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**What do we know  
about internships  
at HBCUs?**

**A review of the  
literature and agenda  
for future research**



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# Abstract

Internships and other high-impact practices (HIPs) that feature experiential learning are being increasingly promoted at Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) as a way to support students' career and academic success. In this paper we review the literature on what is known about HIPs and internships at HBCUs and how students' racial identities have influenced interns' experiences and outcomes. Our analysis finds little empirical research on internships at HBCUs and a general lack of in-depth and critical analysis on the ways that racial identity and the unique institutional cultures of HBCUs impact internships and Black student experiences. We then review contextual forces salient to Black interns' experiences such as pervasive workplace discrimination, and theoretical frameworks that could inform future research on the ways that race, culture, institutional features and local "field effects" interact to shape student experiences and professional development. We conclude by outlining a research agenda for studying internships that foregrounds issues of racial justice, adopts elements of Bourdieu's relational sociology, and investigates how the unique cultures of HBCUs influence how internships are designed, implemented and experienced.

## Introduction

Internships are widely viewed as a “high-impact practice” (HIP) that improves college students’ career outcomes, with corresponding calls for postsecondary institutions to enact policies mandating internships (Busteed & Auter, 2017) and/or strongly encouraging students to participate in them during their college careers (Kuh, 2008). Advocacy for internships is also supported by a growing body of research demonstrating that internships can have positive impacts on students’ employment (Nunley et al., 2016), academic achievement (Parker III et al., 2016), and developmental outcomes such as confidence in one’s career trajectory (Ocampo et al., 2020). Coupled with growing pressure on colleges and universities to cultivate students’ “employability” (Tomlinson & Holmes, 2016), internships are quickly becoming a central feature of institutional strategies for enhancing student success in the early 21st century.

While advocacy for internships is a sector-wide phenomenon in higher education, there is a particular emphasis on these experiences in minority serving institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This focus on internships is in part an extension of a long-standing commitment to service learning and community engagement by HBCUs (Brotherton, 2002; Gasman & McKickens, 2010; Rozman & Roberts, 2006), but the Great Recession of 2008 shook the postsecondary sector and led to a renewed focus on whether or not their graduates were getting well-paying jobs, and HBCUs were not immune to this outcomes. In an indication of this focus on HBCU students’ career development, in 2016 the United Negro College Fund launched a multi-institution \$50 million initiative called the Career Pathways Initiative (UNCF, 2016) that aimed to increase the capacity of participating institutions to serve their students’ career-related needs. Given that institutional racism in education, hiring discrimination and gaps in the opportunities available to students continues to drive disproportionate outcomes between Black students and white students in graduation rates, lifetime earnings, and employment prospects, this focus on the career prospects of Black students in HBCUs is both warranted and essential. As part of these strategies to improve their students’ career prospects, HBCU leaders view work-based learning (WBL) opportunities such as internships as an important experience that can mitigate the impact of systemic inequities while serving their students’ career needs and aspirations.

**HBCUs are increasingly viewing work-based learning (WBL) opportunities such as internships as a key strategy to mitigate the impact of systemic inequities while serving their students’ career needs and aspirations.**

With this continued emphasis on internships for Black students at HBCUs, it is important to review the literature to assess what is known on the topic, and identify any gaps that should be addressed in future research. While findings from research on internships at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and other campuses with few Black students may be insightful and applicable to how internships operate at HBCUs, we argue that HBCUs represent distinctive institutional and cultural contexts (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Harper et al., 2004), and that Black students face unique challenges and opportunities as they seek to pursue and complete internships (Bridges et al., 2008; Covington, 2017). Furthermore, issues and trends in the labor market that influence Black students’ experiences in the labor market including diversity pipeline initiatives, the persistence of hiring discrimination (Quillian et al., 2017), and documented inequities in access to internships underscore the importance of improving the field of higher education’s understanding of internships within

HBCUs. As Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002, p. 344) argued two decades ago, it is “important that we understand exactly how HBCUs create beneficial environments for their African American students,” and this remains true today.

However, while a robust body of literature exists on the unique cultural features of HBCUs and Black student outcomes in higher education, the literature on internship programs in HBCUs is limited, which poses a problem for career services professionals, faculty and institutional leaders who wish to better understand how to improve internships on their own campuses. In this paper we address this gap in the literature by reviewing what is known about HBCUs and internships, key issues shaping career development for Black students, and outline a future research agenda. In addressing these topics, we explicitly reject a deficit-oriented framing of HBCUs, which is a not uncommon perspective that focuses on challenges and perceived deficiencies within the sector (Williams et al., 2019), and instead emphasize the unique assets that HBCUs bring to the topic of college internships. We contend that it is through understanding how these cultural and institutional assets operate and impact students’ lives in HBCUs, while not ignoring the challenges facing Black students in U.S. society, represents a promising foundation for future research to explore.

In this paper we address this gap in the literature by reviewing what is known about HBCUs and internships, key issues shaping career development for Black students, and outline a future research agenda.

## Review of institutional context and culture of HBCUs

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are defined by the federal government as institutions of higher education founded before 1964 whose principal mission is to educate Black students (Redd, 1998). Although the federal definition explicitly focuses on Black students, HBCUs enroll and graduate a diverse set of students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or income level. It is also important to note that HBCUs are not homogenous in structure, size or mission, as they encompass a diverse group of institutions that include both public and private, 2- and 4-year, single-sex and co-educational, and research-intensive and professional institutions (Hoffman, 1996).

HBCUs have long played an integral role in providing access and degree attainment for Black people in higher education, and in facilitating their entry into a wide range of professions (Flowers, 2002; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002). HBCUs continue to embrace their mission to empower young Black men and women no matter where they fall along the academic spectrum, and to provide opportunities for students to participate in activities that cater to their Blackness while also creating a social support network to facilitate their academic and career success (Albritton, 2012). Many of the opportunities available to HBCU students, such as experiential learning, internships, service-learning, study abroad, and research experiences play critical roles in helping students to succeed in their desired careers (Owens et al., 2020). In addition, many scholars

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attribute the success of HBCUs in educating Black students to the unique socio-cultural aspects of the HBCU student experience such as the development of social networks (especially via student clubs and the Greek system), forms of other-mothering, cultivating a sense of belonging, and culturally and spiritually sensitive academic environments that empower Black students (Albritton, 2012; Brown & Davis, 2001; Bridges, et al. 2008; Mobley, 2017; Strayhorn, 2019). For instance, in a study on how Spelman College promotes the attainment of Black women in STEM disciplines, Perna and colleagues (2009) found that students chose the college based on its reputation in supporting Black women in these male-dominated disciplines, and that the negative aspects of Black women's success in STEM (e.g., financial, psychological, & academic barriers) was ameliorated by a cooperative institutional culture, faculty support, and an extensive academic support system. Similarly, some argue that HBCUs offer a "unique sociocultural opportunity" for students, that includes "a nurturing learning environment, mentoring, and a family atmosphere for students" that aren't available at larger institutions (Perry, 2017, p. 9). Researchers also contend that HBCUs also offer Black students a campus climate that supports a sense of belonging and comfort that enhances their experience and eventual success (see Hilton & Felder, 2014), and how the unique climate and culture within HBCUs impacts the design, implementation and student experience of internships is one of the key questions driving our inquiry.

## What do we know about HIPs and internships at HBCUs?

A considerable amount of research exists on student experiences and outcomes while attending a HBCU, and in this section we first review research on HIPs at HBCUs, followed by a discussion of the literature on internships at HBCUs and studies of the role that race plays in internship experiences across the entire postsecondary sector.

### Research on High-Impact Practices at HBCUs

Since internships are one of several HIPs that are widely promoted in colleges and universities, along with programs such as undergraduate research and first-year seminars (Kuh, 2008), we first review what is known about HIPs in HBCU contexts. Some studies on this topic adopt a case study approach and describe initiatives underway at specific HBCUs such as living-learning communities at Norfolk State University (Ericksen et al., 2015; Kirby et al., 2019), while other researchers discuss the more general impact of HIPs on underserved students (e.g., Parker III et al., 2016; Peters et al., 2019). Some studies address a central concern in our review – how does the unique institutional and socio-cultural context of a HBCU impact student experiences – such as Ericksen and Williamson-Ashe's work (2019) that found the service-oriented missions of HBCUs and close social networks developed on HBCU campuses make them especially conducive to high-quality and impactful student experiences.

Overall, while researchers are paying an increasing amount of attention to the obstacles facing students of color in engaging in HIPs (e.g., Finley & McNair, 2013), there remains limited empirical work on the topic that is specifically focused on the HBCU context.

Some empirical work also draws on the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) to assess the prevalence of HIPs at HBCUs. For example, Bridges and colleagues (2008) analyzed NSSE data to identify high-performing minority-serving institutions and found that the HBCUs in the study had a strong dedication to service learning and community service, and that overall, student-faculty interactions and supportive

campus climates for students of color contributed to their students' success. Another line of inquiry on HIPs at HBCUs includes conceptual pieces arguing for the value of HIPs on HBCU campuses including service learning (Patterson et al., 2013) and learning communities (Arroyo et al., 2016). Covington (2017) studied study abroad programs at HBCUs, which are a widely promoted HIP with outcomes including development of "global competency" skills and enhanced racial awareness, but less than 5% of students who participate in these programs are Black. Consequently, Covington (2017) argues that HBCUs should pursue institutional and programmatic efforts to focus on engaging Black students in study abroad, such as engaging Black faculty and staff to participate in the programs, acknowledging the prospects of racism during the experience, and emphasizing the benefits of study abroad to more HBCU students. Overall, while researchers are paying an increasing amount of attention to the obstacles facing students of color in engaging in HIPs (e.g., Finley & McNair, 2013), there remains limited empirical work on the topic that is specifically focused on the HBCU context, and this paucity of work also applies to the study of internships in HBCUs.

### **Research on Internships at HBCUs**

In our review of the literature we found very little empirical research on internships in HBCUs, but with some notable exceptions that lay the foundation for scholars exploring this topic in the future. One of the limitations in some of these studies, however, is the lack of an explicit focus on the ways that students' racialized experiences and/or unique features of institutional cultures and contexts at HBCUs may be impacting internship programs. For example, a survey of internship supervisors in a criminal justice program at a HBCU (Williams et al., 2020) found that communication with clients, personal appearance, and punctuality played a positive role in students' professional development, while gender and the length of the internship did not, but the ways that race or institutional culture played in these dynamics were not included in the analysis. An examination of educational administration internships at a HBCU, with a focus on the instructional technique of problem-based learning, also did not include analyses of these critical topics (Jones, 2010). Similarly, a study of a partnership between Savannah State University and the Skidaway Institute of Oceanography that included undergraduate research and internship programs (Gilligan et al., 2007), and a study of bioinformatics internships at five MSIs (including four HBCUs) (Mendez et al., 2016), both examined internships available to Black students attending HBCUs but both also overlooked how issues of race and the unique characteristics of HBCUs may have influenced students' experiences and outcomes.

More recently, Strayhorn (2020) used data from NSSE to examine the relationship between internship participation and academic achievement for Black business majors attending HBCUs, finding no significant relationships between the two. While other scholars have found that students with internships do have better grades than those without an internship (e.g., Parker III et al., 2016), Strayhorn (2020) points out that other effects of internships such as sense of belonging are other important outcomes that should be studied in the future, as well as the role that variables such as gender play in shaping Black students' academic outcomes. One of the limitations of studies relying on NSSE data, however, is that the survey uses a compound question asking subjects if they have taken an "internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement" – each of which has unique formats, regulations, and educational goals, rendering them distinct (and incomparable) types of co-curricular experiences. In addition, in this study Strayhorn (2020) did not explicitly address how the racial identity of students and/or their attendance at a HBCU impacted their experiences, though these topics are addressed in other writings (e.g., Strayhorn, 2019).

In the study that most directly addressed these issues, Perry (2017) conducted an in-depth case study of a sport and recreation management internship program at a HBCU. In this dissertation, Perry (2017) examined how these internships were designed, students' experiences with them (and especially if they prepare students for the sports industry), and if administrators and students felt that being at a HBCU impacted the program, finding that students and administrators felt that effective communication, identifying and building upon students' career goals, and providing extensive support (e.g., preparation for internship, availability of staff during experience) were key elements of successful program. Based on these findings, Perry (2017) advanced a conceptual framework that includes three categories of factors that influence student experiences in sport and recreation internships – the HBCU environment, program considerations and features, and students' own career development goals and aspirations. For future research in the area, Perry (2017) suggests that aspects of HBCUs that may impact internship programming include unique student-faculty relationships, institutional awareness of and attunement to the unique challenges facing Black students, the history of experiential learning at HBCUs, and a family atmosphere conducive to student success.

The only other empirical study of internships at HBCUs identified in our review was by Vlahovic and Malhotra (2009), who described an effort at North Carolina Central University (NCCU) to establish a geoscience program that included an internship component. The effort focused on training in Geographic Information System technologies, which was designed in part to attract students given that the college competes with larger, flagship universities for students and recognition. The authors noted that demonstrating how a NCCU degree offers a clear path to employment is important for the 90% of NCCU students who receive financial aid, which internships can do. In addition, given that minority students often lack mentors while in college, an internship could address this problem by assigning students to both academic advisors and internship supervisors. However, the authors found that the most challenging part of the initiative was finding enough students for internship placements, noting the counterintuitive nature of arguing that more internships are needed for minority students, and then once they are created they remain unfilled (Vlahovic & Malhotra, 2009). This situation could have been created by the fact that the internships required relocation (which involved considerable financial costs) and the potential that Black students are self-selecting out of an internship due to low professional self-esteem, which led the authors to argue that more Black students should pursue internships so that they could become role models to “break the cycle of self-doubt” (p. 269). Left unaddressed in the literature, however, is how the financial and logistical obstacles to internships faced by many college students, may have a uniquely deleterious impact on Black students who also face (and are impacted by) legacies of racism and inequality in both higher education and the labor market.

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### **Research on race and internships**

While there are few studies on internships at HBCUs, the subject of race has not been ignored in the broader literature on internships. One study demonstrated that white students were more likely to complete internships than Black students, attributing these disparities in completion rates to “a reticence among African Americans

to search for internships, a lack of encouragement about the internship process, a lack of site information, or some other factor” (Knouse et al., 1999, p. 39). Scholars have also documented disparities between racial groups in post-college employment rates (48% for students with minority status vs 62% for those from nonminority status) even 12 months after the internship (Luecking & Fabian, 2000). In a study of over 15,000 students at a university in the U.K., Binder and colleagues (2015) did not find significant differences in internship participation between white and non-white groups, and that internships had positive effects on students’ academic outcomes regardless of ethnicity.

In our review we also identified promising studies on the topic of race and internships emerging from South Africa. In a study of Black student participation in internships in South Africa, researchers found that there was a significant increase in the number of Black Africans interns who participated in the clinical psychology training during the post-apartheid period (1995-2008) than during the apartheid period (1981-1994) (Pillay, 2009). Another study of psychology interns in South Africa found that 46% (n=42) of the students had a negative supervision event during their internship, and that more mixed-race dyads (i.e., a white supervisor and Black intern or vice versa) reported negative experiences than same race dyads, suggesting that the interns racial identity and that of the supervisor is important (Hendricks & Cartwright, 2018). In documenting that 14 students in this study experienced negative experiences on a weekly basis, this study also underscores how internships are not universally positive or “high-impact” experiences.

In a study that also addressed the racial dynamics between interns and others, in this case clients in a counseling program, Mintz and colleagues (1995) found that the mostly white interns felt unprepared for how to interact with and counsel clients of color, and that issues related to race and culture were not part of the core curriculum. This study raises questions about the adequacy of the pre-internship phase within academic courses and programs for preparing students (of any background) to interact with ethnic minorities during their internship.

Finally, we must consider how racial identity often acts as a lever that activates discriminatory or preferential treatment by institutional actors that, in practice, often operates subtly and intersects with other identities (Omi & Winant, 2014; Crenshaw, 1990). Consequently, the racial discrimination that racially minoritized students may face in securing an internship is often compounded by the longstanding social arrangements that privilege students who have access to the capital that allows them to take on unpaid or low-paid internships, and those who have access to social networks through which information about internship opportunities are shared. This is the situation that Levkoe and Offeh-Gyimah (2020) explored in a study of unpaid internships in sustainable agriculture farm internships, which tend to be dominated by young middle-class white people. Additionally, the dominant preferences for the cultural associations connected to normative whiteness passively work to limit the access points to internships for Black students and other students of color, and hinders their full participation and acceptance in internships once there (Boulton, 2015; Levkoe & Offeh-Gyimah,

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2020; Shade & Jacobson, 2015). As a result, some argue that the field of internships is one characterized by inequitable forms of access and opportunity, and that they are, “the first step into a career, but a step structured by inequalities” (Swan, 2015, p. 30). In light of these issues, some researchers have suggested that non-traditional internship structures, online internships in particular, may offer an innovative solution to these common challenges (Kraft, Jeske, & Bayerlein, 2019) of internship access and equity, but the degree to which online internships reduce accessibility issues for minoritized students remains an unstudied phenomenon.

## Contextual factors influencing Black students and internships

We next briefly discuss some of the contextual factors that should be considered alongside the issue of internships at HBCUs, such as diversity in the workplace programming, the persistence of hiring discrimination, and the issue of student-supervisor racial dynamics. These topics are important to discuss because internship programs do not operate in a social, political or historical vacuum, and instead are deeply embedded in and shaped by these forces.

### Pipeline programs for enhancing diversity in the workforce

Diversity pipeline programs have emerged as a popular strategy to recruit, develop and train a diverse future workforce within an industry or a corporation, and often fit squarely within an organization’s larger talent development strategy (Cherinka & Prezzama, 2015; Mason et al., 2016). Even when these initiatives do not include internship programs, and they sometimes do (see Vlahovic & Malhotra, 2002), they remain a widely practice form of corporate engagement with minoritized communities, and thus impact the broader context of Black students’ job seeking behaviors and experiences. Besides addressing continued racial disparities in the workforce, with white people and men overrepresented in occupational categories such as corporate senior leadership (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015) and in professions such as law and medicine (Augustin & Stumpf, 2018; Cunningham & Steele, 2015), pipeline programs are also designed to address persistent workforce shortages. In fact, Mason et. al. (2016) notes that “the inability of the overall health profession to keep pace with the U.S. population is a greater contributor to health disparities than access to care” (p. 1980). In other words, the inability of specialty professions to meet the critical needs of a rapidly diversifying population exacerbates existing economic, health and educational disparities in the U.S.

Some programs may recruit students as early as high school and provide several years of training, or as late as postgraduate studies with an abbreviated training timeline. In addition to participating in an internship, students who participate in these programs often receive additional investments in the form of mentorship and training, which can serve to increase the commitment level from the student to the organization or industry, and, in turn, ensure that the student is highly trained and committed when hired on a full-time basis (Cherinka & Prezzama, 2015). One such example was scrutinized in a study by Mason et al. (2016) as they examined a targeted health professions pipeline program for women and other minoritized groups. In particular, they examined the efficacy of the Orthopaedic Summer Internship Program in recruiting groups who are traditionally

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underrepresented in orthopaedic surgery into the profession. The results of the study showed a strong positive correlation between those that completed the summer internship program and applicants to orthopaedic residency programs. While literature on the relationship between diversity pipeline programs and internships is limited, internships are sometimes a component of diversity initiatives in fields such as medicine (Bouye et al., 2016) and accounting (Ross et al., 2014) and thus represent a fruitful topic for future inquiry.

### **Workplace and hiring discrimination**

Another contextual factor that plays a crucial role in how students of color find success (or not) in the workplace is the persistence of hiring discrimination in the labor market. While little research exists on discriminatory practices and/or experiences in internships, a considerable body of evidence exists that makes it clear that discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity, gender, age and even body type continues to plague U.S. society and labor market. For instance, a recent meta-analysis of field experiments on hiring discrimination against Black and Latino applicants, which represented 55,842 applications for 26,326 applicants since 1989 found that white applicants receive 36% more callbacks than Black applicants and 24% more than Latino applicants, with applicant education, occupational group and local labor market conditions held equal. The authors conclude that, “contrary to claims of declining discrimination in American society, our estimates suggest that levels of discrimination remain largely unchanged, at least at the point of hire” (Quillian et al., 2017, p. 10870).

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A resume audit study, where fictitious resumes are sent to employers with all applicant attributes being equal except for “distinctively” Black (e.g., Ebony Booker) or white (Cody Booker) names for male and female applicants, similarly found that white applicants received 14% more callbacks for job interviews (Nunley et al., 2015). The persistence and widespread nature of hiring discrimination has a variety of negative implications for Black students in general, and students from HBCUs in particular. Besides reducing the prospects for gaining employment and for college graduates, a toe-hold in an early career position, discriminatory practices and their widespread acknowledgment can have psychological impacts on students of color. For instance, people of color are more likely to compromise career aspirations due to perceived barriers to access to educational and career opportunities, in effect self-selecting out of certain career pathways (Fassinger, 2008), a situation that is exacerbated for Black women who face the combined issues of sexism and racism in the labor market (Omi & Winant, 2014).

### **Minority owned businesses and implications for internships**

Finally, we raise an issue that is rarely discussed in the internship literature or in discussions about HIPs or internships at HBCUs – that of the racial dynamics at play between Black students and non-Black employers. While scholars have examined the ways that HBCUs can spur minority-owned business development (Adebayo et al., 2001), the literature is silent on the ways that the racial identity of student interns and their employer hosts may impact student experiences. Considering that some studies have found mixed-race dyads of intern-supervisors to be strongly related to negative intern experiences in South Africa (Hendricks & Cartwright, 2018), and the aforementioned prevalence of workplace harassment (Holder et al., 2015) and hiring

discrimination against Black job applicants, it is not unlikely that Black students from HBCUs will have different experiences in an internship depending on the racial background and identity of their supervisors. While the political, historical and socio-cultural contexts in which the South African study took place is obviously different from those facing Black student interns in the U.S., there are similarities between the two contexts – especially the prevalence of racial segregation and discrimination (Massey & Denton, 1993) – that may make these insights about South African student interns relevant for HBCU students pursuing internships.

## **Theoretical considerations for studying HBCU students and internships**

Our review of the literature on HBCUs and internships revealed a paucity of empirical studies on the topic, particularly those that explicitly addressed the ways that culture, racial identity and the unique institutional climate and history of HBCUs may impact how internships are designed, implemented and experienced. Several promising studies that address the topic of internship participation and outcomes at HBCUs (e.g., Strayhorn, 2020) and how HBCUs cultivate distinctive climates for Black students pursuing internships (e.g., Perry, 2017) lay the foundation for a new research agenda on the topic, which is sorely needed as internships and other HIPs are increasingly promoted across the postsecondary sector. As Parker and colleagues observed (2016), “For institutions with special serving missions, internship involvement is an indispensable practice for students” (p. 108), which makes it highly likely that the field of higher education in general and minority-serving institutions in particular will continue to see internships as a vehicle for enhancing student success. In this final section, we briefly discuss theoretical considerations for the study of internships for Black students attending a HBCU, and pressing questions facing the field that should be addressed in future research.

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### **Theoretical frameworks for studying internships and student success**

In studying the experiences of Black HBCU college students’ internship experiences, which is a complex topic that implicates a wide variety of factors, a theoretical framework is useful if not essential for empirical investigations and campus policymaking. To study internships more generally, scholars have developed frameworks that aim to articulate the processes that impact students’ experiences and outcomes during the internship experience. For example, the management scholars Narayanan, Olk and Fulkami (2010) contend that most internship research ignores the interplay among the three actors involved in the experience – students, university, and the company – which led to their framework that focuses on the testing of specific antecedent (e.g., employer and university size and structure, student readiness) and processual factors (e.g., employer and university communications with students) that may contribute to particular outcomes for all three parties. Another framework focused on internships is that of Sweitzer and King (2013), who outlined four stages of an interns’ experience that included anticipation, exploration, competence and culmination. In focusing on how students themselves construct meaning of their experiences, and also the importance of interns being introduced into new (and potentially discordant) socio-cultural and professional contexts,

this framework is consistent with developmental perspectives in vocational psychology that also emphasize constructivist and processual accounts of development (e.g., Savickas et al., 2009).

However, while these frameworks represent important advances in understanding the mechanisms by which internships impact college students, they do not explicitly account for students' racial identity, institutional cultures and capacities, and racial dynamics between employer hosts and student interns. Of course, several frameworks do exist that focus on college student success and development, some of which are explicitly designed to attend to these issues of racial identity and socio-cultural forces. Three of the most widely used frameworks in the higher education literature include Astin's theory of student involvement and assessment (1984), Tinto's model of student departure (1993) and various models of student engagement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While a thorough review of these frameworks is beyond the purview of this paper, it is important to note that some of these influential models have been criticized for failing to adequately account for racial identity and even for perpetuating misguided notions of cultural assimilation and the erasure of non-white student identities, needs and experiences, and for failing to focus on the unique experiences of Black students and/or address the distinctive nature of HBCUs (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014).

In particular, Tinto's (1993) model of student departure, which is based on theories of rites of passage from cultural anthropology (Van Gennep, 1960) and that of suicide by sociologist Emile Durkheim (1951), has been critiqued for arguing that college student success and persistence depends on how well they shed their pre-college identities and assimilate into the new "culture" of a college, which results in new student identities. In advancing this argument, critics suggest that Tinto (1993) overlooks the history of oppression and discrimination against non-white peoples in the U.S., ignores the harm done to students of color represented by an assimilationist view of college student success, places unfair and immoral burden on students of color to break with their cultural origins, and perpetuates a racist and classist discourse that fails to address the unique assets and needs of college students of color (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Harper & Quaye, 2015; Tierney, 1992, 1999).

In one of the most robust and multi-dimensional models of students' of color success in college, Museus (2014) advanced a framework that was processual, accounted for influences at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels, and highlighted the cultural dimensions of the college experience. Given our interest in the cultural aspects of both internship experiences and HBCUs as unique postsecondary institutions, the critiques of Tierney (1992, 1999) regarding Tinto's (1993) approach are also worth closer inspection. Tierney (1999) notes that culture is "an elusive term that demands definition" (p. 83), and in rejecting the not uncommon view that culture refers to values, norms and practices that are uniformly shared among an entire population or organization, he instead defines it as, "a set of symbolic processes, ideologies, and sociohistorical contexts that are situated in an arena of struggle, contestation, and multiple interpretations" (p. 83). This view of culture is consistent with developments in organizational studies that reject the idea of a single "culture" that characterizes entire institutions or communities, but instead suggests that values, norms and practices reside at smaller, meso-level units such as departments and are better seen as "sub-cultures" (Martin, 2002). Consequently, claims about cultural phenomenon applicable to large groups, communities or organizations (e.g., HBCU culture, Black culture, STEM culture) likely obscure important differences within sub-groups or even within individual persons (DiMaggio, 1997; Strauss & Quinn, 1997).

In advancing an alternative view, Tierney (1999) draws upon French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work to place the focus on "cultural capital," which refers to cultural resources that can be used to "purchase" position or prestige in society, and can take institutionalized (e.g., academic credentials), objectified (e.g., fine art, music) and embodied (e.g., tastes, dispositions and skills) forms (Bourdieu, 1986; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Combined with Bourdieu's (1977) notion of "habitus," which refers to an individuals' internalized dispositions and cognitive schema that shape how they think and act (e.g., Lizardo, 2004), Tierney (1999) argues that cultural capital and habitus are useful ways to think about college students of color entering a postsecondary institution, where entering students bring with them a variety of experiences and cultural identities via their habitus, whereupon institutions can elect to affirm these identities via a program that he calls "cultural integrity" (p. 84).

The construct of habitus has also been used by scholars investigating Black students experiences at HBCUs, and how high-performing institutions support and engage various facets of students' habitus instead of denying them (Bridges et al., 2008). According to this perspective, the degree of "fit" between a Black students habitus and that of the institution is a critical element in determining their ultimate success in college. This perspective is not dissimilar to Harper's (2009) advocacy of race conscious student engagement practices, where educators are advised to go out of their way to ensure that students of colors are provided with activities and opportunities that affirm their cultural and racial identities, instead of blaming students for a lack of success while ignoring the role that institutions can and do play, or "institutional negligence" (p. 138). This account of postsecondary organizations as "innocent" or race-neutral entities is also rejected in Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations, which instead posits that they are racial structures wherein individual and group "cognitive schemas" are linked to organizational norms which too often result in the unequal distribution of resources.

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Finally, the work of Arroyo and Gasman (2014) in developing a non-Eurocentric model of Black student success is worth noting with respect to our current focus on Black students, HBCUs and internships. In this model, the authors pay close attention to institutional forces and contexts that includes a supportive environment (e.g., robust peer networks), robust extracurricular activities (e.g., leadership opportunities), and a rich climate of academic success and achievement. Their framework also adopts a process-oriented perspective wherein students access higher education via an "institutional entry point" that implicates issues of access and affordability, and iterative processes of identity and value system development during the college experience (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). What is notably lacking, however, in current frameworks for studying student success in HBCUs and/or students of color's experiences in higher education are applications to the unique problem of internships which requires attention to multiple "fields" or venues where students attempt to gain entry and function - namely that of both postsecondary institutions and a new organization where the internship is located. In addition, we suggest that research on internships

at HBCUs also would benefit from drawing upon research in counseling and vocational psychology that focus on psychosocial aspects of student growth and development (e.g., Savickas et al., 2009), cognitive and cultural anthropology that highlights how cultural forces function at the individual level (e.g., Strauss & Quinn, 1997), and intersectionality theory that emphasizes how socio-historic factors interact to shape identities and inhibit opportunities for individuals (Crenshaw, 1989). In addition, despite the prior use of Bourdieu's (1977) field theoretic perspective in the literature, research that adopts a fuller explication of Bourdieu's field theory that accounts for not only forms of capital and habitus, but also the various fields in which individuals and organizations are positioned and engage with one another (i.e., field effects) (see Ferrare & Apple, 2015), have yet to be articulated.

Collectively, these theoretical discussions raise important issues for our present consideration of Black students, HBCUs and internships, and we next turn to questions and issues that future researchers should consider when studying these complex phenomena.

### **Pressing questions facing research on internships at HBCUs**

There are a host of pressing research questions that scholars can and should address, as the advocacy for HIPs, internships and career-focused programming is unlikely to cease in the near future in higher education in general, and among HBCUs in particular. Besides the relative lack of empirical work on HBCUs and internships, one of the biggest limitations in the literature is that when HBCUs are included in some studies, the issues of student racial identities and HBCUs as unique cultural institutions are sometimes overlooked or ignored. Similarly, studies on internships that address issues of race too often include race as an independent variable, but with little in-depth examination of the ways that racial identity, politics and discrimination may impact how internships are designed, implemented and experienced by students. Consequently, the issues of race and racial identity needs to be prioritized and problematized in research on college internships as an important and potentially influential factors, variables or contexts, and the research endeavor itself should be scrutinized in light of these issues (see Rios-Aguilar, 2014).

In beginning to articulate a research agenda on internships at HBCUs that foregrounds these issues, as well as the unique socio-cultural environment of these postsecondary institutions for Black students, we first argue that existing issues and questions in the broader literature on internships be pursued but with an explicit focus on race and racial identity. Topics that are currently being addressed in the literature include the role that supervisor behaviors plays in shaping the outcomes of an internship (Hora et al., 2020, McHugh, 2017), differential impacts of unpaid versus paid internships on student outcomes (Silva, 2020), and the impact of first-generation status on internship participation (Ro et al., 2020) to name but a few. In addition, research on the ways that culture and racial identity impact

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mentoring relationships and experiences should also be built upon to investigate student-mentor dynamics at HBCUs (e.g., Byars-Winston et al., 2020). With a new focus on racial dynamics and identity, the growing body of literature on internships can address two of the most pressing issues facing higher education – that of racial equality and college students' career success.

To adequately delve into these complex issues, scholars will need to place race, culture and institutional identity at the center of their inquiries, treating each with the theoretical sophistication and nuance that they require. In doing so, we suggest that the relational sociology of Bourdieu (1977) represents a particularly robust set of “thinking tools” with which to analyze internships for Black students at HBCUs, especially with an emphasis on the ways that power and structural forces manifests in reproducing inequality via educational systems. In addition, we offer the following issues and questions that could be addressed in future research:

- How do the habitus and possession of various forms of capital (i.e., cultural and social) of Black students attending HBCUs evolve and adapt when they enter the new fields of a college or university, and then the internship site?
- How do the conditions and characteristics of the distinctive fields of Black students' pre-college experience, the postsecondary institution (i.e., HBCU) itself, and then the internship program influence their experiences and career-related outcomes?
- How, if at all, does the tradition of service learning at many HBCUs impact how internship programs are designed and implemented?
- What role does the Greek system at HBCUs play in shaping students' acquisition of internships, social capital, and subsequent employment outcomes?
- To what degree are specific features of internship programs (e.g., duration, tasks, type of supervision), aligned with Black students' identities and career-related goals?
- What are the gatekeeping practices (i.e., hiring criteria) used by employers in local and regional labor markets, and to what degree do they take into account the students' racial identities, habitus, and possession of social and cultural capital?
- How, if at all, has the Covid-19 pandemic and protests against anti-Black violence and discrimination in the summer of 2020 influenced how HBCUs are interacting with the employer community, and consequently creating internship opportunities for students?

As the postsecondary sector enters into yet another recession where the career outcomes of college students will become more fraught, competitive, and precarious, and the nation struggles to address its long-standing racial inequities, it is likely that internships and other forms of work-based learning at HBCUs will become even more important experiences for students and institutions. To ensure that these programs, however, are designed and implemented with full attention to not only best practices in experiential education, but also attention to the unique needs and assets of Black students at HBCUs, practitioners in the field will need to be advised and guided by robust empirical work on the subject. It is our hope that this literature review will provoke conversations and inspirations on this point, and that soon the field will understand, “exactly how HBCUs create beneficial environments for their African American students” Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002, p. 344) when it comes to the internship experience.

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The mission of The Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions (CCWT) is to conduct and support research, critical policy analysis, and public dialogue on student experiences with the transition from college to the workforce in order to inform policies, programs, and practices that promote academic and career success for all learners.

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