



INSIGHT

Lessons learned from our grantmaking programs

Using Multiple Lenses: An Examination of the Economic and Racial/Ethnic Diversity of College Students

An Analysis from the Campus Diversity Initiative

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*A research brief from The James Irvine Foundation
Campus Diversity Initiative Evaluation Project*



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Executive Summary

Using enrollment data from twenty-two independent California colleges and universities, this study examined higher education access through two lenses—the distribution of Pell Grant recipients across racial/ethnic groups as well as the percentage of Pell Grant recipients within each racial/ethnic group. Analyses indicate that between 2000 and 2004: (a) the percentage and number of Pell Grant recipients declined overall, (b) the percentage of underrepresented minority (URM) Pell Grant recipients increased as a percentage of all Pell Grant recipients, and (c) the percentage of URM Pell Grant recipients decreased as a percentage of all URM students.

The findings are noteworthy for two reasons. First, all of the campuses were part of a grant-funded project designed to increase access and success for low-income and URM students. Second, figures from the same time indicated that the total number of Pell Grant recipients increased substantially at four-year institutions nationwide.

After discussing the implications of these findings, the brief offers recommendations to help campus leaders better collect and use data in efforts to expand college access for both low-income and URM students. This brief is also intended to help campus leaders confront the “either/or” thinking and persistent assumptions about race/ethnicity and income levels that frequently surfaced during the five-year period of this study. Dichotomous thinking, in particular, threatened to shortchange diversity and access efforts when campus leaders conflated race/ethnicity and class, focused on one factor at the expense of the other, or focused on the two factors in isolation.

The Campus Diversity Initiative and CDI Evaluation Project

The James Irvine Foundation established the Campus Diversity Initiative (CDI), a \$29 million effort to assist twenty-eight independent colleges and universities in California in strategically improving campus diversity. The six-year initiative (2000–2005) supported a range of campus activities and institutional changes with the aim of increasing access and success of low-income and underrepresented minority students in higher education.

The CDI included a strong evaluation component to help each institution focus its strategies and track institutional goals. Researchers from Claremont Graduate University (CGU) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) designed and led the CDI Evaluation Project to assist the CDI campuses in developing their own evaluation expertise and mechanisms. They assembled an Evaluation Project team that worked with participating campuses to measure success, make mid-course corrections, and ultimately broaden and sustain diversity efforts beyond the scope of the grant-funded projects.

Another purpose of the CDI Evaluation Project was to contribute new knowledge about effective diversity practices to the higher education field. Toward that end, the project is issuing three research briefs, of which this is the third, a monograph, a final report, and a resource kit. More information can be found at www.aacu.org/irvinediveval or www.irvine.org/publications/by_topic/education.shtml.

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We thank the CDI campuses for their willingness to share their data with us and for their dedicated efforts throughout the project. We also thank the CDI Evaluation Project Team, past and present, and Martha Campbell of The James Irvine Foundation for her contributions to this research brief. Finally, we thank Misha Charles for her administrative support of the project and especially Nancy O'Neill for her editing of the manuscript.

Introduction

EXAMINING RACE/ETHNICITY AND INCOME LEVEL TOGETHER

Nationally, numerous studies (Heller 2000, 2002; Kahlenberg 2004; Mortensen 2006; and National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education 2002) have indicated that students from low-income backgrounds are increasingly less likely to attend college and complete a four-year degree. Heller and Kahlenberg, in particular, point to the low proportion of Pell Grant recipients enrolling in four-year institutions as a marker of increasingly limited access.

The Education Trust, citing data from the U.S. Department of Education, reports that 97 percent of high-achieving, high-income students attend college compared to 78 percent of high-achieving, low-income students.¹ Perhaps more disturbing, the latter rate is comparable to low-achieving, high-income students, 77 percent of whom attend college. The Education Trust reports that by age 26, more than 60 percent of students from high-income families will have received a bachelor's degree, compared to only 7 percent of students from low-income families.²

As access for low-income students becomes increasingly limited, high-profile, elite institutions such as Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and Stanford have announced targeted programs for low-income students to attend their institutions on full grants and scholarships. Private foundations (e.g., Bill and Melinda Gates, James Irvine, and Lumina foundations) have also begun to focus their grantmaking on increasing access for low-income students as well as for underrepresented minority (URM) students.³ The Federal Pell Grant Program continues to provide need-based grants to low-income students,⁴ though the maximum Pell Grant awarded does not cover the cost of tuition and fees at most colleges, especially private institutions.⁵ Indeed, the overall “buying power” of a Pell Grant is lower today than it was thirty years ago, when adjusted for inflation (Gladioux 2004).

¹ Source: National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS). See <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs97/97388.pdf>, p. 64. Access for low-income students is further constrained by shifts on campuses toward non-need based aid. Such aid is often based on high standardized test scores, which privilege middle- to high-income students (Heller 2006a; Heller and Marin 2002, 2004). For more on the term “non-need based aid,” see Heller 2000b.

² Source: National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS). See www2.edtrust.org/edtrust.

³ In this study, “underrepresented minority” refers to members of African American, Latino/a, and American Indian/Alaska Native communities. When we include members of other racial/ethnic minority communities in our discussion, we use terms such as “faculty of color” and “students of color.”

⁴ Eligibility is determined using a formula that takes into account the student's expected contribution based on income and assets, cost of attending the institution, and full- or part-time status. See www.pellinstitute.org/federalgrantprogram.html.

⁵ According to Wei, Li, and Berkner (2004, 18), “in nominal dollars, the maximum Pell Grant was \$2,300 in 1989–1990; \$2,400 in 1992–1993; \$2,340 in 1995–1996; and \$3,125 in 1999–2000.” According to King (2003), the maximum Pell Grant award, in 2003, covered 16 percent of the average price of tuition, fees, and on-campus room and board at a private, not-for-profit college or university.

Unfortunately, the increased attention being paid to economic diversity has not always translated into a more nuanced examination of access. In our collective experience working on diversity issues in higher education, we have seen many examples where researchers and practitioners have conflated race/ethnicity and class, focused on one factor at the expense of the other, or focused on each factor in isolation.⁶ The tendency to conflate race/ethnicity and class can stem from assumptions that all URM students are low-income and vice versa. The tendency to examine one factor or the other or to examine them in isolation can stem from beliefs that race/ethnicity is no longer “relevant” to college access or that racial/ethnic differences in access and success are merely by-products of economic inequities.⁷ On the research side, there is the desire in quantitative work to control for multiple influences, and so less attention is paid to the impact of the *intersection* of these factors on outcomes related to student access and success.

The increased attention being paid to economic diversity has not always translated into a more nuanced examination of access.

Within the Campus Diversity Initiative (CDI),⁸ twenty-eight campuses worked to enhance college access and success for low-income and URM students. The CDI Evaluation Project team realized early on that analyzing race/ethnicity and income together would provide campus leaders with a clearer picture of progress than would analyzing either factor alone.

In this study, we first investigated the racial/ethnic diversity among Pell Grant recipients. We then examined the economic diversity within major racial/ethnic groups, relying on Pell Grant status as a proxy for economic status. This brief presents the findings and offers recommendations to help campus leaders better collect and use campus data to assess progress. The brief is designed to prompt institutions to consider the many factors within their control that can contribute to greater access and success of *both* low-income students from all racial/ethnic groups *and* URM students from all income levels.⁹

⁶ For example, a report might offer a graph representing access among various racial/ethnic groups, followed by a graph representing access among students at different income levels.

⁷ For example, a recent survey conducted by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Fischer 2006) found that “presidents of four-year colleges said low socioeconomic status should play the greatest role in admissions decisions after academics, even more than other factors, such as race and ethnicity, legacy status, or athletic ability.”

⁸ The twenty-eight campuses involved in the CDI also set out to build institutional capacity for diversity in order to better ensure the success of all students entering their doors. For a more detailed description of the CDI project, see the box on page two or visit www.aacu.org/irvine/eval.

⁹ This study did not focus on the complex historical relationship between race/ethnicity and income in the United States. For more information on this, see Borrego 2003, Grant and Sleeter 1986, and Karabel 1998.

Methodology

A MULTIPLE-LENS APPROACH

We utilized two lenses to analyze Pell Grant recipients across a set of CDI campuses from 2000 to 2004. The first lens examined the overall distribution of Pell Grant recipients across racial/ethnic groups, and any changes that occurred between the start year and end year. This lens, in particular, provided a picture of the overall economic diversity of students attending CDI schools and the racial/ethnic distribution of this economic indicator.

The second lens focused on the percentage of students *within* racial/ethnic groups who received Pell Grants, and any changes that occurred between the start year and end year. This lens provided a measure of the economic diversity within the major racial/ethnic groups included in the data. Ultimately, utilizing both lenses offered a richer picture regarding access for low-income students. They also helped show whether specific racial/ethnic groups were affected differently by low-income student access, and to what extent, during the years under study.

Ultimately, utilizing both lenses offered a richer picture regarding access for low-income students.

Data

Between 2000 and 2004, the twenty-eight CDI campuses submitted annual data to the Evaluation Project team regarding the racial/ethnic demographics of their students, faculty, administrators, and governing boards.¹⁰ The campuses used a standardized template for data submission to ensure consistency of information. Although the participating campuses became involved in the CDI at different points in the initiative,¹¹ data regarding fall 2000 were requested from all twenty-eight CDI campuses in order to establish a baseline for comparison across institutions. The Evaluation Project team asked for data on Pell Grant recipients in order to examine the economic status of students on campuses with undergraduate programs.¹² Although there has been considerable concern about the adequacy of Pell Grants as an economic indicator, it was the best one for cross-institutional comparisons.¹³

¹⁰ The categories used were American Indian/Alaska Native, African American, Latino/a, Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI), white, non-resident, and race/ethnicity unknown.

¹¹ Each of the twenty-eight campuses received three-year grant awards, with the first campuses receiving funds in June 2000 and the last in June 2003.

¹² One of the twenty-eight campuses offered only graduate programs.

¹³ Concern stems from the lack of consistency of available data as well as the limited criteria used for Pell Grant selection (Tebbs and Turner 2005). Individual campuses can perform similar analyses with a much broader array of income data available to them and are encouraged to do so.

Twenty-two CDI campuses provided complete Pell Grant data and thus comprised the sample for this study (hereafter “sample” or “sample campuses”). These data were reported in disaggregated form by race/ethnicity.

Methods

Because of the variation in campus size,¹⁴ *average percentages* were used in some of our analyses to ensure that institutions were weighted equally in the calculations. For example, to find out the percentage of Pell Grant recipients by race/ethnicity in 2000, we first took the raw numbers from a campus and converted them into a percentage for that institution (campus % URM Pell Grant recipients, 2000). Then we added the individual URM percentages from each campus and divided the total by the number of campuses in the sample (average % URM Pell Grant recipients, 2000). In other analyses, we analyzed *percentage change over time on individual campuses* for the twenty-two CDI schools. Finally, in order to make comparisons to national and state data, we worked with the *total sum of Pell Grant recipients* enrolled in CDI schools, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, in fall 2000 and fall 2004.

¹⁴The CDI campuses range from selective research universities to liberal arts colleges to small, special-mission institutions.

Findings

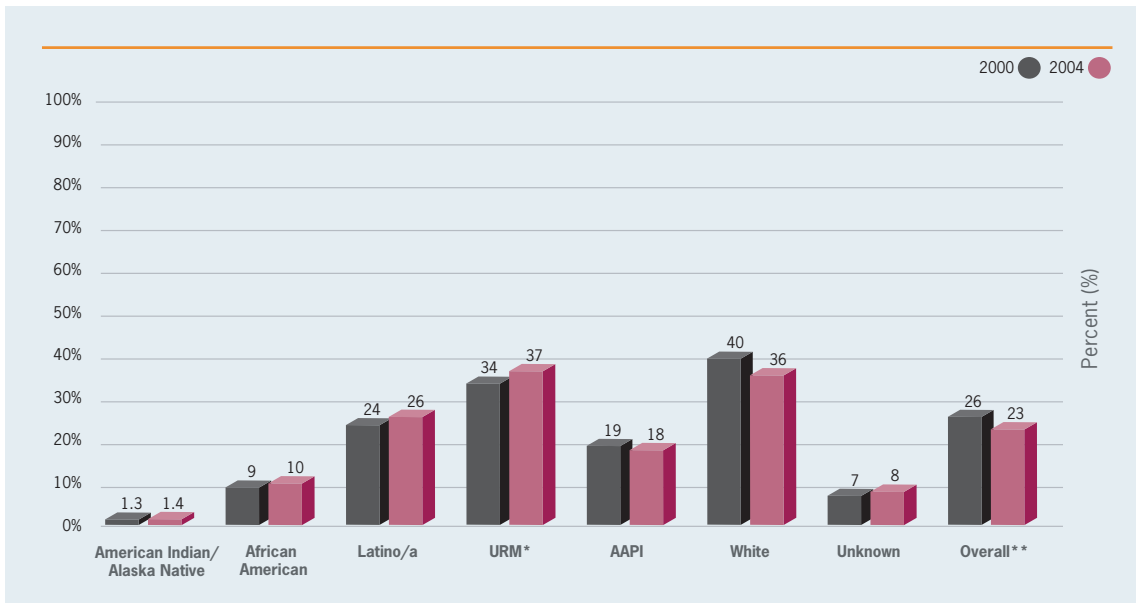
THE PICTURE OF CAMPUS DIVERSITY DEPENDS ON THE LENS

Lens One: As a Whole, URM Students Represent a Growing Portion of Pell Grant Recipients ...

By mapping the distribution of Pell Grant recipients in 2000 and 2004, we could illustrate the extent of economic diversity among the undergraduate students at the CDI schools during this time, as well as any change over time. Because the data were disaggregated by race/ethnicity, this lens also illustrated how low-income students at the sample campuses were represented across racial/ethnic groups.

Across the twenty-two sample campuses, the average percentage of Pell Grant recipients decreased from 26 percent to 23 percent of all students during the period under study (see fig. 1). There was substantial variation across campuses. Of the twenty-two sample campuses, the proportion of students receiving Pell Grants decreased on ten campuses (by an average of 14 percent) and increased on ten campuses (by an average of 10 percent). Two campuses had no change.

Figure 1. Pell Grant recipients by race/ethnicity and overall, averaged across twenty-two campuses, 2000 and 2004



Source: CDI campus data workbooks, campus provided [n = 22].

Note: Due to rounding, some totals may not be exact sums.

*URM = the first three categories displayed.

**Overall Pell Grant recipients as percentage of undergraduate population.

In 2000, white students comprised 40 percent of all Pell Grant recipients, the largest single group and a greater percentage than all URM students combined. By 2004, their overall proportion had decreased to 36 percent of the distribution.¹⁵ Over the same time period, Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) Pell Grant recipients decreased from 19 percent to 18 percent. Conversely, the average percentage of URM Pell Grant recipients increased from 34 percent to 37 percent of all recipients, with the 37 percent comprising 1 percent American Indian/Alaska Native students, 10 percent African American students, and 26 percent Latino/a students. This represented an average increase of three URM Pell Grant recipients per campus (see table 1 and fig. 1).¹⁶

Table 1. Distribution of Pell Grant recipients by race/ethnicity averaged across twenty-two campuses, 2000 and 2004

	American Indian/Alaska Native	African American	Latino/a	URM	AAPI	White	Unknown	Total
2000								
n*	9	62	151	222	135	206	34	593
Average percentage**	1%	9%	24%	34%	19%	40%	7%	
2004								
n	9	65	150	225	126	184	39	574
Average percentage	1%	10%	26%	37%	18%	36%	8%	
Percentage Growth***	0%	5%	-1%	1%	-7%	-11%	15%	-3%

Note: Due to rounding some figures may not appear as exact sums.

*n = average number of Pell Grant recipients across twenty-two sample campuses.

**Average percentage = average percentage of each school's percentage for that year.

***Percentage growth = percent change in n from 2000 to 2004.

Given the CDI's focus on increasing access and success for URM and low-income students, we examined the percentage change in URM Pell Grant recipients at each of the twenty-two campuses (see fig. 2). Here again there was variation across the sample. Between 2000 and 2004, sixteen campuses had an increase in URM Pell Grant recipients (by an average of 6 percent), five campuses had a decrease in URM Pell Grant recipients (by an average of 5 percent), and one campus had no change.

¹⁵ Given the findings from earlier research (Smith et al. 2005) on unknown students at three CDI campuses, it may be that a sizeable portion of students whose racial/ethnic identity is categorized as "unknown" are white. If this is the case, the proportion of white Pell Grant recipients would increase relative to the whole.

¹⁶ The increased percentage of URM Pell Grant recipients was due more to an overall decrease in Pell Grant recipients than to a sizeable increase in the number of URM Pell Grant recipients across the sample.

Table 2. Total Pell Grant recipients nationally, in California, and in the CDI sample, 2000-2001 and 2003-2004

	U.S.*		California*		CDI**
	Public (4-year)	Private (4-year)	Public (2-year & 4-year)	Private (2-year & 4-year)	Private (4-year)
2000	1,245,363	575,082	341,803	43,514	13,036
2003	1,625,128	751,365	409,020	46,555	12,632
Difference	379,765	176,283	67,217	3,041	-404
Percentage Change	+30%	+31%	+20%	+7%	-3%

*Source: U.S. Department of Education, Federal Pell Grant Program End-of-Year Reports, 2000–2001 and 2003–2004.

**Source: CDI campus data workbooks, campus provided (n = 22).

Note: California data not available disaggregated by two-year and four-year institutions.

Lens Two: ... But Pell Grant Recipients Represent a Shrinking Portion of Most Major Racial/Ethnic Groups

The second lens examined the percentage of Pell Grant recipients *within* racial/ethnic groups across the sample campuses. This lens is important for understanding the extent of economic diversity within each racial/ethnic group and for refining our knowledge about who has access to college within each group.

Between 2000 and 2004, all groups declined in percentage of Pell Grant recipients with the exception of unknown and American Indian/Alaska Native students (see fig. 3).¹⁸ Between 2000 and 2004, the percentage of URM students receiving Pell Grants decreased from 45 percent to 41 percent. As with earlier analyses, there was variation among the campuses. Five campuses increased in the percentage of URM students who received Pell Grants (one increased 33 percent and the other four increased by an average of 2 percent). Sixteen campuses decreased in the percentage of URM students who received Pell Grants (by an average of 9 percent). One campus had no change (see fig. 4).¹⁹

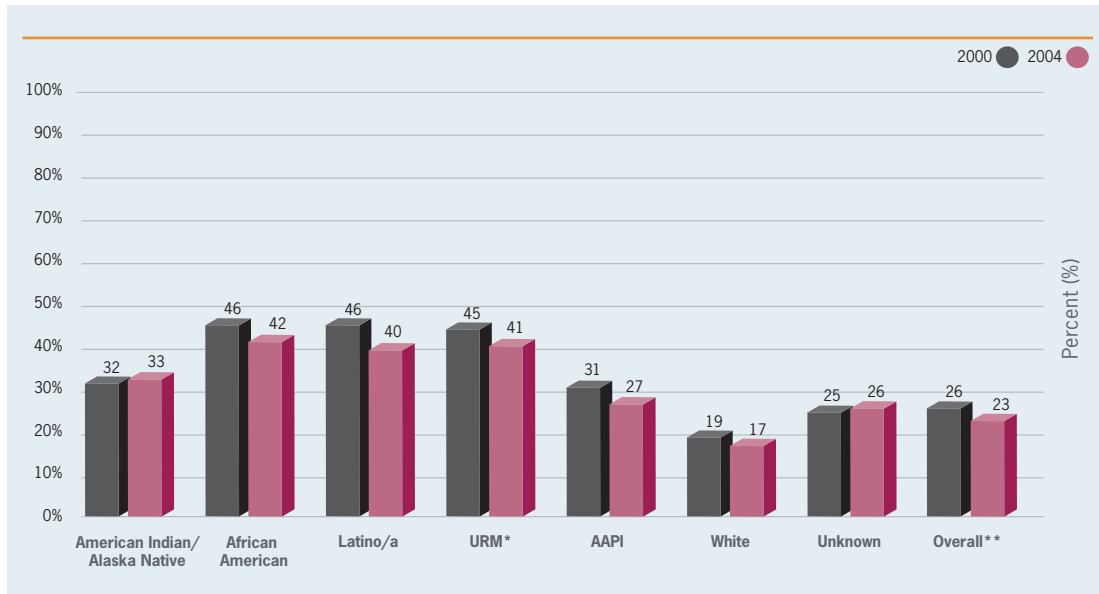
These individual campus findings were particularly noteworthy. In analyses of URM student enrollments at the CDI campuses between 2000 and 2004, we found that the proportion of URM students increased in terms of first-year enrollments and overall full-time undergraduate enrollments. In that context, the Pell Grant data suggests that *much of the growth in URM student enrollments on CDI campuses involved students who were not low income*.²⁰ This is a quite different picture than the one presented in the overall distribution of Pell Grant recipients captured in figure 1.

¹⁸As was discussed earlier, given that a sizeable portion of Pell Grant recipients in the “unknown” category may be white, the decrease in the proportion of white students who were Pell Grant recipients should be interpreted with caution (see Smith et al. 2005).

¹⁹It is important to point out that on campuses with relatively small numbers of URM students, percentages can often skew, for better or for worse, actual gains or decreases. The lesson to be derived is the importance of disaggregating data by race/ethnicity. Where numbers of students are small, campuses should analyze data both in terms of actual numerical gains/decreases and in terms of proportional growth or decline, in order to have some level of comparative analysis within a campus as well as in relation to other institutions.

²⁰This does not necessarily mean that campuses were enrolling only high-income students.

Figure 3. Pell Grant recipients within racial/ethnic groups and overall, averaged across twenty-two campuses, 2000 and 2004



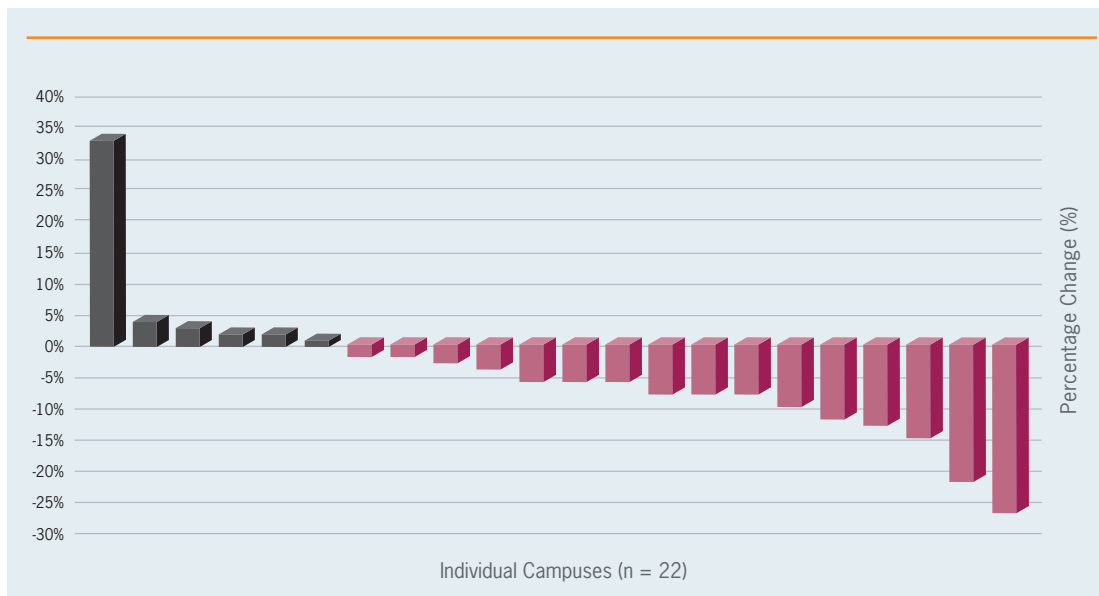
Source: CDI campus data workbooks, campus provided [n = 22].

Note: Due to rounding, some totals may not be exact sums.

*URM = the first three categories displayed.

**Overall Pell Grant recipients as percentage of undergraduate population.

Figure 4. Percentage change in URM students who are Pell Grant recipients, individual campuses, 2000–2004



Source: CDI campus data workbooks, campus provided [n = 22].

Note: One campus was listed as “no change” in the text due to rounding. It experienced a very slight increase (less than .5%), which is reflected above.

Implications

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING COMPLEX DEMOGRAPHIC REALITIES

Our analyses suggest different results using different lenses. Examining racial/ethnic and economic diversity using multiple lenses can enhance campus leaders' understanding of complex demographic realities within student populations—realities that can have a deep impact on campus climate, student engagement and success, and ultimately, institutional dynamics and practice.

In this study, the first lens showed that the distribution of Pell Grant recipients was quite racially/ethnically diverse. While the percentage of students receiving Pell Grants declined overall, there was an increase in the percentage of recipients who were URM and slight decreases in the percentages of recipients who were AAPI and white.

The second lens showed that within most racial/ethnic groups, there was a decline in the percentage of students receiving Pell Grants, although a much greater proportion of URM and AAPI students were low income than was the case for white students. These two lenses, together, suggest that the racial/ethnic distribution of Pell Grant recipients is not as concentrated among URM students as may generally be assumed, yet there are sizeable differences in the percentages of students receiving Pell Grants within each racial/ethnic group and narrowing economic diversity among most groups. This situation has the potential to create a campus dynamic where URM low-income students, and low-income students generally, may feel at odds with the experiences of more and more of their classmates, especially in situations where the wealth of these students is much greater.

Examining data by race/ethnicity and income level *concurrently* offers a more accurate picture of the economic diversity both across and within major racial/ethnic groups. This approach can also help dispel assumptions that all URM students are low income and vice versa—assumptions that frequently surfaced during site visits with the CDI campuses. Information gleaned from such analyses can have a profound impact on many aspects of campus life, including admissions and financial aid processes, student services policies and practices, and student intergroup relations and classroom dynamics. With regard to admissions, for example, campuses seeking to increase the racial/ethnic diversity of their student bodies would want to draw URM students from the widest pool possible—one that spans all income levels. At the same time, campuses may also want to expand the overall economic diversity of the student body by recruiting low-income white and AAPI students.

As campus leaders struggle with increasing access and success for low-income students in particular, it is crucial that they consider multiple lenses and contexts in their approaches. As noted above, a considerably higher percentage of students were low income within URM and AAPI student populations across the sample than were low income within the white student population. Campus leaders would be wise to investigate how this reality plays out in the lives of students. In our experience working on diversity initiatives in higher education, for example, low-income

students of color often experience “multiple marginality” when navigating campuses that are predominantly white *and* where many of their classmates may have markedly different learning opportunities and experiences as a result of income differentials. We have also witnessed marginality among low-income white students who, while making up a sizeable percentage of all low-income students, make up a relatively small percentage of white students overall.

At the same time, success in increasing access for URM students on the CDI campuses proved to be largely a result of recruiting non-Pell Grant recipients. This underscores the value of not conflating race/ethnicity and income level and of understanding the economic diversity within racial/ethnic groups as well as between them. It also highlights the need for more robust notions of access that take into account both race/ethnicity and economic status.

It is important to note that a decrease in Pell Grant recipients did not necessarily suggest that campuses were enrolling high-income students exclusively. It may be that the campuses were enrolling more students from families that narrowly missed the income guidelines for Pell Grant eligibility.²¹ However, any sustained decrease in the number of Pell Grant recipients would suggest that access for low-income students could be in jeopardy.

In contrast to the overall average decrease in Pell Grant recipients on the sample campuses, nationally there was growth between 2000 and 2004, in both the number of students receiving this aid and the total funds disbursed.²² This information counters recent publicity about a lack of growth in the Federal Pell Grant Program,²³ yet it is important to keep in mind that this growth is in actual numbers compared to previous years, and it does not take into account many factors, including changes in the number of students attending college, in the number of students who have applied for Pell Grants, and in the number of students who are eligible for Pell Grants.²⁴ Growth in the number of Pell Grant recipients nationally may represent greater levels of access for low-income students or it may be that there are simply greater numbers of low-income students—students who, due to increasing poverty and wage suppression, have become eligible for Pell Grants over the past five years.²⁵

As campus leaders struggle with increasing access and success for low-income students in particular, it is crucial that they consider multiple lenses and contexts in their approaches.

²¹ For a discussion of income levels as they relate to financial aid, see www.finaid.org/educators/middleincome.phtml.

²² The total funds disbursed increased from \$8 billion in 2000–2001 to more than \$12.7 billion in 2003–2004. Source: 2000–2001 and 2003–2004 Pell Grant Program End-of-Year Reports.

²³ For example, see Field 2004 and Burd 2006.

²⁴ Reports by King (2003) and the American Council on Education (2006) discuss these factors.

²⁵ The proportion of people in the United States who were at 125 percent of the poverty line or below increased from 15.6 percent in 2000 to 17.1 percent in 2004. Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census Historical Poverty Tables 2004.

Moreover, during this same time period, increases in the maximum Pell Grant award per student have *not* covered a greater percentage of college costs. According to the College Board (2005), the maximum Pell Grant covered 42 percent of average public four-year tuition, fees, and room and board in 2001–2002 but only 36 percent in 2004–2005. The amount of average private four-year tuition, fees, and room and board that the maximum Pell Grant covered—16 percent—remained relatively stable over this time period, with a slight decrease from 2003–2004 to 2004–2005.²⁶

²⁶ See figure 8 in Trends in Student Aid 2005 (College Board 2005, 17). Taking a longer view, King (2003) noted that the maximum Pell Grant award covered 36 percent of tuition, fees, and room and board at private institutions in 1979–1980, versus 16 percent in 2003–2004. King also noted that there was a cap on the portion of the total price the maximum grant could cover until 1992.

Recommendations

A MORE NUANCED APPROACH TO DATA COLLECTION AND USE

Data Collection

Disaggregate enrollment and other data by income level and race/ethnicity. California colleges and universities have not kept pace with the national increase in the number of Pell Grant recipients in recent years. Likewise, the number of URM college students in the state has not kept pace with the number of URM students in the California high school population.²⁷ To counter these trends and expand access to higher education for low-income students, for URM students, and especially for low-income URM students, it is critical to examine enrollment data that is disaggregated by income level *and* race/ethnicity.²⁸ Moreover, these analyses point to the importance of disaggregating other data, including retention, graduation and/or GPA data, by race/ethnicity and income level. Doing so can illuminate whether low-income URM students have a markedly different educational experience from their peers and can help campus leaders better contribute to the success of all students.

Go beyond Pell Grant data to analyze income levels. Individual institutions could also utilize more detailed campus data regarding financial aid eligibility and need-based awards to investigate the impact economic status has on recruitment and persistence. More detailed data can also help campus leaders develop a better sense of the broad income distribution (i.e., high-income, middle-income, low-income) among students, rather than simply relying upon “Pell” versus “non-Pell” data. For example, leaders on campuses that utilize the CIRP (Cooperative Institutional Research Program) Freshman Survey could disaggregate data on their student population by race/ethnicity and income strata.²⁹

Examine data at various campus levels. The kind of data collection recommended here will generate the best information when it is conducted at multiple levels. For example, it may be useful for campus leaders to understand the number and percent of low-income students by race/ethnicity overall, but it may also be useful to understand the racial/ethnic and economic diversity of students in particular schools or departments.

Moreover, these analyses point to the importance of disaggregating other data, including retention, graduation and/or GPA data, by race/ethnicity and income level.

²⁷ Source: Authors' calculations based on California Postsecondary Education Commission and California Department of Education data.

²⁸ Some campuses also disaggregated their data by gender and found that important differences were illuminated in the process. Campus leaders may also want to consider further disaggregating major racial/ethnic categories (e.g., Mexican American, Cuban American, Japanese American, Vietnamese American) to ascertain if differences in income levels are revealed.

²⁹ See www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/PDFs/CIRP_survey_2006.pdf. Question 24 of the 2006 survey relates to income strata.

Disaggregate data on racial/ethnic groups by income level. Over the course of several decades of working with campuses to establish diversity initiatives, we have encountered many people who assume that most, if not all, URM students are low income and that most low-income students are URM. These assumptions have consequences—both for low-income URM students and for groups that are rendered “invisible” by them (e.g., low-income white and AAPI students and middle- and upper-income URM students)—and they are often not borne out by the data on individual campuses.

Disaggregate non-need based award recipients by income level and race/ethnicity. Researchers (Heller 2006; Heller and Marin 2002, 2004) have documented how non-need based aid can further compound racial/ethnic disparities.³⁰ Any analysis of campus data regarding access and financial aid should include an examination of scholarship and other non-need based aid recipients, where data on these recipients are disaggregated by race/ethnicity and income level.³¹

Data Use

Use data on income distribution to inform policies, practices, and programs. Moving beyond Pell Grant data to a richer understanding of income distribution can help campus leaders increase the responsiveness of policies, practices, and programs. For example, a campus with a bi-modal distribution of very high-income students and very low-income students may need to have different services in place to enhance campus climate than would a campus where income was more evenly distributed across high, middle, and low levels.

Additionally, by disaggregating such data by income and race/ethnicity, campuses can better understand whether these dimensions intersect in practical ways. For example, using this data, campuses can explore analytic questions such as, “What is the persistence rate of URM students who receive Pell Grants compared to URM students who do not?”; “What is the persistence rate of URM non-recipients compared to white and AAPI non-recipients?”; and “What is the persistence rate of URM Pell Grant recipients compared to white and AAPI Pell Grant recipients?”

Focus on small-population groups. While this study focused on URM Pell Grant recipients, our analyses also revealed important information about other small-population groups. For example, AAPI Pell Grant recipients made up a small portion of all AAPI students. Recognizing this situation, campus leaders interested in diversifying their student bodies would want to consider targeting recruitment efforts toward low-income AAPI communities and creating specific supports for these students once they arrive on campus. The same could be done for white Pell Grant recipients, who made up a small portion of the white student population.

³⁰ We deliberately use the term “non-need based aid” to challenge notions that only certain students merit financial assistance to attend college. See also footnote 1.

³¹ A recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Glenn 2006, A43) noted: “In 1993 only 35 percent of the wealthy students at four-year private institutions in the United States—‘wealthy’ meaning students whose parents’ income was in the highest quartile—received financial-aid packages from their colleges. By 2000 that proportion had risen to 51.2 percent. The proportion of low-income students who received aid—‘low income’ meaning students whose parents’ income was in the lowest quartile—increased much more slowly over the same period, from 52.8 percent to 55.7 percent. In 1993 the average size of an institutional grant was the same for both low-income and high-income students: \$5,500. But in 2000 the average grant given to high-income students was \$6,800, while the average grant given to low-income students was only \$6,200. (All figures are adjusted for inflation.)”

Conclusion

A major focus of the CDI was to increase the access and success of both low-income students and URM students at the participating institutions. Our findings suggest that at most of the sample campuses, there was a decrease or only a slight increase in Pell Grant recipients. Another observation, gleaned from interviews conducted during campus site visits, was that the campuses did not thoroughly engage with data disaggregated by income levels to the extent that they engaged with data disaggregated by race/ethnicity (e.g., first-year enrollments, six-year graduation rates, etc., disaggregated by race/ethnicity). Most campuses were relatively successful in increasing the number and proportion of URM students enrolling. Had they applied a multiple-lens approach, however, they might have experienced greater success in sustaining enrollments of URM Pell Grant recipients and in maintaining a focus on access for white and AAPI Pell Grant recipients. At the very least, a multiple-lens approach would allow campuses to monitor their progress across these critically important dimensions.

It was also clear from the study that the CDI campuses, and higher education institutions in California generally, have on average lagged behind campuses nationally in proportional growth in enrollments of low-income students since 2001. Nevertheless, it is possible for campuses to implement focused efforts to increase the enrollment of low-income students. Indeed, one of the sample campuses with such a focused strategy did succeed and achieved remarkable results.

The status of college access differs across racial/ethnic groups. In this study, we found that the single highest proportion of Pell Grant recipients were white students. This tells us that campus efforts to improve access for low-income students cannot be isolated from campus efforts to increase access for URM students. As Jerome Karabel (1998, 34) notes:

Class-conscious policies may be justified on their own terms, but they are not a substitute for race-targeted policies. ... Racial differences simply are not reducible to class differences, just as class differences are not reducible to racial ones.

Finally, this study points out a continuing trend of limited access to higher education for low-income students from all racial/ethnic backgrounds. Such a trend can only have a negative impact on the social and cultural health of the nation as widening education gaps, and the ensuing economic gaps, perpetuate racial/ethnic and economic inequalities. Campuses can help counter this trend by enacting thoughtful and just policies—including policies related to the careful monitoring of progress using multiple lenses—to help achieve equity in access and success for *all* students.

This study points out a continuing trend of limited access to higher education for low-income students from all racial/ethnic backgrounds.

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