

Guest Editors: **Promising Practices for Increasing Underrepresented Students' Retention and Graduation**

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One hallmark of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) member institutions is the diversity of their student populations. On average, traditionally underrepresented minority students make up 46 percent of CUMU institutions' enrollment. In the 1960s, the challenge of many institutions was providing access to underrepresented minority (UMR) students. Today, two pressing issues facing diverse institutions are retention and graduation, especially of URM students.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 58 percent of all first-time, full-time students who started a four-year degree program in 2004 earned a bachelor's degree within six years. The graduation six-year graduation rate for the entering class of 1996 was 55 percent. The national figures get more interesting as you delve into the details. Following is a table reporting six-year graduation rate data from the NCES.

1996 Entering Cohort

	Overall	White	African-American	Asian	Hispanic	Native American/ Pacific Islander
Overall	55.4%	58.1	38.9	63.4	45.7	38.0
Public four-year	51.7	54.3	36.8	59.5	42.1	35.3
Non-profit four-year	63.1	65.7	44.6	73.5	55.7	48.1
For-profit four-year	28.0	33.2	19.2	28.9	24.6	23.1

This volume of *Metropolitan Universities* showcases efforts by higher education institutions that serve underrepresented minority groups in unique and innovative ways. The collection of articles reveals how academics from a variety of institutions are making progress on the issues of retention and graduation through their program practices. These institutions and programs were selected for inclusion in this issue for two primary reasons. First, each article contains some evidence of the effectiveness of its program. As with any practice, it is most helpful to have evidence of the utility of practice. This is especially true in an era of accountability and limited fiscal resources. Second, each article showcases practices that may be adopted at other institutions. As with any journal, one purpose of *Metropolitan Universities* is to disseminate information about good practices and evidence of effective programs. A unique

purpose of the *Metropolitan Universities* journal is to disseminate information that will inform practice among members of CUMU and other similar institutions.

There are three themes we would like to highlight across the articles. First, every practice has at their heart contributed to student success. It is extremely important to understand that every institution is emphasizing student success in terms of student learning or student engagement as means to increase retention and graduation. There is an emphasis on maintaining or increasing student learning and rigor.

Second, whether it is the Meyerhoff Scholarship Program at University of Maryland, Baltimore County; course redesign at Fresno State; or electronic portfolios at LaGuardia Community College; many of the efforts reported here are faculty-driven. At virtually all higher education institutions, if significant and sustaining change is going to be made, the faculty must be the drivers of that change. While the appropriate administrative and staff support also is necessary, it is not sufficient to create and sustain institutional change.

Third, in order to truly change a long-term practice, it will likely be necessary to engage in culture change. Culture change in a higher education institution requires the involvement of all major stakeholders—faculty, administrators, staff, students, and the community. Organizational culture change is often motivated by one of two, or both, conditions. First, an attractive and compelling vision of moving an institution from its current state and practices to something new must be present. To be most effective, key campus stakeholders must be involved in creating and communicating this vision. The second common stimulus for organizational change is a perceived need to change in order to survive. In today's environment, the calls for higher education accountability from many sources may serve this purpose. The examples of change contained in this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* are motivated by a positive vision of student success and simultaneously provide some data that address accountability questions.

Two very different practices at Fresno State are highlighted. Moore, Statham, and Zelezny describe the role of continuing education programs in the access and success of UMR students in remediation efforts. Sanchez, Ramirez, and Hernandez share the initial positive results of course redesign at Fresno State. An initial model of student success within the course redesign context also is provided.

LaGuardia Community College (Arcario, Eyon, Klages, and Polvariev) has emerged as a national leader in the implementation of electronic portfolios (ePortfolios). ePortfolios are used at LaGuardia to measure student learning outcomes. The experience of LaGuardia may serve as a guide for the process of adopting and utilizing ePortfolios on other campuses.

The team from Millersville University reports some impressive results for its First-Year Learning Experience program. While there is considerable effort around the country on first-year experience programs, the team at Millersville modified its effort based on the research done by two members of its team. The program emphasizes two

non-cognitive student characteristics: resilience and values. The results of this reorientation of its first-year experience program have yielded promising results.

Rivera and Monzon, from San Diego State, use a statistical approach to identify the success factors of first-generation Latino/a students. In their longitudinal study, these colleagues identify on-campus living as one of the key predictors of graduation for at-risk Latino/a students.

The stunning success of the Meyerhoff Scholars Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, is the focus of the piece by Lee and Harmon. The goal of the Meyerhoff Scholars Program is to increase the diversity in science, engineering, and related fields. The program is multifaceted and works with students from entry to graduate school.

Student engagement is the hallmark of the success at California State University, Monterey Bay. Boyce, Chukwuemeka, and Cruz-Uribe review a variety of institutional practices that contribute to student engagement at this relatively young university (established in 1994). At Monterey Bay, URM students graduate at a higher rate than other students. A suite of high impact practices are described that are believed to account for some of this success.

As we were reviewing this collection of articles, we were struck by the quality of the work being done around the country by CUMU institutions which focuses on quality college completion. These examples all provide some level of evidence of success and show the promise of replicability. While institutional or external financial investment is necessary in all cases, these resources are truly a worthy investment in our institutions and students. These exemplary programs, and many others around the country, support students in attaining their educational goals and that is our return on the investment.

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