

Study brings both good, bad news for higher education in Ark.

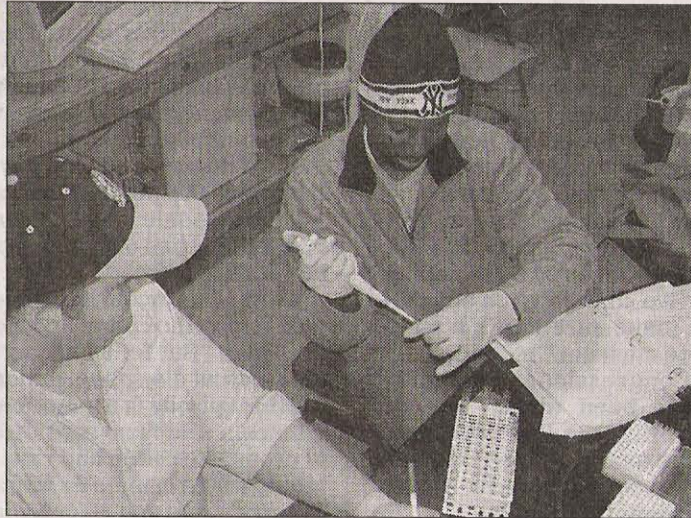
BY ALDEMARO ROMERO
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

A recent national study has brought good news and bad news for the state of higher education in Arkansas.

Arkansas ranks above the nation in the percentage of its population completing a high school degree and is on par in the percentage of recent high school graduates going on to college; however, it lags behind in the percentage that graduates from college.

These figures have just been published in a report titled "Adding it Up: State Challenges for Increasing College Access and Success" produced by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and Jobs for the Future for Making Opportunity Affordable, a non-for-profit organization based in Boston aimed at improving the U.S. population's access to higher education.

Arkansas is among the lowest-performing states in the nation in the percentage of adults ages 25-64 who have a college degree. "The current trend is not positive and will keep the state unful-



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Students work in an Arkansas State University biology lab. To improve the state's economic competitiveness, retention of college-entering students, particularly of ethnic minorities, must improve.

filling its needs for a college-educated population needed to meet work force demands and compete with best-performing nations" the report says. According to this study more attention must be paid to minority ethnic groups since they represent the fastest growing population segment in the state.

The report emphasizes

that a college-educated work force is essential to be more internationally competitive, meet emerging work force needs and promote social mobility and equity opportunity.

Despite the fact that the United States had been leading the world in the percentage of adults possessing a college degree — a key com-

ponent to economic development — that lead no longer exists. Today the United States ranks 10th in the world in the percentage of 24- and 25-year-olds with an associate's degree or higher and is one of the few nations in the world where the older population is more educated than the younger one.

In fact, the United States ranks near the bottom of industrialized nations in the percentage of entering students that complete a college degree, which means that we have a serious problem retaining students in college.

If these trends continue, the United States will produce 48 million undergraduate degrees between 2005 and 2025. This is short of the 64 million needed to match the progress being made in other industrialized nations to reach the goal of 55 percent of the adult population with a college degree.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau disparities persist across racial and ethnic groups despite that the nation is becoming more diverse: Today 42 percent of whites ages 25-64 have an associate's degree or higher,

which is true for only 26 percent of African Americans and 18 percent of Hispanics.

Because most of the increase in the population will occur among non-whites, access to college for other ethnic groups must be emphasized.

Currently 26.5 percent of Arkansans ages 25-64 has a college degree, less than half of what is needed to produce a 55 percent of college educated adult population

by 2025 in order to be able to compete nationally and internationally.

The full report is available at www.makingopportunityaffordable.org.

For more information, contact the Arkansas State University Department of Biological Sciences at biology@astate.edu.

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