



Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities

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Highlights

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Indicator 24. Enrollment

Over the past 25 years, the total enrollment of adults in degree-granting institutions increased for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. Within each racial/ethnic group, female enrollment increased more than male enrollment, although the rates of increase varied by race/ethnicity. This indicator also examines differences in the percentage distribution of enrollment by institution type among the races/ethnicities.

24.1. Undergraduate Enrollment

Undergraduate enrollment figures include all students, regardless of age, enrolled either part time or full time in undergraduate studies at a degree-granting institution. Between 1976 and 2008, total undergraduate fall enrollment increased for each racial/ethnic group. Asian/Pacific Islander enrollment increased six-fold, from 169,000 in 1976 to 1,118,000 in 2008. Hispanic enrollment rose from 353,000 in 1976 to 2,103,000 in 2008—approximately six times the enrollment in 1976. These two racial/ethnic groups had the fastest rates of enrollment growth, leading to increases in their share of total enrollment between 1976 and 2008: from 2 to 7 percent for Asians/Pacific Islanders and from 4 to 13 percent for Hispanics.²⁶ During that time period, American Indian/Alaska Native enrollment more than doubled, increasing from 70,000 to 176,000. Black enrollment rose from 943,000 to 2,269,000, increasing their share of overall enrollment from 10 to 14 percent. White enrollment also increased, but at the slowest rate of all racial/ethnic groups. Although White enrollment rose from 7,740,000 to 10,339,000, White enrollment as a percentage of total enrollment declined from 82 percent in 1976 to 63 percent in 2008.

[View Table 24.1](#)

Overall, the number of both males and females in undergraduate programs has increased since 1976. By 1980, the percentage of females enrolled as undergraduates surpassed the percentage of males enrolled as undergraduates. The largest difference between male and female enrollments was among Black students. In 1976, some 54 percent of Black undergraduates were female. Over time, Black females continued to enroll in degree-granting institutions in larger numbers than Black males, and in 2008, females accounted for 64 percent of the total Black undergraduate enrollment. American Indian/Alaska Native female enrollment also overtook male enrollment. In 1976, enrollment numbers were almost equal between American Indian/Alaska Native males and females, but by 2008, females made up 60 percent of the total American Indian/Alaska Native student enrollment. Additionally, females increased their shares of the total Hispanic and White enrollment (from 46 to 58 percent for Hispanic females and from 48 to 56 percent for White females). Between 1976 and 1990, Asian/Pacific Islander females represented less than half of the total Asian/Pacific Islander enrollment. Since 2000, however, more females have enrolled, and in 2008, females represented 54 percent and males represented 46 percent of total Asian/Pacific Islander undergraduate enrollment. For Asians/Pacific Islanders, these percentages are a near reversal from the percentages of three decades earlier.

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24.2. Graduate Enrollment

Total graduate²⁷ enrollment also increased for each racial/ethnic group between 1976 and 2008. During that time period, Asian/Pacific Islander enrollment grew six-fold, rising from 29,000 to 185,000 students. Hispanic graduate enrollment in 2008 was over five times that of enrollment in 1976, increasing from 31,000 to 169,000 students. Additionally, the number of Black graduate students increased from 90,000 in 1976 to 315,000 in 2008. Each of these racial/ethnic groups increased its share of total enrollment during this time. For example, the percent of total graduate enrollment increased from 6

to 12 percent for Blacks, from 2 to 6 percent for Hispanics, and from 2 to 7 percent for Asians/Pacific Islanders.²⁸ American Indian/Alaska Native graduate enrollment more than doubled, increasing from 6,400 to 17,700 students. Although the number of White graduate students increased from 1,336,000 to 1,750,000, the percentage share of total enrollment decreased for Whites between 1976 and 2008 from 85 to 64 percent.

 [View Table 24.2](#)

Shifts between male and female graduate enrollment were similar to shifts between male and female undergraduate enrollment. More females were enrolled in graduate programs in 2008 than males, and the size of the gap differed by race/ethnicity. Again, the difference in the percentages of males and females enrolled was largest for Black students. In 1976, Black females composed 56 percent of the total Black graduate enrollment. Black females continued to enroll at faster rates than did their male counterparts and, by 2008, some 71 percent of Black graduate students were female. In 1976, females represented less than 50 percent of the total graduate enrollment of Whites, Hispanics, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and American Indians/Alaska Natives. However, between 1976 and 2008, female enrollment grew faster than male enrollment for each of these racial/ethnic groups, and in 2008 females accounted for 60 percent of White, 63 percent of Hispanic, 55 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander, and 63 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native graduate enrollment.

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24.3 Enrollment by Institutional Type

Within the broader context of higher education are several different types of institutions. In terms of governance, institutions are public, private not-for-profit, or private for-profit. The first group includes most traditional state university systems, as well as community colleges. The second group ranges from major research universities, such as Harvard or Stanford, to small liberal arts colleges. The third group includes privately operated higher education corporations, such as Strayer University or the University of Phoenix. Beyond their ownership structure, postsecondary institutions can also be characterized by the length of programs offered, from less than two-year to 4-year institutions, and by their level of research activity.

In 2008, some 73 percent of the 18.4 million U.S. college students attended public institutions, 19 percent attended private not-for-profit institutions, and 8 percent attended private for-profit institutions. There were variations by race/ethnicity, however. About 81 percent of Hispanics and 79 percent of American Indians/Alaska Natives attended public institutions, higher than the percentages for Whites (73 percent), Blacks (68 percent), and Asians/Pacific Islanders (75 percent). Some 21 percent of White, 18 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander, and 17 percent of Black students attended private not-for-profit institutions, while 11 percent of Hispanic and 12 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native students did so. A higher percentage of Black students (15 percent) attended private for-profit institutions than of students of any of the other races/ethnicities shown (ranging from 6 to 8 percent).

Enrollment among the races/ethnicities also varied by the length of programs offered and by the level of research activity at the institutions that students attended. About 24 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students and 22 percent of White students attended public research institutions²⁹, higher than the percentages for Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native students (ranging from 13 to 17 percent). A higher percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students attended private research institutions (9 percent) compared with the other races/ethnicities shown (ranging from 3 to 6 percent). Almost half (49 percent) of Hispanic college and university students attended public 2-year institutions, a higher percentage than any other race/ethnicity shown (ranging from 33 to 42 percent).

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Snapshot: Enrollment in Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges

Almost 2.8 million college students are enrolled in institutions that serve large percentages of particular races/ethnicities. Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are those that were established prior to 1964 and have the principal mission of educating Black Americans. In 2007, approximately 11 percent of Black students attended one of these institutions. Half of all Hispanic college and university students (50 percent) attended an institution in which Hispanics represent 25 percent or more of the full-time-equivalent undergraduate enrollment (sometimes referred to as "Hispanic serving institutions," or HSIs). Tribally controlled institutions are, for the most part, located on reservations and controlled by a Native American tribe. Of the total American Indian/Alaska Native college and university enrollment, 7 percent attended one of these institutions in 2007.

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²⁶ Percentages are based on total enrollment, including nonresident aliens, for whom race/ethnicity is not known.

²⁷ Includes enrollment in master's, first-professional, and doctorate programs.

²⁸ Percentages are based on total enrollment, including nonresident aliens, for whom race/ethnicity is not known.

²⁹ Research institutions include those with a high level of research activity or those that award at least 20 doctor's degrees per year. Relative levels of research activity for research universities were determined by an analysis of research and development expenditures, science and engineering research staffing, and doctoral degrees conferred, by field. Further information on the research index ranking may be obtained from <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications/index.asp?key=798#related>.

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