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New Study Indicates Less than Half of Arizona's High-School Graduates Eligible for Admission to Arizona's Public Universities

(Phoenix, Ariz.) - Less than half of Arizona high-school graduates meet eligibility requirements for Arizona's public universities, according to a [study released by the Arizona Board of Regents](#). The 2014 overall eligibility rate of 46.5 percent remained essentially unchanged from 2009 when the last study was conducted and the rate was 46.7 percent.

Resident freshmen admission for Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona requires at least a 2.50 grade-point average and completion of 16 required competency courses with no more than two deficiencies, but deficiencies cannot both be in math and science. The number of graduates from Arizona's public high schools increased 4.1 percent during the five-year time period between the studies.

"Are we increasing the number of Arizona students eligible to attend our universities? Unfortunately, the answer is no," said Eileen Klein, president of the Arizona Board of Regents. "The data clearly indicates that we need to do a better job of ensuring students are academically ready to pursue education beyond high school, especially since we know that 68 percent of all jobs in Arizona will require some post-secondary education, including certifications and two- and four-year degrees by 2018."

The study also indicates that African Americans, American Indians and Hispanics have substantially lower eligibility rates compared to Asian American and White students. This gap has persisted since the 2009 study and may reflect socioeconomic disparities, income differences, and school resource differences (see Table 1). "The lower eligibility rates in minority populations are very troubling," Klein said. "Hispanic students are the largest minority group in K-12 and are quickly approaching a majority of total enrollment in that system. By 2035, the U.S Census estimates that a majority of Arizona will be Hispanic. Improving the achievement rate among all students, but particularly among Hispanic students, is an imperative for economic success in our state."

Klein noted that eligibility has a significant impact on the public universities. "We have record enrollments - but not record numbers of Arizona students," Klein said. "Consider this - for the high-school graduating class of 2013-14, an astonishing 51 high schools, or 10.5 percent, sent **zero** graduates to postsecondary education in fall 2014. And half of the graduates going to postsecondary education in fall 2014 graduated from 10.6 percent - or 52 - of Arizona's 488 high schools. Many of our schools do an outstanding job preparing graduates but performance is not consistent across the board."

Klein applauded Gov. Ducey's Classrooms First Initiative Council for its instrumental work to develop a funding formula for K-12 that rewards performance, efficiency and innovation. "We are grateful to the governor for his commitment to improving educational results and rewarding student success. Ultimately, we believe this work will also fortify the effort to raise eligibility rates."

The Arizona university system recorded a decrease of 501 (-4.0 percent) in the number of Arizona high-school graduates who enrolled in the fall semester immediately following their senior year. That group totaled 12,013 in fall 2013 and places enrollment of the group at a level that is slightly less than the previous five years.

Table 1. Percent of Arizona High-School Graduates Eligible for Admission to the Public Universities

	2014	2009	2006	2002	1998*	1996*	1989
African American	36.6%	36.8%	32.4%	31.1%	27.1%	40.5%	32.1%
American Indian	33.6%	33.7%	25.7%	20.9%	21.4%	40.4%	22.1%
Asian American	69.6%	69.9%	70.3%	65.9%	61.8%	73.9%	65.7%
Pacific Islander	37.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hispanic	34.1%	34.2%	35.3%	29.9%	29.0%	41.7%	31.3%
White	54.7%	54.9%	56.5%	52.1%	48.6%	61.0%	50.4%
TOTAL	46.5%	46.7%	47.9%	43.9%	41.7%	55.3%	44.2%

**Effective for fall of 1998, the Board of Regents added five high-school units for a new total of 16 curricular requirements. This increase in standards resulted in a dramatic reduction in the eligibility rate for the 1998 high-school graduates.*

“The decrease in Arizona high-school graduates who enrolled in our universities, coupled with the below average eligibility rates, greatly compromises the board’s and universities’ goals to increase bachelor’s degrees for the state,” said Greg Patterson, chair of the ABOR Academic and Student Affairs Committee. “Ultimately, this is directly correlated to meeting workforce demand in Arizona, as well as the state’s capacity to recruit major businesses to headquarter here, bringing more jobs and contributing to a robust economy.”

Encouragingly, the board has reported that academic preparation of the incoming 2013-14 university freshmen class was better than in previous years. Approximately 83 percent were admitted without academic deficiencies compared to 82 percent in fall 2012 and 80 percent in fall 2011. This change may be, in part, the result of the increase in state graduation requirements for the Class of 2013. Their first term grade-point averages were unchanged at 2.9 from fall 2010 through fall 2013.

“There are a number of initiatives we can pursue to increase eligibility rates and it starts with building a greater college-going culture and raising expectations for success in K-12,” Klein said. “We also need to ensure students are offered the courses necessary for admission to universities. We are highly focused on teacher preparation through degree programs at our universities, but continually look for new opportunities to strengthen teacher training. We also are piloting with K-12 key transition courses for students. Finally, we can ensure standards are aligned with postsecondary education expectations.”

The board is currently undertaking a review of required college-preparation courses. With the use of advanced predictive analytics, the board is analyzing which high-school courses best prepare students for college-level work. As an example of efforts to remain responsive to innovations in student preparation and to recognize the multiple paths by which students can demonstrate academic competency, ABOR recently approved some career and technical education courses as a substitute for fine-arts credits for guaranteed university admission. Results and recommendations from the review are expected to be shared in June of 2016.

“We need to align the entire education system around student success,” Klein said. “Just as the public universities and community colleges have set goals of increasing the percentage of adults with associate’s and bachelor’s degrees by 2020, our high schools should also set specific goals for every student to pursue education and training after graduation.”

The Arizona Board of Regents also is interested in convening a group of key education and community stakeholders to discuss the setting of a statewide educational attainment goal, similar to other states such as Tennessee with a “Drive to 55” attainment goal.

About the study design

For the first time, the 2014 study collected electronic data files from student information systems rather than paper transcripts, resulting in a data set eight times the size of the 2010 study.

A total of 59 out of 106 districts (55.7 percent) were selected for the stratified random sample and contacted. After significant outreach, 22 out of the 59 districts responded with data (37.3 percent), including all of the largest districts in the state.

Districts in Navajo, Apache, and Santa Cruz counties were not responsive to requests for participation. The response rate of charter schools was too low to provide results specific to those schools.

A total of 95 high schools participated, compared with 66 in 2006, resulting in an improved representation of minority students and geographic regions.

Participating schools sent 100 percent of senior transcripts, due to the electronic records request, whereas in 2006, they provided a stratified random sample of paper transcripts.

The combined data from all locations allowed the analysis of 26,195 transcripts out of an estimated 59,000 statewide, or roughly 44 percent, a significant increase over the 2006 study of 3,252 transcripts.

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