

EQUITY ASSESSMENT EXCERPTS

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MINORITY STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

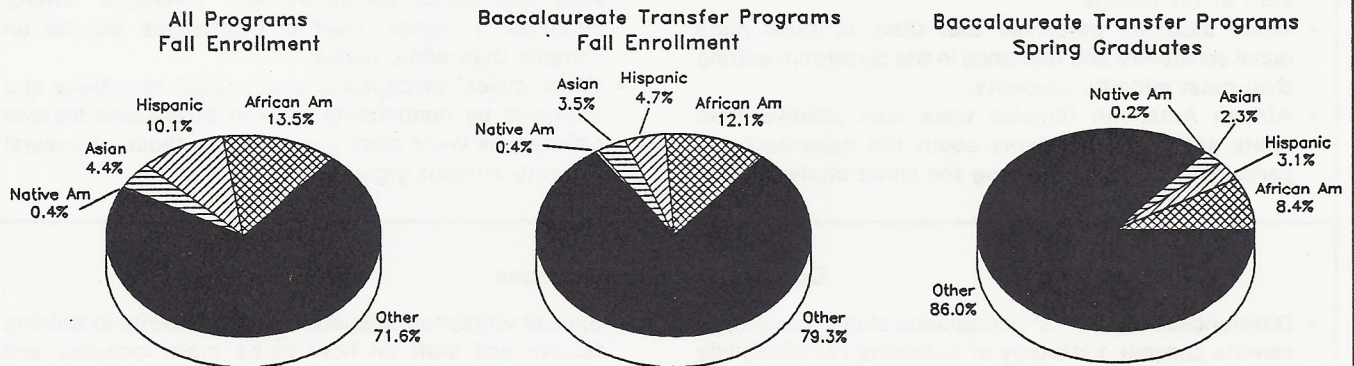
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For a large portion of minority students in Illinois colleges and universities, community colleges are the primary access to higher education. In Fall 1993, American racial minorities represented 28.4% of the total number of students enrolled in Illinois community colleges. From Fall 1989 to Fall 1992, those representations were 27.3%, 27.8%, 27.9% and 28.1%, respectively.* However, minority students are represented largely in precollegiate nontransfer programs. For example, African Americans and Latinos represented 21.4% and 41.6%, respectively, of the total number of students in adult education in 1993. This situation presents a challenge for community colleges to upgrade students' skills sufficient for them to matriculate at the college level.

Of the total number of students enrolled in transfer programs, minorities represented 20.7%. Minorities represented 19.4% of the total occupational program enrollments. In the general associate degree programs, which are not designed for transfer or for immediate employment in a specific occupational field, minorities represented 39.3%.

Minority graduates with associate degrees are disproportionately lower than minority enrollments in community colleges. Of the total number of associate degree graduates in 1993, minority graduates represented 15.4%. The pie graphs show the 1993 enrollment in certain programs and the distribution of 1993 graduates by ethnic category.

ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGES - 1993*



Why are minority student groups not earning degrees at levels equal to their proportions of enrollment? Extensive efforts have been made to improve minority student retention and academic progress through special initiatives. Over \$10 million annually are allocated to community colleges through the Illinois Community College Board Special Populations Grant program for the development of special programs and services designed to help special populations, including minority students. The Illinois Board of Higher Education also budgets several million dollars to improve minority student achievement through the Higher Education Cooperation Act, which supports joint efforts between institutions and agencies. However, these initiatives have not produced expected levels of minority student enrollments and graduates.

Community college administrators are recognizing the need to assess students' learning climates before implementing additional programs and services that might have minimal effect on student achievement. Research findings and observations (Morris and Neal, 1989; Harris, 1992) have supported the need to enhance the classroom and learning environment for minority students as well as offer support services and programs designed to assist students in meeting their educational objectives.

*Data Sources: Illinois Board of Higher Education; Illinois Community College Board.

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Case Study Highlights

The Assessment of Educational Equity Project, at Illinois State University, evaluates institutional and learning climates for students. In the spring of 1992, data were collected from five community colleges to assess learning climates. A random sample of 177 students from one community college provides the basis for the analysis described here. The sample is divided into ten subgroups of males and females ethnically comprised of African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, Latinos and Whites. White students comprised 87% of the sample.

The primary objective of this study was to determine if there were differences in the perceptions held by minority and white students about their college's learning climate. Climate is defined as the intellectual and humanistic orientation which is a part of the students' development (Neal, 1990) — generally encompassing classroom interactions, relationships between students and faculty in and outside of the classroom, and the interactions between students and staff.

The instrument (inventory) used to gather information from students incorporates Likert-type scales with responses ranging from "1" for Strongly Disagree" to "4" for Strongly Agree." Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Multivariate Analysis (MANOVA) and Discriminate Analysis (DA) tests were conducted to determine if significant differences existed.

Findings

- Based upon MANOVA and DA tests, significant differences were found to exist between perceptions of different student groups about the climate in which they learn, in and outside of class.
- Latino females differed from latino males regarding the opportunity for students of all races/ethnicity to be admitted to academic programs.
- African American females differed from Asian males, Latino females and white students about having equal opportunity to participate as faculty and professional staff at the college.
- White students perceived that there is much more racial sensitivity and tolerance in the classroom setting than most minority students.
- African American females were less positive than white and Latino students about the opportunity to participate as leaders among the entire student body.
- Tests showed that perceptions of selected minority students at the community college were generally less favorable than those of white students. They also showed differences among the perceptions within minority groups.
- African American females felt that there was less racial sensitivity and tolerance among nonminority clerical or support staff on campus than white and selected minority students.
- African American and Latino females felt that there was less racial sensitivity and tolerance among nonminority clerical staff in businesses located on campus than white males.
- White males' perceptions about racial sensitivity and tolerance by nonminority staff in businesses located off-campus were more positive than those of several minority student groups.

Conclusions & Implications

- Differences in students' perceptions about the campus climate suggest a strategy of designing or redesigning programs and services that address distinct student group needs.
- Generic programs designed to meet all students' needs might be inadequate to the needs of some subgroups of students.
- Student perceptions about the lack of equal opportunity for minorities to demonstrate leadership abilities among the student body or participate in leadership roles as faculty or staff probably has a lot to do with not seeing persons like themselves in these positions.
- Efforts should be made by faculty to be more inclusive in classroom activities and in topics discussed in class.
- Special workshop sessions could be helpful in training faculty and staff on how to be more inclusive and sensitive to diversity issues and minority student needs.

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

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