

EQUITY ASSESSMENT EXCERPTS

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INSTITUTIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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While minority students are underrepresented in postsecondary education -- in Illinois and nationally -- they are more numerous, proportionately, in the community college sector. Some researchers suggest that minority students are not randomly distributed among two-year colleges because most live in predominantly minority communities and commute to local colleges in their neighborhoods (Richardson, 1988). In part, the decision by students to stay home and attend schools in their community is tied to: 1) affordability, 2) academic preparation, 3) the likelihood of admission to the institution of first choice, and 4) concerns over isolation and alienation (Castillo, 1984; McIntosh, 1987; Nunez & Wormak, 1989).

Relationships with people in the community are critical factors in the cultures of minorities. Bowler, Rauch, and Schwarzer (1986) found that interpersonal relationships weigh heavily in the individual's cultural experience. "Having a sense of belonging to a community and identifying with a set or subset of that community is critical to bringing a sense of group bonding."

Case Study Highlights

Responses, in the Spring of 1992, from a random sample of 177 students (2.5% of the total enrollment at the time) from a community college in Illinois provide the basis for the analyses reported in this case study. The sample is divided into four subgroups for various comparisons: minority males, minority females, white males and white females. Minority students in this study consisted of Asian/Pacific Islander (5%), Black (2%) and Hispanic (9.6%) students. White students comprised 81% of the sample. Of those responding, 61.1% of the students were classified as freshmen and sophomores, 16.9% were Unclassified and 20.3% identified themselves as Other.

Descriptive statistics are used to present the demographic characteristics of the sample. Factor analysis, canonical discriminant analysis, multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA), and analysis of variance (ANOVA) with follow-up tests -- specifically LSD (Least Significant Difference) -- are performed to identify statistically significant differences between and among perceptions held by student groups.

The primary objective of this study was to identify statistically significant differences among the perceptions of community college students of different races/ethnicities or gender groups given institutional attractiveness factors. The identification of factors considered most important to community college students should lead to the consideration and implementation of better strategies for enhancing participation in postsecondary education.

- Based on a canonical discriminant analysis of the items in the Institutional Attractiveness section of the survey instrument, the following factors, in their order of importance to the respondents, were identified: location of institution; quality of academic programs and faculty involvement with students; a culturally diverse campus environment; availability of academic-related support services; inclusion in leadership roles and institution-wide activities; accessibility for the disabled; and availability of financial aid and accessibility to religious services.
- Significant differences were found to exist between mean responses of: (1) males and females, (2) minority and white students, and (3) gender/race/ethnicity subgroups regarding perceptions of institutional attractiveness.
- An environment which is culturally diverse, inclusive and participatory is perceived to be more important to minority students and white female students than to white male students.
- White students more strongly agreed that there were opportunities for inclusion in leadership roles and institution-wide activities than did minority students.
- There were no significant differences in the mean responses to the factors: "quality of academic programs and faculty involvement with students" and "availability of academic-related support services."
- "Accessibility to buildings and programs for the disabled" and "opportunities for frequent contact with faculty" are perceived by all groups to be important for institutional attractiveness.
- "Location of the institution," perceived as important by all student groups, was deemed as most important by white female students.

Summary

Results of this study are consistent with findings of other Equity Assessment studies, some of which are:

- All students value highly "quality academic programs" and "opportunities for frequent contact with faculty."
- Accessibility to buildings and programs for the disabled is perceived by all groups and, particularly by white females, as an important factor of institutional attractiveness.
- Recruitment and presence of faculty/staff from underrepresented groups strengthen the "sense of belonging" felt by students from those groups.
- White male students perceive cultural diversity on campus of lesser importance than other groups of students.
- A nurturing and more inclusive campus environment is critical for individual student success.

About Equity Excerpts

The general purpose of Excerpts is to provide non-technical information about issues that affect underrepresented groups.

More specific project objectives are:

- to provide quick and simple information of empirical findings;
- to generate discussion about issues identified by project researchers;
- to identify areas that need special attention;
- to provide suggestions for the improvement of recruitment and retention of minority students.

Reports, studies, and climate assessment surveys prepared by the project staff are available on a fee basis

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