Coming together for HBCU student success excellence

INSTITUTION: United Negro College Fund
TYPE: Network of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs)
LEARNERS: African Americans, first-generation students, underserved populations
The Opportunity

For more than 78 years, the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) has been the nation’s leading advocate for the importance of minority education and community engagement, enabling more than 450,000 students to earn college degrees. More recently, UNCF’s Institute for Capacity Building (ICB) was created in 2006 to provide targeted capacity-building resources to help Black colleges and universities across the country improve admission, retention and graduation rates.

Maximizing the importance and impact of HBCUs

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Primarily Black Institutions (PBIs) are known for boasting vibrant, academically strong programs. Despite making up 3% of the colleges and universities in the United States, they enroll 9% of all African American students and produce 15% of all African American graduates. And 19% of all African American graduates with STEM degrees come from HBCUs.

What’s more, the economic importance and impact of these member institutions extend well beyond their graduates, as HBCU graduates enter the workforce with sharper skills and vastly enhanced earning prospects. According to a recent study, HBCUs Make America Strong: The Positive Economic Impact of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, an HBCU graduate working full time can expect to earn an additional $927,000 during their working lifetime — 56% more than they could expect to earn without their HBCU degree or certificates.

Yet statistics only tell part of the story. HBCUs have a well-earned reputation for providing students of color with a truly transformational college experience, grounded in culture, belonging, personal growth and self-expression. As Dr. Michael Lomax, President and CEO of UNCF, explains, “We have known for years that students of color feel more at home and perform better in schools where they feel supported and safe.” A campus climate where “fit and belonging” are revered fosters success and helps students thrive — in college and beyond.
An innovative partnership to reinvigorate student support

Even on proud campuses known for their academic excellence, supportive nature and strong communities, students can still face obstacles. During the early stages of the pandemic, the Institute for Capacity Building (ICB) recognized that students were struggling and wanted to provide a more systemic approach to wraparound student support. Results from a survey they sent out during the pandemic showed that students needed a more holistic wellness support system. As a result, they began the search for a partner who could help them not only address current student wellness challenges, but who could provide deep-rooted, wraparound support to help institutions holistically address capacity challenges. So in 2021, the ICB partnered with InsideTrack to launch a re-enrollment pilot program to bring student success best practices to UNCF member colleges and universities as part of their networked approach.

The pilot program worked to proactively re-engage and reconnect students who had stopped out from a select cohort of nine HBCUs and PBIs. It also served as a first step in what would become a multi-year, multi-campus networked partnership designed to support the students who needed it most — and propel them forward. The pilot would go beyond the traditional one-on-one institutional approach by working with the ICB to provide a network of support to participating schools.

—we have to understand how to make every touchpoint with students meaningful. We have to understand and correct broken processes in leaky pipelines. And we have to do it with a networked approach to ultimately make sure institutional support and resources are jointly shared. Our partnership with InsideTrack does all of that.
— Ed Smith Lewis, Vice President, Strategic Partnerships & Institutional Programs, UNCF

WATCH VIDEO
Participating Institutions

This initiative will empower returning HBCU students with high-impact resources and support to manage personal, financial and academic challenges of student life to the triumphant achievement of earning a degree.

— Dr. Michael Lomax, President and CEO, UNCF
Re-enrollment outreach helps HBCU and PBI students continue on their degree paths

UNCF’s Institute for Capacity Building collaborated with InsideTrack to provide personalized success coaching to 4,000 former HBCU and PBI students. The goal was to help students who left college before graduating re-enroll in a network of nine HBCUs and PBIs across the country, helping them effectively navigate the complexity of college re-enrollment, resume their studies and develop plans to successfully complete their degrees. Network schools included Benedict College, Florida Memorial University, Jarvis Christian University, Lane College, Martin University, Talladega College, Voorhees University, Wilberforce University and Wiley College.

Financial support from our funders made this dynamic networked approach possible. Blue Meridian Partners, Macquarie Group Foundation and Strada Education Foundation have all been instrumental in funding UNCF’s partnership with InsideTrack.

“Through the InsideTrack and UNCF partnership, participating HBCUs are able to provide wraparound support that meets the needs of their students. These students are then able to build the skillset needed to address their current educational goals, as well as their future education and life goals — goals that will support them in their future career opportunities. It’s a home run.”

— Malika Clinkscales, Associate Vice President, Partner Success, InsideTrack
Through InsideTrack’s personalized re-enrollment pilot, coaches worked with students to set goals, identify and connect to on-campus resources, and develop individual plans to help make graduation a reality. At partner institutions, multiple campus departments worked together to support learners in navigating academic and financial barriers, with some schools offering incentives such as reducing or removing prior balances. Coaching helped students build the skills needed to balance work, family, financial and academic commitments — with a goal of making a successful return to school and completing their degree.

Helping an initial group of students was only part of the story. Much as their name implies, the Institute for Capacity Building wasn’t interested in a quick fix — they wanted to see if coaching could be the holistic support system they needed to provide students with the additional wraparound support they were asking for.

**Why InsideTrack?**

When it comes to seeking a partner for outside expertise, UNCF is very deliberate about what they need and who they work with. For Ed Smith Lewis, Vice President of Strategic Partnerships & Institutional Programs at UNCF, InsideTrack was the right fit. The reason? As he saw it, InsideTrack was nimble enough to thoughtfully scale coaching to accommodate the needs of nine member institutions across UNCF’s network, while providing insights to the leaders at the Institute for Capacity Building.

In describing the partnership, Smith Lewis noted, “InsideTrack went from a one-to-one institutional approach to a new and fundamentally different networked approach. This was critical to us, given the confines of our resources and stretched bandwidth at many of our campuses. At the end of the day, they took the time to understand our concept and pivot their support to make it work. That’s one of many reasons we’re excited about this partnership.”

Partnering with InsideTrack gave us the opportunity to understand the integral role that coaching can play in a student success initiative. When we started to hear about the way InsideTrack uses evidence-based coaching, we thought, ‘Aha, we’ve got a lot to learn from our friends at InsideTrack.’

— Julian Thompson, Director of Strategy, Institute for Capacity Building, UNCF
The Impact

UNCF re-enrollment campaign exceeds goals and paves the path to completion

Of the 4,000 students who received outreach, 898 responded and established relationships with their coach. As a result, 344 re-enrolled for the Fall 2021 term — representing 8.6% of the original outreach and 38.3% of the students who engaged with coaches. The benchmark for success was set at 4%, and the results exceeded that by 215%. A full 25% of those who re-enrolled were first-generation students. The ripple effect from these 344 re-enrolled students will be felt by students, families and communities as a whole.

8.6% re-enrollment rate
344 students returned for the fall term
25% of those re-enrolled were first-generation students

35x Return on Investment (ROI)

Student quotes from various schools in the UNCF network:

“You are definitely a godsend. It helps just to speak to someone about it.”

“I was just about to throw in the towel, but there’s finally someone I can talk to that wants to help me.”
Three times the impact

Student impact is front and center with the partnership between UNCF and InsideTrack. But that’s just part of the story.

STUDENT BENEFITS
- Proactive outreach to let them know their institution cares about them
- Direct one-on-one coaching throughout the enrollment process
- Holistic wraparound support to increase student success

INSTITUTIONAL BENEFITS
- Learner-insight reporting on reasons for stop-out, policy barriers and other challenges
- Strategies to improve student-facing support and processes
- Alleviated bandwidth for institutional student support teams

NETWORK BENEFITS
- Cross-network insights into overall stop-out reasons for member schools
- Cohort-wide best practices shared with institutions and UNCF Institute for Capacity Building
- Network-wide learner advancement, impacting institutions, families and communities

To be honest with you, just talking to you and you being upbeat and positive, it’s beginning to rub off on me that I can do this.

This coaching is amazing!

Student quotes from various schools in the UNCF network:
Actionable insights provide insider knowledge on student barriers — and ways to help overcome them

InsideTrack coaches also shared frontline insights with participating institutions to increase their understanding of the re-enrollment experience. Here are three key actionable insights from InsideTrack reports — reports that gave UNCF and their member institutions further insight into their student populations, along with ways this information impacts long-term student success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actionable Insights</th>
<th>Institutional Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. LEARN THE REASONS STUDENTS HAD FOR STOPPING OUT.</strong></td>
<td>Knowing this helps institutions assess their systems, processes, policies and procedures to address those causes, improving the experience moving forward for all students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most common reasons cited for leaving school before graduating included managing commitments, financial issues and the impacts of COVID-19.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. UNDERSTAND THE FINANCIAL BARRIERS STUDENTS FACE IN THE RE-ENROLLMENT PROCESS AND BEYOND.</strong></td>
<td>Creating and implementing a balance forgiveness program can help remove this barrier to re-enrollment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For many students who stop out, financial holds can be an insurmountable barrier to returning, even when the drive and commitment is there.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. LISTEN TO THE VALUE STUDENTS PLACE IN BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL TRUST WITH SCHOOL STAFF.</strong></td>
<td>Including InsideTrack as a third party provided a way to rebuild trust and strengthen relationships, giving students a sense of wraparound support from their institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students across UNCF member campuses formed trusting relationships with InsideTrack coaches along the re-enrollment process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of our relationship with InsideTrack, not only were we able to gather data regarding barriers and challenges students were facing, but we also had an opportunity to change some of our processes that were hindering students from enrolling.

— Dr. Glenell Pruitt, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Jarvis Christian University
A network of support, always at the ready

Throughout this pilot program, stopped-out students at nine UNCF member colleges and universities received much-needed personalized coaching, designed to help them successfully return to school to continue and complete their education. But that was just one of the benefits of this unique partnership.

Beyond the student, cohort and institutional wins, this initiative has created a “community of practice,” enabling schools to better share best practices across a network of diverse institutions. This enables member institutions to create more efficiency in their use of limited resources, impacting changes that create a “ripple effect” for not only students, but families, employers and communities.

“We saw the catalytic potential for one opportunity to ripple into additional transformations that lifted the tide of the entire organization. It’s been tremendous to see the folks who are involved in the pilot still communicate with each other and us regularly. And we are beginning — through this work — to really build an HBCU student success community of practice that I think could sustain this work for a long time to come.”

— Julian Thompson, Director of Strategy, Institute for Capacity Building, UNCF

WATCH VIDEO
Michelle Smith, Coach Supervisor at InsideTrack, knows that helping students re-enroll after stopping-out takes many forms. Coaches help students develop the knowledge, skills and beliefs to get back on track toward success, with action plans tailored to each milestone along the path. “They may not know the verbiage to use in emails when reaching out to the admissions office,” she says. “They may not know the questions to ask when they go to their advisor.” For her, crafting a plan and building trust is crucial. One of the ways she fosters trust is explaining that the school cares enough about you — its students — to have this one-on-one coaching program. She tells them, “I’m reaching out to you to help you get back in school — and to be your biggest cheerleader along the way.”

Michelle explains that these students didn’t want to leave school, but something happened that blocked their path to completion — and coaching helps them overcome those barriers. “They’re excited... they want to achieve that goal.”

Watch how coaches like Michelle and HBCU institutions come together to empower students to continue their educational journeys.

“I’m reaching out to you to help you get back in school — and to be your biggest cheerleader along the way.”

— Michelle Smith, Coach Supervisor, InsideTrack
The Partnership — Phase 2

Incorporating retention coaching and capacity building for long-term success

During the Phase 1 re-enrollment pilot program, InsideTrack coaches reached out to 4,000 stopped-out students from a network of nine HBCUs and PBIs. In the next phase of our partnership with UNCF, re-enrollment coaching will automatically be followed by retention coaching in order to help those returning to maintain a strong start. This approach is mission-aligned for InsideTrack, as we aim to support students through completion — and students that have stopped out need extra support to restart and stay on track. By increasing both the number of institutions and the number of students we’re working with, we are able to continue our holistic support while expanding our partnership with UNCF.

With generous funding from Blue Meridian Partners, Macquarie Group Foundation and Strada Education Foundation, UNCF is also launching a new phase in the InsideTrack partnership, focused on scaling the program to allow for more schools and more students to receive holistic coaching support. Over the next four years (through 2026), the program will expand to provide one-on-one success coaching for students throughout their educational journey.

- 20,000 prospective students seeking an HBCU education will receive enrollment and retention coaching
- 4,000 active HBCU students already in their first or second year will receive retention coaching
- 7,000 stopped-out HBCU students will receive re-enrollment and retention coaching

Wiley College is excited and enthusiastic to continue the partnership with UNCF/InsideTrack and the progress made from the previous two semesters. The ‘manpower’ offered by the partnership with InsideTrack allowed for a microscopic focus on each student who wanted to re-enroll. The feedback students gave coaches about the barriers that led them to dropout allows us to streamline our processes, to refocus, to re-imagine what we’re doing not just for that student... but for all our students.

— Dr. Howard Gibson, Vice President, Division of Academic Affairs, Wiley College
Providing the capacity to grow — today and tomorrow

In addition to one-on-one coaching, UNCF will also work with InsideTrack over the next four years to build a shared-services model that will provide at least 10 schools with the training and staff development support they need to build their own in-house coaching programs. Those in student support roles at each college or university will be trained using InsideTrack’s evidence-based coaching methodology. The shared-services initiative is designed to create a financially sustainable model that will enable HBCUs and PBIs to adopt innovative approaches to student success and enrollment management, ultimately reaching an even greater number of students.

A PARTNERSHIP MODEL FOR

Transformational Change

STACKABLE SOLUTIONS

Direct Coaching
Capacity Building

Enrollment Coaching
10,000 Prospective Students

Enrollment Coaching
10,000 Prospective Students

Re-enrollment + Retention Coaching
4,000 Former Students

Student Coaching Certification

Advanced Student Coaching Certification

Retention Coaching
2,000 Active Students

Foundational Coach Training

Ongoing Training

Re-enrollment
Retention Coaching
3,000 Former Students

Coaching Quality Management

Manager Development + Executive Coaching

Retention Coaching
2,000 Active Students

Change Management Support

Discovery + Strategic Consulting

PILOT (Phase 1)

YEAR 1 (Phase 2)

YEAR 2 (Phase 2)

YEAR 3 (Phase 2)

YEAR 4 (Phase 2)

Re-enrollment Coaching
4,000 Former Students

4,000 Former Students

4,000 Former Students

2,000 Active Students

2,000 Active Students

10,000 Prospective Students

10,000 Prospective Students

SUSTAINABLE STUDENT SUPPORT

At InsideTrack, our coaching support services create sustainable impact. But whenever possible, we take that one step further. Training your student support team in our coaching methodology drives lasting improvement for your students and your campus. Through a combination of training, consulting and capacity building, we can teach staff members and leaders how to stand up a coaching operation within their own institution.
CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM COMPONENTS

- Foundational Coach Training
- Ongoing Training to Expand Coach Skill Sets
- Coaching Quality Management
  - Observations and debriefs, trend analysis with actionable feedback
- InsideTrack Certifications
  - Student Coaching, Advanced Student Coaching, Observer, Trainer
- Manager Development and Executive Coaching
  - Virtual training and mentoring
    - Building a sustainable coaching program
    - Creating and delivering compelling coach trainings
    - Developing roster prioritization and outreach strategy
  - Designing a team quality plan
  - Resolving coach performance concerns
- Change Support
  - Ongoing consultation and strategic support

The institutions participating in this next phase include Benedict College, Bethune Cookman College, Claflin University, Clark Atlanta University, Dillard University, Florida Memorial University, Jarvis Christian University, Johnson C. Smith University, Lane College, Morehouse College, Philander Smith University, Stillman College, Talladega College, Voorhees University and Wiley College.

InsideTrack went from a one-to-one institutional approach to a new and fundamentally different networked approach... They took the time to understand our concept and pivot their support to make it work. That’s one of many reasons we’re excited about this partnership.

— Ed Smith Lewis, Vice President, Strategic Partnerships & Institutional Programs, UNCF

Working with HBCUs, PBI’s and other minority-serving institutions is mission-critical work for us. We are committed to transforming student lives and supporting higher-ed institutions in advancing excellence. We welcome the opportunity to do that with even more HBCU and PBI students and institutions.

LET’S CONNECT 
Find out how we can partner with your institution.

MALIKA CLINKSCALES
Associate Vice President, Partner Success, InsideTrack
Malika.Clinkscales@insidetrack.org

Learn more and subscribe for the latest higher education trends and insights: insidetrack.org