

Characteristics of African-American Graduates of Eastern Shore Community College in Spring 2006



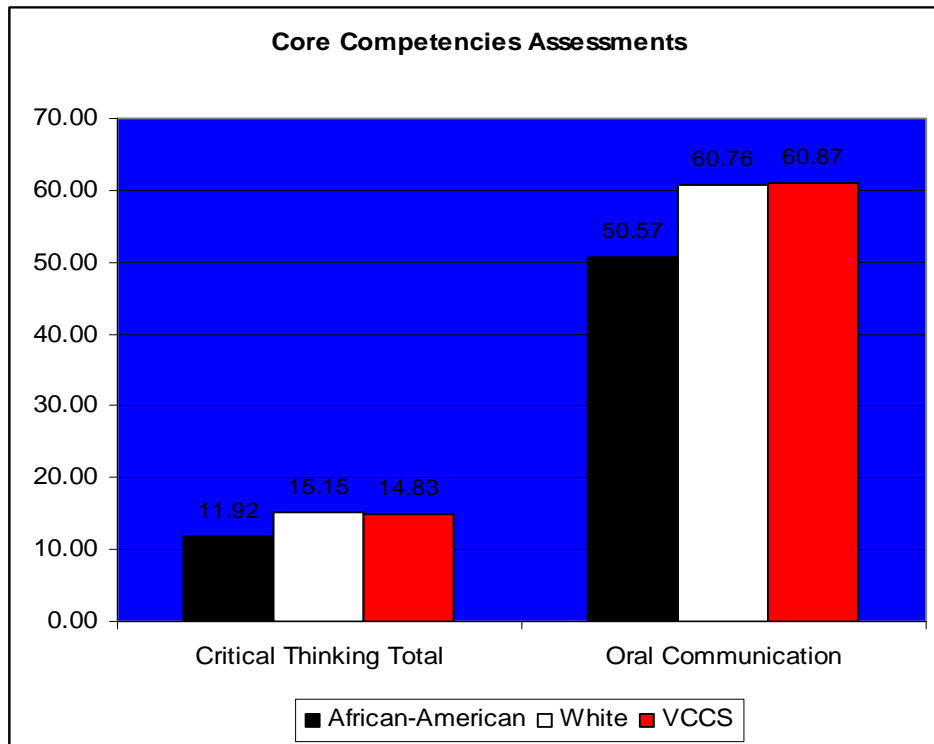
Office of Research, Planning and Assessment
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Overview

In April of 2006, all degree-seeking students applying for spring graduation participated in the Critical Thinking and Oral Communications assessment tests as part of the Virginia Community College System initiative to assess Core Competencies. The purpose of these assessments is to provide evidence of obtainment of general education skills to various external stakeholders and to provide feedback about performance of students to be used for improvement of student learning. Seventy percent of the students tested were female, sixty-one percent were White, and fifty-eight percent were under age 30. This demographic profile closely approximates the general student body at Eastern Shore Community College.

One important finding of the assessment is that graduates that are African-American scored significantly lower than both the Virginia Community College System average and their White counterparts at Eastern Shore Community College. The purpose of this report is to describe characteristics and attitudes of our African-American graduates that may help in defining strategies to improve their learning experience at Eastern Shore Community College. It provides a brief review of the literature on the influence of race on academic achievement, and describes how the African-American graduates response to graduate exit survey questions differ from the responses of White graduates.

Figure 1 - Assessment Test Scores of ESCC graduates by Race



Background

For decades, researchers have pointed to the important influence that race plays in educational attainment. Analyses conducted in the 1990's of the National Study of Student Learning data found that African-American students made significantly smaller gains in critical thinking through the first and third years of college than did White students, even when statistical controls were in place for such factors as pre-college critical thinking level, academic motivation, socioeconomic status, sex, institutional selectivity, total credit hours completed, study effort, patterns of coursework taken, work responsibilities, and extensive measures of academic and social involvement (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1994). This study also found that the number of courses taken in the natural sciences and engineering had a stronger positive influence on first-year critical thinking for White students than for African-American students, and for women (verses men). Studying with peers had a net positive effect on first-year critical thinking for African-American students (but negative for White students), and so did fraternity membership. This study also found that engaging in volunteer work had a significantly stronger positive impact for men than women. Another study found that social and academic engagement had stronger positive effects on general cognitive development for students with relatively low SAT scores than for their peers with higher tested academic ability (Carini & Kuh, 2003).

Often studies describe the importance of institutional integration, both academic and social, on minority student success. These studies show that institutional integration is influenced by pre-enrollment attributes of the individual (such as race) combined with his or her experiences within the institutional environment. The student comes to a particular institution with background characteristics which partially determine how the student will relate to the institution's social and academic environment. The more positive the relations, the greater the integration. The greater the integration, the more successful the student is likely to be. A fairly extensive body of research exists that indicates that historically Black colleges provide a social-psychological climate that results in measurable advantages over predominately White institutions for African-American students. Studies show that the level of effort and involvement in such activities as interaction with faculty, library use, interactions with peers, writing experiences, and course learning all increase for African-American students attending historically Black colleges compared to predominately White institutions. African-American students attending HBCs scored significantly higher on standardized reading comprehension and writing skill tests than their counterparts attending PWIs. Similar results are found when student learning is measured by self-reports of educational attainment. Other studies have shown that ethnic-racial student organizations, groups, or theme houses have positive effects on the adjustment and persistence of African-American students in PWIs.

Perceived racial discrimination within the college environment has also been shown to produce statistically significant and negative impacts on the self-

reported gains of African-American students in quantitative skills, analytical thinking, and understanding of the fine arts. College administrators play an important role in influencing African-American student perceptions of campus climate. Studies show that African-American student persistence is affected by friendly and courteous administrators; effective communication of institutional rules and expectations, fair enforcement of rules, and involvement of students in decision making; support and encouragement from administrators; supportive academic counselors; and administrators who encourage a hospitable racial climate.

Research on the influence of race conducted in the 1990's supports earlier studies. Stampen and Cabrera (1988) found that race was the second most powerful predictor of student success in college, exceeded only by grades in high school. This finding supported Peng's (1977) conclusion that high school grades are more important than placement test scores, and that ethnic group is also important after controlling for socioeconomic status and sex.

Research also indicates that students from lower socioeconomic status families have a more difficult time in college than do students from higher status families, even when intelligence is controlled for (Sewell & Shah, 1967; Porter, 1990). Students who have difficulty in college come from families whose parents are less educated (Chase, 1970); less urban (Tinto, 1975); less affluent (Eckland, 1965); and who have lower expectations for their children's further education (Hackman & Dysinger, 1970).

Porter (1990) also found clear differences in socioeconomic status by ethnic group. About two-thirds of the African-American students attending college are from families in the lower half of the socioeconomic status range. Less than one third of White students fall within this range. In the lowest socioeconomic status quartile, the percentage of African-American students is more than four times that of Whites (43.2% of African-Americans as opposed to 9.7% of Whites).

ESCC Student Characteristics

The following tables compare spring 2006 graduates of Eastern Shore Community College by race. Sixty-six graduates provided information on race, 26 were African-American and 40 were White. Twenty-one (80%) of the African-American students were female (62% of White graduates were female). Eighty-five percent listed their objective as obtaining an Associate degree. African-American graduates scored significantly lower on the pre-algebra, reading, and writing placement tests than White graduates, and achieved a lower mean GPA.

Table 1 - Program by Race

	African-American	White
Business Management	19%	3%
Electronics	19%	3%

	African-American	White
Business Administration	19%	31%
Administrative Support Technology	12%	10%
General Studies	12%	18%
Nursing	8%	0%
Education	8%	23%
Early Childhood Education	4%	8%
Science	0%	5%

Figure 2 - Placement Test Scores by Race

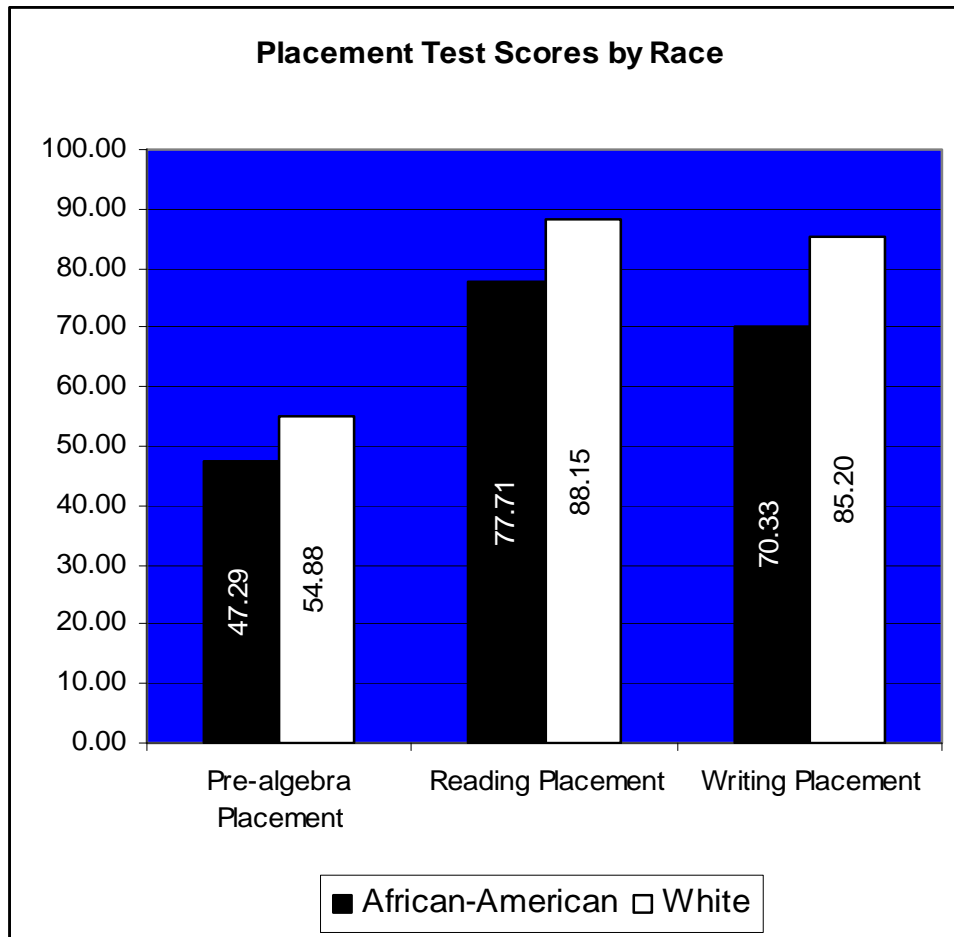
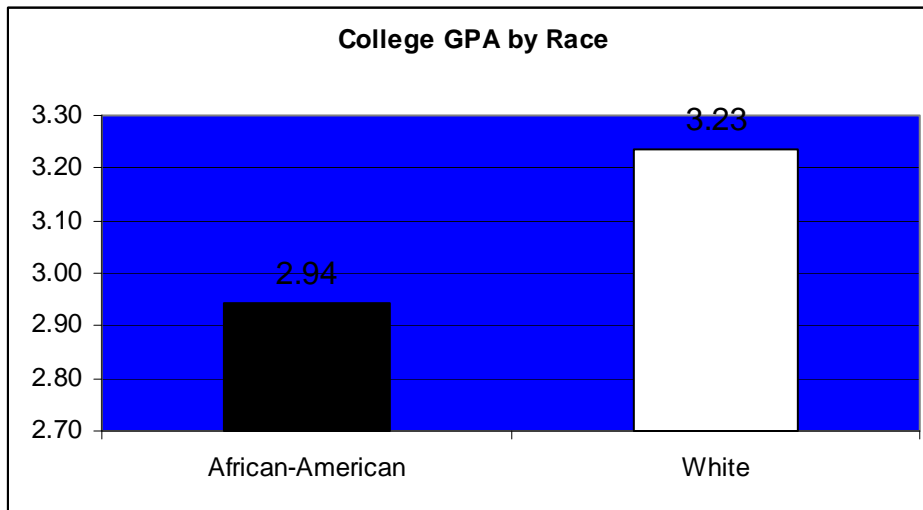
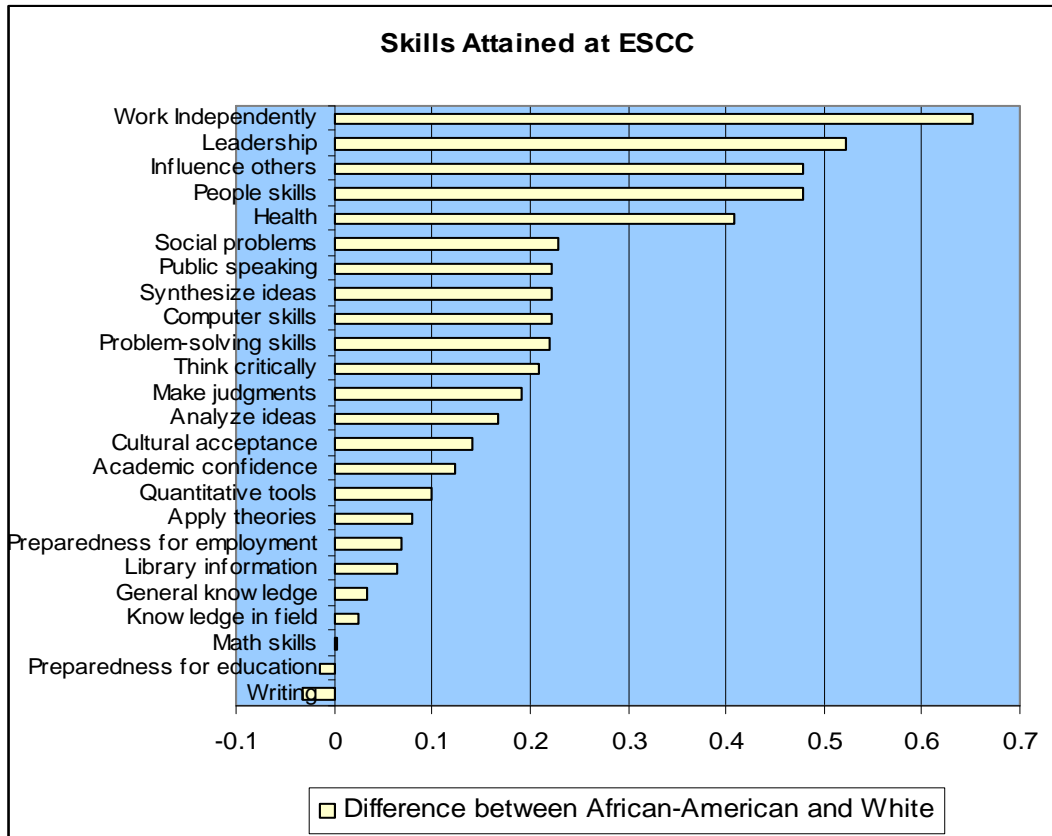


Figure 3 - College GPA by Race



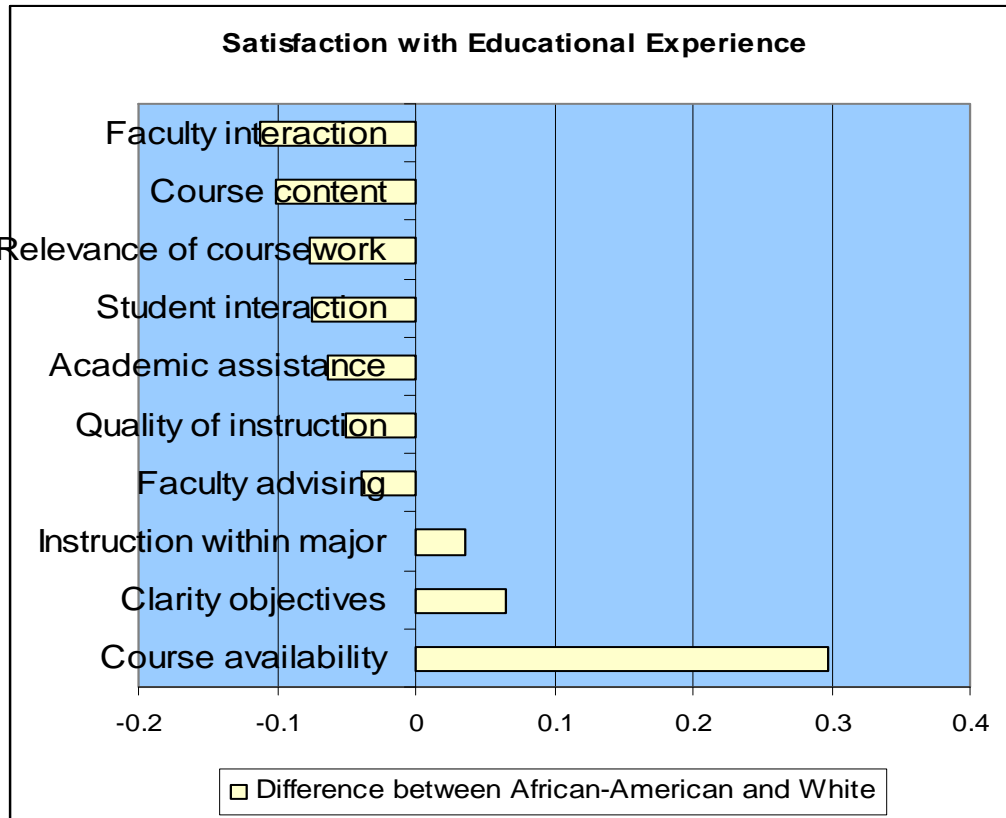
General Knowledge and Skills Attained While Attending Eastern Shore Community College

In addition to the critical thinking and oral communication assessments, graduates were asked to respond to a graduate survey. The purpose of this survey was to obtain the views of all graduating degree students on their experiences at Eastern Shore Community College. Students answered questions pertaining to their educational objectives, general knowledge and skills obtained while attending ESCC, the quality of their academic experience, their satisfaction with campus services and facilities, and their future plans. Graduates were asked to compare the general knowledge and skills after attending ESCC compared to skills they possessed before entering ESCC on a scale of 1-5 with 5=Much Stronger, 4=Stronger, 3=No Change, 2=Weaker, 1=Much Weaker. The figure below shows the difference in mean response given by African-American students from their White counterparts. A bar on the positive side of the graph indicates that mean response of African-American students was more positive than the comparison group, white students. In every category except math skills, preparedness for education, and writing skills African-American students self-reported knowledge and skill attainment while at ESCC was greater than that reported by White students. The good news is that in most categories African-American students feel that they are growing as a result of their experiences here at Eastern Shore Community College.



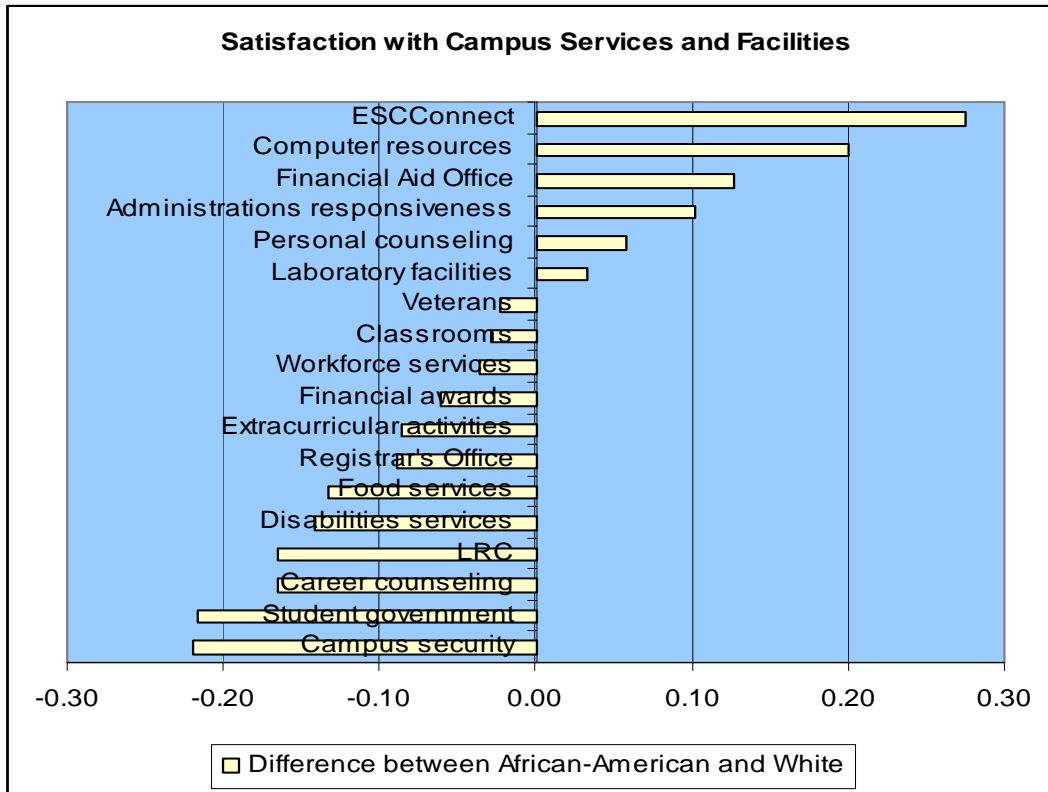
Graduate Satisfaction with Academic Experience at Eastern Shore Community College

Graduates were also asked to indicate on a scale of 1-4, with 4=Very Satisfied, 3=Generally Satisfied, 2=Generally Dissatisfied, 1=Very Dissatisfied how satisfied they were with their educational experiences at Eastern Shore Community College. In each of the following areas, the mean response of African-American students indicated lower satisfaction than White students: The quality of faculty advising, the quality of the interaction they had with faculty members, the quality of the interaction they had with other students, the quality of tutorial help or other academic assistance, the overall quality of instruction, the relevance of their coursework, and the quality of course content.



Graduate Satisfaction with Campus Services and Facilities

When asked to rate their satisfaction with campus services on a scale of 1-4 with 4=Very Satisfied, 3=Generally Satisfied, 2=Generally Dissatisfied, 1=Very Dissatisfied, African-American students indicated that they were less satisfied than White students with the classrooms, the learning resources center, campus security, career counseling and placement, the financial aid awards they received, the food services, the Registrar's office, services for students with disabilities, Workforce Investment Act Services, services for veterans, opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities (e.g., speakers, clubs, cultural offerings), and opportunities to participate in student government.



Educational Participation – Student Effort and Involvement

Students were asked to describe how often they participated in several activities as a measure of their effort and involvement at ESCC. African-American students indicated lower levels of involvement in the following areas: discussing course contents with faculty outside of class, using the Internet for academic research or homework, reading books or articles about their major beyond what was assigned in class, participating in extracurricular activities offered at ESCC, participating in volunteer work, feeling that they were actively involved as a student at ESCC. They also gave ESCC a lower “overall rating” than did their White counterparts.

Student Effort and Participation

