

UNCF FAQs

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IMPACT

What does UNCF do?

UNCF (the United Negro College Fund) invests in better futures for students, communities and the nation by helping African Americans and other students of color go to and through college so they can compete for the best jobs in the 21st-century economy. In pursuit of its mission, UNCF:

- Awards more than 10,000 scholarships under 400 programs each year to help students at more than 1,100 colleges and universities attend college, earn their degrees and launch their careers.
- Gives its 37 member historically black colleges and universities financial and other support so they can keep their academic programs strong and their tuition affordable and give their 50,000-plus students the education that they need and deserve and that the economy requires.
- Advocates in Washington, DC, and around the country for the importance of college education and college readiness.

How does UNCF achieve its successful outcomes?

The return on your investment in UNCF and better futures is measured in students graduating from college. More than 445,000 students have earned college degrees from UNCF-member HBCUs and with UNCF scholarships, a total that increases by more than 8,000 every year. Recent research by UNCF's Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute highlights UNCF's recipe for success:

- UNCF-member HBCUs out-perform non-HBCUs at graduating students from low-income families—the students the country most needs to go to and through college.
- HBCUs are more affordable, costing an average of 27 percent less than comparable non-HBCUs.
- African American recipients of UNCF scholarships have a higher 6-year graduation rate, more than 70 percent, than non-recipients. In fact, UNCF scholarship students graduate at nearly twice the rate of all African American students. That impact, extrapolated to all African American college students, would increase the annual number of African Americans earning college degrees by nearly 16,000 annually.

Those college graduates are the return on your investment in UNCF and better futures.

They are your dividends.

Why is it important to support UNCF-member historically black colleges and universities?

At a time when a college education is the prerequisite for entry into the economy's best and fastest-growing jobs and career paths, research from UNCF's Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute shows that HBCUs out-perform non-HBCUs by 14 percentage points at graduating students from low-income, African American families. Research also shows that it costs students at HBCUs less—an average of 26 percent lower—than students at comparable non-HBCUs. With these advantages, it's not surprising that more students graduate from UNCF-member HBCUs today than in 1972, the first year of "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."[®]

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Why is UNCF, an organization with “college” in its name, so actively involved in making sure that students of color get a better education *before* college?

Students’ ability to enter and succeed in college requires a strong education before college, from kindergarten through high school graduation. But research by UNCF and ACT, the nation’s leading college-testing organization, shows that African American students continue to lag behind those from other racial groups in meeting ACT College Readiness benchmarks. The research demonstrates that academic gaps begin before high school. African American students are more than four times as likely as white students, for example, to attend schools with less qualified teachers. Districts serving the most students of color receive about \$2,000, or 15 percent, less per student than districts serving the fewest students of color. And schools with high African American enrollment have less access to high-level math and science courses than schools with low African American enrollment.

Unless solid academic foundations are established in primary and secondary schools, large numbers of African American students will continue to be academically underprepared and to need remedial courses in college or not to attend college at all. So an organization that, like UNCF, is committed to increasing the number of students of color attending and graduating from college must work to increase the number of students receiving a pre-college education that prepares them for college coursework and college success.

Does UNCF help only African Americans?

Not at all. UNCF’s member colleges and universities admit students without reference to race or ethnicity. UNCF’s largest scholarship program, the Gates Millennium Scholars Program, supports Hispanic American, Asian/Pacific American and Native American students as well as African Americans.

Does UNCF provide internships?

Yes. Many UNCF programs offer students the opportunity to supplement classroom learning with paid, hands-on experience in professions they may be considering. The UNCF/Merck Science Initiative, for example, offers internships with the global pharmaceutical corporation. UNCF Gateway to Leadership internships offer experiences in the financial services industry. And the UNCF/Walton K-12 Education Reform Fellowship Program places participants in positions that give them experience building a robust pipeline of high-achieving African Americans engaged in education reform.

I know students who encounter financial emergencies in the middle of the academic year, between the times scholarships are awarded. What can I do to help?

For low-income families—like the 92 percent of UNCF students who qualify for financial aid—financial emergencies are always just around the corner: a parent’s layoff or pay cut, an eliminated after-school job. Such emergencies can put college education at risk. Students may have to drop out. Seniors may not be able to graduate. And once students leave before graduating, they are apt never to return. UNCF created the Campaign for Emergency Student Aid (CESA) precisely for students facing these emergencies. Since CESA’s founding in 2009, more than 12,000 CESA scholarships, with a value of more than \$25 million, have been awarded—thousands of students, our next generation of college-educated professionals and civic leaders, enabled to stay in college to pursue and complete their degrees.

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INSPIRE

What is the significance of “A mind is a terrible thing to waste, but a wonderful thing to invest in”[®]?

UNCF’s universally recognized motto, “A mind is a terrible thing to waste,”[®] proclaims the fundamental imperative for UNCF’s commitment to giving all Americans the opportunity for a college education: the conviction that our young people are our most precious resource.

In recent years, UNCF has expanded the iconic motto to read “A mind is a terrible thing to waste, but a wonderful thing to invest in.”[®] The enhanced motto underscores that helping students go to and through college is not only the right thing to do, but is also an investment in the economic and social future of families, communities and the country. The support that UNCF receives from individuals, corporations and foundations is the nation’s investment. The 60,000 students who attend college at UNCF-member institutions and with UNCF scholarships, the 8,000-plus who receive undergraduate and graduate each year, and the college-educated professionals they become are the return on that investment. They are our dividends.

At this point in our history, why does the U.S. still need an educational organization and programs targeted at African Americans and other students of color?

Much progress has been made since UNCF was founded in 1944 and especially since “A mind is a terrible thing to waste”[®] was created more than 40 years ago and helped to change the way Americans think about race and education. But the persistent achievement gap between Americans of color and the majority population, and the string of episodes from Ferguson to Baltimore to Charleston and beyond, testify to how far we still have to go to reach racial equality. Educational opportunity must be an important part of that journey. But the high cost of college and lower income levels for many African Americans, and the fact that African Americans disproportionately do not receive a high school education that adequately prepares them for college, African American rates of college attendance and graduation are still much lower than those of other groups. At a time when college opportunity is an indispensable part of our national quest for social and economic justice, the nation needs students to be able to go to and through college, and it needs to draw on the experience of HBCUs and UNCF in making that happen.

Do students have to attend a UNCF-member college to receive financial support?

No. UNCF provides support to students at more than 1,100 colleges across the country—including elite private colleges, flagship state universities and historically black colleges and universities.

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INNOVATE

What is UNCF's Gates Millennium Scholars Program, and how does it help students get the support they need to get to and through college?

Funded by a \$1.6 billion grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the UNCF Gates Millennium Scholars Program (GMS) is a 20-year initiative that provides low-income students of color with the financial, academic and social support that college students from higher-income families take for granted. GMS recipients have a graduation rate of 90 percent, substantially higher than the national 6-year graduation rate of 61 percent and comparable to the rates for students from higher income families. This record of success demonstrates that, given a level playing field, students of color can not only compete but excel in education and in life.

The American economy is increasingly entrepreneurial. Does UNCF offer support for entrepreneurial-minded students?

The UNCF/Koch Scholars Program provides undergraduate and graduate scholarships, online support, mentorship opportunities and an annual summit aimed at broadening educational opportunities so that aspiring African American students can better understand how entrepreneurship, economics and innovation contribute to well-being for individuals, communities and society.

Economic projections point to a need for approximately 1 million more STEM professionals over the next decade if the country is to retain its historical preeminence in science and technology. What is UNCF doing to help students get the education they need to qualify for these positions?

UNCF recently launched the UNCF/Fund II Foundation STEM Scholars Program. The program will identify 500 highly motivated and academically talented African American high school students who are committed to pursuing STEM majors in college and careers in STEM industries. In addition to providing scholarship support, the program will also support students through mentoring and access to internships that will help prepare students for the tech-workforce. The program also exposes students to the principles of startup tech-entrepreneurship and offers them a unique opportunity to pursue their own entrepreneurial ventures upon graduation.

I read that many college graduates are unable to find the kind of well-paid jobs their degrees qualify them for. What is UNCF doing to help them?

UNCF has created the UNCF Career Pathways Initiative. This \$50 million initiative, funded by Lilly Endowment, is supporting the efforts of selected HBCUs, like those that belong to UNCF, and Predominantly Black Institutions to help students gain the knowledge, preparation, insight and skills needed for meaningful employment in the technology-driven global economy.

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INVEST

Why do we need more college graduates?

The workforce and workforce requirements are changing. There was a time when a high school diploma and a good work ethic qualified a worker for a good job. But today almost all the fastest-growing and best-paying jobs and career paths require a college education, and employers need college-educated employees to compete in the global economy. And with the U.S. on track to become a “majority-minority” country (a country with a majority of people of color), many of the new college graduates the country needs will have to come from the ranks of African Americans and other Americans of color—exactly the young women and men whom UNCF HBCUs and UNCF scholarship programs excel in enrolling and graduating.

In addition to paying students’ college costs, do UNCF scholarships make it more likely that their recipients will graduate from college?

Research by UNCF’s Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute demonstrates that recipients of UNCF scholarships are, as a group, significantly more likely to graduate than non-recipients. The Patterson Institute’s *Building Better Futures: The Value of a UNCF Investment* reported that the predominantly low-income African American recipients of UNCF scholarships had a 6-year graduation rate of 70 percent—substantially higher than the graduation rate for all students. These outcomes suggest that if funding permitted all African American students to receive UNCF scholarships, the annual number of African Americans earning college degrees would increase by 15,876 annually, contributing significantly to the country’s college completion goals.

How can I volunteer to help?

UNCF offices across the country work all year long helping students go to and through college by hosting galas, walkathons and other fundraising events, and those same offices work in the local community to make sure students get the education they need to go to college and graduate. If you want to help, go to UNCF.org and click on the office closest to you to get a phone number you can call to find out about volunteer opportunities.