UNCF Reimagines Online Education with HBCUv™ Platform

THE NEW HBCUVTM PLATFORM IS CURRENTLY BEING DEVELOPED AND WILL SUPPORT STUDENTS, STAFF AND EDUCATORS BY DELIVERING A WORLD-CLASS EDUCATION EXPERIENCE ONLINE.

T he COVID-19 pandemic and related need for social distancing created unprecedented challenges for higher education institutions of all stripes, but it had a particularly pronounced impact on HBCUs.

Most of these colleges and universities were forced to pivot from in-person classroom learning to virtual with limited financial resources.

In response, UNCF trained over 2,500 faculty to develop courseware for online classes, but quickly realized the limits of current online learning management systems (LMS).

"What we learned from the pandemic was that better training isn't enough," said Dr. Shawna Acker-Ball, senior director at UNCF's Teaching and Learning Center. "We need better tools and technology to deliver on

the rich instruction and the strong culture of America's HBCUs and extend this transformative experience for students online."

So, during fiscal fear 2022, UNCF introduced a new idea for community learning to put America's HBCUs at the forefront of online education.

Called "HBCUv™," the shared platform is being designed and built with Deloitte Digital where students, educators and staff are enabled to learn, develop and build community together from anywhere. HBCUv™ will provide best-in-class remote education, community engagement and career pathways to students seeking an HBCU education.

To help develop HBCUv™, UNCF selected Deloitte Digital's Ethos, a new offering dedicated to using innovation to advance equity, sustainability and social welfare goals, to design and develop the platform in collaboration with UNCF and its partner institutions.

UNCF discovered that, while current learning management systems do a good job at bringing education online, they make it in a way that is too cumbersome for instructors and students unfamiliar with online learning.

To address this situation, HBCUv™ will have defining characteristics to ensure the experience is authentic and impactful. These include:

- **Promoting Black Excellence:** HBCUv™ will be home to the best Black courses taught by the best Black minds in America and serve as a beacon to young Black talent globally.
- **Creating Black Futures:** HBCUv™ will provide tools and technology that help Black students discover and design their path to a brighter future, including career planning and degree program matching.
- **Driving Results with Data:** HBCUv™ will leverage machine learning and big data to fuel predictive analytics on student performance and provide real-time feedback to instructors on lectures, assignments and assessments.

"HBCUv™ will do this by embedding the culture, community and commitment to Black excellence embodied by HBCUs into a unique online experience that will form the foundation of the future of Black education," said Julian Thompson, director of strategy for UNCF's Institute for Capacity Building (ICB).

UNCF partnered with nine initial HBCUs—Benedict College, Claflin University, Clark Atlanta University, Dillard University, Jarvis Christian College, Johnson C. Smith University, Lane College, Shaw University and Talladega College—to develop and pilot the HBCUv™ platform.

"The inclusion of HBCU students, faculty, staff and administrators as co-designers of the platform will be an attribute of its success," said Dr. Valora Richardson, UNCF's director of digital solutions and innovation. "They know what they need, and we heard them."

The development of HBCUv™ was made possible by more than $10 million in funding from the Karsh Family Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, Citi Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Bank of America Charitable Foundation.

"This is just the beginning," said Edward Smith-Lewis, vice president, strategic partnerships and institutional programs at UNCF. "Solving for the historic inequities that HBCUs and their students and staff face will take a sustained and concerted effort from a diverse coalition of non-profit and for-profit partners."

"For too long there has been a major innovation and investment gap between this nation's HBCUs and other higher education institutions," said Dr. Michael L. Lomax, president and chief executive officer, UNCF. "HBCUv™ not only aims to close that gap, but also lead the way in online instruction and degree granting."

The HBCUv™ prototype is expected in 2024.