial burdens at all colleges and universities. The pressures associated with faculty retention—including the costs associated with replacing faculty—are even more significant at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). HBCUs have long been underfunded and have seen inconsistent trends in enrollment and retention (Nietzel, 2021). However, the social unrest during the summer of 2020 sparked an upward trajectory for student recruitment and enrollment at HBCUs nationwide (Adams, 2021).

## CONTEXT

During the 2020-2021 academic year, HBCUs witnessed an increase in student enrollment and financial support (Nietzel, 2021; Adams, 2021). Along with increased enrollment and philanthropic gifts,<sup>2</sup> HBCUs have garnered the interests of some of the most notable scholars, entertainers, and public figures. Recently, well-known HBCUs such as Howard University have received more media attention because of their new or renewed affiliations to high-profile public figures.

For Howard, these affiliations include Vice President of the United States Kamala Harris, journalists and authors such as Nikole Hannah-Jones and Ta-Nehisi Coates, and actress Phylicia Rashad (Saul, 2021). However, as Michael Sorrell, president of Paul Quinn

College, suggests, lesser-known, private HBCUs are still not receiving an equitable amount of visibility and support (Saul, 2021). In comparison to the faculty employment packages at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), the current renewed interest in HBCUs from prospective students and faculty is especially significant.

When conducting research related to HBCUs, it is vital to keep in mind that these institutions have been starved of resources for over a century. As such, disparities in salaries are the result of systemic inequities (Harris, 2021).

## RESEARCH APPROACH

To address my guiding questions, I reviewed existing literature and conducted a landscape analysis to find any gaps in the literature surrounding HBCU faculty recruitment and retention practices. Along with this analysis, I reviewed data on salaries in 2018 at six HBCUs using data reported to *Chronicle Data*.<sup>3</sup> These data highlight average salaries at the following HBCUs: Fisk University (est. 1866<sup>4</sup>), Talladega College (1867), Tougaloo College (1869), Dillard University (1869), Huston-Tillotson University (1875), and LeMoyne-Owen College (1968). These colleges or universities are private, 4-year HBCUs located in the southern United States.

These colleges and universities were selected for this brief based on their status as sister institutions (Campbell & Rogers, 1979). Sister institution, here, refers to each school being founded by the same organization, the American Missionary Association<sup>5</sup> (AMA). In highlighting these examples, I offer information pertaining to salary gaps according to faculty rank.<sup>6</sup>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The studies in this literature review demonstrate how HBCU faculty employment packages should be revised to include adequate pay, more sufficient attention to work-life balance and

workload, mentorship, and adequate opportunities for scholarly and professional development.

David Jackson's (2002) study is one of the earliest studies that specifically focuses on Black faculty recruitment and retention at HBCUs. Jackson suggests that HBCU alumni see their faculty positions as a duty and obligation to give back to HBCUs. In this way, HBCU alumni who become faculty at HBCUs have more personal investments in their students and the local community because of their own experiences as HBCU undergraduate students.

This notion situates HBCU alumni as more connected to their place of employment at an HBCU. Jackson also proposed that HBCUs should implement terminal degree programs with the notion that, over time, these terminal degree recipients would develop a certain level of commitment to the institution and "appreciate the significance of working at HBCUs" (p. 184). The findings of this study and subsequent research suggest that adequate support for faculty should help with faculty retention and recruitment at HBCUs.

Stephen L. Rozman and Gloria Roberts (2006) wrote about the HBCU Faculty Development Network, its founding, and its success. Founded in 1994 on the campus of Tougaloo College, the Network's inception came after HBCU faculty recognized that they were missing out on faculty development opportunities and, more specifically, that academic conferences lacked HBCU faculty representation. The Network's founders noticed that HBCU faculty were not being afforded opportunities to "gather and share their teaching innovations" (Rozman & Roberts, 2006, p. 83).

The Network's goals, objectives, and sheer existence are prime examples of how institutions can better invest in their faculty's academic and professional careers. As a solution, the Network created an annual faculty development symposium for HBCU



faculty. With community service and service-learning at the Network's core, service and service-learning at the Network's core, the symposium encouraged collaboration and mentorship opportunities among participating faculty. Organizations and initiatives like the HBCU Faculty Development Network introduce solutions to the broader issues of faculty development and socialization.

Ellis (2011) offers another solution to faculty retention by examining the socialization processes influencing the retention of junior faculty at HBCUs. This study focused on faculty career preparation, "academic suicide," and servant leadership as the primary areas that determine successful or unsuccessful socialization and retention (Ellis, 2011). Ellis discusses faculty career preparation in terms of mentorship as it assists junior faculty in their quest to become promoted in faculty rank and tenure.



According to Ellis (2011), academic suicide was described by the study's participants as "a construct that manifested when faculty engaged in professional behaviors or lack thereof that prevented them from performing the duties of their position that would facilitate their upward career trajectory" (p. 127).



Both academic suicide and servant leadership refer to issues with workload that cause faculty to neglect their personal, scholarly, and professional aspirations for the sake of serving their students and/or institution. Put another way, when faculty are laden with responsibilities beyond teaching, they tend to feel that they cannot fully and efficiently serve themselves and others.

Similarly, Beach et al.'s (2008) chapter on faculty development at HBCUs reiterated the primary points on proper preparation for the professoriate. Beach et al. confirmed that "Black faculty at HBCUs have found that they enjoy a strong socialization into the values

and expectations of their institutions and that they feel supported in their work, but that their heavy workloads (they average 12 credit hours of instruction per semester) are a barrier to their success" (p.157).

Using qualitative data via four interviews, Elliot (2013) examined the recruitment and retention of Black male faculty at HBCUs in North Carolina. In three of the four interviews, the interviewees returned to the importance of mentorship for recruiting and retaining Black male faculty and Black faculty in general.

In all four interviews, each interviewee also specified some remedies for pay and employment packages as solutions for improved recruitment efforts and retention. Part of that employment package requires a lower teaching workload and increased support for faculty development. Mentorship is one of the key components in increasing support for faculty development.

Like Elliot's study, Conway and Mutisya's (2018) research specifically emphasized academic mentorship as one of the primary necessities for recruiting and retaining faculty at HBCUs. In this study, the authors call for academic mentoring for HBCU faculty. Here, they make the distinction between general mentoring and quality, academic mentoring.

General mentoring refers to a mentor-protege model and academic mentoring refers to a peer-to-peer model with the latter being the most effective model for faculty (Conway & Mutisya, 2018). This distinction considers how academic mentoring can lead to shared governance and effective collaboration (Conway & Mutisya, 2018).

This type of mentorship fosters mutually beneficial relationships between junior and senior faculty members. Moreover, the authors included their testimonials on the benefits of this type of mentoring as faculty at HBCUs. In her testimonial, Conway noted

that: “Without academic mentoring, I would not have published successfully, obtained grants, nor would I be the person I am today” (Conway & Mutisya, 2018). Mutisya also noted that, “I can view academic mentoring as [a] positive source and a definite success measure in my career development” (p. 11).

The literature highlighted the complexity of faculty recruitment and retention at HBCUs where factors such as mentorship can weigh heavily on the faculty member’s employment experience beyond financial support or salary.

## FINDINGS

Although the aforementioned studies lend particular focus to faculty needs aside from salary, it is important to note that salary—especially with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic—is still a crucial part of any employment package. Therefore, if salaries at HBCUs vastly differ from average salaries at other colleges and universities, faculty recruitment and retention will remain challenging.

Data from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* show the differences between private HBCU faculty salaries at six institutions in the Southern United States and the average salaries in their respective states.

In Figure 1, it is clear that across these six sister institutions, the average salary is considerably lower than the average salaries of their counterparts in the same state.

For instance, Tougaloo College’s average salary for an Assistant Professor is \$28,600 lower than the average Assistant Professor salary in the state of Mississippi. Furthermore, Fisk University’s average salary is \$22,868 lower than the average Assistant Professor salary in the state of Tennessee.

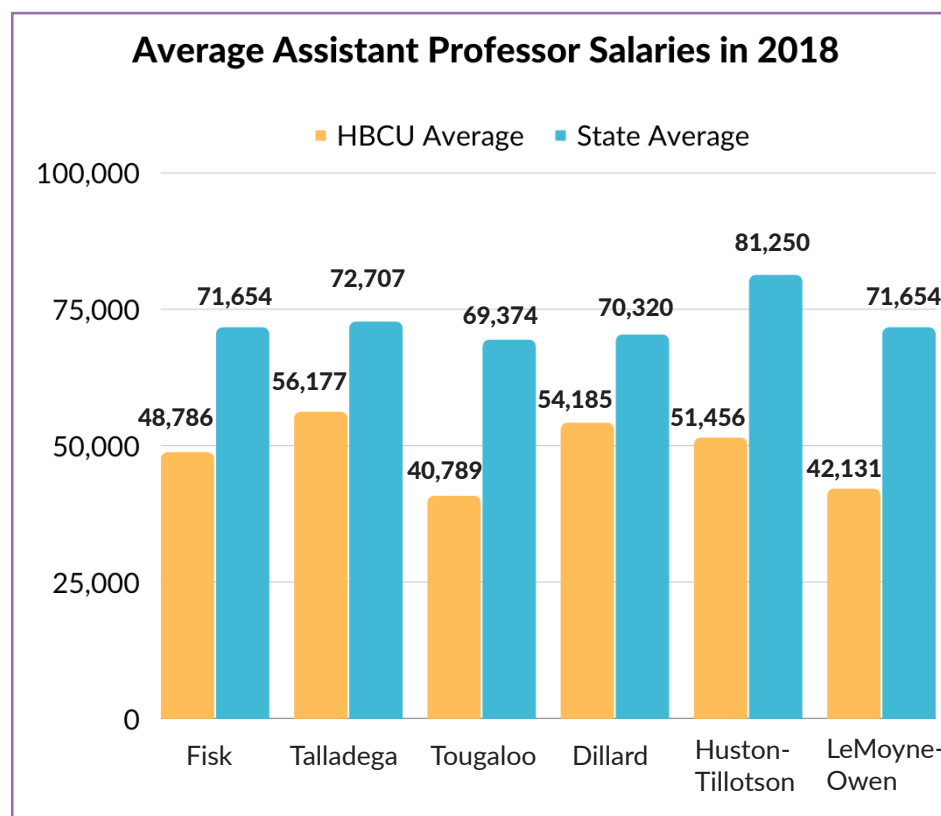


Figure 1 illustrates the average salary for Assistant Professors in 2018 (Chronicle Data).

This issue is even more prevalent in the Associate Professor salaries at these HBCUs as compared to the average state salaries. For instance, as seen in Figure 2, Huston-Tillotson University’s average salary for an Associate Professor is \$35,610 lower than the average Associate Professor salary in the state of Texas.

Additionally, at LeMoyne-Owen College, Associate Professors are making over \$36,000 less than their peers at other institutions in the same state.

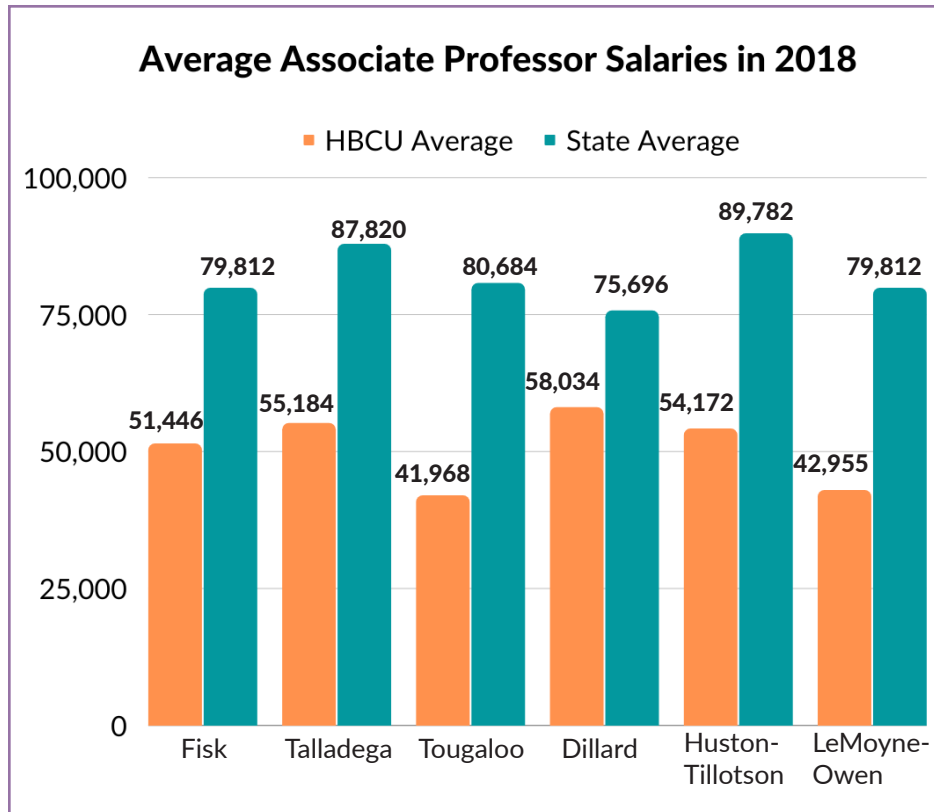


Figure 2 illustrates the average salary for Associate Professors in 2018 (Chronicle Data).

Figure 3, which outlines the average Full Professor salary in 2018, has the most substantial margin between these HBCUs and their state counterparts. Talladega College's average salary for a Full Professor is nearly \$80,000 lower than the average Full Professor in the state of Alabama.

Across these six institutions, on average, Full Professors at HBCUs are making over \$57,000 less than their peers at other colleges and universities in the same state.

As the gaps grow by faculty ranking throughout the three figures, it becomes clear that faculty at HBCUs are making considerably less than their counterparts at PWIs. When coupled with a lack of faculty development opportunities (Rozman & Roberts, 2006), an increased workload beyond teaching (Ellis, 2011), and a deficit of mentorship (Conway & Mutisya, 2018), it becomes clear that junior faculty, regardless of their personal attachments to HBCUs are less likely to seek employment at a private HBCU.

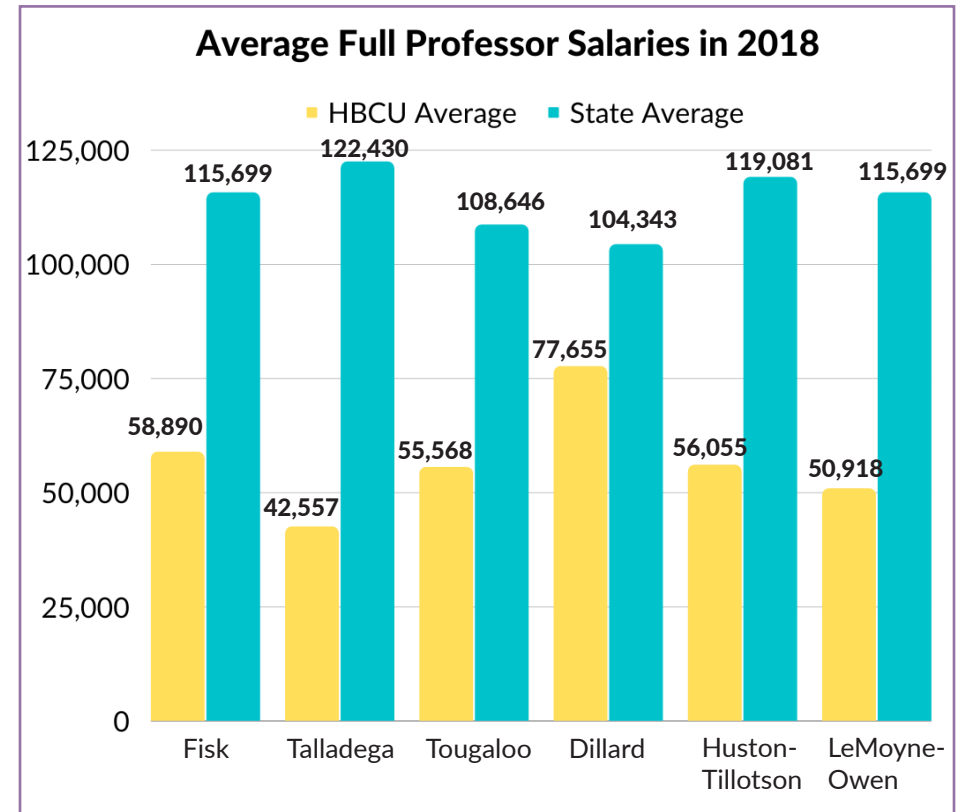


Figure 3 illustrates the average salary for Full Professors in 2018 (Chronicle Data).

The same can be said for senior faculty. Senior faculty at these institutions will likely consider these comparisons, reflect on their professional careers and comparable opportunities, and influence junior faculty to seek employment at institutions offering more adequate salaries than the private HBCUs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Across the literature, mentorship and scholarly development initiatives were prioritized as necessities for effective and successful recruitment and retention of faculty at HBCUs. For example, the HBCU Faculty Development Network's mission to improve faculty scholarly development illuminated the importance of peer-to-peer relationships and faculty collaboration.

It is also important to consider how colleges and universities can ensure the preservation of these programs by hosting faculty symposiums or by encouraging and funding faculty participation at events hosted by organizations like the HBCU Faculty Development Network.

Increased advocacy for programs like the HBCU Faculty Development Network should foster better relationships between junior and senior faculty and encourage colleges and universities to implement their own institution-based research development programs. These programs may also assist with faculty recruitment and retention as prospective and current faculty can see HBCUs investing in their faculty's academic and professional success.

Mentorship programs and initiatives that center junior faculty preparation and acclimation will likely also foster increased recruitment and retention for HBCU faculty (Conway & Mutisya, 2008). According to Elliot (2013), interview respondents who were African American male faculty particularly emphasized the importance of mentorship from senior faculty.

Moreover, good relationships between senior and junior faculty aid in the overall recruitment and retention of junior faculty members, faculty development and academic productivity, and faculty socialization. In general, faculty socialization refers to the successful acclimation of faculty to their college or university community and profession.



Additionally, HBCU administration, advocates, and financial supporters should implement robust mentorship programs for junior and senior faculty to ensure that they can increase faculty recruitment and maintain retention.

As the research suggests, faculty, especially junior faculty, prioritize their scholarly professional development as one of the primary determining factors for their place of employment (Beach et al., 2008; Rozman & Roberts, 2006). If faculty do not have adequate and substantial financial support for their scholarly and professional



development from their colleges and universities, they will begin to feel stagnant in their careers and projected professional timelines.

Scholarly development proves to be one of the most necessary additions to faculty employment packages. Like salary and mentorship, institutional investments in the scholarly development of faculty will foster increased recruitment and retention. Colleges and universities should provide funding for conferencing and research. This funding not only ensures that faculty are able to succeed in their own academic and professional careers, but it also helps facilitate additional networks for the institution and ensures an environment conducive to the advancement of the professional endeavors of junior faculty.

## CONCLUSION

Continued research on faculty recruitment and retention at private HBCUs should supplement existing data with interviews of currently employed faculty or faculty members at other institutions who have considered employment at an HBCU. Further, it may also be beneficial to interview administrators who are the main leaders in implementing the recommendations presented in this brief and preceding studies. Moreover, further research on this topic should consider how such factors as gender pay gaps and geographic region, in conjunction with the cost of living, play into faculty recruitment and retention practices at private HBCUs —especially at lesser-known HBCUs.

Considering the importance of salary in faculty employment packages, it is equally important to consider how salary operates in conjunction with mentorship, scholarly development programs, and other necessities to garner attention from prospective faculty and sustain current faculty. As donations continue to roll in and student enrollment continues to rise, HBCUs, their advocates, and alumni should begin to consider the need for improved and revised faculty recruitment and retention practices. Increased student

enrollment and retention are necessary, however these colleges and universities should focus on cultivating an adequate amount of qualified faculty to teach the increasing number of students.

The findings of this brief show the need for a holistic investment in private HBCUs. Concerned with the overall state of the college and university, a holistic investment would seek to fulfill the needs of students and faculty by focusing on sufficient support for scholarly and professional development, mentorship, and lessening the workload and service expectations for junior faculty. To this end, faculty recruitment and retention efforts must be revisited to ensure that downward trends and negative notions of faculty positions at private HBCUs do not continue and we can sustain private HBCUs into the future.



## ENDNOTES

1. The primary distinction between private and public colleges and universities is funding. Public colleges and universities receive government subsidies while private colleges and universities rely on tuition and endowments (Castañeda, 2021). Private HBCUs are at the center of this study based on their limited access to funding in comparison to public HBCUs.
2. As reported by Saul (2021), the magnitude of donations to HBCUs from philanthropists like MacKenzie Scott helped to increase institutional endowments and—of additional importance—visibility.
3. It is important to note here that averages are not as accurate because the pay for one faculty member can offset the overall average. Medians or means may offer a more accurate representation.
4. These dates indicate the year that each college or university was founded.
5. The AMA was a nondenominational society that provided educational opportunities for African Americans and other minorities (“American Missionary Association”).
6. Faculty rank refers to the ranks of assistant, associate, and full professor.

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