

# **Howard University's Response to Hurricane Katrina and Its Aftermath**

**Testimony for the Congressional Black Caucus Field Hearing  
The National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education  
31<sup>st</sup> National Conference on Blacks in Higher Education**

New Orleans, LA

March 23, 2006

Richard A. English, Ph.D., Provost, Howard University

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I am pleased to present my testimony at this Congressional Black Caucus field hearing on the impact of Hurricane Katrina on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony to Congressman Bobby Scott (D-VA), Congressman William Jefferson (D-LA) and Congresswoman Donna Christian-Christensen (D-VI).

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In late August 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Immediately upon hearing about the plight of university students affected in the New Orleans area, Howard University president, H. Patrick Swygert announced that the doors of Howard University would be open to these students and their families.

Howard University's response to Hurricane Katrina has been decisive, constant, ongoing and comprehensive from admission, enrollment, counseling to job placement. From the day Katrina landed in the Gulf States Howard University has reached out to the students, their families and communities affected by the hurricane. In addition to destroying much of the city of New Orleans and part of the Gulf Coast Region, Hurricane Katrina was destructive particularly in the case of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the region. Their facility infrastructures were compromised and their faculties and staff were displaced. Of particular concern was the effect that Katrina had on the impressive cohort of students that had been recruited by these institutions and who were successfully matriculating.

In developing its Hurricane Katrina Relief Program, Howard had two overriding goals: to contribute to the recovery and enhancement of the institutional and financial integrity of the affected universities, and to help ensure that the education of the students was not interrupted. The HBCUs that were affected by Katrina are unique and necessary institutions that serve local, regional and national purposes. They and the students they serve must be supported in the immediate aftermath of Katrina and as part of our nation's long-term higher education strategic agenda.

From its initial response and throughout all subsequent actions, Howard University has responded with speed, flexibility, decisiveness and effectiveness. Key elements in Howard University's institutional response to this disaster were: 1) Advocacy from the outset by Howard University to appeal to federal officials and agencies to provide financial assistance for the reconstruction and rebuilding of affected universities and financial aid for their students. 2) Emphasis that students must return to their home institutions. 3) Engagement in outreach beyond the campus that involved partnerships with federal, national, community and civic agencies and organizations that offered assistance for impacted students and families. 4) Provision of direct financial assistance to students. 5) Provision of a comprehensive array of academic and support services to students. Among our objectives were the abatement of anxiety, uncertainty of students and their families and restoration of their psychosocial well-being in a totally supportive environment.

As of January 9, 2006, Howard had expended \$640,000 on tuition and for its fall 2005 Hurricane Katrina special admit visiting and continuing students. Total University support to date has been about \$1 million. Among Howard University continuing students, 267 were from the hurricane affected area and became eligible for assistance under the University's Katrina Relief Program. More than 430 students from hurricane impacted areas sought admission to Howard for the fall 2005 semester as visiting Katrina students. One hundred and fifteen (115) matriculated during the fall 2005 semester. Most were undergraduates but some were master's and Ph.D. level students as well. As of

January 26, 2006, Howard had registered 36 visiting Katrina students. Most of the visiting students returned to their home universities.

In responding to the pressing needs of the Katrina visiting students, Howard University faced many challenges. The most pressing ones included: (1) providing proper academic and social counseling to students to smooth their adjustment to Howard University and Washington, D.C.; (2) getting information to staff, faculty and administrators about the presence of the new students on the campus and their special needs of the students; (3) registering the students after the University's regular registration period had ended; (4) coordinating external housing, financial and other assistance to the students from individuals and organizations; (5) informing students' home institutions about the status of the students at Howard University; (6) monitoring the students' mid- semester progress and informing deans and academic counselors; and (7) determining students' eligibility to receive assistance under the University's Katrina Relief Program.

In addition to enrollment and matriculation services, Hurricane Katrina relief activities were initiated by various Howard University schools and colleges, administrative units, members of the University community, and student organizations. These activities included counseling services, fundraising, faculty research, and community service by faculty, staff and students. Many alumni and external supporters of the University have donated funds to supplement the University's financial support for the Katrina students. This support included a grant of \$306,866 from the Republic of South Africa, that was awarded to returning and special admit students to help defray their spring semester expenses.

Most recently, 250 Howard students gave up their traditional spring break and traveled to New Orleans to help residents in the ninth Ward restore their homes that were flooded in the hurricane's aftermath. In another significant initiative, Howard has been working with federal agencies to identify Katrina affected students for internships and employment opportunities. Howard and the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) have formed a partnership to provide paid internships during the summer of 2006 to Katrina students.

Howard remains steadfast in our concern for the well-being of the students, their families, and the institutions of higher education that were affected by Hurricane Katrina. Howard's commitment and response is in keeping with the University's mission to serve humankind and to provide leadership for America and the global community.

I thank NAFEO and the members of Congress for providing this opportunity to present this testimony. Hard copies of my full testimony have been shared with each of you and the testimony is available on my website, [www.provost.howard.edu](http://www.provost.howard.edu).

## **Howard University's Response to Hurricane Katrina and Its Aftermath**

### **INITIAL HOWARD UNIVERSITY RESPONSES TO THE DISASTER**

In late August 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Immediately upon hearing about the plight of University students affected in the New Orleans area, Howard University president, H. Patrick Swygert announced that the doors of Howard University would be open to these students and their families.

In addition to efforts that were focused on activities at Howard University, President Swygert began working with federal and national organizations to develop responses to some of the challenges faced by hurricane survivors. Mr. Swygert contacted the US Department of Education Secretary, Margaret Spellings to propose recommendations for a federal response to assist Dillard, Xavier and other universities affected by Katrina and Rita. President Swygert made an intervention with the U.S. Department of State as well to appeal for federal Katrina funds to assist Dillard, Xavier and HBCUs in rebuilding their campuses and providing assistance to their students. At the invitation of President Swygert, a special meeting called by the leadership of the NAACP and the Urban League was held at Howard University to discuss ways of helping Katrina victims. President Swygert was invited along with other leaders to the White House by President Bush to discuss ways of helping hurricane survivors.

Soon after opening its doors to student and families affected by Hurricane Katrina, Howard University established a Hurricane Katrina Relief Program. The University's relief program provided immediate financial assistance and structured educational assistance to college-level students who were displaced by the hurricane. In addition to financial grants to purchase personal items, fund raising, counseling services, medical and legal assistance and dental services, the Relief Program included tuition and mandatory fee waivers for students who selected to enroll at Howard as visiting students and students who were enrolled at Howard prior to the hurricane.

Initial student and parent inquiries concerning enrollment at Howard came on August 30, 2005. President Swygert and the Provost greeted the students on September 2, 2006 at a special pinning ceremony; a prayer vigil was held; a Hurricane Katrina web-site was launched on September 6, 2005; the Provost enlisted the support of Deans, and Directors and members of the faculty.

Howard waived all tuition, fees, room and board charges for Katrina special admit visiting students for the fall 2005 semester. Each special admit student received a voucher for required texts and materials; and each of these students received a \$1,000 Howard-funded cash grant. The University also made these cash grants available to continuing students whose residences were in the hurricane impacted areas.

On November 10, 2005, President Swygert wrote to the presidents of eight Katrina impacted schools—Xavier, Dillard, Southern, Delgado Community College, Loyola, Tulane, Our Lady of the Holy Cross, and University of New Orleans—to affirm Howard's position of encouraging students to return to their home institutions. The names and ID numbers of these students and a pledge to assist them in contacting their students were included in this communication. From the outset of their presence on campus Howard University insisted that the visiting students were expected to return to their respective home Universities.

As of January 9, 2006, Howard had expended \$640,000 on tuition and for its fall 2005 Hurricane Katrina special admit visiting and continuing students. Total University support to date has been about \$1 million. Among Howard University continuing students, 267 were from the hurricane affected area and became eligible for assistance under the University's Katrina Relief Program. More than 430 students from hurricane impacted areas sought admission to Howard for the fall 2005 semester as visiting Katrina students. One hundred and fifteen (115) matriculated during the fall 2005 semester. Most were undergraduates but some were master's and Ph.D. level students as well. As of January 26, 2006, Howard had registered 36 visiting Katrina students. Most of the visiting students returned to their home universities.

## **DETAILS OF THE HOWARD UNIVERSITY KATRINA RELIEF PROGRAM**

In responding to the pressing needs of the Katrina visiting students, Howard University faced many challenges. The most pressing ones included: (1) providing proper academic and social counseling to students to smooth their adjustment to Howard University and Washington, D.C.; (2) getting information to staff, faculty and administrators about the presence of the new students on the campus and their special needs of the students; (3) registering the students after the University's regular registration period had ended; (4) coordinating external housing, financial and other assistance to the students from individuals and organizations; (5) informing students' home institutions about the status of the students at Howard University; (6) monitoring the students' mid- semester progress and informing deans and academic counselors; and (7) determining students' eligibility to receive assistance under the University's Katrina Relief Program.

Special attention was given to the academic needs of the visiting students given the circumstances under which they came to the University. Academic counseling sessions were held for the students and schools and colleges were provided mid-term academic progress reports for each student for use in follow-up academic counseling.

The final fall 2005 population of visiting and continuing students from universities in the Gulf Coast states was 382 of which 274 (71%) were continuing students and 108 (29%) were visiting students. Generally, the students performed satisfactorily academically during the fall 2005 semester; 327 (86%) of them are in good academic standing and only 55 (14%) are on probation, have a performance stipulation or have been suspended.

### ***Katrina Students Spring 2006 Matriculation and Assistance***

Howard continued its Katrina Relief Program in Spring 2006 for eligible students. Students were eligible for continued enrollment at Howard and were given access to the tuition and fee waiver and financial aid programs. Katrina students wishing to remain at

Howard as visiting students did not have to complete the admission process, but they had to sit for an interview with the Office of Admission and complete a financial aid award form.

Katrina students were permitted to apply to Howard for the spring 2006 semester as transfer students. The Office of Admission considered applications from new Katrina-affected students who sought special admission to Howard for the spring 2006 on a case-by-case basis. As of January 26, 2006, Howard had registered 36 visiting Katrina students. Most of the visiting students returned to their home universities.

## **OUTREACH AND SERVICE**

In addition to enrollment and matriculation services, Hurricane Katrina relief activities were initiated by various University schools and colleges, administrative units, members of the University community, and student organizations. These activities included counseling services, fundraising, faculty research, and community service by faculty, staff and students.

### ***Counseling and Career Development***

- Counselors from the University Counseling Service went to various dormitories to meet with student groups and provide crisis counseling sessions.
- Counselors were present at the orientation that was held for students transferring to HU from the affected Universities and provided tips to students and parents on coping. This session was held on Tuesday, September 6, 2005 in Carnegie Hall.
- Counselors were present at the meeting organized by the Graduate School at Andrew Rankin Chapel on Wednesday, September 7, 2005.
- The University Counseling Service made available walk-in services to students affected by Hurricane Katrina. The demand for special intakes has continued to rise.
- The University Counseling Service is currently working with the Fine Arts Department to organize a quilt-making project for those students and faculty displaced by and affected by Hurricane Katrina.
- The Career Services Office assisted staff members from Xavier University with career placement needs.

***The Office of Residence Life.*** The Office of Residence Life accommodated thirty-eight (38) students impacted by Katrina during the fall semester. In addition, Residence Life coordinated along with Andrew Rankin Chapel and Howard University Student Association (HUSA) an all residence hall clothing drive for the distribution of clothes and toiletries to benefit students impacted by Hurricane Katrina. Further, Residence Life served as the central phone center to compile and disseminate off campus housing sponsorship referrals. Approximately thirty-five (35) off-campus housing sponsors comprised of Howard University professors, clergy, alumni, students, and staff served as hosts for approximately twelve (12) students. There are currently nineteen (19) students residing in university residence halls for the spring 2006 term.

The Office of Residence Life in conjunction with WHUR radio station held a three (3) day drive in support of *Relief for The Howard 400* project. Approximately three hundred (300) resident students participated in the curb side unloading and collection of donations. After the *Relief for The Howard 400* drive was completed, clothing and other items were bagged and distributed to students affected by Hurricane Katrina by Residence Life staff and students. Approximately \$26,000 was collected in support of the HBCU Relief Fund.

***Community Support.*** The following ten (10) community organizations and businesses offered support in assisting students with housing: Washington D.C. Local NAACP Chapter; 19<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church; Epiphany Methodist Church; All Nations Baptist Church; Metropolitan Baptist Church; Howard University Center for Urban Progress; Real Estate Broker, Denise Douglas; Habitat for Humanity, Forum for Youth Investment; and Eastern High School.

Eastern High School students held a curb side drive to collect funds for Howard University Katrina students. Approximately \$2,000 was collected and, the school prepared 100 bags of toiletries and other items for distribution by the Office of Residence Life.

The Office of Residence Life staff worked in conjunction with the Howard University Student Association to raise approximately \$2,500 to benefit students impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

***Intercollegiate Athletics.*** The Student-Athlete Advisory Committee for Athletics collected approximately \$2300.00 that was donated to the DC Red Cross Organization for Hurricane Katrina Relief efforts. Funds were collected during athletic events by student-athletes.

**College of Arts and Sciences.** The College of Arts and Sciences (COAS) raised funds in excess of \$47,000 to assist students adversely affected by the devastating hurricanes in the Gulf States region. Members of the College formed an ad hoc committee, *Howard University for the COAS Disaster Relief Fund*, in response to the crisis. They raised more than \$12,000, enabling students to purchase books and other essential items. In addition, a housing subcommittee was successful in identifying individuals in the community willing to provide shelter for affected students and submitting those names to the Office of Residence Life.

The College applied for and received a *Disaster Relief Grant* in the amount of \$35,000 from Scholarship America to help students adversely affected by hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, Rita, and Wilma.

The College of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate School sponsored a multidisciplinary forum on October 19, 2005 to examine the various dimensions of Hurricane Katrina. The forum explored the history of Louisiana, the physical implications of Hurricane Katrina, the corresponding responses of the government (local, state, and federal), and short-term and long-term repercussions of the event. The event marked the beginning of ongoing efforts to follow closely the atmospheric, social, and political ramifications of major crises of this nature from a multidisciplinary perspective. Proceedings from the conference will be published under the rubric of “Lessons Learned,” edited by the chair of the Political Science Department.

**School of Business.** School of Business (HUSB) allocated \$3,000 to the Katrina Fund. Mr. Michael Santini and his wife matched this contribution with a personal gift of \$3,000. Mr. Santini is the Managing Director of Merrill Lynch & Company and HUSB Board of Visitors'(BOV) member. Additionally, BOV member, Mr. Tom McEachin, Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of UTC Power and his wife contributed \$1,000 to this effort. The School raised an additional \$3,000 at its annual homecoming reception bringing the total fund amount to \$10,000. Qualified students received a \$250 gift card for travel related expenses during the holiday season. Additionally, spring 2006 returning students will receive another \$250 for school related expenses. *Enterprise Rent-A-Car* (21 CAP Company) also donated \$50 Target gift certificates and calling cards totaling 930 minutes to assist six students in the 21 CAP program from the impacted area. Enterprise also supplied a car-load of clothes to affected students.

**School of Education.** Faculty, staff and students from the School of Education contributed to the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts by donating clothes, toiletries, money, bed sheets, and gift cards to students in the School who were affected by the hurricane.

**Bunche Center.** The Ralph J. Bunche International Affairs Center received in November, 2005, a \$128,000 award from the estate of Ms. Martha A. C. Grant, a Howard University graduate in the class of '36, whose late husband, the Reverend (Chaplain) Luther W. Crichlow, was also a graduate of Howard. The award, which memorializes both of the Grants, was donated for the purpose of aiding displaced Katrina victims studying at Howard. The University already has received \$100,000 of this award which is in the process of being disbursed to students in the amount of \$1,000 each for the purpose of funding scholarships and other academic needs.

**Social Work.** On November 16, 2005 the School of Social Work hosted a teach-in: *African American Perspectives on Poverty, Disaster, and Trauma: Lessons Learned from Katrina*. This event was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in the amount of \$10,000. Faculty members volunteered to assist the Red Cross in providing services to Gulf Coast residents relocated temporarily to the D.C. Armory. The School of Social

Work devoted its Spring 2006 “Field Educators Conference” to Hurricane Katrina, Its Aftermath and Disasters.

**Gift from Embassy of South Africa.** The Republic of South Africa gave the University \$306,866 to assist in efforts to support students affected by Hurricane Katrina. The South African Foreign Minister, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, presented the check at a ceremony on campus in Founders Library on January 11, 2006.

## **FACULTY CONSULTATION AND RESOURCE SHARING**

The chairman of the Department of Economics served as an expert on the panel for the Agriculture Policy Committee Section, *From Kelo to Katrina: Rethinking Eminent Domain* session for the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Legislative Conference of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators in Washington, D.C. on December 8, 2005.

A professor from the School of Law contributed the criminal justice component of the Hurricane Legal Assistance Manual that was distributed widely to victims of the gulf storm.

A professor from the School of Social Work provided consultation to FEMA on disaster relief.

## **CURRENT INITIATIVES**

### **The Internship Initiative**

The internship initiative is a component of Howard University’s Hurricane Katrina Relief Program and the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Hurricane Katrina recovery activities. Visiting and continuing students who are enrolled at Howard University as part of its Katrina Relief Program are eligible to participate in the EPA internship program. As interns during the summer of 2006, students will assist EPA with Katrina

and Rita related recovery efforts as well as other EPA activities. Other federal agencies involved in Gulf Coast hurricane recovery have been invited to participate in the recruiting fair as well. In some instances, students may receive academic credit for their internship experience.

Some of Howard's visiting and continuing Katrina students who are selected to participate in the internship program will have a unique opportunity to provide direct assistance to their communities that were so devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Katrina students will also have opportunities to undertake summer internships in other areas of EPA work. The work will take place in locations such as Mississippi, Louisiana, Dallas, Washington, D.C. and Boston. Internship descriptions are being posted on Howard University's website and include contact information for relevant EPA offices.

**Howard Students Spend Spring Break in New Orleans Clearing Debris from Homes and Businesses.** A total of 250 students traveled to New Orleans under the University's Alternative Spring Break program to assist with restoration efforts. The students participated in a variety of tasks ranging from "raking leaves to gutting houses". Some of the students shared their reflections:

"When I first arrived, I was saddened almost immediately. It has been months since Katrina hit and by the looks of things it seemed like the hurricane hit only last week."

"It left me speechless. But what surprised me was that despite their immeasurable loss, residents still had hope and a sense of community."

"Alternative Spring Break was truly a blessing because I was able to see what we as a people had the ability to accomplish."

**Special Grants Program for Spring 2006 for Students Affected by Hurricane Katrina.** President H. Patrick Swygert recently announced the continuation of the

Special Grants Program (SGP) for spring 2006 to eligible Howard University students. The purpose of the SGP is to assist eligible students who were directly impacted by Hurricane Katrina. Eligible students include those who transferred to Howard University as special admits during the fall 2005 semester, continuing students who were enrolled at Howard University before Hurricane Katrina, and new special admits for spring 2006 who resided in a FEMA-designated natural disaster area at the time of Hurricane Katrina.

SGP awards of \$1,000 will be provided in the form of American Express Travelers Cheque Cards. Cheque Cards will be distributed from Monday, March 20, 2006, through Friday, March 24, 2006, from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the Cashier's Office, Room 115. The program will conclude on Friday, March 24, 2006, at 5:00 p.m.

## **CONCLUSION**

In developing its Hurricane Katrina Relief Program, Howard had two overriding goals: to contribute to the recovery and enhancement of the institutional and financial integrity of the affected universities, and to help ensure that the education of the students was not interrupted. The HBCUs that were affected by Katrina are unique and necessary institutions that serve local, regional and national purposes. They and the students they serve must be supported in the immediate aftermath of Katrina and as part of our nation's long-term higher education strategic agenda. Howard remains steadfast in our concern for the well-being of the students, their families, and the institutions of higher education that were affected by Hurricane Katrina. Howard's commitment and response is in keeping with the University's mission to serve humankind and to provide leadership for America and the global community.