



Caring Campus Impact on Racial Equity and Achievement Gaps

America's colleges have struggled to build equity on their campuses. And these struggles have become more conspicuous with the recent killing of George Floyd and the national response to address racial equity.

According to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Blog, “While equality means treating everyone the same, equity means ‘making appropriate accommodations for people from underserved or historically marginalized groups to allow them full access to the rights and privileges enjoyed by the majority.’ Unlike equality, equity focuses on removing the structural barriers that prevent non-dominant groups from excelling.” However, most of the equity responses among America's colleges fail to remove structural barriers. Instead, colleges adopt boutique programs in response to singular student subpopulations that rarely go to scale.

The *Caring Campus* initiative of the Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC) supports college equity efforts by creating campuses where all students—including non-majority students—feel connected and cared for. The core of this work is understanding students' perspectives when interacting with them in the classroom, in an office, or anywhere on campus.

Specifically, the work involves identifying and implementing behaviors to be engaged in by staff, faculty, and administrators that lead to cultural shifts on campus. These cultural shifts are furthered by changes to policies and procedures that respond to the current needs of students and address structural barriers that reify inequity and get in the way of fulfilling the college's mission.

Throughout our community college work, students tell us they want to feel connected. They want a faculty or staff member who “gets” them. This is particularly salient as community college students are more diverse than ever and our current ranks of faculty and staff have yet to catch up. Many students coming to community colleges also have a history of poor educational experiences. They are not prepared for higher education and benefit significantly when there is an adult in authority who cares about their success. Community college educators must do all they can to demonstrate they understand the lives of their students. And making connections are powerful motivators for students to succeed.

The American Association of College and Universities (AAC&U) is one of many organizations concerned about equity issues and their impact on student success. In their guide *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* (2015), they exhort colleges to “Commit to frank, hard dialogues about the climate for underserved students on your campus, with the goal of effecting a paradigm shift in language and actions.” IEBC's Caring Campus addresses this commitment in numerous positive ways, avoiding deficit-based approaches.

As a result, students at *Caring Campus* colleges are demonstrating remarkable impact on student success metrics such as course retention and success, term to term persistence, and completion and transfer rates. And these improvements are closing gaps for traditionally underrepresented groups.

In Figure One (below) course success rates—students earning C or better—increase for all students. However, these increases are most dramatic for groups who typically underperform.

Table one (below) presents course success rates at another college that increased in just one year. Again, we see typically underperforming groups demonstrating the greatest impact.

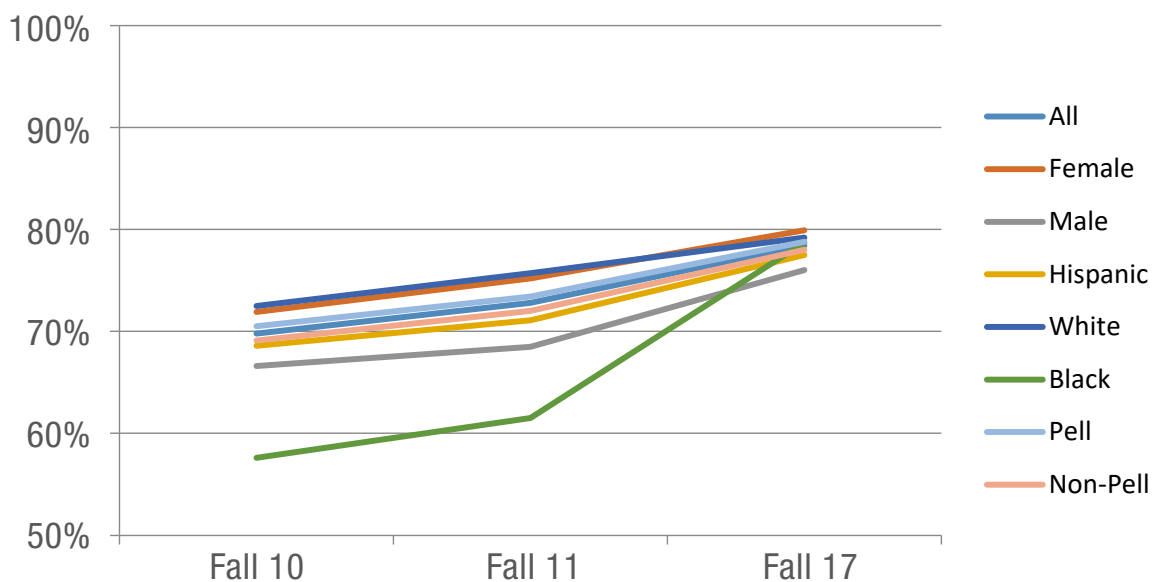
In Figure Two (below), students in *Caring Campus* classes demonstrate higher term to term persistence rates than their peers who were not in these classes. When the data is disaggregated by ethnicity, we see that all groups demonstrated this difference in persistence.

In Figure Three (below), students in *Caring Campus* sections of classes at a community college graduate and transfer to four-year institutions at higher rates than their peers who were not provided the *Caring Campus* experience in their classes. As with other data presented below, this difference was evident for all ethnic groups.

These findings are promising and demonstrate the impact of providing a caring, supportive classroom environment on student success. In *Relationship-Rich Education* the authors note that, “Decades of research demonstrate that peer-to-peer, student-faculty, and student-staff relationships are the foundation of learning, belonging, and achieving in college...and the effects are particularly strong for students of color and first-generation college students.” We anticipate receiving similar findings from other *Caring Campus* colleges as time passes and they are able to assess their impact.

Figure One

Course success achievement gaps narrow after College A implements Caring Campus



¹ Felten, P. & Lambert, L.M. (2020). *Relationship-Rich Education: How Human Connections Drive Success in College*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Table One

Course success achievement gaps narrow after College B implements Caring Campus

Ethnicity	2014-16 (two year average; prior to implementation)	2016-17
Asian	92%	93%
Black	71%	90%
Latinx	86%	91%
White	91%	94%
All students	87%	89%

Figure Two

Term to term persistence after College C implements Caring Campus (Percent)

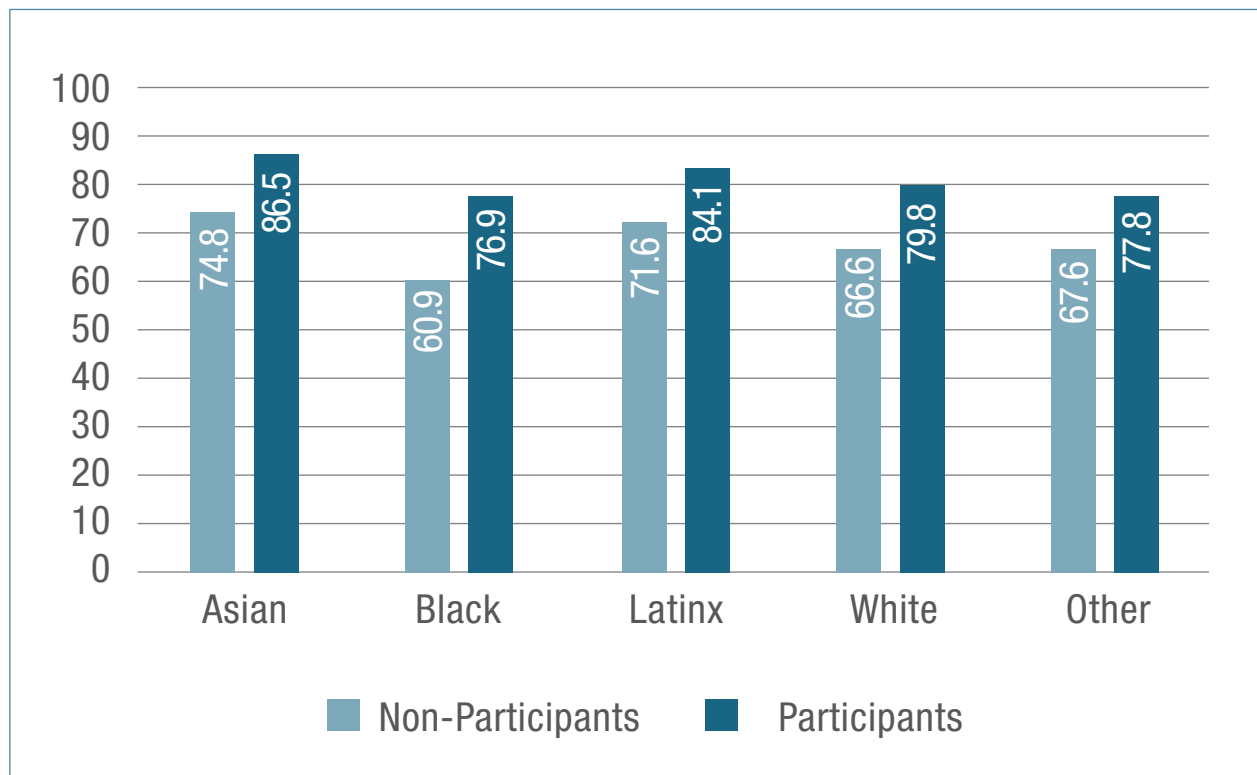
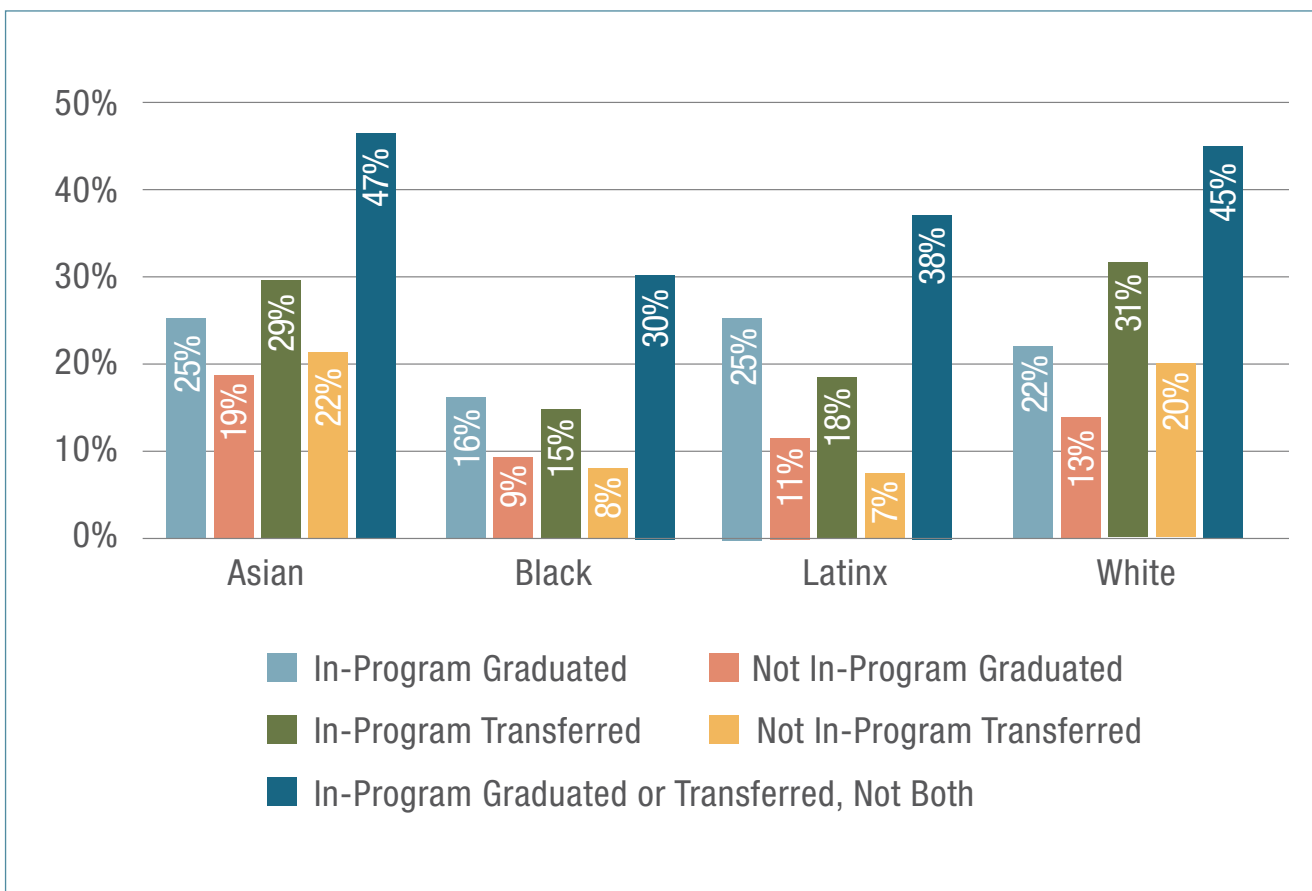


Figure Three

In-Project Students from All Races/Ethnicities Have Higher Rates of Graduation & Transfer to Four-Year Universities at College C



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