INVESTING IN WISCONSIN’S FUTURE
CLOSING RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN WISCONSIN’S PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS
OCTOBER 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Securing strong economic opportunity for Wisconsin’s working families and closing racial and ethnic income disparity requires strong attention to the access and success of students of color at our state’s colleges and universities.

In this report we focus on college degrees – both the two year associates degrees offered by the 16 colleges of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) and four year bachelor’s degrees offered by colleges throughout the University of Wisconsin System (UWS).

KEY FINDINGS
Wisconsin HS graduates are increasingly diverse: In 2000, 10 percent of Wisconsin HS graduates were students of color. By 2016, the share had more than doubled to 22 percent.

Of all graduates from Wisconsin high schools (HS), 40 percent of White graduates enroll in the UW System. Just 25 percent of Latino/a graduates and 14 percent of Black graduates enroll in the UW System. The chances that students of color from Wisconsin enroll in the UW System has declined while the White rate has held steady. IN TERMS OF ACCESS TO UW SYSTEM, RACIAL AND ETHNIC INEQUALITY IS SUBSTANTIAL AND INCREASING.

Six year graduation rates also show substantial disparity. 70 percent of White students at UW System campuses graduate but just 50 percent of Latino/a students and 34 percent of Black students graduate. RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN GRADUATION RATES ARE SUBSTANTIAL, BUT THEY HAVE REMAINED ROUGHLY STEADY.

Details from UW Madison and UW Milwaukee are also troubling.

AT UW MADISON, THE MOST ESSENTIAL PROBLEM IS OF ACCESS.
Happily, graduation rates are relatively high and the racial and ethnic graduation gap has been reduced substantially. Unhappily, very low access by students of color means that even high rates of graduation don’t produce that many graduates of color. Of White students who entered UW Madison in 2010, 4033 finished degrees within six years. That same class held 175 Latino/a graduates and 90 Black graduates.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
This document was written by Laura Dresser, Matthew Braunginn, and Emanuel Ubert. Special thanks to Brandon Roberts and the Working Poor Families Project for financial and intellectual resources which support this project. And a special thanks to Hilary Baker, Ben Konruff, Colleen McCabe, and Conor Smyth of the Wisconsin Technical College System for providing data and thoughtful review. Thanks to Noel Radomski and Clif Conrad. We would also like to thank our colleagues Anna Walther and Katya Szabados for their thoughtful suggestions and review.

ABOUT COWS
COWS is a nonprofit think-and-do tank, based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, that promotes “high road” solutions to social problems. These treat shared growth and opportunity, environmental sustainability, and resilient democratic institutions as necessary and achievable complements in human development. Through our various projects, we work with cities around the country to promote innovation and the implementation of high road policy. COWS is nonpartisan but values-based. We seek a world of equal opportunity and security for all.
At UW Milwaukee, the most essential problem is of low and disparate graduation rates. Six year graduation rates at UW Milwaukee are low: just 43 percent of White students graduate (a rate well below the UW System average). Even so, White UW Milwaukee students are substantially more likely to graduate than Latino/a student’s (32 percent) and twice as likely to graduate as Black students (20 percent).

WTCS is a diverse system and its student population better reflects the increasing diversity of Wisconsin. Overall enrollment at WTCS has fallen in recent years – a drop largely driven by declining enrollment of White students, while enrollment of Latino/a, Asian, and Multi-ethnic students has grown. **WTCS diversity has grown substantially, making it an increasingly important public institution for Wisconsin’s future.** Even here, White students are more likely to graduate, with their six year graduation rate just over 50 percent. For Black students, the graduation rate is 28 percent. And Latino/a students have a graduation rate of just over 39 percent.

**Recommendations**

We make a series of recommendations below but all of these are likely to require a reinvestment by the state of Wisconsin into its public institutions of higher education. Both systems, UWS and WTCS, need increased resources to focus on meaningful equity initiatives. General support of these systems is important. But support targeted explicitly to closing racial disparity and supporting success of students of color will also be required. Years of policies (some to this very day) of targeted oppression cannot be undone without targeted initiatives. To effectively undo institutionalized, systematic, and systemic racialized oppression, there must be targeted initiatives towards students of color and low-income students.

We suggest an intersecting series of four recommendations for the state of Wisconsin, UWS, and WTCS to close the racial equity gap.

1. **Transparency on Equity:** Annual reports on racial and ethnic equity in access and graduation for both UWS and WTCS could help inform innovation, improve outcomes, and engage campus community and other leaders.

2. **Targeted Racial/Ethnic Academic Support Initiatives:** A range of strategies and practices targeted to support students of color have been shown to increase graduation rates. Extending strong models from within the state and adapting proven practices from outside the state would help UWS and WTCS create a more welcoming and supportive environment for students of color.

3. **Tuition and Beyond: Economically Targeted Aid & Non-Tuition Supports:** Racial and ethnic inequality puts more students of color in a position of economic disadvantage. As a result, students of color have much to gain from financial assistance and economic support that is targeted to the economically disadvantaged. Tuition assistance is critical here but increasing awareness of housing, food, and child care costs is increasingly relevant to students.

4. **Targeted Investment in UW Milwaukee:** Serious work to close racial and ethnic inequities must start where our state’s most diverse population resides. And investment in UW Milwaukee focused on the access and success of students of color could substantially increase the overall pool of college graduates of color in the state.
INTRODUCTION

Many groups are documenting and working to eradicate the states racial disparities (see side bar). COWS’ Wisconsin’s Extreme Racial Disparity¹, in 2017 showed the divide that consistently separates the economic, educational, and other social outcomes for the state’s White and Black populations. Among the striking statistics: while 93 percent of Wisconsin’s White students graduated from HS, just 64 percent of Black students did. **WISCONSIN’S RACIAL DISPARITY OF HS GRADUATION RATES WAS THE NATION’S WORST.**

Because educational success is so closely linked to economic opportunity, graduation disparity feeds the economic gap. But it is important to remember that HS graduation is generally not enough to achieve a decent standard of living. COWS’ State of Working Wisconsin shows the meaningful positive earnings impact of completing college in this state.

**Completing college in Wisconsin – getting a degree from our two or four year institutions of higher education – substantially improves living standards.**

Making progress on racial inequity will require stronger educational outcomes for people of color in the state’s high schools. But that will not be enough. Securing strong economic opportunity and closing racial and ethnic income disparity requires strong attention to students’ of color access to and success at our state’s colleges and universities. By “access,” we mean the extent to which students on campuses are representative of the diversity of Wisconsin. And by “success,” we mean the extent to which graduates from these systems are representative of that diversity. These are measures to help focus attention on how students of color are doing in higher education. We focus here on college degrees – both the two year associate’s degrees offered by the 16 colleges of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) and four year bachelor’s degrees offered by colleges throughout the University of Wisconsin System (UWS). We use publicly available data to explore disparity in access and success. We close with a series of recommendations for policy and practice to help close the gaps that are evident in this report.

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Wisconsin Targets Racial Disparity

Reports and projects continue to highlight the severity of racial inequities in the state and build solutions to close the gap.

For more information see:


With this focus on disparity in Wisconsin’s higher education outcomes, we do not mean to imply that these systems are uniquely and solely accountable for racial disparities in the state. We, alongside many other organizations and leaders, focus on the systemic and pervasive disparity in the state to motivate broader commitment to solving this problem. We are not intending to create scapegoats – convenient single answers to relieve the need for a systematic social response. So, to be clear, we do not believe that racial inequality is a problem unique to the state’s higher education institutions. Nor do we imagine that solutions in the higher education system alone could overcome the serious gap we face.

This does not mean, however, that there is nothing to be done by higher education in the state. Closing the racial and ethnic equity gap will require investment and innovation, problem solving, and leadership from across this state. Technical colleges and UW campuses are and will continue to be important contributors to that innovation and problem solving. And we understand that innovation and problem solving will generally require investment and commitment of public resources to support institutional innovation on equity.

We hope these data challenge policy makers, system and campus leaders, and the broader community. We hope that the policy and practice recommendations reinforce the good work that is going on, feed interest in extending that work, and challenge complacency that can arise when problems seem intractable and resources are stretched. And, perhaps especially, we hope this will remind us all that our systems of education at every level – which have long provided a foundation for our community strength and economic prosperity – are worthy of continued public support to reach all of the state’s increasingly diverse students in meaningful and effective ways.

BACKGROUND

Data from the Working Poor Family Project shows that one in four of the state’s families with significant commitment to their jobs struggle to make ends meet. The 150,000 families are labeled “working poor families” because, despite serious commitment to work, their income falls below twice that of the poverty line.

Similar data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction make clear that this is a problem that has been on the rise across the state. The share of children in the state’s public schools who are “economically disadvantaged” has surged across the new century from 24 percent in 2001 to 38 percent in 2017-18.
Economic stress is up for families in every area of the state – up in rural and urban areas, but also in suburbs, increasing in the North woods and in dairies heavy areas of the Southwest, and both liberal and conservative areas.

The struggle to make ends meet is increasing across the state, but it is especially pronounced for people of color here. One in four Wisconsin families have low income despite work, but, including working families with at least one minority parent, the share rises to 44 percent².

The importance of education, especially the completion of college degrees, is also clear. Unemployment is lower and wages are higher for workers with more schooling. College degrees boost wages substantially. Taking college classes without completing a degree has no pay-off for workers – workers with some college but no degree only earn cents more than workers with HS degrees ($15.97 vs. $15.23 per hour). Workers with college degrees do earn higher wages. Workers with an associates degrees earn from $17.87 (for academic AAs) to $18.65 (for Vocational AAs). The median Wisconsin worker with a bachelor’s or more education earns nearly $26.39 per hour.

Given Wisconsin’s extreme racial and ethnic disparities that COWS and other organizations have documented, and given that successful completion of higher education is one of the most critical steps workers make in terms of improving earnings, we focus this report on the access and success of students of color in the state’s public higher education systems.

First, we document increasing diversity of classes graduating from Wisconsin HS. Then we look at UWS and WTCS each in turn. We will attempt to answer a series of questions. Do students within the UW System and Wisconsin Technical College System represent the diversity of the state’s population? Do higher education graduates look like the student population, or are students of color less likely to graduate than their white peers? Answering these questions requires us to look at enrollment and completion rates for these two systems.
It is worth remembering that access and success in post-secondary education is rooted in success in the state’s K12 system. There is much to be done there, given the dramatically disparate graduation rates in Wisconsin’s public schools. But here our focus is on those students of color who graduate from Wisconsin public schools with attention to their trajectory toward educational and economic success across the state’s higher education system.

DIVERSITY RISING: STUDENTS OF COLOR INCREASING SHARE OF WISCONSIN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

Wisconsin’s HS graduates are increasingly diverse. We mentioned earlier that students of color graduate at lower rates than White students so it is worth remembering that the graduating class would be even more diverse if the graduation gap was closed. Even with lower graduation rates, however, Wisconsin’s graduating class of 2016 is dramatically more diverse than the class of 2000. Figure 1 makes the rising diversity quite clear.

In 2000 and 2016, the state had just over 58,000 graduates. In 2000, White students accounted for more than 52,000 of the 58,000 graduates. By 2016, White students made up just 45,500 of the total graduating class, but a doubling of the numbers of graduates of color held the total steady at approximately 58,000. In 2000, just over 6000 of the state’s graduates were students of color. By 2016, nearly 13,000 students of color graduated from Wisconsin public HS.

Latino/a graduates account for an important portion of this growth, as their number more than tripled from 1446 in the class of 2000 to 5380 in the class of 2016. The number of
Black graduates in the state also steadily rose, nearly doubling from 2573 in the class of 2000 to 4783 in the class of 2016. As a share of total Wisconsin HS graduates, Black and Latino/a students have increased from 7 percent in the class of 2000 to 17 percent in the class of 2016.

With Wisconsin HS graduating more students of color, UW Systems and WTCS should also see increasing enrollment and graduation of students of color. We now look for evidence of this increasing diversity in higher education in the state.

**table 2**

**WISCONSIN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES, 2000 AND 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share of Total WI Public HS Grads</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White share (total grads)</td>
<td>90% (52,474)</td>
<td>78% (45,535)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority share (total grads)</td>
<td>10% (6071)</td>
<td>22% (12,989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black share (total grads)</td>
<td>4.3% (2573)</td>
<td>8.2% (4783)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a share (total grads)</td>
<td>2.5% (1446)</td>
<td>9.2% (5380)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black + Latino/a share (total grads)</td>
<td>6.9% (4019)</td>
<td>7.30% (10163)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**UW SYSTEM: ACCESS AND SUCCESS OF STUDENTS OF COLOR**

**UWS PART 1: ACCESS**

Do Students on UWS Campuses Represent the Diversity of the Graduates of Wisconsin Public High Schools?

The number of students of color on UWS campuses is growing. In the year 2000, 1018 Black and Latino/a Wisconsin HS graduates enrolled in UWS. In the year 2016, the total had more than doubled, rising to 2061. But that growth is actually weak relative to much more rapid increase in graduation of students of color from Wisconsin HS. **The diversity of the UWS is not keeping pace with the diversity of graduates from public schools.**

Figure 2 shows UWS student enrollment for major demographic groups coming out of Wisconsin HS and it makes clear the disparity in probabilities of coming to UWS campuses on the basis of race and ethnicity. In both 2000 and 2016, just under 40 percent of White graduates from Wisconsin HS enrolled in UWS. For Latino/a and Black students, the share of graduates enrolling is substantially lower: in 2000 just 29 percent of Latino/a students and 23 percent of Black students enrolled in UWS. In a situation of equitable access by race and ethnicity, these shares would line up: if 40 percent of White students coming from Wisconsin schools were enrolling into UW Systems, then about 40 percent of Latino/a and 40 percent of Black students would be as well.
The trend over the last 16 years is, perhaps, even more disturbing than those disparities. The chances that minority students attend UWS dropped between 2000 and 2016. The decline is most notable among Black graduates from Wisconsin HS. In the year 2000, nearly one-in-four Black Wisconsin HS graduates enrolled in UWS. By 2016, just 14 percent of Black HS graduates did. The trend for Latino/a Wisconsin HS graduates is less pronounced and appears to be rising from a low posted in 2007. Still, in 2016, a lower share of Latino/a HS graduates from Wisconsin enrolled in UWS than did in 2000 (falling from 29 percent to just below 26 percent).

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**Table 3**  
**WISCONSIN STUDENTS THAT ENROLL IN UWS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share of Total WI to UW System</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total WI High School into UW System</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2.5% (1446)</td>
<td>9.2% (5380)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black +Latino/a</td>
<td>1018</td>
<td>2061</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Data note: In 2008, UWS began to gather data on “two or more races” as a unique demographic group. The share of students in this category has steadily increased since its inclusion, from 0.4 percent (619 students) in 2008 to 2.8 percent (4936 students) in 2016. However, UW Systems does not show how many students of two or more races come from the state of Wisconsin. In future analyses of equity, attention to this demographic group will be critical.
Access at UW Madison

Madison is the flagship of UWS and the largest campus in the system. Figure 3 shows UW Madison enrollment probabilities for different demographics. Lower access for the state’s students of color is evident and the disparity is actually growing. Of White Wisconsin HS graduates, fully 6.6 percent enroll at UW Madison. (There was a nine year dip below 6 percent, but it’s been above 6 percent enrollment since 2013.) The share of White HS grads enrolling to UW Madison is substantial and roughly steady across 2000-16.

But as with UWS overall, the chances that students of color will enroll at the state’s flagship campus are well below the White benchmark. For all students of color taken together, chances of Wisconsin HS graduates coming to UW Madison were fairly close to the White share in 2000, but have fallen since. The trend for all students of color is mirrored by Latino/a HS graduates, with the enrollment share of Latino/a Wisconsin HS graduates dropping in half, from 5.6 to 2.7 percent over 2000-16. The decline in chances for Black Wisconsin HS graduates is...
INVESTING IN WISCONSIN'S FUTURE

The raw numbers of students of color on the UW Madison campus are worth noting as the percentages can at times obscure the relative size of groups. As Table 4 shows, the total number of White Wisconsin HS graduates in the entering class of 2000 (3369) was just slightly higher than their total number in 2016 (3193). The total number of Black Wisconsin HS graduates was very small --- just 92 in 2000 and falling to 67 in 2016. The numbers of Latino/a Wisconsin HS graduates is small, but growing, from 81 in 2000 to 143 in 2016.

The above data focus on entering classes of Wisconsin HS graduates and do not include students of color coming from other states. The numbers for overall students of color show a similar troubling trend. In 2000, total UW Madison Black student enrollment was 864; by 2010, Black enrollment had grown to 1079. But from 2010 to 2016, total Black enrollment actually fell slightly to 955 students. Over the same period, total enrollment doubled for Latino/a students from 967 in 2000 to 2034 in 2016.

Access at UW Milwaukee

UW Milwaukee is located in Wisconsin’s largest and most diverse city. Figure 4 shows the share of Wisconsin HS graduates who start at UW Milwaukee for specific racial and ethnic groups. The picture is substantially more complicated than the graphs of differential access and increasing inequality for UWS and UW Madison. First of all, White HS graduates in the state are not more likely to attend UW Milwaukee than graduates of color. Of Wisconsin’s White HS graduates, between 4 and 6 percent enroll in UW Milwaukee (the high point was reached in the mid-2000s but in both 2000 and 2016, 4.2 percent enrolled). In 2000, for students of color, the share of Wisconsin HS graduates enrolling in UW Milwaukee exceeded the level for Whites. But over that same time period, the share of HS graduates who are students of color enrolling at UW Milwaukee has fallen. For Latino/a HS graduates, the UW Milwaukee share fell from 8.6 percent (2000) to 6.7 percent (2016). The enrollment of Wisconsin’s Black HS graduates fell more dramatically. In 2000, nearly 1 in 10 Black Wisconsin HS graduates enrolled at UW Milwaukee. The rate collapsed so that, by 2016, just 4.1 percent of the state’s Black graduates enrolled at UW Milwaukee.

Table 4
WISCONSIN STUDENTS THAT ENROLL IN UW MADISON, 2000 AND 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total WI into UW Mad</td>
<td>2.5% (1446)</td>
<td>9.2% (5380)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3369</td>
<td>3193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL Black+Latino/a</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall numbers shed a different light on the question of equity in access. Increases in Latino/a student enrollment more than made up for declines in Black students so that the number of students of color rose between 2000 and 2016. Table 5 shows that the total number of Black and Latino/a graduates from Wisconsin HS enrolling in UW-Milwaukee was 392 in 2000 and had risen to 558 in 2016.

Overall enrollment in all classes (from in-state students and students from other states) provides a slightly different view, but the low representation of Black students remains clear. In 2000, Black students accounted for 8.1 percent of UW Milwaukee total students. By 2016, Black students slipped to 7.5 percent of the student population. Latino/a student overall share grew from 3.8 percent to 9 percent over the same period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>table 5</th>
<th>WISCONSIN STUDENTS ENROLLING IN UW MILWAUKEE, 2000 AND 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of Total WI to UW MKE</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total WI into UW MKE</td>
<td>3369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL Black+Latino/a</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INVESTING IN WISCONSIN’S FUTURE

UWS PART 2: SUCCESS

Disparity in Graduation in UW-Systems
In the previous section, we showed that Wisconsin’s White HS graduates are much more likely to enroll in UWS and that disparity in access has actually been increasing since 2000. But enrolling is just the first step. The more important step is not onto campus but off of it, with a degree. And again, we find striking racial disparities in graduation rates.

UWS graduation rates for White, Latino/a, and Black students are shown in Figure 5. (These six-year graduation rates report the share of students who enter in a specific year who complete their degrees within six years. So, for example, 67 percent of the white students who entered UWS in 2000 had earned degrees by 2006.) The disparity in graduation rates is clear. Consider the graduation rates of students entering UWS in 2010. Within the six year timeframe, more than two-thirds (69 percent) of White students graduated, just over half (53 percent) of Latino/a students graduated, and one-in-three Black students (34 percent) graduated. White students at UWS are consistently and substantially more likely to graduate than students of color. Indeed, they are twice as likely to graduate within six years as Black students. While the disparities are striking, they appear to be fairly steady. Graduation rates are on a slight upward trajectory for all demographic groups. Racial and ethnic disparity is substantial but not growing.

Closing the Graduation Gap at UW Madison
Graduation rates are substantially higher at UW Madison for all demographic groups. Not only does Figure 6 display these higher chances of graduation but it displays clear evidence of a shrinking disparity in graduation rates. This is very good news. UW Madison has made steady progress in increasing graduation rates for all students. But the progress in graduation rates is stronger for Latino/a and Black students. The graduation disparity between Black and White students since the year 2000 has been cut in half. UW Madison’s diversity efforts, starting with the first tier of their initiative in 1998 with “Plan 2008” appear to be having meaningful impact.

Sources: UW Systems Accountability Dashboard: Progress and Completion https://www.wisconsin.edu/accountability/progress-and-completion/
At UW Madison, the Division of Diversity, Equity & Educational Achievement (DDEEA) finds the increases in graduation rates promising. Currently, the DDEEA, along with the Office of Undergraduate Advising and the Center for Academic Excellence, are looking to scale the efforts that led to the success. They are currently in the process of analyzing the data to inform strategies. It is clearly worth noting this success and extend lessons from it throughout UWS.

But the good news should be tempered by our understanding of access to campus. Turning to raw numbers of students who entered in 2010 and graduated within six years makes the disparity striking. Of White students who entered UW Madison in 2010, 4033 finished degrees within six years. Just 175 Latino/a and 90 Black students entering in 2010 finished degrees within six years. Imagine that Latino/a and Black students were as likely as White students to graduate (so there was no graduation disparity and 86 percent of entering students of all race and ethnicity graduated). If the graduation gap was completely eliminated, 13 more Black students would have graduated and 50 more Latino/a students would have graduated. With very low access of students of color, even equitable graduation probabilities can have limited impact.

Sources: UW Systems Accountability Dashboard: Progress and Completion https://www.wisconsin.edu/accountability/progress-and-completion/
Consistently Low Graduation Rates at UW Milwaukee

Graduation rates at UW Milwaukee are much lower than at Madison and the UWS average. The six-year graduation rate for White students hovers around 45 percent: less than half of the students who enroll on campus graduate. Disparities are evident in Figure 7 as well. While fewer than half of White students graduate, fewer than one in three Latino/a students graduate. Just one in five Black students do. Latino/a graduation rates are on the rise and the gap with Whites is shrinking. Black and White graduation rates appear relatively steady, and the gap remains.

The raw data on graduates using this six-year graduation rate shows significant disparity. There were 1188 White graduates from UW Milwaukee who entered in 2010 and completed a degree within six years. There were only 84 Latino/a graduates and 64 Black graduates from UW Milwaukee who met the same benchmark.

UWS Access and Success: The Bottom Line

In this section, we have documented disparity both in terms of access to the UWS and successful graduation from it. For students of color, the problems of lower accessibility to UWS is compounded by differential graduation rates in the system. The raw numbers of graduates paint the stark picture. Over six years, the class that entered UWS in 2010 had produced 14,282 White graduates, 520 Latino/a graduates, and 282 Black graduates. In Wisconsin HS graduating classes of 2009, Black and Latino/a graduates accounted for more than 12 percent of the total graduates. Six years later, Blacks and Latino/a graduates of UWS make up just 5 percent of the population of graduates.

WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM: ACCESS AND SUCCESS OF STUDENTS OF COLOR

WTCS PART 1: ACCESS

Do Students on WTCS Campuses Represent the Diversity of the State?

WTCS enrollment numbers show how important technical colleges are to the state. In 2016, 326,153 students were enrolled in WTCS. With the state of Wisconsin population of some 5.8 million residents⁴, the campuses of the WTCS served over 5 percent of the Wisconsin state population.
Further, Figure 8 makes clear that the students on WTCS campuses are diverse. In 2016, 6.4 percent of enrolled students were Black, another 6.7 percent were Latino/a, and 72 percent White. The enrolled students on WTCS campuses are more diverse than the overall state population though slightly less diverse than the graduating class from Wisconsin HS. This makes some sense, as the student body is also drawn from the broader population. The average age of students on WTCS campuses is older than in UWS.

Figure 8 shows some interesting trends in raw enrollment numbers across 2007 to 2016. First, it is clear that overall enrollment is falling. This reflects national trends in two year college enrollment. The Great Recession which began in 2007 pushed student populations to historic highs. The lack of job availability pushes many towards education. However, as the economy has grown, student populations have fallen, driven largely by a decline in White students (note that the downward trend of “all students” is mirrored by the downward trend for White students.) Over the same period, the population of key groups of students of color grew: Latino/a and Asian student numbers on campuses increased gradually, and the number of multi-ethnic students has grown substantially. (The designation was introduced as a choice in 2010 and by 2016 more than 4000 students selected the designation.) The WTCS student population has become more diverse over the last decade, as the numbers of White students have fallen while the numbers of students of color have remained steady or grown.

The exception in terms of student population trends is the trajectory of enrollment by Black students. Black enrollment at WTCS grew from 2007 to 2013 but then fell dramatically (from 25,000 to 21,000 students between 2013 and 2016). This decline may be partly explained by the addition of “multi-ethnic” as a choice, but not completely. The slow, steady growth of that category begins in 2010, at the same time as the Black student population is also growing. This downward trend is a cause for concern and deserves careful attention and investigation.
WTCS SUCCESS: EXPLORING WTCS GRADUATION RATES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

WTCS is a system with broad reach and diverse programming. Many students on WTCS campuses have precise needs to meet their education, employment, and life goals. The system carefully constructs analyses of graduation rates for cohorts applying a six year window (i.e., does a student entering at a certain time complete an Associate's degree within six years). Table 6 provides six year graduation rates for the 2012-2017 cohort.

Disparity in graduation rates by race and ethnicity is evident. For White students, the six year graduation rate is a little over 50 percent. For Black students, the graduation rate is just 28 percent which is the lowest graduation rate among all race and ethnicity groups. Just over 39 percent of Latino/a students graduate. (Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders post the highest graduation rate of 62 percent, but they are also the smallest category. Of more than 21,000 WTCS graduates, just 32 were in this demographic.)

The differences in graduation rates are substantial. Just under 2000 Black and Latino/a students earned degrees in this cohort. If Black and Latino/a students graduated at the same rate as White students there would be over 3000 Black and Latino/a graduates from WTCS. Given the underlying diversity of the WTCS, closing the graduation rate gap could have a substantial and direct impact on economic opportunity of people of color in the state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of students in the Cohort</th>
<th>Number of Graduates</th>
<th>6 year graduation rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amer Ind or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1221</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3741</td>
<td>1036</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>2338</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or other Pac Islander</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>1709</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>34309</td>
<td>17360</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All races</td>
<td>44768</td>
<td>21265</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Administrative data analysis, WTCS, conveyed to authors by WTCS 6/6/2018
ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE IMPACT ON WTCS GRADUATION RATES

We are able to offer even more precise information on the WTCS graduation rates, given the analysis of administrative data that WTCS can provide. We show here the important influence of economic disadvantage on graduation rates. This provides an important reminder that economic resources play a strong support role in education attainment. Systematically, and across all race and ethnicity groups, students with economic disadvantage are less likely to graduate than their more resourced and financially supported peers.

Table 7 shows the strong and consistent negative impact of economic disadvantage on graduation rates. For every racial/ethnicity group, students without economic disadvantage are more likely to graduate than economically disadvantaged students. The graduation rate for the economically advantaged students in the 2012-17 cohort is 55.5 percent, well above the 47.5 rate for all students in the cohort. For students facing economic disadvantage, just 37.4 percent graduate within six years. Among Black students, there is a sharp disparity in graduation rates between Black students who are and are not economically disadvantaged. Economically advantaged Black students are more than two times as likely to graduate as economically disadvantaged Black students.

Table 7 helps demonstrate the important way that economic advantages compound and are reinforced in the educational process. At the same time, racial and ethnic disparities in graduation rates are substantial even once you control for economic advantage: White economically disadvantaged students are still much more likely to graduate than Black and Latino/a students who also face economic disadvantage. Closing disparity in graduation rates must focus on programs of support and investment in all programs aimed at students of color, but also on programs of support and investment to help students overcome economic disadvantages as well.
INVESTING IN WISCONSIN'S FUTURE

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CLOSE THE HIGHER EDUCATION GAP

As baby boomers move into retirement, employers will be seeking new workers with skills and degrees to keep their companies growing. It is critical that the racial and ethnic disparities in access and success be closed, not only so that workers of color can thrive but also to meet the skill needs of employers. But progress will require careful attention of institutional leaders, policy makers, and engaged faculty and students, along with public investment in innovations to support students of color.

We make a series of recommendations below, but all of these are likely to require a reinvestment by the state of Wisconsin into these public institutions of higher education. Both systems, UWS and WTCS, need increased resources to focus on meaningful equity initiatives. General support of these systems is important. But support targeted explicitly to closing racial disparity and supporting success of students of color will also be required. Years of policies (some to this very day) of targeted oppression cannot be undone without targeted initiatives. To effectively undo institutionalized, systematic, and systemic racialized oppression, there must be targeted initiatives towards students of color and low-income students.

We suggest an intersecting series of four recommendations for the state of Wisconsin, UWS, and WTCS to close the racial equity gap.

1. Transparency in Equity

Annual reports on racial and ethnic equity in access and graduation for both UWS and WTCS could help inform innovation, improve outcomes, and engage campus, community, and other leaders.

A first step towards equity is to commit to annual report from each system on racial and ethnic equity in terms of access, retention, and success of students. Both UWS and WTCS collect and report these data. But an annual equity report would put all the data (for systems and specific campuses) in one location and provide community and campus leaders information and inspiration to improve programs. One of the first steps to addressing inequities is tracking them.

Such a report could build on the sorts of analyses found here or look to models from other systems. California Community Colleges offer a model. They began equity based tracking and policies in 1993. USC’s Center for Urban Education provides a wealth of tools available to further inform the direction, for both systems and how to specifically target their equity access and achievement gaps. It should be noted several UW System campuses have partnered with USC’s Center for Urban Education to “scorecard” their path towards equity. This is important work that can be replicated throughout the system.

The development of an annual report on equity would provide internal guidance to WTCS and UW Systems. If done well, it could also serve in helping the public understand equity issues and see progress through initiatives each institution is undertaking to address equity.

A national review of strong equity practices strikes a familiar note. Beyond Tuition from the Center for American Progress emphasizes both quality and accountability. By quality they mean that “colleges offer students the education they deserve.” To that end, they suggest conducting equity audits to “identify gaps in policies, practices, and resources that may contribute to poor outcomes for students of color, low-income
students, and other groups who are not traditionally well-served by higher education.” The recommendation here is that UWS and WTCS can use these equity reports to identify both strengths and weaknesses and use that information to create a holistic effort at change.

But Beyond Tuition also emphasizes accountability, meaning “colleges will be responsible for meeting performance benchmarks...with reasonable time for improvement.” Comparison of performance on various campuses can help identify strategies for improvement and provide policy makers and system leaders with benchmarks, goals, and concrete means of accountability.

2. Targeted Racial/Ethnic Academic Support Initiatives

A range of strategies and practices targeted to support students of color have been shown to increase graduation rates. Extending strong models from within the state and adapting proven practices from outside the state would help UWS and WTCS create a more welcoming and supportive environment for students of color.

“Welcoming initiatives” help students of color feel welcome on campus. This can be done through dedicated spaces for students of color, such as engaging multicultural centers and Black Student Unions (BSUs). Spaces where students can engage with people from similar backgrounds help create conditions for them to thrive and be supported.

When it comes to support, it’s also important to expand advising services. Attaching culturally competent and sensitive advisors, mentorship, and mental health professionals to BSUs, Multicultural centers, and other similar spaces can also help students of color navigate and thrive in higher education.

Students of color often experience barriers from their academic advisors, who can discourage students from going into more difficult majors, or fail to provide the support students of color need. The reasoning behind this can range from outright racism, to implicit bias, to cultural ignorance. For these reasons, dedicated support for students of color, from people who are culturally competent, and preferably reflect the diversity of the student population, also can generate higher rates of success in higher education.

Cultural competency and sensitivity shouldn’t end with advisors; professors, teaching assistance, and other instructors should have these skills. Hiring diverse faculty must become a priority for both WTCS and UWS as well. When students of color see themselves reflected in staff and faculty, especially instructors and professors, they feel more welcome on campus. Diverse faculty and instructors also can provide a rich learning experience for all students, better student interaction, and needed mentorship for students of color. A diverse staff creates a more enriching and welcoming learning experience for all students, especially students of color.

Continuing and deepening investment in pre-college programs that help students of color academically and socially prepare for college, in HS as well as the summer entering their freshman year, are recommended as well. These programs help with exposure to universities, which helps students see themselves as potential college students. Being able to envision success, to see college as an option, is an important aspect to accessibility. And once students enter the university these programs should continue their support to students in the form of program student centers and college/student advisors housed within the program itself.
Part of the targeted academic support proposed here can come from access to tutoring services\textsuperscript{26} for students of color. This can be done through pre-college programs that continue their programming into college or through multicultural student centers. These programs help in providing a holistic approach in retention and graduation rates—free tutoring services and student tutors who look like them helps students not only have access to academic support services, but also cultural support.

\section*{3. Tuition and Beyond: Economically Targeted Aid & Non-Tuition Supports}

Racial and ethnic inequality puts more students of color in a position of economic disadvantage. As a result, students of color have much to gain from financial assistance and economic support that is targeted to the economically disadvantaged. Tuition assistance is critical here but increasing awareness of housing, food, and child care costs is increasingly relevant to students.

Financial support with tuition and costs of living is essential to increasing graduation rates. The challenges faced by economically disadvantaged students is apparent in the WTCS data above, which shows consistently lower rates of completion for disadvantaged students. This is consistent with national research on completion which shows that lack of financial support is a significant barrier to completion.\textsuperscript{27} Dedicated academic support for students\textsuperscript{28}, especially around tuition and housing, can help keep students enrolled.\textsuperscript{29} A recent survey shows that 36 percent of college students are food insecure and another 36 percent are housing insecure.\textsuperscript{30} Given these needs, investing in food access, housing support, and other basic needs can improve retention and success.

In response to the demonstrated economic needs of so many students, Beyond Tuition from the Center for American Progress\textsuperscript{31} recommends that a student from a family 150 percent below the federal poverty level have tuition and fees covered, as well as $10,000 for other life and school related expenses. These are ambitious benchmarks but some institutions in the state are moving toward that sort of financial support.

UW Madison’s initiative, the Badger Promise, guarantees a period of free tuition and segregated fees for first-generation college transfers from Madison College, Milwaukee Area Technical College, WESTERN Technical College, Nicolet College, College of Menominee Nation, and the Lac Courte Ojibwa Community College— if a student is eligible for a Federal Pell Grant they can receive up to four semesters of support. And the Bucky Tuition Promise, which guarantees tuition for families making less than $56,000, helps low-income students afford tuition. These models are a big step forward, and extending them to the UWS could have meaningful impact on lower-income students and students of color across the state.

Madison Colleges’ Scholars of Promise\textsuperscript{32} program, which helps cover tuition costs for income and GPA (2.25 or higher) eligible recent HS graduates, is another approach to support for students who may face economic or other challenges. Both systems and the state of Wisconsin should look to expand on these initiatives through broader public investment.\textsuperscript{33} And while targeted private initiatives can have meaningful impact, a broad and direct public investment in UWS and WTCS would help these higher education institutions meet the needs of students.\textsuperscript{34} When funding is increased, universities invest in “instruction and academic support services,” both increasing completion.\textsuperscript{35}

Other financial support for specific populations may also be critical. Child care and its high cost can reduce retention rates for young parents, especially single mothers.\textsuperscript{36} By expanding or creating accessible and affordable child care for students, UWS and WTCS can help alleviate a common barrier for many. Flexible
and accessible financial support for costs of living (beyond tuition) is a critical frontier, and both UWS and WTCS should look to expand non-academic financial assistance for students.

4. Targeted Investment in UW Milwaukee

Serious work to close racial and ethnic inequities must start where our state’s most diverse population resides. And investment in UW Milwaukee focused on the access and success of students of color could substantially increase the overall pool of college graduates of color in the state.

UW Milwaukee is unique and critical to the issues of racial equity in higher education outcomes in the state. It is located in the state’s largest and most diverse city, it is a “community school,” and it provides higher education access for a community facing serious equity and economic challenges. The challenges of low access for Black students and low graduation rates across the board are quite clear. Closing the higher education gap requires success in Milwaukee.

It is critical to acknowledge the need for general public funding to support student success. The Hamilton Project released a report which showed how an increase in state funding to public universities also increased funding for academic support programs. In other words, investment in academic support programs leads to increasing completion rates. As a community school and as an anchor in a challenged context, UW Milwaukee is being asked to do more and it requires investment commensurate to that task.

With increased resources UW Milwaukee would be able to launch targeted initiatives to increase access to Wisconsin students of color and completion for students of color enrolled within their institution. Within this there should be a strong and specific focus on Black students enrolling and graduating UW Milwaukee.

UW Milwaukee is a cornerstone university in UWS when it comes to serving students of color, which means it is imperative the university has the resources necessary to serve its students. These investments, in turn, serve the future of Wisconsin, its families and economy.

ENDNOTES

2. Data comes from Working Poor Families Project 2018
3. https://www.wisconsin.edu/accountability/access/
5. https://www.wisconsin.gov/quickfacts/WI
7. https://cue.usc.edu/publications/briefs-reports-papers/
13. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1267&context=cehsedaddiss
15. https://scholarworks.umw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1259&context=tvctv
17. https://oaaa.virginia.edu/project-rise
19. https://libdr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=edu_conf
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