



Black Undergraduates From *Bakke* to *Grutter*:

Freshmen Status, Trends and Prospects, 1971–2004

While educational research on Black college students is extensive, very few studies can provide a far-reaching overview of the characteristics of Black college students and how their profiles have changed over time. We commissioned Walter Allen, Allan Murray Cartter Professor of Higher Education, to lead this report and make use of the data archives at HERI. As we approach the 40th year of data collection on American college students, we can say we have learned a great deal about the students' aspirations, background and preparation for college, values and attitudes, and behaviors. However, there is still much to be learned about the access and success of different types of students in different types of colleges. This report begins to fill the knowledge gap.

Selected Findings

The half-century since the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed Jim Crow segregation has seen significant and dramatic changes regarding the status of African American students in U.S. higher education. The era is best characterized using a “good news–bad news” scenario. Various indicators of status, trends and prospects among African American college students reveal gains, lost ground and a stubbornly persistent status quo of sizeable, continuing, racial disparities. This report summarizes the status, trends and prospects of Black college freshmen using data collected from 1971 to 2004 through the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP).^{*} More than half a million

^{*}These results were statistically weighted to represent the responses for the 3.6 million Black first-time full-time freshmen attending baccalaureate-granting institutions during that period.

Black freshmen attending over 1,100 baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities were surveyed.

Gender Gap Widens Among Black College Students

Women are a sizeable majority among all African American freshman undergraduates surveyed, and the gender gap widened over time. In 1971, Black women comprised 54.5 percent of those attending four-year institutions, but this percentage had increased to 59.3 percent by 2004. While other race-ethnic groups have discovered a gender gap in college participation, the pattern where women enroll in college at higher rates has been a long-established pattern among African Americans. Yet, the gap steadily grows, portending lower attainment rates for Black males.

Other gender differences are evident among Black freshmen: men tend to come from more affluent backgrounds at both Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) and predominantly white institutions (PWIs), and have higher intellectual self-confidence ratings than women. Black women were significantly more likely than men to have “A” averages at both institutional types, and over time, the gender gap in achievement at college entry has widened at both PWIs (3 percent difference between men and women in 1971 and 14 percent difference in 2004) and HBCUs (6 percent difference in 1971 between men and women and a 12 percent difference in 2004).

The Socioeconomic Status of Black College Students

Today, students from the lowest income groups make up a smaller proportion of the total Black freshman population than in 1971. While the percentage

has decreased over time at both types of institutions, higher concentrations of low income students can be found at HBCUs compared to PWIs. Conversely, there are more Black students in the highest income categories than ever before, with parents who are college educated and who work in white-collar professions. However, a gap still remains regarding Black students and the general freshman population, where over 50% of students reported parents with at least a college degree in 2004. This pattern is indicative of college admissions and recruitment procedures that privilege more affluent students regardless of color.

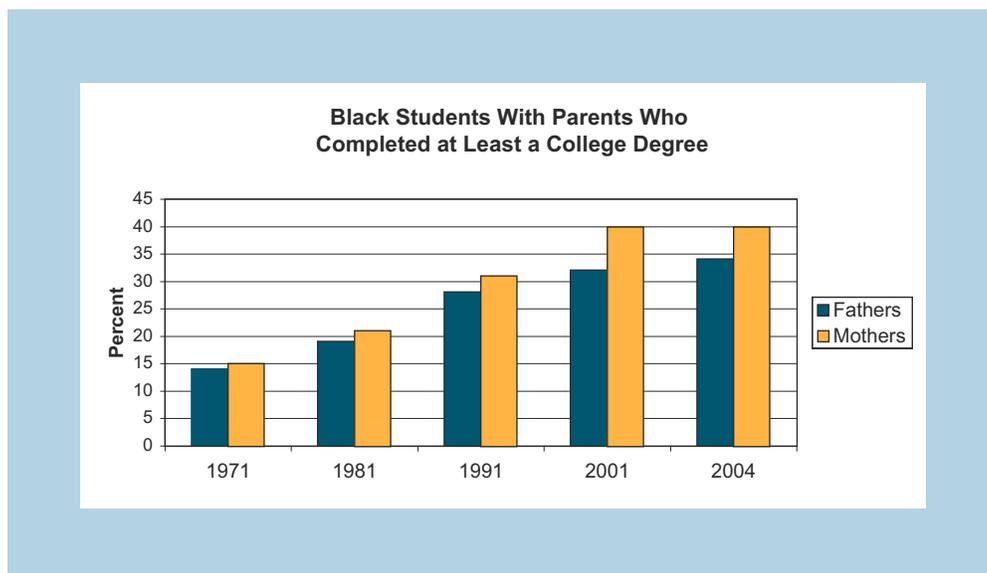
Academic Preparation for College and Aspirations

Black students are now better prepared academically as they enter college. Between 1971 and 2003, there were substantial decreases in Black first-year college students who felt they needed special tutoring or remedial work in English (22 percent in 1971 vs. 16 percent in 2003), reading (13 vs. 7 percent), mathematics (56 vs. 44 percent), science (30 vs. 21 percent) and foreign language (36 vs. 21 percent) at college entry. There were substantial gains between 1984 and 2004 in the proportion who met or exceeded the minimum years of study in English, math, foreign

language, and science. Black students are closer to parity with the general freshman population in terms of years of curricular preparation based on recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. However, more study is needed regarding the types of courses Black students have access to in high school: they were still not as likely as their freshmen peers to meet or exceed foreign language (89 vs. 92 percent) or physical science (45 vs. 59 percent) course requirements, indicating distinctions remain in curricular track and the quality of schools Black students attend.

Comparisons of the 1971 and 2004 cohorts of African American freshmen also reveal significant upward trends in overall academic preparation and aspirations. For instance in 1971, 8 percent of Black freshmen reported high school grade averages of A- or better, as compared to 19 percent of freshmen overall; by 2004, 28 percent of Black freshmen were in this range. Despite significant increases, a significantly higher percentage (48 percent) of the general population reported “A” grades.

Despite differences in preparation, educational aspirations remain high. Twenty-four percent of Black students intended to obtain PhDs, as compared to 17 percent of the general population of students,



and they were slightly more likely to express interest in professional degrees—medical degrees (12 vs. 9 percent) and juris doctorates (6 vs. 5 percent). Black women were twice as likely (16 percent) to aspire toward medical degrees than were men (8 percent). This gender difference is more pronounced among Black students than for the general student population interested in medical careers (11 percent of women vs. 7 percent of men).

Political and Civic Engagement

Over the decades, there has been a trend toward conservative and “middle of the road” political orientations among freshmen. Black students are still more likely to identify as far left or liberal than the general freshmen population, but they are less likely to characterize themselves today as politically “liberal” (36%) than in 1971 (50%). This fact is also evident in their changing views on particular issues, including abortion and homosexuality. Black students are also entering colleges with strong commitments to civic and political participation, coupled with intentions to assume leadership roles. Students increasingly anticipated involvement in volunteer work during college (19 percent in 1990 vs. 30 percent in 2004), but students at HBCUs placed higher importance on volunteering—34 percent of HBCU students expected to volunteer in college compared to 28 percent of students at PWIs. While a growing desire was observed among students to influence social values, this increase was more significant for students attending HBCUs (from 39 percent in 1971 to 52 percent in 2004) than those in PWIs (from 41 percent in 1971 to 48 percent in 2004). Black freshmen also placed increased importance on becoming community leaders, with more Black students at HBCUs being committed to community leadership than students at PWIs in 2004 (47 vs. 40 percent). This trend was accompanied by a large increase in the percentage of students who felt that they possessed skills that would help them fulfill these roles.

Implications

Findings from this report hold many implications for evaluating the progress as well the continuing racial disparities across the higher education landscape. Results highlight the continuing importance of HBCUs in the production of baccalaureates for the nation. At the same time, the role of PWIs has increased in importance over the decades in educating Black college students, and as Justice O’Connor has stated in the recent Supreme Court decision in the University of Michigan affirmative action case *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), “the path to leadership must be visibly open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity.”

The report also covers trends and status information on college choice, views on financial assistance, changing career aspirations, and plans for graduate school. Full citation for this report: Walter R. Allen, Uma M. Jayakumar, Kimberly A. Griffin, William Korn & Sylvia Hurtado (2005). *Black Undergraduates from Bakke to Grutter: Freshmen Status, Trends and Prospects, 1971–2004*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute. ISBN:1-878477-37-4

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Upcoming CIRP Surveys

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) will offer three student surveys during the academic year. The next administration of the HERI Faculty Survey will take place during the 2007–2008 academic year. For further information about any of these surveys, please refer to the HERI website: www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri.

The Freshman Survey

The annual survey of entering college students covers an array of demographic, experiential, and attitudinal issues. The questionnaire covers degree aspirations, major and career plans, and expectations about college. Participating institutions receive a campus profile report, plus national normative data. Institutions can merge their Freshman Survey data with other campus data to create a longitudinal data file for institutional research, planning, and accreditation studies.

Your First College Year (YFCY) Survey

The YFCY Survey provides information on the academic, social, and personal development of first-year college students. When coupled with CIRP Freshman Survey data, YFCY data are especially useful for studying persistence, adjustment, and other first-year outcomes. Students' responses are compared to national and institutional peer group aggregates to enable institutions to determine where their first-year cohort "stands" relative to the first-year experience at large.

The College Student Survey (CSS)

The CSS permits institutions to assess how their students have changed since they entered college. The survey includes measures of self-assessed academic, social, intellectual, and emotional capabilities, and more conventional measures of academic success such as undergraduate GPA and GRE test scores. When combined with the CIRP Freshman Survey data, the CSS serves as a longitudinal measure of cognitive and affective growth in students.

The HERI Faculty Survey

Designed for both faculty and administrators, the survey collects data on career satisfaction; perceptions of campus climate; preferred methods of teaching; and educational goals for students. Demographic information and background characteristics are also queried. In addition, the instrument includes a section that permits individual institutions to ask their faculty/administrators up to 21 locally developed questions. Participating campuses receive a detailed profile of their faculty, as well as national normative data for similar types of institutions. The survey is offered on a triennial basis.

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