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William C. Levin
Bridgewater State College

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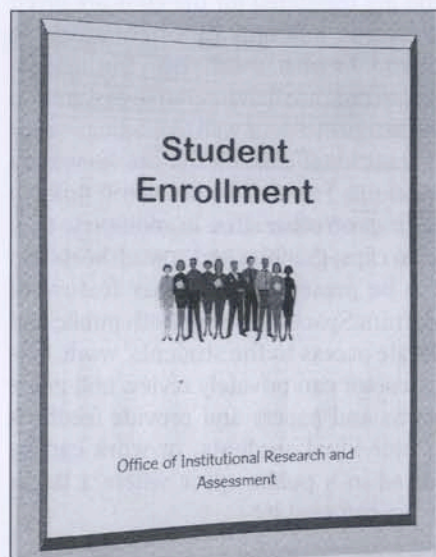
Who is Attending Bridgewater?

William Levin

Bridgewater State College exists to serve the people who go to school there. Over the years the populations of students have changed with the times. The ability to go to a college or university is influenced by dozens of factors such as the wealth of the potential student population, the cost of education, the availability and desirability of jobs and the demand for a college education as qualification for those jobs, availability of housing on or near the campus and the general sense in the community of the value of a college education in terms of money and prestige.

From the point of view of the faculty at a college students can be seen both as individuals and as a collective group. Over the course of their careers at the college we come to know our students as individuals, increasingly understanding their backgrounds, skills and hopes. Any teacher can list the names of students who have been the notable successes and challenges of his or her career. But we also develop a general sense of what the students are like as a group. All too often this broad evaluation takes of the form of generalizations like the belief that "students are not as well prepared as they used to be," that "students are be more career-oriented than ever" or that "we seem to have more older students and students from foreign countries than ever."

We thought it might be useful to provide readers of the *Bridgewater Review* with some solid data about who is attend-



ing Bridgewater State these days. The college supports an Office of Institutional Research and Assessment which, under the direction of Dr. Patricia O'Brien, collects, analyzes and publishes a range of information about the operations of the college. One part of this information focuses on the characteristics of the students who attend. The following data is excerpted from their 1996/1997 report of "Selected Institutional Characteristics: Bridgewater State College." Some of this data is simple description of the characteristics of the college's students while some compares our students with those who have attended in the past or with other college students in the United States.

WHO IS ENROLLED?

To begin with, student enrollment has increased very slightly over the last few years, growing from an enrollment of 5,578 full-time students in 1992 to 5,784 in 1996. The increase is actually somewhat larger when the total number of students on campus (including both full-time and part-time) is counted. Between 1992 and 1996 the increase was about 4 percent, rising from a population of 8,350 to 8,711. So the number of part-time students over those years rose much faster (by 10 percent) than did the number of

full-time students. By contrast, the population of graduate students (combining full and part-time students) has remained pretty much unchanged, averaging about 1,365 for those years. Though there is as yet no way to calculate how many of the undergraduate students at the college have, at one time or another, transferred from other schools, transfer admissions for any given year have been tracked. In an average year between 1992 and 1996 about 750 transfer students are accepted and enroll at Bridgewater. Of those accepted for transfer in 1996, for example, over 62% were female and 35% transferred from community colleges in Massachusetts, roughly comparable to the percent of the freshman class of 1996, 60% of whom were female.

Minority enrollments have increased, rising at a steady rate from 4% in 1992 to 7% in 1996. Most of these minority students are categorized as Black (280 enrolled in 1996), but also include Asian-origin (152), Hispanic-origin (110) and Native American individuals (24). While the College enrolls 104 students from 26 countries outside the United States, more than half (56) are from Japan. Bridgewater is overwhelmingly populated by students from Massachusetts. Over 96% of the students are from inside the state. The average age of full-time enrolled undergraduates has remained steady at age 22 while the average age of part-time enrolled undergraduates has been about 32 years of age.

The freshman class of 1996 had a mean score of 495 on the quantitative portion of the Scholastic Aptitude Tests and a mean score of 509 on the verbal portion. These scores were very much like those for college freshmen in the nation and the state that year. They were, in fact, slightly lower than the national and Massachusetts averages for math, and slightly higher than the national and Massachusetts averages for verbal.

Compared with characteristics of their national peers, BSC freshmen in 1996 were 63% Catholic (compared to 23%

WHEN DO THEY FINISH?

Enrollment by Race and Gender
Fall 1996

	Undergraduate			Graduate			Overall Total
	Male	Female	Total	Men	Women	Total	
Native American	4	16	20	1	3	4	24
Asian *	71	68	139	7	6	13	152
Black *	113	142	255	9	16	25	280
Hispanic *	54	51	105	2	3	5	110
White *	2469	3614	6083	245	739	984	7067
Other/Unknown	307	463	770	92	216	308	1078
Total	3018	4354	7372	356	983	1339	8711

of freshmen in the United States), on average lived 9 miles from BSC (the average distance from college for the nation was 36 miles), 47% of BSC freshmen had mothers who had a high school education or less (38% in the nation had mothers with that level of education) and 8% reported family incomes in excess of \$100,000 a year (15% of the nation's freshmen reported family incomes at that level). In many ways Bridgewater State students are very much like their national peers. They have taken essentially the same distribution of courses in preparation for college and are actually more likely to have had two years of physical science, though their assessments of their own abilities were lower. For example, only 36% of entering freshmen in 1992 rated themselves as "above average" or "in the highest 10%" in their general academic ability. By comparison, 60% of the national sample of entering freshman rated themselves that highly in academic ability. BSC students rated themselves lower on a range of abilities such as math, writing and artistic abilities. In other areas, however, the self-ratings of the Bridgewater sample was much like that of the national sample, though still slightly lower. These areas included creativity, cooperativeness, social self-confidence and popularity and even physical health.

WHAT ARE THEY STUDYING?

As of 1996 the college's undergraduate programs were organized under a School of Education which enrolled 23% of the school's students (N=1986) and a School of Arts and Sciences which enrolled 46% of the school's students (N=4056). The remaining 2,669 students were distributed as 7% who had not yet declared a major (N=592), 11% graduate students in various programs (N=972) and 13% who were not matriculated in the college. In the five years between 1992 and 1996 some majors increased markedly while others have become less popular. For example, within the School of Arts and Sciences, the psychology major increased by almost 56%, going from 499 majors in 1992 to 893 in 1996. The major in art also increased by 60% rising from 125 to 208 majors as did chemical sciences (from 48 to 81 majors), and sociology (from 286 to 436 majors). The largest concentrations of majors, in the areas of education and management sciences, were not so volatile. In 1992 there were 1,644 majors in all the School of Education and by 1992 the number of education majors had increased by 8% to 2,051. Lastly, majors in the areas of management and aviation sciences decreased by 8% from 1,525 in 1992 to 1,246 in 1996.

After World War II it was common to assume that one started a college education right out of high school (excepting soldiers who took advantage of the G.I. Bill) and to take four years to graduate. With the wide range of students who attend college in the 1990's and the great amount of time spent working for money and experience, that is no longer true. At Bridgewater, for example, only 23% of the class that started in 1982 (the 1986 cohort) finished in four years. About 50% took six years to graduate. The pattern held true for the 1990 cohort, 30% graduating in four years while 52% took six years. For those students who started at Bridgewater in 1988 only 21% graduated after four years.

Information like this is, clearly, only a fraction of what we need to know about the Bridgewater State College student. What we learn daily in our classes is still our most important source of information so we can do our best for the students we serve. But it is important to use whatever is available to know more. This information is only a fraction of what Dr. O'Brien has collected for the use of the college community, and it should be evaluated carefully for what it can tell us. How, for example, can we use information from a survey of incoming freshmen? Should we be concerned by those measures that show a lack of confidence and relatively negative sense of self among some of our students? It matters how we balance this data against the experience of our daily lives in the classrooms. ❁