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Partnering for Success: Formal Mentoring with African American Students in an Urban Community College

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Abstract

Community colleges have become the gateway to higher education for many students due to their open access and reduced tuition rates. It was estimated in 2006 that 35% of all post secondary students were enrolled at community colleges and, of that 35%, a large percentage of students were considered nontraditional, minority as well as underprepared for college (Provasnik & Platny, 2008). These factors have been identified as factors associated with low graduation and retention rates (Stromei, 2000; Porchea, Allen, Robbins & Phelps, 2010) resulting in notoriously low graduation rates at community colleges. In an effort to address the needs of African American attending Sinclair Community College (SCC), the Urban African American Mentor Program (UAAMP) was started in 2009 with a core group of 32 students. The intent of this research was to engage in causal comparative research in comparing graduation and retention rates among the UAAMP group and a randomly chosen group of SCC students with similar demographic characteristics.

Methods

Members of the 2009 fall UAAMP group at SCC were studied as well as a control group. Only one cohort was studied since research has shown that these students take longer to complete a degree due to outside obligations, under preparation for college and obstacles with finances. Questions that were studied included:

- What is the retention rate for UAAMP participants?
- Is there a statistically significant difference in these rates between participants and non participants?
- Is there a statistically significant difference in these rates between males and females?
- Is there a statistically significant difference in these rates between traditional aged students (18-22) and non traditional aged students?

2006 Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Nationwide

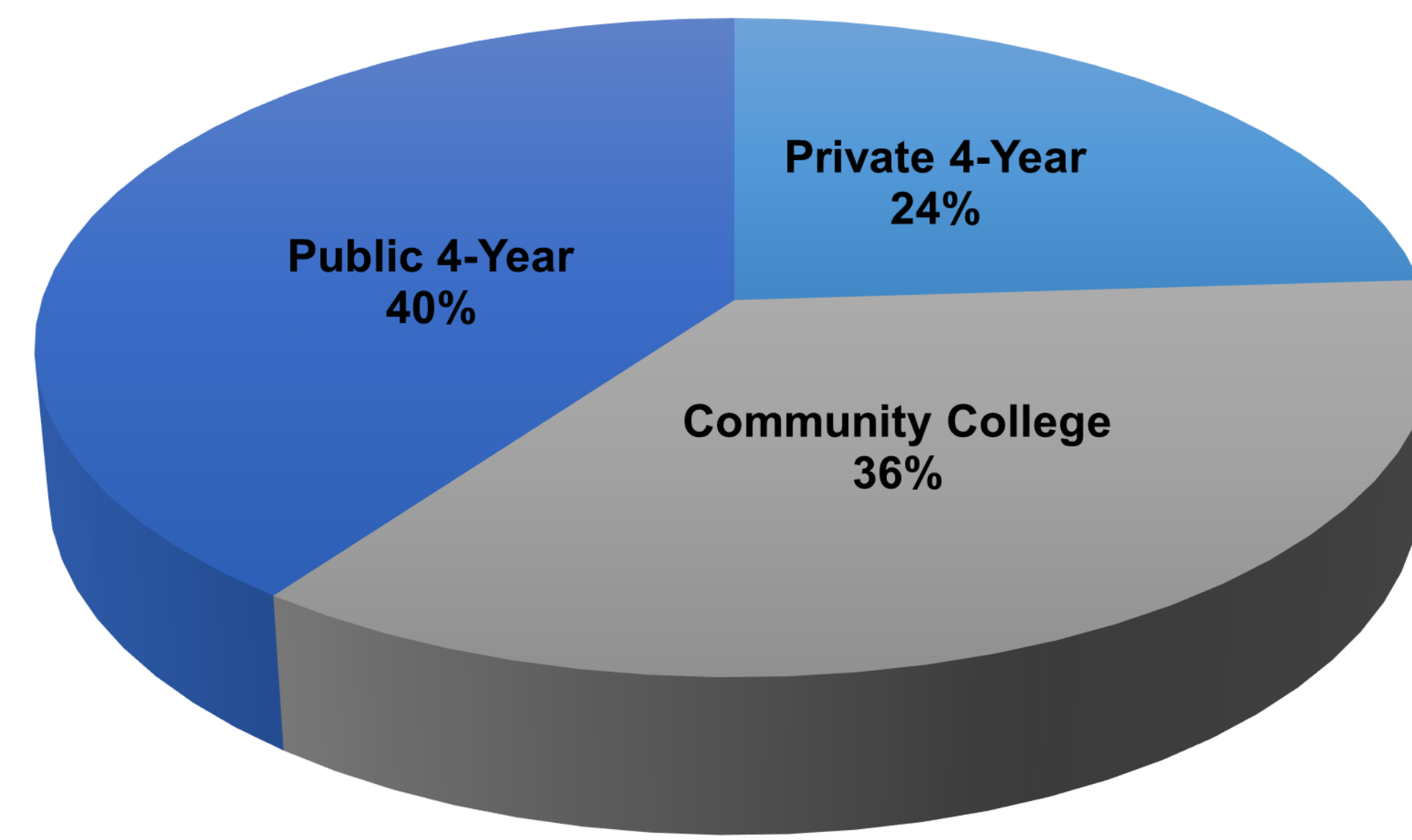
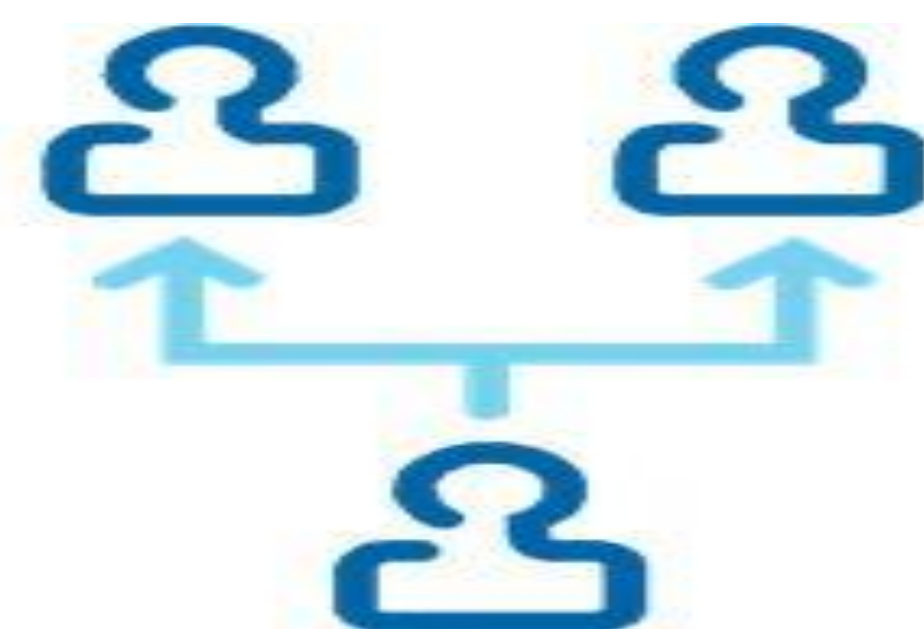


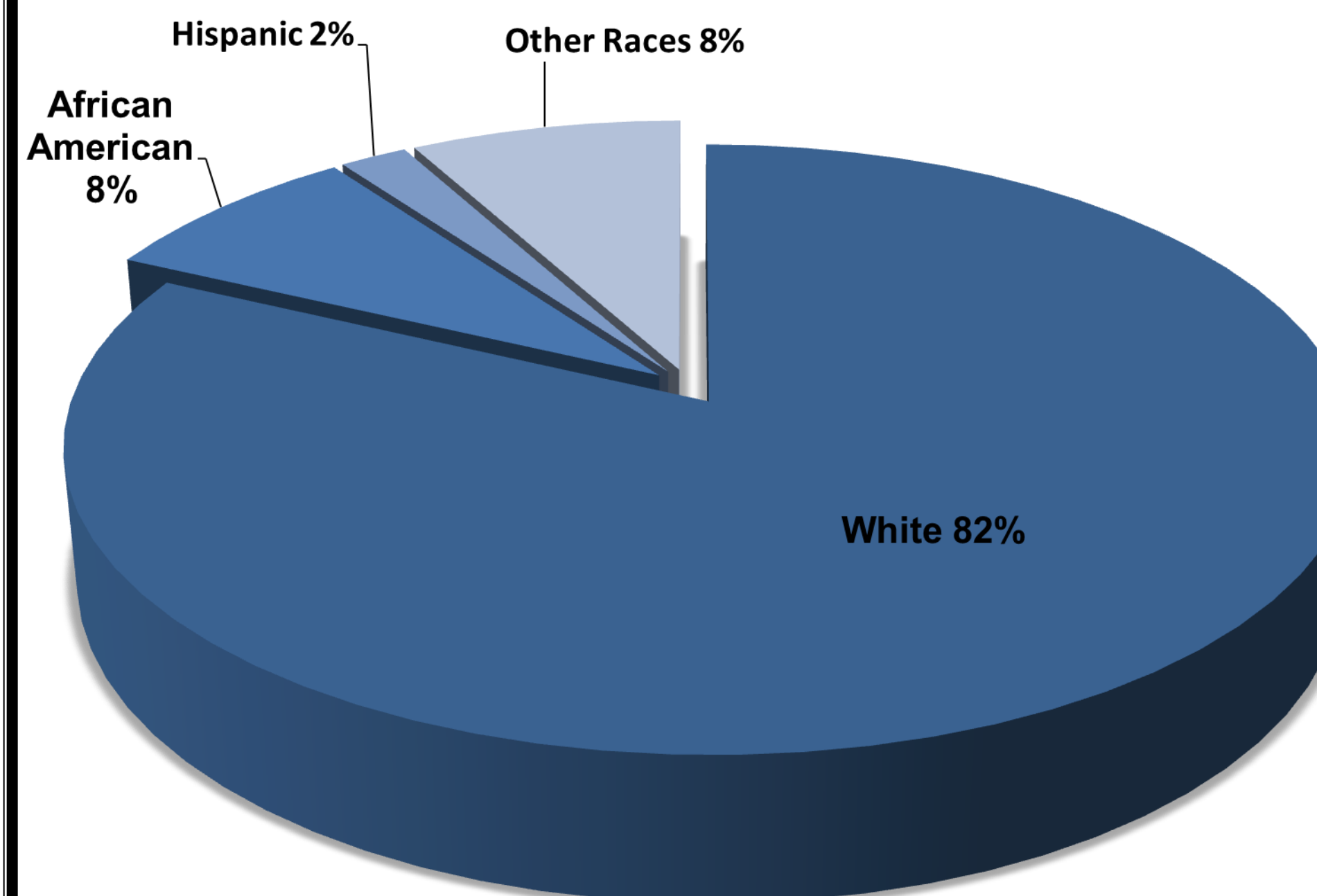
Figure 1. Community Colleges, 2008.

Mentoring

Mentoring has been shown to be an effective tool in the retention of African American Students in public institutions. Formal mentoring as seen in the Urban African American Mentor Program (UAAMP) at Sinclair Community College, is structured to include group meetings and each student is matched with a faculty member as well as a staff member. Each student participant then attends an orientation meeting while the mentors attend a separate training session. Mentor training was designed to educate mentors on helping students with problems in their everyday lives that might otherwise cause them to drop out of school. The goal of the program is to establish a professional and academic community among mentors and students, ultimately resulting in a greater connection to the college. It is hoped that this connection would help increase graduation/transfer rates and be an example to other community colleges.



2011 Ohio Graduation Rates for All Degree-Granting Institutions



Theoretical Framework

- ❖ Tinto (1975): students will persist in their studies if they come to college with a higher GPA, if they are committed to the institution, if they are committed to their goals and if they have a higher level of social integration into the campus community.
- ❖ Dahlvig's (2010): Connections made through mentoring with faculty helped alleviate students' feelings of isolation and encouraged their persistence at college.
- ❖ Brittian et al (2009): Students in the mentoring program had lower GPA's than students not enrolled in the program.
- ❖ Moore & Toliver (2010): Female African American students were more proactive in meeting with their mentors and asking for help.

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2011 Sinclair Graduation

Image @ <https://www.facebook.com/sinclaircommunitycollege>

Results and Conclusions

T-tests failed to reveal any significant statistical difference in graduation rates or retention rates between the UAAMP group and the comparison group. Tests also failed to reveal significant statistical differences in retention rates in both groups between males and females. A T-test did reveal a significantly reliable difference in retention rates between traditional and non-traditional age students. As varied as program participants, speculations on the lack of success of the program include:

- ❖ Students separating from the college for personal reasons.
- ❖ Students who signed up for the program may have perceived of the program as a tutoring program as Brittian et al (2009) alluded to in their article.
- ❖ The number of mentors and mentees is extremely low when compared with Sinclair's total student population of nearly 25,000. It will take a larger push from all members of the institution to increase graduation rates for African American

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