



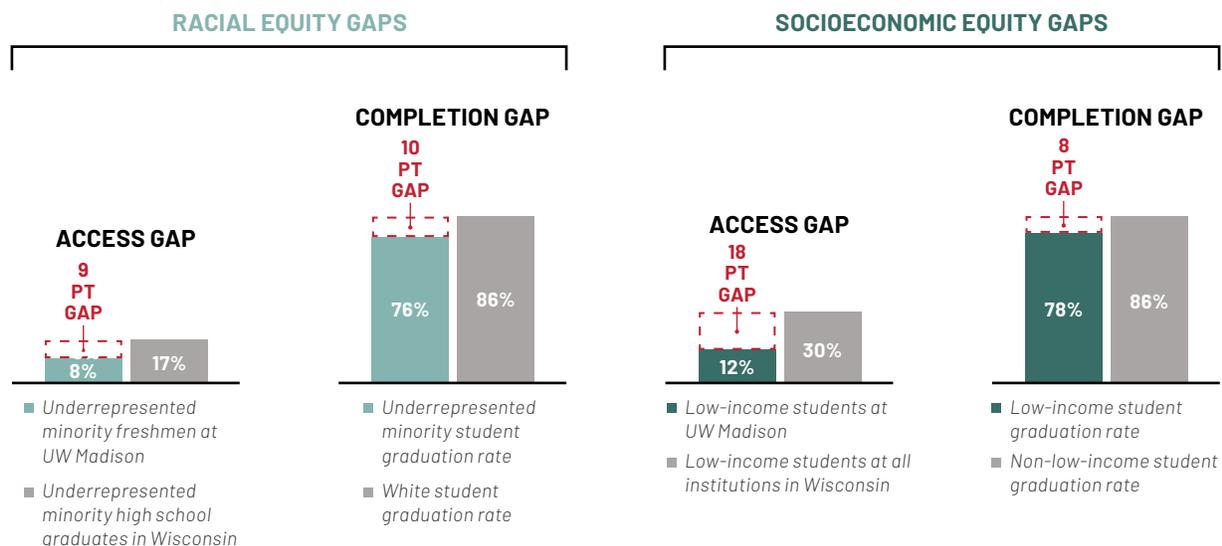
# Equity Snapshot

# University of Wisconsin – Madison

Public flagship universities were established with a mission to provide an excellent education to their states’ residents and are therefore well-positioned to enhance social and economic mobility within their states. Yet in many cases, too few low-income students and students of color have access to these elite colleges and the opportunities they provide. This analysis of racial and socioeconomic equity at the University of Wisconsin – Madison (UW Madison) finds large and growing gaps in college access, as well as troubling gaps in college completion, by race and socioeconomic status (Figure 1). To serve as a catalyst for mobility and equity in Wisconsin, UW Madison must do a better job enrolling and graduating low-income students’ and students of color.

## EQUITY AT A GLANCE

**Figure 1.** Racial and Socioeconomic Equity Gaps in Access and Completion at UW Madison, 2016



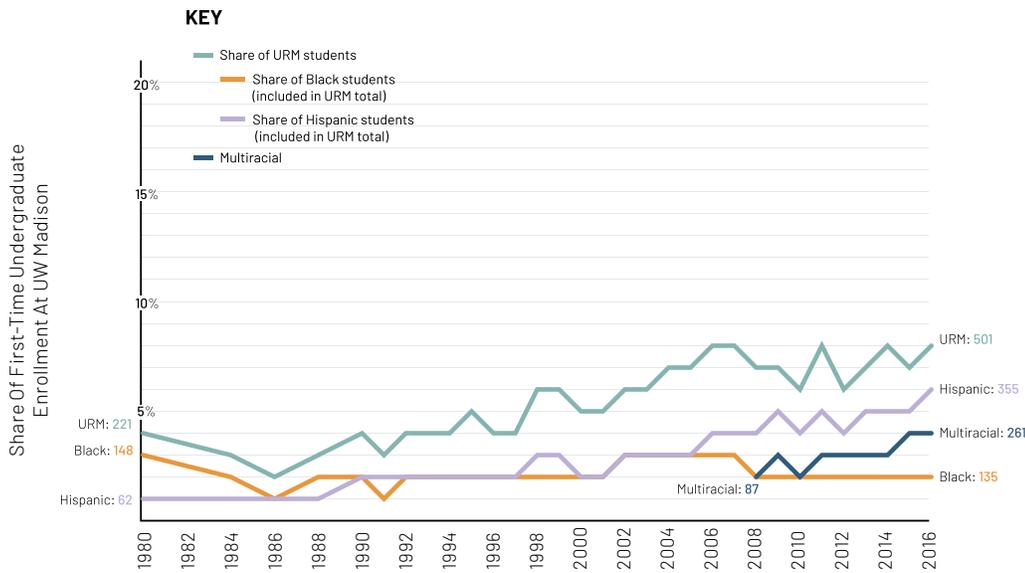
Source: Racial equity gaps: IHEP analysis of first-time, full- and part-time undergraduate fall enrollment, 2016 IPEDS data and public high school graduates 2015–16 Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) data retrieved from <https://knocking.wiche.edu/data/>; IHEP analysis of first-time, full-time undergraduate six-year graduation rate by race/ethnicity, 2016 IPEDS data. Socioeconomic equity gaps: IHEP analysis of first-time, full-time undergraduates receiving Pell Grants at UW Madison and at public, private not-for-profit, and for-profit two- and four-year Title IV participating institutions in Wisconsin, 2015–16 IPEDS data; IHEP analysis of first-time, full-time undergraduate six-year graduation rate by Pell receipt, 2016 IPEDS data.

## WHO HAS ACCESS TO UW MADISON?

**RACIAL EQUITY:** More students of color attend UW Madison today than 30 years ago, but Black and Hispanic students are nonetheless more underrepresented compared with the state population than they were 15 years ago. Between 1980 and 2016, the number of underrepresented minority students at UW Madison doubled (Figure 2). Enrollments for Hispanic students increased nearly six-fold during this time, but enrollments for Black students decreased slightly. See sidebox, “Who are Underrepresented Minority Students?”

UW Madison’s enrollment of underrepresented minority students has failed to keep pace with the growing racial/ethnic diversity in the state. Since 2001, racial gaps between the flagship’s freshmen class and the state’s high school graduates increased to 9 percentage points (Figure 3).

Black students are especially underrepresented at UW Madison.<sup>2</sup> While 8 percent of high school graduates in Wisconsin were Black in spring 2016, just 2 percent of UW Madison’s freshmen class (fewer than 150 students) were Black that fall (Figure 3). Despite a growing proportion of Black high school graduates in Wisconsin, the flagship’s enrollment of Black students has remained stagnant—perpetuating the status quo.



**Figure 2.** Change in Racial/Ethnic Diversity at UW Madison, 1980–2016

Source: IHEP analysis of first-time, full- and part-time undergraduate fall enrollment, 1980–2016 IPEDS data. Note: Cohorts of American Indian/Alaska Native students are too small and therefore not shown separately. However, American Indian/Alaska Native students are included in the underrepresented minority (URM) category.

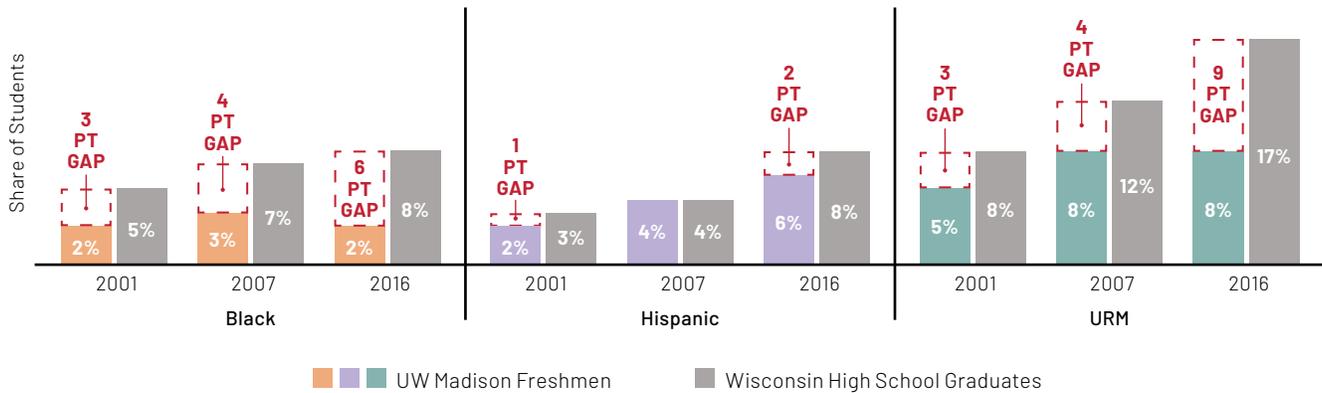
### Who are Underrepresented Minority Students?

In this analysis, underrepresented minority (URM) students or students of color refers to Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native students. Other populations, such as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, Southeast Asian Americans, and other underserved Asian students, also are underrepresented within higher education and deserve attention.<sup>3</sup> However, current data are insufficient to measure access and completion for these critical populations over time.

Also, due to small population sizes and to protect students’ anonymity, this paper includes American Indian/Alaska Native students as part of the collective underrepresented minority group but does not discuss or depict them on their own. In 2016, American Indian/Alaska Native students comprised approximately 1 percent of undergraduates in the United States.<sup>4</sup> And just 40 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native students at public four-year colleges earned a degree within six years in 2014, compared with 61 percent of White students.<sup>5</sup>

We urge institutions to examine trends for all underrepresented groups to develop recruitment and intervention strategies targeted to their needs.

**Figure 3.** Change in Racial/Ethnic Gaps Between Wisconsin High School Graduates and UW Madison Undergraduates, 2001, 2007, and 2016



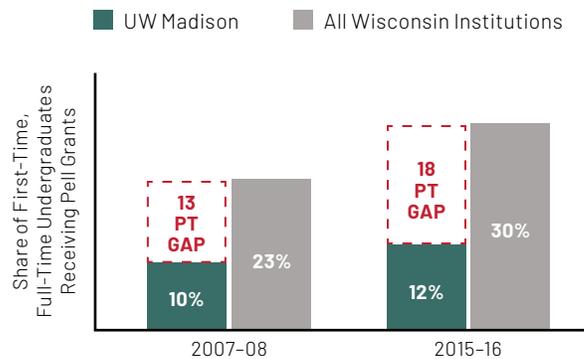
Source: IHEP analysis of first-time, full- and part-time undergraduate fall enrollment, 2001-16 IPEDS data and public high school graduates 2000-01 (earliest available data) through 2014-15 Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) data retrieved from <https://knocking.wiche.edu/data/>. 2000-01 through 2012-13 data on high school graduates are based on the Common Core of Data (CCD), and 2013-14 through 2015-16 high school graduate data are WICHE projections. Note: IPEDS cohorts of American Indian/Alaska Native students are too small and therefore not shown separately. However, American Indian/Alaska Native students are included in the underrepresented minority (URM) category.

**SOCIOECONOMIC EQUITY:** UW Madison enrolls more low-income students today than it did a decade ago, but these increases have not kept pace with growing enrollments of low-income college students in Wisconsin overall. UW Madison enrolls low-income students at less than half the rate of all Wisconsin colleges (12 percent compared with 30 percent; Figure 4).



**NET PRICE:** Price is one barrier to college access for low-income students. In 2015-16, the lowest income in-state students at UW Madison—those with family incomes of \$30,000 or less—paid about \$7,700 in college expenses after accounting for grant aid. This means students with the fewest resources at UW Madison must devote 25 percent or more of their income to college costs.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 4.** Change in Socioeconomic Gaps between UW Madison and All Wisconsin Colleges, 2007-08 and 2015-16



Source: IHEP analysis of first-time, full-time undergraduates receiving Pell Grants at UW Madison and at all public, private not-for-profit, and for-profit two- and four-year Title IV participating institutions in Wisconsin, 2007-08 to 2015-16 IPEDS data.

## WHO SUCCEEDS AT UW MADISON?

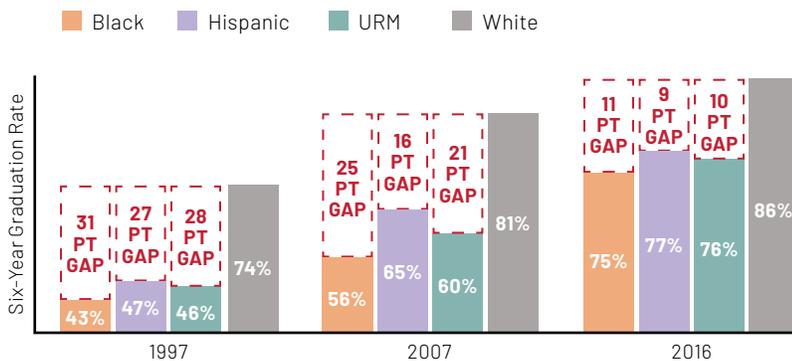
**RACIAL EQUITY:** UW Madison has made impressive gains in graduation rates for all students, especially students of color. Yet the flagship must continue to improve completion rates for underrepresented minority students to close persistent equity gaps. Over the last two decades, UW Madison narrowed graduation-rate gaps between underrepresented minority and White students by 18 percentage points, largely due to increased graduation rates for Black and Hispanic students (Figure 5).

Despite these noteworthy improvements, troubling graduation-rate gaps remain. In 2016, UW Madison graduated underrepresented minority students at a rate 10 percentage points lower than White students (Figure 5).

The flagship must continue working to improve completion rates for students of color but do so without increasing admissions requirements that could exclude students poised to benefit from a UW Madison education. Indeed, increasing selectivity likely contributed to UW Madison’s graduation-rate gains over the past several decades. The flagship became more selective, increasing the median SAT/ACT scores of incoming students by approximately 7 percent between 2002 and 2016.<sup>7</sup> This trend, however, is at odds with the need to enhance socioeconomic and racial diversity.<sup>8</sup>



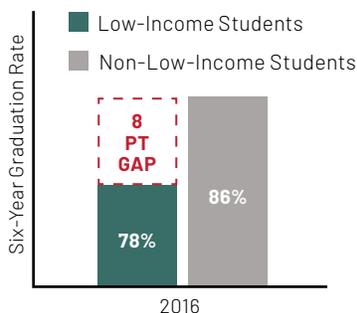
**OUT-OF-STATE ENROLLMENT:** Many flagships have increased out-of-state enrollments, a practice that can hurt socioeconomic or racial diversity.<sup>9</sup> In 2016, 43 percent of first-time, full-time undergraduates at UW Madison were from out-of-state, an increase of 15 percentage points over the last 30 years. Ten percent of these out-of-state students were from Minnesota—a state with which Wisconsin has an in-state tuition reciprocity agreement.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 5.** Graduation-Rate Gaps by Race/Ethnicity at UW Madison, 1997, 2007, 2016

Source: IHEP analysis of first-time, full-time undergraduate six-year graduation rate by race/ethnicity, 1997–2016 IPEDS data. Note: Cohorts of American Indian/Alaska Native students are too small and therefore not shown separately. However, American Indian/Alaska Native students are included in the underrepresented minority (URM) category.

**SOCIOECONOMIC EQUITY:** Low-income students have a lower chance of graduating from UW Madison than their higher-income peers. In 2016, UW Madison graduated 78 percent of low-income students within six years compared with 86 percent of non-low-income students (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Graduation-Rate Gap by Socioeconomic Status at UW Madison, 2016

Source: IHEP analysis of first-time, full-time undergraduate six-year graduation rate by Pell receipt, 2016 IPEDS data. Data on graduation rates for low-income students became available in 2016, allowing for analysis of socioeconomic gaps in student success at individual institutions.

## EQUITY-MINDED POLICIES AT UW MADISON

### What institutions do matters.

Colleges and universities must commit to increasing racial and economic diversity and supporting students of color and low-income students through to completion. That commitment requires unwavering leadership, alongside a solid financial investment. That institutional commitment plays out in a number of ways, including through university policies, which shape the opportunities available to low-income students and students of color. Public flagship institutions should design admissions and financial aid policies that encourage historically underrepresented students to gain access and succeed at high levels. The checklist below includes examples of policies that can encourage, or impede, enrollment and success for low-income students and students of color. Interviews with Great Lakes flagship administrators provided context on the motivations behind enacting these policies and how they impact equity on campus.<sup>11</sup>

While designing and implementing the policies below can open more opportunities for students of color and low-income students, this list is illustrative—not exhaustive. Furthermore, fully closing gaps in access and completion is about more than checking a handful of policy boxes. Institutions need consistent leadership that sets equity goals as top institutional priorities. Doing so compels administrators, faculty, and staff to re-examine and question all policies and practices—large and small. Institution-wide policies matter, but so do the day-to-day decisions made and priorities set on a campus. As a public university founded on the principal of providing an excellent education to Wisconsinites, UW Madison has a responsibility to examine its policies and practices with the goal of opening doors of opportunity within the state.



### NEED-BASED FINANCIAL AID

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#### **UW Madison awards more than three-quarters of institutional grant aid based on need.**

Low-income students are sensitive to the price of college and financial aid offers. Need-based grant aid helps ease the financial burden of attending college, promote affordability, and narrow access inequities.<sup>12</sup> In the 2015–16 academic year, UW Madison awarded 83 percent of institutional grants (\$41.7 million) based on financial need.<sup>13</sup> In Fall 2018, UW Madison will launch a free tuition program that covers tuition and fees not covered by other gift aid for incoming in-state freshmen and transfer students who come from families with an annual adjusted gross household income of \$56,000 or less.<sup>14</sup>



### EARLY DECISION

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**UW Madison does not accept early decision applications.** Binding early decision policies increase the admissions chances of students who have the preparation and financial means to apply early to only one college and commit to enroll there if admitted, without comparing financial aid packages across multiple institutions. Affluent students are almost twice as likely as low-income students to apply to early decision deadlines, and thus benefit disproportionately from the advantages these policies offer.<sup>15</sup> UW Madison does not offer early decision.<sup>16</sup>



## DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

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**UW Madison considers students' demonstrated interest in the admissions process.**

Institutions that favor applicants who show “demonstrated interest” in the school can disadvantage low-income students. While affluent students have the financial means to demonstrate their interest by visiting college campuses, low-income students are often unable to do so because of the high costs associated with these trips.<sup>17</sup> UW Madison considers “level of applicant interest” in the admission process.<sup>18</sup>



## LEGACY PREFERENCE

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**UW Madison considers legacy status during the admissions process.** Legacy admissions policies that give preference to students with familial ties to the institution can increase admissions chances of the children of alumni, a benefit exclusively available to students with college-educated parents.<sup>19</sup> These policies disadvantage low-income students and students of color, who are more likely than their White and non-low-income peers to be the first in their family to attend college.<sup>20</sup> UW Madison considers “alumni/ae relation” in their application review process.<sup>21</sup>



## INTERACTIONS WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

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**UW Madison has “Banned the Box,”** meaning applicants are not asked to disclose and provide an explanation of past criminal convictions and pending criminal charges.<sup>22</sup> Requiring applicants to check a box disclosing interactions with the criminal justice system, a practice that has not been shown to have any impact on campus safety, disadvantages applicants of color to a larger degree than White students.<sup>23</sup>

## Endnotes

1. Low-income students are those who receive Pell Grants. Eighty-two percent of all Pell recipients have incomes below \$40,000. U.S. Department of Education, 2015-16 Federal Pell Grant Program End-Of-Year Report, Table 71. Retrieved from: <https://www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/2015-2016eoyresearchreports.zip>
2. In 2008, UW Madison began reporting race/ethnicity data for multiracial students in response to changing federal guidelines, but data on the demographics of high school students does not include a multiracial category. Even if all multiracial students in 2016 were counted as Black, however, UW Madison would still be enrolling Black students at a rate lower than their representation in Wisconsin's high school graduating class (6 and 8 percent, respectively).
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9. Burd, S. (2015), The out-of-state student arms race: How public universities use merit aid to recruit nonresident students. *New America*. Retrieved from: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/out-of-state-student-arms-race/>; IHEP analysis of student enrollment by state of residence, 1986-2016 data; Jaquette, O., Curs, B.R., & Posselt, J.R. (2016), Tuition rich, mission poor: Nonresident enrollment growth and the socioeconomic and racial composition of public research universities. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 87(5), 635-673.
10. IHEP analysis of state of residence for first-time degree/certificate seeking undergraduate students, 1986-2016 IPEDS data.
11. Administrators at UW Madison did not respond to multiple requests for an interview. Their perspectives are therefore not reflected in this equity snapshot.
12. Castleman, B.L., & Long, B.T. (2016), Looking beyond enrollment: The causal effect of need-based grants on college access, persistence, and graduation. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 34(4), 1023-1073.
13. IHEP analysis of 2000-16 College InSight data, The Institute for College Access & Success. Retrieved from: <http://college-insight.org>
14. University of Wisconsin-Madison Office of Student Financial Aid. (2018). Bucky's tuition promise. Retrieved from: <https://financialaid.wisc.edu/types-of-aid/tuition-promise/>
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