



BULLETIN

Published by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement

HSI/HACU Consortium

Student Characteristics and Hispanic-Serving Community Colleges: Findings from CCSSE 2004

Community colleges serve disproportionately more Hispanic students than white or African American students (Schmidt, 2003). Despite large and growing enrollments, Hispanic students face significant risk factors that may impede their success; for example, both Hispanics and African Americans are more likely than their white peers to experience risk factors such as working more than 30 hours per week, being first-generation college students, being academically under-prepared, being single parents, caring for children at home, being financially independent, attending college part-time, and identifying the cost of attending college as a significant issue (CCSSE, 2003). Persistence and attainment are key concerns for the academic and economic success of these students.

Laura Rendón, professor at California State University at Long Beach, further emphasizes the many challenges Latino students face in higher education – many of which can be affected in positive ways by institutions. Says Rendón:

They have a difficult time staying. Many working-class, first-generation Latinos experience feelings of inadequacy, isolation, and cultural shock. Institutions haven't fostered inclusive environments where students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds can interact and are comfortable with each other. Latino students feel their interests are marginalized in the curriculum, and they have few Latino faculty members to serve as their mentors. What's more, many must work and can only attend college part-time (2003).

The purpose of this CCSSE Bulletin is twofold: first, it highlights student characteristics at Hispanic-serving community colleges participating in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, as compared to other colleges; and second, it offers recommendations

regarding ways institutions can take into account these student characteristics and needs to employ effective educational practices that engage students.

Findings from the 2004 Community College Student Report inform this CCSSE Bulletin. The following 15 institutions have been included in this analysis and comprise the 2004 HSI/HACU Consortium: Brookhaven College (TX), Central Arizona College (AZ), Coastal Bend College (TX), College of the Mainland (TX), Estrella Mountain Community College (AZ), Houston Community College System (TX), Howard College (TX), Mountain View College (TX), North Lake College (TX), Northwest Vista College (TX), Palo Alto College (TX), Phoenix College (AZ), Richland College (TX), Southwest Texas Junior College (TX), and St. Philip's College (TX). CCSSE member colleges administered surveys in randomly selected classes during the spring 2004 term. Following data analysis, reports were shipped to institutions in August 2004. For this CCSSE Bulletin, frequency data aggregated across the 15 colleges participating in the HSI/HACU Consortium, as compared with the other 2004 CCSSE member colleges (137 institutions), have been analyzed to review factors pertaining to student characteristics and student engagement.

Findings – Student Characteristics at HSI/HACU Colleges

Hispanic students are enrolled at greater rates in HSI/HACU colleges than at other colleges. According to CCSSE 2004 results, approximately 38% of part-time students enrolled in HSI/HACU colleges are Hispanic/Latino/Spanish as compared to about 15% of part-time students enrolled in other colleges. In addition, about 40% of full-time students enrolled in HSI/HACU colleges are Hispanic/Latino/Spanish as compared to approximately 14% of full-time students enrolled in other colleges.

Language proficiency and **parental degree attainment** are examples of student characteristics that differ between students from HSI/HACU colleges and students from other colleges. HSI/HACU college students are more likely than their peers to indicate that English is *not* their first language. They are also more likely to indicate parental degree attainment levels that suggest students'

first-generation status.¹ Approximately twice as many students from HSI/HACU colleges as compared to their peers indicate that English is not their first language (23% as compared to 11% respectively). Furthermore, according to *CCSSE* 2004 results, 24% of students from HSI/HACU colleges report that the highest level of educational attainment of their fathers was *less than* a high school diploma, as compared to 16% of their peers from other colleges; twenty-three percent of HSI/HACU college students indicate the highest level of educational attainment of their mothers was *less than* a high school diploma, as compared to 13% of their peers.

Many students enroll in higher education institutions with specific goals and aspirations. *CCSSE* results indicate differences between students' goals at HSI/HACU colleges and other colleges. Students from HSI/HACU colleges are (a) *less* likely than students from other colleges to mark obtaining an associate degree as their primary goal (51% at HSI/HACU colleges and 60% at other colleges), but are (b) *more* likely to mark transferring to a four-year college or university as their primary goal (62% at HSI/HACU colleges and 52% at other colleges).²

Recommendations

As a result of enrolling larger numbers of students with unique needs and backgrounds, HSI/HACU colleges face different challenges than do other institutions. For example, HSI/HACU colleges are called to enhance student engagement by designing educational experiences that place a special focus on ESL and college orientation courses. Effective redesign of these courses will likely support students with limited English-speaking skills and those with limited knowledge of how to succeed in college.

Findings also show that students who enroll in HSI/HACU colleges are more likely than their peers at other colleges to indicate goals to transfer to four-year colleges or universities. Accordingly, HSI/HACU colleges may support student engagement by focusing on academic advising. Paying special attention to the transfer function and transfer services, since many students are not transferring

at a rate commensurate with their goals, likely will facilitate student success.

Review of student experiences with the college environment likewise offers valuable information about the extent to which students are engaged – and how institutions can intentionally design student experiences to facilitate success. An upcoming *CCSSE* Bulletin will address the types of activities students from HSI/HACU colleges engage in and how those activities may encourage or impede their engagement and success.

CCSSE's 2005 HSI/HACU Consortium

CCSSE's 2005 HSI/HACU Consortium consists of 14 colleges across five states. They are Austin Community College (TX), Community College of Denver (CO), Dona Ana Branch Community College – NMSU (NM), El Paso Community College (TX), Harold Washington College (IL), Houston Community College System (TX), LaGuardia Community College (NY), Mountain View College (TX), Northwest Vista College (TX), Palo Alto College (TX), Pasco-Hernando Community College (FL), Pueblo Community College (CO), San Antonio College (TX), Santa Fe Community College (NM), St. Phillip's College (TX), and Wilbur Wright College (IL). These colleges participated in the spring 2005 survey and will receive their results in July 2005.

For more information about *CCSSE*'s HSI/HACU Consortium, please visit www.ccsse.org.

References

CCSSE. (2003). *Engaging Community Colleges: National Benchmarks of Quality, 2003 Findings*. Austin: Community College Leadership Program, The University of Texas at Austin.

Rendon, L. (2003). Educating the Largest Minority Group. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 50:14, B6.

Schmidt, P. (2003). Academe's Hispanic Future. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 50:14, A8.

Footnotes

¹ First-generation college students are classified as students who indicate that both parents have not earned a degree higher than a high school diploma and have no college experience.

² Students are able to mark more than one response to this question.