Does Income Factor Into Graduation Rates?

The *New York Times Magazine* published on Sunday, May 18th an article titled “Who Gets to Graduate?” which stated that “Whether a student graduates or not seems to depend today almost entirely on just one factor – how much money his or her parent makes.” It presented national data of students from an eighth grade cohort that showed that those students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds are much less likely to earn a bachelor’s degree than those from high-status backgrounds, regardless of their SAT scores.

In contrast, at the University of California (UC), students are quite successful at earning a degree whether they are from the bottom income bracket or the highest one.

UC undergraduates from low-income families have average six-year graduation rates that are 30 to 40 points higher than the national average of students that enter college (different from the cohort presented above). In addition, UC undergraduates from low-income families make greater improvements in graduation rates between years four and six compared to the national average. Whereas only an additional five to 10 percent of low-income students graduate between years four and six nationally, an additional 25 to 30 percent of low-income students at UC graduate between years four and six.

UC is focused on ways to make improvements and further decrease the gap in four-year graduation rates, including addressing some of the factors that cited (e.g., improving a sense of belonging, creating small cohort experiences, and directing support services through summer or early orientation programs).

May 19, 2014

Office of the Provost
institutional Research & Academic Planning (iRAP)