



Enrollment and Credential Attainment Among Underrepresented Males of Color Attending Community Colleges in Illinois

Introduction

The economy of the United States is increasingly globalized and knowledge driven, resulting in a higher demand for college credentials. However, many citizens have not completed postsecondary certificates and degrees, which has created a credential gap that has detrimental economic and social consequences on the country. From an economic perspective, a more highly educated workforce is critical for the nation to compete in the knowledge-based, global economy; from a sociocultural perspective, an educated citizenry supports the principles and actions of a participatory democracy (Glaesar, Ponzetto, & Shleifer, 2007). To improve overall postsecondary credential production, Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) recommend focusing on populations that demonstrate low levels of college completion. One such group is males of color, specifically African American¹ and Latino males.

The fact is males of color experience significant challenges throughout the educational pipeline. Beginning in primary school they are more likely than their White counterparts to be suspended or expelled when being disciplined for similar or equivalent behavioral issues (Skiba et al., 2011). At the high school level, White males have a 78% graduation rate compared to 52% to 56% for African American and Latino males, respectively (Holzman, Jackson, & Beaudry, 2012). Disparities between males of color and White males persist through postsecondary education where African American and Latino males demonstrate disproportionately low levels of participation and completion (Bush & Bush, 2010; Harper, 2012; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). For example, 47% of Latino males and 35% of African American males who started college in 2005 had completed a degree at a four-year institution after six years of attendance compared to 59% of White males who had accomplished this outcome (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Despite the increased scholarly work focused on African American and Latino males in postsecondary education in recent years (see, for example, Harper, 2012; Lee & Ransom, 2011; Noguera, Hurtado, & Fegus, 2011; Prager, 2011; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011), significant gaps remain in scholarship associated with these groups. Most notably, the preponderance of research is focused on underrepresented males of color who attend four-year institutions rather than community colleges. Because nearly one-third of all African American males and almost half of all Latino males enroll in community colleges (Harris & Harper, 2010; Ryu, 2010; Wood, 2011), it is important to look at their enrollment in these institutions. As a result, very little is known about the large group of males of color who attend community colleges.

As is the case across the country, Illinois' community colleges appear to demonstrate a commitment to open access enrollment practices, but this claim deserves scrutiny. The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) recognizes the need to close the access and achievement gap to fulfill the state's higher education performance targets, with community colleges playing a central role in the state's strategic plan. According to the IBHE (2010) strategic plan to increase the number of citizens with postsecondary credentials, community colleges need to meet their goals of serving more underserved student populations, including

1. African American and Black are used interchangeably.

males of color, as they are “in need of the greatest assistance” (p. 1). This raises the question of the scope of the access and achievement gap in Illinois. How comparable is access (enrollment) in postsecondary education for males of color compared to White males? And, how comparable is postsecondary certificate and degree completion for males of color compared to White males? These critical questions need to be addressed.

The purpose of this brief is to report the enrollment and credentialing of African American and Latino males attending community colleges in Illinois over the 10-year period of 2001 to 2011 and to compare these results to White males. With this purpose in mind, the following questions guided the study:

1. What change occurred in enrollment and credential (certificate and degree) conferrals for African American, Latino, and White males who attended Illinois community colleges between 2001 and 2011?
2. Disaggregating data by student group, does enrollment and credential conferral differ for African American and Latino males compared to White males?

Methods

Data from the Enrollment¹ and Degrees Conferred Dataset² maintained by the IBHE were used for this analysis³. Specifically, we used disaggregated data based on gender (focusing on males only) and race and ethnicity (African American, Latino, and White) by program type (non-credit⁴, less-than-one-year certificates⁵, one-to-two-year certificates, and associate degrees). The data were used to determine the distribution of program type by subgroups. Distribution by program type within subgroup was calculated by comparing the number of a subgroup in a program type to the total subgroup enrollment in the same program type. This yielded a percentage that allowed for comparison of the distribution by program type for all subgroups of interest. For example, in 2011, 16,784 out of 23,041 African American males attending a community college were enrolled in an associate degree program, suggesting African American males demonstrated a 73% representation in that degree program type. This process was used to describe the incidence of enrollment and degree conferral for all program types and by subgroup.

Limitations of the Data

The enrollment data presented in the IBHE Enrollment and Degrees Conferred Dataset are based on total duplicated fall enrollment and do not capture unduplicated annual enrollment. The IBHE data do not specify whether each degree conferred is exclusive to one student or if a single student is conferred multiple credentials. Therefore, it is possible that these results over-represent the number of students who were conferred credentials because certificates and degrees were not exclusive to a single student. Thus, small differences should be interpreted with caution whereas large differences are more likely to be consistent with unduplicated data, were they available for this analysis. Even with this limitation, the results provide a useful starting point to understand potential equity gaps among the specified male student groups in Illinois higher education.

1. Enrollment is based on fall enrollments.
2. All terms relating to race/ethnicity and degree program types are consistent with the language used within the IBHE dataset. Specifically, the IBHE uses the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) degree levels. According to IPEDS, a degree is “an award conferred by a college, university, or other postsecondary education institution as recognition for the successful completion of a program of studies.
3. Unless otherwise cited, all data presented in this brief are from the IBHE Enrollment and Degrees Conferred Dataset.
4. Non-credit program data were not available for 2001, and therefore not analyzed for this brief.
5. Less-than-one-year certificate data were not available for 2001. 2007-2008 and prior, less-than-one-year and one-to-two-year data were counted together, which over inflates student enrollment in one-to-two year programs for all student groups.

The following sections discuss results for African-American and Latino males compared to White males for the period of 2001 to 2011. The results begin with analysis of all postsecondary education and then move to community college education wherein results are computed for enrollment and credential (certificate and degree) completion and compared by subgroup.

Overall Postsecondary Enrollment

The overall postsecondary enrollment in Illinois increased 15%, between 2001 and 2011, from 750,000 to more than 860,000 students. Each sector of the higher education system experienced increases in enrollment over this 10-year period, with growth ranging from 4% in public universities to nearly 10% in public community colleges, to over 180% in private, for-profit institutions. In 2011, 24% of all students attending postsecondary education in Illinois were enrolled at a public four-year institution; 43% were enrolled at a public two-year institution; 25% were enrolled at a private, not-for-profit; and 8% were enrolled at a private, for-profit institution. The proportion of public community college students relative to all higher education enrollments fell slightly between 2001 and 2011, from 45 to 43%, but still remained the largest sector of higher education in Illinois as measured by IBHE enrollment data.

African American Male Enrollment

The number of African American males enrolled in postsecondary education in Illinois increased 36%, from 34,062 students, in 2001 to 46,179 students in 2011. The percentage enrollment growth observed for African American males was 20% in public universities, 29% in public community colleges, 93% in private, for-profit institutions, and 13% in private, not-for-profit colleges and universities. Despite their percentage increase in enrollment, the share of overall enrollment held by African American males decreased from 5.3% in 2001 to 4.5% in 2011. This means, despite the growth in number of African American males enrolled over the 10-year period, their enrollment did not keep pace with other subgroups. In 2011, nearly half of all African American male college students in Illinois attended a public community college, with the remaining half being distributed between public universities (20%); private, for-profit (15%); and not-for-profit, colleges and universities (15%).

Latino Male Enrollment

Latino male enrollment in postsecondary education in Illinois increased 26% from 2001 to 2011, from 36,535 students to 45,998 students, and these numbers translate into percentage of growth in share of the overall postsecondary enrollment. In 2011, Latino males represented 5.3% of the overall postsecondary enrollment compared to 4.9% in 2001. Similar to their African American counterparts, Latino male enrollment increased in all sectors of the higher education system between 2001 and 2011, showing a 134% increase in private, for-profit institutions; a 60% increase in public universities; a 53% increase in private, not-for-profit colleges and universities; and an 8% increase at public community colleges. In 2011, 58% of Latino males enrolled at a community college, 17% attended a public university, 16% attended a private college or university, and 8% attended a private, for-profit institution. For Latino males, community colleges are the clear and predominant choice institution type in Illinois higher education.

Community College Enrollment by Program Type

Total enrollment in Illinois community colleges increased by 10% between 2001 and 2011, from 339,002 to 372,566, with the percentage change in enrollment in Illinois community college students by program type as follows: a) non-credit programs (9.7%), b) less-than-one year programs (13.6%), c) one-to-two year programs (3.7%), and d) associate degree programs (73%). Overall student enrollment in associate degree programs increased the most of all degree types, increasing from 189,008 students in 2001 to 272,158 students in 2011, which represents a 44% increase.

The remainder of this brief focuses on enrollment in community colleges only.

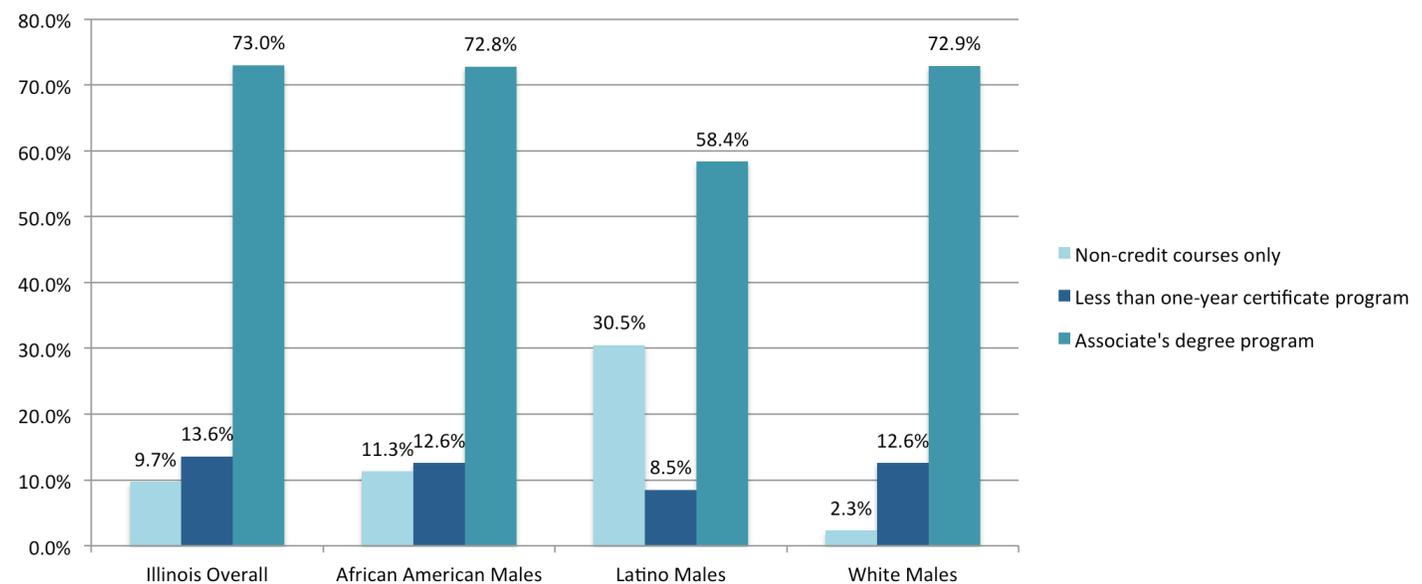
Non-credit Courses¹. In 2011, 36,027 (9.7%) of Illinois community college students were enrolled in non-credit courses, with the percentage enrollment of Latino male males being three times higher in this program type than the percentage of the total student enrollment², at 30.5%. By comparison, the percentage of African American males was 11.3% compared to only 2% of White males.

Less-than-one-year Programs. In 2011, the percentage enrollment in less-than-one year programs was 50,784 or 13.6% of the total student enrollment. In this program type, the percentage of Latino males was 8.5% and lower than the other sub-groups. African American male representation was 1 percentage point less than the total student enrollment, at 12.6%. White males had a higher percentage (18%) participation in less-than-one-year programs than Latino males, African American males, and the total student enrollment.

Associate Degree Programs. Of the three subgroups, Latino males saw the largest increase in enrollment in associate degree programs, with an approximate doubling of percentage in the 10-year period, from 27% in 2001 to 57% in 2011. African American male enrollment also increased substantially, as 56% of African American males were enrolled in associate degree programs in 2001 compared to 73% in 2011. White males also saw a substantial increase, from 61% in 2001 to 76% in 2011.

Using data from the IBHE Enrollments and Degrees Conferred Database to analyze 2011 enrollment of sub-groups and the overall group, the percentage enrollment of African American males by program type was similar to the percentage enrollment of White males and the percentage enrollment of the total group (Figure 1). However, Latino males showed a distinctly different enrollment pattern from the other subgroups. Specifically, the percentage of Latino male enrollment in non-credit courses was three times higher than the percentage enrollment of the total group and the African American male group, and 15 times higher than the White male group. The percentage of the Latino male group was substantially lower in the associate degree programs than the percentage representation of the total group, the White male group, and the African American group. Enrollment numbers for all groups are presented in Table 1.

Figure 1. Comparison of percentage enrollment by subgroup and program type



1. Non-credit programs include English as a Second Language (ESL) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. http://www.ibhe.org/EnrollmentsDegrees/Glossary/CC_Certificate.htm

2. Total student enrollment includes all student groups, by race/ethnicity and gender.

Table 1. Comparison of Enrollment by Subgroup and Program Type

Group	Number Enrolled in Non-credit Course	Number Enrolled in Less-than-one-year Certificate Programs	Number Enrolled in Associate's Degree Program
African American Males	2,604	2,908	16,784
Latino Males	8,219	2,286	15,721
White Males	2,163	16,582	69,962
Overall Illinois Students	36,027	50,784	272,158

Community College Certificates and Degrees Conferred by Program Type

Certificates and degrees conferred by Illinois community colleges increased by 60% over the 10-year period of 2001 to 2011, from 38,410 to 61,538. Our analysis did not lend itself to investigating this increase; however, future research is warranted to better understand it. In both 2001 and 2011, the majority of student enrollments were in associate degree programs; however, credential conferrals were also extensive in programs that award less than an associate degree. In 2011, 48.4% of conferrals were to students who received associate degrees compared to 41% who received a credential in a less-than-one-year program.

By disaggregating completion data by race/ethnicity, patterns of certificate and degree completion were revealed and compared for the subgroups. Completions in non-credit courses are not included in this analysis due to missing data in the IBHE dataset.

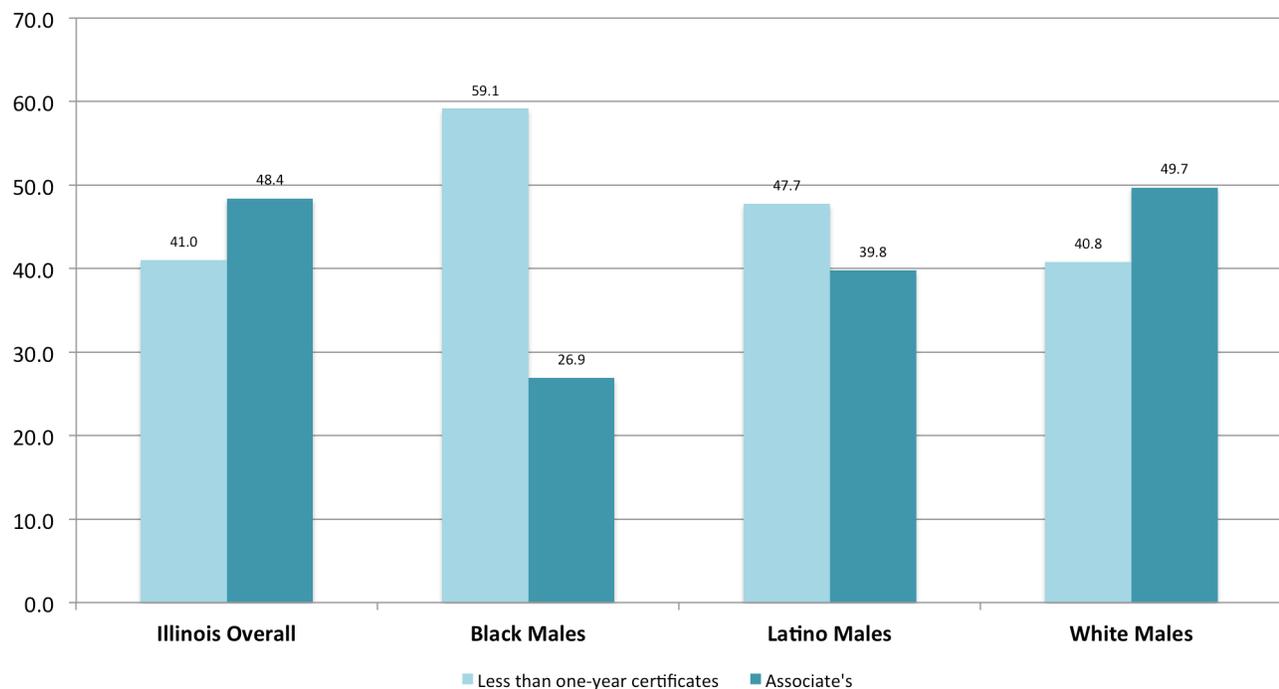
Less-than-one-year Programs¹. As noted, 41% (50,784) of all credentials awarded to community college students in 2011 were less-than-one-year certificates. White male percentage completion in this program type was parallel to the total group's completion, at 41%. In this same program type, African American and Latino males had a higher percentage (59% and 47.7%, respectively) than White males and all students.

Associate Degree Programs. The number of associate degrees awarded increased for all groups between 2001 and 2011. Latino males experienced the largest overall increase, with a 137% (469 to 1,113) increase in the number of associate degrees conferred during the 10-year period. White males experienced a 90% increase, whereas African American males experienced a 67% increase in number of associate degrees awarded. Despite this increase, when examining within subgroup degree attainment, Latino males experienced a 2% only change in associate's degree distribution, with 38% of the credentials that were awarded to Latino males in 2001 being associate degrees, as compared to 40% in 2011. African American males saw a 3% increase from 626 (24%) in 2001 to 929 (27%) in 2011. Whereas White males experienced an increase in the number of associate degrees awarded between 2001 and 2011, the percentage of White males who received an associate degree decreased from 63% in 2001 to 49% in 2011.

Using 2011 data from the IBHE Enrollments and Degrees Conferred Database on certificate and degree attainment, results differed for African American males compared to the other groups (Figure 2). Whereas nearly half of all credentials awarded in 2011 were associate degrees, just over a quarter of credentials awarded to African American males at community colleges were associate degrees. Approximately 40% of all degrees awarded to Latino males at community colleges were associate degrees, a rate higher than their African American male peers but well below the total student group.

1. Less-than-one-year completion data were unavailable for 2001.

Figure 2. Comparison of percentage enrollment by subgroup and certificate and degree conferral



Summary and Discussion

Disaggregation and analysis of data from the IBHE Enrollments and Degrees Conferred Database supports concerns about postsecondary access and completion for African American and Latino males relative to White males. Whereas enrollment increased for African American and Latino males between 2001 and 2011, these groups remained underrepresented in higher education compared to other student populations. Assuming economists' predictions that almost two thirds of all jobs in the United States will require a postsecondary degree by 2018 (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010), the continued underrepresentation of African American and Latino males in higher education may contribute to the continued high unemployment rates of these two groups.

The finding that African American males enroll in associate degree programs at a rate similar to the overall student population is encouraging, suggesting that African American males may be finding initial support for their aspirations to enroll in college. Also, the associate degree attainment rates of African American and Latino males are not comparable to the White males or the overall student group. Thus, often African American and Latino male enrollment in associate degree programs does not translate into degree attainment. Whereas these analyses do not allow us to examine enrollment change, we speculate that African American males may be withdrawing from associate degree programs and enrolling in programs that confer shorter-term certificates. Latino males may be following a similar pattern. These patterns could mean males of color who begin in associate degree programs are leaving these programs for non-credit courses and short-term certificate programs that create a supply of human capital for operative, laborer, and service occupations (see Dowd, 2007), which may not serve these students well in the long term. Alternatively, males of color may be opting out of associate degree programs and pursuing non-credit and short-term certificate programs due to financial barriers. Limited or lack of information regarding financial aid in addition to postsecondary costs may be impacting the persistence of these students (Colyar, 2011; Kahlenberg, 2004). Because these data do not provide insights into the reasons for enrollment and credentialing behaviors, the need for further research at the subgroup level is needed to determine whether our speculation is accurate.

The significant increase in enrollment among all students in Illinois at for-profit institutions is also troubling. Whereas for-profit institutions may offer unique curricular flexibility and access through technology, these institutions tend to have low persistence and completion rates (Lynch, Engle, & Cruz, 2010). Additionally, other research (Belfield, 2013; Deming & Katz, 2012) suggests that students attending for-profit institutions incur more loan debt than students in other sectors of higher education as they are encouraged to apply for high-interest loans to pay tuition and fees. These data suggest that African American males are particularly attracted to for-profit institutions, illustrating the need for further research on what aspects of their educational experiences and outcomes lead them to enroll in these institutions.

Finally, Illinois state data confirm that community colleges are the main point of entry for African American and Latino males in postsecondary education. Therefore, it is particularly important for community college administrators to be conscious of enrollment and completion trends for these subgroups so that they can improve pathways to credentials. Additionally, should institutional outcomes parallel the results of this state-level analysis, institutions should investigate the unique individual experiences and institutional characteristics that contribute to outcome inequalities (Baber, 2014; Kezar, 2010). It is vitally important that state agencies and policymakers support policies that address the educational experiences and outcomes of underrepresented student groups. Whereas there is complexity surrounding this issue, there are also opportunities for a convergence of interest among those concerned with the economic vitality of Illinois and those who advocate for equitable opportunities and outcomes for African American and Latino males.

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