

Delaware State makes history with first ever HBCU Aviation Directors' Summit

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Dover, DEL (WPHL)— Delaware State University's Aviation Program recently hosted the first-ever HBCU Aviation Directors' Summit. The summit took place on November 8th and 9th, 2021.

This was the first time directors from aviation programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the U.S. had ever come together to discuss their challenges and share ideas for their flight training and aviation management programs. Attendees said this summit was long overdue.

“The purpose was to collaborate and share best practices, learn about new programs in the military and with different airlines that are interested in doing business with HBCUs that have aviation programs,” said Lt. Col. Michael Hales, Del State Aviation Program Director, who organized the summit. “That led to huge discussions about how we could fix some of the problems that we all share.”

In addition to Lt. Col. Hales, among the HBCU aviation directors who attended the summit were: Dr. Willie Brown, University of Maryland Eastern Shore; Orestes Gooden, Elizabeth City State University; Dr. Terence Fontaine, Texas Southern University; Dr. Jorge Guerra, Florida Memorial University; and John Murray of Hampton University.

The prominent topical backdrop of the summit was the work of training and graduating more pilots of color to go into the aviation industry and military. As such, a significant part of the summit involved discussions with attending representatives from four airlines – Alaska Airlines, PSA Airlines, Republic Airlines and United Airlines – as well as Col. David Snow from the U.S. Army Cadet Command and Commander Christopher Williams, the director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for the Commander of the U.S. Naval Air Force.

“It was a phenomenal collaboration of a group of HBCUs immersed in aviation, as we shared some new concepts in flight training, student management, fleet operations, student opportunities, jobs,” said Mr. Orestes Gooden. “You name it, we discussed it.”

Xavier Samuels, Chair of Advisory Board for the Aviation Program at Texas Southern University (TSU) said the summit was a gathering of HBCU Aviation Directors that should have happened a long time ago. “We learned a lot, developed a lot, and came up with strategies that will help improve our aviation program at TSU,” he said.

Dr. Brown noted that the summit brought a group of HBCU aviation directors together who could become a force in helping to increase the number of minority pilots flying for commercial airlines and the military.

“When you look at underserved communities and what the missions are for HBCUs, we have not only succeeded in many areas, but we now are starting to shape the path of aviation education for the modern day future,” Dr. Brown said.

Lt. Col. Hales said the group is already planning to meet again next year and make it an annual HBCU Aviation Directors’ Summit.

“If we use our collective voice, the industry and the military will respond to us because right now they are seeking students and graduates of color coming out of aviation programs,” Lt. Col. Hales said.

All of the attendees – especially the HBCU aviation directors – gave the inaugural summit high marks.