

"We're Gonna Make It." -- The Recruitment, Retention

Editors' Note: In the September 17 issue of Black Ink, Debbie Baker began her two part story dealing with the problems African-American students have dealt with while attempting to enter and graduate from the University of North Carolina. In the first part of this article, Baker examined the problems regarding minority entrance into the university from Pauli Murray to present day. In this issue, Baker looks at what happens to black students when they get here and how hard it is for them to graduate.

By Debbie Baker
Staff

Slamming the door to opportunity —Black retention/graduation rates

The UNC-Chapel Hill administration may say that it is committed to the recruitment and enrollment of black students, but the retention and graduation rates tell another story.

"I think the University has been saying the right things in its public pronouncements," said Harold Woodard, assistant dean in the College of Arts and Sciences. However, when you really look at the situation, much more needs to be done."

That's the gospel truth.

As of Fall 1989, there were 13,456 undergraduates and 1,475 of them were black students at UNC-CH. Black undergraduates com-



promise 9.5 percent of the University's population. Of the approximately six million people in N.C., there are 1,318,857 blacks, making them the largest minority group in the state.

During the 1988-89 school term, 40 percent of African-American freshmen had grade point averages below 2.0 on a 4 point scale. Almost half of black freshmen were producing less than average work, although the university requires students to complete 120 hours of academic course work with a 2.0 grade point average or better to graduate.

"I believe the administration articulates that it is committed to helping black students," said Dean Fuse-Hall. "But with statistics like these it must develop a systemized mechanism for obtaining those goals—articulation doesn't mean a whole lot at this point."

Approximately 31 percent of black students graduate in four years from UNC-CH based on statistics from 1984-88. White students in the same class graduated at a rate of 61 percent after four years. On the average, one half of black students graduate with a bachelor's degree after five years, while the same was true for more than three-fourths of white students.

"Across the country, some universities have gone to five-year undergraduate programs," Dean Fuse-Hall said. "What happens is that we (African-American) have begun to buy into that mentality because people tell us we're not talented enough to graduate in four years."

What Accounts for the Gap

A widening gap obviously exists between the graduation rates of black and white students at UNC. All students should be able to work towards an undergraduate degree at relatively the same rate, if everything is equal.

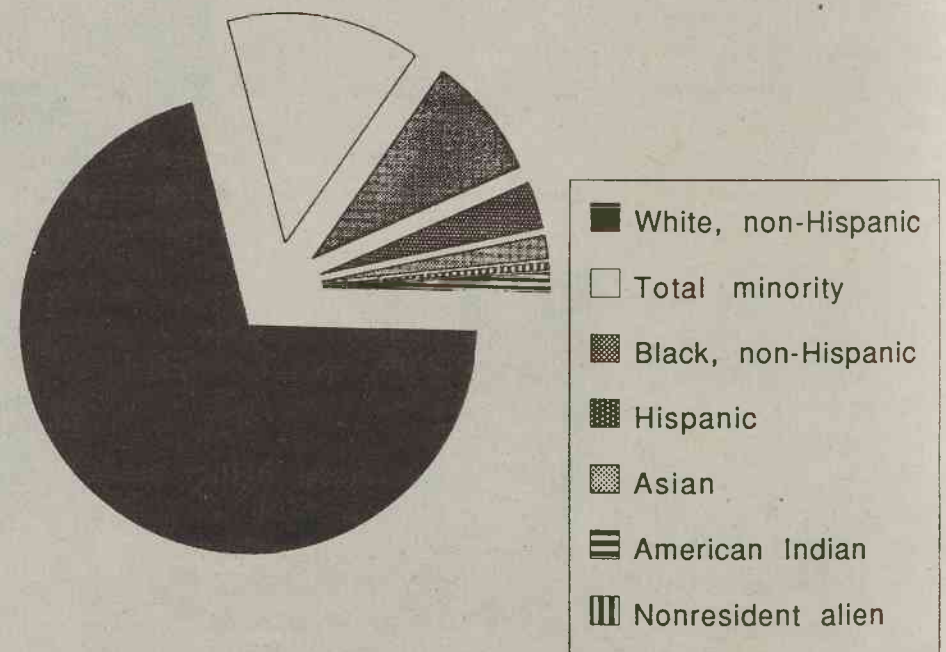
An analysis of recent trends, seem to indicate several reasons which attempt to explain the gap that exist between black and white retention and graduation rates.

Economics

Economics may play the largest role in determining whether black students stay at this University and graduate. UNC has been labeled a bargain because of its relatively low tuition. For the 1990-91 academic year, the estimated cost to attend the University is \$5,910 for an in-state student living on campus.

"Five thousand dollars doesn't seem like a whole lot

Undergraduate Enrollment In Higher Education By Race/Ethnicity
Biennially, Fall 1976 To Fall 1986



of money, but it may be to a family that earns \$16,000 a year and has two or three more kids," Dr. Cannon said. "There are kids who can't afford to attend here, but meanwhile the University is building. But no one wants to deal with that."

Dean Fuse-Hall said black families historically have not accumulated enough money to provide for a student's education and pay for the family's living expenses.

"Most black families cannot withstand a major crisis in their lives," Fuse-Hall said. "If in a family, a parent dies or is ill for a long period of time, a student may have to withdraw from the university in order to help the family."

The University's Office of Scholarships and Student Aid, located in Vance Hall, may relieve some of the financial burden placed on black students and their families. The office distributes state and federal funds to over 7,000 University students each year. The office distributes several types of grants or scholarships designated for minority students. Many needy black undergraduate students receive Minority Presence Grants each year. Presence grants are designed to encourage black students to enroll at UNC even if they come from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds.

Students wishing to be considered for aid must complete a financial aid form each year. Meeting the March 1 deadline is important to help needy students receive the best financial aid packets, said Stuart Bethune, associate director of student management in the office.

"For students who apply on time, we award more than half of their need in grants and schol-

arships. If that student happens to be black, then we'll give them more than 60 percent of their award in grants and scholarships."

Evidently, it is not enough.

Bad Advising/Misinformation

A second factor which seems to contribute to low black graduation rates is misinformation and inadequate college advising. UNC's college advising system has been criticized because some advisers misinform students about perspectives and academic eligibility. Due to UNC's complex graduation requirements, students need professionals who can help them choose the right courses. Sometimes, all the advising students get is from upperclassmen and the major's manual. Advising is crucial during the freshman year as students make choices which they must live with for the rest of their stay at UNC.

Bobbi Owen, associate dean of academic services, says that overall, UNC's advising system is a good one.

"I believe that General College advisers are doing a good job, but like everyone else they make mistakes."

Sure they do.

Sometimes students are assigned to advisers who know nothing about the major they plan to pursue. Business administration is one of the most popular majors for black students and the number of business advisers is limited. Consequently, a student may be assigned to an adviser who is not in the business school. If an adviser knows nothing about a student's major, then he or she should refer that student to someone who does. Besides that, each adviser should at least