

118 were Black students, roughly 4 percent.

“You would think that they would have enough energy to devote to a small cohort,” said Lesa Johnson, a Black sociology professor at Chico State who’s studied campus race relations.

At Chico State, the Black student versus non-underrepresented minority student achievement gap is 26 percentage points for the most recent year. Among all Cal States, only Channel Islands, with a gap of 31 percentage points, has a wider gap—even as its gap between underrepresented minority and non-underrepresented minority students is 8 percentage points.

An 8 percent gap “doesn’t seem so severe,” said Siqueiros. But the “strategies that we’re going to do to close an 8 percent gap versus a 31 percent gap are obviously going to be super different.”

Some campuses have just a few dozen entering freshmen who are Black. As a consequence, a slight change in the number of Black students graduating can lead to big swings in the graduation rate. Cal State Channel Islands enrolled just 25 Black freshmen in 2015, graduating only eight Black students after six years, for a graduation rate of 32 percent. Had the campus graduated eight more Black students, its graduation rate for Black students would have been 64 percent—enough to completely close the equity gap with non-underrepresented students.

The president of the Cal State with the largest share of Black students doesn’t see deception in how the system is portraying the data.

“I think there is a very sincere and intentional effort to close these equity gaps,” said Thomas Parham, president of Cal State Dominguez Hills and one of three Black campus presidents at the Cal State system. “If I had a question about whether we were really committed to the work, then I wouldn’t be doing what I’m doing.”

Parham also cautioned race isn’t the only factor in understanding the data behind the achievement gaps. Whether a student is low-income and first in their family to attend college can also affect the likelihood that they graduate.

Dominguez Hills has a large share of students who fit some or all of those demographic profiles, as well as those who come from communities that endure systemic racism. Like others with similar student-body profiles, Dominguez Hills has to work harder to see students cross the finish line than campuses with more affluent students and who aren’t from underrepresented backgrounds, Parham said.

Still, for both transfer and first-time students, Cal State Dominguez Hills has a nar-

“You would think that they would have enough energy to devote to a small cohort.”

—Lesla Johnson, Chico State professor

rower equity gap for Black students and underrepresented minority students than the system average for the most recent year. Dominguez Hills also has a narrower equity gap than Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, whose student body is 1 percent Black, 19 percent URM and 16 percent low-income—data points that are far below the system average and well under the share of high school graduates in California who took college-ready courses.

On the other hand, Cal State Dominguez Hill’s equity efforts have regressed. Four years ago, there was virtually no six-year graduation rate gap between Black first-time students and non-underrepresented minority students. Since then, the grad rate for Black students fell about 5 percentage points while the rate for non-underrepresented minority students grew nearly 10 percentage points.

To James Minor, former assistant vice chancellor at the CSU’s systemwide office, any help for struggling students at the system directly improves the academic fates of Black students. He highlighted various efforts underway to improve graduation rates for all students, including re-enrolling students who stopped attending and lowering the share of students earning Ds and Fs. Cal State is also trying additional software, and contacting students in the spring who haven’t signed up for fall classes—a clear sign they may drop out. All those efforts benefit Black students, too, he said.

But the university system needs to target Black students specifically, experts and students told CalMatters.

While CSU leader Koester explicitly called out disaggregating data as a goal for improving the Black student experience in the Cal State system, that would appear to conflict with other goals she and the system share.

If Cal State doesn’t want to disaggregate the data regarding Black student achievement until 2025 because of the 10-year goal it set in 2015—as interim associate vice president Gold told CalMatters—then it probably won’t do so under Koester. When Koester took the position of interim chancellor in March, she told CalMatters she doesn’t want the job permanently, that she was “150 percent committed” to the interim position. □

David Leon

Zink

for

ASSEMBLY

The Voice We Deserve, The Change We Need.

ENDORSED
BY THE
**CALIFORNIA
DEMOCRATIC
PARTY**

DONATE TODAY!

www.zinkforassembly.com