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The People's College?

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The People's College?

An examination of who governs community colleges at the local level

K.C. Brekken, SEPA

Introduction: The so-called People's College, America's community colleges provide the most affordable higher education opportunities and educate nearly half the nation's minority undergraduates (Mullin, 2012). This study examines representation of local community college governing boards. Descriptive representation provides the main framework for studying minority representation: Boards should mirror the populations they serve (Meier, Gonzalez Juenke, Wrinkle & Polinard, 2005).

Research Questions:

Q1. *How representative are locally governed community college boards of the black and Hispanic populations they serve?*

Q2. *What explains variation in minority representation?*

Q3. *Does minority representation impact the percentage of black and Hispanic graduates?*

Methods:

A random sample of 400 counties produced a dataset of 91 unique local college governing boards. A regression analysis was used to determine representativeness (**Q1**); An ordered logit analysis was used to explain variation in representation (**Q2**); and a regression analysis was used – with the percentage of black or Hispanic graduates serving as the dependent variable -- to determine the impact of minority representation (**Q3**).



Results:

Q1. Are locally governed community college boards representative of the black and Hispanic populations they serve?

A regression analysis was performed with the % of black or Hispanic board members as the dependent variable and the % of black or Hispanic county residents as the predictor. A slope of > 0 = an over-representative board; 0 = representative; and < 0 is under representative (Engstrom & McDonald, 1981).

% of black representatives' slope: 0.669
 % of Hispanic representatives' slope: 0.543

Q1. Answer: No

Q2. What explains variation in minority representation?

An ordered logit analysis was used with a categorical dependent variable (0 = No black or Hispanic board members; 1 = 1 black or Hispanic member; and 2 = 2 or more black or Hispanic members).

Q2. Answer: The percentage of relevant population was the only variable that significantly explained variation in representation (Other predictors included: Region; Board Size; Elected or Appointed; At Large Elected or Other; Median Income; Prestige; and Education Level).

Q3. Does minority representation impact the percentage of black or Hispanic graduates?

Q3 Results for % of Black Graduates (2012-13) as Dependent Variable

Predictors	Unstandardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error
Region (South =1; Non-South = 0)	0.211*	0.093
% Black County Population	-0.004	0.008
% Black Students (2012-13)	0.04***	0.007
Education Level	-0.003	0.006
Prestige	-0.582	0.490
Median Income	4.617E-6	0.000
Elected (Elected =1; Appointed = 0)	0.190*	0.088
At Large (At Large Elected = 1; Other = 0)	0.018	0.107
Black President (Yes = 1; No = 0)	-0.174	0.144
% of Black Board Members	0.011*	0.005

* $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.0001$

Q3 Results for % of Hispanic Graduates (2012-13) as Dependent Variable

Predictors	Unstandardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error
Region (South =1; Non-South = 0)	0.041	0.074
% Hispanic County Population	0.011**	0.004
% Hispanic Students (2012-13)	0.029***	0.005
Education Level	0.010*	0.004
Prestige	-0.620	0.422
Median Income	2.837E-6	0.000
Elected (Elected =1; Appointed = 0)	0.069	0.074
At Large (At Large Elected = 1; Other = 0)	-0.025	0.090
Hispanic President (Yes = 1; No = 0)	-0.002	0.146
% of Hispanic Board Members	-0.011**	0.003

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.001$ *** $p < 0.0001$

Q3. Answer: The representation of black and Hispanic board members is significant in explaining the percentage of minority graduates as are other environmental and structural variables.

Conclusions: This research finds that few local community college governing boards include blacks or Hispanics. Little has changed in almost two decades since Vaughan and Weisman (1997) conducted their survey on community college governing board ethnicity.

The percentage of minority population plays a large role in the variation of black and Hispanic board members with an adjusted R^2 of 0.41 for the descriptive representation of local community college governing boards of their black county populations and 0.37 for Hispanic county populations.

This study also found the representation of blacks and Hispanics on local community college governing boards is significant in explaining the percentage of black and Hispanic graduates.

Center photo: Accompanied by President Lyndon B. Johnson, Lady Bird Johnson dedicated a new campus at Columbia State Community College on March 15, 1967. Copyright: Columbia State Community College. Reprinted with permission via email.

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