

Nevertheless, They Persisted: Black Student Success in the College of Liberal Arts

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Research Questions

The CLA Data Fellows project focused on identifying the factors shaping Black students' success. Our research was guided by the questions:

What factors contribute to or detract from Black students' success?

How do outcomes for Black students compare to their peers in other racial groups?

Introduction

The CSUs are experiencing declining enrollment and retention of Black students. Across the CSUs, just 48% of Black students in the 2016 class graduated within six years. From 2014-2024, the six-year graduation rate for Black students was 57%. For CLA, the six-year graduation rate is 64.4%, the highest of all the colleges.

CLA enrolls a higher proportion of the Black student population than other racial groups. Students who identify as Black are more likely to have generational experiences with college and less likely to be eligible for a Pell grant than their peers. A majority of Black students at CSULB identified as female (63%).

This project responds to calls to the Graduation Initiative 2025 and the Beach 2030 call to "build an equitable and empowering culture."

Methods

Data Sources: Student data were retrieved from SSD 2.0 for First-Time, First-Year students who entered the university between 2013 and 2020. Student identity variables included race/ethnicity, Pell eligibility, first-generation status, and high school of origin. Student success variables included graduation rate, retention, persistence, and cumulative GPA at graduation. Student major college was recorded at entry and graduation.

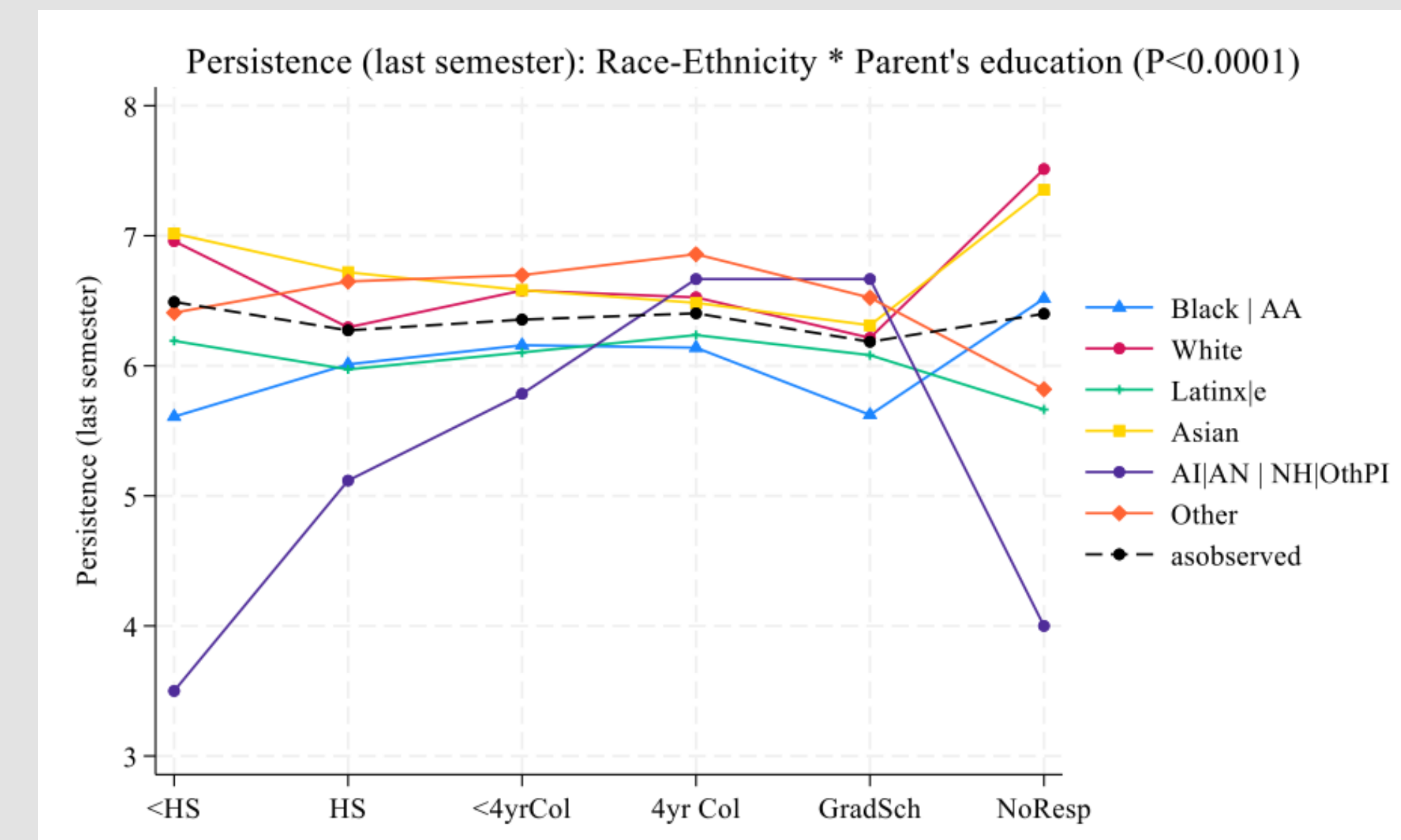
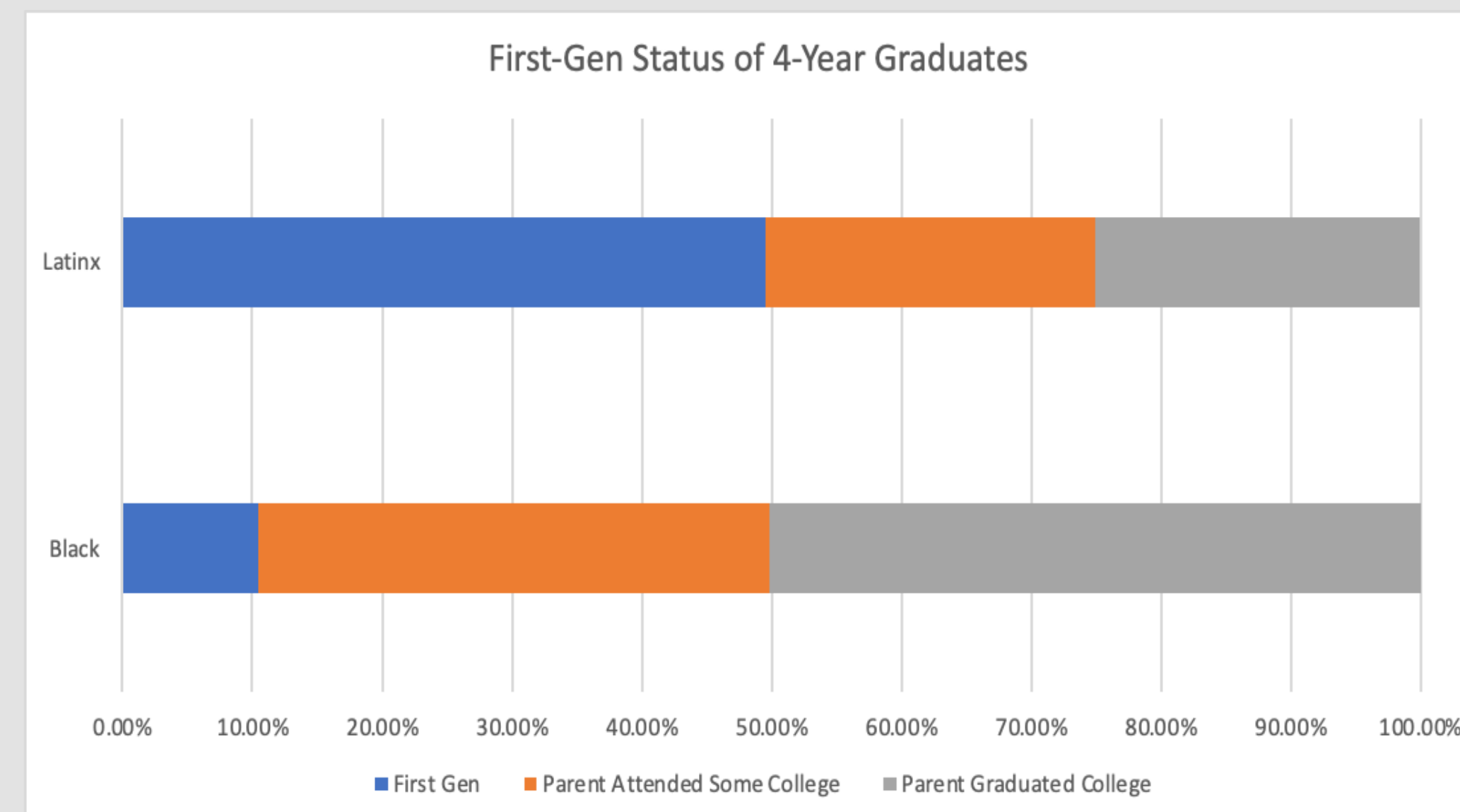
Methods:

Two censor variables were created to identify (1) the semester students graduated and (2) the semester students last attended (Persistence). Dr. Arevalo ran crosstabs to compare the semester students graduated by race/ethnicity and the last semester students attended (persistence) before graduation by race/ethnicity. She performed ANOVAS controlling for covariates to examine several factors that could be associated with the differences observed in the two dependent variables (measures of student success: graduation semester and persistence) by race/ethnicity.

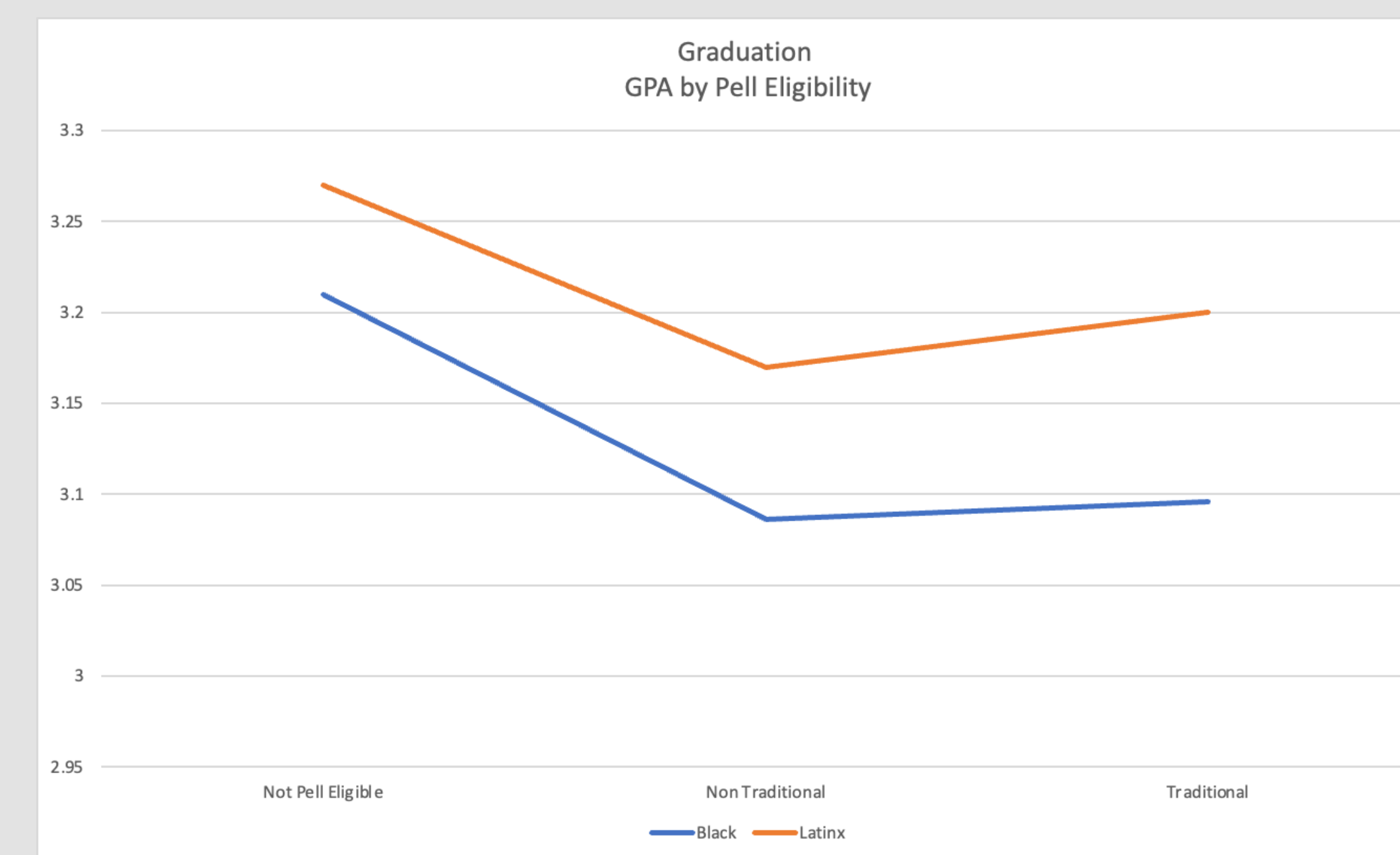
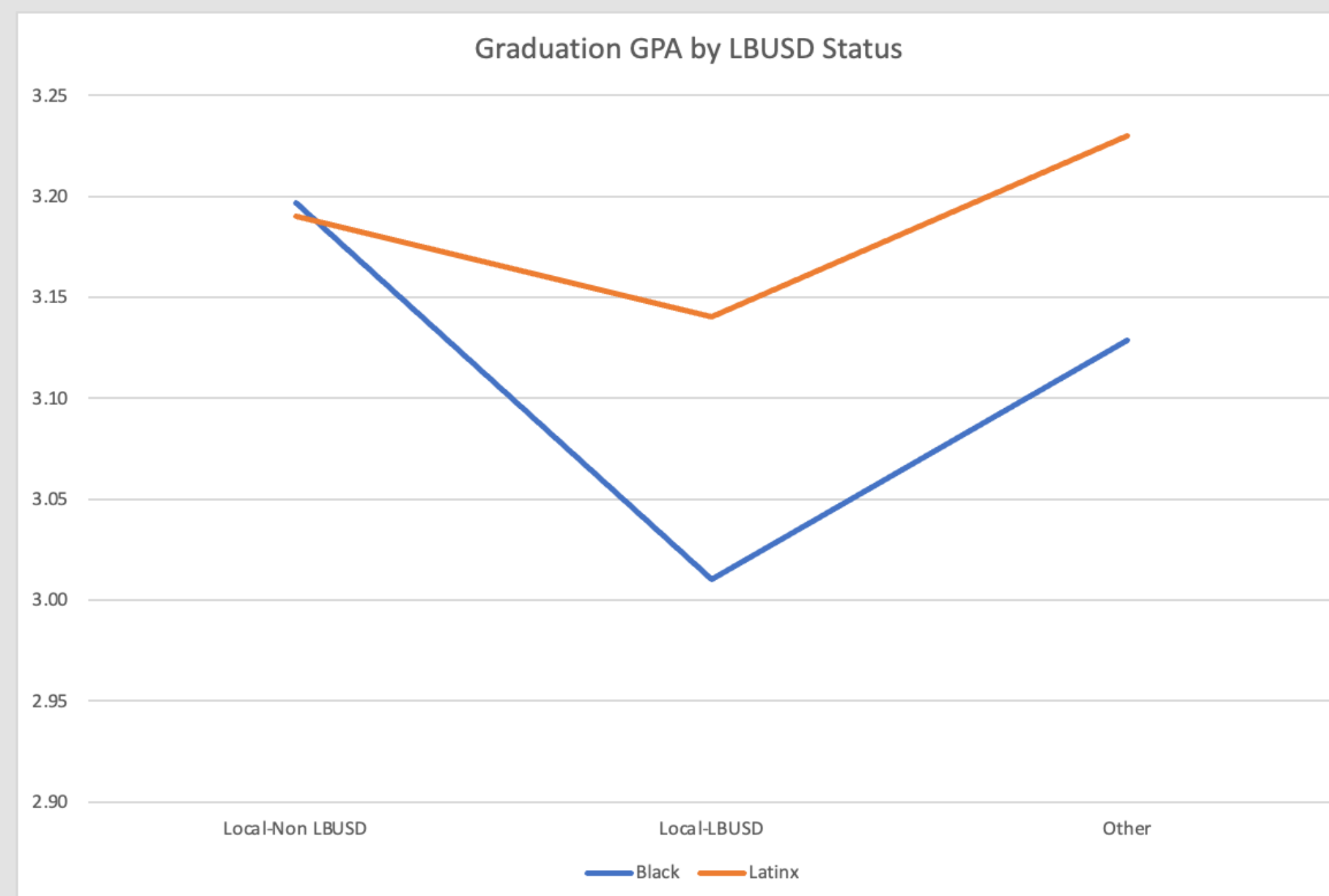
Dr. Park also performed logistic and linear regression analyses between Black students' Pell eligibility/LBUSD/first-gen statuses and dependent variables, controlling for participants' sex and graduation colleges.

Results

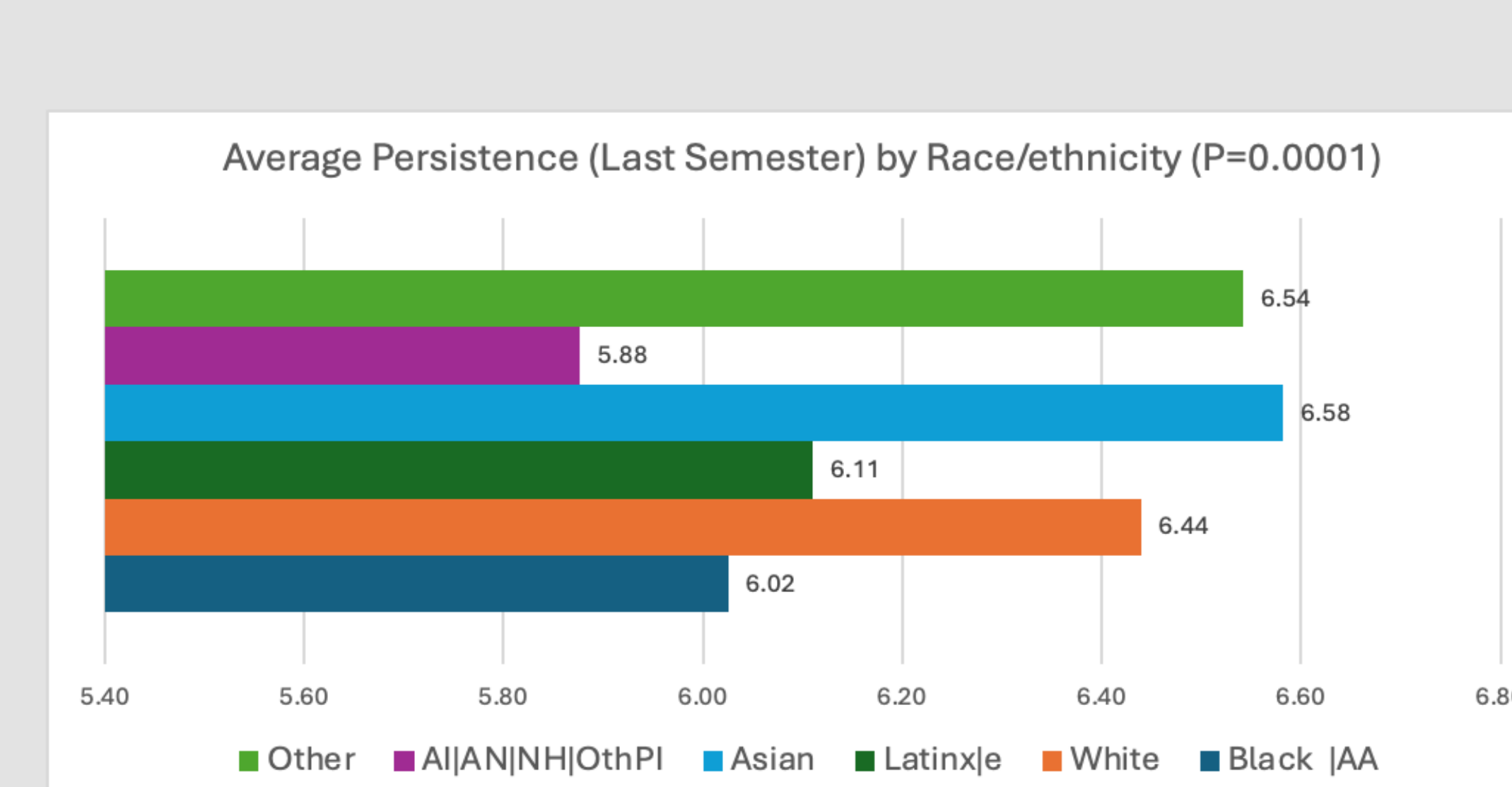
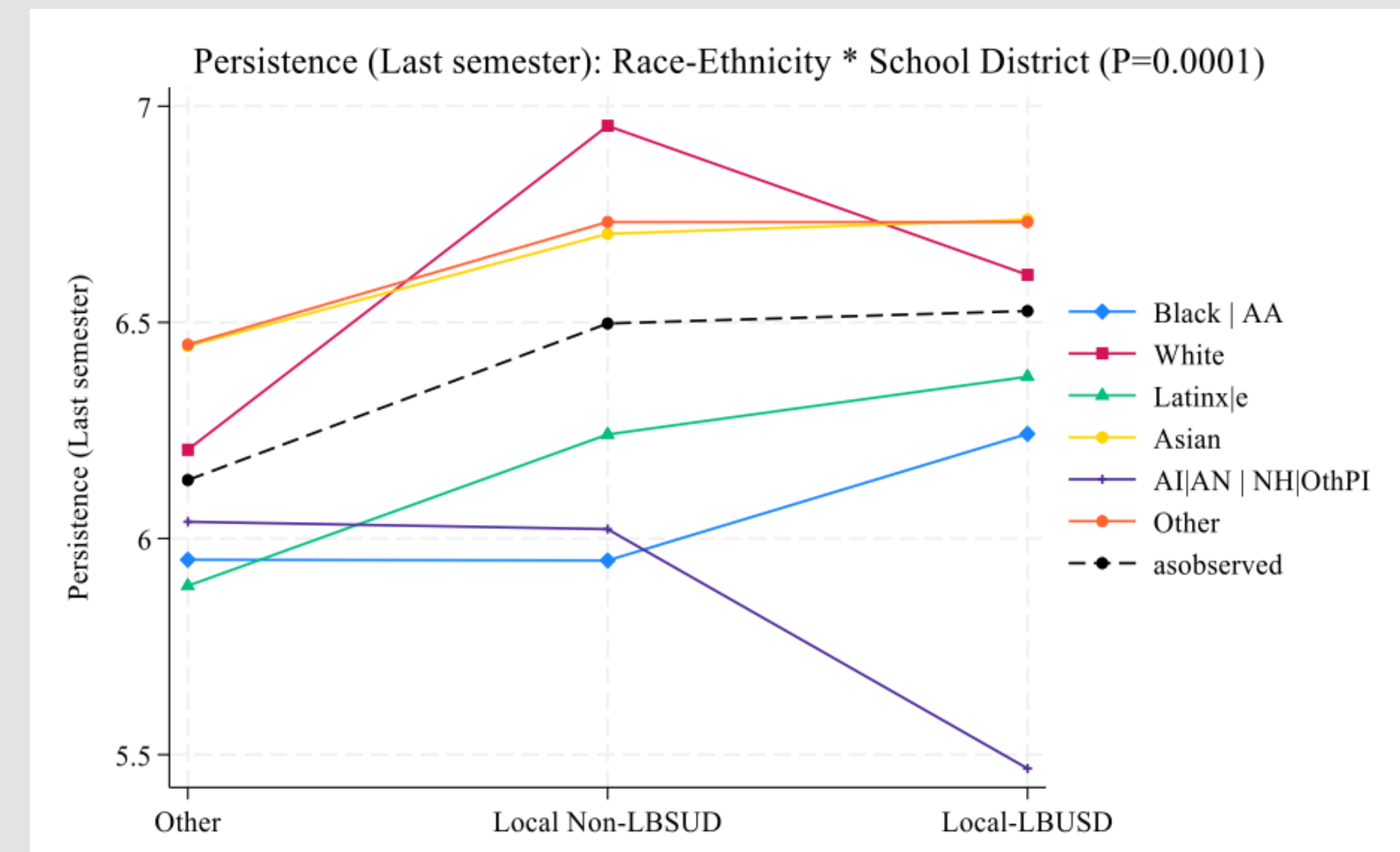
Sixty percent of Black first-generation college students graduate within four years. Black students take longer than their peers to graduate (9.84 sem.), especially those whose parents have less than a 4-year degree. Half (50.2%) of Black students who graduate within four years have a parent who graduated college and 39.3% had a parent who attended some college. The proportion of Black students with a college-educated parent among 4-year graduates is 37% higher than their share of the Black student population as a whole.



Graduation GPAs are lower for Black students than they are for Latinx students, especially for LBUSD graduates. The gap between Black and Latinx the average graduation GPAs is .11 (3.12 v. 3.23). However, no significant gap was found between local non-LBUSD students and a wider gap (.13) was found between Black and Latinx LBUSD graduates. GPA gaps are smaller within and between groups based on Pell-eligibility.



Persistence rates are nearly half a semester shorter for Black students than Latinx and White students. Black students from LBUSD stay enrolled longer than local non-LBUSD and non-local students. The second and sixth semesters are high drop-off points for students.



Conclusion / Discussion

Graduation Rates

Among 2013 FTFY Black students, African Americans took longer to graduate (9.84 sem.) compared to Black Latinx (9.62 sem.) and multiracial Black students (9.66 sem.). Black students who graduated within four years were more likely to have generational experiences with college, which boosts their timely completion of their degree.

LBUSD Status

We consistently found that LBUSD status was a key factor shaping the student experience. Although just 17.38% of Black students come from LBUSD, a higher percentage of Black students come from LBUSD than other racial or ethnic groups. Black LBUSD students have lower GPAs and 4-year graduation rates. However, LBUSD graduates persist longer.

Interaction of factors

Comparing Black and other racial groups shows that the impact of negative factors in intensified for Black students, particularly LBUSD graduates and Pell-grantees.

Persistence

Despite facing academic challenges, Black LBUSD graduates have higher persistence rates. However, Black Latinx, multiracial Black, and non-US visa holders who are Black persist longer than African-Americans.

Recommendations for Action

Strengthen support systems for Black students regardless of generational college status and Pell-eligibility.

- After the introduction of Prop 209, several academic support systems (TRIO, GenExcel and EOP) are directed at first-generation, low-income students.
- Focus on semesters 2-3 and 6-7 as critical dropoff points.

Collaborate with LBUSD and Long Beach College Promise to prepare students for the "hidden curriculum" of college and college-level academics.

Provide faculty training around bias and grading to close GPA gaps.

Next Steps / Future Directions

Defining Success

Qualitative research is needed to understand what success means to Black students and the dimensions of the Black student experience beyond academic performance.

Diversity in the Black experience

More research is needed to understand the different experiences and outcomes for African American, Black Latinx, and multiracial Black students.