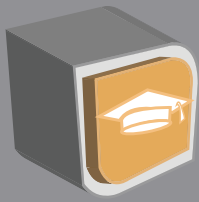


Lynch, M., & Engle, J. (2010). Big Gaps, Small Gaps: Some Colleges and Universities Do Better than Others in Graduating African-American Students. College Results Online. *Education Trust*.

While this article is mostly geared toward faculty, staff can also find some helpful information. It speaks to the need for intentional support such as early alert, student advisors, etc. It maintains that student success equate to good financial sense because it is more cost effective to keep students in the college system than to constantly recruit new students. It demonstrates the need for student support services.

<http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/CRO%20Brief-AfricanAmerican.pdf>



Big Gaps, Small Gaps: Some Colleges and Universities Do Better Than Others in Graduating African-American Students

BY MAMIE LYNCH AND JENNIFER ENGLE

One of the problems with using averages to understand the state of higher education is that the patterns they show gain an air of inevitability. This is especially true when those patterns conform to our sense of how things are—or should be.

So when we see data suggesting that the average graduation rate for black students in four-year colleges and universities is about 20 points below that of their white peers, we are hardly surprised. The average black student, we know, leaves high school with a weaker academic record than the average white graduate, so where's the mystery? Until somebody fixes the high school problem, there's not much colleges and universities can do.

Or is there?

For the past several months, we've been digging beneath the averages and looking at data from individual institutions in our College Results Online database. We've found that some institutions have horrendous graduation-rate gaps between white and black students—well above the national average. And it turns out that other institutions have no gaps at all. Indeed, in dozens of colleges, black students graduate at rates equal to or higher than their white counterparts.

In other words, it's not entirely about preparation, and wide gaps in the graduation rates of white and black students are not inevitable. Our analysis strongly suggests that what colleges do with and for the students they admit matters a great deal.

FOCUSING ON GAPS

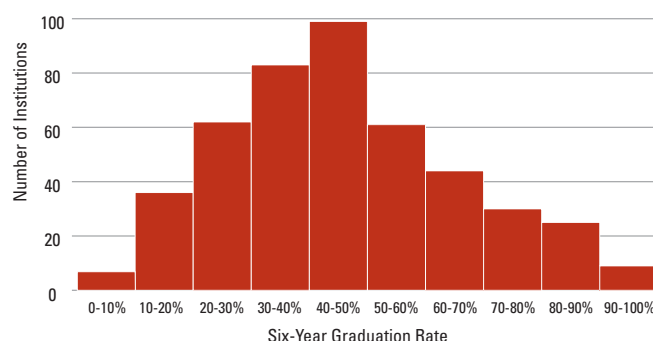
In this brief, we share what we are learning from looking beneath the averages. We identify public and private four-year institutions that appear to serve their black and white students equally well—that is, where both groups graduate at similar rates. We also identify public and private institutions that have a lot of work to do to catch up: Their graduation rate gaps are among the largest in the country.

Gap size, of course, doesn't tell us *everything* we need to know about an institution. Colleges can have small or non-existent gaps in undesirable ways—for example, when students in both groups have abysmal graduation rates. On the other hand, an institution can have a relatively high graduation rate for black students but still have large gaps because white students do even better. That's why other briefs in this series look at the data differently, including examining which institutions have made the biggest recent progress in improving minority graduation rates.

But our focus this time is on *graduation-rate gaps within institutions*. Three reasons:

- Institutions that have demonstrated the capacity to graduate white students at high rates should be able to serve black students equally well.
- Some institutions already are proving that this is possible.
- If every institution pledged to close existing gaps between black and white students, we could produce thousands more black bachelor's-degree recipients every year, and this would be a very big step in putting our country on a path to a better and more equitable future.

Figure 1: Black Graduation Rates Vary Widely Across Institutions



Source: IPEDS 2006, 2007, 2008

Note: Graduation rates are three-year averages for first-time, full-time freshmen from 2006, 2007, and 2008. The sample of institutions includes public and nonprofit Title IV, degree-granting, non-specialty schools with graduation-rate cohorts in at least two of those three years. Institutions with white or black Graduation Rate Survey cohorts of fewer than 30 in any of the three years were excluded from the sample for reliability purposes. Historically Black Colleges and Universities and institutions that primarily grant associate's degrees also are excluded from the sample.

THE GAP IN BLACK AND WHITE

Nationally, African-American students earn bachelor's degrees from four-year institutions at rates 20 percentage points below those of their white peers. In this analysis, we exclude for-profit institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities and concentrate on the 293 public and 163 private nonprofit colleges that have sufficient numbers of students of both races to calculate reliable gaps.¹

The graduation rate for African-American students in the private colleges and universities in our analysis is 54.7 percent, compared with 73.4 percent for whites—an 18.7 percentage-point gap.² Similarly, at public institutions, only 43.3 percent of African-American students graduate within six years, compared with 59.5 percent of whites—a 16.2 percentage-point gap.

Underneath these averages are some pretty sobering statistics (see Figure 1). At nearly two-thirds of the col-

leges and universities we studied, fewer than half of black students actually emerge with the bachelor's degrees they sought at entry; at one-third of the colleges, fewer than 35 percent graduate. (For details on which schools have high and low graduation rates across the country, visit www.collegeresults.org.)

GRADUATION GAPS ARE NOT INEVITABLE

The College Results Online database indicates that graduation-rate gaps vary widely among comparable institutions. For example, the **University of Illinois at Chicago**, which falls on our list of public institutions with large gaps (see page 5), graduates black students at less than 60 percent the rate of whites—30 percent compared with 52 percent—for a large 22-point gap. However, the **University of North Carolina at Greensboro**, the **University of California, Riverside**, and **University of North Carolina at Charlotte** all serve similar students but fall on our list of “small gap” schools (see page 3). In fact, all three institutions graduate black students at rates similar to or higher than the University of Illinois graduates white students (see Table 1). Clearly, when colleges focus on student success, all students benefit greatly—particularly students of color.

At many public and private institutions, black and white students graduate at similar rates. These institutions, listed in Tables 2 and 3,³ have proved it is indeed possible to attain equally strong results for students from different backgrounds. The institutions on these lists did not adjust their academic standards to ensure smaller gaps. Rather, the lists include a diverse set of institutions, representing a wide range of selectivity—from the City University of New York's **John Jay College of Criminal Justice**, with a median entering SAT score of 940, to **Rice University** in Houston, where the median SAT score is 1410. Many of these institutions have shown a continuous commitment to equity and won recognition for their efforts.^{4,5,6}

Table 1: Gaps and Graduation Rates Vary Among Peer Institutions

Institution	Carnegie Classification	Median SAT / ACT Score, Fall '07	Full-Time Equivalent Undergrad Enrollment, Fall '07	% Black, Fall '07	White Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	Black Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	White-Black Gap
University of Illinois at Chicago (IL)	Research	1085	14,849	8.7	51.8	29.8	22.0
University of North Carolina at Greensboro (NC)	Research	1040	12,681	20.8	50.7	55.5	-4.8
University of California, Riverside (CA)	Research	1040	14,693	7.4	62.4	66.9	-4.5
University of North Carolina at Charlotte (NC)	Doctoral/Research	1055	15,750	13.8	50.1	50.1	0.0

Source: IPEDS 2006, 2007, 2008. College Results, 2008.

Table 2: Smallest White-Black Graduation-Rate Gaps Among Public Colleges and Universities

Institution	Carnegie Classification	Median SAT / ACT Score, Fall '07	Full-Time Equivalent Undergrad Enrollment, Fall '07	% Black, Fall '07	White Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	Black Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	White-Black Gap
Stony Brook University (NY)	Research	1180	14,732	8.5	53.5	67.0	-13.5
George Mason University (VA)	Research	1120	15,444	7.4	56.8	62.6	-5.8
Georgia State University (GA)	Research	1085	16,349	30.2	41.6	46.9	-5.3
Christopher Newport University (VA)	Baccalaureate	1170	4,536	6.8	50.4	55.5	-5.1
Winthrop University (SC)	Master's	1045	4,651	27.3	57.4	62.3	-4.9
University of North Carolina at Greensboro (NC)	Research	1040	12,681	20.8	50.7	55.5	-4.8
University of California, Riverside (CA)	Research	1040	14,693	7.4	62.4	66.9	-4.5
University of Montevallo (AL)	Master's	1010	2,342	14.1	47.0	51.3	-4.3
Texas State University-San Marcos (TX)	Master's	1075	21,155	5.1	54.7	59.0	-4.3
Old Dominion University (VA)	Research	1055	13,142	22.6	47.4	50.9	-3.5
SUNY at Albany (NY)	Research	1095	12,222	9.1	63.5	66.2	-2.7
Georgia Southern University (GA)	Doc./Research	1070	13,799	21.6	44.1	46.6	-2.5
CUNY John Jay College Criminal Justice (NY)	Master's	940	10,743	22.6	44.0	46.3	-2.3
Florida State University (FL)	Research	1180	29,182	11.0	69.0	71.2	-2.2
Radford University (VA)	Master's	1005	7,771	5.8	57.8	59.8	-2.0
Coastal Carolina University (SC)	Baccalaureate	1045	6,658	11.5	43.7	45.3	-1.6
Lander University (SC)	Baccalaureate	960	2,182	24.3	43.0	44.0	-1.0
University of South Florida (FL)	Research	1130	28,033	12.7	48.4	49.3	-0.9
East Carolina University (NC)	Doctoral/Research	1025	18,128	15.5	55.4	56.2	-0.8
University of Maryland Baltimore County (MD)	Research	1190	8,463	15.8	59.8	60.4	-0.6
Towson University (MD)	Master's	1080	14,860	11.2	66.7	66.9	-0.2
University of North Carolina at Charlotte (NC)	Doctoral/Research	1055	15,750	13.8	50.1	50.1	0.0
Marshall University (WV)	Master's	1045	8,463	5.6	44.2	44.2	0.0
Sam Houston State University (TX)	Master's	960	12,647	15.1	45.8	45.0	0.8
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (TN)	Master's	1010	7,469	19.4	42.7	41.8	0.9
Valdosta State University (GA)	Master's	1015	8,747	25.5	41.3	40.1	1.2
SUNY College at Purchase (NY)	Baccalaureate	1090	3,791	7.6	49.9	48.3	1.6
University of North Texas (TX)	Research	1095	23,521	13.5	45.3	43.5	1.8
SUNY College at Plattsburgh (NY)	Master's	1050	5,407	4.9	54.7	52.7	2.0

Source: IPEDS 2006, 2007, 2008. Note: Because this small-gap list aims to highlight colleges and universities that are serving students well, the list excludes institutions with white graduation rates lower than 40 percent, the approximate national graduation rate for underrepresented minority students.

For example, **Old Dominion University** in Virginia has a history of success with African-American students. Black students make up almost one-quarter of the student body and in recent years have consistently graduated at rates similar to those of their white peers. In 2008, the university increased its African-American graduation rate to 56 percent, a rate that exceeds the national average for black students. **Florida State University** (FSU) also has consistently small graduation-rate gaps and has boosted African-American graduation rates over time.^{7,8}

Beyond serving African-American students well, 11

of the small-gap institutions also appear in a companion brief because they have small graduation-rate gaps between white and Hispanic students as well (see Table 4). These colleges and universities, such as the **University of Miami**, have shown it is possible for students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to succeed at high rates.

Other colleges and universities have struggled with large gaps but have made great strides in increasing their graduation rates and closing their gaps. For instance, the **University of South Florida** (USF) would not have appeared on the small-gap list at the beginning of the

Table 3: Smallest White-Black Graduation-Rate Gaps Among Private Colleges and Universities

Institution	Carnegie Classification	Median SAT / ACT Score, Fall '07	Full-Time Equivalent Undergrad Enrollment, Fall '07	% Black, Fall '07	White Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	Black Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	White-Black Gap
Agnes Scott College (GA)	Baccalaureate	1170	865	20.9	67.3	72.3	-5.0
Mary Baldwin College (VA)	Master's	1020	1,205	19.0	48.1	52.5	-4.4
Berea College (KY)	Baccalaureate	1065	1,549	17.6	59.4	63.0	-3.6
Loyola University New Orleans (LA)	Master's	1165	2,450	11.7	63.2	65.2	-2.0
University of Tampa (FL)	Master's	1065	4,648	6.2	55.7	57.2	-1.5
University of Miami (FL)	Research	1275	9,911	8.2	74.1	75.3	-1.2
Rice University (TX)	Research	1410	2,996	6.7	91.8	92.6	-0.8
Charleston Southern University (SC)	Master's	970	2,574	29.4	40.0	39.7	0.3
American University (DC)	Doctoral/Research	1265	5,867	4.6	74.5	74.1	0.4
Furman University (SC)	Baccalaureate	1280	2,680	6.7	85.1	84.5	0.6
North Carolina Wesleyan College (NC)	Baccalaureate	950	1,291	47.9	41.9	41.3	0.6
Villanova University (PA)	Master's	1285	6,899	4.2	88.2	87.1	1.1
Loyola Marymount University (CA)	Master's	1155	5,557	8.1	75.8	74.5	1.3

Source: IPEDS 2006, 2007, 2008. Note: Because this small-gap list aims to highlight colleges and universities that are serving students well, the list excludes institutions with white graduation rates lower than 40 percent, the approximate national graduation rate for underrepresented minority students.

decade when its white-black gaps were as high as nine percentage points. But because the university increased African-American graduation rates over the past seven years, the gap has shrunk, and black students now graduate at approximately the same rate as white students. This improvement places USF in the company of fewer than 50 schools nationwide that have small or nonexistent gaps. Similarly, **Georgia State University (GSU)** adopted a data-intensive approach to increasing graduation rates and successfully raised the rates for African-American students and closed its graduation-rate gap.⁹

These improvers can serve as examples for the institutions on our “big gap” lists—the 25 public and 25 private colleges and universities with the largest white-black gaps (see Tables 5 and 6). These institutions all have gaps larger than average, and some have gaps upwards of 30 percentage points. Some institutions—such as the **University of Akron** in Ohio and **Wayne State University** in Michigan—are not serving white students particularly well, but black students fare even worse. Only about four in ten white students at these universities graduate within six years, and *only about one in ten black students do.*

Table 4: Institutions With Large Gaps and Small Gaps Between White and Hispanic Students AND White and Black Students

Institutions With Small White-Hispanic AND White-Black Gaps	Institutions With Large White-Hispanic AND White-Black Gaps
George Mason University	California State University-Chico
Georgia State University	Columbia College Chicago
Loyola Marymount University	Felician College
Loyola University of New Orleans	Kansas State University
Stony Brook University	Millersville University of Pennsylvania
SUNY at Purchase	Rowan University
Towson University	University of Toledo
University of California, Riverside	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
University of Miami	Wayne State University
University of North Carolina at Charlotte	
University of Tampa	

Other institutions—Michigan State University and Indiana University-Bloomington, to name two—graduate white students at high rates but have large gaps for African-American students. At Indiana University, 73 percent of white students graduate within six years—well above the national average—yet only half of its black students do. These gaps are reason for concern, but evidence from such institutions as USF and GSU—and others on the “small gap” lists—proves that large gaps can be reversed.

LESSONS FROM TOP PERFORMERS

Institutions that consistently show high rates of success among minority populations have a wealth of knowledge about ways to improve graduation rates. For example, Winthrop University in South Carolina, a public master’s

institution that enrolls about 5,000 undergraduates, has graduated African-American students at higher rates than whites every year from 2002 through 2008. At Winthrop, where 27 percent of students are black, 62 percent of black students graduate within six years, compared with 57 percent of white students.

Frank Ardaiole, vice president for student life, says Winthrop’s success in promoting high levels of achievement among its diverse student body stems from President Anthony DiGiorgio’s 20-year commitment to make Winthrop “the institution of choice” for minority students in South Carolina and to reflect the demographics of the state. The university has succeeded in recruiting a critical mass of African-American students and, as a result, can take a comprehensive approach to student success.

Table 5: The 25 Public Colleges and Universities With the Largest White-Black Graduation-Rate Gaps

Institution	Carnegie Classification	Median SAT/ ACT Score, Fall '07	Full-Time Equivalent Undergrad Enrollment, Fall '07	% Black, Fall '07	White Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	Black Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	White-Black Gap
Wayne State University (MI)	Research	970	15,478	29.5	43.5	9.5	34.0
California State University-Fresno (CA)	Master’s	930	16,829	5.9	55.9	24.1	31.8
Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania (PA)	Master’s	1010	6,412	5.9	66.2	35.9	30.3
Kansas State University (KS)	Research	1045	17,082	3.1	60.7	30.5	30.2
The College of New Jersey (NJ)	Master’s	1235	6,087	6.1	87.5	58.7	28.8
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (WI)	Research	1030	21,592	6.1	46.1	17.9	28.2
California State University-Bakersfield (CA)	Master’s	930	5,377	8.4	47.2	19.2	28.0
Rowan University (NJ)	Master’s	1105	8,087	7.8	69.5	42.2	27.3
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (WI)	Master’s	1030	8,909	4.4	55.0	27.7	27.3
University of Northern Iowa (IA)	Master’s	1085	10,249	2.6	66.2	39.2	27.0
Millersville University of Pennsylvania (PA)	Master’s	1050	6,814	7.0	67.1	40.1	27.0
California State University-Chico (CA)	Master’s	1025	14,654	2.0	57.5	30.8	26.7
University of Akron Main Campus (OH)	Research	NA	16,051	12.6	39.1	12.4	26.7
Indiana U. of Pennsylvania-Main Campus (PA)	Doctoral/Research	960	11,069	10.8	52.4	26.2	26.2
University of Toledo (OH)	Research	NA	14,438	13.1	49.0	23.9	25.1
Ferris State University (MI)	Master’s	990	9,887	6.4	40.2	15.9	24.3
Saginaw Valley State University (MI)	Master’s	990	6,943	7.3	38.8	14.5	24.3
University of Cincinnati-Main Campus (OH)	Research	1105	18,133	11.0	55.2	31.3	23.9
University of Wisconsin-Madison (WI)	Research	1260	28,341	2.8	80.9	57.6	23.3
Youngstown State University (OH)	Master’s	NA	10,540	13.6	38.6	15.4	23.2
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (MN)	Research	1205	28,825	4.7	65.9	42.8	23.1
Indiana University-Bloomington (IN)	Research	1145	29,325	4.4	73.2	50.3	22.9
Michigan State University (MI)	Research	1145	34,083	8.0	78.4	55.8	22.6
University of Iowa (IA)	Research	1145	19,415	2.2	67.0	44.7	22.3
University of Illinois at Chicago (IL)	Research	1085	14,849	8.7	51.8	29.8	22.0

Source: IPEDS 2006, 2007, 2008.

Table 6: The 25 Private Colleges and Universities With the Largest White-Black Graduation-Rate Gaps

Institution	Carnegie Classification	Median SAT /ACT Score, Fall '07	Full-Time Equivalent Undergrad Enrollment, Fall '07	% Black, Fall '07	White Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	Black Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	White-Black Gap
Lawrence Technological University (MI)	Master's	1065	2,055	7.0	58.6	19.2	39.4
Alverno College (WI)	Master's	930	1,884	14.7	46.6	14.4	32.2
Iowa Wesleyan College (IA)	Baccalaureate	865	702	14.4	38.4	7.5	30.9
Lewis University (IL)	Master's	1010	3,278	9.4	62.1	32.2	29.9
Felician College (NJ)	Baccalaureate	885	1,535	12.5	45.1	17.1	28.0
Robert Morris University (PA)	Master's	1005	3,466	7.8	57.9	30.5	27.4
University of Detroit Mercy (MI)	Master's	1045	2,537	21.4	63.0	36.1	26.9
Abilene Christian University (TX)	Master's	1100	3,801	7.5	60.1	33.8	26.3
Mars Hill College (NC)	Baccalaureate	955	1,192	17.3	41.4	18.4	23.0
Campbell University (NC)	Master's	NA	3,546	15.1	55.5	32.8	22.7
Bradley University (IL)	Master's	1145	5,019	6.0	78.0	55.4	22.6
Roosevelt University (IL)	Master's	1025	2,805	19.2	45.4	22.9	22.5
Columbia College Chicago (IL)	Master's	NA	10,505	13.8	40.9	18.5	22.4
Lehigh University (PA)	Research	1315	4,727	3.2	86.3	64.5	21.8
Widener University-Main Campus (PA)	Doctoral/Research	990	2,834	11.7	58.7	37.0	21.7
East Texas Baptist University (TX)	Baccalaureate	970	1,204	16.7	39.2	17.5	21.7
Mercy College-Main Campus (NY)	Master's	NA	3,976	24.5	40.9	20.7	20.2
La Salle University (PA)	Master's	1055	3,526	12.8	75.4	55.3	20.1
Davenport University (MI)	Master's	NA	5,736	17.1	26.9	7.2	19.7
Marquette University (WI)	Research	1205	7,659	4.9	78.2	58.7	19.5
Gardner-Webb University (NC)	Master's	1013	2,373	17.7	53.3	33.9	19.4
Wittenberg University (OH)	Baccalaureate	1125	1,984	4.9	65.3	46.0	19.3
Adelphi University (NY)	Doctoral/Research	1070	4,513	12.7	69.0	49.8	19.2
N.Y. Inst. of Tech-Old Westbury (NY)	Master's	1005	3,826	5.7	47.3	28.1	19.2
Saint Xavier University (IL)	Master's	1030	2,807	17.6	61.5	42.7	18.8

Source: IPEDS 2006, 2007, 2008.

Instead of targeting special programs specifically toward African Americans, *all* students are expected to graduate, and the university provides support to help them do so. As Ardaiole says, “A Winthrop student is a Winthrop student is a Winthrop student,” and they all receive intentional support.

Winthrop’s University College serves as a central location for retention efforts and as the academic home for freshmen and those who have yet to declare a major. One program includes an early alert system, in which faculty members notify the University College of students who are struggling academically. The college then works with each student’s adviser and resident assistant to provide the student with intrusive counseling.

Acknowledging that “higher education gets in trouble

because it too often shifts the emphasis toward faculty and what they do,” Tom Moore, vice president for academic affairs, explains that Winthrop has worked hard to “seriously move student learning and development to the center of the university’s mission.” As part of this focus, it has incorporated student learning into faculty evaluations and hiring to ensure that all faculty are committed to students’ academic success. These efforts, combined with institutional leaders’ commitment to diversity and student success, are essential in maintaining high graduation rates for all Winthrop students.

Three institutions in the University of North Carolina (UNC) system stand out as leaders with respect to serving African-American students well. **UNC-Greensboro**, **UNC-Charlotte**, and **East Carolina University**¹⁰ all tend

Table 7: University of North Carolina System Universities With Small Black-White Graduation-Rate Gaps

Institution	Carnegie Classification	Median SAT/ACT Score, Fall '07	Full-Time Equivalent Undergrad Enrollment, Fall '07	% Black, Fall '07	White Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	Black Grad Rate, Three-Year Average (2006-08)	White-Black Gap
University of North Carolina at Greensboro	Research	1040	12,681	20.8	50.7	55.5	-4.8
East Carolina University	Doctoral/Research	1025	18,128	15.5	55.4	56.2	-0.8
University of North Carolina at Charlotte	Doctoral/Research	1055	15,750	13.8	50.1	50.1	0

Source: IPEDS 2006, 2007, 2008.

to graduate black and white students at similar rates (see Table 7). The success of these institutions is due partly to consistent and strong leadership from the UNC system, which has worked for the past decade to increase the number of North Carolinians—particularly minority students—with college degrees. Recently, the system required each institution to develop a plan and set realistic stretch goals to raise retention and graduation rates.

UNC-Greensboro Vice Provost Alan Boyette lists three reasons for the university’s focus on student success. First, he says, “it is part of our mission. We don’t just want to provide access, we want our students to succeed.” Second, “it makes good financial sense” to invest in helping students graduate because it costs even more money to recruit new students. And third, Boyette says, the UNC system has made student success a high priority by setting campus retention and graduation goals for Greensboro.

Many of UNC-Greensboro’s initiatives are available to all students, but some are targeted to students of color and other underserved populations. University leaders collect detailed data about these programs and have discovered that students who participate tend to remain enrolled at higher rates than those who do not. Further, the data show that students of color, particularly African-American females, are especially likely to take advantage of these services. “We are data driven,” says Boyette. “We use data to evaluate our programs to decide whether to expand or eliminate them.” Recently, the provost created a division of undergraduate studies to consolidate and optimize the impact of Greensboro’s student-support services.

UNC-Charlotte has taken a similar approach by incorporating academic support services for minority students into the Office of Multicultural Academic Services. This department houses such initiatives as the University

Transition Opportunities Program (UTOP), a summer bridge program; Student Advising for Freshman Excellence (SAFE), which provides academic counseling and support for entering students; PRODUCE, a faculty and peer-mentoring program for minority students in STEM disciplines; and Building Better Brothers, a program focused specifically on the needs of black male students. Some of these programs have been in place for as long as two decades and have successful track records.

The university also offers a range of support services to all students, such as learning communities and tutoring, but administrators find that African-American students disproportionately participate in and benefit from such services. Again, Charlotte officials cite the UNC system’s efforts as a strong motivating factor for the university’s sustained commitment to and support for these student-success programs.

Although there can be no question that our high schools need to do more for and better by African-American students, Winthrop University and UNC’s Greensboro and Charlotte campuses provide evidence that when colleges and universities commit to the hard work of improving student achievement, all students benefit—particularly African Americans.

Similar stories of commitment and examples of promising practices surely exist at other colleges and universities on the small-gap list. These institutions do not focus on what other institutions should have or could have done for their students; instead, they have recognized and taken responsibility for their own role in advancing equity. Most important, they have proved that with dedication and intentionality, any higher education institution can ensure that all students succeed at equal rates.

NOTES

- ¹ Our sample of institutions includes public and nonprofit Title IV, degree-granting, non-specialty schools with graduation-rate cohorts in at least two of the past three years (2006, 2007, and 2008). Institutions with white or black Graduation Rate Survey cohorts of fewer than 30 in any of the three years were excluded from the sample for reliability purposes. Historically Black Colleges and Universities and institutions that primarily grant associate's degrees also are excluded from the sample.
- ² All graduation rates referenced in this brief refer to average graduation rates across three years (2006, 2007, and 2008). This three-year average is intended to smooth one-year data abnormalities.
- ³ All institutions on the small-gap lists also have average three-year white graduation rates of at least 40 percent, which is approximately the average graduation rate for underrepresented minority students nationwide. Because this list aims to highlight institutions that are serving students well, we've excluded institutions with white graduation rates below this 40 percent threshold.
- ⁴ Carey, Kevin. "Graduation Rate Watch: Making Minority Student Success a Priority." Washington, D.C.: Education Sector, 2008.
- ⁵ Carey, Kevin. "One Step From the Finish Line." Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2005.
- ⁶ Haycock, Kati. "Promise Abandoned." Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2006.
- ⁷ Carey, Kevin. "Graduation Rate Watch: Making Minority Student Success a Priority." Washington, D.C.: Education Sector, 2008.
- ⁸ Engle, Jennifer and Theokas, Christina. "Top Gainers: Some Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities Make Big Improvements in Minority Graduation Rates." Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2010.
- ⁹ Engle, Jennifer and Theokas, Christina. "Top Gainers: Some Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities Make Big Improvements in Minority Graduation Rates." Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2010.
- ¹⁰ East Carolina University was highlighted in a previous report by The Education Trust. See: Carey, Kevin. "A Matter of Degrees." Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2004.



About College Results Online

College Results Online (www.collegeresults.org) is an interactive tool designed to provide information about graduation rates for most four-year colleges and universities. CRO allows users to:

- Examine graduation rates and see how these rates have changed over time.
- Compare graduation rates of similar colleges serving similar students.
- Learn about colleges' track records in graduating diverse groups of students.

Some colleges do a much better job of graduating students than others. At many colleges, significant gaps exist in graduation rates between white students and students of color. But some colleges are proving that low graduation rates—especially for minority students—are not inevitable.



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ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST

The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college. We work alongside parents, educators, and community and business leaders across the country in transforming schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses, shape our state and national policy agendas. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people—especially those who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families—to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.