Black Student Exploratory Qualitative Research

By blackraspberry

A few notes…

Research objectives: conduct a qualitative research study with Black college-bound and/or current college

students in Indiana and several other select states, who did not or do not intend to apply to Purdue University,

to understand their reasons for not considering or applying to

Purdue University.

Participants: high school and college students, most between the ages of 16-22. The college respondents came from all over

the U.S., with most hailing from the Midwest and South. Roughly half of the college students were from Indiana.
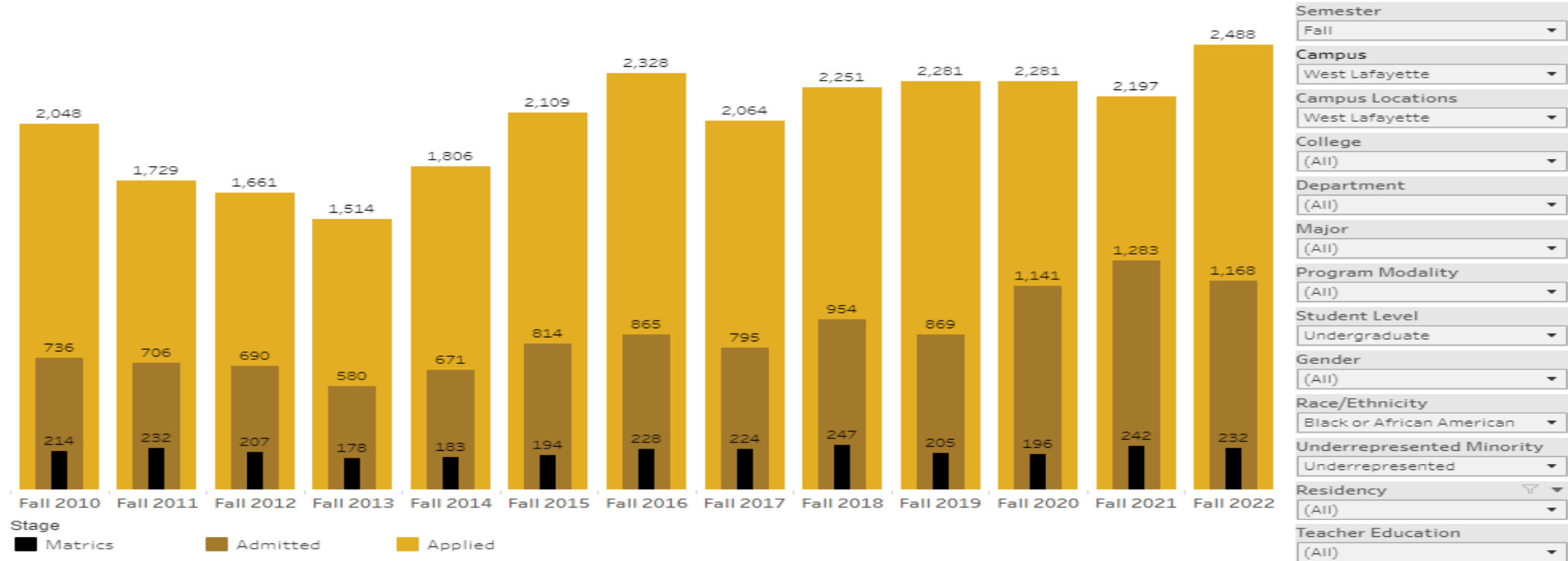
All but two of the high school students reside in Indiana and all attend public school. The types of schools the college students attend vary. While most are enrolled in public universities, several attend private institutions.

The majority of those at private institutions attend PWIs. A few others

attend HBCUs or schools with religious affiliations.

Current Black Enrollment rates

Filtered by: Semester: Fall, Campus: All, College: All, Major: All, Program Modality:All, Student Level: Undergraduate, Gender: All, Race/Ethnicity: Black or African American, Underrepresented Minority: All, Residency: All, Teacher Education: All

Admit/Yield

	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
Admit Rate	35.9%	40.8%	41.5%	38.3%	37.2%	38.6%	37.2%	38.5%	42.4%	38.1%	50.0%	58.4%	46.9%
Yield Rate	29.1%	32.9%	30.0%	30.7%	27.3%	23.8%	26.4%	28.2%	25.9%	23.6%	17.2%	18.9%	19.9%

PURDUE UNIVERSITY.

Race and the Decision-Making Process

Most high school and college students **did not believe race had a positive or negative impact on their application experience**. However, a few did see some positives.

"I have noticed that schools do want to include more Black people in their colleges. I do think that is a great thing, my non-Black [friends] don't need to worry [too] much because pretty much all of my close friends are overachievers, so I am positive that colleges/university will want them anyway." [High School Student]

"I think with me applying to HBCUs, I might have an easier application process and I feel more confident about my choice. These institutions seem to accept some kids with lower GPAs." [High School Student]

Those who did feel the impact of race **felt it indirectly**.

"There was a slight fear in the application processes that I might not be accepted as quick as a White student with less accomplishments would. There is prejudice in our country and it's nerve wracking to be vulnerable to it." [College Student]

"I think a bad experience is that, as a Black student, I have to sell myself more as a student and a person. A lot of times, Black students have to degrade themselves by using their trauma for essay prompts. During the process, you have to pick between being the sad, traumatized Black kid or actually having a chance at going to college. I know every person applying to college has to make their application stand out. It's just different for Black students." [College Student]

"From schools? No. From my classmates? Yes. When you are Black and get into a good school (and a White student doesn't), some people tend to associate your success to being Black. People think you only got into a school over a White person because you are Black, and not because you truly deserved it." [College Student]

"My high school hosted university and college reps at fairs and small group meetings. I attended both so I could gather as much information about the schools as possible. When discussing financial aid, a few reps I met with in the small group settings seemed to be staring at me as if I was the only one who would need financial assistance. There were only a few small glances in the direction of my non-Black classmates. Perhaps this was unintentional on their part, but it was definitely something I made a note of as I decided what schools to consider." [College Student]

Perceptions

Perceptions of Various Universities

On the final day of the online discussion board, we asked students to share their perceptions of the following schools: the University of Illinois, Indiana University, Georgia Tech, Howard University, the University of Michigan, and Purdue University (which will be discussed in greater depth in the section that follows).

For each school, we asked students to: 1) tell us what they think of the school (and if they'd never visited, what they've heard about it), 2) provide a description and photo of who they consider to be the typical student at that school, and 3) tell us whether they think that school would be a good fit for someone like them.

Not surprisingly, because college students had already been through the research and application process, most were quite familiar with what they consider to be the positives and negatives of each school.

And, because they had visited some schools and viewed materials and websites from others, they also had a pretty clear idea of what the student body looks like and whether they could imagine themselves as a part of it.

IU

Indiana University

Positives: Many recognized Indiana University for its strong academics and wide range array of programs, ranging from journalism and communications to research and medicine.

Negatives: Several noted that the student population at IU is predominantly White.

The **typical student at Indiana University** is White, middle class and from the Midwest.

Most said Indiana University is **not for them** due to the location and perceived lack of diversity. Several others said they simply did not know enough about IU to confidently say whether it would be a fit our not.

A White school in the middle of [n]owhere, [that's] what I think when [I] hear Indiana." [College Student]

"This definitely would not be the school for me because of the state it is in and the lack of diversity that the school presents." [College Student]

[M]iddle-class Caucasian students and [fo]otball players." [College Student]

"There's not much diversity here, which wouldn't make me feel at home." [College Student]

"I don't think I would go to this school just because it's in Indiana and I don't like the state that much. I don't know anything about the school, and I've never visited, so I don't really have much of an opinion on it." [College Student]

The good…

Purdue University: Positives

Most credited Purdue for having **stellar programs in engineering and technology**. A few also believed its business program is equally well-respected.

- A couple of college students said a degree from Purdue in these fields holds considerable weight.

Some have heard that Purdue offers **a fantastic learning environment** where **professors are very hands-on** and work hard to ensure that their students can easily jump into the career of their choice when they graduate.

- A few said they have heard that the student body is equally supportive of other students.

While Purdue's sports programs were not mentioned in the responses on the online discussion board, some in the IDIs noted that Purdue is **well-recognized for its sports and athletics programs**, specifically football, basketball, and volleyball.

This was particularly important to those who expressed a love for sports – either as participants or as cheering spectators – and who indicated that sports is how they first heard about Purdue.

52

The not so good...

Purdue University: Negatives

Those who are not interested in engineering and STEM believe that Purdue is not for them. In many instances, this idea was fostered by counselors and high school teachers, who often positioned Purdue as the school to go to for engineering.

A few high school students added that they did not know what majors Purdue offers because **Purdue is not on their radar at all**. They did not hear about it from their counselors, they did not receive any materials from the school, and they did not meet with any reps at recruitment events.

Several said that while Purdue has a beautiful campus, the **location lacks appeal,** and its **rigorous and competitive academic programs** give them the impression that they would miss out on having a well-rounded collegiate experience.

Final thoughts

Purdue University: In Their Own Words

"A lot of my **science teachers talk about Purdue** because most of them went to Purdue. They talk about how **Purdue is a big engineering school.** It is known for aerospace sciences and stuff like that. They have mainly STEM stuff." [High School Student, IDI]

"I think Purdue would be good for me because I am a nerd who's also good at math and science. However, the campus felt a little too boring for me." [College Student]

"I don't think this school is for me just because I wasn't drawn to the campus and my interests aren't a big focus at this school." [College Student]

"I feel like I've been around people who mainly say that **you go there for business.** I never really hear many people, or have had teachers or administrators say, Purdue is a medical school." [High School Student, IDI]

"I feel like Purdue **appeals to a certain audience** that is **interested in science or engineering.**" [College Student]

"I value having balance amongst all areas in my life; not just a focus on academics." [College Student]

"I feel like **that's the school you go to if you want to be an engineer** and that's not a field I'm interested in, so I'm not really interested in going to Purdue." [High School Student, IDI]

"**Their best programs are not of interest.**" [College Student]

Recommendations

Message to Director of Admissions [

If they are told the school is diverse, they also **want it to be inclusive of students** of various ethnicities, sexual orientations/identities, religious beliefs, and overall interests.

Many emphasized that they don't want to be told a school is diverse, only to discover that is not the case. **If the school is not diverse, they want Admissions to be honest about that fact.** And then, they want to hear how Black students will be welcomed, included, and supported while enrolled.

Some mentioned wanting to know that there are **BIPOC professors, deans, and administrators on the faculty and staff** who they can look to for support, encouragement, and inspiration.

Many stressed the importance of **knowing that there are systems in place** that will make them feel safe and supported, both when it comes to incidents involving microaggressions and racism that may take place on campus and when it comes to events that are occurring in society at large.

Telling them that they will not experience any racism on the campus of a PWI comes across as idealistic, disingenuous and out of touch.

- A couple said it would also be important to hear that the school would stand with its African American students should matters of injustice or inequality arise.

What can we do?

Statement P Reactions

Students were quite surprised to learn about **the number of majors and graduate programs offered** at Purdue, explaining that it suggests the educational path they are interested in is likely included therein.

They were also quite surprised to learn that these majors/programs included business and liberal arts. This clearly indicated that **Purdue is more than just an engineering school**, which is what many had been led to believe.

However, a few **would want to see more details** about these majors/programs and would want to see their specific area of study listed, particularly if it was a niche or specialty area that fewer schools offer, like neuroscience, anthropology, or gaming design.

- A couple suggested that while 200 majors sounded impressive, until they saw an actual list, they would wonder how many of those majors would be of interest to them.

Statement P
Purdue University offers more than 200 undergraduate majors and 130 graduate programs including business, liberal arts, nursing, and education. Purdue also has a strong Exploratory Studies program to support those students who still need time determining their future career path.

"I just really **connected it to a school for people that really wanted to go into engineering**. To know that they have business, liberal arts, nursing, and education, **gives me another view** on what they have to offer." [High School Student, IDI]

"They could say they have 200 majors, but one of them might be an oboe major and only two percent of the world plays oboe. It's just numbers and smoke and mirrors." [College Student, IDI]