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June 25, 2026

The Real Target in America's War on Higher Ed

It's women.

By [Gloria L. Blackwell](#)



For generations, higher education has helped women build economic security, enter professions long closed to them and gain access to leadership, research and opportunity. That is precisely why the institutions and policies supporting higher education are now under growing attack.

Over the past year, a series of decisions affecting graduate student loans, civil rights enforcement, research funding, accreditation and diversity initiatives have begun reshaping who can realistically access advanced education and under what conditions. Individually, these actions may appear technical or administrative. Together, they risk making higher education less accessible, less inclusive and less capable of serving as an engine of economic mobility.

The cumulative effect is impossible to ignore: The very institutions that have helped women gain economic power are being systematically weakened.

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That matters because higher education has never functioned as a neutral system. Women have had to fight for access to colleges, graduate schools, research opportunities, faculty positions and leadership roles. Black women, Hispanic/Latina women, students with disabilities, parenting students and LGBTQ+ students have faced even steeper barriers. Progress does not happen automatically. It happens because institutions expand opportunity, invest in students, enforce civil rights protections and create pathways into careers that long excluded women.

The stakes are especially high for women of color, because graduate education delivers some of the largest economic gains for those who have historically faced the greatest barriers to wealth and opportunity. According to the American Association of University Women's analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey data, earning a master's degree increases earnings by more than 25 percent for Black women and 24 percent for Hispanic/Latina women, compared to just under 10 percent for white women. Those numbers tell an important story: Advanced degrees are not simply credentials. They are one of the most powerful tools available for narrowing economic inequality for these groups.

And yet the same data reveals how persistent inequities remain. Even with a master's degree, Black women earn only 63 cents and Hispanic/Latina women just 66 cents for every dollar earned by white, non-Hispanic men with the same level of education. Women of color are already being forced to work harder, borrow more and climb steeper hills to secure economic stability. So, when policymakers make graduate education harder to access by capping the total amount of federal loans a student can borrow, they're not only creating unequal hardship—they're also deepening existing inequality.

That is exactly what is happening now. Advanced degrees in law, medicine, public health, education and STEM routinely cost far more than the proposed graduate borrowing limits, set to go into effect in July, would cover. Students with generational wealth may still find a way forward. Students without it—disproportionately women, including women of color—may not.

And the pressure does not stop with affordability. Across the country, colleges are eliminating or shrinking programs focused on gender, race and equity. Civil rights enforcement has weakened, leaving students with fewer protections against discrimination and harassment. Research funding cuts are threatening academic pathways for early-career scholars, especially women, in STEM. Political attacks on diversity initiatives are creating fear and confusion on campuses, pushing institutions to retreat before they are even ordered to do so.

When graduate education becomes more expensive, women are more likely to delay enrollment or abandon advanced degrees altogether. When universities cut support programs or eliminate fields of study, women lose mentorship, community and professional pipelines. When research funding dries up, women, especially younger scholars and women in STEM, are often pushed out first. And when civil rights enforcement weakens, the burden falls hardest on students who already face discrimination and unequal treatment.

These are not isolated policy fights. They are interconnected attacks on access to higher education itself.

And the consequences will be devastating. They will show up in paychecks, retirement savings, homeownership rates and economic mobility. They will widen the wage gaps women are already fighting to close. They will hit hardest in communities where graduate education has served as one of the few reliable tools for building generational stability.

Higher education is one of the strongest pillars of American democracy and economic mobility. Weakening it weakens the country's future. And for women who stand to gain the most economically from advanced education while still earning far less than men, the damage could last for generations.

There is still time to choose a different path.

Gloria L. Blackwell is CEO of the American Association of University Women.

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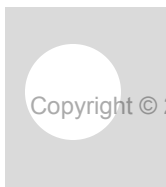
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Dear Colleague Letter Asks Colleges to End Affinity Housing

Written By

Gloria L. Blackwell

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LIMITING ACCESS

What It Would Mean for These Public Colleges to Ban Undocumented Students



By [Amann Mahajan](#)

June 26, 2026



Students across the country in recent years have protested policies that target undocumented immigrants.

STEPHEN MATUREN, GETTY IMAGES

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Florida's educational officials are preparing to approve policies that would bar undocumented students from attending public colleges and universities. The cost? Millions in lost tuition — and much more in long-term economic and social losses, experts and advocacy organizations say.

While Florida wouldn't be the first to take this step, limiting college access there would be especially disruptive given that the state has a large population of undocumented high-school students — roughly 8,000 — graduating each year.

A vote is scheduled Tuesday on a Florida Board of Education proposal requiring those wanting to enroll at the state's 28 public colleges to provide documentation of "citizenship or lawful presence."

On Thursday, the Board of Governors overseeing Florida's 12 public universities took a similar step — advancing an amendment that would prevent people "present in the United States unlawfully" from initially enrolling at institutions that had not admitted "all academically qualified applicants" in the previous two years. (In a university system whose campuses all have somewhat selective admissions, this would likely preclude undocumented students from enrolling.)

The Florida Legislature quashed bids to limit undocumented enrollment in state colleges and universities this year, but the boards are poised to act anyway. Spokespeople for the Board of Governors and Department of Education, which houses the State Board of Education, did not respond to a request for comment.

If approved, the changes would make Florida one of a handful of states to expel undocumented students from the halls of public higher education — following Georgia, South Carolina, and Alabama, which adopted similar policies well before the Trump administration's second immigration crackdown began in 2025.

“Why is Florida shooting itself in the foot?”

But the changes will likely have a larger impact in Florida. The Higher Ed Immigration Portal pegs the number of undocumented students in the state’s higher-education system at more than 49,000.

“This state intends to slam the doors of our top public universities right in the faces of thousands of bright, hardworking, and qualified human beings,” Florida Atlantic University student and Florida House of Representatives candidate Alexander Lambridis said at Thursday’s Board of Governors meeting.

The policies’ proponents have broadly argued they want residents with full legal documentation to have first access to Florida’s educational resources — particularly in the case of selective state universities.

But the Florida Policy Institute, which describes itself as a nonpartisan research organization, estimated that the state’s college system [stands to lose](#) as much as \$15 million in foregone tuition and fees under the policy. Valencia College, in particular, could lose roughly \$7.3 million and Palm Beach State College roughly \$1 million, according to the organization.

(Both colleges have reached out to the institute, according to senior policy analyst Alexis Tsoukalas, to ask further questions about the calculations. The projections are based on tuition waivers the institute says are used by undocumented immigrants, though it is unclear what proportion of students using the waivers were undocumented. Spokespeople for Valencia and Palm Beach State did not respond to a request for comment.)

Beyond that, lawyers and immigration advocates have said that the policies will cut out a core employment and taxpayer base. Beyond colleges and universities alone, another Board of Education policy would limit undocumented students’ access to adult general-education programs, including English language instruction.

“Why is Florida shooting itself in the foot?” said Diego Sánchez, vice president of policy and strategy at the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration.

“The state educated these students, they went through the public system, high school, etc., benefited from their hard work, and now wants to close the door just as they’re ready to contribute,” he added, saying that students would likely elect to move to another state or seek out private institutions.

The new policies would add to changes that were already underway. Last year, the state Legislature revoked protections allowing undocumented students to access in-state tuition. (Other states have also recently removed in-state tuition benefits, mostly in response to scrutiny from the Trump administration, which argues such policies are illegal.) Some Florida colleges and universities also allowed campus police to partner with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement after Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, pressured them to do so.

In the coming months, education officials will also have to sort out a series of questions. For one, the proposed state-college policy does not clarify whether it applies to current students seeking re-enrollment alongside first-time enrollees.

University of Florida law-school professor Juan Caballero, who leads the school’s immigration clinic, added that stakeholders will likely need to more clearly define “lawful” and “unlawful” presence. While some cases are clear-cut, others are muddier: It’s not certain, for instance, whether all students under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, would be impacted.

“Rulemaking is supposed to implement laws passed by the Legislature. It’s not supposed to be used to legislate sweeping policy changes on its own”

The Board of Governors appeared to struggle with some distinctions at its Thursday meeting, when several members determined the initial wording — which prevented people “not lawfully present” from enrolling — might be used to prevent international students from pursuing online degrees, which many of the state universities offer.

The governors ultimately moved to amend the wording to instead exclude students who are “present in the United States unlawfully,” adding that further changes could be made before the policy comes to a final vote in September.

Lawyers and advocates have also argued that the two boards could be overstepping their jurisdiction by passing the policies after state legislators already shot down provisions in bills with similar aims.

“Rulemaking is supposed to implement laws passed by the Legislature. It’s not supposed to be used to legislate sweeping policy changes on its own,” Sánchez said.

Some hope the possible overstepping opens a window for legal contestation for advocates as both boards appear to move toward approval. Farah Al Jallad, an organizer with the Florida Student Power Network, said the group would be pushing legislators on the Joint Administrative Procedures Committee to more closely examine the boards’ policies.

“The Legislature already said they didn’t want this,” she said.

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Photo by Ashley Mowreader

Members of the Morgan MILE program pose for photos during lunch at Morgan State in May. The program aims to support men in higher ed through brotherhood, character building and professional development. From left to right: Daniel Blessing, Loic Nemlin Koffi, Miles Davis, K'Miles Davis, Cameron Collins, Devin Easley, Jayden Sterrette, Rasheed Soumas (taking photo).

June 10, 2026

Reaching Young Black Men Through Sense of Belonging

Across demographic groups, young Black men are the least likely to attend college and earn a degree. Institutions are using new and established interventions to foster connection and vocation among the next generation of Black male graduates.

By [Ashley Mowreader](#)

When Cameron Collins was in high school, “college wasn’t exactly my first plan,” he said.

Collins was raised by a single mom and his grandmother in Prince George’s County, Maryland. His father didn’t graduate college and the other men in his life worked in the trades.

“That was what I wanted to do,” he said. “I didn’t really have a male role model in my life—outside of like my coach from sports—who graduated college.”

Collins encountered a challenge many Black men face as they consider their lives after high school: whether or not to pursue a college degree. A majority of Black men forgo postsecondary education, for a variety of reasons—including the lack of role models or peers in higher education.



“Representation matters,” said Derrick Brooms, inaugural executive director of the Black Men’s Research Institute at Morehouse College, where he studies Black men’s experiences in college. “Those representations are living manifestations of possibilities.”



Left: Words of encouragement that students at Early College School at Delaware State University wrote to themselves and their peers. Right: A timeline of achievements by Black individuals in the U.S., featuring the year California State University, Sacramento, became a Black-Serving Institution and the founding date of the Black Honors College.

Ashley Mowreader

While Black youth make up 15 percent of all 15- to 25-year-olds, in 2025 they accounted for less than 11 percent of all students enrolled in undergraduate programs in the U.S. Only a third of Black college students are men, and they are significantly less likely to graduate in six years than Black women or college students overall.

For decades, colleges, policymakers and advocates have sought to grow the number of Black men in higher education and improve their graduation rates. But now that the Trump administration has prohibited initiatives—and even research—aimed at individuals based on race or gender, closing equity gaps has become more difficult for institutions.


Despite the political backlash, some colleges are investing in new and proven interventions for Black men that build pipelines to college, establish a sense of belonging and provide students with mentorship and peer support.

Gaps in Enrollment

Over the past 50 years, Black student enrollment has grown across higher ed. In 1972, Black students made up 8 percent of all college students, according to U.S. census data. In spring 2025, Black students made up approximately 11 percent of enrollments, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center's estimates.

“Representation matters. Those representations are living manifestations of possibilities.”

Derrick Brooms, inaugural executive director of the Black Men's Research Institute at Morehouse College



However, Black men are not attending college at the same rates as their female counterparts. In 1972, 20 percent of Black men and 16 percent of Black women between the ages of 18 and 24 were enrolled in higher education, according to census data. But by 2021, Black women were

attending college at much higher rates than their male peers: 42 percent versus 31 percent.

And educational attainment for Black men continues to lag behind national averages. In 2024, a little less than half (46 percent) of all Americans ages 25 and up held an associate degree or higher, according to census data published in September. Among Black men, only one-third did.

Black Educational Attainment

Percent of Black adults educational attainment (alone or in combination) for adults ages 25 and older by total and by gender.

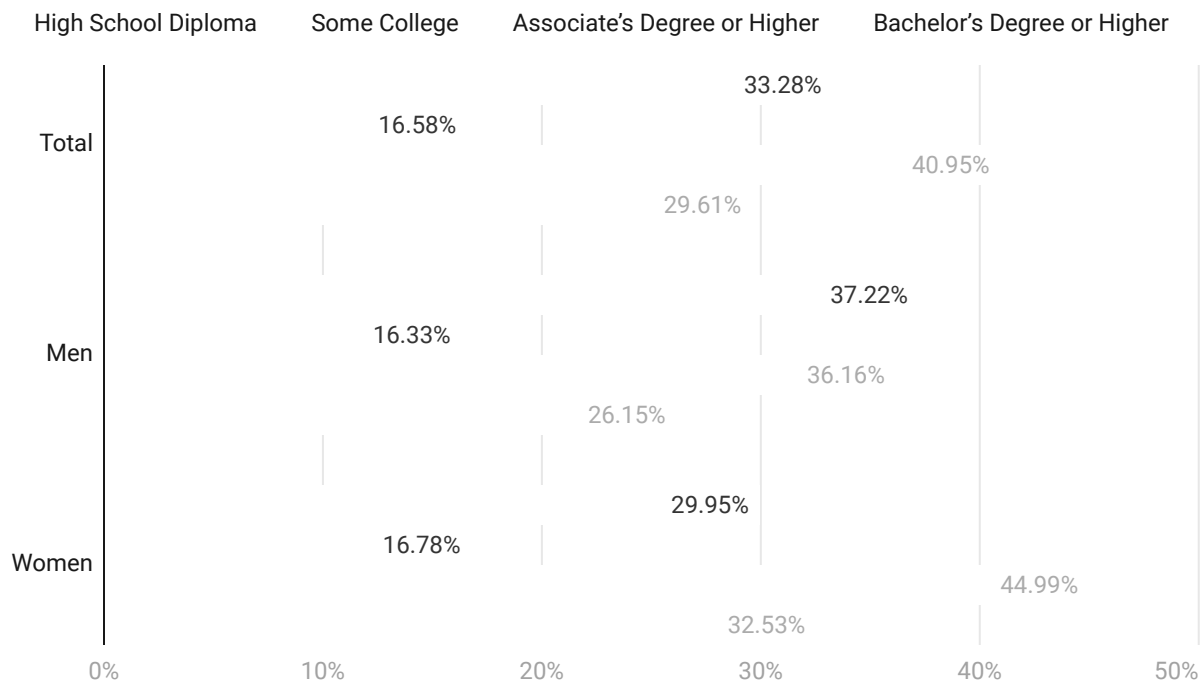


Chart: Ashley Mowreader • Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2024 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC). • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Barriers to Success

For young Black men, decisions about attending college or going straight into the workforce often hinge on cost and the perceived return on investment, Brooms said.



In an age of cryptocurrency, predictive market betting and sports gambling, the opportunities for young men to make money fast loom large. The payoff for a college degree has grown less certain, judging from high unemployment rates for college graduates and fewer available jobs in male-dominated fields that require a degree, such as computer science.

Young Men View Trade Schools and Bachelor's Degrees as Holding Similar Value

Percent of young men who say it is very or somewhat likely that someone with each of the following could get a well-paying job in today's economy.

	Somewhat likely	Very likely
Master's degree, PhD, or other post graduate degrees	27%	56%
Bachelor's degree from a 4-year college	40%	42%
Associate degree from a 2-year college	46%	27%
Diploma or certificate from a trade school	44%	37%
High school diploma	36%	28%

Chart: Inside Higher Ed | Public Agenda • Source: Public Agenda Survey of American Men conducted November 4-18, 2025 • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datavrapper](#)

Some men see more value in working than in spending four to six years on a degree “that might not even yield anything at the end,” explained Jonathan Quash, university executive director of the City University of New York's Black Male Initiative.

In interviews, students who choose college cited early and persistent influences who pushed them toward higher education—middle school teachers, parents, siblings and community members.

For Collins, who is now a rising junior at Morgan State University in Baltimore, it was his high school guidance counselor and chemistry teacher who encouraged him to consider college.

Editor's Picks

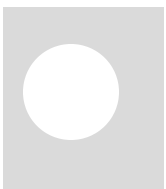
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Dear Colleague Letter Asks Colleges to End Affinity Housing

“They told me that I was already doing well in school now, and I shouldn’t want to limit myself,” he said. “I should be trying to excel in the highest degree, and college is one of the ways to do that.”

Without them, “I don’t know if I would be here in college now,” Collins said.





Cameron Collins (left) chats with fellow Morgan MILE members Miles Davis (center) and Devin Easley.

Ashley Mowreader

But just enrolling isn't enough. For Black students to stay in college, they need to have a sense of belonging, Quash said. Research shows students are more likely to drop out if they feel isolated or experience discrimination. A 2026 study from Brandeis University found that one-third of Black students experienced prejudice on campus and 34 percent felt their campus was hostile toward people of color.

For men of color, mentor and peer support can make the difference between staying enrolled and leaving college, said Saúl Valdez, director of the American Institute for Boys and Men's Higher Education Male Achievement Collaborative.

“If you don't have that one person on campus who is your champion or your advocate, then it's pretty easy to feel like the system is not tailored toward you or to support you,” Valdez.

In the past, colleges created targeted programs to promote belonging among Black or male students. But recent state and federal crackdowns on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have made it significantly harder for colleges to focus on singular populations.

Shortly after President Trump took office, the Department of Education issued a Dear Colleague letter to colleges and universities that took an expansive view of the Supreme Court's 2023 ruling banning affirmative action in admissions and declared race-based scholarships, cultural centers and other resources illegal.

In response to several lawsuits, the courts blocked ED's interpretation of the law. But many colleges responded anyway, eliminating perceived DEI measures in order to avoid losing federal funds. Colleges nationwide shuttered DEI offices, rebranded graduations or mentorship programs, laid off staff and struck affinity language from public-facing webpages.

Since then, many institutions have sought to avoid scrutiny by widening the framing of their belonging and mentoring interventions to include students from all gender and racial backgrounds.

Some, including CUNY, have continued to offer Black male-focused initiatives, prompting backlash from the federal government. On Tuesday, the Justice Department announced it was opening an investigation into CUNY for alleged racial discrimination—even though the university website says the Black Male Initiative is “open to all academically eligible students.”



“If you don't have that one person on campus who is your champion or your advocate, then it's pretty

easy to feel like the system is not tailored toward you.”

Saúl Valdez, director of the American Institute for Boys and Men’s Higher Education

Male Achievement Collaborative.

Pathways to Campus

For Black men, the barriers to completion pile up well before they set foot on a college campus.

Research shows that Black students are more likely to face disciplinary action in school, which can make them feel less safe and supported. A 2012 survey found that nearly half of Black boys at public schools grades 6 to 12 have been suspended from school at some point.

At the same time, Black students often face academic disadvantages in high school that can limit their college opportunities. They are less likely than their White peers to be recommended by their teachers for advanced coursework, and their schools are less likely even to offer advanced coursework or dual enrollment (completing college classes while in high school) opportunities.

While 15 percent of all high schoolers in the U.S. are Black, only 8 percent participate in dual enrollment, said John Fink, a senior research associate and program lead at Columbia University Teacher’s College Community College Research Center (CCRC). In comparison, white students account for half of the students in dual enrollment, though they comprise 46 percent of all high schoolers.

When Black students do earn college credits in high school, they're more likely to attend selective universities and to complete a bachelor's degree in a competitive field like STEM, Fink said. But "the vast majority of school districts have racial and ethnic gaps in dual enrollment participation," according to CCRC findings.

To provide greater access to dual enrollment and offer a glimpse into the college experience, some HBCUs have embedded charter schools on their campuses.

One example is the Early College School, a public charter middle and high school in Dover, Del., housed at Delaware State University, the state's only Historically Black University. ECS enrolls up to 625 students, predominantly of color, in grades 7 to 12 and allows them to earn up to 60 credits at DSU and graduate with an associate degree.



Top: The exterior of Early College School's high school building, on Delaware State University's campus in Dover, Delaware. Bottom: The interior of Early College School's middle school, embedded in the university's Living and Learning Commons.

Ashley Mowreader

On paper, ECS operates like all other charter schools in Delaware: both the middle and high school are open access, and students are chosen through a lottery. But walking on campus reveals just how distinctive it is.

The middle school is connected to a DSU student center and the high school is nearly indistinguishable from other campus buildings. Pictures of Black heroes and celebrities decorate the hallways alongside a list of their accomplishments. ECS students dine in a DSU cafeteria and spend time at the student union; those enrolled in college courses trek independently to various academic buildings.

One of them, Darius Rainey, a senior from Smyrna, Del., has dreams of working in cybersecurity and IT. He knew college would be a part of his plan (in part influenced by his dad and dad's friends' career paths) and he believes ECS's dual enrollment opportunities have expedited his journey to get there.

"I feel like I'm a lot more prepared for the college classes next year; it definitely put me in the mindset that I needed," Rainey said. He graduated in May with his associate degree and will start at DSU in the fall.

ECS's average daily attendance rate is 95 percent, 4 percentage points higher than the national average—and a rarity in any high school post-COVID. Its four-year graduation rate is 95 percent for all students including Black students, 7 percentage points higher than the state average.

Administrators attribute student success to high expectations, strong relationships between students and teachers and Black male mentors in

the school.

“Being connected to people who you don’t want to let down in some ways [is important], because I know they’re invested in me, not just as a person, but also in what it is that I want to pursue and accomplish,” said Brooms of Morehouse, an all men’s HBCU in Atlanta.

Scholars, as teachers call ECS students, are reminded early and often that attending college courses is a privilege they earn. Students said they’re pushed to reach the same level of maturity as their college-going peers. In addition to content knowledge, they gain time management and professional communication skills, as well as diligence in respecting school rules.



Students complete a mathematics test at Early College School’s high school building.

Ashley Mowreader

On a campus tour, students pointed to various buildings and noted exactly which grade levels were allowed to access them. Dorms and parties are

off-limits to ECS students; the student union is open to students in college courses, and the on-campus Chick-fil-A is accessible only to college course attendees on good behavior. Administrators stressed they want to give students a taste of college life, predominantly through academics.

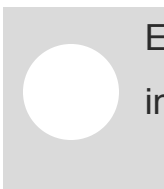
Another feature that sets ECS apart from other Delaware charters is its demographics. The students are mostly students of color, and the staff are predominantly Black, with Black men serving as coaches, teachers and counselors.

Nationally, Black men make up only 1.3 percent of public school teachers, despite comprising 6 percent of the total population. Having just one Black teacher is associated with greater educational gains for Black youth.

“When you talk about Black boys in school and higher ed, they have to see themselves and what they can aspire to be,” said Dara Savage, associate principal for Early College School.

But the turnover rate for Black male teachers is high, partly because Black men are often tasked with disciplining Black students, said Kai Maull, one of ECS’s school counselors. “The more of that that happens, you know, the males, they get out. That’s where the burnout comes for them, for us.”

On average, over 60 percent of ECS students enroll at Delaware State after graduation. This year, 64 percent of graduating men will attend DSU in the fall and an additional 15 percent will attend another college or university, Principal Nyia Pritchett said. This past fall, Delaware State’s ECS model expanded to HBCU Early College Prep, a public charter school in Queens, New York, welcoming just over 100 high school freshmen.





Students participate in music class at Early College School's high school building. The ECS band performs alongside the Delaware State band for special events and parades.

Ashley Mowreader

Fitted for the Future

At Morgan State University, one network of ambitious young men is easy to spot: just look for the matching suits and ties.

The MILE, short for Male Initiative on Leadership, is a decades-old program focused on helping men at the HBCU persist and graduate. One of its markers is the gray blazers and orange-and-blue striped ties that students wear at homecoming, weekly meetings and during community service projects.

Seeing older, confident men on campus in sharp business attire is what often first piques younger students' attention.

Collins remembers spotting his resident adviser wearing a suit on Monday evenings to attend board meetings. “Seeing the leadership on campus and seeing how people carry themselves, I wanted to be just like that,” he said. “There was a standard of excellence that was upheld, and I wanted to be a part of something that had that standard of excellence.”

The program emphasizes self-confidence, community service, leadership and “helping men understand who they are,” said Justin Hall, associate director of resident life.

“Black and brown men are bombarded with negative stereotypes and imagery, and so what we seek to do is to help those men tap into who they really are and be in love with who they are as men,” said Douglas Gwynn, director of residence life and housing.

Many Black men are the first in their family to go to college. For those students, finding role models or mentors in their community “can be powerful, because it reveals to you what’s possible,” said Brooms.

The Morgan MILE’s 149 members are expected to participate in weekly general meetings, service projects, retreats, collaborative events with other campus partners—including its sister organization, EVOLVE, which supports women at the university—and Brother to Brother, a confidential safe space for the men to build personal bonds and get vulnerable.

“When I went to my first Brother to Brother, I was really iffy because like, I don’t really know you guys, why are you guys asking about my feelings?” said K’Miles Davis, a senior health education major and president of the Morgan MILE for 2025–26. “But during that time—it’s long, it can go on all night—I’m opening up, I agree with you. We laugh, we cry, we crack jokes.”



K'Miles Davis, a rising senior at Morgan State University, gives a presentation on the values of the Morgan MILE.

Ashley Mowreader

In addition to providing brotherhood and community, the Morgan MILE helps meet students' financial needs to ensure they're able to persist in school. Students are made aware of basic needs support on campus; the matching suits are donated by J.C. Penney.

The Morgan MILE is free to join for any student in any academic program at any point in their college career. Engaging in campus activities may mean students can't work or have to work fewer hours, but Morgan MILE leaders like Danny Molock, director of the office of student life, reminds them that investing in the program can pay dividends in the long-term.

Program coordinators create opportunities for the MILE men to learn dining etiquette, take golf trips or go horseback riding together, exposing them to new experiences and building confidence. Program participants also described the additional professional benefits they've gained from the

MILE: internship offers, research invitations, mentorship, and even copies of textbooks or advice on which professors' courses to take.

In addition, the program has benefited academic outcomes: from fall 2017 to fall 2024, Morgan MILE participants upheld an average 3.16 GPA, compared to the general Morgan State male student population's 2.62.

With the support of the MILE men, Collins landed an internship this summer with a renewable energy company. Instead of working in a trade, he dreams of becoming an engineer, helping make affordable energy for lower income communities, including in Jamaica, where he was born.

The Morgan MILE program has also been adopted or modeled at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, the College of William and Mary, Fayetteville State University and Howard University.

Creating Space at PWIs

HBCUs are designed to expand access to higher education, which shapes institutional culture around student success, explained Brooms.

"There's not that sink-or-swim mentality, either you gotta figure it out and make it or you need to go somewhere else. That's not the ethos at the overwhelming majority of HBCUs; we want you to be here, we want you to be successful, and we're going to support you," he said.

Now, some predominantly white campuses—including California State University, Sacramento—are looking to replicate that supportive environment for Black students.

"The idea was, we're never going to be a Historically Black College and University, but we're going to be everything but the historical part," said

Luke Wood, president of Sacramento State and a researcher focused on Black men in education.

Wood's first step in creating a new campus climate was to secure a new title to showcase Sac State's goals for Black students.

In 2024, the university partnered with California lawmakers to establish a new type of state designation: a Black-Serving Institution (BSI). To receive the BSI designation, colleges must demonstrate meaningful progress in Black student success, including offering a robust African American studies program, cocurricular learning opportunities or campus affinity centers and outreach programs committed to serving Black students. As of January 2026, 25 colleges in California held a BSI; Sacramento State was the first.



Sacramento State received a commemorative designation from the California Legislative Black Caucus as a Black-serving institution, the first in the state, to recognize the university's efforts to support Black students' success.

California State University, Sacramento

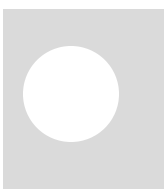
Since receiving the designation, Sac State has seen a significant increase in Black students, Wood said. From fall 2024 to fall 2025, Black student enrollment (not including students of two or more races) grew 15 percent, to 2,380 students, according to [CSU system data](#).

“Right now is a time when a lot of universities have either turned away from DEI or are like, ‘We’re going to do it, but we’re just not going to talk about it,’” Wood said. “We want to be the one place that students see that is not going to sacrifice our values.”

Sacramento State enrolls the second largest share of Black students in the CSU system: 9 percent of the student body, behind CSU Dominguez Hills’ 13 percent, excluding students of two or more races. In comparison, Black or African American students made up about 5 percent of total enrollment in the [California State University](#) and [University of California](#) systems in fall 2025.

Wood’s second step in becoming a Black-supporting institution was to create safe spaces for students of color.

In fall 2024, the university launched a new cocurricular cohort model, the Black Honors College (BHC), an application-only program open to all students who hold a 3.2 GPA or higher. Students spend their first two years in a close-knit environment, completing all their courses with a small group of peers and faculty, before launching into the larger Sac State campus.





Sacramento State's Black Honors College support staff introduce themselves to new BHC cohort members during spring orientation in January.

Ashley Mowreader

The BHC, “created a pipeline for somebody to say, ‘Hey, I don’t probably want to go as far as going to an HBCU, but I also want an experience that feels authentic to my culture, and I can learn about my culture,’” said Shawki Moore, assistant director for presidential projects and strategic partnerships at Sac State and co-founder of the Black Honors College.

Participants are given mentorship, specialized academic advising, tutoring and mental health support, as well as a designated gathering space on campus, which builds a sense of belonging and helps them stay on track to graduate, said BHC dean and co-founder Boatamo Ati Mosupyoe. Sac State will graduate its first cohort of BHC scholars in spring 2028.

In interviews, students said the small cohort model makes it easy to connect with friends and classmates, as well as university personnel. Faculty and staff don’t just teach and advise; they provide constant

reminders to keep up with deadlines, encouragement to apply for new opportunities — and sometimes lunch money for the forgetful student.

Chibuike Michael Ezeh is a second-year student and the BHC's director for the Associated Students, Inc., a leadership board for clubs. Ezeh is the first in his family to attend a four-year college from high school and said he found the BHC to be a meaningful place to foster connections, receive mentorship and dream big.

“When I have the director of the Black Honors College or even the president of Sac State looking at me and telling me, like, I could be the next president [of the university], like they could really see that in me, I feel like there’s no way I can slip up,” Ezeh said. “If they’re saying I could do it, then I very much can do it.”

A cornerstone of the Black Honors College experience is the general education coursework that highlights Black history, culture and contributions.



Newly admitted Black Honors College participants listen to presentations during spring orientation in January. The latest spring cohort had 60 members.

Ashley Mowreader

BHC leaders chose professors from within and outside the university to teach courses based on their past work in Black student success or teaching on the Black experience and history. Mosupyoe pushed off her retirement to lead the program.

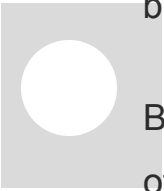
Faculty said that the BHC's makeup of Black-majority students and Black-focused content creates a unique classroom environment, distinct from general Sac State courses.

"Not only are we as professors engaging them in different ways focused on the Black experience, but the Black students themselves are the center of the conversation," said Christopher Towler, an associate professor of political science within the BHC.

The BHC also has an embedded therapist, Courtney Hughes, who provides mental health support and encouragement to students. Research shows embedded therapists in DEI programs like the BHC can help destigmatize counseling, create access and provide more culturally responsive support.

In addition to the Black-serving designation, administrators attribute enrollment growth across campus to the BHC.

"You see the flood, a dramatic increase in the Black population here, because people were like, 'I want to be a part of it,'" Moore said.



Being part of a community and feeling a sense of belonging is a key driver of success for young Black men, whether they attend a Black-serving PWI or an HBCU.

“You are the sum of the people you hang around,” Collins said. “The people around you are going to make you what you want to be at the end of the day.”

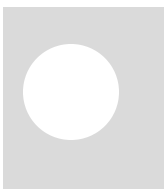
This story was produced with support from the Education Writers Association Reporting Fellowship program.

Written By

Ashley Mowreader

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June 10, 2026

DOJ Investigates CUNY Initiative

Saving to Higher Ed

DOJ Investigates CUNY's Black Male Initiative Snapshot

By [Katherine Knott](#)

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Dhillon said in a statement that “race can never play a role when deciding how to distribute educational resources or opportunities.”

Andrew Harnik/Getty Images News

The Justice Department is investigating a program at City University of New York that offers support for men from underrepresented backgrounds for alleged racial discrimination.

Trump officials said in a [Tuesday news release](#) that the Justice Department received reports that CUNY's Black Male Initiative “provides educational benefits to minorities, particularly black males, on the basis of race.” The university says on the program's [website](#) and in other materials that while the initiative is geared toward Black, Caribbean and Hispanic men, its activities are open to all students.

As part of the initiative, students receive “additional layers of academic and social support,” such as peer-to-peer mentoring, according to the website.

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Harmeet K. Dhillon, assistant attorney general for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, said in a statement that "race can never play a role when deciding how to distribute educational resources or opportunities." The DOJ release noted that the Civil Rights Division hasn't reached any conclusion about the investigation.

The Justice Department has declared a range of diversity, equity and inclusion practices unlawful and opened several investigations into allegations of racial discrimination at universities.

CUNY did not respond to a request for comment.

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As international enrollment falls, U.S. students face program cuts and higher prices

New data show the number of foreign students, who subsidize domestic ones, continues to decline

by JON MARCUS June 29, 2026

Students walk past the Tommy Trojan statue at the University of Southern California. Expected declines in international enrollment are among the reasons USC has given for financial problems that have led to massive layoffs. Credit: Genaro Molina/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

Harrison Keller was starting only his second year as president of the University of North Texas last fall when he was abruptly confronted with a big problem.

The Washington Post

Enrollment was down. And the source of the crisis made it much worse: In the wake of Trump administration moves to deny and revoke visas, deport international students and impose travel bans, 2,800 students from abroad who the university expected to show up **had stayed away**.

This story also appeared in [The Washington Post](#)

Full-tuition-paying international students — especially graduate students, who Keller said bring \$20,000 to \$25,000 each to his bottom line — are critical to balancing the budget, underwriting services and keeping costs lower for their domestic classmates.

The loss of so many of them pushed the university **\$45 million into** the red, Keller said, forcing it to eliminate **71 academic programs**. And a continuing decline in the number of international students will mean a hit of another **\$47 million in lost revenue** in the next academic year, according to university budget projections. (Keller said he expects the loss to be closer to \$25 million thanks to ongoing spending cuts.)

“I picked a hell of a time to become a college president,” he said.

And the problem isn't letting up. New federal figures show that international enrollment is continuing to fall, with **the number of student arrivals** down by 5 percent in March, almost 8 percent in April and 1 percent in May, compared to the same months last year. That's on top of a drop of **nearly 22 percent** in the number who arrived last summer versus the summer before.

“It leaves a really big hole in the budget, which has to get filled one way or another, either by increasing tuition or cutting services,” said Dick Startz, a professor of economics at the University of California, Santa Barbara — where, he noted, international students pay **more than three times** what California students do, and subsidize financial aid for their American classmates.

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Many American students and their families may not have realized how important full-tuition-paying international students are to university finances, said Domenico Ferraro, an associate professor of economics at Arizona State University **who has studied this**.

“Unfortunately, I think that many people don’t have a clear perception of what international students contribute” financially, Ferraro said.

Now the consequences are becoming clear.

Nationwide, international students make up 6 percent of enrollment but account for 12 percent of revenue at colleges and universities, research conducted at Princeton University found — and at institutions particularly dependent on them, more than 30 percent. Those figures are from 2016, before international student numbers rose even more, meaning the revenue impact is likely higher now.

The money from international students has kept tuition and fees lower for domestic students while enabling higher spending on services, the Princeton study found. It also concluded that, contrary to assertions by critics, international students aren’t crowding out American ones. This, too, has become even more true since the period covered by the study, as fewer U.S. high school graduates choose to go to college, leaving seats in classrooms empty.

“We have a great opportunity, which we’re engaged in blowing,” Startz said of the potential for international students to close both those enrollment and financial gaps.

Instead, Moody’s bond-rating agency warns, the ongoing drop in the number of international students is causing “significant financial stress” and creating a credit risk for universities and colleges — especially the 15 percent with the largest international enrollments.

“It definitely hurts. There’s no question,” said Ruth Johnston, vice president of the consulting arm of the National Association of College and University Business Officers. “You’re not bringing revenue in, and there are so few revenue sources for higher education in the first place.”

Related: [More than a quarter of private colleges are at risk of closing, new projection shows](#)

Since January of 2024, there have been more than 300 instances of universities and colleges eliminating programs, closing departments and laying off faculty and staff, according to the tracking database CollegeCuts. A growing number of schools cite international enrollment declines among the triggers. Many have also announced tuition increases.

Northwestern University said a projected international enrollment drop was among the reasons it eliminated 425 positions, froze hiring and put off building projects, for example. The University of Southern California cut nearly 1,000 jobs, including some for academic advisers, after listing expected declines in the number

of international students — applications from whom fell **23 percent** at USC — among its financial problems.

DePaul University **laid off 114 employees** after its number of students from abroad **fell 30 percent** overall, and international graduate student enrollment by two-thirds. Falling international graduate student enrollment was also given as a cause of budget cuts and buyouts at **Boston University**, and declining international enrollment in general for a rare budget deficit at **Syracuse University** and deficits and layoffs at New York's **New School**, the **University of Texas at Arlington**, **Niagara College** and the **Stevens Institute of Technology**.

Among other universities that cited international enrollment drops as a factor behind deficits, budget cuts and layoffs: the **University of Michigan School of Public Health**, the **School of the Art Institute of Chicago**, **Eastern Illinois University**, **The College of Wooster** and **Kent State University**. And the president of the California College of the Arts blamed Trump administration pressure on international students for worsening an enrollment decline and budget deficit so bad **that the college will close**.

Related: The biggest expansion of federal scholarship money in 50 years is at hand — and almost nobody is ready for it

Most of these institutions have also raised tuition — Syracuse by **nearly 4 percent**, for the upcoming academic year, to a total cost of attendance of **about \$96,000** for students living on campus, for example; Northwestern by **3.5 percent**, also to \$96,000; USC by **about 3 percent**, to **\$103,162**; and The New School by **3.5 percent**, to a total cost of **about \$93,000**.

With international education having become as much a political as economic issue, none of these universities responded to repeated requests for comment, including about how much of the tuition increases could be attributed to the drop in the number of international students.

Universities with large proportions of international students

These are among U.S. universities and colleges with the biggest percentages of international students.

Institution	Percent international
Longy School of Music of Bard College	77
Brigham Young University-Hawaii	48
New England Conservatory of Music	39
Manhattan School of Music	37
American Academy of Dramatic Arts-New York	34
The New School	34
Rhode Island School of Design	33
School of the Art Institute of Chicago	30
Niagara College	30
Berklee College of Music	29
University of the Ozarks	28
California Institute of the Arts	28
San Francisco Conservatory of Music	28
Babson College	28
University of Detroit Mercy	27
New York University	27
Pratt Institute	27
The Juilliard School	26
Missouri Valley College	24
Oberlin College	24
DePauw University	23
Boston University	22
Mount Holyoke College	22
Bard College	22
Florida Institute of Technology	21
College of the Atlantic	21
University of Chicago	20

Illinois Institute of Technology	20
Knox College	20
Johns Hopkins University	20
Brandeis University	20
Columbia University	20
University of Rochester	20
Carnegie Mellon University	20

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, nonresident students. Percentages are from 2024, the most recent year for which the figures are available

Johnston points out that most universities are trying to avoid tuition hikes at a time when surveys show that two-thirds of Americans think a four-year degree is **no longer worth the cost**.

“A lot of it is because there are issues around perceived value of higher education,” she said. “We know there’s a concern about that.”

That leaves institutions to cut spending by eliminating majors, departments and employees, said Ferraro, of Arizona State.

“If you can’t increase the revenues from tuition, there is not much left other than cutting spending,” he said.

Universities’ vulnerability to the decline in the number of international students is a problem partly of their own making. As **domestic enrollment has fallen** — down by about 2 million students since 2010 — colleges and universities increasingly recruited from abroad. The number of international students in the United States rose during that period **by more than 60 percent**, to nearly 1.2 million, according to the Institute of International Education.

Increasing their numbers of international students was also many universities’ response to financial pressures. For every 10 percent cut in state appropriations for public research universities, for example, those universities recruited **16 percent more international students**, research by scholars at the University of Michigan and elsewhere found.

The strategy wasn't only about filling seats. It was to keep money coming in at a time when American families were chafing at the cost of higher education and demanding more financial aid. As colleges gave deeper discounts to domestic undergraduates, the proportion being charged the full listed price fell to **16 percent**, while more than **80 percent of their international classmates** paid the full tuition. Several institutions actually charge **international students higher tuition** than even out-of-state domestic ones, or add fees for them ranging from \$874 to \$5,218 a year, according to the American Council on Education, the principal association of U.S. colleges and universities.

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Yet even as colleges and universities grew more dependent on this money — and before the Trump-era crackdowns — threats emerged to the continued supply of students from abroad. There was more competition from other countries, and the U.S. share of the market for international students **began to fall**.

A dramatic example of what's beginning to happen in the United States is well under way in Canada, where the number of international students is down **by 73 percent** since the government **set a limit** on them in 2024 in response to anti-immigration sentiment and complaints that international students in some cities were driving up housing costs.

Before then, **more than a fifth** of students at Canadian two- and four-year colleges and universities were coming from other countries, a proportion that had grown as government funding for higher education fell. International undergraduates pay **almost six times as much** as their Canadian classmates in tuition, according to the government agency Statistics Canada.

“Institutions were making net surpluses off these international students and using it to sustain services for domestic students,” said Alex Usher, president of the Canadian consulting firm Higher Education Strategy Associates, or HESA.

Three-quarters of tuition revenue in Ontario, the most populous province, **came from international students**, HESA estimated. Now that the international student numbers have plummeted, Ontario universities will have lost **\$1.5 billion** in income by the end of this year, in U.S. dollars, according to the Council of Ontario Universities, resulting in significant cuts to programs and services. Sixty percent of universities and colleges in Canada **were planning budget cuts**, a survey found. At least one, the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology, blamed declining international student numbers for forcing it **to close**.

Tuition fees in Canada haven't gone up, Usher said. But while domestic students “aren't necessarily paying more, they're getting less.”

In the United States, declining international enrollment only worsens the many other financial problems faced by universities and colleges, Ferraro said.

“If you don’t compensate for this with international students,” he said, “the future of higher education is going to be a bunch of empty buildings.”

Contact writer Jon Marcus at 212-678-7556, jmarcus@hechingerreport.org or [jpm.82](https://signal.com/jpm.82) on Signal.

This story about international students was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education. Additional reporting by Liz Willen. Sign up for our higher education newsletter.

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