Examining Faculty and Staff Salary Inequities Between Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Non-HBCUs

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Abstract

Researchers (Bichsel et al., 2022; Clark, 2023; Scaringe, 2023) have consistently found that low salaries are a primary reason for faculty and staff to leave their institution, especially at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Herder, 2024; Lopez, 2023). As a result, this study leverages current Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024) to explore salary differences between faculty (multiple ranks) and staff (multiple classifications) at HBCUs and peer institutions. Quantitative analyses suggest that HBCU staff and faculty salaries lag considerably behind salaries at peer, non-HBCU institutions, suggesting financial inequities experienced by HCBUs may carry into compensation for faculty and staff, possibly limiting the impact that HBCUs can have within the Black community and beyond. Implications for research, policy, and practice are addressed, especially as they relate to federal funding mechanisms and private industry partnerships that could help provide HBCUs with the financial support they deserve to compensate HBCU faculty and staff equitably.

Keywords: Historically Black Colleges and Universities, HBCUs, Black college students, faculty pay, staff pay, human resources

Introduction

As the United States' economy continues to evolve after the COVID-19 pandemic, colleges and universities in the United States have struggled to recruit and retain both faculty and staff. This struggle has been exemplified by what journalists have dubbed "the Great Resignation" in United States higher education (Seltzer, 2022, para. 1), as 2022 estimates suggest that as high as 25% of employees at colleges and universities in the United States are new since 2019 (Bichsel et al., 2022). In 2023, another 50% of employees indicated that they are actively looking to leave higher education (Clark, 2023; Scaringe, 2023; Schmiedehaus et al., 2023). This struggle has been especially evident at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

(HBCUs) that are often historically underfunded and under supported by state, regional, and federal governments (McLean, 2023). In recent years, executive leaders at HCBUs have turned over at higher rates than at peer institutions (Herder, 2024), while faculty and staff at HBCUs have continued to leave the field at high rates as well (Herder, 2024).

However, speaking to the resiliency of HBCUs, these institutions continue to be the leading institutions in degrees awarded to Black students in the United States and are known as key drivers of Black economic mobility (McKinsey Institute for Black Economic Mobility, 2021). Although a known problem in higher education and at HBCUs, no empirical work has investigated salary discrepancies between HBCUs and their predominantly White institution (PWI) counterparts to explore potential financial inequities. By exploring any possible salary discrepancies, HBCU leadership could better understand how to better position their institutions for the successful recruiting and retaining of faculty, including advocating for increased funding from state or federal government entities or charitable foundations. The most tangential work was completed by Harvard's Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education that surveyed faculty from over 300 institutions across the United States, finding that faculty at HBCUs felt more underpaid (12%) than faculty at PWI counterparts (8%) (Lopez, 2023). No studies have explored staff compensation at HBCUs or conducted a comparative analysis of staff compensation at HBCUs and PWIs,

As a result, this study seeks to explore potential salary discrepancies between HBCUs and other institutions, including PWIs, possibly illuminating human resources inequities that may impact the operation of HBCUs and ultimately the impact that these inequities may have on HBCU students and other stakeholders. For Black college students to optimize their postsecondary experiences at HBCUs, these HBCUs need the resources and support to be able to recruit and retain the best and brightest faculty, helping facilitate research and professional opportunities for Black students seeking to prepare themselves for a highly competitive labor market. From here, this study answers the following questions related to salaries at HBCUs and peer institutions:

RQ1: Do salary discrepancies exist between professionals working at HBCUs and non-HBCUs across the United States?

RQ2: If so, what are these discrepancies and what functional areas suffer from the greatest discrepancies within HBCUs?

By responding to these questions, researchers, policymakers, and HBCU professionals will better understand labor market inequalities suffered by HBCU professionals, informing how policies and practices can shape how HBCUs are funded and how HBCU professionals are supported financially by their institutions. To provide Black students with the best opportunities to be successful after college, these students need to be educated and supported by the best and brightest faculty and staff that HBCUs can employ. In this way, the quality of HBCU faculty and staff is critical for not only the current generation of Black students but generations of Black students to follow. Earning a college degree is not only the surest path to a stable financial life but also facilitates future generations of college-going youth (Herder, 2024), meaning that the quality of HBCU faculty and staff today ultimately impacts the Black students of tomorrow and long after, underscoring the necessity for HBCUs to competitively compensate their faculty and staff to maintain progress toward building both collective wealth and educational attainment for the Black community writ large.

Literature Review

Decades of research have addressed how HBCUs operate, including how HBCUs compose and enact strategic missions and visions (Johnson et al., 2017), support students (Palmer et al., 2010), and serve their communities (Smith et al., 2017), highlighting resource and equity gaps (Herder, 2024; Taylor, 2018, 2019). Relevant to the study at hand, studies have focused on how HBCUs train, recruit, and retain faculty (Jackson, 2002; Perna, 2001), with much less literature on HBCU staff (Addison-Harrell, 2015; Fletcher et al., 2023). Yet, research has consistently iterated that HCBUs suffer from underfunding and accreditation costs that are difficult to fundraise for and maintain due to changing leadership (Herder, 2024) and fiscal policies (Crawford, 2017; McLean, 2023). Moreover, to date, no studies have explored salary discrepancies between HBCUs and non-HBCUs, therefore, HBCU leadership does not possess the empirical evidence that HBCUs are indeed undercompensating their faculty and staff, rendering it more difficult to advocate for funding and resources to recruit and retain faculty and staff. As a result, this brief literature review summarizes the work on HBCU faculty and staff compensation and human resources, helping to inform this study's aims and outcomes.

HBCU Faculty Compensation and Human Resources

Many studies have highlighted how HBCUs have prepared future faculty members (Perna, 2001) and how HBCU faculty members play an integral role in cultivating successful learning environments for HBCU students (Palmer et al., 2010). However, much less is known about how HBCU faculty are compensated compared to their peers at other institutions, with little research focusing on how HBCU faculty may be supported by institutional human resources or other sources of financial support. An early study of HBCU faculty was Jackson's (2002) who found that oftentimes, predominantly White institutions and other institutions can outbid HBCUs for African American faculty, rendering it difficult for HBCUs to compete for the best and brightest Black faculty in the United States. In 2004, Provasnik and Shafer (2004) published descriptive statistics of HBCU salaries, suggesting that HBCU faculty were paid less than peers at non-HBCUs, but no studies have ever followed up on this descriptive report of NCES data, although a recent study by Lopez (2023) found that many HBCU faculty members want to be paid more and do not feel they are adequately compensated by their institution. A single case study was conducted by Palmer and Griffin (2009) to explore salary discrepancies between HBCU and non-HBCU faculty in Maryland, finding that HBCU salaries often lagged behind peers even though all institutions in Maryland were held to similar faculty compensation policies and guidelines through the University of Maryland System.

A study of HBCU business deans, however, asserted that many HBCUs are led by individuals without the business or marketing experience to lead HBCUs toward fiscal stability, leading many HBCUs to compensate faculty beneath their market value (Andrews et al., 2016). One pathway forward suggested by Guy-Sheftall (2006) was for HBCU leaders to facilitate a better sense of shared governance on HBCU campuses, allowing faculty to take more active roles in leadership and promotion of the institution, which would inevitably lead to having a stronger voice on budgetary and fiscal issues. Moreover, Fields (2000) wrote about how HBCU leadership need to assemble high-quality cabinets to help inform how HBCUs can fundraise, advocate for more financial resources, and assemble more competitive financial packages for HBCU faculty, as HBCUs have always struggled with recruiting and retaining faculty through competitive salaries. Nearly two decades later, Prince and Ford (2016) highlighted the difficulty that HBCUs face in advocating for equitable federal and state funding, with private HBCUs relying too heavily on fundraising to pay for human resources expenses including faculty contracts. Similarly, Addison-Harrell (2015) interviewed faculty and staff at HBCUs and found that although these professionals enjoyed their work environment overall, faculty and staff felt underpaid and undervalued by their institution.

However, with the exception of Palmer and Griffin's (2009) case study into HBCU and non-HBCU faculty discrepancies present in the University of Maryland System, no other studies have explored salary discrepancies between faculty and staff at HBCUs and non-HBCUs to explore any human resources inequities between these institution types.

HBCU Staff Compensation and Human Resources

Compared to the empirical research on HBCU faculty, much less is known and understood about HBCU staff. Prior studies of HBCU business deans (Andrews et al., 2016) and HBCU leaders (Guy-Sheftall, 2006) have broadly claimed that funding is a critical and persistent issue that impacts HBCU staff, but the voices of these staff are largely absent from the literature.

In recent years, Addison-Harrell (2015) and Fletcher et al. (2023) explored the perceptions and attitudes of HBCU faculty and staff toward their professional work environment, with both studies finding that HBCU staff often feel undervalued and undercompensated. To remedy this issue, related studies have suggested that HBCUs ought to create long-term, performance-based contracts for HBCU leaders to allow these leaders the time to demonstrate their leadership ability while also paying a competitive salary when compared to PWIs and other competing institutions in the local region (Broussard & Hilton, 2017). However, few studies have focused on entry-level or mid-level management HBCU staff, with the majority of work focusing on executive leaders at HBCUs and their retention and recruitment, which involves competitive compensation packages (Andrews et al., 2016; Broussard & Hilton, 2017; McDemmond, 2013).

Yet to date, no study has conducted a preliminary HBCU staff analysis as Palmer and Griffin (2009) did for HBCU faculty, with no empirical work focusing on HBCU staff and their perceptions toward salary, human resources, or professional compensation. As a result, this study serves as the first to examine both faculty and staff salaries at HBCUs and compare these salaries to peer institutions to explore financial inequities between HCBUs and peer institutions, possibly informing how HBCU leadership can better position their institutions for the successful recruiting and retaining of faculty.

Methods

The study was guided by the hypothesis that non-HBCUs compensate both faculty and staff at all ranks and classifications better than HBCUs, resulting in financial inequities and difficulties recruiting and retaining high quality workers. It is critical to explore this hypothesis, as no prior study has conducted a preliminary HBCU staff analysis as Palmer and Griffin (2009) did for HBCU faculty. As a result, the null and alternative hypotheses of this study are:

H_o: There is no statistically significant difference in professional salaries between HBCUs and non-HBCUs within the same region (United States Congressional District).

H_1: There are statistically significant differences in professional salaries between HBCUs and non-HBCUs within the same region (United States Congressional District).

Data Collection

All data for this study was gathered from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). The most current salary data for institutions of higher education in the United States—including HBCUs—was the 2021-2022 academic year. As a result, this study gathered both institutional characteristics and the most current salary data for 6,225 institutions of higher education. Institutional characteristics included the institution's zip code, sector, latitude and longitude coordinates, state, bureau of economic activity region, and HBCU indicator. By gathering this information, we were able to explore possible differences in professional salaries between HBCUs and non-HBCUs, controlling for various institutional characteristics, such as zip code, sector, and others previously mentioned. This approach moves beyond Provasnik and Shafer's (2004) and Palmer and Griffin's (2009) work to explore possible salary inequities across all HBCUs in the United States while controlling for institutional characteristics.

IPEDS requires the reporting of specific faculty salary data including average salaries reported for all full-time instructional staff on 9- and 12-month contracts (including assistant professor, associate professor, lecturer, and unranked faculty). However, IPEDS requires the reporting of professional salary data by overall number of professionals in a certain unit and the overall salary outlays of that unit, resulting in a manual calculation of average salary. Regarding professional units and outlays, we gathered salary data: 1) research, 2) public service, 3) library, 4) management, 5) business and fiscal operations, 6) computer engineering and science, 7) community, social service, legal, arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media, 8) healthcare practitioners and technical, 9) service, 10) sales, 11) office and administrative support, 12) natural resources, construction, and maintenance, and 13) production, transportation, and material moving. Data can be provided by the authors upon request.

Data Analysis

To explore salary differences between HBCUs and non-HBCUs, we first calculated the overall means in salaries across all IPEDS professional units and outlays, facilitating an unpaired t-test to explore any statistically significant differences (see Table 1). Then, in a histogram, we plotted mean values across all IPEDS professional units and outlays to facilitate ease of interpretation, displaying HBCU and non-HBCU salary means. Finally, the data in Table 2 and 3 parses mean salaries by congressional district as a proxy for geographic location, allowing us to explore whether geography plays a role in salary discrepancies, as prior work (Palmer & Griffin, 2009) only explored HBCU salary data from one state (Maryland). As a result, to expand upon prior work, we analyzed mean salaries across non-HBCUs and HBCUs by congressional district to better understand any geographical differences that may be present within the data. Lastly, we explored sector differences (two-year, four-year, etc.) to better understand if salary discrepancies varied between non-HBCU and HBCU employees working in different sectors (Table 4).

Limitations

This study was limited in several ways, including the reliability of institutionally reported salary data to IPEDS and the limited understanding of salary contexts and decisions in general in higher education. Although institutions of higher education regularly report salary data to IPEDS, these data are reported by both mean salary and outlays, forcing the researcher to calculate salaries based on the overall number of reported professional positions per salary outlay. Here, although nearly all mean salaries in this study were reported by institutions per professional unit, we did need to calculate some mean salaries, even though professional positions may not be compensated equally within the overall salary outlay. Moreover, many employees may make less or more depending on how salary was calculated and reported by institutions and whether an employee made additional money as a contractor, consultant, or specialist for the institution or another organization. Similarly, only mean salaries are reported to IPEDS, which does not consider non-salaried staff who may be eligible and work overtime, suggesting mean salaries may be underestimations of real salaries. However, this study is an important elaboration of Palmer and Griffin's (2009) work, and this study's novelty and timeliness may overcome these limitations for many readers.

Findings

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics and results of unpaired t-tests comparing salary means between HBCUs and non-HBCUs. Results in Table 1 suggest that HBCUs, across every professional unit, pay less in mean salary than non-HBCUs. Moreover, salary discrepancies are not uniform across all professional units, as unranked faculty and public service employees at HBCUs are paid over $15,000 less per year than the same types of employees at non-HBCUs. Inversely, other instructional staff, office/administrative support employees, and several other categories of professional units had much smaller pay gaps, ranging from $1,621 to roughly $4,000 among the five professional units with the smallest salary discrepancies. Additionally, each salary discrepancy between HBCUs and non-HBCUs was statistically significant with the exceptions of transportation employees (p = 0.12) and other instructional staff (p = 0.56). Here, there is ample evidence to reject the null hypothesis and argue that HBCU salaries are much lower to a statistically significant degree than non-HBCU across nearly all professional units in higher education.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of average salaries across faculty and staff positions, 2021-2022

Titles	**Mean Non-HBCU Salary**	**Mean HBCU Salary**	**Salary Discrepancy at HBCUs**	**P-value**
Unranked Faculty	$74,943.32	$57,827.71	$17,115.61	0.002***
Public Service	$74,681.91	$58,631.83	$16,050.08	<0.001***
Lecturer	$79,850.41	$68,706.47	$11,143.94	0.01**
Research Staff	$76,322.95	$65,550.22	$10,772.73	0.001***
Instructor	$69,822.91	$59,548.67	$10,274.24	0.001***
Associate Professor	$99,523.48	$89,639.56	$9,883.92	0.002***
Professor	$116,560.40	$106,715.40	$9,845.00	0.04**
Maintenance	$51,541.53	$43,379.00	$8,162.53	<0.001***
Computer Science	$65,386.67	$58,137.68	$7,248.99	<0.001***
Management	$107,010.40	$99,815.29	$7,195.11	0.005***

Assistant Professor	\$84,888.02	\$78,498.59	\$6,389.43	0.01**
CSS Legal and Arts	\$58,804.32	\$53,369.84	\$5,434.48	<0.001***
Services	\$42,591.38	\$37,340.16	\$5,251.22	<0.001***
Business and Finance	\$63,966.77	\$58,999.31	\$4,967.46	0.02**
Librarians	\$55,381.06	\$50,503.99	\$4,877.07	<0.001**
Sales and Related	\$48,805.49	\$44,808.99	\$3,996.50	0.07*
Transportation	\$48,468.44	\$44,577.92	\$3,890.52	0.12
Healthcare	\$63,101.96	\$59,660.68	\$3,441.28	0.05*
OAS	\$45,155.72	\$42,136.88	\$3,018.84	<0.001***
Other Instructional Staff	\$82,917.40	\$81,295.78	\$1,621.62	0.56

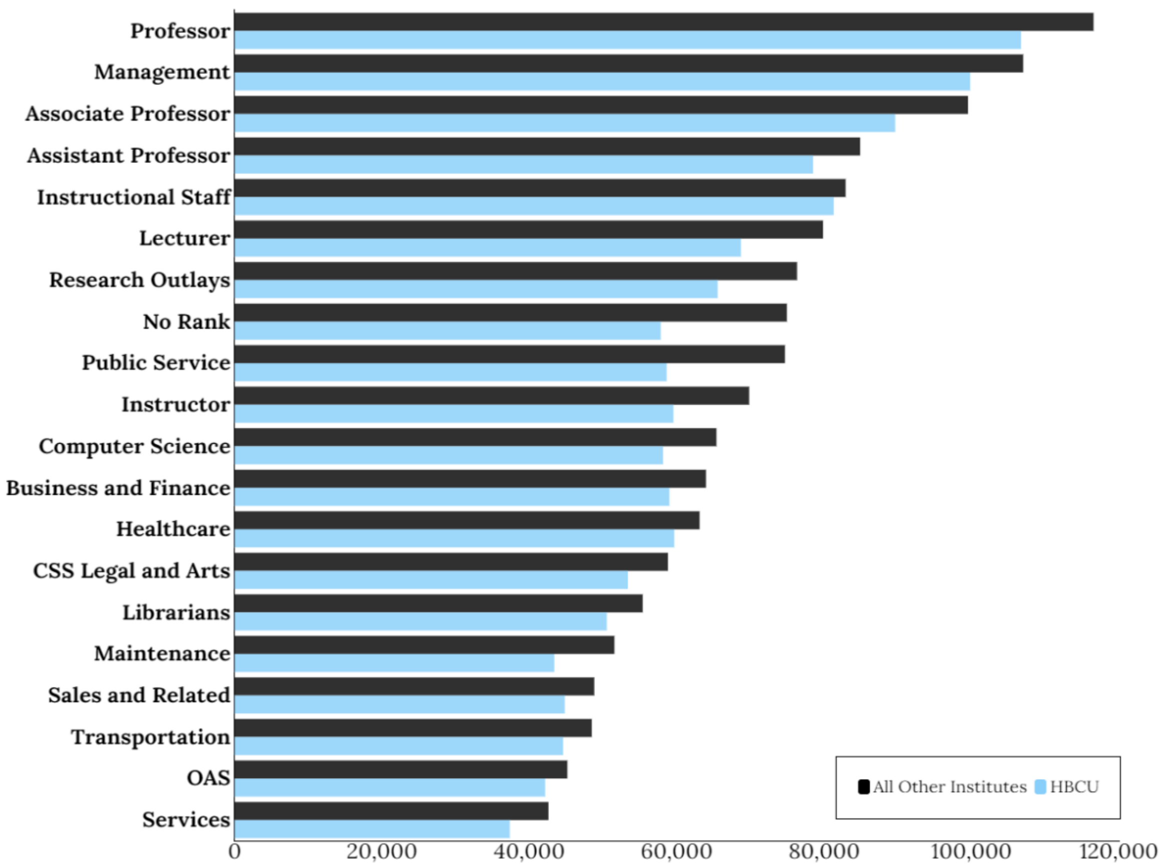
Note: *$p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Visualizing Inequity and Salary Stratification

Figure 1 visualizes overall mean salaries by non-HBCUs and HBCUs, suggesting that all types of institutions typically pay professional units similarly, with full professors and management making the highest salaries within non-HBCUs and HBCUs. Moreover, the highest paid salaries at both non-HBCU and HBCUs (roughly \$100,000-120,000), make nearly three times the mean salary than services and office/administrative support employees (roughly \$40,000), suggesting considerable pay discrepancies between professional units in higher education.

Figure 1

Histogram displaying non-HBCU and HBCU salary discrepancies by overall salary



Exploring Geographic Differences

Data in Table 2 displays mean salaries of non-HBCU and HBCU employees within congressional districts, along with paired t-tests by congressional district. Here, data in Table 2 suggests that many of the same salary discrepancies between non-HBCUs and HBCUs are also present when controlling for geography, as public service employees at HBCUs are paid nearly $33,000 less within different congressional districts than public service employees at non-HBCUs. Large salary gaps also exist among professors, no rank faculty, associate professors, and research staff, with professionals in these units experiencing over $12,000 salary discrepancies at HBCUs compared to non-HBCUs. Considering geography, data in Table 2 clearly illustrates differences compared to Table 1 regarding instructional faculty (professors, associate professors, etc.), suggesting that when controlling for geography, instructional faculty at HBCUs lag further behind peers at non-HBCUs when considering yearly mean salaries.

Moreover, salary discrepancies were statistically significant across many professional units with the exceptions of public service employees ($p < 0.149$), lecturers ($p < 0.164$), and several other units. Yet, when controlling for geography, professionals at HBCUs working in transportation, office/administrative support, and business and finance units made more than non-HBCU peers: these differences were not statistically significant, however. Here Table 2 presents more evidence to reject the null hypothesis and argue that HBCU professionals are paid much less than non-HBCU professionals within similar units with several exceptions.

Table 2

Paired t-tests comparing mean salaries of non-HBCUs and HBCUs within congressional district

	Mean Non-HBCU	**Mean HBCU**	**Difference**	**P-value**
Public Service	$91,517.00	$58,675.00	$32,842.00	0.149
Professor	$123,260.00	$106,668.00	$16,593.00	0.009***
No Rank Faculty	$71,732.00	$57,408.00	$14,324.00	0.093*
Associate Professor	$102,259.00	$89,888.00	$12,371.00	0.000***
Research Staff	$78,948.00	$66,904.00	$12,045.00	0.021**
Instructor	$67,221.00	$59,558.00	$7,663.00	0.052*
Lecturer	$75,561.00	$68,035.00	$7,526.00	0.164
Assistant Professor	$85,572.00	$80,661.00	$4,911.00	0.011**
CSS Legal and Arts	$57,670.00	$53,803.00	$3,867.00	0.025**
Maintenance	$47,328.00	$43,623.00	$3,706.00	0.004***
Healthcare	$62,051.00	$59,153.00	$2,898.00	0.072*
Computer Science	$60,621.00	$57,758.00	$2,863.00	0.161
Instructional Staff	$84,542.00	$82,405.00	$2,137.00	0.369
Management	$103,787.00	$102,224.00	$1,564.00	0.683

Librarians	$52,124.00	$51,200.00	$924.00	0.556
Sales and Related	$44,293.00	$43,892.00	$401.00	0.559
Services	$39,439.00	$39,316.00	$123.00	0.981
Transportation	$43,105.00	$43,751.00	$646.00	0.597
OAS	$42,042.00	$42,933.00	$891.00	0.324
Business and Finance	$59,259.00	$60,867.00	$1,609.00	0.414

Note: *$p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Moreover, data in Table 3 displays descriptive statistics of numbers of congressional districts across non-HBCUs and HBCUs by mean salary. This data suggests that business and finance, office/administrative support, and services professionals have similar opportunities to be paid more than peers within different congressional districts. For example, across 31 different congressional districts, HBCU professionals working in business and finance make more than peers at non-HBCUs. However, near the bottom of the table, instructors at non-HBCUs made higher mean salaries than HBCU peers within 48 congressional districts while the inverse was true in only 7 districts where HBCU instructors made more than non-HBCUs. Although HBCUs are not located in every congressional district in the United States, data in Table 3 clearly show that professionals working for non-HBCUs have many more geographic opportunities by congressional district to make higher mean salaries than they would at HBCUs.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of congressional districts and non-HBCU and HBCU salaries

	# Districts where non-HBCUs make more	**# Districts where HBCU make more**
Business and Finance	26	31
OAS	27	30
Services	27	30
Management	31	26
Librarians	32	25

Instructional Staff	34	23
Computer Science	36	21
CSS Legal and Arts	36	21
Healthcare	37	20
Transportation	39	16
Assistant Professor	41	15
Maintenance	42	15
Professor	45	12
Research	35	11
Sales and Related	44	10
Public Service	27	9
Lecturer	32	8
Associate Professor	48	8
Instructor	48	7
No Rank Faculty	44	5

Exploring Sector Differences

Finally, we conducted paired t-tests to explore mean salary differences between non-HBCUs and HBCUs across different sectors. The average difference in salaries between HBCUs and non-HBCUs were not statistically different based on sector. Coupled with data in Table 2 and 3, data in Table 4 suggest that institutional sectors are not a contributing factor to salary discrepancies between non-HBCU and HBCU professionals, while professional unit and geography are contributing factors.

Table 4

Paired t-tests comparing mean salaries between non-HBCUs and HBCUs across different sectors

	Private not-for-profit 4 year	Public 2-year	Private, not-for-profit 2 year
Public 4-year	$p = 0.31$	$p = 0.83$	$p = 0.24$
Private not-for-profit 4 year		$p = 0.87$	$p = 0.29$
Public 2-year			$p = 0.97$

Discussion

This study successfully answered its research questions and addressed its hypotheses related to salary equity and HBCUs in the United States. Building upon Palmer and Griffin's (2009) prior work in the state of Maryland, data in this study suggests that HBCU professionals may experience large salary discrepancies when compared to non-HBCU professionals, with gaps widening across several professional units and geographic locations. Even though HBCUs continue to be the leading institutions in degrees awarded to Black college students in the United States and are known as key drivers of Black economic mobility (McKinsey Institute for Black Economic Mobility, 2021), data in this study suggest that professionals working at these HBCUs are not compensated at the same level as their peers. Here, much is implied in terms of research, policy, and practice for the modern HBCU and its leadership who wants to remain competitive in the labor market for the best and brightest talent to choose to work—and continue working—at HBCUs.

First, recent reports have suggested that HBCUs continue to suffer from underfunding, allowing better resourced institutions the ability to recruit and retain professionals by offering higher salaries and better benefit packages (McLean, 2023). Years ago, Palmer and Griffin (2009) suggested that there were serious salary gaps between HBCU and non-HBCU professionals in the state of Maryland, possibly contributing to the high turnover of HBCU professionals compared to peers at non-HBCUs. The study at hand makes the same argument, suggesting that turnover rate among HBCU professionals may be higher than at non-HBCUs due to salary discrepancies, echoed by prior, current research (Herder, 2024). Here, HBCU leaders must align with policymakers to advocate for more federal and state funding to remain competitive and facilitate higher salaries across many professional units. It simply should not be the case that non-HBCUs can pay an average of $91,517 (controlling for geography) while HBCUs can only pay $58,675 for work within the same professional unit (see Table 2). These salary inequities are unacceptable: in no uncertain terms should HBCU professionals be devalued in such a way when they conduct similar work within similar professional units as non-HBCU professionals. Moreover, coupled with the historic, longitudinal discrimination faced by HBCU students and institutions themselves, reparations must be made to rectify HBCU salary inequities and fundamentally change how individuals in the labor market view HBCUs.

Here, institutional improvement grants and minority-serving institutional initiatives could be expanded, including expanding the Title III-B (Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities Program) government title program specifically for HBCUs. Hispanic-Serving Institutions have long benefitted from the Title V program facilitated by the U.S. federal government which has provided institutions and researchers with funds to improve Hispanic-Serving Institutions and render these institutions more competitive in the labor market and more able to recruit and retain high quality professionals (U.S. Department of Education, 2024). The Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities Program should be expanded for HBCUs to specifically include professional development for current HBCU leadership and staff, along with annual appropriations that facilitate more competition in the labor market to allow HBCUs to better compete with their peers. In addition, HBCU leaders should engage with private industry and philanthropists to fundraise for salaries and professional development if the federal government does not act in HBCUs' best interests.

Additionally, this study suggests that HBCU professionals have limited options in terms of upward mobility through geography, as data in Tables 2 and 3 suggest that non-HBCU professionals are paid more than many HBCU professionals working across many professional units. Also, there are greater numbers of congressional districts that contain non-HBCUs that pay more than HBCUs, stifling both competition for labor and the ability for HBCU professionals to move upward in their career through changing institutions and geography. As of 2022, there are only 101 HBCUs in the United States, primarily located in the U.S. South and East. Here, HBCU professionals already have limited options in terms of professional advancement considering the small number of HBCUs currently in operation. As a result, HBCU leaders should consider developing a singular professional network for HBCU professionals to allow for transitioning between HBCUs and ample opportunity for professional development. Here, such a network would allow HBCUs to keep their own, to retain HBCU employees within HBCUs, strengthening the leadership pipeline and enriching the HBCU knowledge of professional faculty and staff. Similarly, HBCU leaders should investigate the salary structures of peer, non-HBCUs within their local region or congressional district to explore how these non-HBCUs support higher salaries and whether HBCUs can fundraise or advocate for additional funds to remain competitive and retain their own employees.

Finally, although an important elaboration of Palmer and Griffin's (2009) work, much more research is needed to build upon this study and move HBCUs further toward salary equity. For example, little is known about the experiences of HBCU staff beyond student services (Addison-Harrell, 2015; Fletcher et al., 2023), when this study suggests that the greatest levels of salary inequity within HBCUs may be experienced by public service professionals, research staff, and instructional faculty. Here, much more research is needed regarding how HBCU professionals view their salaries and benefits and whether their institution has optimized the resources necessary to provide salary increases and ample professional development opportunities. Moreover, further analyses are needed to better understand how mean salaries are calculated and whether IPEDS salary data is accurate. Here, nation-wide surveys of HBCU and non-HBCU professionals should be conducted to understand, from the employee directly, how much employees are making and whether further salary inequities are present.

Such endeavors would help HBCU leadership demonstrate resource and financial gaps to better advocate for additional local-, state-, and federal-level support to compensate HBCU professionals equitably. Concretely, HBCU leaders and advocates could leverage this study and nation-wide HBCU survey data and address their legislators, particularly federal legislators, for updates to the U.S Department of Education's Title III Part B (Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities Program) (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Therein. HCBU leaders and advocates could ask for increasing funding levels to support HBCU professionals at the same level as their non-HBCU peers or a federally supported HBCU professional retention program that leverages federal funds, rather than institutional funds, to help HBCUs recruit and retain their professionals.

Conclusion

Arguably, beyond its data and reporting, this study's major contribution to the literature is an underscoring of the fact that HBCU professionals—and the institutions themselves—are still experiencing financial inequities in the form of lower salaries than peers. The empirical research has already documented the negative impact of low salaries, including high turnover and an inability to recruit qualified, talented professionals to move HBCUs forward (Herder, 2024; Lopez, 2023; Palmer & Griffin, 2009). Moreover, related research has already identified resource gaps between HBCUs and non-HBCUs regarding technology infrastructure (Taylor, 2018) and support for students with disabilities (Taylor, 2019), echoing the fact that HBCUs do not receive the same resources to provide student support as non-HBCUs, specifically predominantly White Institutions. In this regard, this study serves as a reminder that although HBCUs have made considerable progress in the last fifty years across many student success metrics, HBCU professionals continue to be undercompensated, as these professionals are experiencing salary inequities that should not persist for the next fifty years of HBCU history.

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