PhD Completion Project: Summary of Best Practices

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Background

- Attrition rates for PhD programs is a significant national problem
  - 30-50%
  - Greatest loss among women and students from underrepresented populations seen in sciences and engineering
- Fewer students from underrepresented groups enter graduate programs
  - Produce fewer faculty to serve as role models
  - Exacerbates the attrition problem
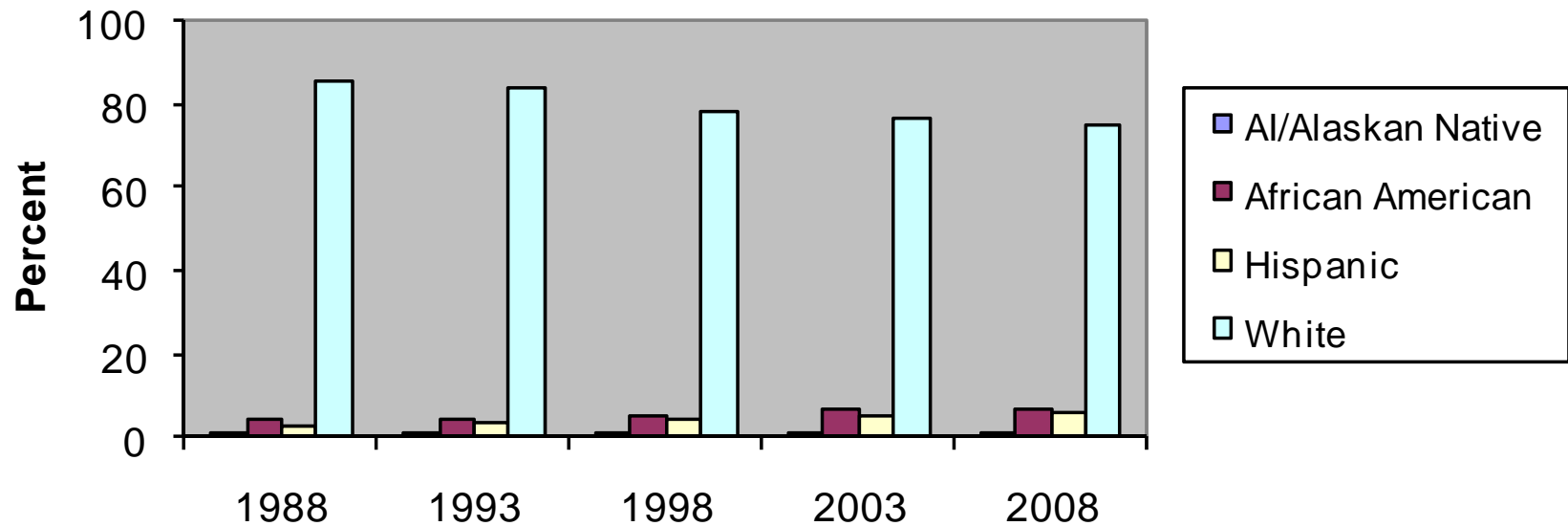- UNC-Chapel Hill focused initial efforts on underrepresented students

National Trends

Percent PhDs by Race/Ethnicity (National)
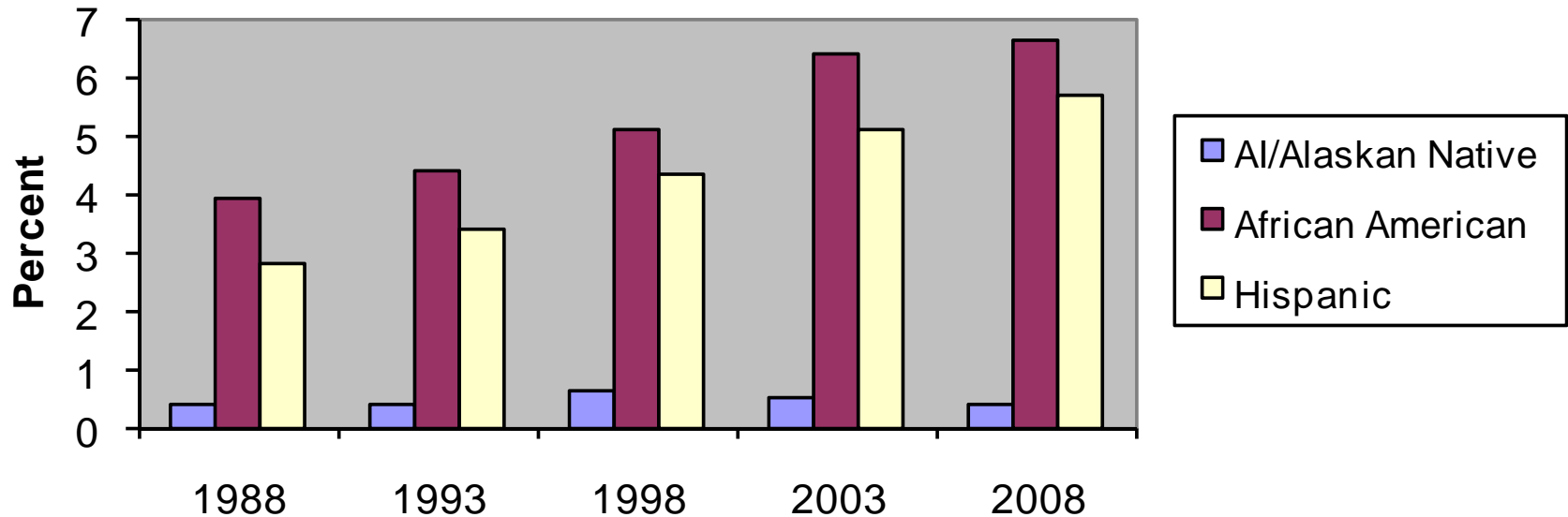
National Trends

Percent PhDs by Race/Ethnicity (National)

# Graduate student distribution by race/ethnicity and gender

	Male	Female	Total	Percent
Native American	4	7	11	0.5%
Asian	45	75	120	4.9%
African American	52	125	177	7.2%
Hispanic	28	33	61	2.5%
White	612	1,012	1,624	66.5%
Non-Resident Alien	196	132	328	13.4%
Other	63	58	121	5.0%
Total	1,000	1,442	2,442	
Percent	41.0%	59.0%		100.0%

*Counts include degree seeking students only. Students seeking certificates are not included.
Note: Percentage calculations are rounded.

Source: Office of Institutional Research & Assessment (GA010)
As of Census, September 3, 2008

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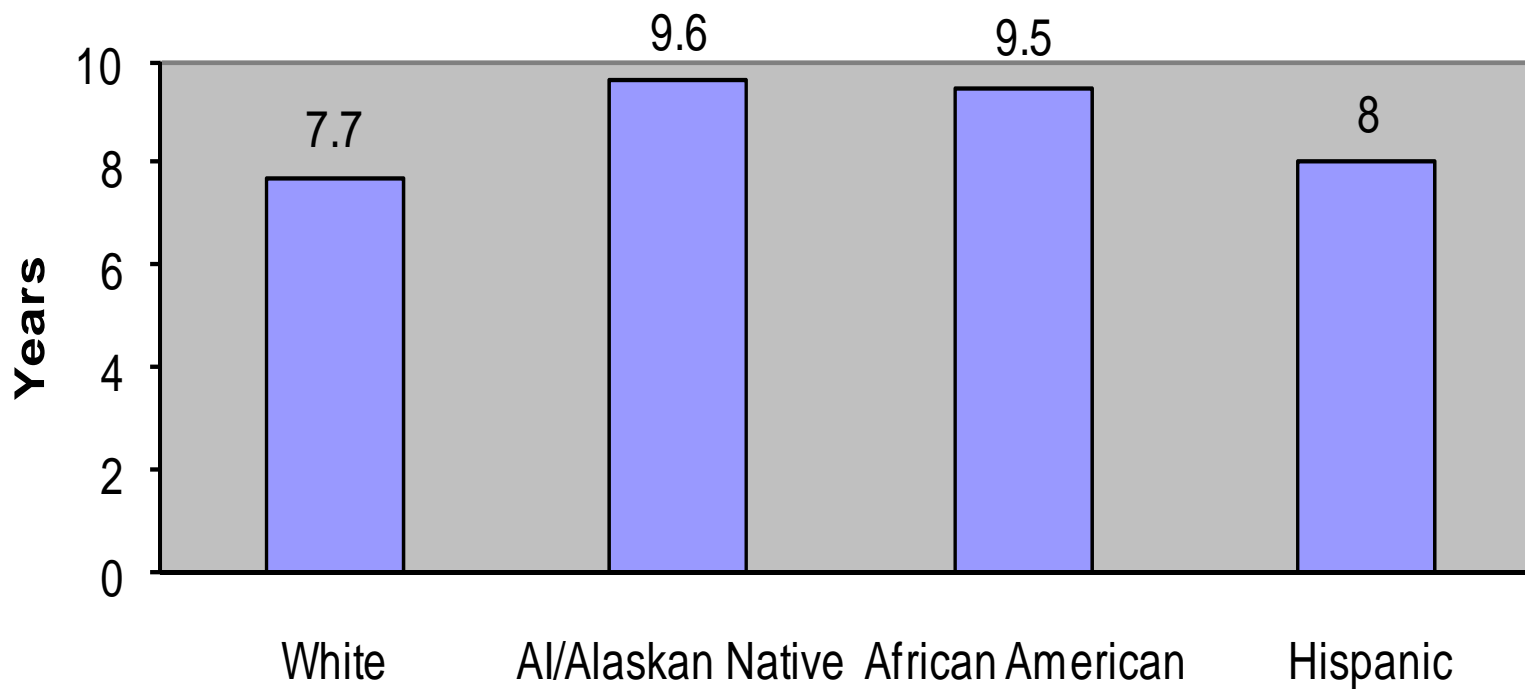
PhD Completion Project: Strategic Approaches

- **Goal** - to introduce to the campus environment a set of interventions aimed to improve both diversity and PhD completion rates

- Special emphasis on those student groups at greatest risk of attrition
  - Women
  - Underrepresented populations

- Special emphasis on improving completion and time to degree

Interventions

- On-campus **recruitment** visits and student selection – *expanded opportunities for academic programs to bring prospective students to campus for recruiting visits, with emphasis on those students from underrepresented populations*

- **Mentoring** initiatives – *aimed to reward faculty for their performance as outstanding student mentors*

- **Dissertation** initiatives – *aimed to reward students for outstanding dissertations completed in a timely manner*

- **Data dissemination** – *program review process coupled with exit survey information*

Intervention Specifics

- Recruitment – diversity travel awards
  - Students who have been admitted
  - Director of Diversity, Recruitment, and Retention
- Mentoring – Faculty Award for Excellence in Doctoral Mentoring
  - Student nominated process
  - Presented at Hooding Ceremony
  - Recipient participates in new student orientation
- Dissertations –Dissertation Awards
  - Initiated by CGS funding
  - Presented at Annual Graduate Student Recognition Ceremony
  - Embraced by faculty in all disciplines

Intervention Results

- **Recruitment**
  - **Matching funds from University for diversity travel awards**
  - Importance of student visits recognized by faculty and senior leadership
  - Over 50 student visits/year via diversity travel awards
  - Increasing number of academic programs using awards
  - Enrollment data

    2006: 10% incoming students identified as underrepresented

    2008: 12% incoming students identified as underrepresented

    2009: 11% incoming students identified as underrepresented with additional 5 % Other

- **Mentoring**
  - Faculty appreciation being recognized for effective mentoring
  - Embraced by students across discipline:

    2007: 21 nominations

    2008: 43 nominations

    2009: 37 nominations

    2010: 35 nominations

Intervention Results

- **Dissertation Awards**
  - Direct acknowledgement of student achievement
  - Criteria includes timely completion of degree
  - **Secured by endowed gift**

- **Data Dissemination**
  - Program review process
  - Results of exit surveys
  - Discussions with faculty

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The Path Forward

- Expand the use of exit surveys for all students
  - Data provided to departments as part of review process
  - Captures student in our new alumni data base
- Travel funds now part of our permanent budget
  - Used to recruit underrepresented populations
  - Fit, fit, fit
- Continuous enrollment policy
  - Essential to track time to degree