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Education Trust Credits Winthrop in Retaining African-American Students

Winthrop University

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Quick Facts

- Winthrop University, a public master's institution that enrolls about 5,000 undergraduates of which 27 percent are black, has graduated African-American students at higher rates than whites every year from 2002 through 2008.
- The university has succeeded in recruiting and retaining a critical mass of African-American students and, as a result, can take a comprehensive approach to student success.



Frank Ardaiole

ROCK HILL, S.C. - Winthrop University is singled out in an **Education Trust** report, "Big Gaps, Small Gaps: Some Colleges and Universities Do Better Than Others in Graduating African-American Students" as a national leader in consistently showing high rates of graduation success among minority populations.

Nationally 57 percent of all students who enroll earn diplomas within six years, but the graduation rates for different groups of students are vastly different. About 60 percent of whites graduate but only 49 percent of Latinos and 40 percent of African Americans who start college hold bachelor's degrees six years later.

Winthrop University, a public master's institution that enrolls about 5,000 undergraduates of which 27 percent are black, has graduated African-American students at higher rates than whites every year from 2002 through 2008. About 62 percent of black students graduate within six years, compared with 57 percent of white students.

In the report, **Frank Ardaiole, Winthrop's vice president for student life**, credits **President Anthony DiGiorgio's 20-year commitment** to make Winthrop "the institution of choice" for minority students in South Carolina. The university has succeeded in recruiting and retaining a critical mass of African-American students and, as a result, can take a comprehensive approach to student success.

Instead of targeting special programs specifically toward African Americans, Ardaiole said that all students are expected to graduate at Winthrop, "A Winthrop student is a Winthrop student," he said.

Winthrop is highlighted in the Education Trust report as a top performer with lessons for all universities to learn. "In my 21 years here, I cannot recall a more gratifying statement," said Ardaiole. "Why? Our success has been predicated on just over two decades of dedicated commitment and hard work by university faculty and staff who have worked tirelessly to improve upon Winthrop's appreciation of diversity and student success for all through many detailed yearly objectives and outcomes being fulfilled."

Winthrop's **University College** serves as a central location for retention efforts and as the academic home for freshmen and those who have yet to declare a major. One program includes an early alert system, in which faculty members notify the University College of students who are struggling academically. The college then works with each student's adviser and resident assistant to provide the student with counseling.

Some institutions get in trouble because they shift their emphasis toward faculty and what they do,

according to **Tom Moore, Winthrop’s vice president for academic affairs**. He said Winthrop has worked hard to “seriously move student learning and development to the center of the university’s mission.”

As part of this focus, Winthrop has incorporated student learning into faculty evaluations and hiring to ensure that all faculty are committed to students’ academic success, Moore said. These efforts, combined with institutional leaders’ commitment to diversity and student success, are essential in maintaining high graduation rates for all Winthrop students.

Education Trust officials said graduate rates averages nationwide mask important differences between institutions. “Graduation rates at individual institutions tell a range of stories – some of smashing success – which should be studied deeply and replicated widely,” said Kati Haycock, president of The Education Trust. “Unfortunately, there are others of shocking irresponsibility. The lesson of all of these stories is: What colleges do for students of color powerfully impacts the futures of these young people and that of our nation.”

Using several years of data from **College Results Online** – a unique Web-based tool that allows the public to view college graduation rates by race, ethnicity, and gender for four-year institutions across the country. The rates reveal:

- At nearly two-thirds of the colleges and universities in the study, fewer than half the African-American students emerge with a degree.
- And though the vast majority of Latino students in the study entrust their futures to public colleges and universities, more than 60 percent of the institutions they attend graduate fewer than half their Latino students in six years.

“We did uncover some large gaps in student success rates and low graduation rates for students of color. But it would be wrong to assume that these gaps are inevitable or immutable,” said Mamie Lynch, higher education research and policy analyst at The Education Trust and coauthor of the report. “For many of the ‘big gap’ schools, we can point to an institution working with a similar student body that graduates students of color at rates similar to those of white students.”

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