

Profiling Colleges and States that Improved Their Graduation Rates

Idea for Future Research

By James Sly

The literature on higher education has generally focused on studying which policies successfully increase college enrollment, while less attention has been given to understanding how to increase college graduation rates. This is particularly surprising since I have heard of several colleges that have increased their 4 year graduation rates substantially over time, like the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities campus (45 percentage points), Arizona State University (20 percentage points), and the University of Texas – Austin (15 percentage points), but I can find little discussion of how they managed to pull this off, apart from a few cursory sentences in the media. At the same time, when you look at the state level, many states have dramatically increased their college graduation rates like Idaho, Washington, Utah, Arizona, and New Hampshire among others but I have little idea how they managed to accomplish those goals as well. Ideally, I would like to team up with a journalist to profile these big state colleges who successfully increased their 4 year graduation rate to find out what initiatives they undertook that turned out to be successful, while also doing an in depth analysis of those states who raised their graduation rates to find out what their policy secrets were as well. Perhaps some strategies might not make sense to other colleges or states across the country, but some strategies very well could, but we will not really know until we find out how they pulled off this educational success story, so I do think it makes sense to pursue this line of research.