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First-year Retention Rates of Four-year, Not-for-Profit Colleges and Universities and Institutional Characteristics

Hannah Birky

Abstract

This paper explores the correlations between retention rates and various university characteristics at American four-year, not-for-profit colleges and universities, using data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education System.

The study estimates ordinary least squares regressions and finds that cohort size, average size of student loan, percentage of in-state students, percentage of women in the cohort, and in-state tuition are positively correlated with first-year retention rates, while the percentage of the cohort receiving aid, the percentage receiving loans, percentage of domestic minorities in the cohort, and the percentage doing distance education are negatively correlated with first-year retention rates.

The paper's finding that minorities have lower success rates after the first year reinforces the idea that colleges and universities need to put forth effort to meet the needs of diverse student bodies, especially by making sure that university faculty and staff are adequately representative of the student body.