

## EDUCATION



Graduates of Arrupe College of Loyola University Chicago

ARRUPE COLLEGE OF LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

# Academic Aid

## How colleges work to close the education gap for minority students

By Ana Pelayo Connery

**W**HEN NIA HIPPS RESEARCHED colleges last year, she was disappointed at the lack of diversity on most campuses. “I tried to apply to schools where at least 10 percent of students were students of color but they were limited,” says the Afro-Latina from Moorestown, N.J. “I wanted a mix of

Latinx and Black students, and it was so hard to find.”

After spending most of her academic life at predominantly white schools, Hipps was ready for a change. “I was tired of being ‘the face of the race,’” she says. Her search led to several historically Black colleges and universities, or HBCUs, including the all-female Spelman College in Atlanta, where she eventually enrolled after attending the school’s introductory event for admitted

students known as Spelbound. “I talked to students who said they received many internship and job opportunities from companies who come to Spelman and say, ‘We want you,’” she says. “Students of color don’t necessarily get that kind of attention at predominantly white institutions.”

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the number

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## BREAKING BARRIERS WITH TWO-YEAR DEGREES

Removing the barriers to education is the only way to pave a path to it, and that's just what a growing number of two-year colleges are doing with innovative programs designed to help disadvantaged students earn degrees.

Built as cohort models with small class sizes, these programs provide the same rigor of courses as traditional colleges as well as the opportunity for students to continue their education at the larger four-year university they're associated with once they earn their associate degree. They also offer low tuition rates that leave students paying close to nothing per academic year, once state grants, Pell Grants and scholarships are awarded.

But the benefits don't end there.

Given that so many of these students have no choice but to work while attending school, these programs are designed with flexible schedules and amenities that stretch

beyond what most two-year colleges offer. Many of them provide free meals and books, transportation resources, and in some cases, housing, thanks to philanthropic endowments. Most have advisers dedicated to helping students find paid internships while enrolled in school and jobs once they graduate — or help them continue their education at a four-year university.

In 2015, the Arrupe College of Loyola University Chicago was among the first to offer one of these programs. It launched with the mission of providing a liberal arts education to local students who would normally not find themselves on the college track. "We are laser-focused on a group of students that most schools don't look to recruit," says Father Thomas Neitzke, the dean of Arrupe College. Most of the students in the program are Latino or Black, and in some cases, undocumented.

While Arrupe is credited with being among the first, many other schools have launched similar programs in recent years, including



Arrupe College of Loyola University Chicago Dean Father Thomas Neitzke and students

Dougherty Family College at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis; Fairfield Bellarmine at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Conn.; the ADVANCE program at Northern Virginia Community College in partnership with George Mason University in Virginia; and the soon-to-open Messina College at Boston College.

According to Neitzke, about 50 percent of Arrupe College

students complete the two-year program and 72 percent of those go on to four-year universities. For students who continue their studies at Arrupe's sister school, Loyola University, the graduation rate rises to 91 percent.

Compared with community colleges nationwide, where nearly half of the students drop out within a year and only about 40 percent finish within

six years, Arrupe's success is notable.

"The (two-year) model isn't cheap," says Neitzke. "But with it, we're saying that we believe in educating these students and we will do what we can to eliminate the barriers that exist because diversity and inclusion is an important mission."

— Ana Pelayo Connery

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of students enrolling in HBCUs and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) is skyrocketing even as enrollment across the board is in record decline. Similar to HBCUs, HSIs are institutions making a concerted effort to attract Latino students. Today, according to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), two out of every three Latino undergraduate students attend an HSI where full-time Latino student enrollment is at least 15 percent. HSIs are also home to more Black students than all of the HBCUs combined according to HACU.

"I didn't know about HSIs when I applied to college, but I wish I had," Hipps says. "Campus culture is a huge consideration for students of color when deciding where to attend college. A big concern among my peers is the microaggressions we experience when we're one of the only."

### BARRIERS TO COLLEGE

Even as college attendance among Latino students has jumped by nearly 50 percent since 2010, in part because of a surge in the Latino population and the rise of HSIs, the attendance rate of Black students has plummeted more than 13 percent. A recent Gallup study on behalf of the Lumina Foundation found that cost and discrimination are the most frequently cited obstacles to obtaining a college education for students of color. For those who do enroll, financial barriers such as the need to work impact their ability to stay enrolled. Black and Latino students are more likely than any other group to work full time or have family caregiving responsibilities, which can make it difficult to succeed in college.

The financial burden continues even

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Spelman alum Dorothy Lopez, left, and student Nia Hipps

PROVIDED BY NIA HIPPS

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Arrupe College of Loyola University  
Chicago graduate Paloma Lozano

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for students who earn degrees. Students of color graduate, on average, with more debt than their white counterparts.

Experts say that's one reason why community colleges, where the costs are lower and schedules are more flexible, are so attractive.

"Community colleges provide financially attainable options and flexibility — plus, articulation agreements with larger four-year universities can make the prospect of transferring to a larger school easier," says Shereem Herndon-Brown, co-author of *The Black Family's Guide to College Admissions*.

As a result, students are moving beyond where they can get an education to where they can be appreciated without feeling like an impostor. "They're looking

for places where they will be valued," Herndon-Brown says.

#### FUTURE OUTLOOK FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR

In June, the Supreme Court, in a landmark case, struck down affirmative action admissions policies used by Harvard College and the University of North Carolina to diversify their campuses, a decision that will directly affect students of color in higher education. At the same time, several states are pushing back against diversity programs at public universities. Whatever happens with these movements, the rise of attendance at HBCUs and HSIs sends a signal to predominantly white schools that students of color are looking for institutions

that are intentional about the students they attract and how they serve them. "It's important to be both mission-driven and mission-executing with students of color, and there are many institutions that know they need to do a better job of that," Herndon-Brown says.

Schools that foster diverse environments and work to minimize enrollment gaps can help create an educated and equitable society so long as they're willing to serve all students, rather than just those that fit in a box. "I'd love to see more colleges and universities speaking to high school diversity clubs, and maybe bringing students of color to talk about their experiences," Hipps says. "At the end of the day, when you apply to college, you just want to feel wanted."