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ACADEMIC CLIMATE AND STUDENT RETENTION

Charles E. Morris, Ira L. Neal, Maria E. Canabal, and Lilibeth Gumia

The relationship between academic climate and undergraduate student retention continues to be a critical issue for the postsecondary education community. Researchers (Tinto, Pascarella, Blackwell, Astin, Olivas and others) have found that academic success, retention, and persistence to graduation are related to factors such as: student interaction with faculty, inclusive curricular offerings, presence of role models, and high school preparation. Yet, despite the documented importance of these factors, it appears a great deal of work remains to be done especially for Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians. The progress that some institutions have made may not be as promising or as significant as suggested in magazines, reports, journals and other printed media on the topic of campus climate.

Case Study Highlights

In a case study of 4,502 randomly selected undergraduate students (approximately 25% of the total undergraduate population) enrolled at a public midwest university-- eight factors were identified as important to describing academic climate. Undergraduate students participating in this study were grouped by gender and by race. Comparisons were made between those students who would start over at the institution and those who would not, given the opportunity to choose. The research findings suggest, in general, that for women and minority students, the academic climate continues to present impediments to their academic progress, when compared to white males. More specific findings are:

- The eight factors identified in the case study are: Racial Sensitivity (on and off campus); Student Inclusion at the Departmental Level; Inclusion at Upper Levels of Leadership/ Management; Student Growth and Development; Racial Sensitivity in the Classroom; Faculty Consideration for Students' Academic Needs; Inclusion in Institution-Wide Activities; and Inclusion in the Classroom.
- Mean responses of Black and Hispanic students on the eight academic climate factors did not differ significantly on any factor.
- Minority students as a group indicated that racial insensitivity and exclusion from the academic culture were reasons for not wishing to start over at the same institution.
- Students who indicated they would not start over at the institution had significantly lower mean responses on the following factors: Racial Sensitivity (on and off campus); Inclusion at the Departmental level; Inclusion at Upper Levels of Management; and Student Growth and Development.

- Female students viewed to a greater extent than males that barriers existed to a supportive academic climate.
- All students perceived that racial sensitivity and inclusion in the academic culture did not exist to the same degree for all racial groups.
- Of the 111 Black students that indicated that they would not start over at the institution, 85% had grade point averages of 2.0 or higher.
- Forty-five and a half percent of all Black students participating in this case study indicated that they would not start over at the institution. Of the black student respondents, 73.3% were females and 26.7% were males.
- Black students identified racial sensitivity, on as well as off-campus, as the most critical factor affecting their decision to start over at the institution.
- Of all student groups, Black and Hispanic females indicated the greatest dissatisfaction with the academic climate. Hispanic and Black students were more likely than other groups to choose not to start over at the institution.
- Of the 1,141 students that indicated that they would not start over at the same institution, 85% had grade point averages of 2.0 or above.
- One hundred and two (or 8.9%) of the 1,141 students that indicated they would not start over at the institution had grade point averages of 1.99 or below.
- 43.6% of the 401 minority students participating in this case study indicated they would not start over at the institution.
- Twenty-three (46%) of the 60 Hispanic students participating indicated that they would not start over at the institution. 60.9% of the total Hispanic respondents were females, and 39.1% were males.
- Nineteen (82.6%) of the 23 Hispanic students receiving a grade point average of 2.0 or higher, would not start over at the institution.
- One out of four white students participating in this case study indicated that they would not start over at the institution. (63.3% of the white respondents were females, and 36.7% were males).
- Nine hundred and fifteen (91.8%) of the 997 White students who indicated that they would not start over at the institution had grade point averages of 2.0 or higher.

About the Project

The inception of the project was due to several key issues including:

- Legislation enacted by the Illinois General Assembly to address the issues of limited access and success of racial/ethnic minority student groups.
- The lack of data to develop information about the relationship of campus climate to minority student retention.

Objectives of the project include:

- The identification of campus climate variables related to the retention of students, particularly minority students.
- The identification of policy issues related to campus climate and the retention of students.

—Reports, studies, and climate assessment surveys prepared by the project staff are available on a fee basis.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, WRITE:

"Assessment of Educational Equity"
Center for Higher Education
Illinois State University
Normal, IL 61761-5960
Phone # (309)-438-8627