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No, 96% of Black tenured faculty are not at HBCUs

by Kim Weeden | February 7, 2016



Harvard. White, but not literally ivory.

What percentage of Black tenured professors work at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs)? In an article in the January 29 *Washington Post*, education journalist Valerie Strauss [states that it's 96%](#). Not surprisingly, this statistic quickly fed into the social media outrage machine, and has been widely distributed.

[Strauss](#) linked to a November blog post that she published in the *Post*, by [Leslie Fenwick and Patrick Swygert](#), who wrote:

Of course, the majority of the nation's tenured black faculty are at historically black colleges/universities (HBCUs). Most earned their doctoral or other terminal degrees at traditionally white institutions, but despite these credentials are not vigorously recruited or advanced into the ranks of tenured faculty in large numbers at TWIs. Remarkably, **96 percent of black tenured faculty are at HBCUs** (even though HBCUs comprise only 3 percent of the nation's 3000 colleges and universities). If HBCUs disappeared, so would most of the nation's black academics.

Unfortunately, the statistic doesn't pass the sniff test. HBCUs are an *important* feature on the landscape of American higher education, but they aren't a *large* feature on that landscape.

According to the publicly available [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#) (IPEDs), the main federal repository for data on higher education in the US, there are approximately 100 HBCUs, out of about 7,500 post-secondary institutions. Granted, a surprising number of these 7,500 are hair and cosmetology schools. But, even if you limit the search to degree-granting institutions, more than 4,800 colleges and universities are listed in IPEDs.

HBCUs thus make up only about 2% of the total number of colleges and universities. And, although a handful of HBCUs employ more than 1,000 instructional staff, most are much smaller. If HBCU's really employed 96% of all Black tenured academics, the number of Black tenured academics at the remaining 4,700 colleges and universities would need to be implausibly small. Sniff test, failed.

But if it's not true 96% of the Black tenured faculty work at HBCUs, what is the correct percentage? In 2013, the most recent year of mandatory reporting to IPEDs, there were about 14,400 Black tenured academics in the US, not counting those at institutions with missing data. This includes full professors, associate professors, assistant professors, lecturers, instructors, and faculty with "no academic rank."

Incidentally, 14,400 Black tenured academics constitute only 4.7% of the total number of tenured academics in the US.

In 2013, HBCUs (excluding 6 with missing data) reported 6,159 tenured academics, of all ranks. Of these, 3,178 or 52% are Black.

Race, rank, and institution type of tenured faculty in the US: 2013

Rank/title	ALL TYPES			HBCUs			HBCU Black as
	Black	All races	% Black	Black	all races	% Black	% of all Black
Full professor	5,344	152,704	3%	1,245	2,396	52%	23%
Associate professor	6,253	112,041	6%	1,444	2,741	53%	23%
Assistant professor	1,101	10,472	11%	347	577	60%	32%
Instructor	1,017	19,000	5%	21	60	35%	2%
Lecturer	107	595	18%	3	3	100%	3%
No academic rank	565	8,374	7%	118	382	31%	21%
Total	14,387	303,186	5%	3,178	6,159	52%	22%

The correct answer to the question: **22%**. The *Post* articles, and whatever the original source may have been, are off by a factor of more than 4.

Would America's colleges, students, and economy benefit from more diversity (of all kinds) among the professoriate? Yes, absolutely. But grossly exaggerated claims about the level of racial segregation in American higher education do a disservice to those of us who believe in both the value of diversity and the value of data.

(Oh, and it turns out that women own more than [1% of world's property](#), too.)

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