



University of Rhode Island

Retention and Graduation Rates for Students

Participating in

Special Programs for Talent Development

Between 1994 and 2003

Prepared by the Office of Information Services / Institutional Research

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## Introduction

Special Programs for Talent Development (SPTD) was founded in 1968 to provide a special opportunity to students of color and students from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend the University. It provides help with adjusting to college through a summer pre-matriculation program, special academic advising, tutoring, financial aid based on need, and a "home away from home" at URI.

The purpose of this study is to assemble a longitudinal dataset that makes possible a comparison between students participating in SPTD and those not participating. The accepted measures of success in college – retention and graduation rates – over the last decade are examined, as well as SAT composite scores which are a measure of preparation for college level work. Data extracted from the University's Student Information System (SIS) at chronologically consistent points over an eleven-year period (1994 through 2004) allows individual student enrollments and completions to be tracked over time. These data include gender, race/ethnicity, enrollment term, credit load, SAT scores, and graduation date for all students who entered as new undergraduates.

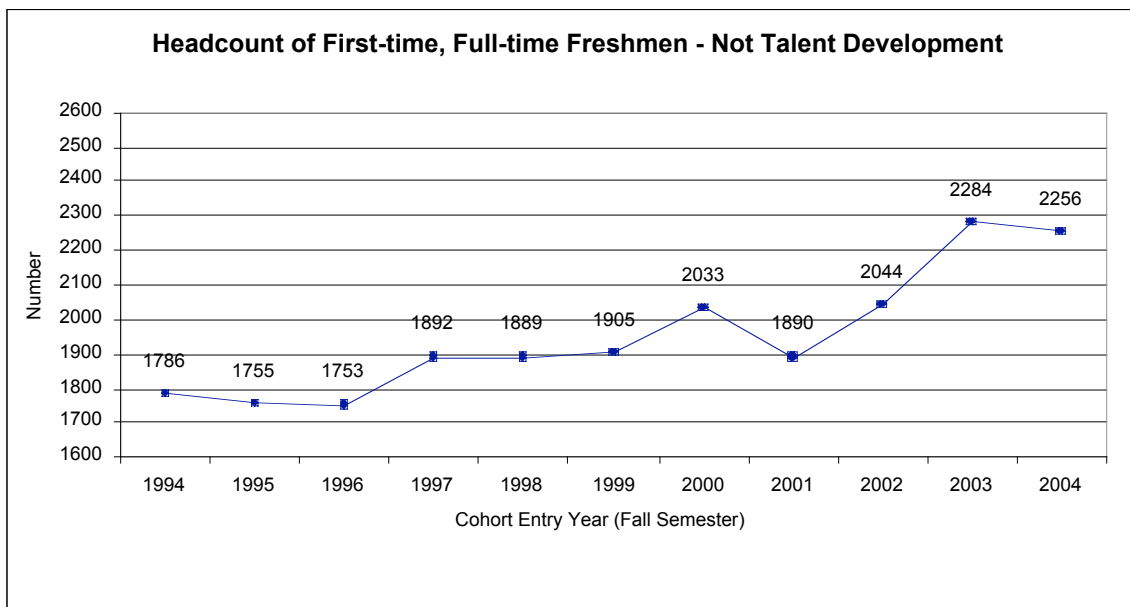
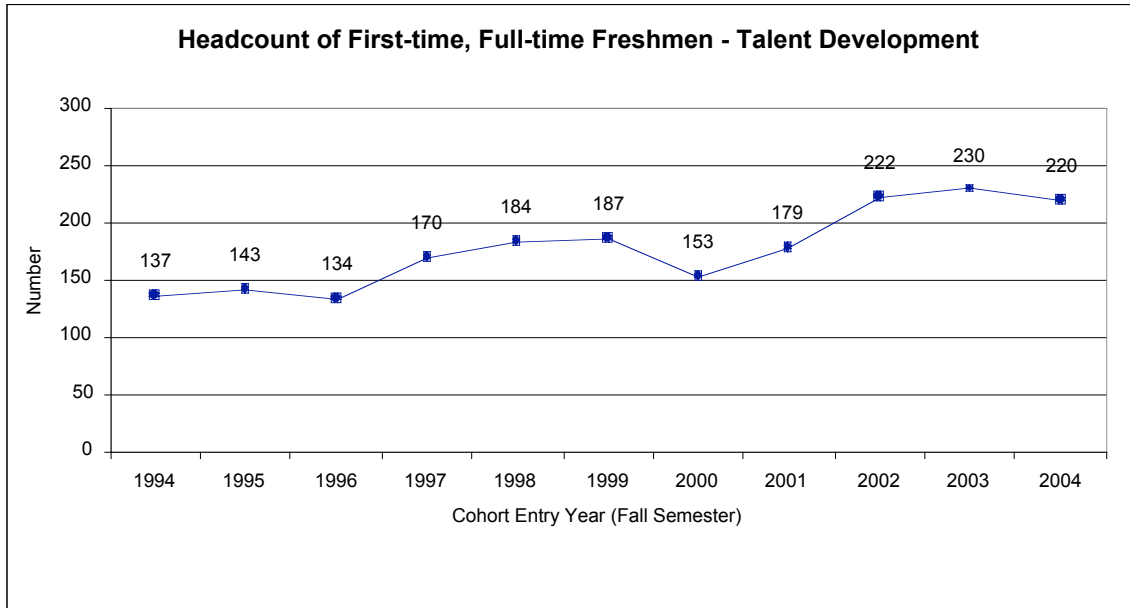
Participation in SPTD is the key variable in this study, but the regularity and timeliness with which it was recorded in the source data is uncertain. For example, the participation code often is absent from a student's initial term record, but present in subsequent term records. To address such problems with presumably missing data, a student was considered to be participating in SPTD in all terms if coded positively in any term. Thus, initial cohorts are likely to include most students in the program except in cases where SPTD students were enrolled for only one term but not coded as participating. This type of exception results in a loss of data and reduces the cohort sizes. Despite these conditions, totals for all cohorts appear reasonable, relatively consistent from year-to-year, and acceptable for this initial analysis. If a more accurate list of SPTD participants can be identified, recalculation of the derived data will not be difficult.

Cohorts are established with a population of first-time, full-time freshmen defined as students entering with fewer than 24 college credits at admission, carrying at least 12 credits in their initial fall term of enrollment, and pursuing a baccalaureate degree. Once established, cohorts can only retain or lose, but never gain, students. Re-enrollment as of October 15<sup>th</sup> in following fall terms and graduation within 6 years after initial enrollment are standard criteria for the calculation of retention and graduation rates. Each cohort is split into two sub-populations: 1) students participating in SPTD and 2) students not participating. The ratio is about 1 to 11. This analysis compares the two sub-populations by various demographic categories (all students, Rhode Island residents only, by gender, by race/ethnicity).

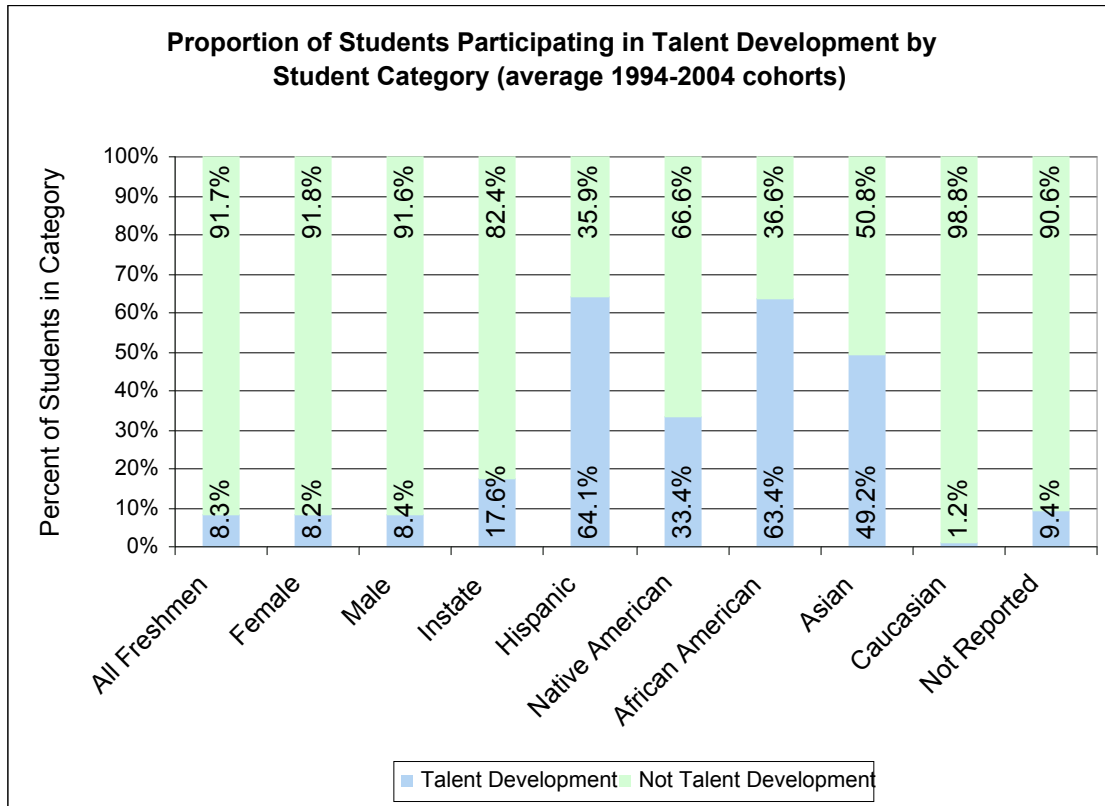
With small sample sizes and even smaller segmented categories, calculated rates are likely to show large differences from year to year. To dampen wild swings, rates for several years are averaged using the maximum number of years available for a particular variable (e.g., first year retention can be based on ten years of data while graduation within six years must exclude cohorts that have not yet completed six full years from the start).

## Results

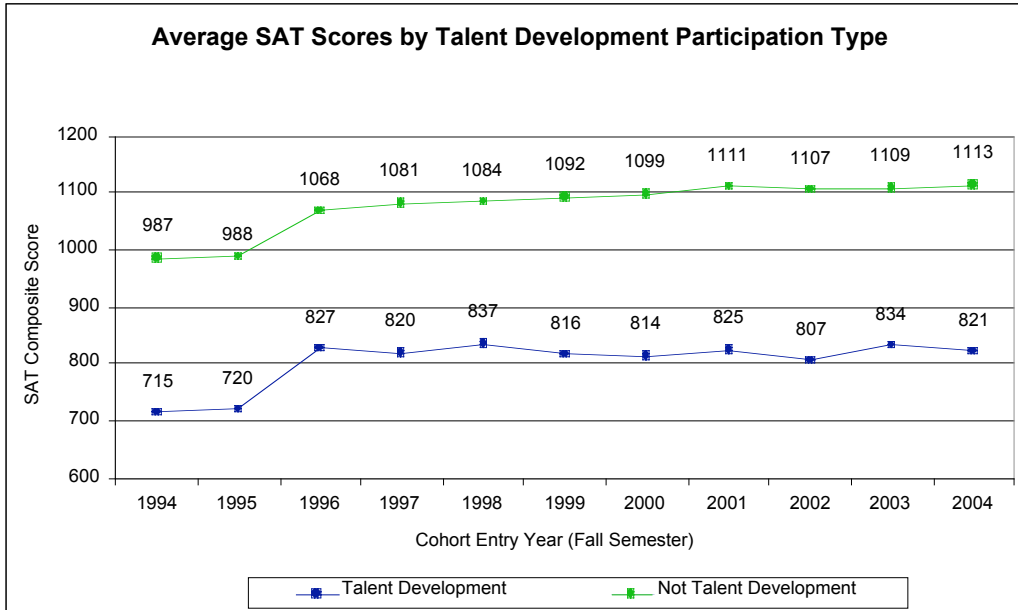
The size of both the freshmen cohorts of student participating and not participating in SPTD have increased with time. The proportion of participants has ranged between 7% and 10% of the full freshman cohort during this period.



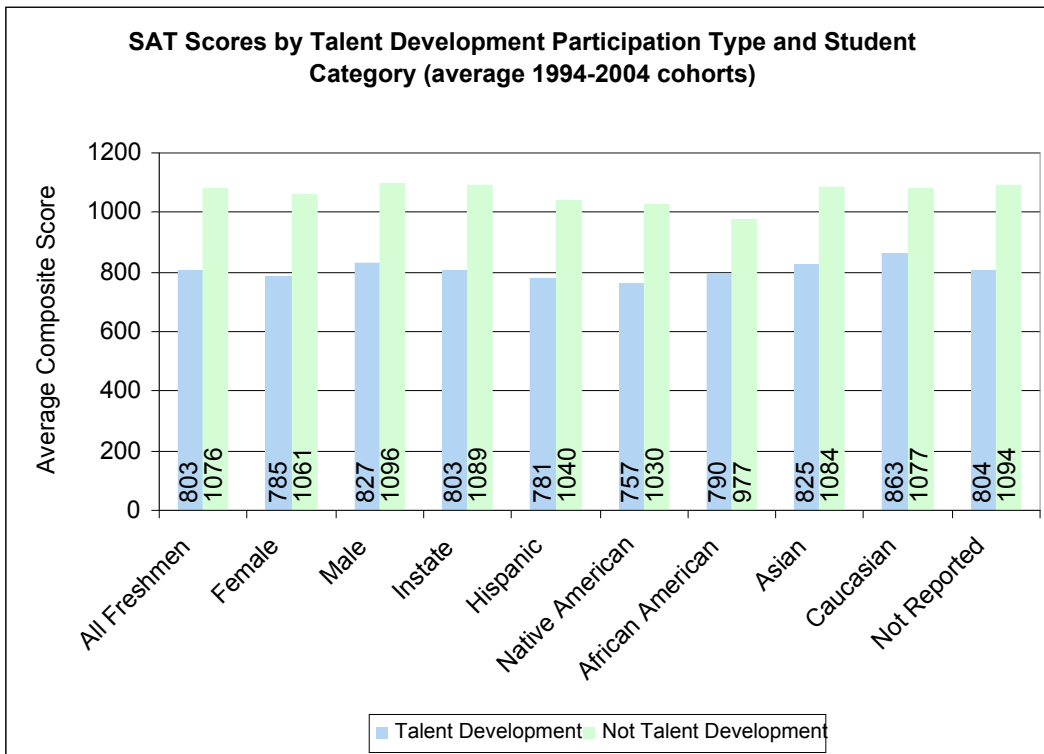
The proportion of freshmen participating in SPTD varies depending on the category of students. When all cohorts from 1994 through 2004 are aggregated the overall participation rate is 8.3% of all students and 17.6% of all Rhode Island students (out-of-state students do not participate in SPTD). Participation rates by men and women are essentially the same. Significantly different rates for the several race/ethnicity categories reflect the mission of the program.



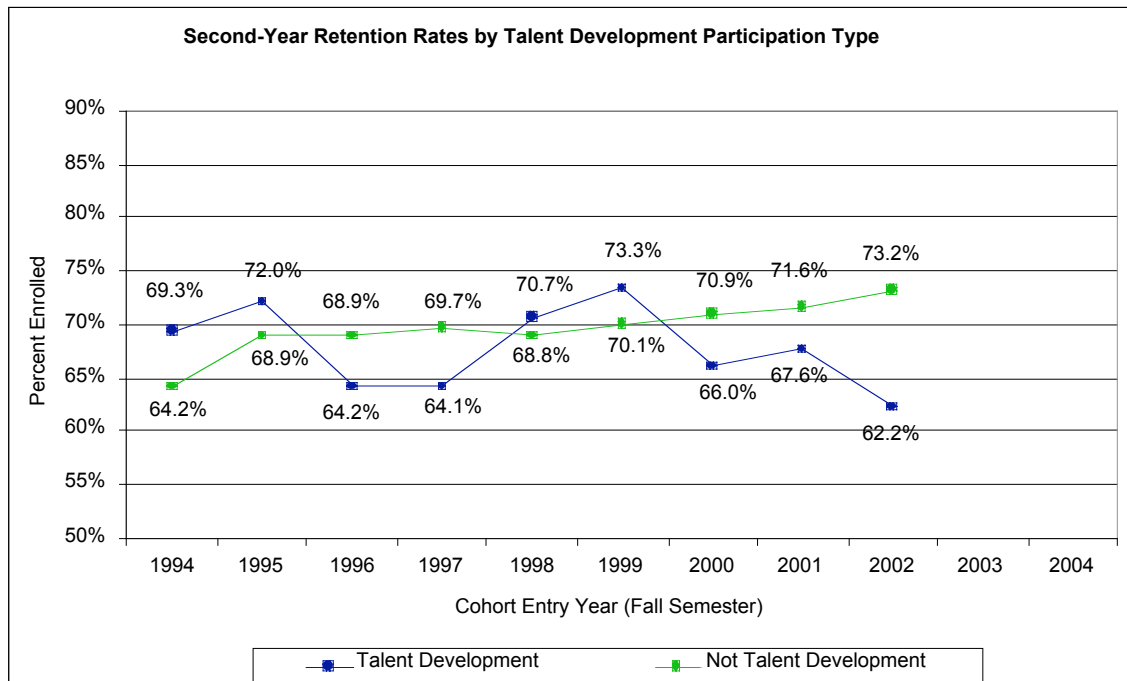
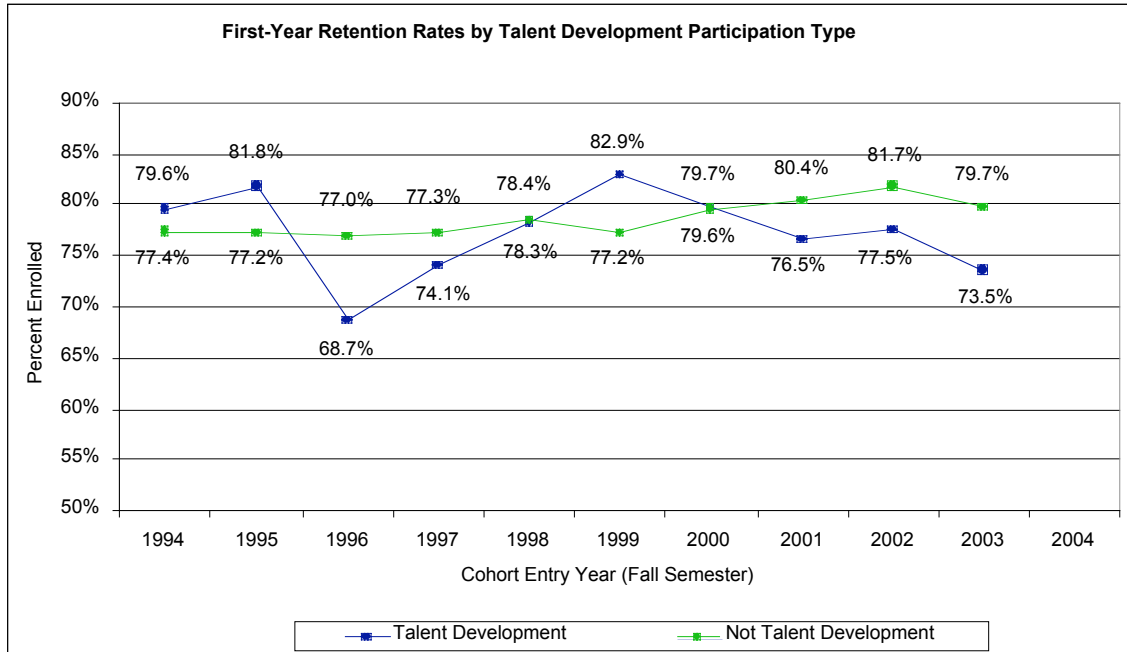
Average SAT Composite scores have tended to increase slightly for non-Talent Development students while remaining relative constant for Talent Development students. Note that the change in scores beginning in 1996 resulted from a re-centering calculation by the test administrator.



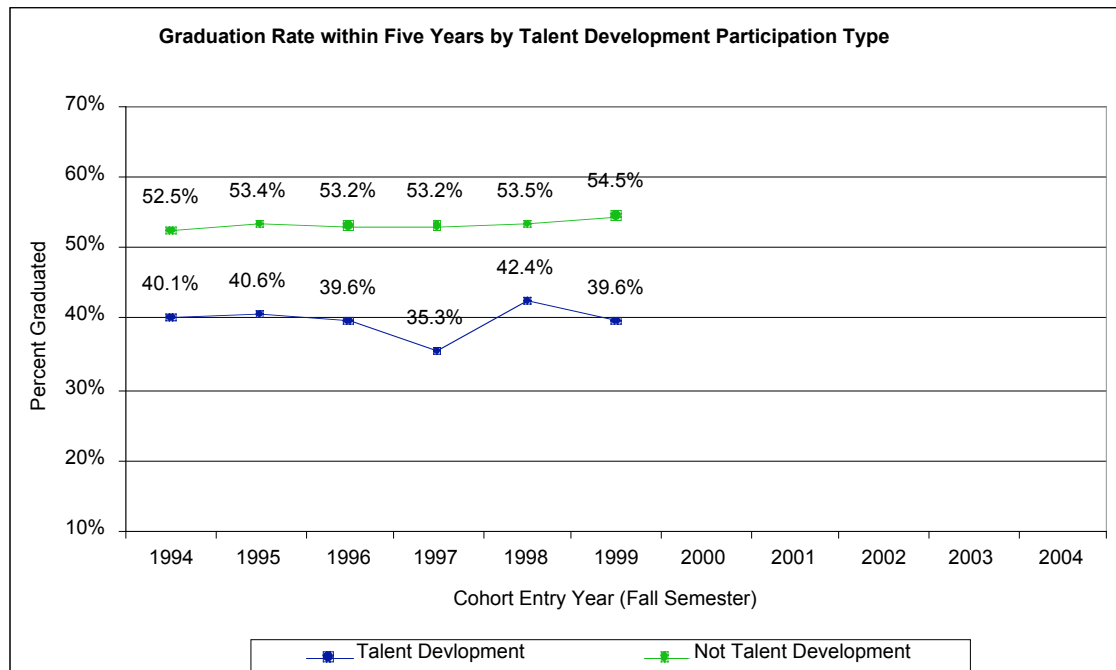
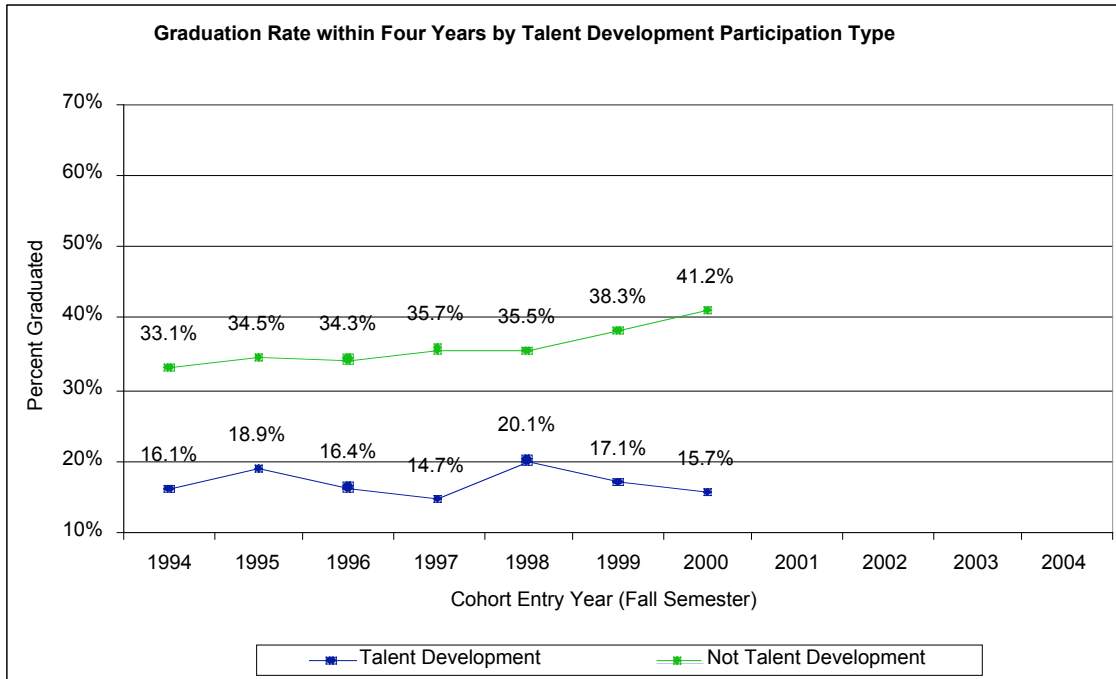
Average SAT scores for Talent Development and non-Talent Development students are significantly different but relatively consistent across all student categories.

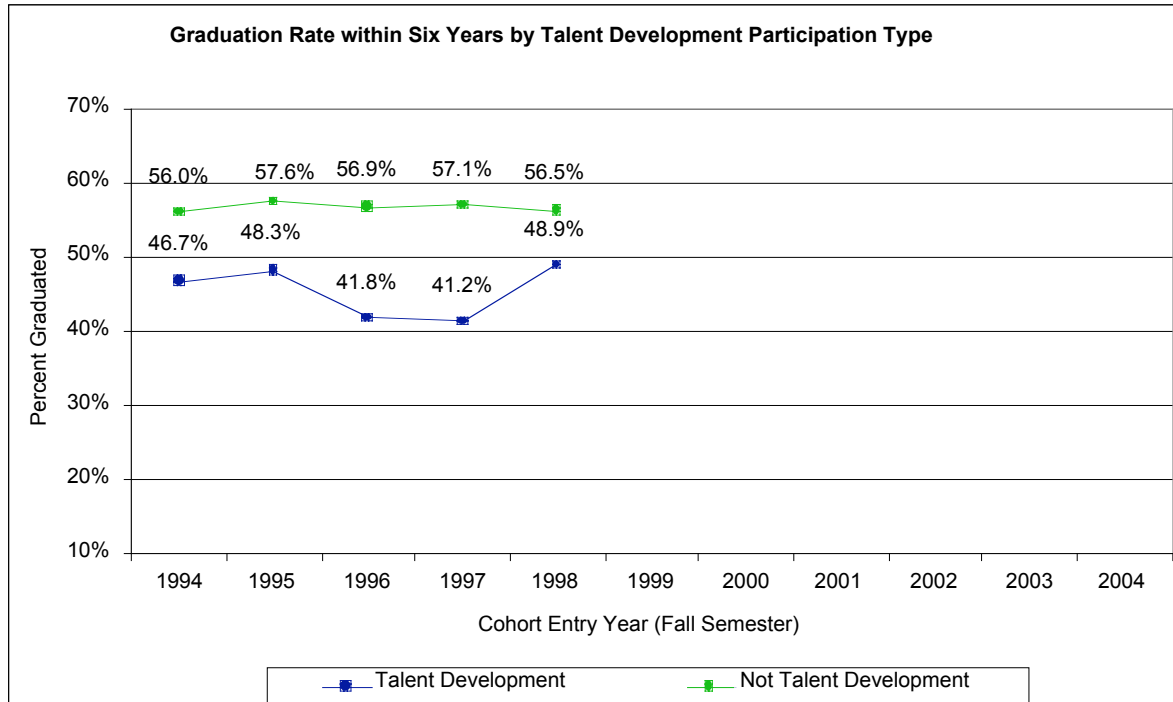


Retention rates for all students in the first and second years after entry are very similar for both Talent Development and non-Talent Development students. Average rates are 1.3% (first-year) and 1.9% (second-year) less for Talent Development participants.



Graduation rates for all students show more distinct differences between Talent Development and non-Talent Development students at the four, five, and six-year time-to-graduation periods. The narrowing of the gap with more time (average of 19.1% at four years to 11.4% at six years) indicates that in the aggregate Talent Development students tend to take longer to earn their degrees than their non-Talent Development counterparts.

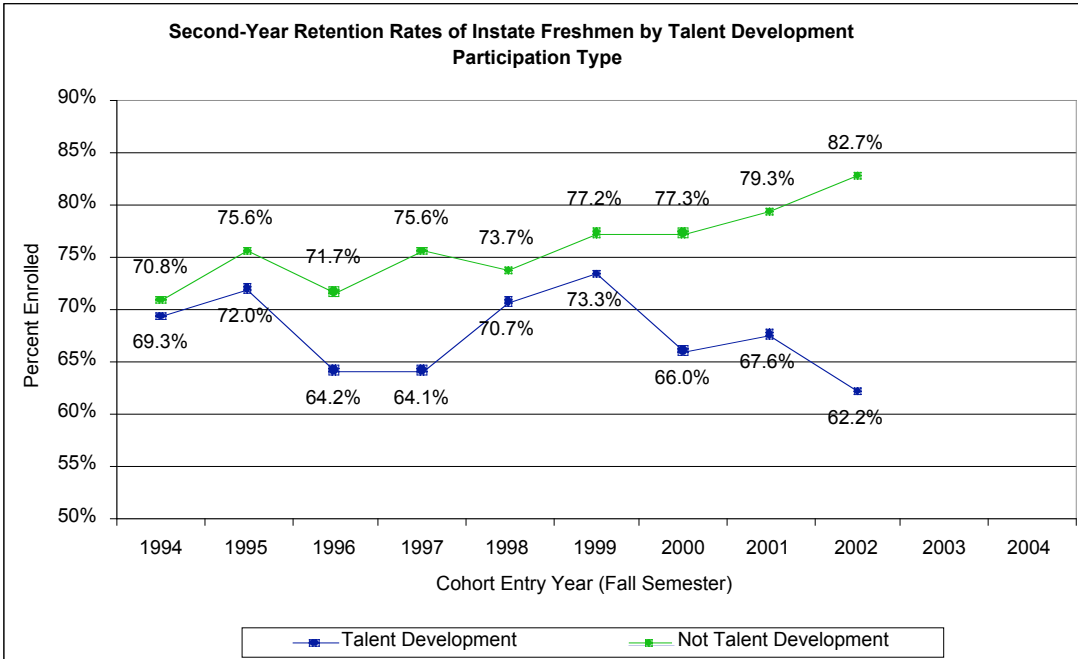
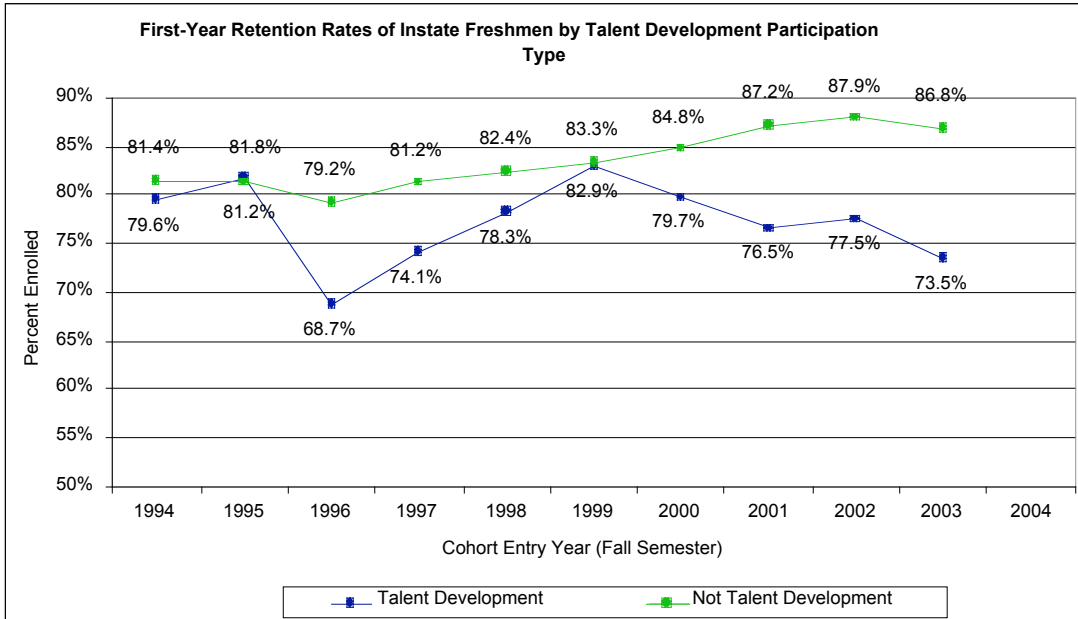




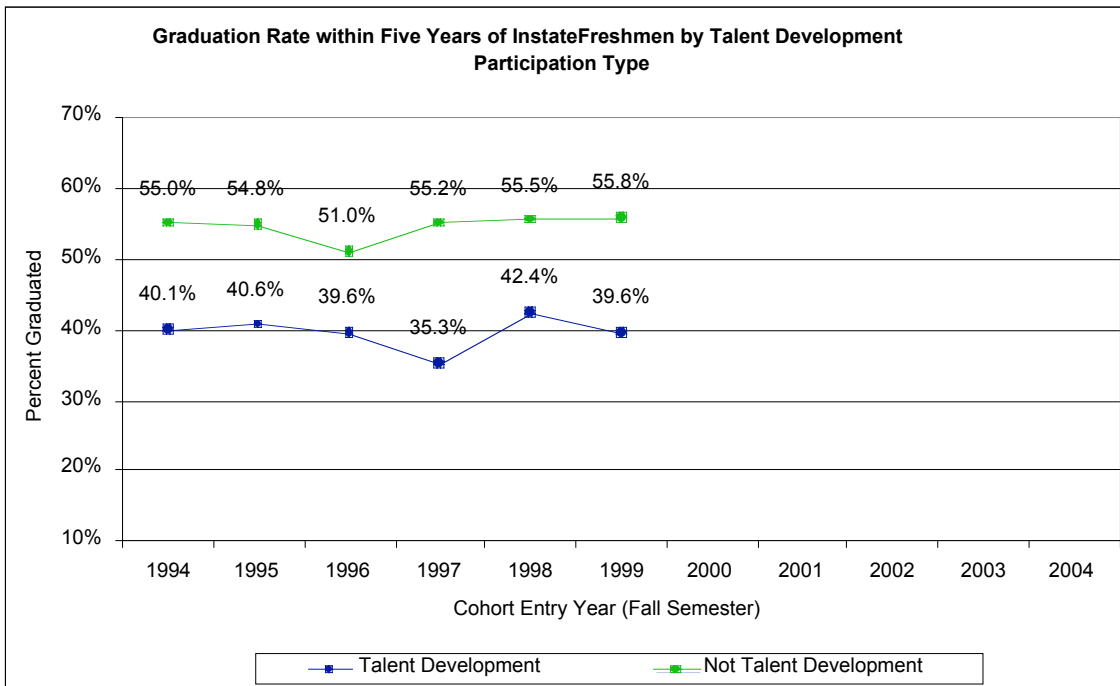
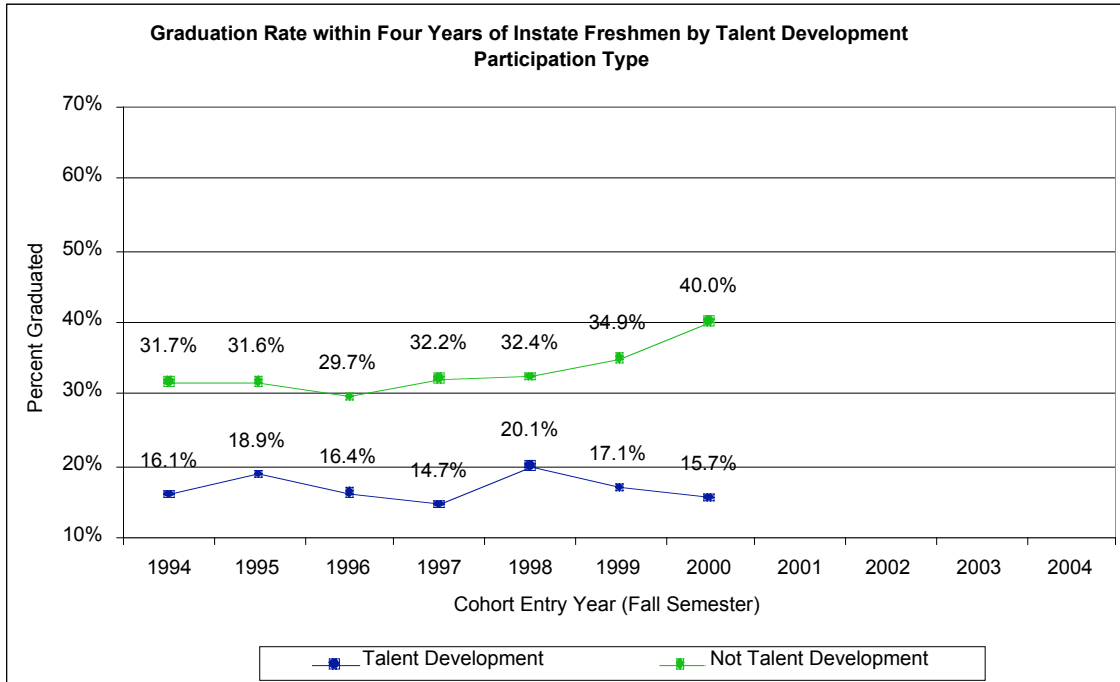
After six years from the initial fall semester, graduation rates for Talent Development students lag behind the non-Talent Development students by an average of more than ten percent. This study did not examine if the gap narrows beyond the sixth year after entry. The proportion of students completing within four years appears to be accelerating for the non-SPTD students, but essentially level for the SPTD participants.

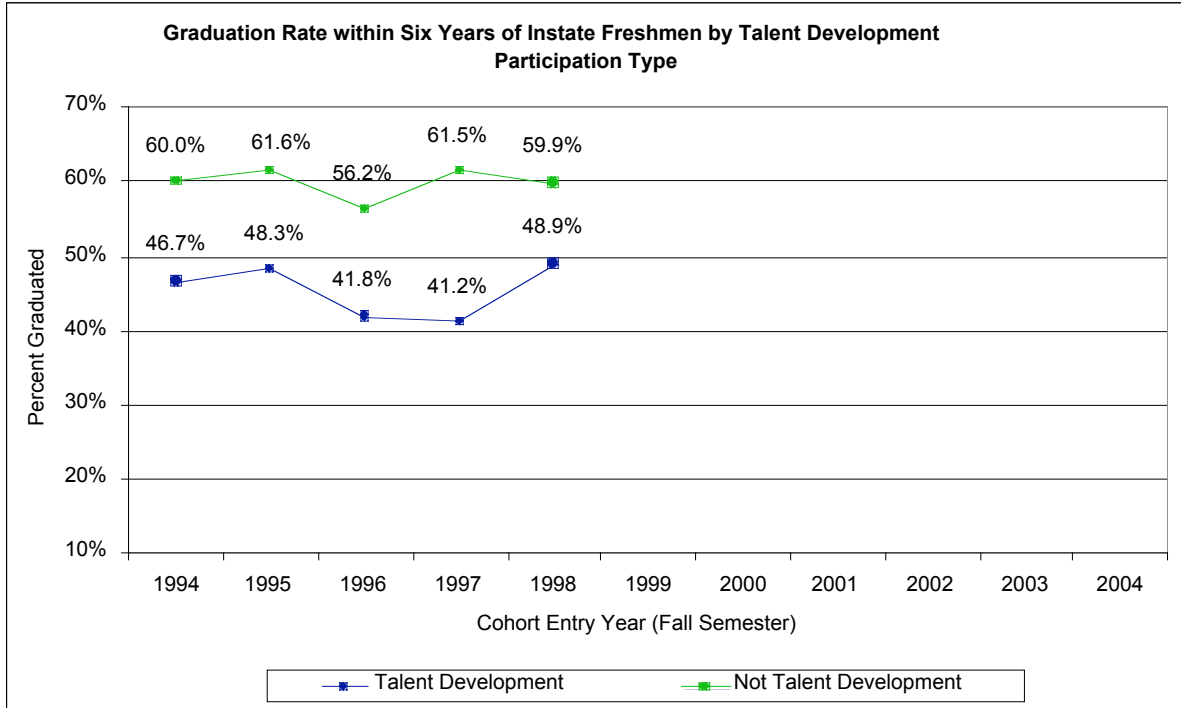


When retention rates for Talent Development students are compared to non-Talent Development students just from Rhode Island, the results are less similar than when out-of-state non-Talent Development students are included. A trend toward increasing divergence has occurred in recent years and is more pronounced in for the second-year rates than the first.

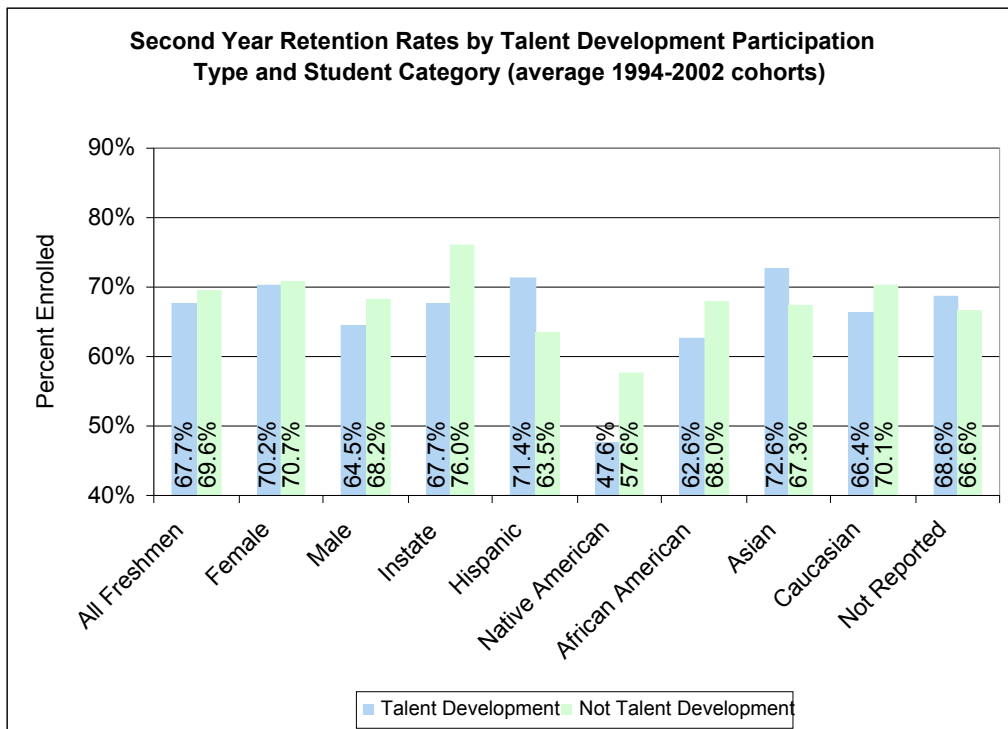
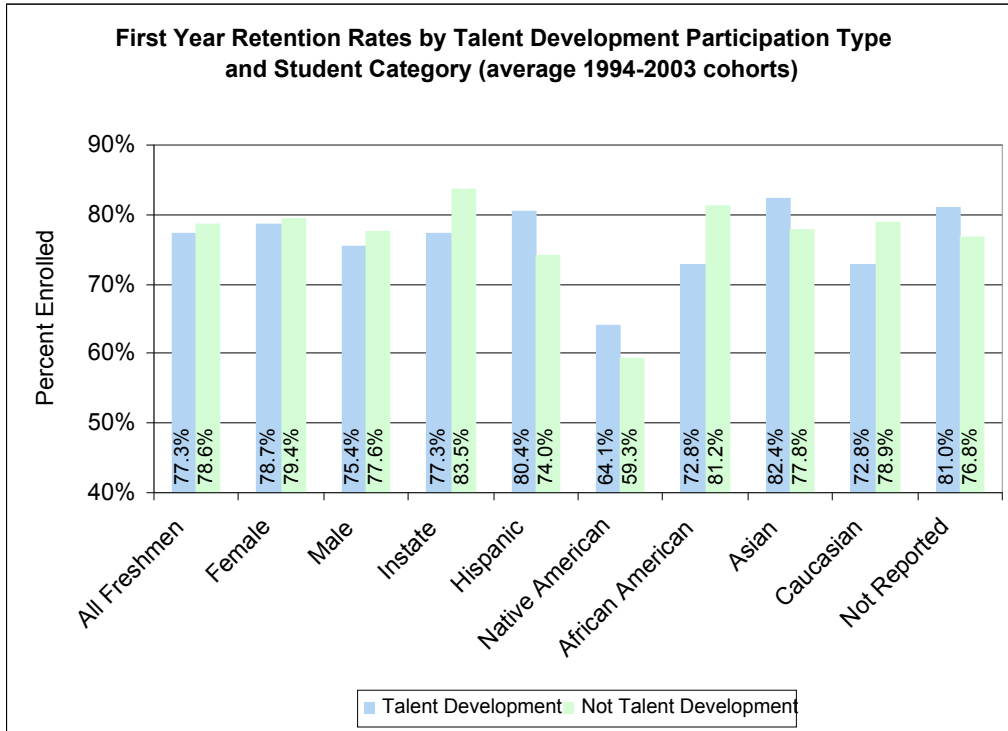


Graduation rates for Talent Development and non-Talent Development students just from Rhode Island show a consistent average difference of 16.2% (four-year) to 14.5% (six-year) among the three time-to-graduation intervals. However, in recent years a trend to completing in the shortest time has emerged for non-Talent Development students.

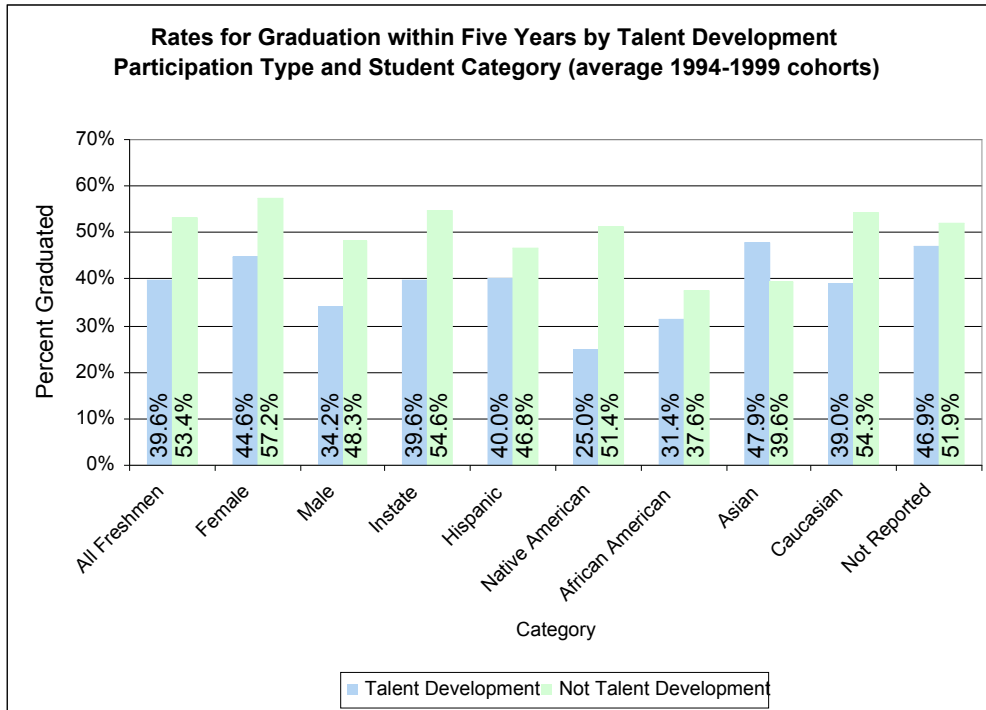
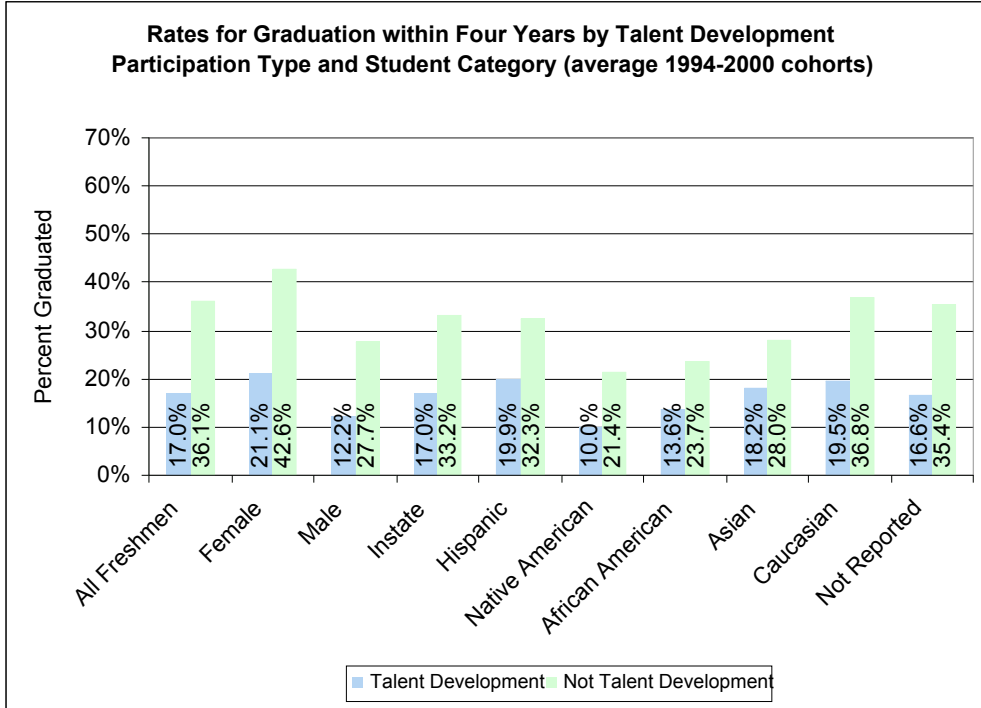




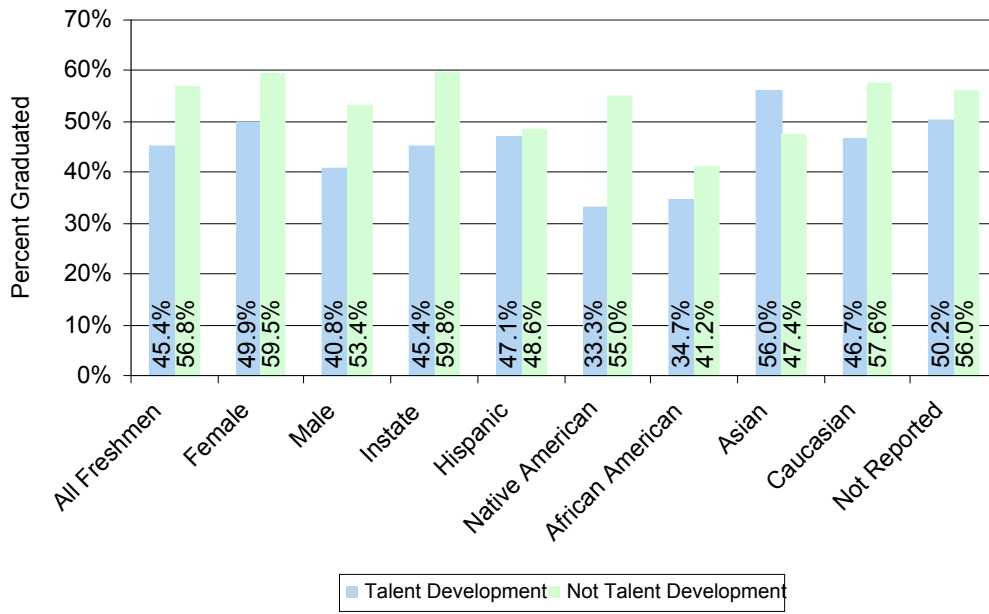
The differences in average retention rates between Talent Development and non-Talent Development students vary among the different student categories. Hispanic, Native American, Asian, and students not reporting a race/ethnicity who participate in SPTD have a better average retention rate those who do not.



The differences in average graduation rates between Talent Development and non-Talent Development students vary among the different student categories. Asian students participating in SPTD have a better average graduation rate at five and six years than those who do not.



**Rates for Graduation within Six Years by Talent Development Participation Type and Student Category (average 1994-1998 cohorts)**



## Discussion

Special Programs for Talent Development has had much success over the years in providing opportunities for pursuing higher education to students who might not otherwise be able to do so. It is appropriate to look at its results and to establish a baseline of data for further discussion. This analysis uses the standard measures of retention and graduation rates during the last decade to compare students who have participated to counterparts who have not participated.

Averaged over the years 1994 through 2004, 8.3% of the first-time, full-time freshman cohorts participated in SPTD. The proportion rises to 17.5% of Rhode Island students. In general, these students enter college much less prepared for college work with significantly lower average SAT Composite scores than non-SPTD (273 points lower for all students and 285 for RI-resident students). Research using national data indicates that preparation as evidenced by SAT scores is one factor highly correlated to retention and graduation.

Compared to all non-SPTD students (both in-state and out-of-state residents combined), SPTD students continue in the second and third years at nearly the same rate. However, because all SPTD students are Rhode Island residents, a fairer measure would be to compare with only non-SPTD Rhode Island students. In this case the SPTD students lag by an average of 6-8% behind their in-state counterparts. The gap was smaller ten years ago but has widened in recent years. Likewise, their average graduation rates within four, five, and six years also are lower by 14-16%. Here, however, there is no change in the gap over time.

When individual gender and race/ethnicity categories are compared by SPTD participation status, other differences appear.

- Women participating in SPTD have almost the same retention rate as non-SPTD women.
- Retention of men participating in SPTD is lower by 2-4% than non-SPTD men.
- The six-year graduation rate for SPTD women is 10% lower and for men 13% lower.
- Hispanic and Asian students participating in SPTD have retention rates 6-8% higher than those not participating.
- Participating Asian students have six-year graduation rates 9% higher.

It is important to note that these groups contain small numbers of students and that out-of-state students are included in the non-SPTD groups. Percentages have been averaged over several years to smooth variations due to sample size.