

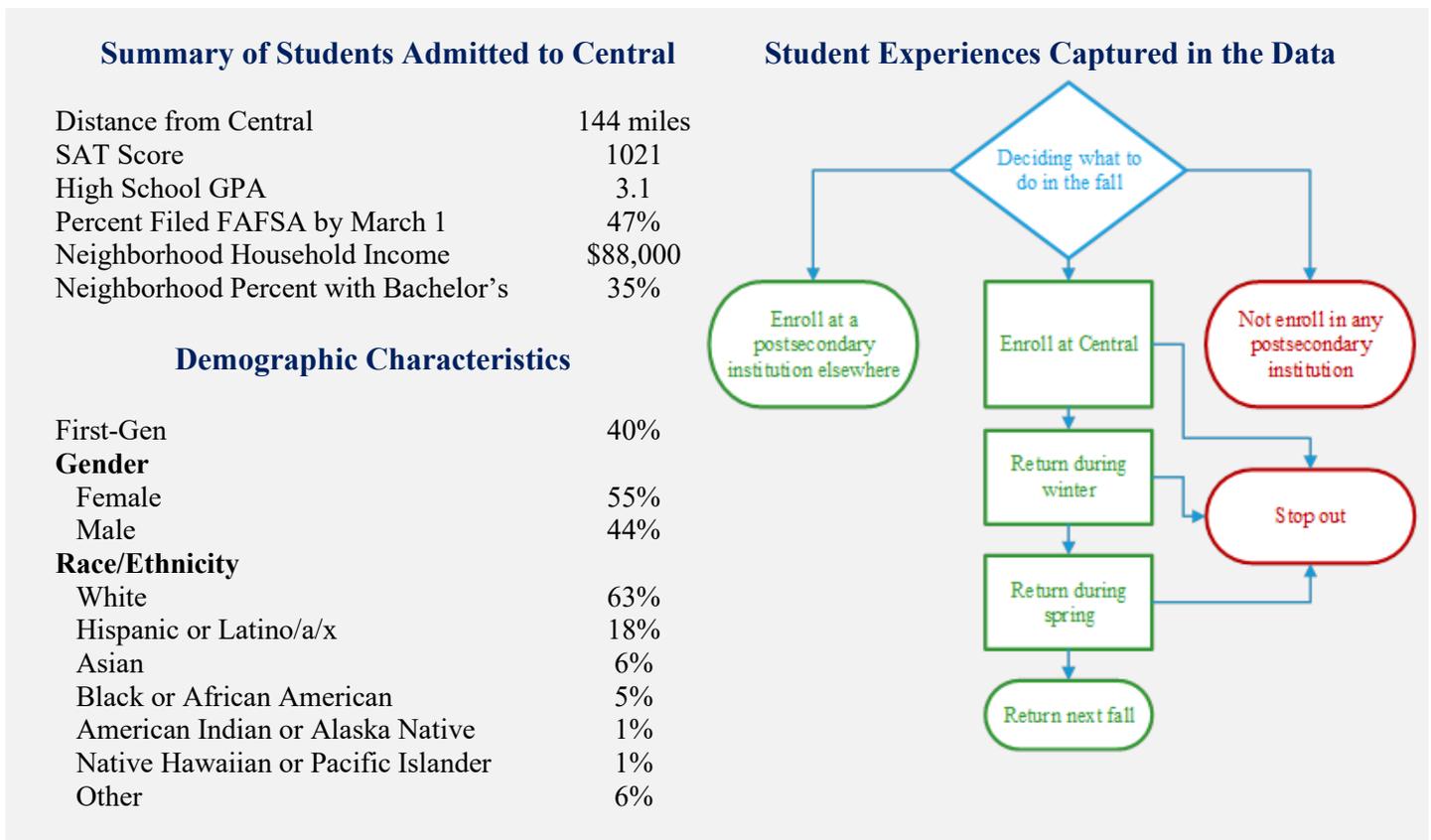
Turning Intention into Action

Exploring Student Attributes that Predict Enrollment and Retention at Central Washington University

Although the rate of postsecondary credential attainment in Washington State has increased by nearly 5 percentage points over the past decade, the state has not yet reached its goal of 70 percent.¹ To boost the overall attainment rate, identifying effective solutions for rapidly growing segments of the population is crucial. Central Washington University (Central) stands as an essential site for research because it is a postsecondary institution that enrolls a significant number of first-generation (first-gen) college-going students, and it is an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).

Study Overview

This study leverages detailed student-level administrative data for over 100,000 students from Washington State high schools who were offered a seat at Central from 2004 to 2022. Its aim is to better understand the student attributes that predict enrollment and retention at Central. By examining the relationship between key milestones and these attributes, the study seeks to improve enrollment strategies and identify students potentially facing barriers to postsecondary success. *For more information see [the full report](#).*



¹ The state's attainment goal applies to 25- to 44- year-olds.

The study examines the relationship between student attributes and several outcomes of interest, including whether admitted students enroll at Central and whether those who enroll are retained into the subsequent fall term. The analysis uncovers several findings that can help Central work towards improving the outcomes of future cohorts graduating from Washington high schools. Insights gained from Central can inform student success strategies at other educational institutions serving similar populations across the state.

Key Findings

Local students have better outcomes at Central. Students with home addresses within commuting distance to Central (50 miles) have substantially higher probabilities of enrolling and being retained at Central.

The date when students first complete their FAFSA is a strong predictor of retention. This information can serve as an early warning indicator to assess whether a student is at risk of not being retained.

Hispanic students are less likely to enroll, but those who do are more likely to stay. Hispanic students who are admitted to Central are less likely to enroll than their peers of other races. However, Hispanic students who do enroll are more likely to be retained to the subsequent academic year than all other racial and ethnic groups included in the study.

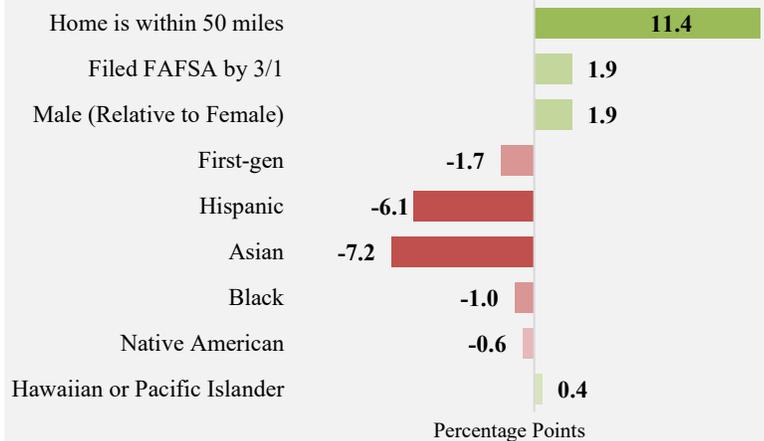
Other Underrepresented Minority (URM) students on campus are less likely to be retained. Students who enroll at Central that identify as Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or American Indian or Alaska Native are less likely to be retained to the subsequent academic year than their peers.

Male students of color are less likely to be retained than their White male peers and female peers of the same race. This aligns with prior literature that indicates a specific need to overcome barriers to enrollment and retention for male students of color.

Difference in Likelihood of Key Outcomes by Select Student Attributes

Enrollment at Central

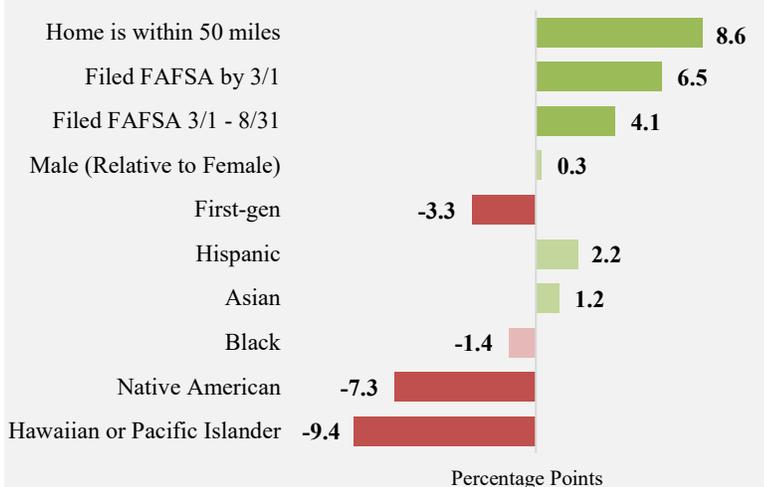
(average enrollment rate = 75 Percent)



Notes: The sample in this figure is restricted to students who accept an offer for a seat at Central. Only probabilities generated from indicator variables are displayed. Racial categories are relative to White students. The FAFSA category is relative to students who do not file a FAFSA by 3/1 in the year they enroll. Additional controls include age, College in the High School participation, neighborhood characteristics, and cohort.

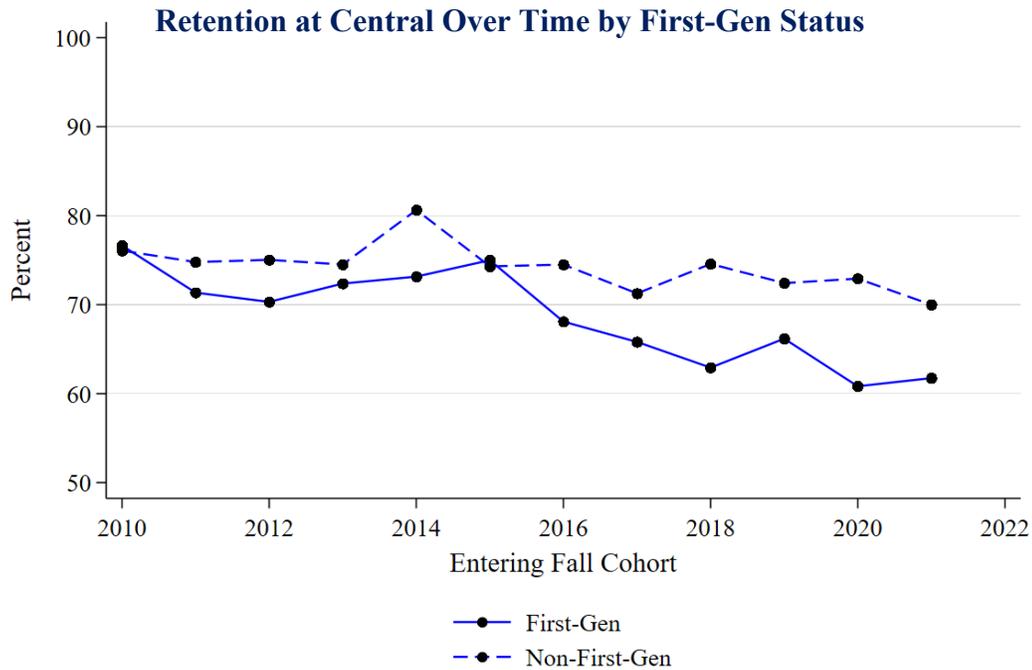
Retention at Central

(average retention rate = 73 Percent)



Notes: Only probabilities generated from indicator variables are displayed. Racial categories are relative to White students. FAFSA categories are relative to students who do not file a FAFSA by 8/1 in the year they enroll. Additional controls include age, College in the High School participation, neighborhood characteristics, high school characteristics, transcript high school GPA, and cohort.

A disparity in retention rates between first-gen and non-first-gen students has emerged. While retention rates for the 2015 cohort were nearly equal, first-gen students are now retained at a rate 8 percentage points lower than their non-first-gen counterparts.



This study underscores the critical role of data-driven research in helping postsecondary institutions serve students from diverse backgrounds. Following the analysis of administrative data, WSAC and research partner MDRC will conduct additional research using qualitative methods to help diagnose barriers to enrollment at Central. Insights will be transformed into actionable solutions through a design sprint with students and staff, and further refined through workshops where student can weigh in on how Central can best support their unique needs. These insights can also be applied to other institutions in Washington facing similar challenges, ultimately benefiting the state's overall educational landscape.