

Black medical students report more belonging, greater confidence in scholastic abilities in HBCU schools

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A new study focused on Black medical students finds those attending historically Black medical schools report a greater sense of belonging

and greater confidence in their scholastic abilities than those in predominantly white medical schools.

A survey administered three times during study participants' second year of [medical school](#) compared the responses from students attending historically Black medical schools (HBCUs) with those attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs).

In addition to finding a greater sense of belonging, the study found HBCU students reported more confidence about being accepted into a top 10 residency and greater residency goal stability than those in PWIs.

"Our findings suggest that Black [medical students](#) in PWI schools may experience greater everyday discrimination relative to their HBCU peers that leads to reduced perceptions of their ability to succeed within medical [school](#)," said Sylvia Perry, the study's senior researcher.

Perry is an associate professor of psychology at Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern University and the principal investigator in the Social Cognition and Intergroup Processes (SCIP) Lab. She is also a faculty fellow of the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern.

Study co-authors include Northwestern alumnus James Wages '21, now an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Central Arkansas, and corresponding author Max Jordan Nguemeni Tiako of Harvard Medical School.

The study builds on Perry's prior research using a self-affirmation intervention to counter the impact of racial stressors that Black medical school students experience in PWIs. While the results indicated that the affirmation did not close the belonging, well-being or residency competitiveness gaps, it did reduce the gap in residency goal stability.

Other past research suggests that Black STEM students at PWIs report struggles with creating an inclusive campus climate, whereas HBCU students perceive STEM disciplines to be diverse and view their institutions as supportive.

Based on the new findings, the researchers recommend PWIs take action to increase representation within the [medical field](#).

"We believe that it is important for predominantly white institutions to signal a commitment and make efforts to increase diversity among trainees and faculty," Perry said.

"Simply increasing the number of students and faculty of color is not enough," she added. "These institutions should also focus on increasing underrepresented medical students' sense of belonging by making the reduction of bias and discrimination explicit priorities. Medical schools must create an environment in which all students can thrive and feel safe."

Future research will involve better understanding of the environmental factors that contribute to these disparities and providing targeted intervention strategies to increase belonging among PWI medical students.

"Black Medical Students' Sense of Belonging and Confidence in Scholastic Abilities at Historically Black vs Predominantly White Medical Schools: A Prospective Study," published July 15 in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*.

More information: Max Jordan Nguemeni Tiako et al, Black Medical Students' Sense of Belonging and Confidence in Scholastic Abilities at Historically Black vs Predominantly White Medical Schools: a Prospective Study, *Journal of General Internal Medicine* (2022). [DOI:](#)

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