

Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream is a multiyear national initiative to help more community college students succeed. The initiative is particularly concerned about student groups that traditionally have faced significant barriers to success, including students of color and low-income students. The initiative aims to help participating colleges identify at-risk student groups in their student populations and then design and implement intervention strategies that will increase the success of these at-risk groups.

Minority Males: Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Student Outcomes

“The [gender] gap is dangerous. It is intolerable. It is a blight on America’s future. And it is worse in community colleges than elsewhere in post-school education.”¹

“Where are all the boys?” Community colleges are asking this question as enrollment of females outpaces that of males. In fact, the number of female students quadrupled between 1970 and 2005, increasing the portion of females enrolling in community colleges from 40 percent to 58 percent. The gender gap is even larger among students of color: 63 percent of black students are women, and 37 percent are men; 57 percent of Hispanic students are women, and 43 percent are men.²

The concerns extend beyond enrollment. In response to a growing gender gap in academic performance, colleges also are asking, “What is happening to the boys?” Data show that females — especially females of color — are outperforming their male peers. Males neither persist nor attain credentials at the same rates as females; again, the differences are more pronounced for students of color. For example, between 1977 and 1997, the increase in the number of black females receiving credentials was greater — two to four times greater — than the increase in the number of black males receiving credentials. (The exact figures depend on the specific credential.)

Historically, females are better academically prepared for postsecondary education than are males. On average, females’ high school grade point averages (GPAs) have been two-tenths of a point higher than males’ high school GPAs.³

The figures are similar for community college students: In 2004, the average high school GPA of female community college students was 3.0, compared with 2.8 for their male peers.⁴ Twenty-nine percent of female high school graduates were in the highest 20 percent on an indicator measuring the academic intensity of high school courses taken, compared with 26 percent of males.

Previous issues of *Data Notes* have analyzed student outcomes by race/ethnicity. This issue examines the differing developmental needs and enrollment and persistence patterns of Achieving the Dream students⁵ by gender, with a focus on male students of color.

Attendance Status

Overall, 56 percent of males attended Achieving the Dream colleges full time during the first term of enrollment, compared with 51 percent of females (Figure 1). Indeed, for all racial/ethnic groups, males were more likely to attend full time during the first term than were females. Among traditional-age students — those 18 to 23 — 63 percent of females attended full time, compared with 64 percent of males. This difference is statistically significant, but the gap for older students is larger: 28 percent of females age 24 and older attended full time, compared with 32 percent of males.

One factor that may account for this difference is that female students who attend community colleges tend to be older than males,⁶ and older community college students are likely to have families. Females are more likely to have primary responsibility for the care of children, which often leads them to attend college part time.

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¹McClenney, K. Quoted in Esters, L.I. and Mosby, D.C. “Disappearing Acts: The Vanishing Black Male On Community College Campuses.” *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. August 23, 2007. Available: www.diverseeducation.com/artman/publish/article_9184.shtml.

²U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2006. Tables 182 and 211. Available: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d06/tables/dt06_182.asp and http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d06/tables/dt06_211.asp.

³Peter, K., and Horn, L. (2005). *Gender Differences in Participation and Completion of Undergraduate Education and How They Have Changed Over Time* (NCES 2005-169). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC, U.S. Government Printing Office. Available: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005169.pdf>.

⁴Derived from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, Data Analysis System. Available: <http://nces.ed.gov/dasolv2/>.

⁵Students entering 55 Achieving the Dream colleges in fall 2003 were analyzed.

⁶The average age of females was 24, compared to 22 for males.

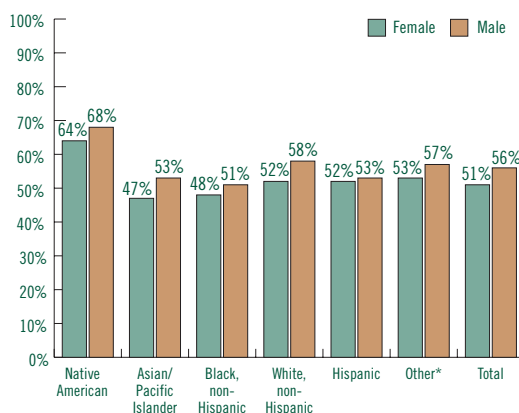
What Is a Cohort?

A *cohort* is a group of people studied over time. The individuals in the group have at least one statistical factor — such as when they started college — in common.

The Achieving the Dream 2002 student cohort, for example, is the group of credential-seeking students that attended Achieving the Dream institutions for the first time in fall 2002.

Tracking a cohort over time makes it possible to compare the progress and outcomes of different groups of students (e.g., groups defined by race, age or other demographic characteristics) and to determine if there are gaps in achievement among groups of interest.

Figure 1. Percentage of the 2003 Achieving the Dream cohort attending on a full-time basis during the first term, by gender and race/ethnicity



*Includes: Non-resident alien, more than one, other.

Developmental Needs

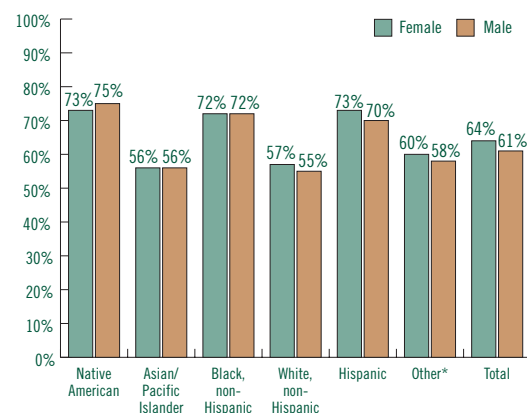
Sixty-four percent of female students were referred to developmental education of some type, compared with 61 percent of males (Figure 2). The overall referral rates by gender are statistically significantly different for white and Hispanic students but not for Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander and black students.

Persistence

Although females had higher developmental referral rates and were less likely to start college full time, they persisted at higher rates than males. This finding was consistent regardless of race/ethnicity. For purposes of this analysis, “persistors” are those still enrolled at some point during the third year or who had completed a credential or transferred by the end of the third year.

Seventy-two percent of females persisted to the second term, compared with 68 percent of males (Figure 3). Females were more likely to persist

Figure 2. Percentage of the 2003 Achieving the Dream cohort referred to developmental education, by gender and race/ethnicity



*Includes: Non-resident alien, more than one, other.

to the second and third years than were males: Female persistence rates were 5 percentage points higher than male persistence rates in both instances.

Asian/Pacific Islander students were the only racial/ethnic group that did not have significantly different persistence rates by gender for all three persistence measures. Gender differences in persistence rates in the other racial/ethnic groups ranged from 4 to 8 percentage points. The largest difference was for Native American students persisting to the second term: 8 percentage points. The gap in persistence rates by gender for black students was consistently 7 percentage points, the largest gap overall among all racial/ethnic groups.

GPA and Credits Earned

Figure 4 displays the average GPA and number of credits earned by the end of the third year for students enrolled full time during the first term,

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Figure 3. Percentage of the 2003 Achieving the Dream cohort persisting to the second term, second year and third year, by gender and race/ethnicity

	Persisted to second term		Persisted to second year*		Persisted to third year*	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Native American	69.1	61.4	51.3	44.2	35.6	32.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	74.2	71.8	66.5	65.4	48.8	46.8
Black, non-Hispanic	70.8	64.5	55.6	48.7	35.1	28.3
White, non-Hispanic	71.5	67.8	58.9	54.0	41.4	36.0
Hispanic	73.4	68.6	61.0	54.1	34.3	30.5
Other**	73.8	69.8	61.3	58.8	41.8	38.3
Total	72.0	67.8	58.9	53.9	38.7	34.2

*Persistors are those who re-enrolled at any time during the year, completed or transferred.

**Includes: Non-resident alien, more than one, other.

Figure 4. Average GPA, number of credits accumulated and percentage of credits completed by the end of the third year for students enrolled full time during the first term for the 2003 Achieving the Dream cohort* by gender and race/ethnicity

	GPA		Credits accumulated		Percentage of credits completed	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Native American	2.5	2.3	55.1	55.8	76.6%	78.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.7	2.6	57.3	52.3	78.3%	74.6%
Black, non-Hispanic	2.4	2.2	47.8	46.9	73.0%	71.3%
White, non-Hispanic	2.7	2.4	52.6	49.4	79.0%	75.5%
Hispanic	2.6	2.4	49.0	45.5	73.5%	69.6%
Other**	2.7	2.5	56.3	54.4	79.9%	75.0%
Total	2.5	2.3	51.4	49.3	76.8%	73.8%

*For those students who persisted to the third year.

**Includes: Non-resident alien, more than one, other.

by gender and race/ethnicity.⁷ The overall average GPA for females was 2.5, compared to 2.3 for males. By race/ethnicity, females consistently had higher GPAs than males by an average of two-tenths of a point.

Females who attended their initial term full time accumulated 51 credential-bearing credits by the end of their third year, compared with 49 for males. The differences by gender in the numbers of credits accumulated for Native American and black students were not statistically significant; however, females in other racial/ethnic groups earned between two and five more credits than did male students. It is noteworthy that a higher portion of females was referred to developmental education, but females accumulated more credential-bearing credits than did males.

Not only did females accumulate more credits, they also completed a larger percentage of the credits they attempted. Females completed 77 percent of credits attempted, compared with 74 percent completed by males. These differences were not statistically significant for Native American and black students. However, for other racial/ethnic groups, females completed 2 to 5 percentage points more of the credits they attempted than did males.

What Does This Mean?

Females in Achieving the Dream colleges, regardless of race, were less likely than males to enroll full time during their first term, and they were referred to developmental education with higher frequency than males. But females who enrolled full time accumulated more credits, completed a larger percentage of the credits they attempted and attained higher GPAs than male students. The gender gap is wider for students of color.

These findings indicate that males attending Achieving the Dream colleges may be better

prepared than females in some subjects. And by being more likely to enroll full time than females, males should accumulate more credits. However, the results show that males are falling behind females when measured in terms of achievement and persistence.

It may be worth examining options for separate intervention strategies designed specifically for males and females. Colleges also may consider specific strategies for male students of color. The research suggests the following questions for Achieving the Dream institutions:

- Are there differences in developmental needs for males and females, particularly students of color? Also important is the depth (the number of levels below college level) of the developmental needs. Although females were referred with more frequency, colleges should investigate whether the depth of the needs differs by gender.
- Is gender related to persistence and outcomes at your institution, especially for male students of color?
- Are the early warning signs of impending dropouts the same for male and female students?
- What programs are in place at your institution that target either male or female students? What about male students of color?

Achieving the Dream's Database

Achieving the Dream colleges can use the Achieving the Dream database created by JBL Associates, Inc., to replicate the analysis presented here for their own institutions. This analysis might help colleges identify areas of their curricula or groups of students needing special attention. ■

Data Notes is a bimonthly publication that examines data to illuminate the challenges facing Achieving the Dream colleges and to chart their progress over time.

This issue of *Data Notes* was written by Sue Clery, Senior Research Associate, JBL Associates, Inc., and edited and designed by KSA-Plus Communications, Inc.

If you have questions regarding this issue, or if there is a topic you would like to see addressed in *Data Notes*, please contact Sue Clery at sclery@jblassoc.com.

This report uses the September 2007 version of the Achieving the Dream database. Colleges are identified by the year they started work with the initiative.

⁷GPA is measured only for students persisting to the third year.