

Howard University Homecoming: Balancing Tradition and the Student Experience
By: Lydia Daniel, Gabrielle George & Denver Hunt



Graphic Courtesy of Howard University (howard.edu)

On October 23, 2025, Howard University celebrated its 101st Homecoming with the theme “One of One,” marking a century-long tradition of culture, community, and pride. The weeklong celebration featured performances, parties, and the annual football game, drawing students, alumni, staff, and local residents to campus. Homecoming isn’t just about football for the Howard community; it’s about unity, connection, and community. Each year, attendees gather in solidarity to honor the University’s legacy and values that continue to bring people together

People gather not only to celebrate their institution but also to celebrate each other and everything they have accomplished during their time at Howard. Howard Homecoming began in 1924 as a three-day event focused on an alumni reunion and a football game against Lincoln University.

Over the years, it has blossomed into an event for music, fashion shows, step shows, parades, and much more. Some of the Homecoming events include a step show, a fashion show, and a yard fest. Step is rooted in deep history and culture. The step show features different Greek organizations performing their own choreography. The choreography usually consists of music, precise movements, chants, and storytelling. The step show combines competition, pride, and tradition, and is one of the most anticipated events of Homecoming.

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The fashion show is another highly anticipated event, featuring student models and designers who walk down a runway in their outfits. The runway is brightly lit, and it looks pretty professional. It is a significant event for creatives attending Howard.



*Models walk the “ A State of ‘Nervana” runway during Howard University’s Fashion Show.
(Photo taken by Gabrielle George / Howard University)*

Finally, Yard Fest is a big event where the Yard is completely redone, with a vast stage, different musical artists performing, food vendors set up, and large crowds forming. It is an event focused on community, music, dancing, food, and so much more.

While the festivities offered something for everyone, some attendees expressed frustration with the ticketing process and navigating the events, particularly freshmen. Howard’s Homecoming is known for its variety, with staple events such as the Step Show, Fashion Show, and Yardfest drawing thousands. But for many first-year students, the range of activities felt overwhelming.

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Carter Fields, a freshman computer engineering major, shared his perspective on his first Homecoming.

“As someone who doesn’t really go to functions for real, it’s a lot,” Fields said. “I regret waiting in the line, but lowkey, the line was the most fun part,” he added, referring to the party lines.

Several freshmen said they felt under-informed about how to attend or access major events. Drew Poindexter, a freshman dance major, shared her perspective on how much information she ultimately received about Homecoming.

“I think we just got the bare minimum information,” Poindexter said.

Tickets for popular events such as the Step Show and Fashion Show cost \$50 for the general public and \$40 for students, who were required to line up outside Cramton Auditorium from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with doors opening at noon.

“It’s too expensive,” said Kennedi Ward, a freshman chemistry major. “We’re still college students at the end of the day, and you’re trying to charge an arm and a leg. A lot of people don’t have an arm-and-a-leg type of money.”

Ward suggested combining three events into a ticket package for a student discount. “Do a package of everything that costs money for Howard. So like the Step Show, Fashion Show, and the game all for \$100,” she said.

Many students also relied on social media pages like Instagram accounts to stay informed on the Homecoming events. “Follow pages like the HUSA Association and UGSA,” Ward advised.

In the days leading up to Yardfest on Oct. 24, anticipation buzzed among freshmen about the concert lineup. Dylan Carswell, a freshman supply chain management major, shared his dream performers.

“In my dream world, we get PartyNextDoor, Bryson Tiller and Drake,” Carswell said.

Despite the confusion and long lines, excitement remained high. For many freshmen, Homecoming represented both a challenge and a milestone, their first real taste of Howard tradition. The freshman perspective on Howard University’s Homecoming highlights flaws in how information is shared, while also reflecting the anticipation, anxiety and excitement that come with experiencing the celebration for the first time.

While freshmen experienced Homecoming with fresh eyes and unfiltered excitement, upperclassmen and alumni viewed it through a different lens — one shaped by frustration, nostalgia, and tradition. They approached the week with a far more layered perspective.

For many juniors and seniors, this year's celebration stirred mixed emotions. What's supposed to be one of their last carefree Homecomings before graduation instead left some feeling sidelined. Sylvia Baker, Class of 2026 and a nursing major, said, "There isn't ever a real middle ground for seniors. Everything is centered for... no shade, the really old people, such as alumni, or the newer, younger people, such as the freshmen. There's nothing official really for students entering their third or fourth year — well, nothing fun anyway."

Many upperclassmen said they love the tradition, but there's no real balance between events that lean heavily toward alumni and those that lean heavily toward Baby Bison, leaving them feeling stuck.

Students agreed that the week lacked events tailored for those in the in-between stage — students nearing the end of their journey but not quite ready to reminisce like alumni. Justin Freeman, Class of 2027, captured this feeling best. "Honestly, we're not asking for anything big," he said. "It doesn't have to be some huge gala or fancy dinner — just something that feels like it's for us. We've been here putting in the work, and it'd be nice to have a moment to just breathe, have fun, and be recognized before we cross that stage."

Alumni, on the other hand, viewed Homecoming through the lens of legacy and loyalty. But even that pride has been tested by growing financial strain. While turnout remains strong, the cost of participation has risen, with many citing the expense of travel, hotels, and event tickets as barriers. Brenedette Gordon, Class of 2004, reflected, "I know that most of the time these events are priced so alumni can give their money to the orgs... but what happens when the alumni get priced out?"

Her concern mirrors a broader feeling that while Howard's tradition of excellence endures, inclusivity, financial or otherwise, must remain part of that legacy.

Across all perspectives, there's a clear throughline: admiration and exhaustion, pride and frustration make up Homecoming week for many. The celebration continues to embody the university's spirit. Still, students and alumni hope future versions strike a stronger balance between past and present, alumni and undergrads, and honor both tradition and accessibility.

Denver's Perspective:

As for me, stepping into my first Howard Homecoming as a transfer first-year was a mix of curiosity and cautious excitement. I didn't buy tickets to major events like the fashion show or step show — not because I didn't want to, but because it simply wasn't in the budget, a recurring concern shared by many students mentioned earlier. Even though I attended the football game, I had the privilege of not paying for my ticket. Regular prices reached around \$100, and student

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tickets climbed from \$40 to \$60 as the date approached. It made me realize how easily cost can become a barrier for students who genuinely want to participate.

Still, the game ended up being one of my favorite parts of the week. Even as someone who doesn't fully understand football, the energy was infectious. Howard's 33–27 overtime win against Morgan had everyone on their feet — cheering, groaning, and celebrating in unison. The crowd was fully alive in the moment, and it felt like more than just a game — it was a shared experience, a collective burst of pride that made my first year feel a little more connected.

For me, Homecoming wasn't about attending every event or buying every ticket — it was about finding joy in the spaces I could access. Having quick conversations with other students about how cold it was waiting in line, laughing with alumni, and watching blue, white, and red flood the streets were honestly some of the best parts. I didn't have the wide-eyed excitement of the freshmen or the bittersweet nostalgia of the seniors, but I existed somewhere in the middle — observing, learning, and finding my own rhythm within the Homecoming experience.

Although homecoming faces numerous challenges, it continues to serve as a cornerstone of HBCUs and the Black community. Howard University is no exception, standing as a pillar that uplifts both its students and its surrounding community.