Toyota Supports First-Ever Bachelor's Degree for Environmental Justice at Historically Black University Huston-Tillotson

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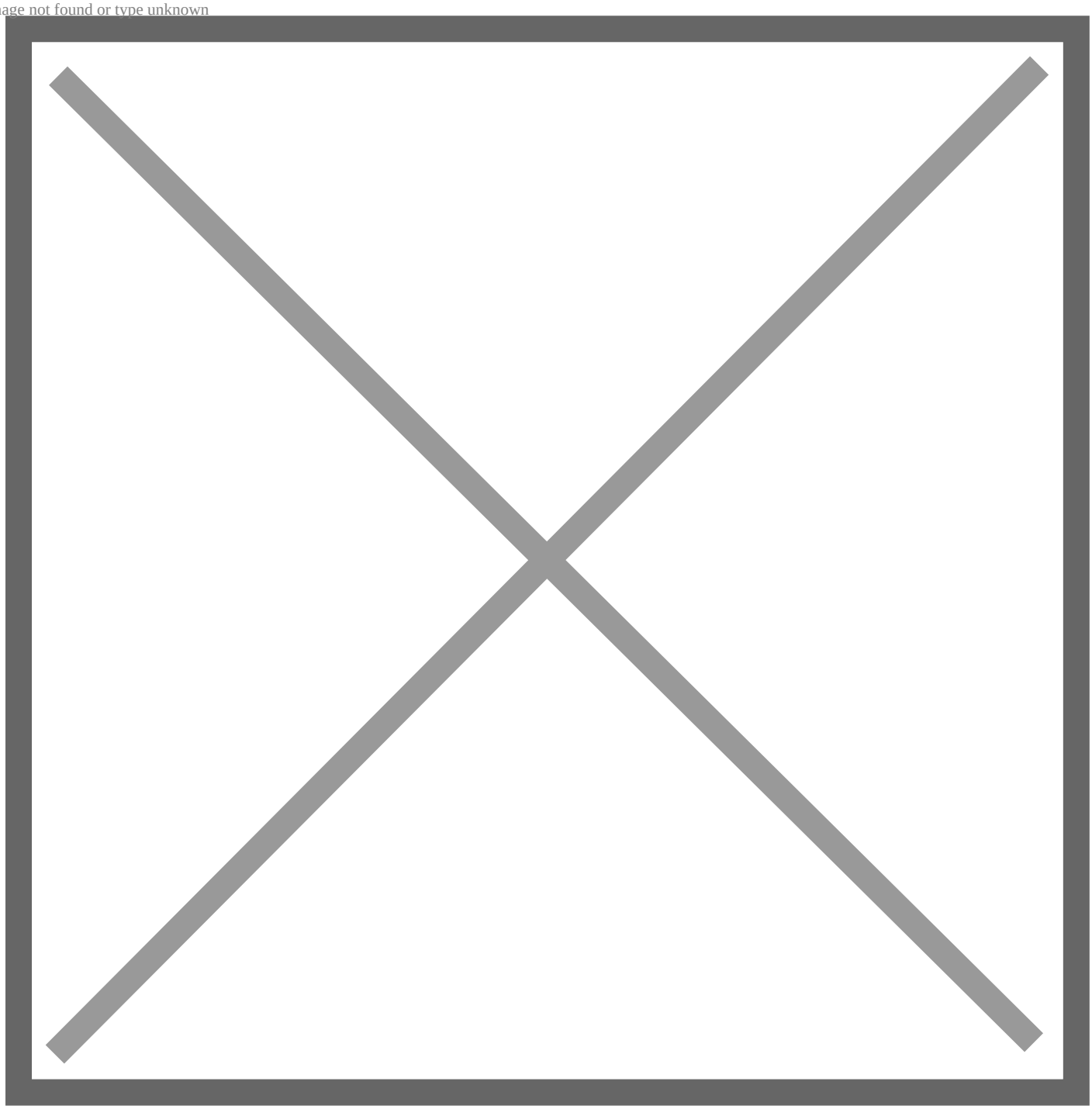
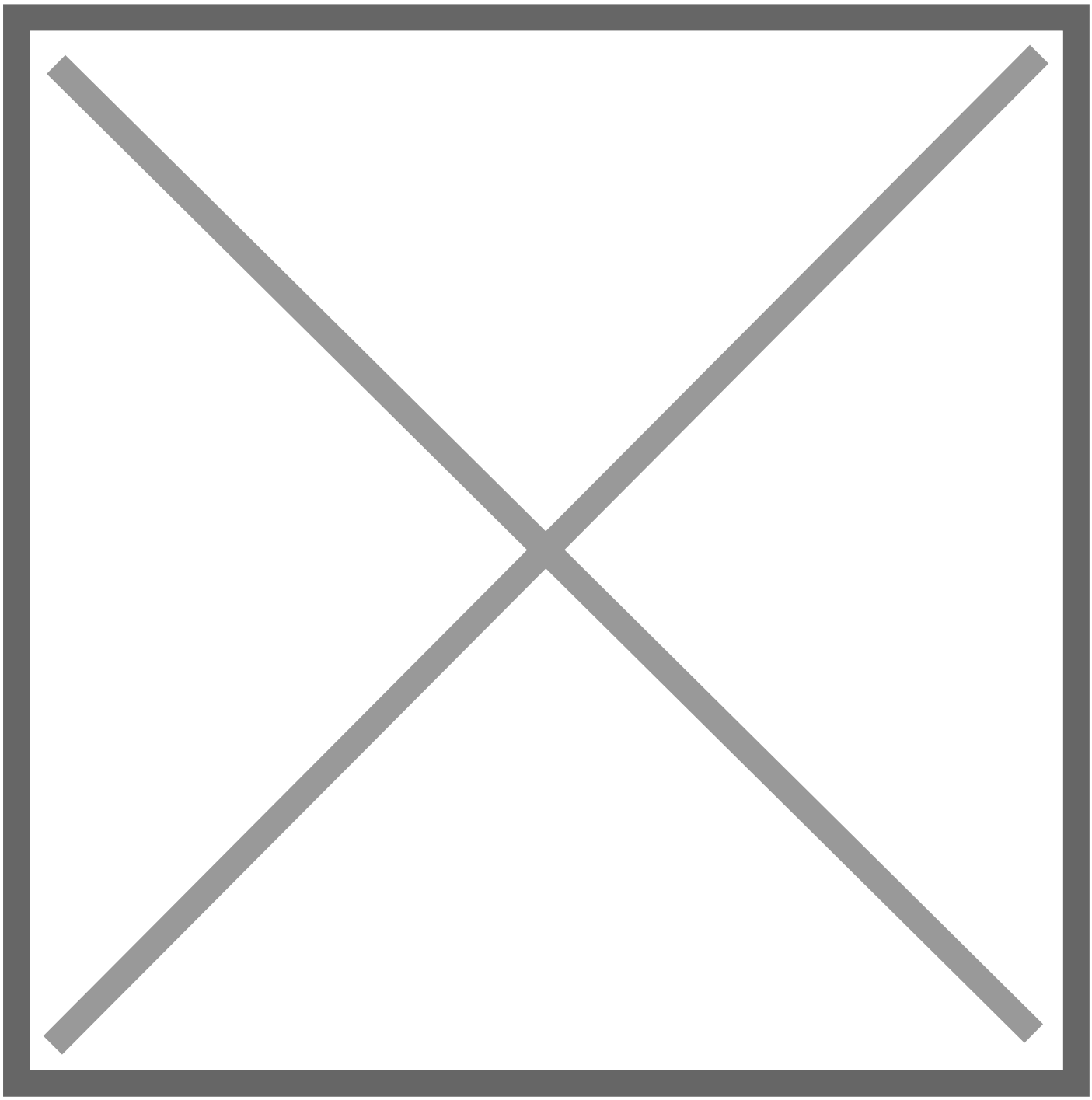


Since the founding of the first Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in pre-Civil War America, the educational and social missions of the schools have evolved continuously, keeping step with the needs of students and society.

Toyota is moving into the future right along with them.

Since 2015, Toyota has donated $400,000 to HBCUs and Tom Joyner Foundation, investing in African American students with academic support, scholarships and programming.

Toyota is now sustaining its partnership by helping launch a new bachelor's degree at Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, Texas. This first-ever program within the college's Center for Sustainability and Environmental Justice will meet the growing demand for solutions to critical environmental issues.

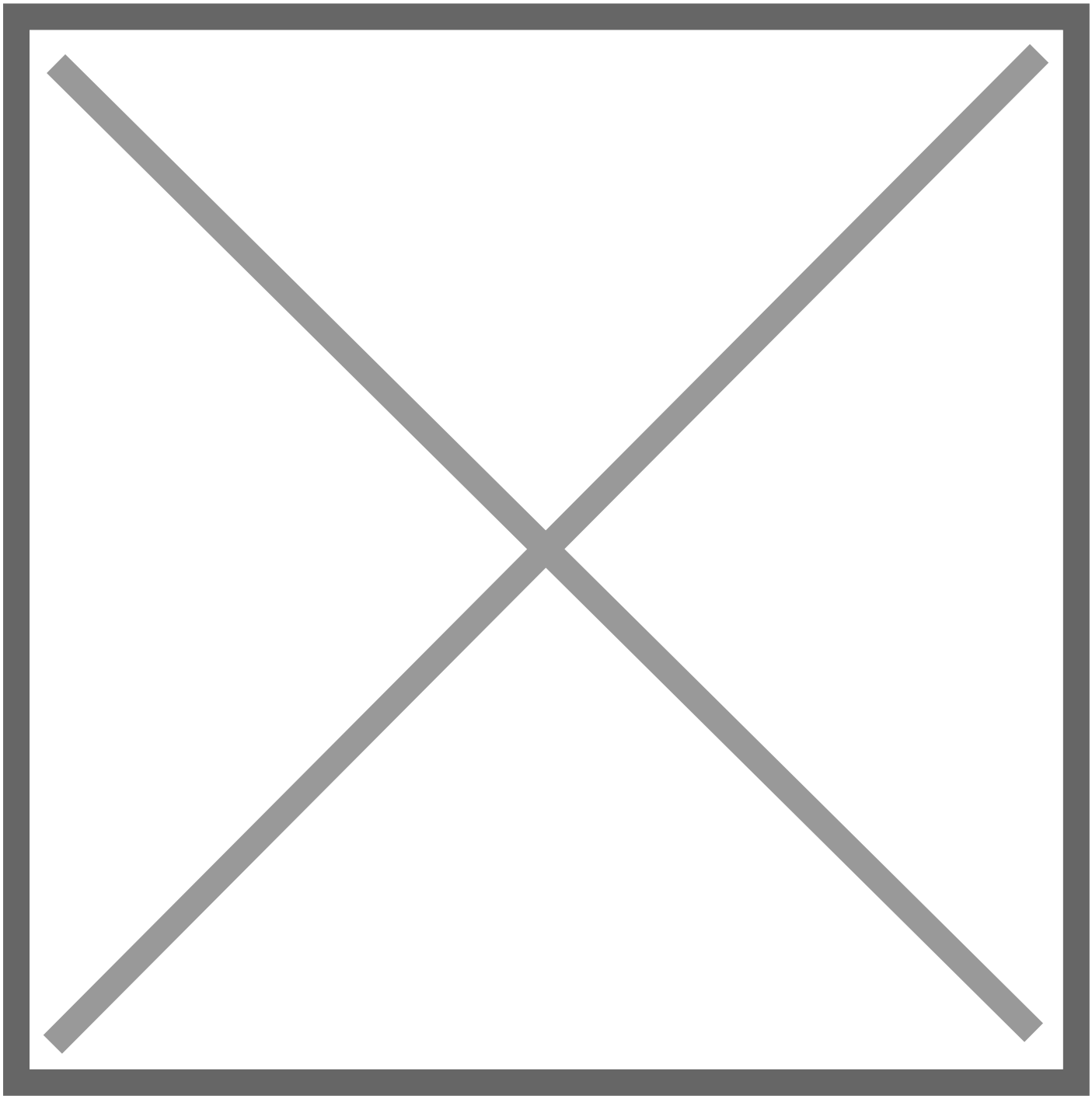


Created for African American students denied entry to white institutions of higher learning during segregation, HBCUs initially focused on traditional vocational trades and professions in law, medicine, theology, education and civic leadership. A cornerstone of social mobility for African Americans, HBCUs grew a diverse and talented workforce for the future, whether that future was the 20th or 21st century.

Responsive to shifting societal needs, the colleges are now creating programs to build on that foundation, and in the case of Huston-Tillotson will train the next generation of environmental stewards with an eye on the next century as well.

“We are committed to making sure our students have a seat at the table. When marginalized groups are excluded from environmental decision-making, we face devastating effects. Environmental justice is key to preventing future crisis,” said Dr. Colette Pierce Brunette, president of Huston-Tillotson University.

Donations from Toyota fund scholarships pinpointing promising high-need, high-achieving students interested in careers in environmental fields. In addition, they help with operational support to maintain and expand existing sustainability initiatives at the college.



“The burden of environmental damage most heavily impacts lower income communities, indigenous communities, and communities of color. Understanding the lack of diversity in environmental professions, it is Toyota’s goal to provide resources that strengthen more diverse representation in these fields,” said Al Smith, group vice president, Social Innovation for Toyota Motor North America (TMNA).

At the root of these initiatives is a recognition of the need for environmental justice, which posits that all people deserve equal access to a healthy environment. Marginalized communities will need specialized solutions and urban sustainability experts will lead the teams to innovate them.

Certainly, Toyota’s contribution to Huston-Tillotson is geared towards the same outcome as the company’s overall giving to HBCUs: boosting college retention and graduation rates for African American students. What this program offers in addition is an equity lens specifically trained to environmental issues. And though individual communities need solutions specific to them, of all social groups, the most inclusive is that of resident of this planet. In terms of a mission that needs all hands, all voices and all minds, there is none more crucial than the one to save our common home.

In addition to Huston-Tillotson, Toyota is providing contributions to the Tom Joyner Foundation for the following HBCUs:

1. **Fisk University** to the newly-created B.S. degree in Data Science.
2. **Texas Southern University** to the Urban Garden and Farmers Market program within the Mickey Leland Center on Hunger, Poverty and World Peace, within the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs.
3. **Bennett College for Women** to support the Mental Health and Wellness programming for students.
4. **Cheyney University of Pennsylvania** for the overall advancement of its students.