

INVEST

Black Females Moving Forward in Computing Program Launched



Making impact for students is important across the board and finding new avenues in growing industries is always key, especially for HBCUs. One area that HBCUs have excelled in preparing students for is the dynamic computer science and technology industry. The tech industry is one of the fastest-growing career fields worldwide. With jobs ranging from software developer to information security analyst to computer network architect to web developer—the technology sector has an ever-increasing number of opportunities and career paths. Our nation’s HBCUs do an incredible job at preparing students for careers in the technology field. Twenty-five percent of African Americans with STEM degrees (which includes technology-related degrees) are graduates of HBCUs. Of that, 46% of those graduates are Black women.

Yet, Black women are lagging behind in this very high-paying career field. Even though many Black women have made significant strides within technology, Black women are significantly underrepresented across the computer sciences spectrum—making up only 3% of the tech workforce. And even fewer Black women have leadership roles in Silicon Valley (less than .5%).

Why? While the pipeline of Black women with computer science degrees is growing, they are less likely than their white and Asian counterparts to actually land jobs in the field. Some blame biased hiring practices or having fewer Black professionals working in the field. Whatever the reason—the fact is that there is a considerable diversity gap in the tech industry workforce and in leadership.

As a solution to attract more Black women to careers and professional connections in computing, in 2019, UNCF teamed up with Reboot Representation Tech Coalition to establish the Black Females Moving Forward in Computing Program (BFF). Reboot Representation Tech Coalition, led by CEO Dwana Franklin-Davis, has set an ambitious and attainable goal to double the number of Black, Latina and Native American women receiving computing degrees by 2025. And to meet that goal, the organization has provided UNCF a \$423,000 grant to help African American women succeed in the field.

The new UNCF BFF program will build a community of skilled Black women focused on entering careers in computing. Through the virtual professional development program, participants will receive academic support on computing-related curriculum and virtual networking opportunities via the online platform, Codio—a cloud-based platform that provides a unique integrated digital learning environment for students to engage in computer science assignments while receiving instantaneous feedback, instruction and mentoring. The investment from Reboot also includes faculty support to further develop Codio modules.

High impact tutorials and lectures will be delivered to the scholars by doctoral-level professors and experienced industry professionals to serve as resources and foster degree completion and workforce readiness for the computer tech industry.

“This program is unique among our professional development opportunities,” said Taliah Givens, senior director of student professional development programs. “The structure, resources and mentoring targeted to the field of computing encapsulates UNCF’s mission of supporting students to and through college and into rewarding careers.”

To date, UNCF has accepted 100 Black women, currently enrolled in computing related degrees, into the BFF program. Once participants complete the program, 15 women will be eligible to receive scholarships in the amount of \$5,000 for the 2021-22 academic year and \$5,000 for the 2022-23 academic year.

“We have an extraordinary opportunity to move the needle for Black women pursuing degrees in computing by providing academic supports and mentorship,” said Dr. Chad Womack, senior director of STEM initiatives and HBCU innovation, commercialization and entrepreneurship at UNCF. “This initiative will grant participants access to a vast network of resources, and we believe will help change the trajectory of Black women within this significant area of our economy.”

That’s the kind of innovation and impact that makes a real difference for students and HBCUs both, helping African American students connect to careers in a field that needs them and pays well.

And, Reboot’s support of the new UNCF BFF program shows there’s no better way to Invest in Better Futures.®