

## More Black Women than Black Men in Higher Education

Over the past 33 years, Black women have enrolled in four-year colleges at higher rates than have Black men, according to the results of a new study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies. In 2004, Black women comprised 59.3 percent of all first-time, full-time Black students attending four-year institutions, compared to 54.5 percent in 1971.

The study also revealed that among Black freshmen, males have higher intellectual self-confidence ratings than do females: 76 percent of males vs. 65 percent of females rated themselves among the top 10 percent compared with their peers. However, Black women attending both historically Black colleges (HBCUs) and predominantly White institutions (PWIs) were significantly more likely than were men to enter college with "A" averages. Over time, the *gender gap* in achievement at college entry has widened at both PWIs (3 percent difference between men and women in 1971 and 14 percent difference in 2004) and HBCUs (6 percent difference in 1971 between men and women and 13 percent difference in 2004).

"The findings reveal that the *gender gap* is not a new issue among Black college students, but it continues to widen in many areas of access, achievement, and important college and graduate school preparation behaviors. This portends even lower attainment rates for Black males in the future," said the lead author of the report, Walter R. Allen, UCLA professor of education and sociology and holder of the Allan Murray Cartter Chair in Higher Education.

These findings are based on a new study, "*Black Undergraduates From Bakke to Grutter*," focusing on the status, trends and prospects of Black college freshmen over the past 33 years. This unique study uses national data collected from 1971 to 2004 through the Cooperative Institutional Research Program. The findings are based on the responses of more than half a million Black freshmen attending more than 1,100 baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities. The data have been statistically weighted to represent the responses for the 3.6 million Black first-time, full-time freshmen students attending institutions of higher learning during that period.

"Black students have been more likely to attend four-year institutions than other underrepresented groups. This can be attributed to the long tradition of historically Black college attendance," said Sylvia Hurtado, director of the Higher Education Research Institute. "This report is the most comprehensive look at Black students as they enter both historically Black and predominantly White four-year institutions."

### **Fewer Black Students from Lowest Income Groups**

Today, students from the lowest income groups make up a smaller proportion of the total Black freshman population than in 1971 (30 percent in 2004 vs. 41 percent in 1971). Although the percentage has decreased over time at both types of institutions, higher concentrations of low-income students can be found at HBCUs (43 percent in 1971 vs. 34 percent in 2004) compared to PWIs (39 percent vs. 28 percent, respectively).

Conversely, there are more Black students in the highest income categories than ever before (2 percent in 1971 vs. 13 percent in 2004), with parents who are college educated (15 percent of mothers in 1971 vs. 40 percent in 2004) and who work in white-collar professions (44 percent of fathers in blue-collar occupations in 1971 vs. 15 percent in 2004). A gap still remains regarding Black students and the general first-time, full-time freshman population, where more than 53 percent of students reported parents with at least a college degree in 2004. "This pattern is indicative of college admission and recruitment procedures that privilege more affluent students regardless of color," Allen said.

### **Black Students Better Prepared for College**

Black students are better prepared academically than before for entering college. Between 1971 and 2003, there were substantial decreases in Black first-year college students who felt they needed special tutoring or remedial work in English (22 percent in 1971 vs. 16 percent in 2003), reading (13 percent vs. 7 percent), mathematics (56 percent vs. 44 percent), science (30 percent vs. 21 percent) and foreign language (36 percent vs. 21 percent) at college entry.

Additionally, there were substantial gains between 1984 and 2004 in the proportion who met or exceeded the minimum years of study in English, mathematics, foreign language and science based on recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. In 2004, 97 percent of all Black freshman college students had completed 4 years of English and 3 years of mathematics. However, more research is needed regarding the types of courses black students have access to in high school, as they were still not as likely as their freshman peers to meet or exceed foreign language (89 percent vs. 92 percent) or physical science (45 percent vs. 59 percent) course recommendations, indicating distinctions remain in curricular track and quality of schools Black students attend.

Comparisons of the 1971 and 2004 cohorts of Black freshmen also reveal significant upward trends in overall academic preparation and aspirations. In 1971, 8 percent of black freshmen reported high school grade averages of “A-” or better, as compared to 20 percent of freshmen overall. In 2004, 28 percent of Black freshmen were in this range. Despite significant increases among black freshmen, a significantly higher percentage (48 percent) of the general freshmen population reported “A” grades.

Educational aspirations remain high. Twenty-four percent of Black students intended to obtain doctoral degrees, as compared to 17 percent of the general population of students. Black students also were slightly more likely to express interest in professional degrees than were students overall - medical degrees (12 percent vs. 9 percent) and law degrees (6 percent vs. 5 percent). Black women were twice as likely (16 percent) to aspire toward medical degrees than were men (8 percent). This gender difference is more pronounced among Black students than for the general student population interested in medical careers (11 percent of women vs. 7 percent of men).

### **Political and Civic Engagement**

Over the decades, there has been a trend toward conservative and “middle of the road” political orientations among freshmen. Black students are still more likely to identify as “far left” or “liberal” than the general freshmen population (36 percent vs. 30 percent), but they are less likely to characterize themselves today as politically “liberal” (36 percent) than in 1971 (50 percent). This fact also is evident in their changing views on particular issues, including abortion (59 percent believed it “should be legal” in 1981 vs. 53 percent in 2004) and homosexuality (28 percent believed “homosexual relationships should be prohibited” in 2001 vs. 36 percent in 2004).

Black students also are entering colleges with strong commitments to civic and political participation, coupled with intentions to assume leadership roles. Students increasingly anticipated involvement in volunteer work during college (19 percent in 1990 vs. 30 percent in 2004), but students at HBCUs placed higher importance on volunteering (34 percent of HBCU students expected to volunteer in college compared to 28 percent of students at PWIs). While a growing desire was observed among students to influence social values, this increase was more significant for students attending HBCUs (from 39 percent in 1971 to 52 percent in 2003). Black freshmen also placed increased importance on becoming community leaders, with more Black students at HBCUs being committed to community leadership than students at PWIs in 2003 (47 percent vs. 40 percent). This trend was accompanied by a large increase in the percentage of students who felt that they possessed skills that would help them fulfill these roles.

“Our findings reveal the changing face of Black student college participation since 1971. We see cause for both celebration and concern in these data. While there has been considerable progress, significant racial disparities persist,” Allen said.

[Copies of “*Black Undergraduates From Bakke to Grutter: Freshmen Status, Trends and Prospects, 1971-2004*” by Walter R. Allen, Uma M. Jayakumar, Kimberly A. Griffin, William Korn and Sylvia Hurtado, are available from the Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, 3005 Moore Hall, Box 951521, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521. To reach the Higher Education Research Institute directly, call 310-825-1925, or the lead author, Walter R. Allen, call 310-206-7107. For a survey summary, visit <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/PDFs/BlackUndergradRB.pdf>].