

Key Takeaways from “Top-Tier Research Status for HBCUs? The Impact of Changes to the Carnegie Classification Criteria in 2025”

Recognizing the strategic importance of increasing the defense research capacity of minority-serving institutions, Congress enacted Section 223 of the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act with the goal of encouraging these institutions, including eligible historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), to achieve R1 status. Starting in 2025, the criteria used to determine the highly coveted R1 (“very high research activity”) top-tier research classification of the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education will be streamlined to be simply spending \$50 million on research and development (R&D) and awarding 70 PhD degrees in any research field—all within a year.

This policy brief addresses the question of how the original goals for HBCU progress supported by Section 223 translate to the criteria for achieving R1 status proposed for 2025. The in-depth analysis provides insights on Howard University’s path to successfully qualifying for R1 status in 2025, and predicts that North Carolina A&T State University will soon follow in 2026-2027.

Recommendations:

1. **Revisit Section 223.** Congress, the U.S. Department of Defense, and HBCU leadership together should revisit the goals and objectives of Section 223 to develop strategies based on the CCIHE classification criteria being adopted in 2025.
2. **Increase the proportion of STEM research PhDs.** To achieve and sustain R1 status, strategies for eligible HBCUs should increase the proportion of STEM research PhD degrees to greater than 33 percent, with 45 percent as a goal.
3. **Increase the proportion of institutional expenditures.** HBCUs focused on top-tier research status should increase the proportion of institutional funding of R&D, largely driven by endowment income, to levels of 30 percent or greater.
4. **Close the funding gaps.** For HBCUs closest to 70 research PhD conferrals per year, near-term infusions of state and local R&D funding can provide a bridge to developing long-term strategies to grow the proportion of institutional funding.

For more information:

- Download the report: <https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/top-tier-research-status-for-hbcus/>
- Contact us: cset@georgetown.edu