

**Tennessee Higher Education Commission**  
**Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Success**  
**Status Report**  
*July 12, 2021*



## **Overview**

Since January 2018, Dr. Brittany L. Mosby has served as the inaugural Director of HBCU Success. In this role, she serves as a liaison and advocates for Tennessee’s seven HBCUs, including American Baptist College (ABC), Fisk University, Knoxville College, Lane College, LeMoyne-Owen College (LOC), Meharry Medical College (MMC), and Tennessee State University (TSU).

Tennessee has been in the national spotlight as a continued leader in higher education policy and for the pioneering commitment to its HBCUs represented by T.C.A. §49-7-217. In July 2018, *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* featured an article titled, “Setting the Agenda for Tennessee HBCUs,” about the work of the Director of HBCU Success. In turn, Tennessee HBCUs have attracted record-breaking investments from local and national supporters for their academic excellence and innovation. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, several Tennessee HBCUs have seen significant growth in student enrollment as well.

With a collective annual enrollment of 12,000 students, and state investment of \$10 million through student financial aid (2017), these institutions produce just over 20 percent of African American Tennesseans with bachelors’ degrees every year. Tennessee’s HBCUs are a vital contributor towards achievement of the state’s postsecondary attainment goals.

## **§49-7-217. Initiative on historically black colleges and universities.**

**(a)** The “Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)” or “initiative”, as used in this section, is an organizational unit of the commission, established and administered by the executive director for the purpose of providing oversight to focus on ways to **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 state programs, and ensure that Tennessee has the highest proportion of college graduates from HBCUs in the country.** The initiative shall operate in consultation with the consortium of historically black colleges and universities, pursuant to part 29 of this chapter.

- The Director of HBCU Success is broadly interpreted as the organizational unit of the Commission that represents the “initiative” referenced here and throughout and works to fulfill all statutory goals outlined within. The director serves as both a liaison to and advocate for Tennessee’s HBCUs internally within THEC and other state agencies, as well as externally to the public.

- In alignment with THEC’s relentless focus on increasing the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential, HBCU Success highlights and promotes the unique contribution and vital role of Tennessee’s HBCUs. HBCU Success prioritizes **student success** (i.e. programs and practices that are student-centered and evidence-based to increase retention and completion) and **institutional support** (i.e. providing technical assistance and consultation around academic advising practices, data analytics, curriculum development, and current state policy to institutional leaders) as focus areas to achieve the three stated objectives of this statute.

**(b)** The initiative shall work with state departments, agencies, offices, the private sector, educational associations, philanthropic organizations, and other partners to **increase the capacity of HBCUs to provide the highest quality education to a greater number of students, and to take advantage of these institutions' capabilities in serving the state's needs** through five (5) core tasks:

**(1)** Strengthening the capacity of HBCUs to participate in state programs;

The director works daily to ensure HBCUs have adequate and appropriate access to available state programs and resources. The director of HBCU Success has also established programs specifically for supporting HBCU students, staff, and faculty.

- **HBCU Executive in Residence:** the HBCU director works with individual campuses towards solution of a single, targeted issue.
  - Lane College, offering access to THEC data team to build and analyze risk models for student departure (Fall 2018 – Spring 2019)
  - American Baptist College, offering consultation and facilitation regarding accreditation reaffirmation process (Summer 2021)
- **Summer bridge program grants** (\$400,000) for the development and implementation of academic bridge programs for first-year students at American Baptist College, Fisk, Lane, LeMoyne Owen, and Tennessee State University (July 2019 – January 2020)
- **TN H.I.R.E. (HBCU Interns Reaching for Excellence):** a collaboration with HBCU career and placement offices to connect HBCU students with summer internship opportunities. Past partners include TBR, Jackson Chamber of Commerce, and the Shelby County Commission. THEC Bureau of Academic Affairs and Student Success also hosted a TN H.I.R.E. student during the summer and fall of 2019.

Other internal supporting projects include working with TBR and LeMoyne Owen to review and accept SAILS math completion for credit; developing an informational seminar for AdviseTN counselors, partnering with TSAC staff to assist with financial aid outreach to students, and collaborating with College Access and Success to create HBCU promotional materials for high school juniors and seniors.

Also involved in meeting this goal is the dissemination of information regarding state opportunities, as well as internally recommending HBCUs for participation in relevant projects. To this end, the director maintains a list of these opportunities, as well as which HBCUs are eligible and/or currently participating, including:

- TN Promise and TN Reconnect (Lane, LOC, TSU)
- Veterans Reconnect (Fisk, Lane, TSU)
- VETS Campus designation (Lane, TSU)
- Contract Education (MMC)
- TN Doctoral Scholars Program (TSU, MMC)
- TN Accreditation Network (Fisk, Lane, LOC, TSU)
- TN Open Education and Textbook Affordability Task Force (TSU)
- TN Black Male Success Initiative (Lane, TSU)
- Diversity in Teaching grants
- Harold Love Community Service Award

**(2) Fostering enduring private-sector initiatives and public-private partnerships while promoting specific areas and centers of academic research and programmatic excellence throughout all HBCUs;**

THEC encourages, and where needed facilitates, academic and research-based partnerships between Tennessee HBCUs and other higher education institutions and state agencies. Recent and ongoing collaborations include:

- Tennessee Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (TLSAMP) (Fisk, LOC, MTSU, Nashville State, Southwest TN, TSU, Tennessee Tech, University of Memphis, UTK, and Vanderbilt)
- UT Knoxville, TCAT Knoxville, and Knoxville College
- University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Nursing and LeMoyne-Owen College
- Fisk University and APSU School of Nursing
- MTSU/Meharry Medical School Early Acceptance Program
- Dr. Levi Watkins Jr. Institute (TSU/Meharry Accelerated Pathway Program)
- University of Memphis and Meharry Program to Enhance Collaborative & Interdisciplinary Research (PECIR)
- Meharry-Vanderbilt-Tennessee State Cancer Partnership
- Lane College and the TN Department of Corrections
- Science Consortium of Minority Schools (Fisk, Lane, LOC, TSU)

**(3) Improving the availability, dissemination, and quality of information concerning HBCUs to inform public policy and practice;**

Through maintenance of a public website (<http://www.tn.gov/thec/HBCU-Success>) with resources and links for students and families, the advocacy community, and institutional leaders.

- The 2020 HBCU Success Viewbook – an informational publication that features profiles of Tennessee HBCUs as well as statewide data on HBCU student enrollment, retention, and graduation.
- HBCU Infographics Series – a collection of visual representations of various data points of interest from Tennessee HBCUs

**(4)** Sharing administrative and programmatic practices within the consortium for the benefit of all;

THEC encourages and facilitates communication and information sharing between HBCUs, as well as with public universities and community colleges. HBCU Success has convened affinity groups of HBCU administrators, staff, and faculty around topics related to student success; specifically, the HBCU Summer Bridge and First-Year Experience Summit (2019) and regular institutional updates and sharing at the biannual HBCU Success Advisory Board meetings.

**(5)** Exploring new ways of improving the relationship between the state and HBCUs.

Established **HBCU Success Day on the Hill** – the only annual event that brings together all seven Tennessee HBCUs at the State Capitol to interact with members of the General Assembly and other state officials. Participants include HBCU administrator and staff, alumni, state employees, and other HBCU advocates.

- February 13, 2019
  - Invited speaker - Johnathan Holifield, Executive Director, White House Initiative on HBCUs
- February 25, 2020
  - HBCU Presidents' Panel Discussion – Dr. Herman Felton, President, Wiley College of served as moderator
    - Participants: Dr. Forrest Harris (ABC), Dr. Kevin Rome (Fisk), Dr. Keith Lindsey (Knoxville), Dr. Logan Hampton (Lane), Dr. Carol Johnson Dean (LeMoyne Owen), Dr. James Hildreth (MMC), and Dr. Glenda Glover (TSU)
- February 2021 – postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions

**(c)** **(1)** The commission is authorized and directed to provide all necessary and appropriate guidance, assistance, and support to facilitate strategy development and coordinated implementation by the initiative and the partnership to accomplish the respective and mutual key tasks of the initiative as outlined in subsection (b).

**(2)** In furtherance of subdivision (c)(1), the commission may enter into one (1) or more memoranda of cooperation with the initiative and the partnership on terms deemed by the commission to be appropriate, mutually beneficial, and in the best interest of the consortium and the partnership.

THEC staff provide regular updates to the Commission on HBCU Success activities and opportunities for partnership/collaboration with the Commission. Additionally, the director of HBCU Success presents on behalf of Tennessee HBCUs at various State governmental events.

- Presented testimony to the Tennessee Caucus of Black State Legislators (April 2018) and the General Assembly sub-committee on Land Grant funding (September 2020)

**(d)** All state departments and agencies are encouraged to create an annual plan of its efforts to strengthen the capacity of HBCUs through increased participation in appropriate federal-state programs and initiatives. Where appropriate, each agency plan shall address, among other things, the agency's proposed efforts to:

- (1)** Establish how the department or agency intends to increase the capacity of HBCUs to compete effectively for grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements and to encourage HBCUs to participate in state programs;
- (2)** Identify state programs and initiatives in which HBCUs may be either underserved or underused as national resources, and improve HBCUs' participation therein; and
- (3)** Encourage public-sector, private-sector, and community involvement in improving the overall capacity of HBCUs.

**(e)** If a department or agency creates an annual plan pursuant to subsection (d), then the department or agency shall:

- (1)** Provide appropriate measurable objectives and, after the first year, shall annually assess that department's or agency's performance on the goals set in the previous year's agency plan; and
- (2)** Provide a written summary of the objectives and goals to the education committee of the senate and the education committee of the house of representatives within thirty (30) days of the annual assessment required in subdivision (e)(1).

Currently, there are multiple state agencies that are working with HBCUs in various capacities related to their department mission.

- The **Department of Health** Office of Minority Health Disparities works closely with HBCUs through the state-funded HBCU Wellness program. Additionally, THEC and TDH have partnered with HBCUs across the state to deploy COVID-19 testing supplies and vaccination strike teams.
- The **Department of Corrections** has recently entered into partnership with the Tennessee Higher Education Initiative (THEI) and Lane College to deliver courses to incarcerated individuals. Knoxville College is working on a similar program for facilities in East Tennessee. A potential area for growth includes partnering with Adult Learner Initiatives to expand in other regions/institutions.
- **Economic and Community Development** houses the Tennessee Broadband Initiative. With federal support through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Tennessee HBCUs have access to both state and federal funding to expand broadband infrastructure.

In the future, HBCU Success plans to formalize this cooperation between state agencies and foster more by establishing an interagency working group (IWG), made up of representatives from other state agencies to maintain points of contact for fostering new HBCU partnership areas. Potential areas to develop:

- **TN Council on Developmental Disabilities** has previously partnered with THEC to establish programs for students with disabilities at public and private universities, this work can be expanded to Tennessee HBCUs.
- **TN State Museum** and **Department of Tourist Development** for displays and features on HBCUs, and their contribution to the rich, diverse history of Tennessee.

**(f)** The initiative may establish a board of advisors to consist of no more than twenty-five (25) members appointed by the commission. The board shall include representatives of a variety of sectors, including philanthropy, education, business, finance, entrepreneurship, innovation, and private foundations, as well as sitting HBCU presidents. The board may advise the commission and the initiative in the following areas:

- (1)** Improving the identity, visibility, and distinctive capabilities and overall competitiveness of HBCUs;
- (2)** Engaging the philanthropic, business, government, military, homeland security, and education communities in a dialogue regarding new HBCU programs and initiatives;
- (3)** Improving the ability of HBCUs to remain fiscally secure institutions that can assist the state in reaching its educational goals;
- (4)** Elevating the public awareness of HBCUs; and
- (5)** Encouraging public-private investments in HBCUs.

The inaugural HBCU Success Advisory Board was initially appointed by the Commission and served from 2018-2021. The slate of second term board members is currently on the July 22, 2021 THEC agenda for approval. The board is made up of Tennesseans representing a variety of sectors who are dedicated HBCU supporters and committed to the strategic advancement of Tennessee's HBCUs. The Board meets biannually according to its bylaws. The agenda items for discussion are based on the five areas of advisement as outlined in statute above.

- **November 2018**, special called session (Tennessee State Capitol Building)  
**Invited presenter:** Dr. Ivory Toldson – President, QEM Network; Associate Professor, Howard University; Editor, Journal of Negro Education; former Executive Director, White House Initiative on HBCUs
- **April 2019**, regular meeting (Meharry Medical College)  
Agenda topics:
  - HBCU Success Year-in-Review report
  - Setting the Board Charge: Accountability and Advocacy
  - Operational of Goals: elevating public awareness and encouraging public-private partnership and investments in HBCUs

- **December 2019**, regular meeting (Parkway Towers)  
Agenda topics:
  - HBCU Statewide Scholarship Proposal
  - Tennessee’s HBCU Consortium
  - Presidents’ Reports
  
- **July 2020**, regular meeting (Virtual)  
Agenda topics:
  - Mobilizing HBCU Advisory Board to respond to COVID-19
  - Advancing public awareness of TN HBCUs
  
- **August 2020**, special called meeting (Virtual)  
Agenda topic: Sub-committee reports on COVID-19 response
  
- **October 2020**, regular meeting (Virtual)  
Agenda topics:
  - Fall 2020 HBCU Enrollment updates
  - 2020 Tennessee HBCU Success Viewbook
  - Promoting HBCU Participation in State Programs
  
- **April 2021**, regular meeting (Virtual)  
**Invited remarks:**
  - Dr. Emily House – Executive Director, THEC
  - Representative Antonio Parkinson – Chair, TN Caucus of Black State Legislators
 Agenda topics:
  - 2020 Tennessee HBCU Success Viewbook presentation
  - Institution Updates