



## **Forum**

### *How States and Institutions Shape Racial Dynamics in Higher Education*

November 15, 2006

## **Executive Summary**

### **Overview**

WISCAPE hosted this forum on the University of Wisconsin–Madison campus as part of an ongoing series examining issues related to access and persistence in higher education. The program focused on two major issues: 1) the benefits and implications of strategic recruitment of minority students, and 2) diversity policy efforts throughout the United States. This forum considered the various effects these policies and practices have had on racial dynamics in higher education. Participants had the opportunity to discuss this vital issue with established and emerging scholars in the field whose research brings an interesting perspective to the ongoing dialogue about campus diversity initiatives.

The forum consisted of two main public presentations. During the morning session, William Trent, Professor of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois, presented the results of his ongoing research on the Gates Millennium Scholars strategic recruitment practices. Jerlando Jackson, WISCAPE Faculty Affiliate and Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at UW–Madison, and Manuela Romero, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Alliance for Minority Participation (WiscAMP), commented on Professor Trent’s presentation.

To download presentation slides and papers from this forum, please visit:  
<http://www.wiscapc.wisc.edu/calendar/details.asp?id=435>.

In the afternoon session, Regina Deil-Amen, Assistant Professor of Educational Theory and Policy at Pennsylvania State University, presented her research on postsecondary access and success and the role of two-year colleges. Eric Grodsky, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Davis, then discussed the work he and graduate student Michal Kurlaender are engaged in on the effects of affirmative action

programs on the demographic profiles of higher education institutions. Following Grodsky's presentation, Josipa Roksa, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia, presented her work on the effectiveness of transfer articulation policies. These discussions were moderated by Sara Goldrick-Rab, WISCAPE Faculty Affiliate and Assistant Professor of Educational Policy Studies at UW–Madison.

### **The Benefits and Implications of Strategic Recruitment of Students of Color**

Trent began the discussion with a brief overview of the Gates Millennium Scholars (GMS) program. This program provides college assistance for 1,000 financially needy, high-performing students of color each year, with the goal of enhancing the quality of their educational experience. He explained that finding these students requires strategically searching for and recruiting from schools where they can expect a high yield, including majority-minority schools.

According to Trent, adopting a strategic recruitment plan resulted in the identification of a pool of high-need, highly-talented students attending majority-minority schools. Attending one of these schools had clear, positive implications for becoming a GMS scholar, attending a more selective postsecondary institution, and choosing to major in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) field.

Trent's research examined the high school racial composition of GMS program applicants from 2000 to 2004 in an effort to understand the implications for college recruitment. Trent tested two measures of school racial composition to explore these relationships: 1) a traditional measure of the percentage of the school population that is white, and 2) a categorical measure referencing majority African American, majority American Indian, majority Asian, majority Latino, majority White, and no majority race.

These categorical measures of racial concentration may be more informative for some analyses than percentage white/black measures because the likelihood that students attend schools with white classmates varies significantly, according to Trent. He found that American Indian students are the most likely to attend schools with substantial percentages of white students, followed by Asian students, African American students, and Latino students. It is important to note that there is not a statistically significant difference between the percentages of white students at the high schools of African American students and those of Latino students.

Overall, GMS recipients have fewer white students in their schools with an average of 40.4 percent, as compared to non-recipients with 46.1 percent. Trent also noted that a student's race is strongly associated with the race of their classmates and that school composition is a significant predictor of whether students will receive the GMS award. According to Trent, these results strongly suggest that the Gates Millennium Scholars

program's targeted recruitment strategy is identifying schools with high yields of financially needy, high-performing students of color.

One indicator of school quality employed was the number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses offered. The 2001 GMS applicants came mainly and disproportionately from high schools offering more AP courses. Sixty-five percent of GMS applicants come from schools with four or more AP courses. Approximately 19 percent of public high schools nationwide offered seven or more AP courses in the 2000-2001 academic year. However, about 38 percent of the schools attended by GMS applicants offered seven or more AP courses in the same time span. In addition, 18 percent of public high schools nationwide offered four to six AP courses, while 27 percent of public high schools attended by GMS applicants offered four to six AP courses.

Trent also performed regression analyses examining the effect of categorical racial school composition versus majority white schools on college selectivity. Majority Latino and schools with no majority student race concentration exhibited a beneficial impact on college selectivity.

Students from high schools with no majority student race concentration were the most likely to choose STEM fields. For each race category, as compared to a majority white school, students were twice as likely to select a STEM major.

Trent concluded that while his finding that GMS recipients are largely found in majority-minority high schools and from schools with no majority student race concentration or that are not racially identifiable is certainly significant, it is more important that the GMS program's targeted recruitment strategy has been effectively identifying high-need, highly-talented students. According to Trent, outstanding students of color can be found in a lot of schools where we don't necessarily expect them to be and where many selective postsecondary institutions don't recruit.

This is perhaps not surprising, observed Trent, as minority students are less likely to be taking the same high-level courses in majority white schools, and are thus comparatively less prepared for college. Additionally, Trent conjectured that students of color in majority white schools may be less financially disadvantaged because typically majority white schools have the lowest proportional enrollment of high need students.

Trent also emphasized that attending majority-minority schools has mixed consequences, not simply negative ones. The evidence on becoming a GMS recipient, college selectivity, and choice of a STEM major suggests that being enrolled in majority-minority schools was not a disadvantage, at least for GMS applicants. However, these schools did tend to offer fewer AP courses, resulting in a persistent pattern of limited access for African American students in the 2001 cohort.

Trent concluded that these findings, coupled with strategic recruitment practices, could be extremely helpful in altering admissions and financial aid policies at higher education institutions, as well as changing government higher education and financial aid policies.

### **Where Are All the Black and Latino Students?: Postsecondary Access and Success and the Role of Two-Year Colleges**

Deil-Amen began the afternoon panel session by discussing diversity issues in sub-baccalaureate institutions. She pointed out that the vast majority of Black and Latino undergraduate students are enrolled in institutions that are non-selective and access-oriented, and that about half attend two-year colleges. Community and occupational colleges have become a major access point to higher education for low-income and minority students as postsecondary access has expanded.

Deil-Amen performed case studies of 14 two-year colleges in and around Chicago, including seven public community colleges and seven private for-profit and non-profit occupational colleges. She noted that these occupational colleges were chosen as ideal, not representative types. Deil-Amen also examined baseline surveys and two rounds of interviews with seniors from five high-poverty high schools in Chicago as the students attempted the postsecondary education transition.

Postsecondary aspirations have increased, noted Deil-Amen, with 85 percent of high school graduates planning to attend college. However, 77 percent of community college students who express a desire for a degree fail to attain such any degree within ten years. For African American students, nearly 90 percent who want degrees do not attain them within six years. The bachelor's degree or higher achievement gap between White and minority students is actually growing. Deil-Amen examined why attainment is not keeping up with these mounting aspirations.

Deil-Amen questioned whether illusions of increased opportunity are being fostered because, though college access has increased, low socioeconomic status, lower-achieving students still experience limited success in postsecondary education. Specifically, she expressed concern that vulnerable students are being deceived by a "college for all" mentality that encourages students to go after a college degree even when actual degree attainment is unlikely, unaware of the barriers that stand between them and success.

Deil-Amen's research centered around two goals: 1) to prepare and encourage minority students to pursue at least a bachelor's degree, and 2) to be realistic about opportunities for low income and under-prepared students. By recognizing both their real challenges and opportunities, Deil-Amen says that students will have the capacity to develop realistic postsecondary strategies.

Certain social mechanisms contribute to the maintenance of a “covert” color line in postsecondary education, according to Deil-Amen. Though high school teachers dispense blanket encouragement to their students to embrace college dreams, they fail to provide individualized guidance. Students with inadequate information develop and pursue vague, “at-risk” goal/degree expectations without knowing what else they ought to expect. While college access has increased, inadequate academic preparation has left students with limited tools to academically succeed. Thus, it is no surprise that academic struggle and remedial placement resulting in delayed access to college credits marks many students’ transition into college.

As many students go on to community college, counselors fail to provide realistic and informed postsecondary education implementation strategies proactively, said Deil-Amen. Additionally, community colleges may be failing to formally structure assistance with procedural hurdles and the provision of social and academic integration opportunities. In the organizational complexity of community colleges, students’ “social know-how” becomes critical for success. At the occupational colleges that Deil-Amen studied, students’ social know-how had less influence on their experience because there was greater emphasis on systematically assisting students with long-term planning and transforming implicit “rules” into explicit organizational structures and policies. First generation students, of whom a disproportionate number are minority students, tend to possess limited time and financial resources and/or many work and family obligations, making them much more vulnerable to the negative consequences of limited social know-how.

Deil-Amen concluded that while many policies and programs are directed at raising the postsecondary education aspirations of Black and Latino students and improving college access, they fall short at providing the preparation and structured support necessary to succeed in the college environment. Future efforts should not only include focus on raising students’ aspirations, but also considerations of academic preparation, proactive guidance, strategy development, and institutional structures to facilitate the success of the majority of Black and Latino students, not just those who are exceptionally qualified and attend selective postsecondary institutions.

### **The Demography of Higher Education in the Wake of Affirmative Action**

Grodsky shifted the discussion to the impact of affirmative action on the demographic make-up of postsecondary education. Grodsky acknowledged that there has been plenty of talk about affirmative action in higher education, but research has resulted in mixed findings in regard to how widespread affirmative action and its effects are, how important it has been and will continue to be, and how affirmative action policies and impacts have changed over time.

In his previous work, Grodsky found that a slight majority of colleges and universities engaged in affirmative action for African American applicants between the high school graduating classes of 1972 and 1992. Since 1996, the percentage of postsecondary institutions considering minority status in their admissions decisions has declined from approximately 60 percent of public colleges and universities to about 30 percent. Private colleges and universities have also shown significant decline, from approximately 55 percent to 40 percent. Grodsky also examined whether affirmative action was restricted by court or legislative action. Both the public and private sectors display evidence of a substantial drop in affirmative action use due to restriction.

For this specific project, Grodsky reviewed affirmative action practices in California. He found that affirmative action policies were employed by elite University of California System campuses (Berkeley and Los Angeles) and more competitive campuses (San Diego and Santa Barbara). Grodsky also discovered evidence of affirmative action usage in some California State University campuses, such as California Polytechnic State University.

In 1996, the California electorate voted in support of Proposition 209, part of which restricts affirmative action policy in public education. Grodsky sought to find out whether Proposition 209 affected the proportion of African American and Latino matriculants at both public four-year colleges and other types of postsecondary institutions, as well as whether it affected the average quality of the four-year colleges attended by African American and Latino students.

To this end, Grodsky analyzed Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data. IPEDS gathers data from all baccalaureate-granting institutions in the United States and has had mandatory reporting since 1992. The database breaks down the enrollment of full-time, first-time, first-year students by race/ethnicity. Grodsky found that at public four-year colleges the average percent of African American students in incoming cohorts dropped significantly from 6.5 percent to 5.5 percent in 1997 after the enactment of Proposition 209. The average percent of Latino incoming students remained unchanged, despite the fact that the number of Latino high school graduates increased substantially.

The average percentage of African American students in private, non-profit colleges increased slightly (0.2 percent) and somewhat more so in proprietary sub-baccalaureate institutions (2.5 percent). The average percentage of Latino students in incoming cohorts increased at private, non-profit colleges by 2.2 percent, at proprietary sub-baccalaureate institutions by 5.6 percent, and at community colleges by 4.4 percent.

Grodsky observed that Proposition 209 has resulted in a decline in the share of African American matriculants while the share of Hispanic matriculants has remained stable at University of California System and California State University campuses. African American and Hispanic students hold increasing shares in California's other postsecondary education institutions.

The substantial reshuffling of under-represented minority students across schools caused by Proposition 209 has affected school quality for these groups, explained Grodsky. There has been a general decline in school quality for Latino students and a decline in public sector institutions for African American students.

Grodsky concluded by discussing the possible implications of his findings for the nation as a whole. The effects Proposition 209 had on the demography of higher education in California may be indicative of the nationwide effect of other legal restrictions on affirmative action policies. He noted that his findings were consistent with retrenchment in national institutional data after the 1990s. Finally, Grodsky urged the audience to carefully consider the meaning of “equality of opportunity,” its implications, and what the educational community is willing to do to further that goal.

### **Building Bridges for Student Success: Are Articulation Policies Effective?**

Roksa addressed the issue of student success in the context of postsecondary transfer policies and practices. Transfer has received much scholarly and policy attention, said Roksa, because it is one of the key functions of community colleges. Approximately two-thirds of community college students expect to go on to earn their bachelor’s. According to Roksa, about 25 to 52 percent of community college students do transfer to four-year institutions. In addition, a substantial portion of those who do successfully attain bachelor’s degrees started their higher education journey in a community college, especially minority students who are over-represented in community colleges

In response to this research on community college transfer to four-year institutions, many states have developed articulation policies in attempts to facilitate the transition. Though much effort has gone into describing these policies, there has been very little success in evaluating how well, if at all, they work; policymakers have been putting blind faith in the assumption of effectiveness.

Roksa examined student data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) for the cohort of 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students in 1992. She then looked at the impact articulation policies, statutorily defined by the state, impacted these students’ likelihood of transfer to a four-year institution after their admittance to a community college. She found that the implementation of an articulation policy did not improve the likelihood of transfer. Roksa also broke down the odds ratios for the likelihood of transfer by any four-year institution, in-state four-year institutions, and in-state public four-year institutions. But again, no effect on transfer likelihood was observed. Overall, articulation policies have had no effect on transfer even considering measurement error, according to Roksa’s research.

Roksa argued that transfer is the wrong outcome against which to evaluate articulation policies. Most state articulation statutes describe their main goal as the preservation of

credits between community colleges and four-year institutions. The relevant outcomes for evaluating this goal are bachelor's degree attainment, time to bachelor's degree completion, and the number of credits that successfully transfer, said Roksa. There is almost no difference in bachelor's degree attainment levels for community college transfer students, time to bachelor's degree attainment, or credits to bachelor's degree between states with articulation policies and those without, Roksa found.

Because state articulation policies were not designed to facilitate transfer, Roksa observed that it is not surprising to find that such policies have no effect on transfer. To actually improve transfer rates, policymakers must focus on the attributes and actions that are already known to affect transfer. Roksa pointed to delayed and interrupted enrollment as factors that decrease the likelihood of transfer and to expectations of bachelor's degree attainment, high 12<sup>th</sup>-grade test scores (particularly in math), and high community college grades as factors that increase the likelihood of transfer.

Though these attributes and actions are susceptible to policy influence, Roksa said that policymakers need to change the way they think about transfer. It's more than a "community college issue," she observed; it is part of a bigger educational process involving K-12 education, community colleges, and four-year institutions. For this reason, Roksa encouraged the development and consideration of broader policies that address factors hindering transfer.

## **Conclusion**

This forum successfully engaged students, faculty, staff, researchers, administrators, and policymakers in a discussion of how policies affect racial dynamics present in postsecondary education. Participants acquired a deeper understanding of how issues of recruitment, affirmative action, transfer, and the difference between improving access and improving success affect diversity trends in today's higher education institutions.

Discussions following both presentations focused on the importance of advancing diversity goals by dealing with students and potential students as they truly are, not as ideals. Respondents and audience members emphasized the value of providing students the resources and support they need to succeed in postsecondary educational contexts.

### **Related Web Links**

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>

National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS)

<http://www.shceo.org/>



**WISCAPE Forum Executive Summary**

CF021: *How States and Institutions Shape Racial Dynamics in Higher Education*

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**Agenda**

**Keynote Presentation**

*The Benefits and Implications of Strategic Recruitment of Students of Color*

12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Pyle Center Auditorium

**Introduction**

Noel Radomski  
Director  
WISCAPE

**Presenter**

William Trent  
Professor of Educational Policy Studies  
University of Illinois

**Respondents**

Jerlando Jackson  
WISCAPE Faculty Affiliate  
Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis  
University of Wisconsin–Madison

Manuela Romero  
Executive Director  
Wisconsin Alliance for Minority Participation (WiscAMP)

**Discussion**

**Break**

1:30 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.

Pyle Center Auditorium Lobby

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**Panel Discussion**

1:45 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Pyle Center Auditorium

**Moderator**

Sara Goldrick-Rab

WISCAPE Faculty Affiliate

Assistant Professor of Educational Policy Studies

University of Wisconsin–Madison

**Where Are All the Black and Latino Students?: Postsecondary Access and Success and the Role of Two-Year Colleges**

Regina Deil-Amen

Assistant Professor of Educational Theory and Policy

Pennsylvania State University

**The Demography of Higher Education in the Wake of Affirmative Action**

Eric Grodsky

Assistant Professor of Sociology

University of California, Davis

**Building Bridges for Student Success: Are Articulation Policies Effective?**

Josipa Roksa

Assistant Professor of Sociology

University of Virginia

**Discussion**

Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education (WISCAPE)

University of Wisconsin–Madison

409 Education Building

1000 Bascom Mall

Madison, WI 53706-1398

Phone: (608) 265-6342

E-mail: [wiscapewisc@education.wisc.edu](mailto:wiscapewisc@education.wisc.edu)