

DATA AND EVIDENCE

TOOLS FOR ASSESSING ADMINISTRATIVE HOLDS



FROM THE NO HOLDING BACK PROJECT

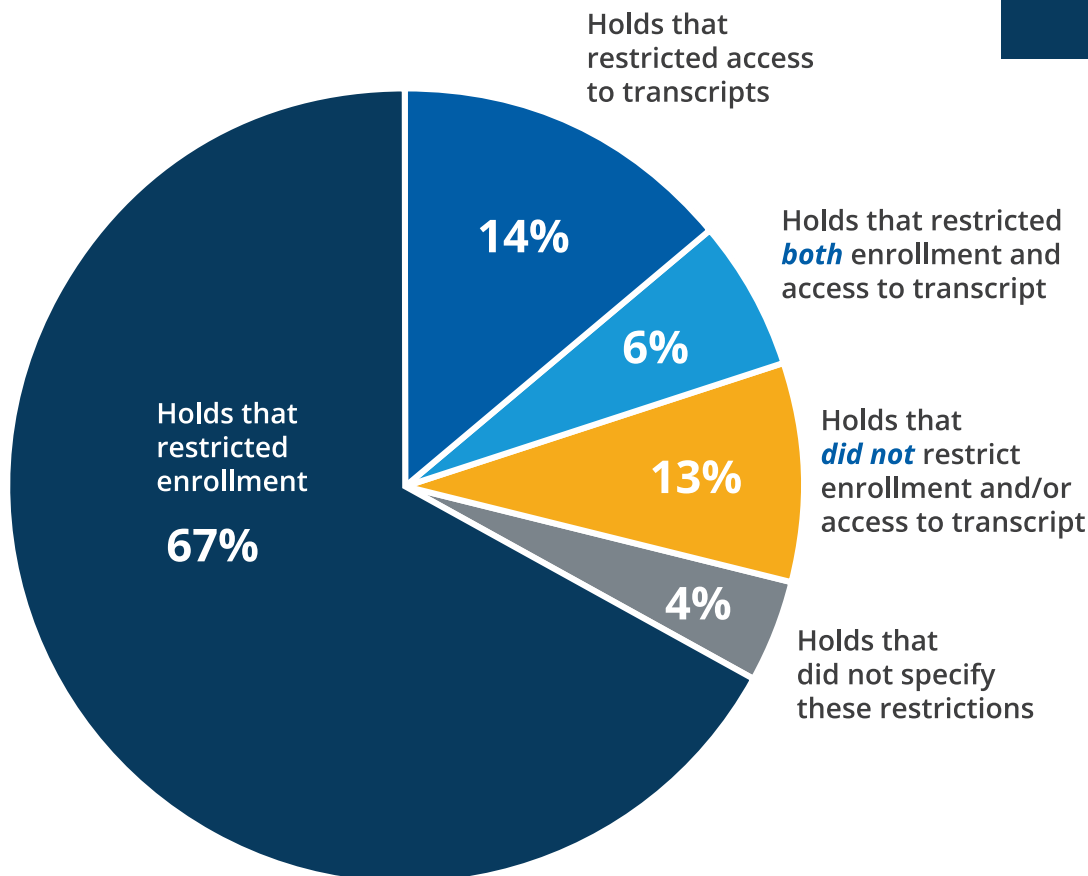
Compiling and analyzing available data is a foundational part of assessing holds at an institution. Staff availability and capacity, and data availability, are real challenges, but 12 public institutions in the [No Holding Back](#) project piloted a basic approach to analysis and gained insights to how they might improve the use of holds at their institutions.

For example, the data showed that many more holds were in place than most institutions expected. Potentially 250,000 or more holds were placed in total across the reporting institutions during academic year 2021–22 (AY 2021–22), restricting registration, transcripts, or diplomas; with 94% placed by the four-year institutions. By comparison, approximately 120,000 degree-seeking undergraduates were enrolled across these reporting institutions in AY 2021–22. The bursar and registrar units originated most of the holds.

“We started with 89 holds and inactivated 57. We are still evaluating the remaining 32 to see if we can further reduce or eliminate as well as working on changing processes to support that.” Laramie County Community College

LARAMIE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Holds Activity Across 12 Institutions



(continued)



Starting Ideas

► Consult this available [technical guide](#) and [workbook](#) for details about possible data to gather. The guide provides a sample framework for regression, ordinary least squares analysis, and exploratory crosstabs to test the association of student characteristics, unresolved debt amounts, and holds that restrict access to registration or transcripts. Institutions with sufficient capacity and data may wish to expand their analysis; for example, analyzing more than a single year and examining both resolved and unresolved holds..

► **Get an understanding of what data are stored, and at what level of detail, early in the planning phase.** Answering questions about the full impact and experience of holds for different types of students often requires data beyond what is immediately available.

For example:

- The completion of current semester advising may reset a student advising hold.
- Payments can overwrite, reset or delete payment dates and other data.
- The definition or meaning of a date or data element might vary by type of hold or across departments or staff.

► **If data are limited or incomplete, look for insights from immediately available data.** This can be accomplished while requesting changes to data storage or planning more detailed analysis for the future.

► **Determine your capacity for analysis, in terms of staff, time, and resources.**

► **Determine what intensity or type of analysis will be compelling for your stakeholders.**

💡 Graduate students helped to do some of the analysis at one four-year institution. The students also conducted a focus group and received feedback from students.

💡 Explore your data through cross-tabulation in addition to more rigorous statistical analysis, as demonstrated in the 'Detailed Crosstabs' section of the [sample workbook](#). Cross tabulations are a useful tool for disaggregating data, identifying potential relationships between variables, and revealing possible disparities, disproportions, or intersectional factors. Keep in mind, however, that crosstabs alone do not necessarily identify statistical significance.



An available [technical guide](#) and [workbook](#) provide a starting point for an institution's quantitative assessment of holds activity. Other considerations and inspiration may be found in the pages below, including the [summary of results from this project](#).

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► Clarify and prioritize research questions to streamline data collection and clarify appropriate analysis methods.

For example:

- What number and percent of students experience holds annually? Which kind(s) of holds?
- Are there differences in students' experiences of holds at this institution? Which students receive more holds? Which have higher or lower hold amounts? Which students resolve holds at higher or lower rates? Which students with holds have different enrollment or retention patterns?

Data points to consider:

- Student demographics (age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, family education, academic indicators)
- Pathway (first-year/transfer/continuing, in-/out-of-state)
- Major field of study, college/department
- Financial status or arrangements, dependency status (grant, loan, military benefits, public benefits, employer reimbursement)• Degree- and non-degree/-certificate students
- Other relevant characteristics of your student population for which holds usage or impact might differ by type of student (undocumented students, foreign students)
- Do patterns differ after a change in holds policy or practice?
- Do debt hold patterns differ before and after Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) funding? Or before and after other disruptions or changes?
- How long are holds outstanding (unresolved), by type and amount of hold? How does this relate to other academic year events and financial cycles?
- What do the data suggest about financial thresholds? For example:
 - At what amount are holds applied for different account balances? For example, owed tuition, library fines, or parking fees?
 - How do financial balance or debt hold amounts compare to state funding per student? At what point do debts become a sufficient business risk?
 - What portion of financial debts are due to Return of Title IV Funds (R2T4)?

“ We learned that student experiences with registration holds vary immensely from discipline to discipline. Students of the department generating the second-greatest number of major-based holds were likely to carry more than 16 holds in their first two years; other departments and majors had vastly lower rates. The Associate Dean of that college immediately led efforts to change how student requirements for those majors is enforced.

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,
FULLERTON



“ Fifty percent (50%) of students with a debt hold owe less than \$2,000, and over 40% owe less than \$1,000. The total amount of debt that these students with \$2,000 or less owed comes to only about 25% of all unresolved debt. The silver lining of finding this out was seeing that if we were to successfully revise our policies to increase the threshold for hold placement, we could potentially remove roadblocks for a relatively high number of students for relatively low financial risk.

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS



(continued)



FROM THE NO HOLDING BACK PROJECT

- How effective do holds appear to be as a tool for achieving compliance?
- Is there evidence that students can differentiate the urgency or severity of the different holds, or that they can understand holds as distinct from other information prompts which do not limit registration or documents? ['type' or 'category' icon]
- Is there a relationship between types of holds and academic success (persistence, retention, credit accumulation, completion, transfer)? Do advising holds appear to help or hinder student success? ['success' or 'accomplished' icon; and 'type' or 'category' icon]
- Also see the [Transcript Holds guide](#) for specific considerations for debt-related and transcript holds



When interpreting results consider: Do holds have a primary, contributing or no association with what is observed? What other factors might explain observed or confirmed patterns?

Student Perspectives

A key focus of the No Holding Back project was whether there were differences for holds for students of color and lower-income students. Overall, across the participating institutions, the institutional analysis indicated that Pell recipients, Hispanic students (of any race), non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander students were less likely than average to have the holds they experienced resolved within the single year analyzed--both for financial and other types of holds. And in the year analyzed, Pell students were less likely to experience financial holds.

“ Alaska Native students, including those who identify as two or more races, received a disproportionate number of holds compared to all students. Also, Pell-eligible students were likely to have \$1,103 more in their hold amount compared to non-Pell-eligible students. We continue to explore both of these.

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA SOUTHEAST

“ If I can't pay my debt of \$1500, then I won't be able to pay an additional fee of \$100 to remove the hold. I just need more time, or an opportunity to explain what is going on. The payment plans having immediate consequences really doesn't make sense.

STUDENT AT 4-YEAR UNIVERSITY

STUDENT CHARACTERISTIC	% OF SAMPLE	RATE EXPERIENCED HOLDS (COMPARED TO AVG.)	RATE RESOLVED HOLDS (COMPARED TO AVG.)
Pell recipient	35%	▼ As likely or less likely	▼ Less likely
Hispanic (of any race), non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Native Hawai'ian/Other Pacific Islander	32%	▲ More likely	▼ Less likely

(continued)



FROM THE NO HOLDING BACK PROJECT

WICHE also heard detailed perspectives from 50 students from 10 of the participating institutions about their experience with holds (see other [student perspectives](#) and videos online).

Siemour* was attending a four-year university when we spoke with them. Siemour recalled the experience of a registration hold due to an unpaid debt. They increased their work hours to make the payment but were less able to focus on classes. When the hold was lifted, they had to register for classes outside their required coursework because the required courses were no longer available.

Ocean* was attending a four-year university when WICHE heard from them about the expectation to fully understand and respond to holds upon first arriving on campus. Ocean was unable to register for their first-year classes and saw a “general hold” message in the student portal. Not understanding it, Ocean ignored it, hoping it was about a process that would resolve itself. In the end, Ocean faced \$300 in late fees and extensive work with the financial aid office to resolve the hold. Once Ocean knew to contact financial aid, they experienced flexibility and support in the form of resilience funds.

“ It felt like I was already supposed to know about holds...to know everything about where to get resources and how to use every platform, and if you don't, you're met with condescension. *You don't know how to log on (to the student portal)? You don't know where the rec center is?* ”

STUDENT AT 4-YEAR UNIVERSITY

*Actual names not used to provide anonymity to interviewed students. Information has been anonymized unless express permission to attribute was granted.



Do you know of
another resource,
have a question or want
to recommend something?

Share with us here:
[www.wiche.edu/
administrative-holds/share](http://www.wiche.edu/administrative-holds/share)



Project Data Summary

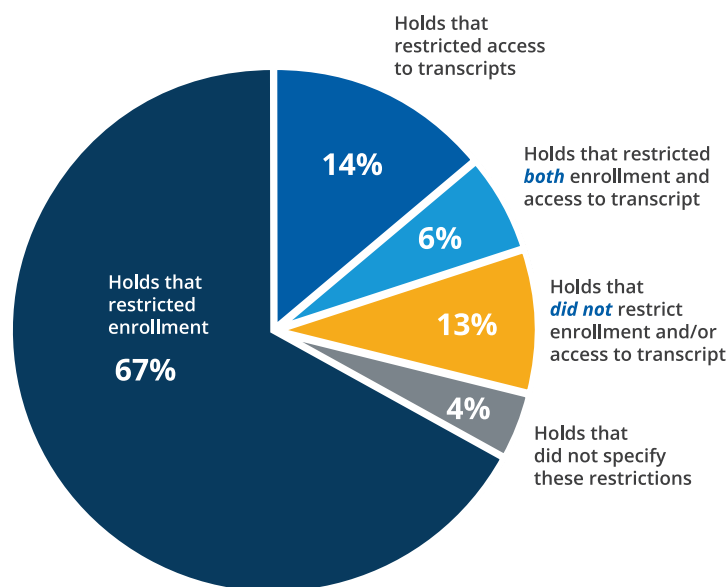
TIP: Which of these patterns are likely at your institution? What ideas does this provide for your holds assessment? Review the data notes for important considerations for your analysis.

The 12 institutions that participated in the No Holding Back project from August 2022 to August 2023 contributed standardized results from their research. The institutions ran their own analysis. WICHE and AACRAO did not have access to individual student data or detailed data for independent analysis. Results that were possible to summarize across institutions are shown below, with important caveats. **These results are meant for illustration and a basic overview of the analysis approach piloted by the No Holding Back institutions, not as statistically evaluated findings.**

The analysis timeframe for academic year 2021-22 overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic, so institutions were encouraged to consider how factors like enrollment changes and CARES Act Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund availability may have impacted findings. Standardized analysis and summary may mask important contextual variation. To limit burden, increase feasibility, and acknowledge data limitations, institutions were not asked to provide substantially detailed analysis, but many institutions conducted more in-depth analysis for their own purposes.

Types of Active Holds Across 12 Institutions

Institutions were asked to only include holds that limited or restricted access to enrollment (registration) or a transcript (or diploma). It was not possible for all institutions to isolate holds to this level of precision.



Source: WICHE analysis of holds usage data from 12 institutions participating in the No Holding Back project. Note: data indicate the number of named holds present in student information systems, which is a different metric than the number of students with that type of hold (see below).

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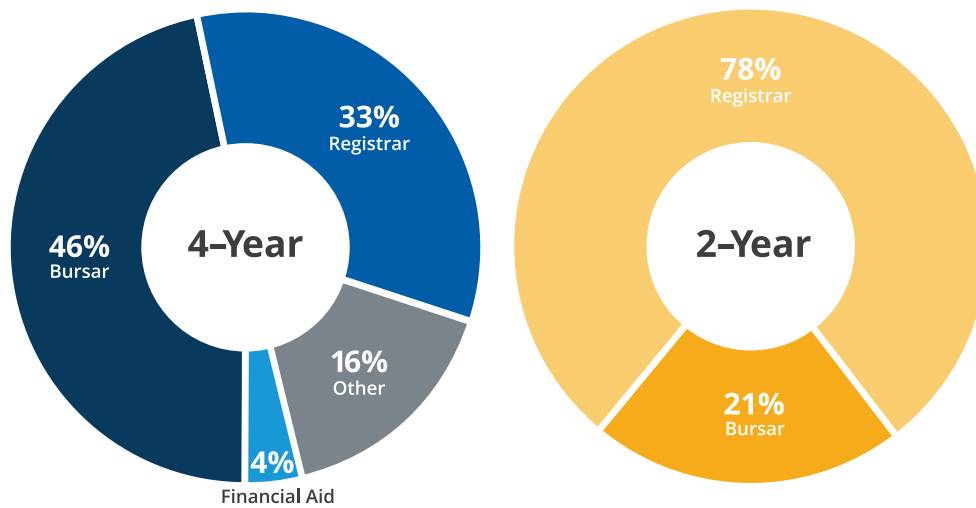


FROM THE NO HOLDING BACK PROJECT

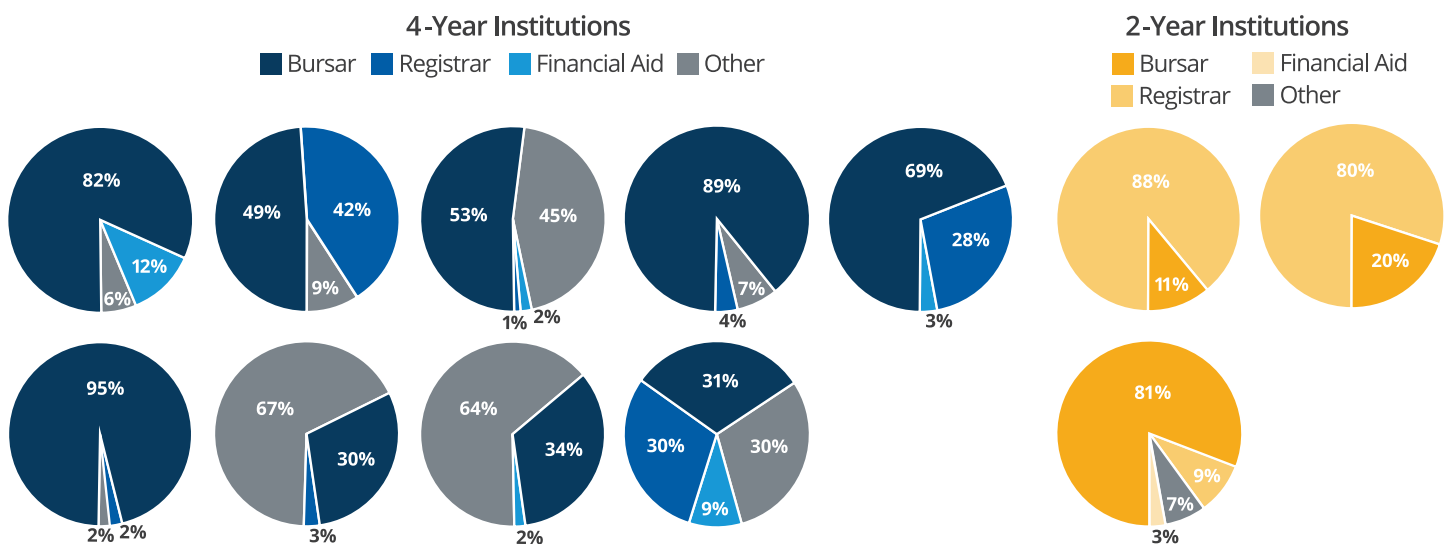
Percent of Holds Applied in AY 2021-22, By Department

Potentially **250,000 or more holds** were placed in total across **11 participating institutions during AY 2021-22**, restricting registration, transcripts or diplomas (**94% were by four-year institutions**). By comparison, approximately **120,000 degree-seeking undergraduates** were enrolled across these institutions in AY 2021-22. There was wide variation across institutions in which departments were associated with the most holds activity, but the bursar and registrar's office were the most likely to initiate holds.

Combined Rate Across Institutions, by Sector



Rate by Individual Institution



Note: Institutions not labeled for confidentiality reasons. Source: WICHE analysis of tabulation output from 11 institutions' analysis of their student-level data, from the institutions participating in the No Holding Back project; one institution did not provide these data. Note: some institutions may have tabulated distinct counts of students with at least one hold; others, the total number of hold instances.

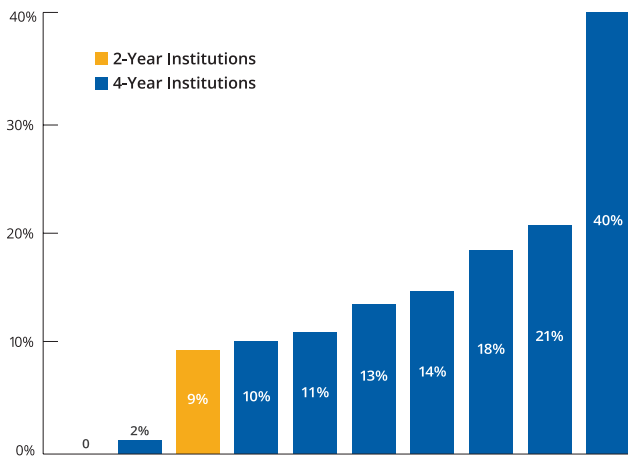
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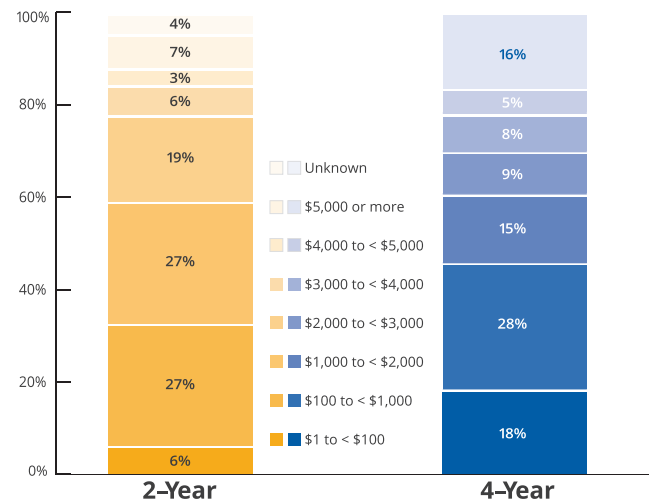
Unresolved Debt Amounts

As part of their assessments, the participating institutions analyzed unresolved financial holds in greater detail, in this case, the maximum unresolved financial obligation per student with these holds.

Percent of Students With One or More Unresolved Financial Holds



Amount of Financial Obligation Associated With the Unresolved Financial Hold



Note: Rate for ten institutions with these data. Institutions not labeled for confidentiality reasons.

Source: WICHE analysis of tabulation output from 11 institutions' analysis of their student-level data, from the institutions participating in the No Holding Back project. Note: results represent the maximum unresolved financial obligation associated with a given hold, per student with these holds in AY 2021-22. Not all institutions provided all details. May include some imprecision, for example, where having both a registration and transcript hold for an amount led to double-counting, variation in how data were available or were reported, and contextual variation in the use of holds.

- ▶ On average, overall, debt holds were resolved for 88% of the 111,300 students who had them (across 10 institutions).
- ▶ About 14,000 students had unresolved financial obligations in AY 2021-22, equalling a combined total of \$30.6 million (across 11 institutions). For a very small percentage, the unresolved debt related to less than \$100. The most prevalent holds were for debt amounts between \$1,000 and \$3,000.

Further institutional analysis of unresolved hold amounts by 10 institutions in AY 2021-22 showed:

- ▶ The minimum unresolved debt amount for any student ranged from \$1 to \$270, and the maximum ranged from \$4,290 to \$33,600.
- ▶ The total outstanding balance associated with these unresolved debt holds ranged from \$72,000 to \$18.1M.

(continued)



FROM THE NO HOLDING BACK PROJECT

Rate at Which Different Types of Students Resolved Holds

Because a key focus of the No Holding Back project was whether students of color and lower-income students experience holds differently than other students, each institution analyzed holds resolution among Pell recipients and by race/ethnicity. On the whole across 11 reporting institutions, in AY 2021-22:

- ▶ Pell recipients, who were 35% of the students in this sample, were as likely or less likely than average to experience holds, but also less likely to have them resolved.
- ▶ Hispanic students (of any race), non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, or Native Hawai'ian/Other Pacific Islander students, who were 32% of the students in this sample, were more likely to experience debt-related holds and less likely than average to have them resolved, with some variation by type of hold and student.

Within these overall trends, there was variation by institution and type of holds.

	HAD HOLDS				ALL HOLDS RESOLVED			
	Transcript Holds	Registration Holds	Debt Holds	All Hold Types	Transcript Holds	Registration Holds	Debt Holds	All Hold Types
ALL STUDENTS (Pell)	55%	55%	55%	73%	67%	69%	64%	67%
Pell Recipient	52%	55%	53%	74%	62%	66%	54%	64%
Not a Pell Recipient	58%	54%	57%	71%	69%	71%	71%	68%
ALL STUDENTS (Race/Ethnicity)	55%	54%	54%	70%	61%	67%	61%	67%
COMBINED CATEGORIES								
Hispanic any race or non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, or Native Hawai'ian/Other Pacific Islander	60%	51%	57%	69%	60%	64%	61%	61%
Other race	53%	55%	53%	72%	62%	69%	62%	70%
Race unknown	43%	64%	44%	64%	52%	66%	49%	70%
Foreign/non-resident	67%	49%	67%	64%	59%	72%	59%	73%
SPECIFIC CATEGORIES								
White	56%	55%	55%	73%	62%	69%	61%	70%
Hispanic any race	65%	50%	59%	68%	64%	67%	64%	64%
American Indian/Alaska Native	64%	52%	55%	78%	52%	57%	52%	56%
Asian	35%	45%	34%	50%	67%	71%	66%	69%
Black/African American	62%	59%	55%	73%	49%	56%	48%	54%
Native Hawai'ian/Other Pacific Islander	17%	22%	16%	28%	40%	44%	39%	42%
Two or More Races	54%	61%	53%	72%	60%	66%	58%	66%

Source: WICHE analysis of tabulation output from 11 institutions' analysis of their student-level data, from the institutions participating in the No Holding Back project. Note: one institution did not provide these data, and three institutions did not provide results by detailed race/ethnicity categories, so higher-level categorizations are also shown. According to IPEDS data, in total the 11 institutions enrolled about 120,000 degree-seeking undergraduates in AY 2021-22, but the maximum number of students reported in any cross-tabulation was 105,000, likely due to limitations in identifying holds activity.

(continued)



FROM THE NO HOLDING BACK PROJECT

Institutions also performed regression and ordinary least squares analysis to investigate associations between certain demographics and holds activity and debt amounts. This further analysis is not summarized due to limitations on comparability and in many cases, too few students for these statistical analyses.

“

One of the key findings from our data analysis was the relationship between student race/ethnicity and debt amount. Specifically, identifying as Black, Native American/Alaskan Native, or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander seemed to be positively and significantly related to debt amount and unresolved debt amount. While we did not find statistically significant positive relationships between Pell recipients and debt amounts, we do not fully trust that finding given the study period: i.e., many students who would otherwise have debt-related holds did not have them during the study period simply because of emergency funding made available during the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

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