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Adapting an HBCU-inspired framework for Black student success in U.S. LIS education

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Abstract:
This perspective essay explores Gasman & Arroyo's (2014) HBCU-inspired framework for Black student success as a prism for re-envisioning LIS education. In response to calls for anti-hegemonic LIS education, the authors discuss a potential tool for Black student success and suggest its benefits to LIS education. The framework can introduce non-white, anti-racist educational practices to the work of educating the U.S. library workforce; it is relevant in light of ongoing racial and political strife in U.S. society.

Introduction

The 2020 murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery globalized the Black Lives Matters movement and inspired widespread reflection on systems of racial control and subjugation. In the aftermath of the killings, several international library and information science organizations, the majority of which are composed of librarians of Anglo or European heritage, pledged to address racial and ethnic inequities. The American Library Association vowed to counter "the systemic racism and violence that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color experience on a daily basis in our inequitable society" (ALA, 2020); the Australian Library and Information Association stood "in solidarity with our United States counterparts in condemning violence and racism against people of color" (ALIA, 2020); the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) condemned "all forms of racism as fundamentally contrary to human rights and to the values of our profession" (IFLA, 2020); and the U.K.'s Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals committed to dismantling "global racism which has been faced by [B]lack people and people of colour for generations" (CILIP, 2020). LIS educators, too, vowed to renew their commitment to anti-racism. The Association for LIS Education decried the "deprivation of freedom, peace, safety, health, and opportunities in education workplaces, and many other venues" (ALISE, 2020).

In 2020, the tendrils of hegemony were exposed through a once-in-a-century plague, ongoing political persecution and demagoguery, and racist violence. These perils, no doubt, worked symbiotically. While some were forced to finally reckon with this reality, marginalized communities had long known the damage caused by discrimination.

When it comes to LIS, introspection must be met with a change in the status quo, beginning with probing how librarians are trained and socialized. Re-envisioning LIS means confronting the field's staunchly Anglo-Saxon past. In the U.S. especially, there remain several rich but unexplored avenues for reflecting diverse identity, ideology, and especially pedagogy.

In this article, we argue that racial reconciliation should begin at the LIS education level—that is, how LIS programs function through accreditation, administration, staffing, teaching, and student support. Our aim here is to suggest, through an evidence-derived educational model that demonstrates how HBCU institutions function as social equalizers, how the LIS profession can more closely align with its positioning as community anchors.

Racial representation and inclusion cannot be accomplished without earnest scrutiny of program ideologies (Hudson, 2017; Lance, 2005; Roberts & Noble, 2016), curricula (Abdullahi, 2007; Cooke & Sweeney, 2017), research (Mehra & Rioux, 2016); and especially student experience (Logan, Augustyniak & Rees, 2002; Kazmer, Gibson, & Shannon, 2013). This article, therefore, leans on critical race theory (Crenshaw et. al, 1996) to understand Blak-centered education as emancipatory or fugitive pedagogy, as Jarvis R. Givens (2021) puts it. The growing application of critical race theory in LIS (Brook, Ellenwood & Lazzaro, 2015; Brown, Ferreti, Leung, Mendez-Brady, 2018; Gibson et. al, 2018; Hall, 2012; Honma, 2005; Hudson,

2017; Kumasi, 2012; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2011; Walker, 2015a) has afforded meaningful insight on how the LIS field reifies racial hierarchies. LIS education is a *continuum* of socially biased epistemologies. As products of bureaucratic host institutions and a racially skewed higher education environment, most U.S. LIS programs sustain institutional inequities (Honma, 2005; Brook et. al, 2015). The outcome is a meritocratic, rivalrous, metric-driven higher education agenda that reduces student identities to produce a ready workforce. Canadian scholar David James Hudson rebukes what he sees as the "whiteness of practicality" or utilitarian imperatives in LIS that manifest as "implicit dismissal of all understood to be impractical." (2017, p. 206).

LIS can stand to inject non-white values, cultures, and practices into its educational ecosystem. Doing so calls for a transition from Eurocentric, "classical" intellectual absolutism. South African LIS Professor Dennis Ocholla (2007; 2020) calls on LIS educators to eschew a history of dependence—that is, a pervasive, exogenous culture that results in educational indoctrination. Ocholla promotes Afrikology or African-centered indigenous knowledge as a means of disrupting the white professional standard within LIS. He suggests that African higher education follows a patriarchal, colonized educational heritage born of racist notions of civilization, refinement, and enlightenment. The question, then, is how can global LIS expand its intellectual foundation and embrace non-white educational models? This question provokes us; we, too, realize the need to adopt other ways of knowing within U.S. LIS education.

Except in the case of LIS education provided at Minority-Serving Institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (henceforth, HBCUs or HBCU institutions), U.S. LIS programs have relied on dominant conventions. These approaches have historically lacked the knowledge, skills, and ideologies of communities beyond mainstream U.S. society. The U.S. LIS educational experience transfers both tacit and explicit knowledge that begins and ends with white, middle-class America in mind.

Accordingly, the purpose of this perspective essay is to introduce Gasman and Arroyo's (2015) HBCU-inspired framework for Black student success. In addition to describing the framework's potential benefits, we examine the role of HBCUs in U.S. LIS education. There have been very few HBCU-LIS program partnerships after the closing of four of the five historic HBCU-based LIS programs. However, these fleeting initiatives produced little in the way of recommendations for culturally-responsive education. The result is missed opportunities for reciprocity and reflection. It is not enough to incentivize students of color, a portion of whom are recruited from HBCU institutions, to matriculate through LIS programs. Pipeline efforts will continue to be hollow so long as there is inattention to the environments in which students of color are expected to succeed. Decision-makers would do well to weigh whether LIS spaces are ready for a significant epistemological shift; they must also gauge the extent to which LIS students are educated to resist global injustice in all its forms. This holistic diversity aim is innate to HBCU-based education, as the framework will depict, but has only recently gained earnest traction within LIS. We believe that an HBCU-inspired framework for Black student success can specify precisely how LIS education can incorporate whole-person, civil rights-oriented higher learning.

Brief overview of America's historically Black colleges and universities

        Before discussing the educational practices at HBCU institutions, it is necessary to contextualize this sector of U.S. higher education. The HBCU designation recognizes accredited colleges and universities that exclusively educated Blacks prior to the 1965 U.S. Higher Education Act. HBCUs originated in the 19th century in response to the need for advanced education for formerly enslaved African Americans during a period when racial segregation prohibited their enrollment in mainstream colleges and universities. All but three HBCU institutions were founded after the emancipation of slavery in 1865[1]. There are over 100 HBCU institutions, most of which are located in the U.S. south (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

        The corporate mission of providing higher education opportunities for African Americans persists. HBCU institutions educate a third of Black college students while comprising less than 2% of United States colleges and universities (Gasman & Commodore, 2014; Kena et. al, 2016). HBCU institutions significantly contribute toward the country's goal of having 60 percent of those aged 25-64 possess a Bachelor's degree by 2025 (Lee & Keys, 2013c as cited in Walker, 2015a). HBCUs have provided pathways to higher education among people of color, particularly in the STEM and education professions (Lee & Keys, 2013c as cited in Walker, 2015a). Research substantiates that HBCUs promote Pan-African cultural pride and mold civic leaders as evidenced by Vice President Kamala Harris, world-renowned novelist Toni Morrison, media mogul Oprah Winfrey, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and countless others. The White House Initiative on HBCUs continues to support these important institutions.

        HBCUs have profoundly influenced Black librarianship. For much of the 20th century when the library schools and American Library Association denied or suppressed Black participation, a large proportion of African Americans were trained at the library schools at Hampton University, Alabama A&M University, the University of the District of Columbia[2], Clark Atlanta University and North Carolina Central University (NCCU). The NCCU School of Library and Information Science is the only remaining historically Black LIS program in the U.S. and has trained mainly librarians of color for close to 80 years. HBCUs fostered African American library pioneers such as E.J. Josey, Virginia Lacy Jones, Clara Stanton Jones, Eliza Gleason, and Irene Owens. Many celebrated Black librarians—for instance, Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress; Wanda Brown, past ALA President; and Julius Jefferson, Jr., current ALA President—are graduates or affiliates of HBCUs.

        A number of studies examine the cross between HBCUs and the LIS professions. Most discuss the contributions of HBCU campus libraries (Allen and Brooks-Tatum, 2014; Brown 1996; Gravois, 1664; 1995a; 1995b; Guthrie & McCoy, 2010; Hill, 2012; Love, 2016; MacDonald, 2003; Malone, 1996; Phoenix & Henderson 2016; Royster, 1998, Walker & Sims,

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1 The Second Morrill Act of 1890 required states to establish separate land grant colleges for Blacks.

2 The University of the District of Columbia failed to earn ALA accreditation and was subsequently sundowned.

2012; Walker, 2014; Youmans, 2009). The HBCU Library Alliance, a consortium that supports the libraries at these campuses, has published two *State of Libraries at HBCUs* reports (2005; 2011). Particularly important to this paper, several publications demonstrate the historical value of HBCU-based LIS education. Sutton (2005) describes several teacher-librarian and apprentice librarianship programs in the early 20th century; Gunn (1986) captures the closing of Hampton University's library school and the establishment of the then Atlanta University's library school; Mulligan (2007) similarly discusses the closing of the Clark Atlanta program; DeLoach (1980) investigates the impact of Title II-B federal funding for minority recruitment in LIS education; Lenox (1994) reflects on serving as a dean of an HBCU library school; Du Mont (1986) chronicles the history of all but one HBCU library schools; and Speller's (1991) edited conference proceeding highlights the contributions of the NCCU's SLIS.

This article picks up where Lenox, Du Mont, and Steller left off. Though they provide overviews of HBCU-based LIS programs, the uniqueness and mechanisms of HBCU-based education largely go unmentioned. DuMont set out to "appraise the historical development of library education for [B]lacks and make recommendations for the future" (1986, pg. 234) yet all but discussed how the HBCU model of LIS education differed from mainstream library education (Ndumu & Chancellor, 2021). Likewise, Speller and Lenox celebrate their specific HBCU library schools but offer few details on precisely how these institutions created pathways to the upper echelons of the U.S. LIS field. The success of HBCU-based library education required intentionality and resistance. These library schools were established in response to the strategic exclusion of people of color on the part of the American Library Association and mainstream library schools. Collectively, these programs educated more than 7,000 African American librarians beginning with the 1925 founding of Hampton University's program and continuing today with that of North Carolina Central University (Ndumu, 2021).

Molding socially-engaged Black librarians for a cumulative of 95 years has not been by happenstance. The aim here is not to glamorize the HBCU narrative. We simply offer a new perspective on how the LIS educational standard can and must change from the largely individualized, normative, and function-focused design to that of community, transformative, and human-centered pedagogy.

Adapting Gasman & Arroyo's HBCU-inspired framework for Black student success

The HBCU-inspired framework comes out of the work of the Center for Minority-serving Institutions[3](CSMI), which includes Tribal Colleges, Hispanic-serving institutions, and HBCUs. Directed by Marybeth Gasman, the CSMI elevates the educational contributions of non-dominant higher educational institutions (Center for MSIs, 2019). We echo Gasman and Arroyo's sentiments: "our goal here is not to satisfy or even address the breadth of concerns related to HBCUs" (2014; p. 58). Instead, our purpose is to amplify their positive work on behalf of Black college students. Data supports the accomplishments of these institutions in educating

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[3] The Center for Minority-serving Institutions was founded at Pennsylvania State University in 2014 but relocated to Rutgers University beginning in September 2019.

an array of students, particularly those from low-income and first-generation college backgrounds. Gasman and Arroyo are the first to aggregate these empirically-proven net gains and present a comprehensive philosophy of how HBCUs foster Black student success.

Propositions

Through a synthesis of over 149 empirical studies on HBCUs, Gasman and Arroyo make the case that, taken as a whole, HBCUs are characterized as having:

1. A supportive environment—or, "positive power motives" and feelings of safety and recognition that encapsulate all functions of campus life (pg. 64)
2. Flexible entry points—or, visibility, accessibility, and affordability to applicants from diverse populations (p. 66)
3. Broad, iterative interpretation of student achievement—in addition to formal assessment, performance evaluation correlates with a.) culturally relevant pedagogy, b.) identity formation; and c.) values cultivation (p.68)
4. A holistic view of success—they prepare students for career growth as well as activism (p. 70)

Grounded in the HBCU literature, Gasman and Arroyo's framework takes an anti-deficit stance. The framework first recognizes that HBCUs attract, enroll, and meet the needs of a broad range of students. "Some hopeful applicants are highly talented and affluent and could succeed anywhere, whereas others are decidedly under-prepared, are from disadvantaged backgrounds, and have few other opportunities, if any" (p. 66). This elasticity lends itself not to educational inferiority but educational equality.[4] It runs counter to the predominant meritocratic basis of mainstream U.S. education.

Gasman and Arroyo contend that HBCUs assist those from underprivileged backgrounds by providing ample enrichment opportunities along with same-race mentorship. With a supportive environment as a moderating function, HBCUs present "a moral and social curriculum" (Jean-Marie, 2008 as cited in Gasman & Arroyo, 2014) that is reinforced by instructors and peers from similar cultural backgrounds. Tangential to this, they suggest that HBCUs place distinctive emphasis on student identity formation in the context of ethnoracially-situated, intellectual, and leadership development. The last facet encourages student voice and agency in the educational experience. Students are further presented with images and exemplars of Black success. As a result, HBCU graduates have a higher than average social consciousness and change-oriented leadership vision. Their alumni demonstrate pride in their alma mater and enter society poised to be engaged citizens who combat injustice.

Though few HBCUs rank high on well-known national indices, their graduates fare better than those of predominantly White institutions (PWIs) when it comes to serving Black society. HBCUs earn higher mobility scores across all institutions in the U.S. meaning that graduates are

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[4] The notion that HBCUs do not offer competitive learning environments reflects essentialist and elitist pedagogical models that set Ivy Leagues as standards. Yet, this bias is statistically unsupported; "no study has found a net negative achievement effect of attending an HBCU" (Gasman & Arroyo, p. 68).

more likely to return, relocate, or contribute to—if not lead—Black communities (Brookings Institute, 2017). Largely because of the work of HBCUs, Blacks are represented in the nation's critical sectors. For instance, 80 percent of Black politicians; 70 percent of Black dentists and physicians, 50 percent of Black engineers, 50 percent of Black public school teachers, and 35 percent of Black attorneys are HBCU graduates (United Negro College Fund, 2008). These alumni, in turn, recruit and attract the next generation of HBCU students.

HBCU education should be seen not as a brand, but a model. However, "the power of the model to impact student success is found less in any single component or process and more in the totality of all parts working together interdependently and holistically" (Gasman & Arroyo, 2014, p. 71).
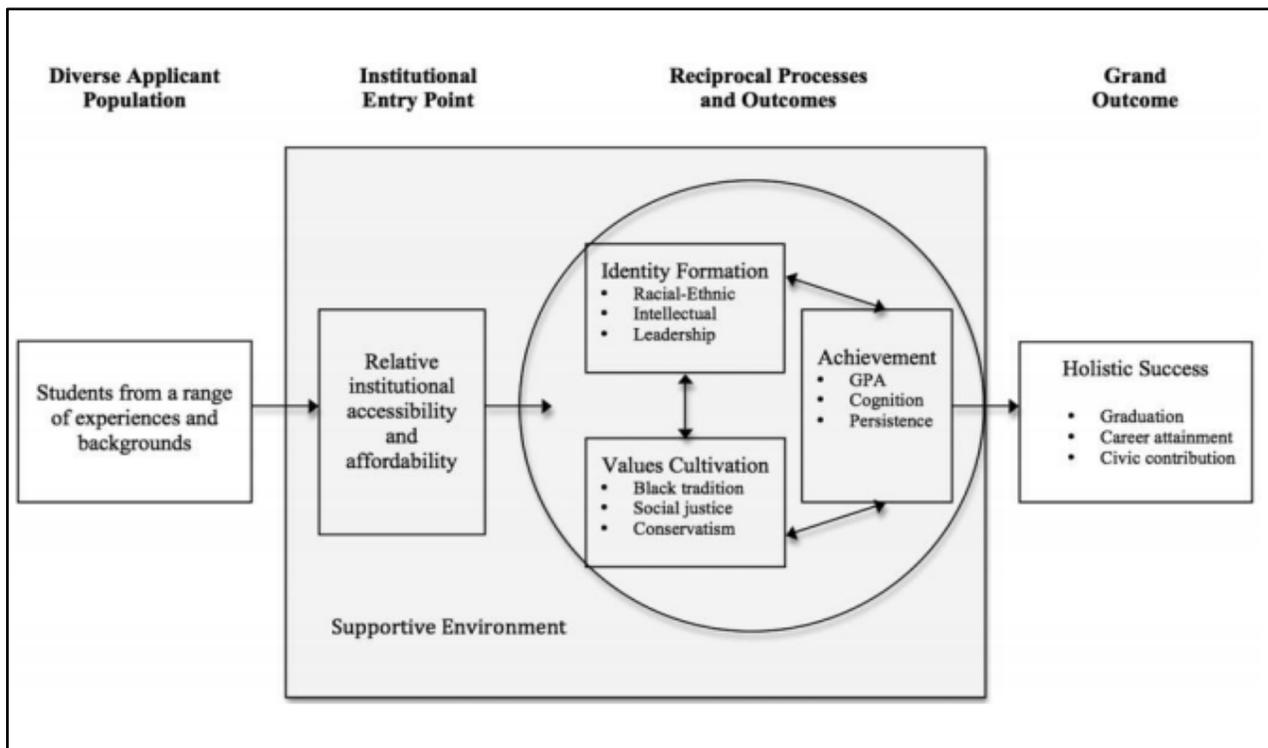

Figure 1. *Gasman and Arroyo's HBCU-based educational approach for Black student success*

Implications for LIS

As LIS educators with substantial experience with working in HBCUs, we take liberty in expounding upon the Gasman and Arroyo's arguments. We believe that the essence of the HBCU campus is a village-like, communal setting. The uniqueness of the HBCU prototype is that it rejects classist, transactional, solo, and Anglo-conformist paradigms. Education that humanizes through dialogue and co-ownership of the learning experience (Freire, 1968; hooks, 2014) is transformative, specifically in times of racial inequity and civil unrest. The HBCU-inspired model for HBCU success can encourage LIS educators since at its core is rich interaction.

First, a program-centered rather than student-centered approach would remove the burden of discovering and enrolling in LIS programs from the student (bottom-up approach). Instead, the onus is placed on leaders to plan and design programs as opposed to simply professional competency, but also values cultivation, identity formation, and holistic outcomes (trickle-down effect). Since online learning prevails in LIS, educators should find ways to inject synchronous, non-instructional engagement activities. Data on diversity-related facets of LIS programs pinpoints that there are dwindling opportunities for non-instructional student enrichment. At last count, only 40 percent of LIS programs sponsor diverse student organizations and 69 percent host diversity-related events or shared diversity-related news, based on available website data (Ndumu & Betts-Green, 2018). There is a need to replicate in multiple formats the types of cohorts, mentorships, symposia, and student activities that were once common in face-to-face library schools (Jaeger, Bertot & Subramaniam, 2013). Most importantly, these endeavors should represent racial, ethnic and ideological dynamism. In so doing, LIS programs will "place a premium on qualitatively rich interaction between real people where human individuality, freedom, and high context interaction are practiced as a lived holistic philosophy" (Gasman & Arroyo, 2014, p. 74).

Moreover, LIS needs to be visible and accessible to those who are the least likely to know about the profession. We must ask whether our marketing, community relations, and admission requirements (e.g., Graduate Record Examination and Grade Point Average benchmarks, non-recognition of foreign-earned undergraduate degrees in the case of immigrants) stand in the way of recruitment aims. Some components of entry points privilege the LIS profession and have very little bearing on the effectiveness of future librarians. Our preoccupation should not be "with who gets in but what happens to them afterward" (Kannerstein, 1978, pg. 97 as cited in Gasman & Arroyo, 2014).

We must also ponder the current state of racial representation across LIS programs. According to 2020 ALISE statistics, underrepresented groups comprise only 11% of LIS faculty.[5] Pursuant to the framework's top-down reasoning and drawing from the idea of the virtuous circle of LIS diversity (Jaeger & Franklin, 2007; Jaeger et. al, 2015), LIS must increase its community of racially and ethnically diverse faculty and administrators in order to mold students of color. Gasman and Arroyo point to several studies (Cokley 2000, 2002; Seifert et al. 2006; Wood & Turner, 2011) which corroborate that the presence of faculty of color may potentially be more salient to achieving racial diversity than program design.

Concluding Thoughts

The goal of this article is to introduce a well-known framework for Black student success as a method for embracing an anti-racist agenda in U.S. LIS education. Racial ethics, representation, and inclusion in LIS education will continue to be a challenge until there is congruence between program structures and the growing, potent call for the dismantling of long-

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5 ALISE statistics did not specify by institution. This data point was aggregated. Approximately 10% of respondents declined to answer or listed their racial identities as unknown.

standing systemic inequities in the profession. An anti-hegemonic model for Black student success poses benefits for all LIS students, we believe. Those who do not identify as having underrepresented racial backgrounds might be motivated to become comrades or culturally competent information professionals.

The HBCU-inspired framework is but one illustration. LIS programs can also glean from the practices at other types of (perhaps more regionally relevant) minority-serving institutions such as Hispanic-serving and Tribal Colleges. The Center for MSIs is a reliable data resource on these vibrant colleges and universities. w\We acknowledge that a number of current LIS diversity initiatives appear to be working: flexible instruction that meet the needs of non-traditional graduate students; successful, long-term, and soft-money independent mentorship and funding opportunities for students of color (i.e., the Spectrum scholarship program); bilateral and multifaceted HBCU-LIS collaborations such as the DLF + HBCU Library Alliance partnership; and a commitment to recruiting and training faculty of color (for instance, the Project Athena and La SCALA programs). Through concerted and well-designed efforts, LIS can facilitate racial reconciliation.

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