HOWARD UNIVERSITY

1867

PRESIDENT BEN VINSON'S

BISON ENGAGEMENT TOUR

LETTER TO THE **COMMUNITY**

DEAR HOWARD UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY,

As I reflect on what I learned in the first six months as the 18th President of Howard University, I am inspired by this community and what I know we can achieve together. In September, I embarked on the Bison Engagement Tour across our beloved campus, meeting with more than 2,700 students, faculty, alumni, and staff to better understand both the challenges and opportunities ahead for our University.

My objective for these conversations was to create an honest and open space for direct engagement. These wide-ranging discussions, including with all 14 schools and colleges, the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, the Howard University Student Association, Faculty Senate, and the Board of Trustees, allowed me to grasp the full spectrum of perspectives at Howard.

The structure of the engagement tour was built around key questions that would deepen my understanding of what makes Howard unique and assist my administration in effectively addressing our needs and leveraging our strengths, including:

1. *What would you like me to know as your new president — things you are most proud of — to help me weave a narrative, tell stories of Howard, of your school, college, or unit, to those I meet to promote the University?*

2. *What are the things you think I should know so that I can do my job as best as I can, and what might be some solutions you would suggest for our University to move forward?*

We stand on the threshold of a new chapter in Howard's storied legacy, with a mandate of shared purpose to ensure that Howard University remains at maximum strength, paving the way for a future where the Bison community continues to thrive. I am excited and optimistic about what lies ahead. Together, with your support, wisdom, and engagement, we will chart a course that honors our rich history while boldly stepping into the future, uplifting this legacy for generations to come.
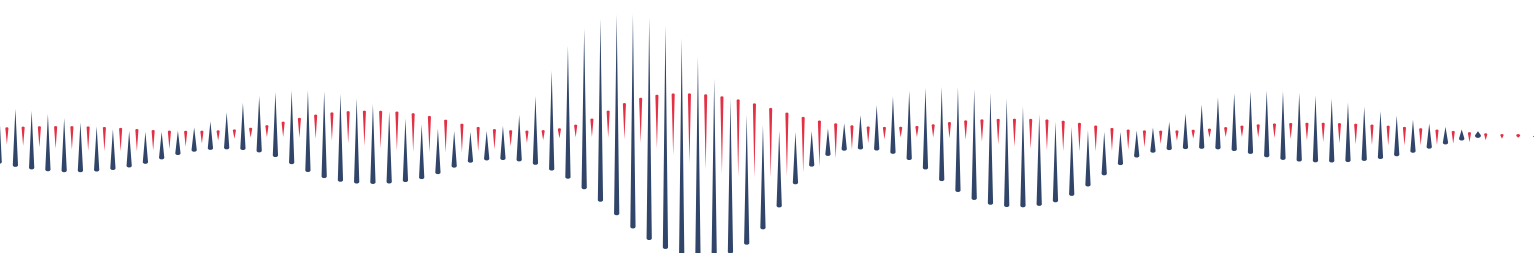
Warm regards,

Ben Vinson III, Ph.D.
President, Howard University

CONTENTS

BISON ENGAGEMENT TOUR BY THE NUMBERS

133 DAYS

2,700+ PEOPLE ENGAGED

14 Schools and Colleges ....

Students ....

Faculty Senate ....

Staff ....

Alumni ....

Other Key HU Stakeholders ....

MORE THAN
1,000
STUDENTS
ENGAGED

MORE THAN
300
STAFF/
ADMINISTRATION
ENGAGED

MORE THAN
800
FACULTY
ENGAGED

MORE THAN
600
ALUMNI
ENGAGED
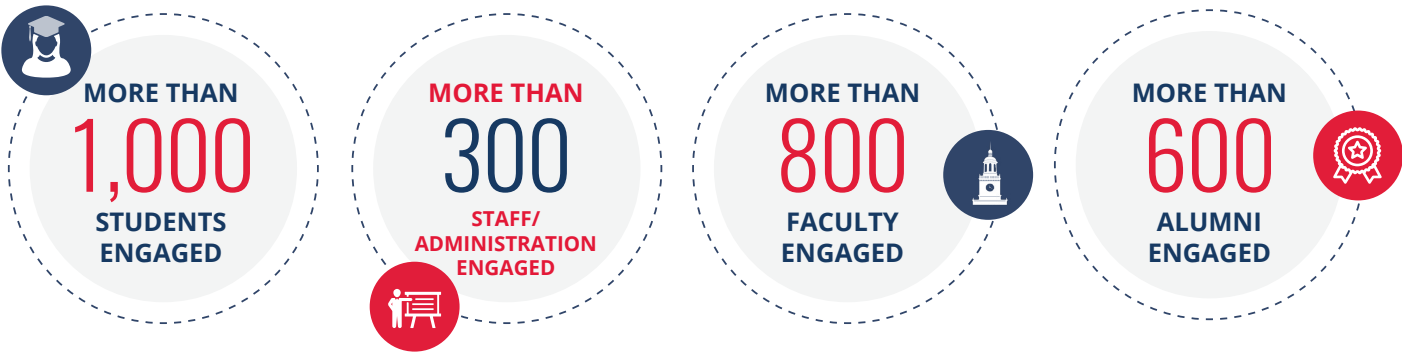
20 LISTENING SESSIONS

500+ IDEAS SHARED

POINTS OF PRIDE

The Bison Engagement Tour underscored the University's multifaceted strengths and areas of pride that resonate deeply with students, faculty, alumni, and staff. This includes legacy and culture, quality of education, research, student support and planning.

Here are highlights of what I have learned about Howard's Points of Pride.

LEGACY AND CULTURE

There is deep pride about Howard's legacy and culture that is driven by the University's history, inclusion, and service.

- *History:* The people who work and study at Howard deeply love the University and are mindful and proud of its great legacy, of walking in the footsteps of giants.
- *Inclusion:* Howard is a very special place that warmly welcomes its new employees and students and attracts many former employees and alumni to return to campus.
- *Service:* Howard has a long tradition of providing social services to communities in the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) region and throughout the nation.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

There's a strong sense of pride over Howard's quality of education that is reflected through our brand, programs, pedagogy, and collections.

- *Brand:* Howard's brand is solid, and well-known, and the University attracts talented students, faculty, and staff.
- *Programs:* Howard boasts rigorous and diverse academic programs, and is the most comprehensive HBCU and the leading producer of Black professionals.
- *Pedagogy:* Howard provides an education across its 14 schools and colleges that is unapologetically from a Black perspective.
- *Collections:* The size of Howard's fine arts and archival collections are unrivaled and are among the largest in the world.

RESEARCH

There is a sense of pride over our steady progress with research in three areas: research growth, the University Affiliated Research Center (UARC), and partnerships.

- *On Growth:* There has been impressive growth in research productivity across the University in terms of external grants, scholarly publications, and creative works.
- *The UARC:* The $90 million contract with Howard, the U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Department of Defense is a great milestone with the potential to catapult the University into a major research-intensive institution.
- *Partnerships and Impact:* Howard enjoys numerous partnerships with industry, research agencies, and a wide range of public and private entities.

STUDENT SUPPORT

The pride expressed around student support was centered around five areas: our commitment, investment, mental health services, the Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel, and study abroad.

- *Commitment:* Faculty and staff are passionate about grooming the next generation of graduates and professionals.
- *Investment:* Under the Howard Forward Strategic Plan, student retention and graduation rates have risen remarkably.
- *Mental Health:* The provision of mental health services for students has been enhanced.
- *The Chapel:* The Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel plays a crucial role at the University, providing wellness to the community through faith and justice.
- *Study Abroad:* Opportunities for students to study abroad have increased.

PLANNING

Points of pride around planning were expressed in the following areas.

- *University Strategic Plan:* Howard Forward marked a major milestone in institutional efforts for growth, improvements, and advancements.
- *Unit Plans:* Various schools and divisions have developed comprehensive and innovative strategic plans patterned on the current strategic plan.
- *Operational Systems:* New systems have been rolled out such as Workday and BisonHub to improve operations.
- *Consolidation:* Several schools and colleges, and several departments have been consolidated to facilitate improved departmental collaboration, calibration, and curricular alignment.

ENHANCING STUDENT SUCCESS

Howard University has significantly invested in enhancing academic quality and improving students' post-graduate outcomes. We've attracted and nurtured top-tier talent, such as Stacey Abrams, our inaugural Ronald W. Walters Endowed Chair for Race and Black Politics; and Sherrilyn Ifill, our inaugural Vernon Jordan Endowed Chair in Civil Rights. These appointments underscore our commitment to academic excellence and deepen the University's educational mission. Further, the University has continued to develop innovative programs to enhance student job prospects through the Academic Innovation Office.

Howard University is poised to further elevate its academic stature, informed by valuable feedback from students, faculty, and staff outlining a clear path to deepen the University's educational commitment, inclusivity, and innovation. For example, the Howard University School of Education recently established its inaugural degree completion program for a Bachelor of Science in Human Development, which is 100% online and provides students with the necessary skills and techniques to succeed in high-demand fields upon graduation.

KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Build upon Howard's identity as the top producer of Black academics by further investing in post-graduate research development and opportunities across fields of study.

- Review general education requirements to ensure they provide diverse learning experiences.

- Expand access to a variety of general education courses, taking into account the need to accommodate increased enrollments and maintain course quality.

- Tackle the challenge of increasing student-to-instructor ratios, particularly with larger incoming student counts, by exploring options such as hiring additional faculty or incorporating blended learning models.

- Create more tailored experiences for colleges located outside of the main campus, such as career fairs and faculty and student support services focused on their field of study.

- Continue investments in academic programs designed to bridge student gaps in writing and mathematics, such as the summer bridge program.

- Remove barriers in academic registration for transfer students by ensuring concurrent initiation of the process for all students.

- Enhance cross-campus integration by facilitating connections between student organizations and services, ensuring students from all schools feel included and have access to diverse programs and activities.

- Strengthen Career Services by promoting partnerships between schools, colleges, and external organizations, and by leveraging faculty networks, complementing the efforts of newly hired Career Services staff.

ELEVATING RESEARCH AND LEARNING

Howard's recent accomplishments in research, innovation, and entrepreneurship have been nothing short of remarkable. We surpassed our research funding goal two years ahead of schedule – **raising $122 million in 2022, a $31 million increase from the previous year** – and secured groundbreaking grants to recenter the Black perspective across research disciplines. Notably, Howard became the first HBCU contracted by the Pentagon to establish a University Affiliated Research Center (UARC), receiving a five-year $90 million contract which will create opportunities for Howard students to obtain hands-on experience in research and development.

Howard is set to achieve R1 research university classification, a distinction no other HBCU has obtained. Our work to transform Howard into a cutting-edge research institution will further enhance our depth and diversity of scholarship.

KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Strengthen and introduce initiatives to overcome departmental silos.

- Celebrate the graduation of the first online Master of Social Work cohort, using this milestone to assess the program's success and areas for improvement in Howard University's online education offerings.

- Investigate and formalize a school/university profit-sharing model for online programs, ensuring fair and sustainable financial arrangements as the university expands its online presence.

- Upgrade to R1 institution standards, including facilities, workloads, staff, and salaries.

- Encourage faculty to collaborate with undergraduate students on expanded research opportunities, such as grant proposals, conference presentations, and academic journal submissions.

- Expand the research office staff and streamline processes to assist faculty with external grant applications, leveraging grant writers or external companies.

- Enhance collaborations with R1 institutions, industry, government, and non-profits for research contracts and partnerships.

- Pursue innovative research areas with potential for external funding, such as AI, quantum computing, precision medicine, and climate change, leveraging industry collaborations and research networks.

- Enhance professional development programs for staff and faculty, with a focus on technical skills and current pedagogy.

- Review faculty responsibilities to address the balance between student advising, organization sponsorship, and teaching loads, ensuring equitable workload distribution.

ADVANCING ENGAGEMENT AND UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS

Howard University leadership is dedicated to nurturing an open and transparent community that supports students, staff, and faculty. Moreover, University leadership remains committed to engaging directly with the Howard community through regular gatherings that unite various segments of our campus. These convenings will foster collaboration across communities that may not regularly interact, creating opportunities to strengthen our mission to address challenges affecting the Black community. In March 2024, Howard celebrated the 30th anniversary of its Alternative Spring Break program, which received a record 2,100 applicants. Concurrently, Howard has maintained strong partnerships with foundations and philanthropic organizations to advance the University's mission of service, including its collaboration with the PNC Foundation, which aims to bolster resources and support for Black business owners across the country. Howard will continue to expand its service to the Black community and bolster lines of communication and trust with community members.

KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Build upon existing enrichment programs to expose high school students to campus life and higher education opportunities, particularly in fields where Black researchers and scholars are underrepresented.

- Strengthening channels of communication to continue building trust among community members.

- Develop new mechanisms to connect recent and more tenured staff faculty to create community amongst broader cross-sections of Howard.

- Enhance collaborations with agricultural leaders and industry partners to address food insecurity in the local community.

- Continue to mobilize Howard's research prowess and institutional power to impact physical determinants of health for the Black community, including by partnering with healthcare organizations to establish satellite clinics in underserved areas.

- Increase visibility and recognition of faculty and student accomplishments across various platforms, celebrating and promoting their academic and professional achievements.

- Encourage student journalism and media coverage of University events, providing practical experience and exposure for communications students.

- Expand accessibility to University-sponsored events, such as athletic matches, guest speakers, and arts events, for students from different disciplines.

IMPROVING **OPERATIONAL** EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

The University is currently undergoing its largest capital real estate initiative – a $785 million Campus Master Plan – which significantly accelerated the construction of new academic centers and improved administrative services. The Master Plan will revitalize Howard's campus and ensure that our facilities are equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and resources to prepare our students for the workplaces and challenges of the future. Further, the University is bolstering campus housing and institutional management to meet the needs of a growing student body.

We will continue to incorporate feedback from the campus community to assess administrative and infrastructure challenge areas, and implement strategies that will improve the Howard experience.

KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to foster a culture of transparency and communication, ensuring that students, staff, and faculty feel heard through regular touch points such as town halls with President Vinson and regular in-person meetings with campus leadership and the community.

- Prioritize and address the severe HVAC issues in the School of Social Work, Founders Library, Undergraduate Library (UGL), and other affected buildings to ensure a conducive environment for university operations.

- Assess and strategically plan for expanding physical infrastructure and resources to accommodate the growing student body and evolving academic needs.

- Explore and invest in modern, efficient HVAC systems and maintenance solutions to prevent future operational disruptions and ensure a comfortable environment for students and staff.

- Increase transparency of long-term facilities management and maintenance strategy for university buildings and infrastructure.

- Streamline the Workday transition by addressing the specific challenges in procurement, HR, and grants administration, ensuring smoother and more efficient processes.

- Revise approval flows within Workday to accurately reflect the necessary hierarchy, differentiating between those who need to approve and those who only need notification.

- Develop a support system within Enterprise Technology Services to cater to ad hoc and one-off needs, enhancing user experience and problem resolution.

- Recognize the need for additional administrative staff who are specialized in Workday processes to alleviate the burden on current staff wearing multiple hats.

- Expand staff professional development opportunities and mobility, creating clear paths for career advancement and skill enhancement.

- Continue to develop and promote HR initiatives such as the Leadership Academy and Staff Directory.

- Fully implement CourseDog to enhance catalog and curriculum management, course scheduling, room/events scheduling, and to provide analytical insights for better demand projections and resource allocation.

- Foster interprofessional collaborations through interdisciplinary centers, institutes, and forums addressing public issues and research problems, facilitating private-public partnerships.

SUSTAINING FINANCIAL STRENGTH

Increased enrollment, alumni contributions, federal appropriations, and academic awards at Howard have significantly strengthened the University's financial health. Noteworthy contributions include a $20 million donation from Carrie Walton Penner and Greg Penner to support the Graduation Retention Access to Continued Excellence (GRACE) Grant Endowment Fund, and MacKenzie Scott's $12 million unrestricted gift to the College of Medicine. These donations will be vital for student retention and the construction of new innovation centers on campus.

Howard will continue to enhance its financial stability and outlook.

> Last year, Howard's endowment rose to $809 million, with a total of $60.4 million in gifts raised.

KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Assess and adjust University policies at all levels to align with the responsibilities and opportunities of R1 status, ensuring comprehensive support for research and academic excellence.

- Improve the Workday administrative process to provide principal investigators (PIs) with enhanced visibility and management capabilities for their grants.

- Address the impact of recruitment and award processes on doctoral conferral numbers by refining these procedures to better support student success and program growth.

- Develop clear guidelines and support systems for grant application and management, particularly for non-STEM fields.

- Engage in continuous dialogue with faculty to understand and address their concerns regarding financial sustainability and research support.

1867

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