

# CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT Clafin University



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—Rev. Whittaker Middleton, Vice President for Institutional Advancement

Founded on the visionary idea of access to higher education for all people, Clafin University today boasts not only a world-class student experience but a top-notch fundraising shop. With data-driven strategy and careful relationship cultivation, Clafin exceeded a \$96.4 million campaign goal and raised \$108 million.

## Clafin University achieves record-breaking fundraising and unparalleled alumni support.

In addition to its visionary history, state-of-the-art facilities, and close-knit community, Clafin University holds another important distinction: the highest annual alumni giving rate among all historically black colleges and universities at an impressive 53%.

Clafin’s culture shift happened both intentionally and gradually, with investment in resources and commitment from leaders. The Rev. Whittaker Middleton, who joined the private South Carolina university in 1973, became its first vice president for institutional advancement in 1982.

Before then, Clafin not only didn’t have a fundraising office; the school simply didn’t fundraise outside of the church. Alumni spanning over a century of school history had only contributed \$15,000 to Clafin collectively.

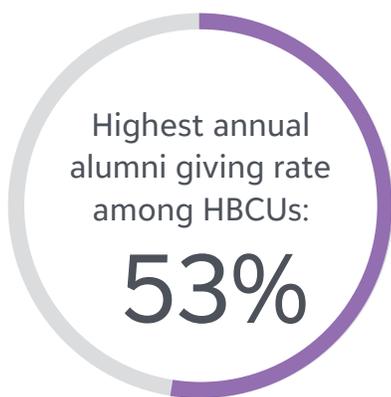
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Middleton remembers the files—thousands of them, where he and colleagues wrote out notes about donors and prospects. When the team migrated to digital records in the mid-1990s, they moved those files to the attic.

“It became so heavy that an architect said we have to move them out of there, because it was affecting the building’s foundation,” Middleton remembered. “Everything was manual then, and we weren’t able to capture as much information or have continuity when staff changed. We only thought it was working, because we didn’t know anything else.”

Decades later, in 2016, Claflin completed its largest capital campaign in school history, raising \$108 million on the heels of an economic recession. Consultants had advised against the school’s \$96.4 million goal, but Claflin leaders knew they could find ample support—and knew they had the tools to do it.

“One of the smarter things I’ll leave here as part of my legacy was the purchase of Blackbaud’s fundraising solution,” Middleton said. “I saw the writing on the wall. Ours was the first office on campus to have a computer at all, but there was no donor base and no way of communicating.”



Over goal on  
**\$96.4M**  
capital campaign

## Building Relationships

Partnering with Blackbaud for a fundraising and relationship management solution revolutionized Claflin’s development operations. “If someone gave you thousands of dollars over years, it only takes seconds to see that,” Middleton said. “Can you imagine how long it would take sorting through paper? And with Blackbaud, if you put the information in correctly, it’s going to be error-free. That’s the beauty of the software; it saves time and money.”

Most importantly, the technology changed the way Claflin built relationships. Now, fundraisers can better understand alumni interests—from the classes they took and activities they participated in as students to their giving habits after graduation.

“It’s not only for fundraising but to engage,” Middleton said. “When we traveled, alumni would say, ‘I only hear from you when you want money.’ We have learned that if you continue to engage alumni when you don’t want something, many times you don’t have to ask when you do want something.”

When Middleton’s team traveled to cities around the United States for Claflin’s capital campaign, those stops raised \$400,000 on average per city,

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and the team added 15,000 prospects to their database. “Without Blackbaud, we would not have had the anecdotal information to solicit and cultivate intelligently,” Middleton said. “It makes a big difference when we can go into the meeting and know about that person. What Blackbaud has enabled us to do is have information to start conversations and to make decisions. Before Blackbaud, we were sort of going on whims. When you’re doing that, you make a lot of mistakes.”

## Looking Ahead

Clafin’s future success depends on its ability to grow support from people with the deepest personal connection. Unlike state-supported institutions, Clafin receives no government funding and also receives its greatest contributions from churches and organizations rather than individuals—a trend Middleton hopes to change.

“Clafin is not about just doing enough to get by,” Middleton said. “One of the challenges for HBCUs like us is trying to raise more money from alumni and individuals. Foundations and corporations might give a lot of money this year and then not contribute for five or six years. When you cultivate alumni, they tend to give each and every year. You can count on them.”

Clafin soon will appoint a new university president with a new vision, a new strategy, and a new fundraising challenge—something Middleton looks forward to learning and tackling with the best tools available. “The technology will determine what our goals will be,” he said. Reflecting on the file folders of bygone days, he added, “Everything will be driven by data, and the word for that is ‘transformation.’”

Take fundraising and donor management to the next level.

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### About Blackbaud

Leading uniquely at the intersection point of technology and social good, Blackbaud connects and empowers organizations to increase their impact through cloud software, services, expertise, and data intelligence. We serve the entire social good community, which includes nonprofits, foundations, companies, education institutions, healthcare organizations, and the individual change agents who support them.