



Historically Black Colleges and Universities

The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, defines a historically black college or university (HBCU) as “any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans.” These institutions were established and developed in an environment of legal segregation and greatly contributed to the progress of blacks by providing access to higher education (Hill, 1985). In 2015–16, there were 102 HBCUs in operation in 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Half of these institutions were public and half were private nonprofit institutions. The number of students enrolled at HBCUs increased by 32% between 1976 and 2015 to about 293,000. In comparison, the number of students enrolled in degree-granting institutions increased by 84%, to about 20 million during the same period (NCES 2017). In 2015, the majority of HBCU students were enrolled in 4-year institutions (89%) and the remainder were enrolled in 2-year institutions. More than three-quarters of HBCU students attended public institutions (75%) and 25% attended private nonprofit institutions.*

Although HBCUs were originally established to educate black or African American students, they enroll a diverse student body. In 2015, students who were not black or African American were 24% of total enrollment in HBCUs, up from 15% in 1976 (NCES 2017).†

* Special tabulation from the 2015 Fall Enrollment survey in <https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/webcaspar/>.

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