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Selected Recent Institutional Research on Diversity Issues in Undergraduate Education and the Achievement Gap at UW-Madison

At UW-Madison almost any analysis of the student experience includes breakdowns by race/ethnicity.

Annual report on Plan 2008 Goals

Analysis: Annually the provost gives a report to the campus community on progress on the Plan 2008 goals focused on quantitative measures and survey results. The September 2006 report is available at <http://www.diversity.wisc.edu/reports.php>.

Retention and Graduation Rates and Enhanced Retention and Graduation Rates

Analysis: The achievement gap is traditionally defined by retention and graduation rate differences. Annually we calculate the retention and graduation rates for students by various categorizations, including race/ethnicity. In addition, we use National Student Clearinghouse records to calculate a transfer-out rate, a “retained-anywhere” rate and a “graduated-anywhere” rate for all students and for targeted minority students only.

Key finding: Starting with the 2002 entering freshmen cohort, the retention rate gap started to show signs of closing. After 4 years 85% of the cohort and 74% of targeted minority students from that cohort have graduated or are still enrolled. The gap has narrowed from more than 20 percentage points to 11 percentage points. From NCS records, about 4-6% of students transfer-out to or graduate from other institutions. The rates are similar for white and targeted minority students. Thus, the achievement gap is not closed by including enrollments and degrees from other US institutions.

Projections of WI High School Graduates and Implications for Admissions (2004)

Analysis: This study examines projections of the high school pipeline, by race/ethnicity, and analyzes the implications for UW-Madison undergraduate admissions.

Key finding: Even with increases in diversity in the WI HS graduating class, if current patterns continue, the number of minority HS graduates students who are in the top half of their class and earn above the Wisconsin average ACT score (a conservative threshold of UW-Madison’s selectivity criteria) will be fewer than 1,000. Currently 31% of white HS graduates compared with 4% of African American HS graduates meet this threshold for selectivity. Pipeline programs such as PEOPLE and efforts to increase ACT test taking and college-readiness are necessary to increase the qualified applicant pool.

New Freshmen Admits: Where Do They Enroll (if they don’t choose UW-Madison)?

Analysis: Not all admitted applicants choose to enroll at UW-Madison. This study uses National Student Clearinghouse records to determine where Fall 2005 admits who did not enroll at UW-Madison attended college. The focus of the study was on targeted minority students. By understanding what institutions are more attractive for all students we may be able to improve our recruiting efforts.

Key finding: Among admitted applicants 63% enrolled at UW-Madison, 17% enrolled at another WI institution, and 16% enrolled out of state. Among WI residents, University of Minnesota, UW-Milwaukee,

Marquette U., and UW-LaCrosse are frequent choices. Contrary to popular belief, HBCU's and lower-tuition institutions are not topping the list.

Housing Effects

Analysis: This study compares success in the first year by race/ethnicity for students who lived in University Housing and those who choose other housing options. University Housing provides a rich integration of academic and student services.

Key finding: Approximately 80-90% of new freshmen live in University Housing. For Fall 2005 freshmen, students who lived on-campus had higher average grades and were retained at higher rates than students who lived off-campus. This finding holds when controlling for apparent preparation (ACT scores, HS rank, HS GPA). Minority students were less likely to live in University Housing, thus they disproportionately missed out on the academic benefits of this experience. (We are following up with an examination of why minority students may not choose University Housing.)

Academic Enhancement Report

Analysis: UW-Madison aims to offer opportunities for every student to participate in at least one academic enhancement activity: live in a residential learning community, participate in a first-year interest group, study abroad, take a service learning course, participate in research with faculty, complete a for-credit internship, take an honors or an independent study course.

Key findings: Among 2005-06 bachelor's degree recipients, 84% had at least one academic enhancement experience recorded on their student record. Among targeted minority graduates, the participation rate was 89%.

Time to Degree

Analysis: Targeted minority students are more likely to be enrolled beyond the sixth year than other students (approximately 5% of targeted minority students compared with 2% of other students). We studied three entering cohorts to identify factors associated with graduating within six years and factors associated with being enrolled but not graduated past six years.

Key findings: Targeted minority status alone is not a significant factor for longer time-to-degree or being enrolled past the six year mark without graduating. That targeted minority students do take longer, on average, to graduate is because targeted minority students are more likely to engage in behaviors that are linked to longer time-to-degree: stopping out, taking fewer than average credits, withdrawing, dropping 10% or more of credits.

Undergraduate Survey

Analysis: Periodically (currently every three years) UW-Madison surveys undergraduates about their academic and social experiences. A summary report on minority student responses is among the focus reports prepared from survey responses. Most recently the survey was conducted in spring 2006.

Key findings: Minority students report both similar and different experiences compared to other students. For example, compared to other students targeted minority students reported being less prepared by their high school for college and having a more difficult transition to college. Both groups were similar in their satisfaction with the assistance they received from the university in making the transition. Overall, minority students were less satisfied with their experience and tended to respond less favorably on questions related to climate and campus community.

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