

A Closer Look at Diversity: Exploring African American Enrollment Across South Carolina's Public Colleges and Universities

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...If institutions of higher education are able to bring together students from various ethnic and racial backgrounds at the critical time of late adolescence and early adulthood, they have the opportunity to disrupt an insidious cycle of lifetime segregation that threatens the fabric of our pluralistic democracy.

(Gurin, 2009, Section V, para (E))

INTRODUCTION

As American society grows more heterogeneous, the issue of diversity in colleges and universities becomes increasingly significant. Research shows that racial and ethnic diversity support a range of individual, social, and institutional benefits including active thinking skills, intellectual engagement, motivation, and various academic skills. Diversity outcomes also support a number of democratic processes; the ability to take different perspectives, increased citizenship engagement, and greater cultural understanding (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Skills learned from a diverse environment also play important roles in the workplace. "These skills include the abilities to work well with colleagues and subordinates from diverse backgrounds; to view issues from multiple perspectives; and to anticipate and respond with sensitivity to the needs and cultural differences of highly diverse customers, colleagues, employees, and global business partners" (Brief of General Motors in Gurin et al., 2002, p. 361). Because of its importance, South Carolina has made a commitment to diversity in higher education, aiming for enrollment proportional to the minority population in the state (S.C. Commission on Higher Education, n.d.b).

28%

Percentage of African Americans living in South Carolina (2009 estimate)
Data: U.S. Census Bureau

FINDINGS

Data from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE) show that over 205,000 students were enrolled in public higher education in South Carolina in the fall of 2010. Of these, almost 51,000 (25%) were African American with enrollment varying greatly by type of institution as well across individual institutions.

The state's research universities enroll the smallest percentages of African Americans, followed by the comprehensive teaching colleges and universities, USC's two-year regional campuses and the technical and community colleges (See Table 1). Although African American enrollment at the research institutions is uniformly low (See Table 2), there is considerable variation within the other institutional types. Enrollment in the comprehensive teaching colleges and universities ranges from 6.3% to 93.8% with four institutions attaining relative parity (plus or minus 5 percentage points of the target of 28%) (See Table 3). However, nearly one third of all African American students in the teach-

Table 1

African American Enrollment by Gender and Institution Type

Institution	Men	Women	Total	Percent Enrollment
Research Institutions	1,714	2,933	4,647	9.0%
Comprehensive Teaching Colleges and Universities	4,693	8,766	13,459	26.1%
Two-year Regional Campuses of USC	345	957	1,302	29.2%
Technical and Community Colleges	9,486	22,099	31,585	32.4%
Total	16,238	34,755	50,993	24.9%
Percent Gender	31.8%	68.2%	100%	

Note: Percentages calculated using data from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, Academic Year 2010-2011 Enrollment Reports.

Table 2

African American Enrollment by Gender and Institution Type: Research Institutions

Institution	Men	Women	Total	Percent Enrollment
U.S.C. - Columbia	1,080	2,162	3,242	11.0%
Medical University of South Carolina	65	154	219	8.6%
Clemson University	569	617	1,186	6.1%
Total	1,714	2,933	4,647	9.0%
Percent Gender	36.9%	63.1%	100%	

Note: Percentages calculated using data from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, Academic Year 2010-2011 Enrollment Reports.

Table 3

African American Enrollment by Gender and Institution Type: Comprehensive Teaching Colleges and Universities

Institution	Men	Women	Total	Percent Enrollment
South Carolina State University	1,776	2,315	4,091	93.8%
Francis Marion University	441	1,340	1,781	44.2%
Lander University	241	679	920	30.1%
U.S.C. - Aiken	207	663	870	26.7%
U.S.C. - Upstate	420	1,027	1,447	26.3%
Winthrop University	433	1,091	1,524	25.4%
Coastal Carolina University	702	802	1,504	17.3%
U.S.C. - Beaufort	73	217	290	16.5%
The Citadel	205	98	303	8.9%
College of Charleston	195	534	729	6.3%
Total	4,693	8,766	13,459	26.1%
Percent Gender	34.9%	65.1%	100%	

Note: Percentages calculated using data from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, Academic Year 2010-2011 Enrollment Reports.

Table 4

African American Enrollment by Gender and Institution Type: Two-year Regional Campuses of U.S.C.

Institution	Men	Women	Total	Percent Enrollment
U.S.C. - Salkehatchie	118	388	506	44.0%
U.S.C. - Union	47	137	184	34.7%
U.S.C. - Sumter	89	199	288	24.2%
U.S.C. - Lancaster	91	233	324	20.4%
Total	345	957	1,302	29.2%
Percent Gender	26.5%	73.5%	100%	

Note: Percentages calculated using data from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, Academic Year 2010-2011 Enrollment Reports.

RESEARCH BRIEF

ing institutions attend South Carolina State University, one of the two public Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the state.

The four USC regional campuses enroll only 3% of the African American students in the state with enrollments ranging from 20% to 44% across institutions. Only one campus is close to racial parity, U.S.C. – Sumter (See Table 4). The majority of African American students (62%) are enrolled in the technical and community colleges (See Figure 1). Enrollment in these institutions ranges from 13% at Tri-County Technical College to 96% at Denmark Technical College, the second of the state’s public HBCUs. Six of these institutions have attained relative parity with regard to proportional representation (See Table 5).

Women significantly outnumber men in South Carolina’s public institutions, 59% to 41%. African American women, however, outnumber African American men at even greater rates, 68% to 32% (See Figure 2). The gender differential for African American students is highest in the two-year regional campuses of USC (47 percentage points) and lowest in the research institutions, with a gap of 26 percentage points. The gender gap in the technical and community colleges is the second largest at 40 percentage points and the teaching colleges and universities are third with a difference of 30 percentage points.

IMPLICATIONS

The low percentage of African American students enrolled in research institutions and the high percentages enrolled in the two-year colleges reflect a system that has yet to equitably address education across its social, demographic, and economic differences. Although numbers are promising statewide, it is evident from the disaggregated data that African American students are more highly concentrated in the technical and community colleges, the two-year regional campuses, and not surprisingly, in the two state HBCUs. While consistent with national trends (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010), large numbers of African Americans students in the two-year institutions is a cause for concern among educators and policy makers. Not only does this concentration impact diversity, but given the fact that substantial numbers of students who begin their postsecondary education in community colleges never complete it (Horn & Nevill, 2006), this finding also has implications for other areas of educational policy in the state.

Also consistent with national trends (Aud et al., 2010), enrollment data indicate an increasing gender gap in higher education, with women enrolling at higher rates than men. This is especially true of African Americans and may be due, in part, to the higher relative value of a college education for women as opposed to men (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2006).

Obviously, there is room for improvement by the higher education sector. However, some facets of this outcome are not amenable to rapid or comprehensive change. For example, one of the reasons that African American students are concentrated in certain two-year colleges is that community colleges are generally commuter colleges (Dougherty, 1992). As a result, they reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the area in which they are located. The racial profile of these schools will not change unless there are significant alterations in the demographic distribution of the surrounding area or the colleges offer residential housing such as Greenville Tech has done.

Figure 1
African American Postsecondary Students by Institutional Type

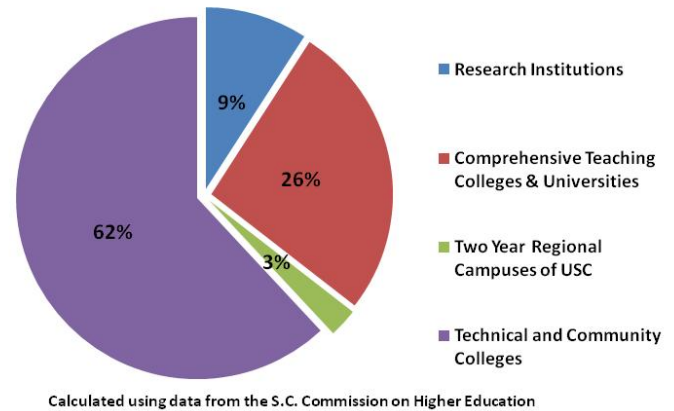
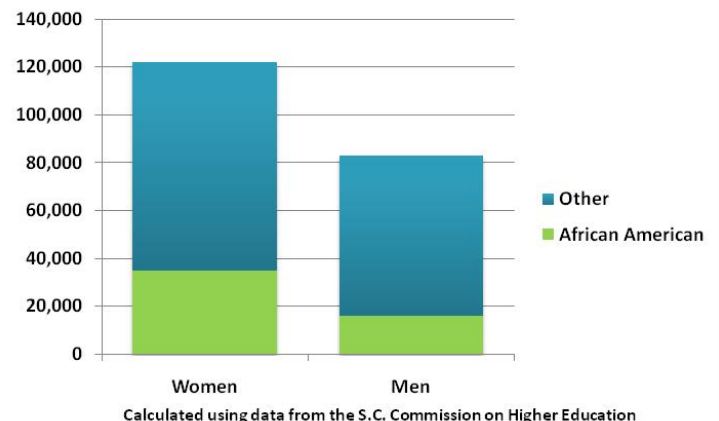


Table 5
African American Enrollment by Gender and Institution Type: Technical and Community Colleges

Institution	Men	Women	Total	Percent Enrollment
Denmark Technical College	440	555	995	96.3%
Williamsburg Technical College	189	349	538	74.4%
Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College	582	1,259	1,841	57.5%
Central Carolina Technical College	596	1,582	2,178	49.7%
Florence-Darlington Technical College	758	2,100	2,858	48.8%
Northeastern Technical College	168	385	553	45.4%
Technical College of the Low Country	277	847	1,124	40.3%
Piedmont Technical College	598	1,573	2,171	38.1%
Midlands Technical College	1,326	2,861	4,187	34.7%
Aiken Technical College	269	725	994	31.8%
Trident Technical College	1,433	3,264	4,697	29.7%
Spartanburg Community College	443	1,124	1,567	26.7%
York Technical College	478	1,081	1,559	26.0%
Horry-Georgetown Technical College	473	1,436	1,909	24.4%
Greenville Technical College	1,187	2,312	3,499	23.5%
Tri-County Technical College	269	646	915	13.2%
Total	9,486	22,099	31,585	32.4%
Percent Gender	30.0%	70.0%	100%	

Note. Percentages calculated using data from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, Academic Year 2010-2011 Enrollment Reports.

Figure 2
Racial and Gender Differences in Postsecondary Enrollment (All Students)



RESEARCH BRIEF

Other issues that affect diversity are more open to change. The prevailing disconnect between K-12 and the postsecondary education systems means that students with fewer resources, especially those from families where no one has ever attended college before, are at a distinct disadvantage at all levels of the college preparation and enrollment process. Pre-college intervention programs can, however, provide benefits that help students become college ready (Harvey, 2008). In addition, these programs often provide the greatest benefits for those who need them the most; low-income students with low college expectation levels and low achievement levels (McDonough, 2004).

CONCLUSION

This brief provides an exploratory analysis of enrollment in South Carolina's public colleges and universities by race. Although the percentage of African Americans in public postsecondary institutions is nearly representative of the state's population, South Carolina is a state where higher education is racially stratified by institutional type as well as by individual institutions. Given the current dearth of resources, it is critical that policy makers and others with an interest in diversity understand the complexities of this problem as well as the possibilities and limitations of policy to make change.

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