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Title

Should high non-completion rates amongst ethnic minority students be seen as an ethnicity issue? : evidence from a case study of a student cohort from a British university

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Abstract

This paper examines the question of how the high non-completion rates found amongst ethnic minority students in UK higher education should be interpreted. US studies examining the nexus between academic performance, ethnicity and social background have concluded that ethnicity-related performance differences are not just the by-product of social class. This study examines the nature of these linkages in the UK where the composition of the ethnicity mix and the nature of the socioeconomic environment are both markedly different from the US. The paper is based on a detailed case study of a cohort from a UK university that recruits a high proportion of its students from ethnic minority backgrounds. Prima facie evidence is found which questions the assumption that the under-performance of minorities should be treated predominantly as an ethnicity issue. It is found that after controlling for socioeconomic background, minority student non-completion rates are found to be very similar to those of their White peers. Further evidence is also uncovered which suggests

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that in practice there are considerable complexities in the ways in which ethnic differences impact on non-completion rates. From an educational policy perspective, it is argued that more effective results might be obtained if student support initiatives aimed at reducing the non-completion rates among minority student place a greater emphasis on issues relating to their socioeconomic background.

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