A PORTRAIT OF THE INAUGURAL COHORT OF WASHINGTON STATE ACHIEVERS

THREE YEARS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

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Written by MICHELE F. ZIMOWSKI, PH.D.

Prepared for THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

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In an effort to improve college-going and graduation rates in the State of Washington, especially among low-income and minority students, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation established the Washington State Achievers program (WSA) and selected 16 public high schools with large proportions of low-income students to participate in the program from among the 70 or so that applied for support. In addition to providing grants to the 16 schools to encourage redesign efforts that benefit all students, WSA awards scholarships to low-income students attending those schools to encourage and support their enrollment in college. To qualify for a scholarship, an applicant must be attending one of the 16 high schools, come from a family with low to modest income and assets, and aspire to earn at least a four-year undergraduate degree. The program selects applicants who demonstrate potential for future academic success—not just simply those who already have high grades or test scores.

In 2001, the first year of the program, the Washington Education Foundation (WEF), as the administrator of the scholarships, awarded grants to 530 qualifying seniors attending the 16 schools. This first group of Achievers graduated from high school in the spring of 2001 and began college in the fall of 2001. Every year since then, WEF has selected somewhere between 550 and 600 additional scholarship awardees in their junior year of high school, providing them with adult mentorship and other college-planning assistance in their senior year and with scholarship funds and mentorship as they enter and progress through college—all in support of their matriculation and successful completion of a bachelor’s degree. WEF will continue to award between 550 and 600 new scholarships each year until it selects the tenth and final cohort in the 2008-2009 school year. That final cohort will begin college in the fall of 2010.

In selecting awardees, WEF assumes that about 500 students in each cohort will actually enroll in college full time, qualifying them for full program support, including scholarship funds and mentorship while in college. Over the course of the ten cohorts, the program thus expects to fund close to 5,000 low-income students in all.

To monitor the educational experiences and outcomes of the awardees, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago is following selected cohorts of Achievers over time from about a year after they graduate from high school until they reach their early thirties. Studies of the first, third, and fifth cohorts are currently underway. This report describes the status and experiences of the first cohort of Achievers (Cohort I) as reported at the time of the first follow-up survey, roughly three years after they were seniors in high school.

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1. In the first year of the program, WEF awarded scholarships to students in their senior year, pending their graduation from high school. In all subsequent years of the program, the application and selection process took place during the students’ junior year of high school to give them time to consider college choice, apply for other sources of financial aid, and enroll in additional college preparatory classes as desired or needed.

2. Beginning with the second cohort, WEF provides adult mentorship and college planning support to all awardees in their senior year of high school. Beginning with the third cohort, WEF also provides all awardees with a four-day, three-night college preparatory experience in the summer between their junior and senior years in high school.
THE LONGITUDINAL SURVEY

In the spring of 2002, about a year after they were seniors in high school, NORC contacted the inaugural cohort of Achievers by mail asking them to complete a paper-and-pencil survey. In the summer and early fall of 2004, roughly three years after high school, NORC asked the Achievers to complete a paper-and-pencil first follow-up survey.3

This summary is based on the responses the Achievers gave in the first follow-up survey and on background information supplied by WEF, including race/ethnicity and gender.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the design and methodology of the longitudinal survey, and the more technical aspects of the analysis, including the statistical procedures used to produce the survey estimates and their standard errors, please see:

The Inaugural Cohort of Washington State Achievers Three Years After High School, NORC, 2006, available on the project’s website at: http://www.norc.org/gatesscholars/.

Also refer to the above report for a more comprehensive treatment of the status and experiences of the Achievers three years after high school. The report presents the results of the analysis in their entirety.

TECHNICAL NOTES

The descriptive comparisons discussed in this summary were tested for statistical significance with a two-sided Student’s t-test at the 0.05 significance level. For multiple comparisons among the four major racial/ethnic groups, a Bonferroni adjustment was applied to take into account the number of comparisons made.

In interpreting the comparisons, it is important to consider that the power to detect differences among the various racial/ethnic groups varies considerably from comparison to comparison due to differences in the subpopulation sizes and the relative number of respondents in each group. As a rule, the chances of not finding a difference, when one exists, are highest for comparisons involving African American Achievers and lowest for comparisons between Asian/Pacific Islander and Caucasian American Achievers. Please refer to the full report for more information on this topic.

Also please note that some of the entries in the graphs do not sum to 100 percent due to rounding error.

3 Around 5 percent of Achievers did not take advantage of the award in their first year after high school. These students as well as those who were able to take advantage of the scholarship in the first year after high school are all considered part of the Achiever population and all were asked to participate in the first follow-up survey.
About two out of every five Achievers in the inaugural cohort are White/Caucasian Americans; more than half are minority students. Asian/Pacific Islanders account for nearly one-fourth of all Achievers in the first cohort. African Americans make up another one-seventh of the cohort, Hispanic Americans a little less than one-sixth of the cohort. Only about one percent of all Achievers are American Indian/Alaska Natives, a group too small to report for analytic purposes. They are therefore included in the “Other” category along with multi-racial Achievers and Achievers of other racial/ethnic origins.

Overall, there are about twice as many female as male Achievers in the first cohort, but their relative shares vary by race and ethnicity. Female Achievers outnumber their male counterparts by roughly two to one in the Asian/Pacific Islander and Other groups. Females also account for nearly three-fourths of Caucasian American Achievers and close to three-fifths of Hispanic American Achievers. Just about half of African American Achievers are female, about half male.

**Definitions**

- **OTHER:** American Indian/Alaska Native and multi-racial Achievers, as well as Achievers of “other” racial/ethnic origins.
Four out of every five Achievers attended college their third year out of high school. Although the enrollment rates of the Achievers varied somewhat by race/ethnicity and by gender, there were no statistically significant differences among the groups. At least three out of every four Achievers in each group were enrolled in college their third year out of high school.

More than nine out of every ten enrollees were full-time students their third year after high school. Although the share of full-time students varied a little from group to group, there were no statistically significant differences among the four major racial/ethnic groups or by gender.

**Definitions**

- **ENROLLEES**: Achievers who were enrolled in college during the 2003-2004 academic year, their third year after high school.
- **NON-ENROLLEES**: Achievers who were not enrolled in college during the 2003-2004 academic year, their third year after high school.

* The Other group was not included in comparisons by race and ethnicity.
At the time of the first follow-up survey, about three out of every four Achievers who were not enrolled in college their third year out of high school planned to return to college sometime within the next two years. When asked to describe their plans for returning to school, some non-enrollees mentioned that they had already enrolled in college for the upcoming academic year. Others said that they had applied or had plans to apply for admission to one or more colleges or universities. Still others said that they would return to school after fulfilling other commitments such as serving in the armed forces or as a missionary for their church.

The small number of non-enrollees without plans to return to school within the next two years (close to five percent of all Achievers) were all currently working for pay 35 hours or more per week. Nearly all reported that they needed to work to support their families. A little less than half were parents of one biological, adopted, step- or foster child. Nonetheless, more than two-thirds of this small group of Achievers thought that they would eventually go back to school to complete at least two years of college. More than two out of every five thought that they would return sometime in the future to earn at least a bachelor’s degree. More than half reported that they were currently on an approved leave of absence from their college or university.
Three years after high school, close to nine out of every ten Achievers expected to complete at least a bachelor’s degree. Nearly one out of every two had their sights set on an advanced degree. A little less than one out of every five aspired to earn a first professional or doctoral degree.

Over nine out of every ten enrollees expected to complete at least a bachelor’s degree compared to less than three out of every five non-enrollees. Over half of enrollees anticipated earning an advanced degree compared to less than one in every five non-enrollees.

**Definitions**

- **At least a bachelor’s degree:** A bachelor’s degree, post-baccalaureate certificate, master’s, first professional or doctoral degree.
- **Advanced degree:** A master’s, first professional or doctoral degree.
Educational Aspirations of Enrollees Three Years after High School

By Race/Ethnicity And By Gender

As a whole, Asian/Pacific Islanders were more likely than Hispanic Americans to have their sights set on earning a bachelor’s degree as their highest degree. At the same time, Hispanic Americans were more likely than Asian/Pacific Islanders and Caucasian Americans to foresee earning a doctorate as their highest degree. Asian/Pacific Islanders, on the other hand, were more likely than African Americans to anticipate earning a first professional degree. Even so, there were no statistically significant differences among the four major racial/ethnic groups in the shares expecting to complete at least a bachelor’s degree.

Females were more likely than males to envision earning at least a bachelor’s degree. Even so, with the exception of a marginally significant difference favoring females at the level of the post-baccalaureate certificate, there were no statistically significant differences by gender in the shares aspiring to earn their highest degree at each level of educational attainment at or above the level of a four-year degree.
Transfer Patterns of Enrollees

Three Years After High School

Transfer Rates and Reasons for Transferring

By the time of the first follow-up survey, nearly two out of every five enrollees had changed or had plans to change colleges in the near future.

By the time of the first follow-up survey, almost two out of every five enrollees had transferred from one college to another sometime during their college career or had plans to transfer in the fall of their fourth year out of high school. When asked to indicate their chief reason for changing schools, close to two-thirds of transferees cited going from a two-year college to a four-year institution as their primary reason. While there were no statistically significant differences among the four major racial/ethnic groups in their tendencies to transfer, female enrollees were much more likely than their male counterparts to change schools. More than two out of every five females transferred or were in the process of transferring compared to a little less than one out of every four males.

With the exception of Hispanic Americans, the majority of transferees in each major racial/ethnic group changed schools to attend a four-year post-secondary institution.

Although most transferees changed schools to attend a four-year institution, Asian/Pacific Islanders were more likely than Hispanic Americans to say it was their chief reason for transferring. Caucasian Americans, on the other hand, cited social considerations at a higher rate than Asian/Pacific Islanders. Finally, Hispanic Americans were more likely than Caucasian Americans to mention academic reasons and more likely than Asian/Pacific Islanders to cite family considerations as their primary reasons for transferring. There were no other statistically significant differences among the groups.
Academic, Social, and Civic Engagement of the Enrollees as a Whole

Their Third Year After High School

While in College, the Majority of Enrollees Worked With Other Students Outside of Class and Discussed Ideas With Other Students Outside of Class on a Regular Basis.

While in college their third year after high school, more than two out of every three enrollees worked with other students outside of class and discussed ideas from their classes or readings with other students outside of class at least once a week. At the same time, only about one in every three discussed ideas with faculty members outside of class on a regular basis (at least once a week).

While in College, Most Enrollees Participated in a Range of Social and Civic Activities at Least Once During the School Year.

The majority of enrollees took part in events sponsored by their own cultural group, tutoring sessions, community service, and religious activities at least once while in college their third year out of high school. Less than half took part in fraternity and sorority events or in resident hall activities at least once during that year.
While in college their third year after high school, the majority of African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Hispanic American enrollees participated in activities sponsored by their own cultural group, tutoring sessions, community service, and religious or spiritual activities at least once during the academic year. With the exception of community service activities, Caucasian Americans were less likely than their minority counterparts to take part in these activities at least once during the school year, with less than half participating sometime during their third year after high school.

Less than half of all enrollees in each racial and ethnic group participated in resident hall activities or in fraternity and sorority events at least once while in college their third year out of high school. As a whole, Caucasian Americans were less likely than their minority counterparts to take part in a fraternity or sorority event sometime during that year.
While in college their third year after high school, females were less likely than their male counterparts to participate at least once during the year in fraternity or sorority events, resident hall activities, and events sponsored by their own cultural group. They were also less likely to take part in tutoring sessions, community service activities, and religious or spiritual activities sometime during that school year.