

U.S. Senate, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee

**The Honorable Senator Kay Hagan
The Honorable Senator Rand Paul
&
Honorable Members of the HELP Committee**

**“STRENGTHENING MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTIONS:
Best Practices and Innovations for Student Success”**

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Testimony Presented by:

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**STRENGTHENING MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTIONS:
BEST PRACTICES AND INNOVATIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

Introduction

Good morning. Chairwoman Hagan, Ranking Member Paul, and Distinguished Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, my name is Dr. D. Jason DeSousa, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Student Retention for Fayetteville State University (FSU). Thank you for inviting me to testify about student success and the best practices that are being implemented across historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and, particularly, at FSU.

I want to especially thank Senators Hagan, Burr and Mikulski for spearheading and or supporting letters in the Senate for HBCU funding across the federal government for the past six years. Your support and that of Senators Alexander, Isakson, Paul and others who represent HBCUs is greatly appreciated.

Additionally, please allow me to thank Fayetteville State University's Chancellor James Anderson and Provost Jon Young for the support and resources that they have provided me to implement practices that undergird student success for the University's students. I would be remiss if I did not thank Dr. George D. Kuh, Indiana University Professor Emeritus of Higher Education, for guiding and mentoring me through graduate school at Indiana University.

I am a proud graduate of Morgan State University, an HBCU in the state of Maryland. As an undergraduate, the enriching educational experiences, effective mentoring, and supportive campus environment, helped shape the person I am today. Based on my high school performance and standardized test scores, I was fortunate enough to be accepted to Morgan State University. It was Morgan's "talent development" philosophy that inspired my confidence and motivated me to be a resilient student with superb habits of the mind—habits that prepared me for graduate school at Bowling Green State University (Bowling Green, Ohio) and Indiana University Bloomington (Bloomington, Indiana). I would be remiss if I did not mention the role of my academic adviser, Mrs. Margaret Barton, who set the very highest levels of academic and personal expectations for others and me. Every HBCU has a Margaret Barton—one who academically challenges students yet nurtures and supports them.

During my junior year, my peers nominated me to serve as the Student Regent on the Morgan State University Board of Regents, the institution's governing board. The nomination led to my formal appointment by then Maryland Governor Harry R. Hughes. My tenure on the Board of Regents was life changing, with President Earl S. Richardson—the longstanding Morgan

president—serving as a remarkable role model. I owe him the highest debt of gratitude for his support, encouragement, mentoring as a student and a professional.

My career in education includes several stints on seven public and private HBCU campuses, serving as provost and VP over academic & student affairs and other positions. On those campuses, the enrollments ranged from 850 to 9,000 and I have seen first hand what works and where resources are needed to gain more success. I hope you will leave today with a better understanding of what we are doing at Fayetteville State to create success for all students and in particular for those who traditionally underperform or face significant challenges as non-traditional students.

Background on Fayetteville State University

First, let me tell you about Fayetteville State University. FSU is one of 47 public HBCUs in the nation. We serve over 6,000 diverse students in over 43 academic majors, 23 graduate programs and one doctoral program. We are a comprehensive regional university. Our primary mission is to provide students with the highest quality learning experiences that will produce global citizens and leaders as change agents for shaping the future of North Carolina and our nation.

FSU has six Strategic Priorities, with “Retention and Graduation” expressed as its first priority. Given our emphasis on student access, success, and persistence to graduation, this year the Washington, DC-based “Institute for Higher Education Policy” named FSU as an “Exemplar Institution for Access and Success” for its commitment to high-impact access and success practices that are particularly targeted to improve underserved North Carolina populations. (FSU joins California State University-Northridge, Florida State University, and Miami Dade College in this distinction.)

Some of the University’s “Points of Distinction” include the following:

1. The University of North Carolina General Administration’s “Teacher Quality Impact Study” listed FSU’s School of Education as producing highly effective teachers of science and English.
2. As of 2012, FSU enjoys the distinction of being the only UNC institution to house on its campus an International Early College High School.
3. FSU is one of 20 high performing institutions, with higher-than-predicted graduation rates according to the Indiana University-based National Survey of Student Engagement

(NSSE) Institute. FSU joins other high performing schools such as Macalester College, Miami University of Ohio, University of Kansas, University of Texas El Paso, and University of Michigan.

4. The University actively supports the military by offering classes on campuses on Fort Bragg, Camp Lejeune, and Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, all in North Carolina, and Fort Sam Houston in Texas. (I return to our commitment to military-affiliated students, including returning Veterans elsewhere.)

We are a proud member of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, a national non-profit located in Washington, D.C. whose mission is to provide programmatic and capacity building assistance to public HBCUs, provide scholarship dollars to students, and serve as an advocate for our community at the federal and state levels.

This Committee's focus on HBCUs and best practices is extremely important given the current changing demographics in our country and the need to ensure we are building a diverse globally competitive pipeline of future entrepreneurs, STEM professionals, teachers, and other professionals where African Americans and others are underrepresented. According to recent data released, in 2011, HBCUs produced 20% of STEM bachelor degrees, 16% of STEM master degrees, and 12% of STEM doctoral degrees earned by African Americans. HBCUs are doing their fair share for our country but we need and want to do more. Title III B, the federal account entitled "Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities," funds three of the innovative practices I will discuss below.

At FSU, we are focused on increasing the success rates for African American male students in light of the national recognized crisis that exists around black male achievement. Additionally, we are focused on helping foster entrepreneurs and preparing our students to be job creators. Criminal Justice and Business Administration are the two top leading disciplines for our students. Our black male initiative and our work with student entrepreneurs and military affiliated students are among our best practices.

BEST PRACTICES AND INNOVATION AT FAYETTEVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

Male Initiative on Leadership & Excellence (MILE)

First, at FSU, African American males represent the lowest performing campus sub group. We are making strides in turning that around. Through the “Male Initiative on Leadership & Excellence” (referred to as the MILE), the University is seeing success. The annual persistence rate for men engaged in the MILE program, on average, is 98%. This compares to an average 44% year-to-year persistence rate for African American male students not participating in the MILE. In 2012, 82% of first-year MILE participants returned the following semester. The “all male” retention rate of those who did NOT participate in the program was 62% during the same period, which is 20%.

The nation cannot afford to leave African American males behind. College educated men of color eventually earn jobs that enable them to contribute to county, state, and federal tax bases. Men of color out of work due to a lack of higher education alternatively could strain social services.

Accordingly, many HBCUs are improving African American male college completion rates through similar innovate programs, including the Morgan State University MILE, the North Carolina Central University Centennial Scholars, and Student African American Brotherhood found at several HBCUs.

What resources support the MILE?

- Over the past three years, FSU received several grants from the University of North Carolina General Administration to support the Male Initiative Program. We also use Title III B funds. Title III B funds are extremely important to our campus. We ask this committee to please consider increasing the authorized funding level for Title III B for FY 15 and to expand the permissible use of funds to specifically include student travel for educational purposeful experiences.
- We would specifically use some of these funds to broaden the exposure of students in the MILE by organizing educationally enriching trips to financial institutions, local and national corporations, graduate and professional schools, national conferences related to student success, and even the state legislatures. This would expose students to the types of careers they may consider in the future.

- HBCUs would be more competitive if we expanded the classroom beyond the bricks and mortars of campuses and give students increased opportunities for more hands-on, experiential experiences outside of the classroom. Many students from North Carolina matriculate through college without leaving the State or even study broad. This is the case for many HBCU students across the country—they simply do not have the opportunity to travel outside of their college region. As you prepare for the next re-authorization of the Higher Education Act, we ask that the Committee consider authorizing the use of Title III B funds for a more expanded educational experience as part of university curriculum.

FSU's strong relationship with Fayetteville Technical Community College (FTCC) has enabled both institutions to take their male initiatives to a more innovate level. Through The Links, Inc., FSU and FTCC have been collaborating over the past two-years to better increase transfer rates from FTCC to FSU. FTCC's "Male Mentoring Program" and FSU's MILE now partner to create opportunities for men of color transferring to FSU to connect with a MILE peer mentor before entering FSU. While the initial grant did not require both male initiatives to partner together, Chancellor Anderson and FTCC President Larry Keen insisted on this innovative practice, which has been yielding positive results.

Entrepreneurship

As noted earlier, FSU is focused on helping students be job creators and entrepreneurs. In 2014, students and faculty from FSU established its first start up called the "Next Generation Biomedical" LLC. Company ownership is 75% students, 87.5% minority, 50% women, and 12.5% veterans. The company was founded for the purpose of inventing new medical products and services that improve patient wound recovery and reduce costs. The CEO is an FSU MBA student. The hands on experience students receive by working on this project is extremely valuable and provides them with real life business challenges and opportunities for life-long learning.

In April of 2014, a team of student owners for New General Biomedical traveled to Atlanta to compete for venture capital in the first Innovation and Entrepreneurship Business Competition and Conference hosted by the Thurgood Marshall College Fund and Opportunity Funding Corporation, a subsidiary of TCMF. Additionally, on May 9, 2014, the Innovation Fund of North Carolina awarded FSU's Next Generation Biomedical with a \$25,000 grant to help launch their patent-pending wound care product. FSU's Chief Research Officer, Ms. Carl Padilla, developed the wound care product. NGB was one of five winners out of 127 new ventures that applied for funding during this cycle.

Our work in the entrepreneurial space is recognized nationwide. The prestigious “Social Science Research Network” ranked our School of Business and Economics among the Top 130 Business Schools in the United States. Only five percent of business schools hold such a distinction.

National Security

Fayetteville State University’s Center for Defense and Homeland Security, in conjunction with University of Maryland Baltimore County, is offering a certificate program for Student Veterans. This program provides hands on cyber security skills training and job placement. We see this as one of our most innovative ventures and it is being supported by Title III B funds.

Through this certificate program, we are helping connect returning Veterans with enhanced job training and we are contributing to our nation’s national security readiness. We see this as the tip of the iceberg and anticipate great returns on this investment. We hope that in the future Congress will direct additional Title III B funds for this type of initiative.

Other Innovations that Undergird Student Success

In addition to our innovative work around African American male achievement, entrepreneurship, and national security, we have initiatives that support student success for at-risk females, those with learning differences, students with promise, LGBT students, and High Impact Practices.

- **Students with Promise** may enroll at FSU through the “CHEER” (“Creating Higher Educational Expectations and Readiness”) summer bridge program. Students who go through this program are more likely to persist than those who did not enroll in CHEER during their first-year at FSU.
- **Students with Learning Differences** will have access to College “STAR” (“Supporting Transition, Access and Retention”). College STAR is helping scores of North Carolina collegiates with learning differences—such as ADHD, Executive Functioning, and PTSD—at East Carolina University, University of North Carolina Greensboro, and Appalachian State University. This year, FSU will be the first HBCU in North Carolina to implement the program. It provides academic and personal support for students with learning differences and faculty development opportunities to build institutional capacity for “universal design for learning.”

- **Female Students** find support through two unique programs: “Saving Our Sisters” (SOS) and “Strong Sisters Soaring” (S³). These programs provide academic support for first-year females who were admittedly on a provisional basis because of low GPA and or test scores. The latter is an initiative designed to address health issues for women.
- **LGBT Students** now have personal support services through our campus SafeZone Office. SafeZone is national program adopted by college campuses to support students with differences in sexual orientation. Wade Davis, a former NFL player, was the inaugural speaker for SafeZone in February 2014. In his introductory comments, Mr. Davis indicated that FSU was the first HBCU at which he was invited to speak.
- **High Impact Practices** (Funded by Title III B), also known as “HIPs,” are essentially practices that lead to greater levels of student success than other institutional practices. HBCUs are doing more in this are, especially around first-year seminars, undergraduate research; learning communities, community-based learning, and diversity and global-based learning to name a few.

It is well established in American higher education that students who are engaged in HIPs are more likely to demonstrate higher grades, greater interaction with faculty, and increased graduation rates than students who do not engage in HIPs. The positive impact of HIPs, such as increased GPAs, is more pronounced for underrepresented students, including African Americans. That said, Title III B funds will be used to implement high impact practices across our campus for the 2014-2015 academic year.

Conclusion

As noted in my testimony, Fayetteville State University is working hard to ensure federal investments are yielding high returns. Additionally, we are doing our part to leverage resources by partnering with majority institutions and others to provide greater academic support services to our students and to returning veterans in order to strengthen our institution. I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you.

