

Student Racial/Ethnic Diversity in the Oregon State System of Higher Education

Overview

The Oregon State System of Higher Education's enrollment distribution, by racial/ethnic group, is comparable to the distribution among public high school graduates and in the Oregon population overall in most categories ([Table 1](#)). The exceptions are Asian American students who are over-represented in OSSHE compared to high school graduates and the Oregon population as a whole, and Hispanic/Latino students who are under-represented. However, the proportion of resident Hispanic/Latino first-time freshmen in fall 1996 is higher than the proportion of Hispanic/Latino undergraduates overall, and more closely matches the distribution of Hispanic/Latino high school graduates and the Oregon population.

Approximately 75% of the OSSHE students who entered as freshmen in fall 1995 were still enrolled in OSSHE in fall 1996 (including students transferring to another OSSHE institution after initial enrollment in OSSHE). The retention rate for minority group students overall is comparable to the rate for other groups, although the rate varies among the individual racial/ethnic groups. The retention rate is higher for Asian Americans (80%) and for nonresident aliens (79%), and lower for Native American students (63%).

Long-term retention and graduation rates show a similar pattern. There are higher six-year graduation rates for Asian American students (55% for the State System) and lower rates for Native American students (31%).

OSSHE Enrollment

Between fall 1981 and fall 1996, the number of minority group students in OSSHE *increased* by 57.7%, while the total number of OSSHE students *decreased* by 6.5% ([Table 2](#)). The most dramatic increase is among Hispanic/Latino students, whose number nearly tripled -- from 655 to 1,851 over the 15-year period.

The number of students in the "unknown/decline to respond" category increased by nearly 30% between fall 1981 and fall 1996. One likely reason may be the difficulty for students of multiple racial or ethnic origins to choose a single identifying category. The recent addition of a larger array of choices on the forms used to collect racial/ethnic data should reduce the number of "unknowns" in future reports.

In fall 1996, students of color constituted 12.6% of OSSHE students, ranging from 8.2% at Southern Oregon University to 15.7% at Portland State University ([Table 3](#)). Asian American students make up the largest proportion of minority group students at Portland State University (8.5% of the total enrollment), Oregon State University (7.1%), University of Oregon (6.8%), and Oregon Institute of Technology (4.5%). Hispanic/Latino students comprise the largest proportion of minority group students at Eastern Oregon University (3.6% of the total enrollment), Southern Oregon University (3.2%), and Western Oregon University (3.2%).

First-Time Freshmen

The enrollment of minority group first-time freshmen has grown dramatically since 1981, especially among Oregon residents ([Table 4](#)). Minority resident first-time freshmen doubled between fall 1981 and fall 1996, from 383 to 768. In contrast, the number of European American resident first-time freshmen declined 15%, from 5,770 in fall 1981 to 4,887 in fall 1996.

First-year retention rates for first-time freshmen vary across institutions and minority groups ([Table 5](#)). The highest first-year retention rates are at University of Oregon and Oregon State University (79% overall at each institution), with lower rates at institutions with larger nontraditional student populations (Portland State University with 65.4% and Southern Oregon University with 65.7%).

First-year retention rates for Asian American freshmen are above the institution averages except at Eastern Oregon University and Southern Oregon University. Rates for African American and Hispanic/Latino freshmen are at or above institution averages in nearly all cases. Rates for Native American freshmen are below institution averages except at Oregon Institute of Technology.

The six-year graduation rates for full-time first-time freshmen entering OSSHE in fall 1989 also vary across institutions and minority groups ([Table 6](#)). Again, the highest rates are at University of Oregon (63.7%) and Oregon State University (61.9%). Among minority groups, Asian American students show the highest graduation rates at Oregon State University and University of Oregon. African American students have the highest minority group rates at Portland State University, and Hispanic/Latino students have the highest rates at Eastern Oregon University, Oregon Institute of Technology, Southern Oregon University, and Western Oregon University. Native American students have the lowest graduation rates among minority groups at nearly all OSSHE institutions.

Note: If you are unfamiliar with the [OSSHE System](#), you may wish to browse our website.

June 1997

Contact/Comments: IR@sch.osshe.edu

[IRS Home Page](#) [IRS Home Page](#)  [Return to Report Index](#)