

# General Education Assessment at Private Historically Black Colleges and Universities: An Exploratory Study

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General education, defined by the 1945 Harvard Committee as the classes required of all students at an institution of higher education that generally are not applied toward a student's major discipline (Conant, 1945), has been an important element of American higher education curriculum since the first colonial colleges were established (Levine, 1978; Lucas, 1994). During this early period of American higher education, the general education curriculum generally consisted of "a prescribed set of courses that were designed to educate men to become learned and disciplined clergy, state leaders, and gentlemen" (Dwyer, 2004, p. 19). Over the next 350 years, general education would undergo many changes. Despite shifting beliefs with regard to what, when, and how general education courses should be taught and administered, the mission of general education has remained essentially the same: to cultivate the "knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all of us use and live by during most of our lives" (Stone & Friedman, 2002, p. 199).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, many inside and outside the higher education community began to question whether colleges and universities were transmitting these important skills and competencies to students. Reports such as *Missions of the College Curriculum* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1977) and *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education* (Bennett, 1984) criticized American colleges and

universities for failing to graduate students with “even the most rudimentary knowledge about the history, literature, art, and philosophical foundations of their nation and their civilization” (Bennett, 1984, p. 3).

In the twenty-five years since the publication of these reports, assessment has grown to play an important role in higher education. Outcome assessment has been mandated by most states (Erwin, 1991), and according to *Campus Trends* data, over 94 percent of higher education institutions have assessment practices under way (El-Khawas, 1995). All six major college and university regional accrediting organizations expect institutions to have “active assessment programs that impact program functioning” (Allen, 2004, p. 19).

Many of these assessment practices have been focused on improving the quality of general education curricula. This increased focus on general education from a policy perspective has paralleled an increasing amount of research examining various elements of general education assessment (Allen, 2004; Aloï, Gardner, & Lusher, 2003; Bresciani, 2007; Eder, 2004; Nichols & Nichols, 2001). This research has increased the higher education community’s understanding of how institutions are assessing their general education curriculum and what can be done to ensure that students are achieving the learning outcomes desired by colleges and universities. Much of this research on the assessment of general education, however, has been focused on predominately white institutions (Bresciani, 2007; Nichols & Nichols, 2001). As a result, very little is known about general education assessment at historically black colleges and universities.

In an attempt to gain a better understanding of general education assessment at black colleges, this exploratory study examined both the assessment practices used and the challenges faced by private, four-year HBCUs in their attempts to assess their general education curriculum. The following section provides an overview of general education assessment and a review of literature on general education at HBCUs. That section is followed by a detailing of the methodology employed for this study, the findings of the study, and recommendations for future research.

## General Education Assessment

In 1994 the Association of American Colleges (AAC) issued a report titled *Strong Foundations: Twelve Principles for Effective General Education Programs*. This document captured most of the current thinking on the role and purpose of general education curricula. The AAC recognized that a general education curriculum must be “more than breadth and simple exposure to different fields

of study” so that students are able to “experience a coherent course of study, one that is more than the sum of its parts” (1994, “A New Concept,” ¶2).

The AAC report also proclaimed that “strong general education programs assess and monitor progress toward an evolving vision through ongoing self-reflection” (1994, “Principle 12,” ¶1). Unfortunately, scholars have found that many colleges and universities have not effectively assessed their general education curriculum. Lopez (1998) has reported that many institutions struggle to assess their general education curriculum, while Hudgins (1993) has called efforts at general education assessment woeful.

One of the reasons for this ineffectiveness is the fact that general education assessment can be very challenging for colleges and universities (Stone & Friedman, 2002). The most difficult aspect of the assessment process is that, in most cases, “programmatic assessment calls for consensus and agreement among faculty who are housed in different academic departments and who represent various disciplines” (Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 241). As the assessment process progresses, several other challenges often present themselves. These include, but are not limited to, lack of time to plan, conduct, and/or analyze assessment data; lack of financial resources to conduct general education; an assessment faculty belief that assessment is an infringement of their academic freedom; difficulty motivating students to take assessment seriously; and lack of agreement about the purposes and/or learning objectives of general education (Allen, 2004; Lopez, 1998; Palomba & Banta, 1999).

Despite these difficulties, in recent years many institutions have increased their efforts to more adequately assess their general education curriculum. In addition, education researchers have increased the amount of scholarly attention given to the assessment of general education curricula. A cursory look at recent issues of the *Journal of General Education* shows that dozens of articles have been published since 2000 examining various aspects of general education assessment. None of these articles, however, has focused on general education assessment at America’s historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The reason for this lack of exploration into general education at HBCUs is unclear. Dating back over sixty years ago, Derbigny (1947) noted that studies of general education “in the American college have not been concerned with the progress of the movement in educational institutions for negroes” (p. 32). More recently, Brown and Freeman (2002) attribute this lack of exploration to the perceived poor quality of HBCUs. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that research on general education assessment at HBCUs has been sparse. This lack of research leads many scholars, practitioners, and students to wonder how, when, and what methodology is being used to assess general education at HBCUs.

## The Importance of Studying General Education Assessment at HBCUs

The study of general education assessment at HBCUs is important given the role of HBCUs in the American higher education system. Over 70 percent of all African American physicians and dentists, half of all African American engineers, 75 percent of African Americans with a Ph.D., and 46 percent of African American business executives are HBCU graduates (Williams, Ashley, & Rhea, 2004). HBCUs enroll almost 15 percent and graduate almost 25 percent of African American students in the nation at the baccalaureate level, despite comprising less than 3 percent of all institutions of higher education (“Howard, Other HBCU Launch Initiative in Teaching and Learning,” 2004). HBCUs also provide opportunity for individuals facing roadblocks getting into college. Forty-five percent of HBCU freshmen are first-generation students (Williams et al., 2004). These statistics indicate that HBCUs are responsible for educating a large number of students, especially students of color. Therefore, understanding if and how HBCUs are assessing their general education curriculum can provide the higher education community with important insight into what a large segment of students are learning during their college matriculation.

In addition, increased knowledge of general education assessment at HBCUs can provide both supporters and critics of HBCUs evidence with regard to the effectiveness of HBCUs in fostering student learning. Recently, two schools of thought have developed about HBCUs. On one hand, many observers believe that HBCUs, as evidenced by the quantity and quality of their graduates in relation to their structural and financial resources, are one of the most successful sectors of the American higher education system. Others, however, have a different view of HBCUs. As summarized by Maxwell (2003), many criticize HBCUs saying that “in a society that is striving for racial integration, the further duplication of physical facilities, academic programs, and services with a racially segregated, two-tiered higher education system is counterproductive financially, philosophically, and pedagogically” (¶20). Given these very different points of view, research into general education assessment can provide important evidence of the strengths and/or weaknesses of student learning at HBCUs. Because a solid assessment program is a vital part of a good general education program, if it is found that many HBCUs are engaged in systematic assessments of their general education curriculum, it could be interpreted as a strong indication that black colleges have effective general education programs that increase student learning. On the other hand, if very few HBCUs are effectively assessing their general education program, it could be seen as evidence that HBCUs are not fully aware of student learning and could be offering lower-quality general education programs.

Despite this importance, few studies have examined general education at HBCUS, and even fewer have examined general education assessment at HBCUS. An ERIC database search for publications on the subject of general education or core curriculum at HBCUS yields only a handful of articles. Of these articles, Verharen's "A Core Curriculum at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: An Immodest Proposal" (1993) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities publication titled *Course Development for a New General Education Curriculum* (1989) were the only articles or reports since 1989 concerning institution-wide general education at HBCUS. Neither of these publications devotes attention to assessment. Therefore, there is currently a need to engage in exploratory research on general education assessment at HBCUS in order to establish the current state of general education assessment and set an agenda for future research into this area.

## Research Methodology

The purpose of this exploratory study was to describe how private, four-year HBCUS assessed their general education curricula. The study was designed to address the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of general education curricula at private, four-year historically black colleges and universities?
2. What assessment practices are commonly used to evaluate general education curricula at private, four-year historically black colleges and universities?
3. What challenges hinder the ability of private, four-year historically black colleges and universities to assess general education curricula?

The study focused on only private, four-year HBCUS due in part to the belief that private HBCUS offered a wider variety of general education curricula than public HBCUS. In Texas, for example, general education curricula at public colleges and universities are regulated by the state educational board. Private colleges and universities, however, have the autonomy to create their own general education curricula. This autonomy is believed to have resulted in a wider variety of general education curricula programs at private HBCUS and presumably a wider variety of assessment techniques used. This belief was also supported by a preliminary analysis of general education curricula at HBCUS done as part of this study, which found evidence that general education programs at public HBCUS were more similar than general education programs at private HBCUS.

Of the 105 HBCUs across the United States, fifty are classified as private, four-year institutions (“List of HBCUs,” 2003). Three of these institutions, Morehouse School of Medicine, Meharry Medical College, and Interdenominational Theological Center, do not confer bachelor’s degrees and were therefore dropped from this analysis. In addition, due to Hurricane Katrina, two institutions from Louisiana, Xavier University and Dillard University, were dropped. The remaining forty-five institutions made up the sample used for this study.<sup>1</sup>

Two methods were utilized to analyze data for this study. A content analysis of course catalogs and institutional Web sites was conducted to address research question 1. Content analysis is the “systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1). Its goal is a “numerically based summary of a chosen message set” (p. 14). This analysis focused on identifying three characteristics of general education curricula at private, four-year HBCUs:

1. The minimum number of credit hours needed to complete the university-wide general education curriculum
2. The percentage of total hours needed for graduation consisting of general education courses
3. The general education delivery method (distribution or rigid)<sup>2</sup>

Research questions 2 and 3 were addressed using data from a researcher-created survey of chief academic administrators and directors of institutional research at private, four-year HBCUs administered in spring 2006. Surveys allow a researcher to collect information from people relatively quickly and aid in the organization and summarization of descriptive observations (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). The survey was composed of three sections: general questions, general education assessment methods, and obstacles to conducting assessment of general education. Sections 1 and 2 contained *open-ended* completion questions along with *closed-ended* checklists, yes/no questions, and Likert-scaled questions. Section 3 contained only Likert-scaled questions. To guide the construction of the survey, literature pertaining to academic program and general education assessment was consulted.<sup>3</sup>

The initial mailing of the forty-five surveys produced eleven responses. After sending follow-up e-mails and making phone contact with several institutions, ten additional usable surveys were obtained for a total of twenty-one (a 47 percent response rate). Data collected from the content analysis and the survey were analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

# Data Analysis and Findings

Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the data collected for this study. Each of the three research questions was addressed by analyzing means, medians, modes, and frequencies.

## Research Question 1

The average minimum number of credit hours needed to complete the university-wide general education requirement at private four-year HBCUS was 50.39 hours. The required hours ranged from 32 to 67 hours, with a standard deviation of 7.90 hours, a median of 51 hours, and a mode of 54 hours. On average, the general education requirement made up 40 percent of the total hours needed for graduation at private four-year HBCUS. This ranged from 26 to 54 percent, with a median of 40 percent and a mode of 40 percent. The large majority of private four-year HBCUS utilized the distribution method for their general education curriculum. Only three of the forty-five institutions used what could be consider a rigidly prescribed general education delivery method. Each of the other institutions used some form of a distribution requirement.

## Research Question 2

Survey respondents (see Table 1) were asked if their general education curriculum had undergone any major changes in the past five years. Nine (43 percent) of the twenty-one administrators indicated that their institution's general education curriculum had undergone major changes during this time period. The

TABLE 1 Frequency Chart for Survey Questions 1-5 (n = 21)

Survey Question	Yes	No
1. Have any major changes occurred in your general education curriculum in the past five years?	9 (43%)	12 (57%)
2. Does your general education program have a formal, written mission?	16 (76%)	5 (24%)
3. Does your general education program have formal, written goals?	17 (81%)	4 (19%)
4. Does your general education program have a formal, written assessment plan?	15 (71%)	6 (29%)
5. Is your general education assessment plan revised on a regular basis?	12 (57%)	9 (43%)

remaining twelve (57 percent) administrators indicated that their college's general education curriculum had not recently undergone any major changes.

Sixteen (76 percent) administrators indicated that their institution's general education plan had a formal, written mission. Administrators were also asked if their institution's general education curriculum had formal, written goals. Seventeen (81 percent) responded yes to this question, while four (19 percent) responded no.

Fifteen (71 percent) administrators indicated that their institution's general education curriculum had a formal, written assessment plan. The remaining six (29 percent) responded that their institution did not have a formal, written assessment plan. Twelve (57 percent) administrators indicated that their university's general education assessment plan was revised on a regular basis. Nine (43 percent) administrators responded that their general education assessment plan was not revised on a regular basis.

General education assessment results were reported to the faculty at eighteen (86 percent) of the responding institutions. Eighteen (86 percent) of the respondents also indicated that their institution reported data to accreditation agencies, while five (24 percent) respondents indicated that data were reported to governmental representatives. Nineteen (90 percent) institutional representatives stated that assessment data were reported to the university president, deans, and vice-presidents. Assessment results were reported to employees or support staff at four (19 percent) of the institutions, reported to current students at seven (33 percent) institutions, and reported to prospective students at only one (5 percent) institution. According to the respondents, parents did not receive assessment results at any of the schools surveyed, governing boards received assessment results at fourteen (67 percent) institutions, and financial donors received assessment information at two (10 percent) institutions. Only one (5 percent) institutional representative indicated that assessment data were sent to the Office of Institutional Research. Every institution reported assessment results to at least two campus constituencies, and most reported data to at least four campus constituencies.

Only twenty institutions responded to the survey question asking about the supervision of general education assessment. Of these, ten (50 percent) institutions reported that general education assessment was supervised by the director of institutional assessment. General education assessment was overseen by the dean/director of general studies at four (20 percent) colleges, by the vice-president of academic affairs at three (15 percent) institutions, and by an associate vice-president for academic affairs at three (15 percent) colleges.

Each respondent was asked to identify who was involved in the development and implementation of general education assessment. All twenty-one



institutions answered this question, and twenty (95 percent) indicated that faculty were involved in the development of assessment procedures. Fourteen (67 percent) of respondents indicated that current students were involved, while employees and support staff were involved at thirteen (62 percent) of the institutions. Deans were involved in the development and implementation of general education assessment at sixteen (76 percent), vice-presidents at twelve (57 percent), presidents at eight (38 percent), and the board of trustees at three (14 percent) of the colleges surveyed. One (5 percent) institutional representative answered this question by noting that an assessment committee was the only group involved in the development and implementation of general education assessment. The composition of this assessment committee, however, was not reported.

Representatives were asked when data were collected for general education assessment. Seventeen (81 percent) institutions reported that data were collected for general education assessment upon a student's entry into the institution. Twenty (95 percent) institutions indicated that data were collected after a student completed several general education classes and after completion of the general education program. Only two (10 percent) representatives indicated that data were collected after a student had graduated from the institution.

Again, only twenty institutional representatives responded to the question asking which instruments their institution used to assess their general education curriculum. Twelve (60 percent) reported using capstone courses. Individual portfolios were used at nine (45 percent) of the institutions, while fourteen (70 percent) institutions used institutionally developed tests, seventeen (85 percent) used nationally normed standardized tests, and eleven (55 percent) used student satisfaction surveys. Institutional representatives indicated that culmination projects were used at three (15 percent), student focus groups at two (10 percent), faculty surveys at six (35 percent), and interviews with students at three (15 percent) of the institutions surveyed. Two (10 percent) institutional representatives reported using student reflection essays as an instrument in assessing their general education curriculum.

Each institutional representative was asked to rate, on a Likert scale, his or her agreement with the following statement: "Our institution effectively interprets general education assessment data." The levels on the scale were Strongly Agree (1), Somewhat Agree (2), Somewhat Disagree (3), and Strongly Disagree (4). Four (19 percent) representatives strongly agreed, 14 (67 percent) somewhat agreed, one (5 percent) somewhat disagreed, and two (10 percent) strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean was 2.05, with a standard deviation of 0.80.

The same Likert scale was used to assess institutional representative's response to the following statement: "General education assessment data is used

to make improvements to the curriculum.” Five (24 percent) of the institutional representatives strongly agreed, twelve (57 percent) somewhat agreed, two (10 percent) somewhat disagreed, and two (10 percent) strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean was again 2.05, with a standard deviation of 0.86.

Each representative was also asked to respond to the statement: “Overall, our institution employs an effective, comprehensive general education assessment plan.” Six (29 percent) strongly agreed, seven (33 percent) somewhat agreed, four (19 percent) somewhat disagreed, and four (19 percent) strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean was 2.28, and the standard deviation was 1.10.

In summary, a variety of methods were reported to have been used to assess general education at private four-year HBCUs. The majority of institutions had formal, written missions, goals, and assessment plans for their general education program. Implementation of the assessment process was done by several groups on campus, and data from assessment were reported to a wide variety of people. Every institutional representative indicated that his or her institution reported assessment data to at least two groups and used three or more campus constituencies in the implementation and development of its general education assessment program. Most institutions collected assessment data once a student completed some general education courses and after students had completed all their general education requirements. Nineteen of twenty-one institutions collected student data at multiple points to assess general education.

A variety of instruments were used to assess general education. The most popular were nationally standardized tests and institutionally developed tests. The majority of institutional representatives indicated that their institution used more than one instrument, and the majority (fourteen institutions) used four or more instruments to assess their general education curriculum.

Finally, many institutional representatives believed that their institution’s general education assessment plan was comprehensive and effective. Almost 40 percent, however, did not believe that their institution’s general education assessment plan was proficient. Most representatives believed that their institution effectively interpreted general education assessment data and used the assessment results to make improvements to the curriculum.

### Research Question 3

The last question was addressed using ten survey questions that asked institutional representatives to respond to several statements relating to the challenges their institution faced in conducting general education assessment using the same Likert scale detailed earlier. The results are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Frequency Chart for Survey Questions 14–24 ( $n = 21$ )

Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M	SD
14. Lack of time to plan, conduct, and/or analyze assessment data	6 (29%)	8 (39%)	4 (19%)	3 (14%)	2.19	1.03
15. Lack of knowledge about general education assessment techniques	0 (0%)	5 (24%)	9 (43%)	7 (33%)	3.09	0.77
16. Lack of financial resources to conduct general education assessment	2 (10%)	7 (33%)	7 (33%)	5 (24%)	2.71	0.95
17. General education assessment lacks a clear purpose	1 (5%)	5 (24%)	6 (29%)	9 (43%)	3.09	0.94
18. Faculty belief that general education assessment is an infringement of their academic freedom	0 (0%)	6 (29%)	7 (33%)	8 (38%)	3.09	0.83
19. Difficulty motivating students to take assessment seriously	8 (38%)	8 (38%)	3 (14%)	2 (10%)	1.76	0.70
20. Faculty belief that general education assessment will be used to evaluate them individually	5 (24%)	8 (38%)	5 (24%)	3 (14%)	2.29	1.01
21. Lack of agreement about the purpose and/or learning objectives of general education	3 (14%)	4 (19%)	6 (29%)	8 (38%)	2.90	1.09
22. Administration is not supportive of assessment efforts	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	5 (24%)	15 (71%)	3.67	0.57
23. Standard assessment instruments are not available	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	18 (86%)	3.76	0.62
24. Belief that assessment of students occurs when a course is graded, therefore further assessment is unnecessary	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	6 (29%)	13 (62%)	3.52	0.68

The responses indicate that the biggest challenges facing private four-year HBCUS in assessing their general education curriculum were difficulty motivating students to take assessment seriously ( $M = 1.76$ ); a lack of time to plan, conduct, or analyze assessment data ( $M = 2.19$ ); and faculty belief that general education assessment would be used to evaluate them individually ( $M = 2.29$ ). It was also found that most institutional representatives believed that their college's administration was supportive of general education assessment ( $M = 3.67$ ), individuals supervising assessment were knowledgeable of assessment techniques ( $M = 3.09$ ), and institutions had access to assessment tools ( $M = 3.76$ ).

## Discussion/Conclusion

The goal of this exploratory study was to provide a general description of the current state of general education and general education assessment at private, four-year HBCUS. To do this, two research methodologies were employed. The first employed a content analysis of course catalogs and institutional Web sites to identify the average number of hours needed to complete the general education curriculum, what percentage of the total hours needed for graduation were composed of general education, and what delivery method was used for general education curriculum at private four-year HBCUS. Second, a researcher-created survey was distributed to chief academic administrators and directors of institutional research. Of the forty-five surveys sent out, twenty-one were returned, for a response rate of 47 percent.

In analyzing the data collected, several interesting characteristics and attitudes about general education and general education assessment at private, four-year HBCUS emerged. The average minimum number of credit hours needed to complete the institutional general education requirement at private four-year HBCUS was 50.39 hours. On average, this makes up 40 percent of the total hours needed for graduation. These numbers are slightly higher than for other colleges and universities. Ratcliff, Johnson, La Nasa, and Gaff (2001) have found that the average general education requirement is 37.6 percent of the hours needed for graduation with a baccalaureate degree. This study also found that only three of the forty-five private, four-year HBCUS used what could be consider a rigidly prescribed general education delivery method. Every other institution used some form of a distribution requirement. This is also very similar to the distribution method employed by other colleges and universities (Ratcliff et al., 2001).

With regard to assessment, it was found that most private HBCUS had both formal, written goals and a formal, written assessment plan for their general education program. In addition, it was found that the majority of private HBCUS involved multiple constituencies in their assessment efforts, collected assessment

data at different points throughout a student's matriculation, and employed a variety of instruments in their assessment efforts. Each of these characteristics has been found to be indicative of an effective general education assessment plan (Allen, 2004; Lopez, 1998; Palomba & Banta, 1999). This is supported by the fact that according to this study the majority of HBCUS believe that they employ comprehensive, effective general education assessment practices.

The findings of this study also detail some of the more prevalent issues faced by HBCUS in assessing their general education program. The most frequent challenges found were lack of time to plan, conduct, or analyze assessment data; difficulty motivating students to take assessment seriously; and faculty belief that general education assessment will be used to evaluate them individually. The least prevalent challenges were a nonsupportive administration, nonavailability of assessment instruments, and lack of knowledge about general education assessment techniques. These challenges do not appear to be exclusive to private HBCUS. Other scholars have found that many of the challenges detailed by HBCU representatives are experienced by all types of American colleges and universities (Allen, 2004; Palomba & Banta, 1999).

Given the small sample size and limited segment of HBCUS used in this analysis, the generalizability of this study to all HBCUS is limited. Despite this limitation, this study provides important information about general education at historically black institutions of higher education that had previously been unavailable. Because most of the private HBCUS surveyed appear to be engaged in many activities characteristic of a high-quality general education assessment program, one could conclude from this study that private HBCUS as a whole are indeed engaged in high-quality general education assessment. In addition, because the literature has found that a good general education assessment plan is a strong indication of a quality general education curriculum, the information found in this study could be used as evidence that general education at private, four-year HBCUS is of high quality.

Several questions also arise from the findings of this study. One involves institutions that are not currently engaged in what would be considered best practices with regard to general education assessment. Certain practices, such as having formal, written assessment goals, general education missions, and assessment plans, have been institutionalized as important elements of a strong general education curriculum. Some of the HBCUS in this study, however, indicate that they are not engaged in these activities (as noted in Table 1). This raises some questions about these institutions that should be the focus of future research in this area. Do these institutions not believe that these practices are important elements of a strong general education program, or are these institutions restricted in some ways from engaging in these practices? It was also found that many

HBCU general education programs have changed over the past several years. Examining how these programs have changed and what influences have had the greatest impact on this change would be an important element of further research on general education at HBCUS.

The findings of this study also raise important questions about the impact of the workload of HBCU faculty and administrators on the ability of HBCUS to assess their general education curriculum. Among the most frequent challenges cited in this study by HBCUS with regard to their ability to assess their general education program was the lack of time to engage in general education assessment. Future research should examine whether this is an artifact of the financial status of HBCUS. Many HBCUS have faced financial difficulties in recent years (Williams et al., 2004). As a result, many HBCU faculty and administrators are asked to engage in activities that go beyond the typical activities of faculty and administrators at other types of colleges and universities. This could be a factor in the lack of time cited by HBCUS to engage in general education assessment. Further research into this area would shed more light on this relationship.

Given the number of students served by HBCUS and the critical role of general education in helping students develop core intellectual capabilities, continued research on general education at HBCUS is essential if the higher education community is to fully understand the importance and impact of black colleges and universities. While this exploratory study adds somewhat to the higher education community's understanding of the nature of general education and general education assessment at HBCUS, more should be done in this area. In addition to the aforementioned questions, this research should center on areas such as general education assessment at public HBCUS, more complete studies of general education that include the perspectives of students and faculty as well as administrators, and examining other aspects of general education such as student learning, faculty beliefs, and preferred delivery methods. It is hoped that the descriptive findings of this study will serve as a catalyst for this future research on general education at HBCUS.

#### NOTES

1. Each of the private, four-year HBCUS used for this study fell under one of three major accrediting bodies: the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement, and the Middle States Commission on Secondary Schools.
2. A "rigid" delivery method refers to an institution requiring all students to take the same general education courses regardless of major. A "distribution" method refers to an institution where students are able to complete

their general education requirements by selecting from a variety of courses within certain core subjects.

3. The primary sources used to aid in the construction of items/questions for this survey instrument were Allen, 2004; Bers, 2004; Palomba & Banta, 1999; and Stone & Friedman, 2002.

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