

## Aquatic Disparities in Historical Black Colleges and Universities to State Colleges in North Carolina

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the aquatic facility access, aquatic curriculum offerings, and pool use in both state and historically black colleges in North Carolina. Reviewed schools through the Physical Education Department (PED) curriculum and verbal contacts of the aquatics department. The PED curriculum data collected the number of classes available, the qualifications of the instructors, and the type of classes available to the students. Most colleges and universities, both state and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, had pools or access through close proximity to the campus. Few of the community colleges had access to aquatic facilities. Seven out of 12 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) possessed aquatic classes in their curriculum worth academic credit. Two out of 12 HBCUs possessed pool facilities but failed to include aquatic classes in their curriculum. The most frequently offered courses were beginning and intermediate swimming, and lifeguarding. In contrast, eleven out of 12 State Colleges and Universities had a pool; however, not all offered classes in aquatics. Indoor pools are not an issue in the lack of curriculum-offered aquatic classes. State schools offer more aquatic courses. HBCUs used their pools in conjunction with athletic departments and offer minimal lessons in the academic PED classes. I worked with Diversity in Aquatics, a group that promotes and networks with diverse populations in drowning prevention and any teaching or interest with aquatics. At a Diversity in Aquatics conference, not only did I present a data driven poster and a power point, I had the opportunity to hear many aquatic academia speak and present information, expanding my resources.*

**Keywords:** aquatics, swimming, water safety, Historically Black Colleges and Universities

### **Hypotheses**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities can work towards equality in aquatics by not only ensuring pool accessibility, but also by expanding existing programs. The CDC reported death rates from drowning nearly three times higher among African Americans when compared with their white counterparts. Black men are at the highest risk of drowning, specifically between the ages of 5 and 19. Historically Black Colleges and Universities in North Carolina play a role in continuing the disparities of aquatic learning environments. Drowning is the fifth leading cause of unintentional deaths in the United States, making swimming a vital life skill. By denying access to facilities and advanced courses, these schools are perpetuating stereotypes among Black swimmers and leaving student without lifesaving abilities and conscientiousness around water.

#### Method

- Collected data on pool accessibility: Pools availability to students
- Contacted schools to confirm proximity of pool to campus: either located on campus or within a five-mile radius
- Contacted Athletic, Physical Education, or Aquatics departments were contacted for curriculum: Were their classes available to sign up for credit at their college or university or was it recreation only?
- Data collected from websites for curriculum available: Did the school list aquatic courses in their course catalog?

**Results**

Table 1. List of North Carolina HBCUs and State Schools, Pools and Courses

School	Pool Availability	Course Credit	Advanced Courses
<b>HBCUs</b>			
Barber-Scotia	No	No	No
Bennett College	Yes	No	No
Elizabeth City	Yes	Yes-PE	Yes
<b>State</b>			
Fayetteville State	Yes	Yes-PE	No
Johnson C Smith	Yes	No	No
Livingstone	No	No	No
North Carolina	Yes	Yes-PE	Yes
<b>A&amp;T</b>			
North Carolina	Yes	Yes-PE	No- but adapted
Central			classes
Shaw	Yes	Yes-Health &PE	No
St. Augustine	No	No	No
Winston-Salem State University	Yes	Yes- PE	Yes
<b>State Schools</b>			
Appalachian	Yes	Yes-PE & Rec Management	Yes
East Carolina	Yes	Yes-PE	Yes
NC State	Yes	Yes-PE	Yes
UNC Asheville	Yes	No	No
UNC Chapel Hill	Yes	Yes-PE	Yes
UNC Charlotte	Yes	Yes-PE	Yes
UNC Greensboro	Yes	Yes-PE	Yes
UNC Pembroke	Yes	No	No
UNC School of the Arts	No	No	No
UNC Wilmington	Yes	Yes	Yes

Requirements for non-advanced courses versus advanced courses: A fewer number of courses or beginner level of courses versus many courses offered for credit and providing recreation in the aquatic field.

Examples of classes offered

Non-advanced

- Beginning swimming- This encompasses the introduction, fundamentals of water skills and stroke development
- Water aerobics – Aerobic exercise that requires water-immersed participants in a group fitness class setting with a trained professional teaching. This class focuses on aerobic endurance and resistance training.
- Intermediate swimming- Skill proficiency and swimming with ease and efficiency, plus gaining the ability to swim smoothly over greater distances.

**Advanced**

- In addition to all prior classes.
- Synchronized swimming- A class of synchronized sequence of movements performed by a group of swimmers.
- Lifeguarding- Learning to effectively prevent and respond to water emergencies with the American Red Cross Lifeguard Training. The courses equip one with the skills and knowledge to prepare you for a variety of scenarios in and around the water. With lifeguard training, one will learn quick response times and effective preparation are vital to being a lifeguard while also understanding the crucial elements in helping to prevent drownings and injuries.
- Scuba- The three main phases of open water scuba diving include:
  - 1) Knowledge development in a classroom to understand the basic principles of scuba diving.
  - 2) Confined water dives to learn basic scuba skills.
  - 3) Open water dives to use your skills to explore!

While men of all races are the largest demographic of drowning victims, women and minorities have and continue to lack the same opportunities in aquatics. In 1911, the creation of the YWCA brought access to pools for women, despite men's questions as to why a woman would need such a skill as swimming (YWCA). Black women to this day are discouraged from swimming because of the stereotype that a woman's priority is to sit around and look beautiful. Because of the way that the chemicals in a pool can affect black hair, they cannot simply let their hair dry and go about their day like most white women. However, as proven most recently by Simone Manuel's gold medal in swimming, women are capable of more than looking pretty on the sidelines.

In the past, the disparities of ethnic and socioeconomic background played a huge role in the swimming abilities or lack thereof. In 1945, the YWCA offered the first racially integrated pool. Jim Crow laws segregated public pools by race and once integration finally forced white and black citizens to mix, many public pools shut down to avoid actually integrating. This created both a racial and a socioeconomic divide, denying access to swimming lessons from experienced teachers unless they had the money to go to a private pool or country club. The stereotype that "black people can't swim" is true for some, but absences of pools have been for people of color. In order to push back against the stereotypes, we must educate and provide access to minorities providing the same opportunities that affluent white people have always had. This will continue to be a vicious cycle until trained professionals intervene. Parents who cannot swim are not able to teach or encourage their kids to swim, leading to only a 13% chance that their child will learn (Brewer). The solution to this might be HBCU's with functional pools offering formal swimming lessons to students of diverse communities, such as The Boys and Girls Club to provide experience in controlled and safe environments. It is also important to provide proper instruction by certified instructors to reduce the risks of injury or drowning in addition to making sure that certified lifeguards are always on duty when the facility is open. It may not be the responsibility of the HBCUs to initiate these programs, but they ultimately have the opportunity to change the dynamics of a community and its comfortability with swimming.

**Key Findings**

Pool accessibility is a modern issue for students and families. Pools are expensive and require funds and professional training to maintain. Public pools are not available to every neighborhood, particularly low-income neighborhoods that have low turnout. There is just a 17% discrepancy between state schools in North Carolina and Historically Black Colleges and Universities when it comes to pool availability and accessibility. While this may seem relatively low, it supports the idea that where person of color receives less access to pools and training in swimming their number of drownings remain higher. To reduce the number of drownings more students need to be taught to swim. There is a clear attempt to provide HBCUs with access to pools; 73% of the HBCUs in

North Carolina have swimming pools, but this is not enough. 90% of North Carolina State Schools have swimming pools. While the disparity is lower than one might expect, other factors influence the level of education and skills accessible to HBCUs.

Charles Edward Williams expresses the real psychological and historical effects of water in relation to race. He created an exhibit called Warm Water. Williams' "I am" is a series that depicts five, painted self-portraits with him wearing red water wings. This paired with his artistic representation of the death of Eugene Williams expresses his negative experiences with water through the event that sparked the Chicago Race Riot of 1919. The 1919 drowning occurred when a white Irish male threw rocks at five black teens on their handmade raft. The raft crossed the unspoken line of division between the two races. One of the rocks hit an African American boy in the head and he drowned. The police arrived but failed to arrest the boy that threw the rock. This was emblematic of the tensions rising between races and provoked riots that became violent and destructive. President Woodrow Wilson blamed the incident in Chicago for racial tensions across the United States (History). Warm Water is about the social and psychological racial constructs that carry over from America's past into modern day divisions. Water became yet another space for unprovoked murder of an African American boy by a white, unaccountable boy. It is important to note that predominantly African American communities received merely splash areas instead of pools in the past, denying them proper swimming lessons.

With great strides in providing access to aquatic facilities HBCUs need to address another issue that became apparent during the course of the study. Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities are at a disadvantage in aquatics and swimming skills. As a result, they lack the lifesaving skills that might prevent water related deaths.

We know that the number one factor that influences drowning is the lack of swimming abilities. Factors following the lack of swimming skills include barriers, close supervision, types of water settings, and failure to wear lifejackets. In addition to factors effecting drowning and other disadvantages. The lack of different types of aquatic classes offered in the HBCUs distinguishing the programs. HBCUs focus on the lower level classes like water aerobics and beginning swimming. The State Universities offer more of a choice in aquatics courses that keep students engaged and connected to the pool, including as a form of recreation.

North Carolina's HBCUs limit their aquatic programs by failing to provide qualified instructors and advanced level classes. Due to lack of funding for proper maintenance and quality instruction, many use their facilities for rental opportunities instead of prioritizing the needs of their students and faculty. Providing qualified instructors is also expensive and due to this cost many pools choose to have lower qualified instructors or none at all. HBCUs should ideally provide classes such as lifeguarding, scuba diving, and intermediate swimming. By framing swimming abilities as a source of income, as with lifeguarding, or as recreation, as with scuba diving or water ballet, water can become an invaluable resource to the community. Learning to swim will help to prevent drowning, which is important and valuable, but there is so much more from which HBCUs can benefit. Water can be a source of psychological and physical stress, but we can empower students through education and exposure and change their lives forever.

### ***Conclusion***

Discrepancies exist between the North Carolina State schools and the North Carolina Historically Black Schools and Universities. The data supports that between the two types of schools there is less than a 20% variation in access to pool facilities. The major discrepancies lie in the programs offered to the students to promote aquatic participation. Beginning swimming lessons are not offered to enough students. To address these discrepancies, Historically Black Schools and Universities should ensure access to qualified instructors and higher-level courses within the curriculum. Aquatics programs should not only continue to keep the students actively participating in skill-based aquatics, but also incorporate aquatics classes that interest student populations.

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