

Educational Attainment for All: Diversity and Equity in Washington State Higher Education



Prepared by the University of Washington and Washington State University
with foreword by the Washington Student Achievement Council

July 2013 (Revised)

Foreword

The Washington Student Achievement Council takes a leading role in facilitating analysis and research leading to increased educational attainment in the state.¹ The Council's Ten-Year Roadmap will prioritize recommendations for P-20 improvements, including strategies to expand participation and success for racial and ethnic minorities in higher education.² To inform the state's planning efforts, the Council hired the University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity to develop a diversity and equity report in collaboration with the Washington State University Office of Equity and Diversity.

The attached report, *Educational Attainment for All: Diversity and Equity in Washington State Higher Education*, provides greater clarity on the state's higher education diversity challenges. The Council acknowledges diversity in the 2012 strategic action plan, noting that "... demographic and economic forces have produced significant education and employment gaps, particularly for Washingtonians of color, and if no changes are made, these gaps will likely become greater over time."³

The report describes state population and education system demographics. It also analyzes data and information from multiple sources to do the following:

- Identify enrollment and achievement gaps.
- Highlight research on and best practices for broadening pathways to college for underrepresented groups.
- Highlight research on and best practices for student persistence and success.
- Identify gaps in the data and information available.

The report also describes the results of a 2013 statewide Survey of Higher Education Diversity Programs in Washington State, which asked public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities about their best practices and challenges. In addition, the report provides examples of promising and inspiring programs in other states. The report closes with recommendations and includes detailed supporting appendices.

¹ RCW 28B.77.003(3)

² RCW 28B.77.020(3)(h)

³ Washington Student Achievement Council. (2012). *Critical Crossroads: A Call for Action*. Retrieved April 11, 2014 from <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/strategic-action-plan>

Note: The following recommendations are an excerpt from the 2013 Diversity and Equity Report. The complete report is available at:

<http://www.wsac.wa.gov/diversity-and-equity>

Recommendations for Policy Change and Action

It is clear from the literature on college access and success and the survey of Washington higher education institutions that diversity practitioners know “what” to do to broaden pathways to college and increase college degree production. Dissemination of best practices has become quite common through a variety of mechanisms including national associations, the Department of Education, private foundations, diversity advocates and Washington State committees. Implementing those best practices, however, has been uneven and sporadic throughout Washington due to varying levels of institutional capacity, lack of data on student outcomes and funding challenges.

Eight recommendations for enhancing educational attainment for all of Washington’s citizens are provided below. They center on developing a coordinated and comprehensive strategy of capacity-building, data collection and public policy that crosses institutional boundaries, improving information about college access, keeping college affordable and strengthening relationships between K-12 and post-secondary educational systems.

1. ***Pay more statewide attention to changing demographics and their impact on college enrollment.*** Washington, like the rest of the nation, is becoming more racially diverse and students from these groups have been underrepresented in college enrollment, especially at four year colleges. Those responsible for working with underrepresented populations in K-12 systems, community colleges and four year colleges and universities are often working in isolation and disconnected from state policy-makers. Their collective efforts to increase access to and success in college for underrepresented students must be more strategic, visible and coordinated if the State is to realize its goal of increasing degree production. To that end, the Council should annually convene diversity staff and coalitions from the different educational sectors. The purpose of the convening shall be to assess progress on broadening access to and success in college for underrepresented groups, identify strategic priorities and share effective practices. Proceedings from the annual convening should be produced and shared with the Council, the Legislature and other policy-makers.
2. ***Identify and address gaps in institutional capacity to deliver best practices.*** Many of the best practices to support students in college require implementation of institution-specific initiatives. Advising, tracking student progress through gateway courses and first year programs, supplemental instruction, student engagement in learning and other support services are not things that can be delivered by a state entity. They require staff on college campuses with student development expertise and sensitivity to the diversity of student backgrounds and experiences that influence progress. The

survey administered for this report captured just a small portion of the information needed to assess the ability of Washington's colleges to deliver these types of service. Further institutional analysis and information is needed in order to better assess where institutional investment is needed.

3. ***Increase disaggregation of data for diverse populations.*** In gathering information for this report, the research team encountered data gaps on English language learners, students with disabilities, first generation students, former foster youth, Queer students and the influence of membership in multiple at-risk student populations. In addition, some districts collect sub-ethnic and sub-racial data but it is not uniform across the state despite recommendations from the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) to do so. In their work, EOGOAC has found that the intersection of race and socio-economic status can have a significant impact on educational outcomes. Thus, racial data must also be disaggregated across socio-economic groupings to better discern where disproportionality exists. Lack of easily accessible and disaggregated data on student populations limits what we know about these students and their progress toward a college degree.
4. ***Work toward consistency of data definitions across the entire K-20 educational system in Washington.*** Definitions of what constitutes student success and how to measure it vary considerably in the State. Further, public and private K-12 systems, policy agencies, 2 year and four year colleges, and federal reporting agencies definitions of academic rigor and college readiness make it nearly impossible for students and families to plan for college enrollment. Consistency and common language across the entire system will enhance planning and predictability for Washington's students. The Council should convene the data team from the EOGOAC and the Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) to ensure that all groups are using consistent data definitions for state purposes and are transparent about data definitions used for other reporting purposes (i.e. federal grants or private funding agencies.)
5. ***Enhance the ability of Washington's educational systems to view their own data, utilize key indicators and track individual students as they proceed through transitions from high school to college and among postsecondary institutions.*** The ERDC has already started this critical work and the Council should advocate for continued support of this activity. Key indicator data will allow institutions to benchmark student degree outcomes with others in the State and across the nation. In Washington, like in other parts of the country [43] data systems are inadequate to follow students across systems. Washington has a few models of dashboards with key indicators that could serve as a foundation for utilizing the data system underway at the ERDC. For example, the Road Map Project in King County has identified eight indicators to measure whether students graduate from high school both college and career ready, and six indicators to measure their progress toward earning a degree. The Office of Financial Management worked with public universities to develop key indicators to measure student enrollment, student progress and degree completion. An important next step in this work is to raise awareness about the ERDC as a resource and train

personnel from all sectors on how to best utilize the center to benchmark progress and track student outcomes.

6. ***Keep college accessible and affordable for Washington residents.*** Since the economic downturn began in 2008, Washington's colleges have been forced to reduce operations and increase tuition at an unpredictable and unsustainable pace. Declining state funding for K-20 education reduces the ability of public high schools to offer rigorous curricula, destabilizes Washington's Guaranteed Education Tuition plan and threatens innovative programs like College Bound. Constant uncertainty about the cost of college undermines the ability of families to plan for and support students as they pursue college degrees. Low-income and first generation families are especially sensitive to these threats and are more likely to limit college enrollment based on perceptions about cost.
7. ***Clarify roles and responsibilities of educational sectors, community based organizations, business and government in contributing to degree production.*** Everyone has a part to play in improving Washington's degree production. It will be important to minimize duplication of effort and maximize collaborations among different sectors as Washington's demographics change and the need to reach more underrepresented students intensifies. The Council should convene a task force of K-12 educators, higher education leaders, industry advocates and state policy-makers to identify what each entity is doing now to contribute to degree production and what opportunities exist for collaboration and partnerships.
8. ***Establish and maintain a web-based college access and success tool for students, parents, and educators.*** The Council should commission the development of the tool that focuses on navigating secondary and post-secondary pathways to and through college. The web-based tool could be complemented by a phone service of qualified persons and/or webinars to present information and answer questions. It could also be enriched by a social media network/community and proactive communication strategies.

Washington State has been a global leader in innovation and knowledge production for much of the last century. Maintaining this leadership throughout the 21st century and beyond will require that the State make substantial progress on closing its educational achievement and degree attainment gap. We know how, we just need the political and social will to fully fund and support educational attainment for all of Washington's residents.