**HBCU Sample Op Ed**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been islands of hope for millions of Black Americans for more than a century and a half. A college degree has long stood as the key to economic mobility in America. But this opportunity is continually becoming more difficult to attain, especially for those from our underrepresented communities. Investments in making higher education accessible to marginalized groups is not only fair and morally justified, it also serves to maximize our nation’s human capital, leading to a more skilled workforce and a more productive economy.

For decades the Pell Grant program has served to provide financial aid in higher education for those who need it. Today, nearly [7 million students](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ncan.org/resource/resmgr/policyadvocacy/ncanfederalpriorities2021.pdf) receive crucial support from the program, including [59 percent of all Black students](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ncan.org/resource/resmgr/policyadvocacy/ncanfederalpriorities2021.pdf). However, the impact of this government program is diminishing. 40 years ago, Pell Grants covered more than three quarters of the cost of tuition. Today that number stands at around 30 percent. Even more jarring is the fact Black graduates owe an average of [$25,000 more](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/06/02/biden-plan-close-racial-wealth-gap-should-include-student-loan-debt-cancellation#:~:text=Black%20college%20graduates%20have%20an,National%20Center%20for%20Education%20Statistics.) in student debt than their white counterparts. An investment in the Pell Grant is an investment in America’s future, and doubling the Pell Grant is the most direct and effective way to make higher education more accessible for thousands of capable students, a critical step in our on-going fight for justice.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the overlapping health, economic, and racial disparities in our country. President Biden’s campaign platform emphasized the need for us to “build back better.” From the perspective of HBCUs there is no more effective way to build a better future for our students than to double the Pell Grant, which has already been assisting first-generation, low-income, and minority students in attaining college degrees for decades. According to the National College Attainment Network, enrollment for these groups has fallen in the wake of COVID. Therefore, we must bolster educational opportunities for these students, so that we do not lose even more ground in closing the equity gap and providing equal opportunity to all.

The class of 2020 showed major college enrollment declines across the board, but the effects of the pandemic on accessibility to higher education were seen most dramatically in both low-income and high minority high schools (a [29.2% decline](https://www.ncan.org/news/542655/NSC-Report-High-School-Class-of-2020-Shows-Catastrophic-Enrollment-Declines.htm), and a [26.4% decline](https://www.ncan.org/news/542655/NSC-Report-High-School-Class-of-2020-Shows-Catastrophic-Enrollment-Declines.htm), respectively.) If Congress acts now to double the maximum amount available under the Pell Grant from $6,495 to $13,000 - as President Biden promised he would push for during his campaign - the share of public four-year institutions affordable to the average recipient [will jump from 25% to 80%](https://hechingerreport.org/student-voice-doubling-the-pell-grant-will-make-college-a-reality-for-more-students-like-me/).

This boost will benefit not only the students themselves, but will in turn likely spark a resurgence of enrollment in HBCUs nationwide. HBCU enrollment has [fallen 11% in the past decade](https://www.jamesgmartin.center/2020/06/did-you-know-hbcu-enrollments-fall-10-in-last-decade/), dipping from 327,000 students in 2010 to 292,000 in 2018. Doubling Pell will put more money in the hands of students first, and allow them to use it at the institution that best fits their educational needs.

If the Pell Grant is doubled, not only will current students receive increased grants, but the pool of eligible students will grow, providing more working-class students access to aid.

There is no better time to invest in higher education than in the aftermath of a recession. A [study by Georgetown University](https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/americas-divided-recovery/) found that coming out of the Great Recession, “Graduate degree holders gained 3.8 million jobs, Bachelor’s degree holders gained 4.7 million jobs, and Associate’s degree holders gained 3.1 million jobs, compared to workers with a high school diploma or less, who added only 80,000 jobs.” Individuals with college degrees are also [far less likely](https://www.forbes.com/sites/wesleywhistle/2020/04/17/college-graduates-are-less-likely-to-become-unemployed-due-to-the-coronavirus/?sh=7009b86361e4) to be laid off during an economic downturn than those with a high school diploma.

College affordability is a crisis whose effects ripple throughout the nation causing a multitude of other problems in its wake. Wealth inequality and diminished social mobility amongst those of lower income-levels, disproportionately impacts minorities. And it limits us as a nation, by not allowing swaths of intelligent, capable workers to attain the necessary training and connections to develop meaningful careers and sustain a solid income, which would in turn provide a substantial boost to the country’s economy. Doubling Pell is a simple and commonsense move that would quickly and fairly alleviate the college affordability crisis.

Students from low-and moderate-income families are in critical need of additional grant aid to pay for college. Doubling the maximum Pell Grant—and permanently indexing the grant to inflation to ensure its value doesn’t diminish again over time—will honor the history and value of these grants as the keystone federal investment in college affordability and help more students attend college, earn a degree, get a good-paying job, and ensure them a brighter future.