



*If You Can Dream It, You Can Achieve It at an HBCU or PBI!*

February 17, 2015

The Honorable Ted Mitchell  
Under Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Under Secretary Mitchell:

The National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)<sup>1</sup> is pleased to submit the following comments and responses to some of the questions posed about the “framework” for the Department of Education’s Postsecondary Institution Rating System (PIRS) released on December 19, 2014. We appreciate the many and varied ways in which our members, the 105 HBCUs and 80 PBIs, and NAFEO as the advocacy association for the nation’s HBCUs and PBIs, and “*the voice for blacks in higher education*,” have been afforded opportunities for stakeholder input to date, in the shaping of PIRS. We look forward to a continuing engagement that we hope will yield a system of fully and fairly measuring and rewarding those institutions that are doing the lions share of educating disproportionate percentages of the growing student populations in high need disciplines, and in culturally competent, affirming, pluralistic, rigorous environments, while containing costs. When the academic preparedness of the students, socio-economic status, wealth and generation of family education are taken into consideration, as well as the wealth of the colleges and universities as evidenced by endowment size, total per pupil expenditure, and per pupil public support, HBCUs outperform other institutions. A fair and equitable PIRS system will reflect this.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO) is the only 501 (c) (3), not-for-profit membership association of the presidents and chancellors of the nation’s richly diverse 105 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and approximately 50 Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs). NAFEO members are CEOs of 2- and 4-year public, private, land-grant, sectarian and non-sectarian, undergraduate, graduate and professional schools in 35 states, the District of Columbia, and Virgin Islands. They represent 500,000 students, 53,000 faculty, and 5 million alumni worldwide. NAFEO member institutions educate disproportionate percentages of low-income students.

<sup>2</sup> In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed Executive Order 12232, which established a federal program “... to overcome the effects of discriminatory treatment and to strengthen and expand the capacity of historically black colleges and universities to provide quality education.” In 1981, President Reagan, under Executive Order 12320, established the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which expanded the previous program and set into motion a government wide effort to strengthen our nation’s HBCUs. In 1989, President George Bush signed Executive Order 12677. This executive order established a Presidential Advisory Board on Historically Black Colleges and Universities to advise the president and the secretary of education on methods, programs, and strategies to strengthen

As we understand it, PIRS is to be designed to increase consumer information about and increase accountability of postsecondary institutions for improving access (by enrolling and sustaining especially students from the growing populations of the nation who are racial and ethnic minorities, low-income and first generation students, traditionally underrepresented in higher education), containing the costs of attaining a postsecondary degree, and moving students to certificate or degree completion in less time.

The HBCU and PBI communities eagerly anticipated the release of the PIRS “framework.” As you know, NAFEO seized the announcement of the establishment of PIRS as an opportunity to convene a nineteen member NAFEO Assessment Council that identified a number of data elements, metrics, methods of data collection, methods of weighing or scoring, and presentation frameworks for PIRS. This group of presidents and chancellors of diverse HBCS and PBIs, deans, and recognized leaders in the assessment and rating arenas, submitted their initial recommendations to requests for comment, Docket ID 2013-IES-0151-0001 in January 2014. We were pleased to see recognition of some of the recommendations and concerns raised in that document, in the PIRS “framework” you released on December 19, 2014.

Believing as we do, like Zig Ziglar did, that “repetition is the mother of learning, the father of action, which makes it the architect of accomplishment,” we are incorporating by reference the previous comments and attaching them hereto for ease of reference and in the hope that we will accomplish having a few more of our recommendations incorporated into the ultimate framework. The document also provides supporting information for some of the recommendations to specific questions posed in the December 19<sup>th</sup> framework.

We begin this submission as we did that of one year ago, recalling that which NCES concluded as early as 2006: *“The United States “does not have one metric, or even a handful of common metrics, that could paint a picture of the accomplishments of its more than 2,500 four-year and 1,600 two-year institutions.” We concur with Dwyer, Millet & Payne (2006), “... there is no commonly used metric to determine effectiveness – defined in terms of student learning – of higher education in the United States.”*

NAFEO’s below comments are in response to some of the specific questions posed by the Department regarding the PIRS “framework.” The comments should not be perceived as superseding the seven (7) key points NAFEO made in its January, 2014 comments that are attached hereto and incorporated by reference. The below comments augment the earlier submission or more narrowly tailor earlier points to align with the questions posed in the December 19, 2014 summary document:

(1) The Department requests guidance relative to **"peer groupings."** We believe that grouping institutions by mission alone will not be as helpful as the Department would like. For example, while it is logical that HBCUs might be a "peer grouping" because by federal definition HBCUs have similar missions, at least relative to the education of African Americans. While this is true, HBCUs are as richly diverse as the broader community of colleges. Among the 105 HBCUs we have public and private institutions,

land-grant institutions, 2- and 4-year institutions, urban and rural institutions, research universities, master's universities, baccalaureate universities, liberal arts colleges, seminaries, and professional schools. They span the gamut from selective to open admissions. While most HBCUs have endowments that are roughly one eighth the size of the average endowment of historically White colleges and universities, there are outliers that must be considered in determining appropriate "peer groupings." Some HBCUs are predominately black, several are nearly equally divided among African American students and "other race" students. Four are now predominantly "other race" institutions. The majority of HBCUs average in excess of 20% student diversity and 40% faculty diversity. In this regard, they are exemplars in diversity. While on average HBCUs enroll and graduate student bodies that are 73% Pell eligible, on the low end of the spectrum, a few HBCUs have student bodies that are in the mid 30%-40% range and on the high end, some have student bodies that are nearly 90% Pell eligible. A cohort of HBCUs has student bodies that are no longer majority first generation. Because of these important differences relative to the establishment of "peer groupings," we urge careful consideration of mission-based peer groupings that would automatically put all HBCUs into one "peer grouping."

**We believe that the institutional "peer groupings" should be determined based on institutional wealth as evidenced by the size of the institutional endowments, the total per pupil expenditure, and the per pupil public support.**

(2) Relative to the Department's stated goal of focusing on and rewarding colleges and universities that do well in **expanding access and affordability**, the Department has suggested that it will focus on the percentage of Pell grant students enrolled, among other things. The **percentage** of Pell grant eligible FTE students would provide a highly accurate and currently available metric that would suggest whether the institution truly reflects the growing majority of the high school students in the state, region, and/or nation. It would also indicate whether an institution has as a central part of its mission expanding access to and success of low-income students and students underrepresented in higher education. We believe that adding to this metric consideration of the percentage of FTE students who come from low-performing high schools, and who come from specific zip codes that are known to be zip codes in which families of least advantage reside, would provide three reliable, predictive, currently available metrics for determining the extent to which a college or university is faring well at enrolling students traditionally underrepresented and underserved.

Another factor that should be considered is the **extent to which the colleges are graduating the above identified students in growth and high need disciplines**, such as the sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics; in health professions, teaching professions, sustainability professions and the law (as an access and justice tool).

**Race and ethnicity are important criteria** for consideration in determining whether a university is expanding access. As long as it is the law of this land that race/ethnicity are valid college admissions criteria when considered among a range of other criteria,

race/ethnicity should be considered.

The extent to which a college or university is **advancing African Americans** in particular is an important metric for at least the following reason:

The President of the United States has established as a priority of the highest order the Educational Excellence of African Americans, because, “[n]early 60 years [after] ... the Brown v Board of Education decisions, African American students continue to lack equal access to a high quality education and still lag far behind their white peers in reading and math proficiency, high school rates, and college completion...;” and to “restore the country to its role as the global leader in education, to strengthen the nation by improving educational outcomes for African Americans of all ages, and to help ensure that all African Americans receive an education that properly prepares them for college, productive careers, and satisfying lives....”

There is support for **consideration of whether a college or university is an HBCU in determining whether a college or university is expanding access, affordability and accountability**. In signing Executive Order 13532, Promoting Excellence, Innovation, and Sustainability at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, President Obama prioritized HBCUs in rating the American higher education community of colleges, as had five previous Presidents of the United States before him, Democrats and Republicans.<sup>2</sup> Executive Order 13532 states in pertinent part:

“By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, in order to advance the development of the Nation's full human potential and to advance equal opportunity in higher education, strengthen the capacity of historically black colleges and universities to provide the highest quality education, increase opportunities for these institutions to participate in and benefit from Federal programs, and ensure that our Nation has the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by the year 2020, it is hereby ordered as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed Executive Order 12232, which established a federal program “... to overcome the effects of discriminatory treatment and to strengthen and expand the capacity of historically black colleges and universities to provide quality education.” In 1981, President Reagan, under Executive Order 12320, established the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which expanded the previous program and set into motion a government wide effort to strengthen our nation’s HBCUs. In 1989, President George Bush signed Executive Order 12677. This executive order established a Presidential Advisory Board on Historically Black Colleges and Universities to advise the president and the secretary of education on methods, programs, and strategies to strengthen these valued institutions. In 1993, President William Jefferson Clinton signed Executive Order 12876. This executive order required for a senior level executive in each agency have oversight in implementing the order, and that the Office of Management and Budget be involved in monitoring implementation of the order. On Feb. 12, 2002, President George W. Bush signed Executive Order 13256. This executive order transferred the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities to the Office of the Secretary within the U.S. Department of Education. Previously, the White House Initiative was housed in the Department’s Office of Postsecondary Education.”

“Section 1. Policy. Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have made historic and ongoing contributions to the general welfare and prosperity of our country. Established by visionary leaders, America's HBCUs, for over 150 years, have produced many of the Nation's leaders in business, government, academia, and the military and have provided generations of American men and women with hope and educational opportunity. The Nation's 105 HBCUs are located in 20 States, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands and serve more than 300,000 undergraduate and graduate students. These institutions continue to be important engines of economic growth and community service, and they are proven ladders of intergenerational advancement for men and women of all ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds, especially African Americans. These institutions also produce a high number of baccalaureate recipients who go on to assume leadership and service roles in their communities and who successfully complete graduate and professional degree programs.”

Similar language can be found in the preamble to congressional legislation **“Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” Title IIIB** of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Title IIIB was first enacted by Congress as part of the Higher Education Act Amendments of 1986 (P.L. 99-498) as the Historically Black College and University Act, Title IIIB. It was the official federal legislative approach to recognizing this nation’s sorry history of invidious discrimination in higher education against the progeny of the American system of slavery; of the lingering impact of years of non-support of HBCUs; the continuing unequal support by states, funders, corporations and others for the nation’s original and premiere mission-based equal educational opportunity higher education institutions that we call HBCUs; and of the centrality of HBCUs for meeting the nation’s educational access and economic goals; moving the nation toward closing the achievement and attainment gaps, meeting human needs and human resources, and to global competitiveness.

In developing a rating system, consideration should be given to **race/ethnicity, advancing African American educational excellence, and HBCU status.**

(3) A consideration of **graduate earnings should not be a measure** of the quality of education. It would run counter to promoting and supporting public service and civic engagement, core American values. To use graduate earnings as a measure of the quality of education would also be inimical to the social contract between America and its colleges and universities in which postsecondary education is widely accepted as a public good playing a central role in addressing human needs and human services, neither of which likely yield the highest paying jobs. To measure graduate earnings in determining college quality also would be contrary to the national homeland security, the local community security, and justice interests of the nation.

Consideration of student **loan debt as an outcome measure** would run counter to the

access goal of the rating system. Such a consideration would deter enrollment and retention of low income, first-generation, and minority students, the fastest growing student populations in the nation. Using student loan debt as a criterion could be perceived as and might become a disincentive for low-income students to prepare for and aspire to attain a college certificate or degree. It would certainly lead colleges and universities to move away from educating the growing populations of this Nation, disproportionate numbers of whom are low-income, first generation.

(4) Relative to the Department's exploration of a **linkage between** the college rating system, a determination of how much **student grant aid** a student may receive, and the terms and conditions of student aid, we believe it would be regulatory overreach to link college ratings to federal student aid and may run counter to the constitutional tenet of academic freedom. It would certainly result in students with greatest financial need, dropping out, stopping out, or not enrolling in college at all. We oppose such an effort.

We hope the above comments, observations and recommendations when read in tandem with the previously submitted, incorporated by reference and attached background document, will prove useful to the Department in moving closer to shaping a rating system that will provide consumers with timely, useful, fair and accurate information, and incentivize and reward those institutions that are doing the lions share of educating disproportionate percentages of the growing student populations of the nation in high need disciplines, and in culturally competent, affirming, pluralistic, rigorous environments, while containing costs.

Please do not hesitate to call on NAFEO should you have questions or desire additional information. I may be reached at (202) 552-3300.

Thank you for your favorable consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

*Lezli Baskerville*

Lezli Baskerville, Esquire

President & CEO

NAFEO