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# GVSU Program: TRiO: 50 Years is Only a Beginning

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# TRiO: 50 Years is Only a Beginning

By Chad Patton, GVSU Staff

**T**wenty Fourteen marked the 50th year of the Federal TRiO Programs. It was through the passing of its three flagship programs—TRiO Upward Bound (1964), TRiO Educational Talent Search (1965), and TRiO Student Support Services (1968)—that TRiO became a national institution whose mission remains to “provide equal educational opportunities for all U.S. citizens by increasing college readiness and developing higher education aspirations among students from low-income, first-generation college, and ethnic/racial minority backgrounds” (Pitre, & Pitres, 2009, p. 96-97).

TRiO, within the past 50 years, has seen a major transformation since President Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (that which stands as the conception of the programs). For starters, TRiO has grown from a three-program institution to an eight-program institution. Indeed, TRiO has continued to grow based on America’s social needs; whereas its roots derive from two pre-college programs and one college program, TRiO has responded to specific needs dependent upon social necessity. This has included a program for veterans, a program for post baccalaureate students, and an Upward Bound Math-Science program.

These next 50 years, however, will be the most important years throughout the history of TRiO. On the very year that TRiO celebrates its 50th anniversary, minorities are



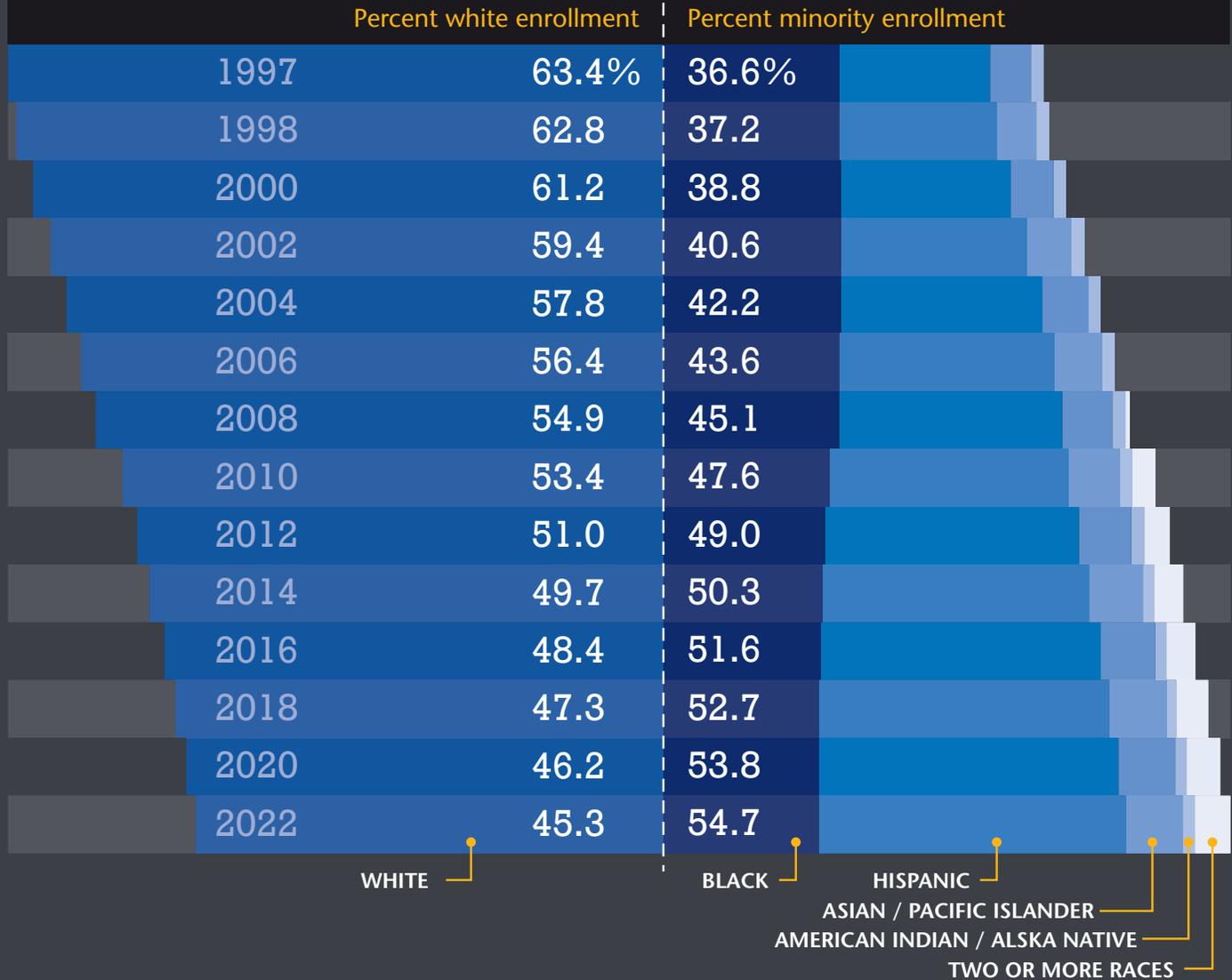
expected to “outnumber [W]hites among the nation’s public school students for the first time” (Krogstad, & Fry, 2014). Compound Krogstad and Fry’s statistics with The United States Census Bureau’s (2012) most recent report that, by 2060, The United States will reach a minority majority. Yet amidst these data that could regulate the future of access for the United States, TRiO programs still struggle with the binaries that have been created by their politicization. Indeed, the above statistics support that TRiO’s second half-century will be just as important (if not, more important) than their first. More than anything, however, it is imperative that TRiO works harder to improve its best practices despite the political binaries that shape its effectiveness in the United States.

## Limited by Binaries

TRiO programs, being government-funded programs, have historically been the topic of political contention. As a result, TRiO programs have been limited by the binary of their effectiveness: either they are effective (Walsh, 2011), or ineffective (Haskins, & Rouse, 2013)—there is no spectrum of in-between. Nonetheless, TRiO programs have proven resilient for their ability to redefine access for underrepresented racial minorities (URMs).

Walsh’s (2011) study contended that TRiO Talent Search and TRiO Upward Bound “can benefit African American and Hispanic students immensely when *properly imple-*

## Public Schools in the United States Projected to be Majority-Minority in 2014



Note: Whites, blacks, Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Prior to 2008, "two or more races" was not an available category. In 2009 and 2009, some students of both Asian origin and Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander origin were included in the two or more races category. In 2010 and 2011, all students of both Asian origin and Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander origin were included in the two or more races category. In 2008, five states reported enrollment counts for students of two or more races. In 2009, 14 states reported enrollment counts for students of two or more races. Source: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. PEW RESEARCH CENTER.

Graph reference:

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/08/18/u-s-public-schools-expected-to-be-majority-minority-starting-this-fall/>

mented" (p. 19). The TRiO pre-college programs have worked tirelessly to improve access for low socioeconomic status (low-SES) students as well as under represented minorities (URMs). There is an important caveat to Walsh's quote, however: that African American and Hispanic students are benefited only when TRiO Programs

are properly implemented. Unfortunately, the binary of effectiveness can, at times, limit the proper implementation of a TRiO program. Those interested in the program's continuation are afraid to point out its flaws in fear of losing funding. On the other hand, those interested in

halting TRiO's funding are afraid to admit that TRiO is even the least bit successful.

A hopeful attitude will see that Walsh's (2011) article positions itself between the two binaries—although it still leans toward effectiveness. It attempts to take a third-party view of TRiO, and critique it at face value. Although TRiO needs more studies like Walsh's, it also needs more studies like Haskins and Rouse's (2013). TRiO must know where it is failing in order for it to attempt to get better. Inasmuch, TRiO needs a clearer understanding of best practices in order to meet the shifting demographic that is expected to arrive by 2060.

## Conclusion

It has become increasingly apparent that the landscape of education is changing at an intensely rapid pace. There is the growing population of underrepresented minorities as well as President Obama's potential measure to make the first two years of higher education free for all United States Citizens. For the past 50 years, TRiO has been working to change this climate, but it also becomes imperative that TRiO changes with the climate. As new needs in education develop, new goals develop as well. TRiO's evolution

will fit those goals if, and only if, an honest dialectic is formed around its effectiveness, and how that very effectiveness can improve.

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LETTER FROM  
THE EDITOR

# Thank You

This issue is a tribute to the amazing students, faculty, staff, and alumni that makes the College so successful. From humble beginnings, the COE is now a leader in education.

*Colleagues* would not be possible without the dedication of a small group of people that has made it an award-winning publication. My heartfelt thanks goes to Lisa Tennant, the designer and illustrator of this issue, who has been working on the magazine for 10 years. Next Paige Leland, a GVSU senior, has been integral in writing and editing for this issue.

There are many writers that contribute to *Colleagues*, but in particular Dr. Roger Wilson has been a constant and excellent feature writer for the magazine. I am immensely grateful for all of his work.

We finish our 50<sup>th</sup> celebration with this issue, but our next issue will reflect on ten years of *Colleagues* as a magazine. If you are interested in writing a piece, please email me at [pelonc@gvsu.edu](mailto:pelonc@gvsu.edu) with your proposal.

Clayton Pelon  
Editor-in-Chief

