Option 1: Why are college graduation rates so low? Overview “Go to college” we tell lots of students. However, just going to college does not mean that a student will finish college with a degree. In fact, lots of students do not complete a degree even though that was their goal. Why is that? In this essay you will study college completion rates at colleges and universities in the U.S. You will apply sociological theories you learned in this course to explain why students do not complete a bachelor’s degree. You will evaluate and propose solutions to increase college completion rates in the U.S., and your major at CSUN. What can universities, individual students, and our society do to increase college completion rates? Purpose · To describe trends in college completion rates at 4-year colleges and universities in the U.S. · To describe trends in college completion rates at CSUN overall and in your major specifically. · To apply three sociological theories to explain why students do not complete a bachelor’s degree when that was their intended goal. · To evaluate and select two solutions to increase college completion rates in the U.S. · To create one program or policy to increase college completion rates at CSUN in your major. Tasks 1. First, examine the “Fast Facts” about college completion rates (aka graduation rates) gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). To understand how to describe graduation rates, read the response to the question “What are the graduation rates for students obtaining an undergraduate degree?” 2. Using Table 326.10 from the NCES, examine the 6-year completion rates for the 2014 cohort only. Scroll down to the section “Graduating within 6 years after entry, males and females, all 4-year institutions, 2014 entry cohort.” Describe those trends in college completion rates in your own words. Specifically, describe these trends below: a. What percentage of students graduated with a BA within 6 years at all 4-year institutions in the U.S.? To find out, look at the overall 6-year completion rate for all institutions for the 2014 entry cohort (that’s the first column). “All institutions” refers to public universities, private universities, and for-profit universities combined. How does that completion rate compare to the completion rate for for-profit universities? Again, 2014 entry cohort only. b. How do college completion rates differ by race-ethnicity? Look at the 6-year completion rates for the 2014 entry cohort for the following groups: -White students -Black students -Hispanic students -Asian/Pacific Islander students (the Total column under the Asian/Pacific Islander heading) -American Indian/Alaskan Native students c. How do college completion rates differ by gender? Look at the overall 6-year completion rates for males and females. See the section “Graduating within 6 years after entry, males, all 4-year institutions, 2014 entry cohort.” Then, scroll down to look at the rates for females. 3. Examine the graduation rates for students at CSUN on the CSUN Counts Dashboard. a. What percentage of students graduated with a BA within 6 years at CSUN? Click on Graduation Rates > CSUN Graduation Rate by Cohort Change the “row display” box to None. The “rate select” box to Graduated from CSUN. The “student entry” box should be First-Time Freshman. The “graduation years” box should be 6 years. Leave “cohort period” box as multiple values The boxes under Data Filters should all be set to “All” (college name, dept name, etc.) The Freshman Experience Subgroups boxes should be all set to “All” Here’s where the magic happens: You will see the First-Time Freshman 6-Year Graduation Rate displayed. Look at the rate for the most recent cohort (fall 2015). b. How does the 6-year rate compare to the 4-year rate? i.e., what percentage of students graduated within 4 years at CSUN? Again, look at the fall 2015 cohort. ☹ c. How do college completion rates at CSUN differ by race-ethnicity? Change the “graduation years” box back to 6 years. Change the “Row Display” box Ethnicity. Examine rates for the most recent cohort (fall 2015). Look at the rates for: -African American students -Latinx students -American Indian students -Asian American students -White students d. How do college completion rates at CSUN differ by gender? Make sure the “graduation years” box is set to 6 years. Change the “Row Display” box Gender. Look at the rate for the most recent cohort (fall 2015). Look at the rates for females and males. e. What percentage of students IN YOUR MAJOR graduated with a BA within 6 years at CSUN? Make sure the “graduation years” box is set to 6 years. Change the “Row Display” box to None. Change the “Dept Name” box to your major (scroll down for Soc). Look at the rate for the most recent cohort (fall 2015). Applying Sociological Theories 4. Apply what you’ve learned this semester to explain why graduation rates are so low in the U.S. and at CSUN. Why don’t students complete a bachelor’s degree when that was their intended goal? Apply three sociological theories/explanations you’ve studied this semester to understand why students don’t graduate. One of the theories should address institutional practices (see below). You should describe each theory and explain how the theory can be applied to understand the problem of graduation rates. Cite at least 5 scholarly sources that were assigned for this course. The theories about graduation rates can be categorized in two groups: - Student and family resources. This refers to the challenges that individual students and their families face in staying in college and graduating. It includes lack of financial capital (low income), how well-prepared a student is for college, human capital of parents, social capital, cultural capital, success frames, stereotype threat, peer influence, among other things. - Institutional practices. This refers to the choices that universities make. It includes policies and programs the university, colleges, or departments have created to help students graduate or become academically successful, the cost of tuition and fees, the amount of money spent on student advising, the kinds of courses and majors they offer, whether the social climate of the university fosters inclusion and a sense of belonging for all students, among other things. Solutions 5. There are many, many programs and policies that have been created to address low graduation rates in the U.S. and at CSUN. Research some of these programs/policies and select two solutions aimed at increasing college completion rates in the U.S. Describe the solutions that you have selected and how they would help increase college completion rates. A good place to look for policies and programs is the Fixes column in The New York Times. Type in the search bar: “college graduation rates” or “higher education.” 6. Based on what you have learned this semester and through this project, create a program or policy designed to increase graduation rates at CSUN in your major. Pretend that CSUN gave you $500,000 and a mission to improve the graduation rates in your major. What program(s) or policies would you create to keep students in college and help them graduate within 4 or 6 years? See paper outline on next page à Paper Outline a. Introduction. (Length: about ½ page) b. Examine data. Examine statistics for 6-year college completion rates in the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and CSUN’s Dashboard. Describe the trends in college completion rates. (Length: about 1 page) c. Apply what you’ve learned. Apply at least 3 sociological theories/explanations to understand why students don’t graduate. One of the theories should address institutional practices; the other theories can address individual and family resources. You should describe each theory and explain how the theory can be applied to understand the problem of graduation rates. Cite at least 5 scholarly sources that were assigned for this course. (Length: about 3-4 pages) d. Research solutions and select two solutions. Research some innovative programs and policies that are trying to improve college graduation rates. Select two programs/policies and write about them. Describe the two solutions you have selected and explain how they would help increase graduation rates in the U.S. Would you classify the programs as focused on improving individual student and family resources, or institutional practices, or both? (Length: about 1½ - 2 pages) e. Create your own solution to increase the 6-year graduation rate at CSUN. That is, based on what you learned this semester and while doing research for this project, create a program or policy that would help increase 6-year graduation rates at CSUN. Describe the program in enough detail that Dr. C will be able to understand it. Explain how it will positively affect graduation rates. Would you classify this program or policy as focused on improving individual student and family resources, or institutional practices, or both? (Length: 1 - 2 pages) f. Conclusion. (Length: about ½ page)