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## HBCUs continue to be relevant as they prepare students of color

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NEW ORLEANS (March 28, 2022) – With more than 100 historically black colleges and universities in the United States, HBCUs outperform other institutions in retaining and graduating first-generation, low-income African American students, according to the United Negro College Fund.

I'm offering a timely reminder as I prepare to graduate that, as President Walter Kimbrough said in his recent Honors Convocation speech, "Excellence lives here."

Created after the Civil War, HBCUs provided refuge as it aimed to educate black people when white institutions would not. Even today, HBCUs like Dillard are known for taking students in, accepting them where they are in their learning journey and getting them where they need to be by graduation.

I believe HBCUs also are important because they help African Americans make connections as students prepare to achieve their goals.

I attend Dillard University, a private historically black college founded in 1869. I have enjoyed my time at Dillard University because of the people I have met and the connections I have made.

Making connections is the key to success in any major. I have been able to connect with my mass communication professors. My professors have taught me what is required of a young journalist, and I've followed their advice. I started as a reporter for the Courtbouillon student newspaper for a class, moved to managing editor in my junior year and became editor-in-chief in my senior year. As a senior, I am proud of the accumulation of published "clips" for my portfolio, which is so important in my chosen field.

If I had chosen to attend a predominantly white institution, or PWI, I feel I would have been another number. Dillard University cares about my success, and I don't feel displaced. As I prepare to head

to graduate school at a PWI, I feel prepared and confident because of Dillard's nurturing atmosphere and high expectations.

Famous people have attended HBCUs, including Vice President Kamala Harris, television host Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and former professional athlete and television host Michael Strahan, to name just a few.

During my time at Dillard, prominent people have come to speak to students. In 2021, actor Michael Ealy spoke at Dillard University's commencement. He came back this spring to speak about his acting career. We've had first lady Michelle Obama here, actor Denzel Washington, actor Jurnee Smollett and so many more musicians and other celebrities. Grammy winner PJ Morton was an artist-in-residence last year.

I have taken advantage of the opportunities provided by Dillard. In spring 2020, I visited historical landmarks in Atlanta through an alternative spring break program. I've worked with student media and am about to get additional professional experience working with a sports news crew at the Final Four.

Students are proud to be a part of HBCUs. Paulina Webber, a junior English major from Little Rock, Arkansas, who also is in the pre-law program, said, "Being at an HBCU has allowed me to develop connections and evolve my networking skills to open doors in the legal field."

HBCUs will always be relevant in society as they give that extra push to excel while students build their confidence. I encourage those who come behind me to make the most of the challenges and opportunities that schools such as Dillard provide.