

"Affirmative Action" and College Graduation Rates

by Thomas Sowell (June 4, 2002)
<http://www.capmag.com/article.asp?id=1635>

Some thought that racial preferences and quotas -- "affirmative action" -- in university admissions decisions were on their way out after they were banned by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in Texas and by Proposition 209 in California. However, the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that it is all right for the University of Michigan to use racial factors in determining whom to admit to their law school.

The next stop is obviously the Supreme Court of the United States. How that case will turn out is anybody's guess. The Supreme Court has gone back and forth on racial quota cases over the years. Often there have been changing 5 to 4 decisions from one case to the next and shifting majorities for different portions of a given decision. The trumpet has been making a very uncertain sound for a very long time.

There may be more of the same this time, with the High Court trying to square the circle or split the difference, and ending up with five votes for a ruling based on nothing more than a need to get five votes. In other words, the whole issue is unlikely to be resolved on Constitutional principles and more likely to be left a festering sore, for the sake of expediency.

When racial preferences were ended in California, there was much hysteria in the media, with dire predictions that blacks would be kept out of higher education. Just recently, with much less publicity, the fact has come out that there are now *more* black students in the University of California system than there were when racial preferences and quotas were in effect. The same is true in the University of Texas system.

What has happened is that black students have *redistributed* themselves within both these state university systems. There are no longer as many blacks attending the respective flagship universities in these systems, but they are attending other institutions whose normal standards they meet, instead of being overmatched and flunking out of more prestigious institutions.

A book by former university presidents William Bowen (Princeton) and Derek Bok (Harvard) had made a misleading case for affirmative action that the media have hailed as definitive. Bowen and Bok claim that the mismatching of black students under affirmative action has not produced the dire results predicted by critics. Their evidence? Black students graduate at higher rates at a particular set of elite institutions that Bowen and Bok have chosen to study than at lower ranked institutions in their study.

The real issue, however, is not how highly ranked the institutions are, but how big the racial difference in admissions standards has been. This they never tell us, despite mountains of statistics on everything else. From other studies, however, it is clear that racial differences in SAT scores, for example, are much smaller at Harvard (95 points) than at Duke (184 points) or Rice (271 points).

In other words, where the racial preferences in admissions are not as great, the differences in graduation rates are not as great. The critics of affirmative action were right: *Racial preferences reduce the prospects of black students graduating.* Other data tell the same story.

Compare racial preferences in Colorado, for example. At the flagship University of Colorado at Boulder, test score differences between black and white students have been more than 200 points -- and only 39 percent of the black students graduated, compared to 72 percent of white students. Meanwhile, at the University of Colorado at Denver, where the SAT score difference was a negligible 30 points, there was also a negligible difference in graduation rates -- 50 percent for blacks and 48 percent for whites.

In short, it is not the relative rankings of the institutions but the racial differential in admissions standards that has been crucial. You are not doing anybody a favor by sending them where they are more likely to fail, rather than where they are more likely to succeed. Critics of racial preferences and quotas have been saying that for more than 30 years, and now the data back them up -- which may be why you don't hear much about those data.

None of this should be relevant to the question before the Supreme Court, which is whether the 14th Amendment's requirement of "equal protection" for all Americans is trumped by the magic word "diversity."



About the Author

Thomas Sowell has published a large volume of writing. His dozen books, as well as numerous articles and essays, cover a wide range of topics, from classic economic theory to judicial activism, from civil rights to choosing the right college.

Black Student College Graduation Rates Remain Low, But Modest Progress Begins to Show

http://www.jbhe.com/features/50_blackstudent_gradrates.html

The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education

Nationwide, the black student graduation rate remains at a dismally low 42 percent. But the rate has improved by three percentage points over the past two years. More encouraging is the fact that over the past seven years the black student graduation rate has improved at almost all of the nation's highest-ranked universities.

On page 11 of this issue of JBHE we report the encouraging news that African-American enrollments at the vast majority of our nation's highest-ranked colleges and universities have shown significant improvement over the past quarter-century.

But a more important statistical measure of the performance of blacks in higher education is how many black students throughout the nation are completing school and earning a college degree. Department of Education data reveals that, as expected, black students who earn a four-year college degree have incomes that are substantially higher than blacks who have only some college experience but have not earned a degree. Most important, blacks who complete a four-year college education have a median income that is near parity with similarly educated whites.

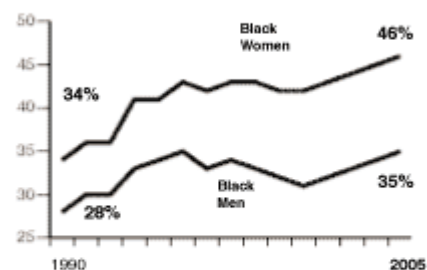
According to the most recent statistics, the nationwide college graduation rate for black students stands at an appallingly low rate of 42 percent. This figure is 20 percentage points below the 62 percent rate for white students. Here, the only positive news we have to report is that over the past two years the black student graduation rate has improved by three percentage points.

Black Women Outpace Black Men in College Completions

In each of the three years from 1998 through 2000 there was a one percentage point decline in the graduation rate for black men. But for the past four years the graduation rate for black men improved by one percentage point and now stands at 35 percent. Over the past 15 years black men have improved their graduation rate from 28 percent to 35 percent.

This year the college graduation rate for black women rose by one percentage point to 46 percent. And over the past decade and a half, the graduation rates for black women have shown strong and steady gains. Turning in a powerful performance, black women have improved their college completion rate from 34 percent in 1990 to 46 percent in 2005.

Nationwide, the Black Student College Graduation Rate Is a Very Low 42 Percent. But Black Women Are Far More Likely Than Black Men to Complete College.



Note: Figures are for 328 institutions, all of which are members of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Division I. The graduation rate is defined as all enrolled students who earn a degree within six years. These figures cover entering freshmen for the fall of 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998.

Chart © The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.

Graduation rates play an important role in measuring the success of affirmative action programs. Many opponents of affirmative action assert, often without even looking at the actual data, that black student graduation rates are damaged by race-sensitive admissions. It is critical to review the statistics to see if this is true. In this report we emphasize the graduation rates of black students at the nation's highest-ranked colleges and universities. The reason is that almost always these are the institutions that have the strongest commitments to race-sensitive admissions.

For many years Harvard University, traditionally one of the nation's strongest supporters of affirmative action, has produced the highest black student graduation rate of any college or university in the nation. But for some unexplained and possibly immaterial reason, Harvard slipped to second place in 2004. But now Harvard's black student graduation rate has increased to 95 percent, once again the highest among U.S. colleges and universities.

Amherst College, a small liberal arts college in western Massachusetts, now has a black student graduation rate of 94 percent, the second highest in the nation. Last year Amherst had bested Harvard by two percentage points. Princeton University ranks third in the nation with a black student graduation rate of 93 percent. Six other highly ranked colleges and universities in the United States posted a black student graduation rate of 90 percent or above. They are Wellesley College, Brown University, Northwestern University, Washington University, Wesleyan University, and Williams College.

Eleven other high-ranking institutions have a black student graduation above 85 percent. They are Stanford University, Yale University, Dartmouth College, Davidson College, Columbia University, Duke University, Georgetown University, Smith College, Swarthmore College, the University of Virginia, and Wake Forest University.

Colleges and Universities With the Nation's Highest Black Student Graduation Rates, 2005
(Ranked by the Highest Black Graduation Rate)

| Institution | Black Student Graduation Rate, 2005 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Harvard University | 95 % |
| Amherst College | 94 |
| Princeton University | 93 |
| Wellesley College | 92 |
| Brown University | 91 |
| Northwestern University | 91 |
| Washington University | 90 |
| Wesleyan University | 90 |
| Williams College | 90 |
| Stanford University | 89 |
| Yale University | 89 |
| Dartmouth College | 88 |
| Davidson College | 88 |
| Columbia University | 87 |
| Duke University | 87 |
| Georgetown University | 87 |
| Smith College | 87 |
| Swarthmore College | 86 |
| University of Virginia | 86 |
| Wake Forest University | 86 |

Source of statistics: NCAA.
Table ♥ The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.

At a Small Number of Prestigious Colleges and Universities, the Black Student Graduation Rate Is Higher Than the Rate for Whites. But at Many Selective Colleges and Universities, the Black Graduation Rate Continues to Remain Well Below the Rate for Whites.

(Colleges and Universities Are Ranked by the Smallest Gap in Black-White Graduation Rates, 2005)

| Institution | White Rate* | Black Rate | % Point Difference | Institution | White Rate* | Black Rate | % Point Difference |
|----------------------------|-------------|------------|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------|------------|--------------------|
| Mount Holyoke College | 78% | 82% | -4 | Duke University | 94% | 87% | +7 |
| Smith College | 83 | 87 | -4 | Georgetown University | 94 | 87 | +7 |
| Macalester College | 82 | 84 | -2 | Rice University | 91 | 84 | +7 |
| Wellesley College | 90 | 92 | -2 | Swarthmore College | 93 | 86 | +7 |
| Pomona College | 80 | 81 | -1 | University of Virginia | 93 | 86 | +7 |
| Washington University | 90 | 90 | 0 | Yale University | 96 | 89 | +7 |
| Wake Forest University | 87 | 86 | +1 | Dartmouth College | 96 | 88 | +8 |
| Wesleyan University | 91 | 90 | +1 | Haverford College | 93 | 85 | +8 |
| Amherst College | 96 | 94 | +2 | University of Pennsylvania | 93 | 85 | +8 |
| Harvard University | 97 | 95 | +2 | Bowdoin College | 91 | 82 | +9 |
| Oberlin College | 80 | 78 | +2 | Claremont-McKenna College | 81 | 72 | +9 |
| Calif. Inst. of Technology | 86 | 83 | +3 | Univ. of Southern California | 79 | 70 | +9 |
| Columbia University | 90 | 87 | +3 | Bucknell University | 89 | 79 | +10 |
| Davidson College | 91 | 88 | +3 | Cornell University | 93 | 83 | +10 |
| Emory University | 85 | 82 | +3 | University of Notre Dame | 96 | 85 | +11 |
| Northwestern University | 94 | 91 | +3 | Tufts University | 92 | 80 | +12 |
| Vanderbilt University | 85 | 82 | +3 | Mass. Inst. of Technology | 94 | 81 | +13 |
| Brown University | 96 | 91 | +5 | Middlebury College | 92 | 79 | +13 |
| Grinnell College | 86 | 81 | +5 | Univ. of N. Car.-Chapel Hill | 83 | 69 | +14 |
| Princeton University | 98 | 93 | +5 | Washington and Lee Univ. | 90 | 76 | +14 |
| Colgate University | 90 | 84 | +6 | Trinity College | 87 | 72 | +15 |
| Hamilton College | 86 | 80 | +6 | Univ. of Calif.-Los Angeles | 88 | 73 | +15 |
| Johns Hopkins University | 88 | 82 | +6 | Univ. of Calif.-Berkeley | 86 | 70 | +16 |
| Stanford University | 95 | 89 | +6 | Carnegie Mellon University | 82 | 65 | +17 |
| University of Chicago | 86 | 80 | +6 | Colby College | 88 | 68 | +20 |
| Vassar College | 89 | 83 | +6 | Carleton College | 90 | 69 | +21 |
| Williams College | 96 | 90 | +6 | University of Michigan | 88 | 67 | +21 |
| Bryn Mawr College | 83 | 76 | +7 | Bates College | 88 | 64 | +24 |

Note: The graduation rate is defined as all enrolled students who earn a degree within six years.

*The white graduation rate is for Caucasians only and does not include Asians, Hispanics, or any other minority group.

Source: JBHE analysis based on statistics provided by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

Table ♥ The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.

Academically selective institutions are almost always strongly committed to affirmative action in admissions, yet at the same time they tend to deliver a high black student graduation rate. Obviously, this undercuts the assertion made by many conservatives that black students admitted to our most prestigious colleges and universities under race-conscious admissions programs are incapable of competing with their white peers and should instead seek admissions at less academically rigorous schools. The fact that almost all entering black students at Harvard, Amherst, Princeton, and several other highly ranked colleges and universities go on to earn their

diplomas shows that African Americans do compete successfully at our nation's most prestigious institutions of higher learning.

High-Ranking Institutions With Low Black Student Graduation Rates

Among the nation's colleges and universities that are commonly rated as selective, the lowest black student graduation rate occurs at the Bates College in Maine. Only 64 percent of the black freshmen who enroll at Bates College go on to graduate. Among the high-ranking universities, the lowest black student graduation rate is at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. But the number of black students at Carnegie Mellon is not large. The curriculum at Carnegie Mellon is heavily directed toward science. This may be a factor in the relatively low graduation rate of black students.

Far more disturbing is the poor black student graduation rate at the academically selective University of Michigan. This is a huge state university of 40,000 students. And performance there is a national bellwether. Only 67 percent of entering students at the University of Michigan go on to graduate. Currently there are nearly 1,900 black students at the University of Michigan, the largest black enrollment of any high-ranking college or university. If these black students graduate at the same rate as their peers in the recent past, more than 600 of them will fail to earn their bachelor's degree.

As for the nation's other high-ranked institutions, only three other schools have a black student graduation rate below 70 percent. They are the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Colby College, and Carleton College.

Explaining the Differences in Black Student Graduation Rates

The Progress of Black Graduation Rates at the Nation's Highest-Ranked Universities

(Ranked by the Gain/Loss in Black Graduation Rates)

| Institution | 1998 Rate | 2005 Rate | Difference |
|----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Calif. Institute of Technology | 60% | 83% | +23 |
| Carnegie Mellon University | 47 | 65 | +18 |
| University of Pennsylvania | 69 | 85 | +16 |
| Columbia University | 72 | 87 | +15 |
| Univ. of Calif. at Los Angeles | 58 | 73 | +15 |
| Rice University | 71 | 84 | +13 |
| University of Chicago | 69 | 80 | +11 |
| Northwestern University | 81 | 91 | +10 |
| Emory University | 74 | 82 | +8 |
| University of Notre Dame | 77 | 85 | +8 |
| Vanderbilt University | 74 | 82 | +8 |
| University of Calif. at Berkeley | 63 | 70 | +7 |
| Cornell University | 77 | 83 | +6 |
| Stanford University | 84 | 89 | +5 |
| Johns Hopkins University | 78 | 82 | +4 |
| Dartmouth College | 85 | 88 | +3 |
| Duke University | 84 | 87 | +3 |
| Princeton University | 90 | 93 | +3 |
| University of Michigan | 64 | 67 | +3 |
| Yale University | 86 | 89 | +3 |
| Brown University | 89 | 91 | +2 |
| Georgetown University | 85 | 87 | +2 |
| Mass. Institute of Technology | 79 | 81 | +2 |
| Univ. of N.C.-Chapel Hill | 67 | 69 | +2 |
| Harvard University | 94 | 95 | +1 |
| University of Virginia | 87 | 86 | -1 |
| Tufts University | 82 | 80 | -2 |

Note: To avoid fluctuations from year to year, the graduation rate data listed here are four-year averages for the year noted and the three previous years.

Source of Statistics: NCAA. Chart ♥ The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.

Why are black graduation rates very strong at some high-ranking institutions and considerably weaker at other top-ranked schools? Here are a few possible explanations:

- Clearly, the racial climate at some colleges and universities is more favorable toward African Americans than at other campuses. A nurturing environment for black students is almost certain to have a positive impact on black student retention and graduation rates. Brown University, for example, although often troubled by racial incidents, is famous for its efforts to make its campus a happy place for African Americans. In contrast, the University of California at Berkeley has had its share of racial turmoil in recent years. The small number of black students on campus as a result of the abolishment of race-sensitive admissions has made many African Americans on campus feel unwelcome. This probably contributes to the low black student graduation rate at Berkeley.
- Many of the colleges and universities with high black student graduation rates have set in place orientation and retention programs to help black students adapt to the culture of predominantly white campuses. Mentoring programs for black first-year students involving upperclassmen have been successful at many colleges and universities. Other institutions appear to improve graduation rates through strong black student organizations that foster a sense of belonging among the African-American student population.
- Geographic location unquestionably plays a major role in black student graduation rates. For example, Bates College in Maine is located in a rural area with a very small to negligible black population. The same holds true for Grinnell College in Iowa, Oberlin College in Ohio, and Carleton College in Minnesota. Black student graduation rates at many of these rural schools are lower than at colleges and universities in urban areas.
- The presence of a strong and relatively large core of black students on campus is important. Among the highest-ranked colleges and universities, institutions that tend to have a low percentage of blacks in their student bodies, such as CalTech, Bates, Middlebury, Grinnell, Davidson, Carleton, and Colby, also tend to have lower black student graduation rates. Black students who attend these schools may have problems adjusting to college life in an overwhelmingly white environment. And these schools are less likely to have black-oriented social or cultural events to make black students feel at home.

The Progress of Black Graduation Rates at the Nation's Highest-Ranked Liberal Arts Colleges

(Ranked by the Gain/Loss in Black Graduation Rates)

| Institution | 1998 Rate | 2005 Rate | Difference |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Macalester College | 62% | 84% | +22 |
| Oberlin College | 56 | 78 | +18 |
| Smith College | 70 | 87 | +17 |
| Davidson College | 74 | 88 | +14 |
| Bryn Mawr College | 63 | 76 | +13 |
| Grinnell College | 69 | 81 | +12 |
| Wellesley College | 81 | 92 | +11 |
| Wesleyan University | 81 | 90 | +9 |
| Middlebury College | 71 | 79 | +8 |
| Colgate University | 77 | 84 | +7 |
| Amherst College | 89 | 94 | +5 |
| Swarthmore College | 81 | 86 | +5 |
| Trinity College | 68 | 72 | +4 |
| Mount Holyoke College | 80 | 82 | +2 |
| Williams College | 88 | 90 | +2 |
| Bates College | 65 | 64 | -1 |
| Claremont McKenna College | 73 | 72 | -1 |
| Bowdoin College | 84 | 82 | -2 |
| Washington and Lee Univ. | 78 | 76 | -2 |
| Carleton College | 74 | 69 | -5 |
| Colby College | 75 | 68 | -7 |
| Haverford College | 93 | 85 | -8 |
| Vassar College | 91 | 83 | -8 |
| Hamilton College | 90 | 80 | -10 |

Note: To avoid fluctuations from year to year, the graduation rate data listed here are four-year averages for the year noted and the three previous years.

Source of Statistics: NCAA. Chart © The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.

- Curriculum differences also play an important role in graduation rates. Carnegie Mellon University and CalTech are heavily oriented toward the sciences, fields in which blacks have always had a small presence. It continues to be true that at many high-powered schools black students in the sciences often have been made to feel uncomfortable by white faculty and administrators who persist in beliefs that blacks do not have the intellectual capacity to succeed in these disciplines.

- High dropout rates appear to be primarily caused by inferior K-12 preparation and an absence of a family college tradition, conditions that apply to a very large percentage of today's college-bound African Americans. But equally important considerations are family wealth and the availability of financial aid. According to a study by Nellie Mae, the largest nonprofit provider of federal and private education loan funds in this country, 69 percent of African Americans who enrolled in college but did not finish said that they left college because of high student loan debt as opposed to 43 percent of white students who cited the same reason.

Under any circumstance, a college education costs huge amounts of money. Not only are there very large outlays for tuition, books, and travel, but, even

more important, going to college takes a student out of the work force for four or more years. The total bite into family income and wealth can amount to \$160,000 or more per student. High and always increasing college costs tend to produce much greater hardships for black families.

Deep financial pockets enable some schools to provide greater financial aid than others. And this is a major factor in student graduation rates. Well-funded universities such as Princeton, which has the nation's largest endowment per student and probably the nation's most generous financial aid program for low-income students, will undoubtedly claim an advantage in black student retention and, subsequently, in producing high graduation rates. Clearly, the availability of a high level of financial aid shields low-income black students from financial pressures that may force minority students to leave college to fulfill family obligations and financial responsibilities.

This journal has always placed emphasis on financial pressures as a major agent in producing low black graduation rates. But, undoubtedly, cultural and family issues bear a huge responsibility. Invariably, the critical problem is that a very high number of young blacks are entering college with wholly inadequate academic credentials, ambition, and study habits.

We accept the view that a very strong black student graduation rate is a good indicator of institutional success in racial integration of a given campus. But readers are cautioned that a lower graduation rate can be a positive indicator of a college or university's willingness to take a chance on academically dedicated young black students with substandard academic credentials.

Comparing Black and White Graduation Rates

Sometimes a better way to compare the performance of the nation's highest-ranked colleges and universities in successfully graduating black students is to examine the *difference* in the graduation rates between their black and white students. Using this comparison, a high-ranking institution such as Pomona College in California, which has a black student graduation rate of 81 percent — a figure well below many of its peer institutions — nevertheless ranks high on a relative basis because its white student graduation rate of 80 percent is actually one percentage point lower than the rate for black students.

Many academics and administrators will be surprised to hear that there are a few selective colleges in the United States that report a higher graduation rate for blacks than for whites. Five of the nation's highest-ranked colleges and universities actually have a higher graduation rate for black students than for white students. According to the latest statistics from Mount Holyoke College, Pomona College, Smith College, Wellesley College, and Macalester College, a black student on these campuses is more likely to complete the four-year course of study and receive a diploma than is a white student. JBHE has not been able to identify the reason for this anomaly at these five institutions, which is markedly inconsistent with nationwide statistics. But it is interesting to note that three of the five institutions are women's colleges.

At some institutions the difference in black and white graduation rates is very small. Washington University in St. Louis has a 90 percent graduation rate for both blacks and whites. At Wake Forest University and Wesleyan University, the white student graduation rate is only one percentage point higher than the rate for blacks. At Amherst College,

At Flagship State Universities, the University of Virginia Is the Leader By Far in Successfully Graduating Black Students

Ranking the States by the College Graduation Rate for Black Students at the State's Flagship Public University

| | | | |
|---------------------------|--------|--------------------------|-------------|
| University of Virginia | 86.0 % | West Virginia University | 49.0 % |
| Univ. of Calif.-Berkeley | 70.0 | Louisiana State Univ. | 46.0 |
| Univ. of New Hampshire | 70.0 | University of Iowa | 45.0 |
| Univ. of N.C.-Chapel Hill | 69.0 | University of Kentucky | 45.0 |
| University of Michigan | 67.0 | Univ. of Mississippi | 45.0 |
| Penn State University | 65.0 | Ohio State University | 43.0 |
| Univ. of Connecticut | 65.0 | Univ. of North Dakota | 43.0 |
| University of Florida | 65.0 | National Average* | 42.0 |
| University of Delaware | 63.0 | University of Oklahoma | 41.0 |
| State Univ. of New York | 63.0 | University of Kansas | 40.0 |
| Rutgers Univ. (N.J.) | 61.0 | University of Maryland | 40.0 |
| University of Georgia | 61.0 | Univ. of Rhode Island | 40.0 |
| University of Texas | 61.0 | University of Montana | 39.0 |
| University of Illinois | 60.0 | University of Arizona | 38.0 |
| University of Vermont | 58.0 | University of Idaho | 38.0 |
| Univ. of Washington | 58.0 | Univ. of New Mexico | 37.0 |
| University of Missouri | 56.0 | University of Minnesota | 35.0 |
| University of Maine | 55.0 | University of Wyoming | 35.0 |
| University of Alabama | 54.0 | University of Hawaii | 34.0 |
| Univ. of South Carolina | 54.0 | University of Nevada | 33.0 |
| University of Oregon | 53.0 | University of Arkansas | 32.0 |
| University of Colorado | 52.0 | University of Nebraska | 32.0 |
| University of Tennessee | 52.0 | University of Utah | 32.0 |
| Univ. of Massachusetts | 50.0 | Univ. of South Dakota | 25.0 |
| Indiana University | 49.0 | University of Alaska | 15.0 |
| University of Wisconsin | 49.0 | Univ. of Dist. of Col. | 7.0 |

*For all large state-operated universities nationwide.
Source: JBHE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT analysis of data from the NCAA.

Harvard University, and Oberlin College, the difference is only two percentage points.

At the Ivy League schools Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, and Brown, the black graduation rates are relatively high, and in all instances they are five percentage points or less below the graduation rate for white students. At Yale, Penn, Dartmouth, and Cornell, there is at least a seven percentage point racial gap in graduation rates.

All told, there are 37 high-ranking colleges and universities that have a favorable black-white graduation rate difference of eight percentage points or less. Two years ago there were only 30. Four years ago only 16 high-ranking colleges and universities had a graduation rate gap of eight percentage points or less. This is a strong sign of progress.

Overall, 16 of the 56 colleges in our survey report a black graduation rate that is 10 percentage points or more below the graduation rate for white students. Last year the racial gap was 20 percentage points or more only at the University of Michigan. The black-white graduation rate gap at the University of Michigan currently stands at 21 points. This year there are three other high-ranking schools with at least a 20 percentage point gap. They are Colby College, Carleton College, and Bates College.

Trends in Black Student Graduation Rates at Highly Ranked Universities

So far we have reported the latest available data on the current graduation rates of black students at the nation's most prestigious colleges. We now examine the *long-term trend* in black graduation rates at these universities over the past seven years. Of the 27 high-ranked universities for which JBHE has long-term college completion data, the black graduation rate has improved at 25 institutions. The greatest improvement in the black student college graduation rate occurred at the California Institute of Technology. The black student graduation rate at CalTech has improved from 60 percent to 83 percent. But there are so few black students at CalTech, usually one or two in each class, that the graduation rate figure can fluctuate to a large degree based on the performance of just one or two students. In fact, the data from CalTech shows that if just two additional black students had failed to earn their degrees, the black graduation rate at the institution would have dropped from 83 percent to 67 percent.

Far more impressive is the 18 percentage point increase in the black student graduation rate at Carnegie Mellon University. There, the four-year average black graduation rate rose from 47 percent in 1998 to 65 percent in 2005.

Similarly impressive gains in black student graduation rates occurred at the University of Pennsylvania, Rice University, UCLA, and Columbia University. Each university has seen its black student graduation rate improve by at least 13 percentage points over the 1998 to 2005 period. Columbia University, which showed an 8 percentage point drop in black student graduation rates from 1993 to 1999, has shown a rebound over the past six years. Since 1999 the black student graduation rate at Columbia rose from 72 percent to 87 percent.

There has been a major improvement in the black graduation rate at the University of California at Berkeley over the past decade. Since 1993 the black student graduation rate at Berkeley has increased from 51 percent to 70 percent. A large part of this increase occurred in the 1993 to 1998 period. It is important to recall that the dramatic rise in black student graduation rates at Berkeley occurred during a period when the university was still pursuing a strong affirmative action admissions program. These figures suggest that, contrary to the view expressed by most racial conservatives, there was a strong improvement in black graduation rates during the recent period of intense affirmative action in

Graduation Rates of Black Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

(Ranked by the Highest Graduation Rate)

| Institution | Black Student Graduation Rate, 2005 | Institution | Black Student Graduation Rate, 2005 |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Spelman College | 77% | Florida A&M Univ. | 34% |
| Fisk University | 64 | Grambling State Univ. | 33 |
| Morehouse College | 64 | Rust College | 33 |
| Miles College | 62 | Delaware State Univ. | 32 |
| Howard University | 56 | Bethune-Cookman | 31 |
| Elizabeth City State | 55 | Livingstone College | 31 |
| Hampton University | 55 | Shaw University | 31 |
| N. Carolina Central | 49 | Cheyney Univ. of Pa. | 30 |
| Tuskegee University | 48 | St. Augustine's College | 30 |
| Winston-Salem State | 48 | Univ. of Ark.-Pine Bluff | 29 |
| Bennett College | 46 | Lane College | 28 |
| S. Carolina State Univ. | 46 | Norfolk State Univ. | 27 |
| Alcorn State Univ. | 45 | Paine College | 27 |
| N.C. A&T State Univ. | 44 | Coppin State Univ. | 26 |
| Stillman College | 44 | St. Paul's College | 26 |
| Univ. of Md. E. Shore | 44 | Southern University | 26 |
| Johnson C. Smith Univ. | 41 | Central State Univ. | 25 |
| Fayetteville State Univ. | 40 | Fort Valley State Univ. | 25 |
| Lincoln Univ. (Penn.) | 40 | Lincoln Univ. (Missouri) | 25 |
| Virginia State Univ. | 40 | Benedict College | 24 |
| Morgan State Univ. | 39 | Virginia Union Univ. | 24 |
| Alabama A&M Univ. | 37 | Alabama State Univ. | 23 |
| Miss. Valley State Univ. | 37 | Savannah State Univ. | 20 |
| Prairie View A&M | 37 | LeMoyne Owen College | 16 |
| Jackson State Univ. | 36 | Texas Southern Univ. | 14 |
| Tennessee State Univ. | 36 | Univ. of Dist. of Col. | 7 |
| Clark Atlanta Univ. | 34 | | |

Source of statistics: National Collegiate Athletic Association.
 Chart ♥ The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.

admissions at Berkeley. This tends to confirm that preferential admissions are not a big drag on black student college graduation rates.

The largest decline in the black student graduation rates among the high-ranked universities was at Tufts University. There, the black graduation rate dropped from 82 percent in 1998 to 80 percent in 2005. The University of Virginia was the only other high-ranking university to show a percentage point decline in its black student graduation rate over the past seven years.

The Trend in Black Student Graduation Rates at Liberal Arts Colleges

Many of the nation's highest-ranked liberal arts colleges have been reporting graduation rates by race only for the past several years. During the 1998 to 2005 period, 16 of the 24 high-ranked liberal arts colleges in our survey show an improvement in black student graduation rates. At Macalester College in Minnesota, there was a huge 22 percentage point improvement in the seven-year period from 62 percent to 84 percent. At Oberlin, Grinnell, Wellesley, Davidson, Bryn Mawr, and Smith, the black student graduation rate improved by 10 percentage points or more over the past seven years.

Nine highly ranked liberal arts colleges saw a decline in their black student graduation rate over the past seven-year period. By far the largest drop was at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. In 1998 the school posted a black graduation rate of 90 percent. This year the African-American student graduation rate dropped to 80 percent. The small number of black students at Hamilton (blacks are only 4 percent of the student body) shows how the graduation success or failure of a handful of black students can have a major impact on the school's graduation rate.

Vassar College, Haverford College, and Colby College have also shown significant decreases in their black student graduation rates in recent years.

Comparing the Graduation Rates at Flagship State Universities

A very important aspect of our report is graduation rates at the nation's so-called flagship state universities. Always keep in mind that America's large state universities educate three fourths of all African-American college students in the United States. In preparing this ranking we are necessarily gauging the success of the particular state in graduating large numbers of black students who for the most part live within the state. And this measure gives us a good indicator of the graduation rate for the "average" black student in the state.

But this measure does not always present an accurate assessment of black students' success in graduating from a college in a given state. At some state-chartered universities such as the University of North Carolina, the University of Virginia, the University of Maryland, and the University of Michigan, concerted efforts are made to attract high-achieving black students from other states. For example, the University of Wisconsin has a program to recruit high-performing black students from Chicago's public school system. This influx of talented black students at selective flagship universities from out of state tends to inflate the overall black student graduation rate at these universities.

With this caveat, our calculations show that by a large margin the University of Virginia has the highest black student graduation rate of any state-chartered institution in the nation. The black graduation rate at the university is 86 percent. The next-highest rate at a flagship state university is at

The Progress of Black Graduation Rates at Selected Historically Black Colleges and Universities
(Ranked by the Gain/Loss in Black Graduation Rates)

| Institution | 1996 Rate | 2005 Rate | Difference |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Fisk University | 46% | 64% | +18 |
| Lincoln University (Missouri) | 12 | 25 | +13 |
| Univ. of Md.-Eastern Shore | 31 | 44 | +13 |
| Alcorn State University | 33 | 45 | +12 |
| Howard University | 47 | 56 | +9 |
| Morehouse College | 55 | 64 | +9 |
| Prairie View A&M Univ. | 28 | 37 | +9 |
| Winston-Salem State Univ. | 39 | 48 | +9 |
| Cheney Univ. of Pennsylvania | 23 | 30 | +7 |
| Paine College | 20 | 27 | +7 |
| Stillman College | 37 | 44 | +7 |
| Virginia State University | 33 | 40 | +7 |
| Elizabeth City State Univ. | 50 | 55 | +5 |
| Spelman College | 72 | 77 | +5 |
| Jackson State University | 32 | 36 | +4 |
| Tennessee State University | 32 | 36 | +4 |
| Tuskegee University | 44 | 48 | +4 |
| Morgan State University | 35 | 39 | +4 |
| Alabama State University | 20 | 23 | +3 |
| Coppin State College | 23 | 26 | +3 |
| Delaware State University | 29 | 32 | +3 |
| Texas Southern University | 11 | 14 | +3 |
| Alabama A&M University | 35 | 37 | +2 |
| Bennett College | 44 | 46 | +2 |
| North Carolina Central Univ. | 47 | 49 | +2 |
| Southern University | 25 | 26 | +1 |
| Fort Valley State University | 25 | 25 | 0 |
| Livingstone College | 31 | 31 | 0 |
| North Carolina A&T State Univ. | 44 | 44 | 0 |
| Rust College | 33 | 33 | 0 |
| South Carolina State Univ. | 46 | 46 | 0 |
| Bethune-Cookman College | 32 | 31 | -1 |
| LeMoyne-Owen College | 18 | 16 | -2 |
| Mississippi Valley State Univ. | 39 | 37 | -2 |
| Univ. of District of Columbia | 11 | 7 | -4 |
| Virginia Union University | 28 | 24 | -4 |
| Fayetteville State University | 46 | 40 | -6 |
| Grambling State University | 41 | 33 | -8 |
| Shaw University | 39 | 31 | -8 |
| Lincoln University (Penn.) | 49 | 40 | -9 |
| Florida A&M University | 44 | 34 | -10 |

Note: To avoid fluctuations from year to year, the graduation rate data listed here are four-year averages for the year noted and the three previous years. Due to the reporting requirements of the NCAA, these are the only historically black colleges and universities for which we have graduation data going back more than four years.

Source of Statistics: NCAA. Chart from The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.

the University of California at Berkeley and the University of New Hampshire. At these two flagship universities, 70 percent of all entering black students go on to graduate. Eleven other states have flagship universities that post a black student graduation rate of 60 percent or higher. These are the state universities in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Delaware, Florida, Michigan, New York, Connecticut, Georgia, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey.

Five states and the District of Columbia have flagship state-chartered universities at which the black student graduation rate is below 33 percent. In addition to the University of the District of Columbia, the states that have flagship universities with a black student graduation rate below 33 percent are Alaska, Arkansas, South Dakota, Utah, and Nebraska.

Graduation Rates at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

We come now to a most disappointing set of statistics. The graduation rate of African-American students at the nation's historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) tends to be much lower than the graduation rate for black students at the nation's highest-ranked institutions. Yet the graduation rate at a significant number of HBCUs is well above the nationwide average for black student graduations, which, as stated earlier, currently stands at an extremely low rate of 42 percent.

By a large margin, the highest black student graduation rate at a historically black college belongs to the academically selective, all-women Spelman College in the city of Atlanta. In fact, the Spelman black student graduation rate of 77 percent is higher than the black student graduation rate at 13 of the nation's 56 high-ranking predominantly white colleges and universities referred to earlier. Spelman's unusual strength shows in the fact that it has a higher black student graduation rate than such prestigious and primarily white colleges as Bates, Colby, Berkeley, UCLA, Michigan, Claremont McKenna, and Carnegie Mellon.

Following Spelman in the rankings, the next-highest black student graduation rate among the HBCUs was at Morehouse College and Fisk University. At Morehouse and Fisk, 64 percent of the entering black students go on to graduate within six years. Hampton University, Miles College, Howard University, and Elizabeth City State University in North Carolina sadly are the only other HBCUs that graduate at least half of their black students within six years.

Here is the worst news of all: At 24 HBCUs — nearly one half of all HBCUs in our survey — two thirds or more of all entering black students do not go on to earn a diploma. The lowest graduation rate was at the University of the District of Columbia, where only 7 percent of entering freshmen go on to earn a bachelor's degree. At Texas Southern University in Houston, 14 percent of entering students complete college.

The low graduation rates at black colleges are due to a number of reasons. Many of the students enrolled at these institutions are from low-income families, often ones in which there are few books in the home and where neither parent nor grandparent went to college. In addition, the black colleges on the whole have very small and totally inadequate endowments. They often lack the resources necessary to generate funds for student financial aid. Often they are unable to furnish sufficient aid packages for upperclassmen to permit them to stay in school. This circumstance appears to be a major

factor in accounting for the low black student graduation rate at these schools. But probably the most important explanation for the high dropout rate at the black colleges is the fact that large numbers of African-American HBCU students do not come to college with strong academic preparation and study habits. The graduation results at the HBCUs are worsened by the fact that flagship universities in the southern states often tend to shuttle the lowest-performing black applicants into the state-controlled black colleges in their state.

Trends in Graduation Rates at HBCUs

JBHE has collected student graduation rate statistics going back to 1998 for a group of 41 historically black universities. The good news is that during this period, 26 of the 41 colleges and universities have seen an improvement in their black student graduation rates. Ten colleges and universities showed a decline in their black graduation rate. The college completion rate at Fort Valley State University, Livingstone College, North Carolina A&T State University, Rust College, and South Carolina State University remained unchanged.

Over the past seven years there have been huge differences in graduation rates at some of these HBCUs. For example, the black graduation rate at Fisk University increased from 46 percent in 1998 to 64 percent today. In 1993 the black student graduation rate at Fisk was only 25 percent. Other schools showing large improvements in their black student graduation rates are Alcorn State University in Mississippi, Lincoln University in Missouri, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and Morehouse College. All of these black colleges and universities have seen a 10 percentage point or more rise in black student graduation rates over the past seven years.

In contrast, the black graduation rate at Florida A&M University shows a 10 percentage point drop in black student graduation rates over the past seven years. There was also at least a five percentage point decline in the black student graduation rate at Shaw University, Grambling State University, Fayetteville State University, and Lincoln University of Pennsylvania.