

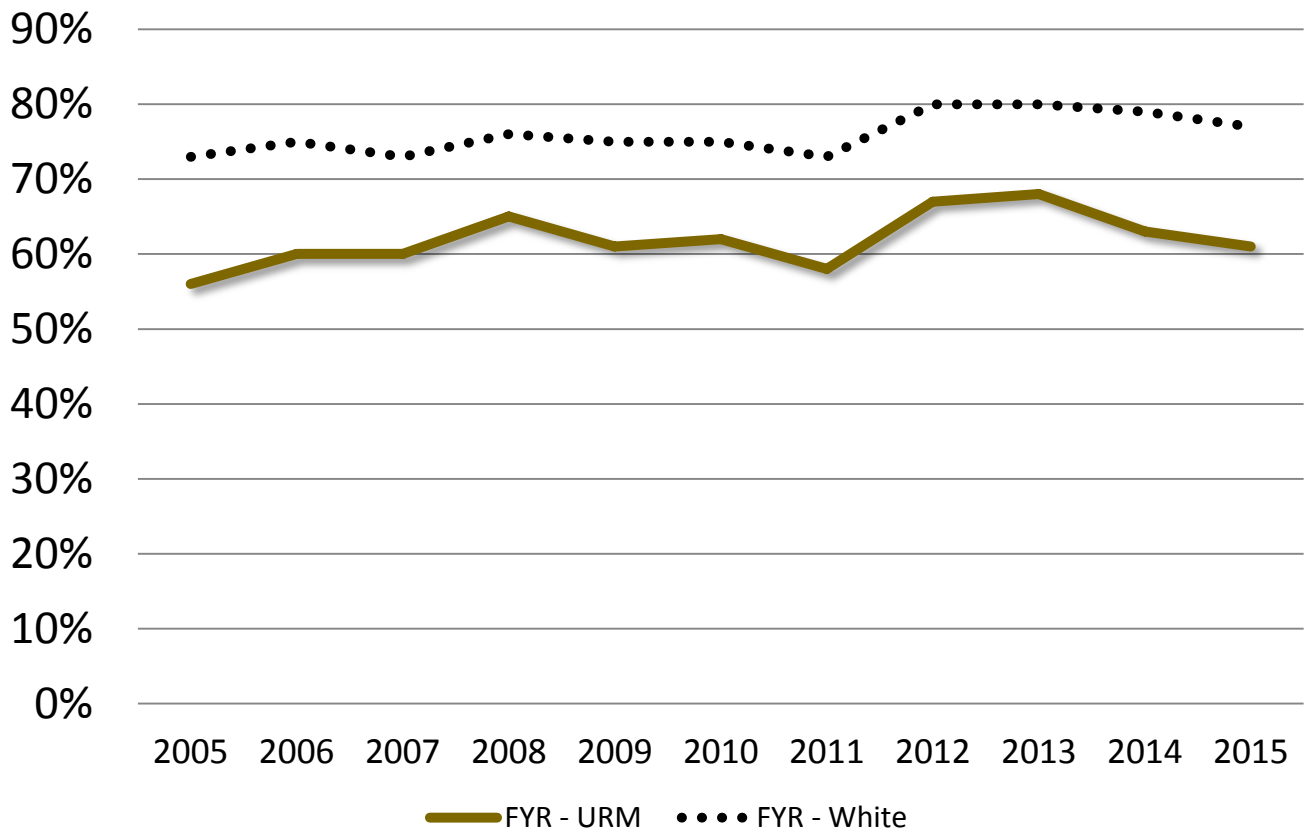
OIRA Special Mini-Report:

Retention and Graduation of Underrepresented Minority Students

The first year retention (FYR) rate for underrepresented minority students has declined noticeably since it's peak in 2013. It now hovers around 61%, which is actually a few percentage points below its historical average.

The gap in retention rates between URM students and white students is around 16% for 2015, which is slightly higher than historical averages. This gap has proven difficult to close in the last decade. It also tends to widen with each passing year, persisting all the way through to graduation.

First Year Retention (FYR) of Underrepresented Minority Students (URM)

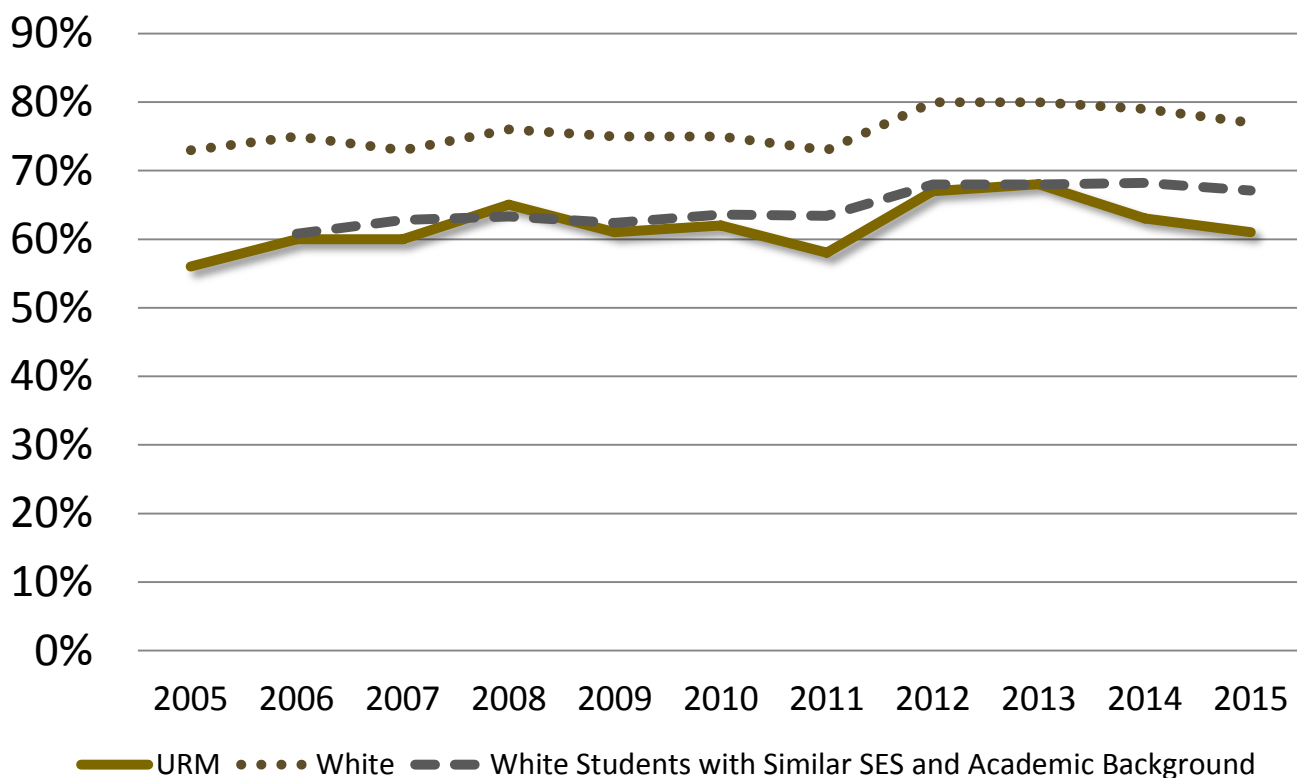


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Raw retention rates only tell part of the story. Underrepresented minority students are more likely to come from households and areas with lower socio-economic status (SES) when compared with their white peers. The graph below repeats the graph presented on the first page, but with an added control condition made up of white students with similar SES and academic backgrounds of URM students.

What's notable about this graph is that when these controls are added, URM students do not look appreciably different than their white counterparts. The data suggests that, at least when first year retention rates are concerned, academic and economic factors may have more explanatory power than race or ethnicity. If the university aims to improve URM student outcomes, a natural first step may be to broadly focus on students with academic and financial difficulties.

First Year Retention (FYR) Rates for Underrepresented Minority Students (URM) and White Controls

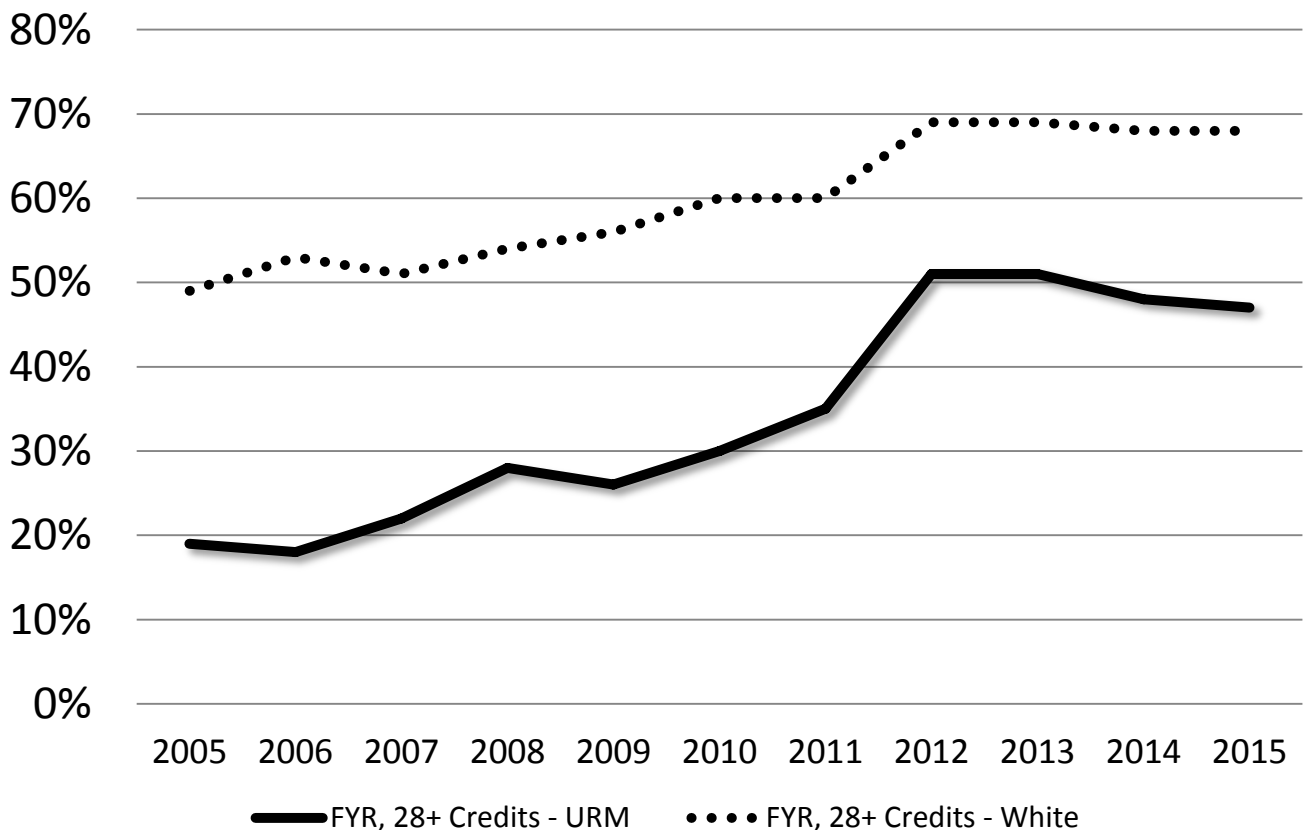


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OIRA tracks other important measures besides raw retention rates. One of the most important metrics related to student success in the first year is retention with sophomore status – essentially combining credit accumulation rates with retention rates. The graph below shows the historical proportion of students (URM and white students) that retain to start their second year with enough credits to be considered a sophomore, and hence ‘on-track’ to graduate in 4 years.

This percentage has increased dramatically for students since 2005, but has improved even more for URM students. The gap here, which was more than 30% in 2005, is now about 20% in for 2015 students. This metric is critical for students (and the university), as it is highly correlated with both eventual graduation and on-time graduation.

Sophomore Standing Rates (i.e. the First Year ‘On-Track’ Rate)

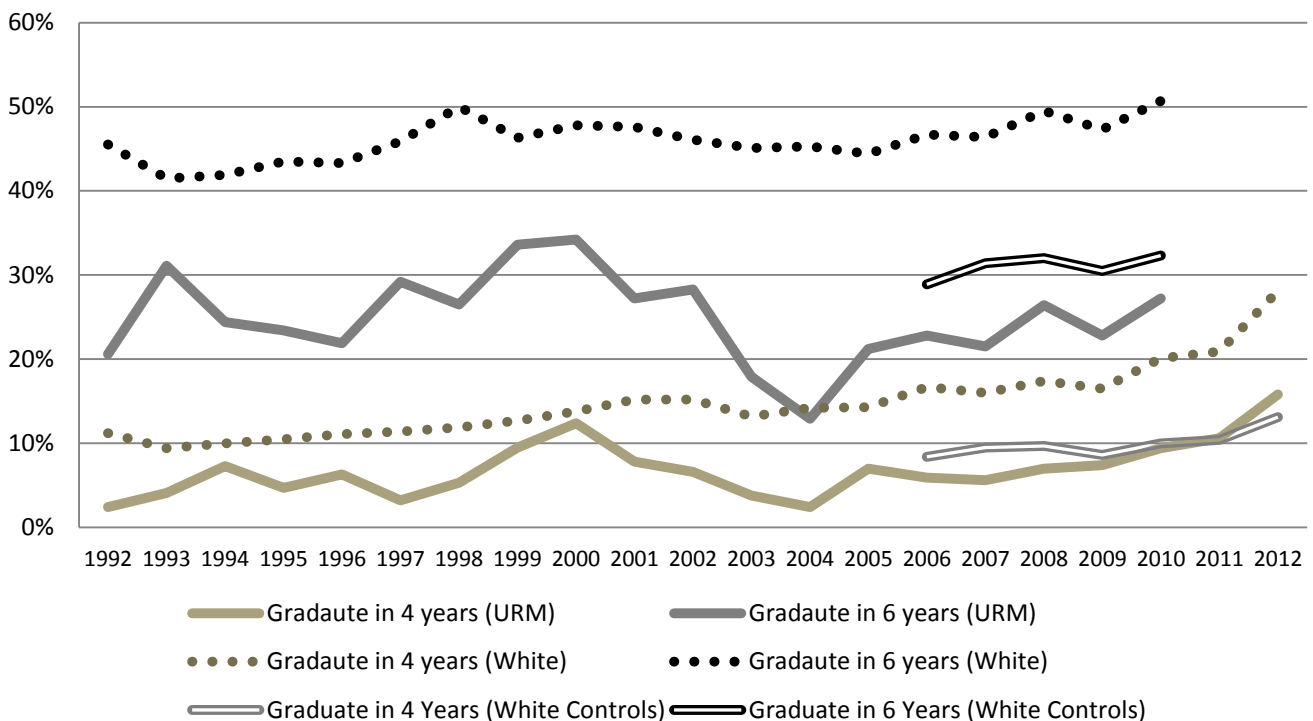


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Graduation rates for URM students often see large fluctuations. In general, historical 4 years rates were low, mostly in the single digits, while 6 year rates for URM students were mostly between 20 and 30 percent. Both rates are well below rates for white students.

Recent 4-year graduation rates (which correspond to the increase in retention rates for the 2012 cohort) have shown a great deal of growth, for both minority students and white students. While both groups have shown a large increase in 2012, the graduation gap has not narrowed.

Much like the graph for retention rates, control conditions were created for both 4-year and 6-year graduation rates that represent white students with similar background characteristics relative to URM students. Data and methodological limitations prevent a more detailed historical comparison, but recent rates are available starting with the 2006 incoming cohort. Interestingly, four year graduation rates are very similar between URM students and white controls, but URM students lag noticeably behind white controls after 6-years.

Graduation Rates by URM Status

Conclusions

There are noticeable differences in the retention and graduation rates for underrepresented minority students (URMs) compared to their white peers. These differences start with retention rates during the first year and persist through to graduation. On average, graduation rates for URMs are less than half of the rates seen by white students.

There are, however, some encouraging signs within the data. First off, URMs are not retaining at substantially different rates when compared to white students with similar academic and socio-economic backgrounds. There is also evidence that these groups have similar 4-year graduation rates. Secondly, both URM and non-URM students have seen noticeable gains in retention rates, first year on-track rates, and four-year graduation rates. All of these signs point to improved outcomes for URMs in the years to come.

Rates of several important student metrics have improved for URM students over recent years. Yet, these improvements are not isolated to only URMs – mostly these improvements have impacted all students more or less equally. Thus, the ‘success gap’ between URM and their white peers has not closed. And while it is good to know that URM students are not being left behind from these recent improvements, they have also not been very successful in closing the achievement gap.

More concerningly, the gap in 6-year graduation rates is still very large. And unlike other student outcome metrics, there is a noticeable difference in the 6-year graduation rates between URMs and white students with similar backgrounds.

In the 2005 cohort, nearly 90% of URMs identified as African American. However, more recent cohorts of URM students are more diverse, with only about 70% identifying as African American. Because of the diversity within URMs themselves, it is important not to paint all URM subgroups with the same broad stroke. Future research will seek to disaggregate subgroups even further to help identify notable patterns and trends.