

## **The Chronicle of Higher Education**

### **Higher Education is in flux as demographics change, federal report shows**

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Washington – For-profit colleges are serving a bigger a share of a market that includes an increasing number of women and minority students, according to report released on Thursday by the U.S. Education Department.

The report, a compendium of data published annually by the National Center for Education Statistics, confirms several significant changes in higher education over recent years. It found that women and minority students accounted for a large proportion of enrollment growth at colleges and universities in the decade leading up to the 2005-6 academic year.

Despite the growing diversity at colleges, however, the nation's minority populations continue to face major educational obstacles, cautions the report, titled "The Condition of Education 2008." Compared with other minority groups, Hispanic students remain underrepresented in colleges and universities, largely because many of them are immigrants who have poor English skills and attend schools in low-income areas.

In a statement released with the report, Mark S. Schneider, commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, said the document shows that the nation had made some gains, such as increased college enrollment and higher reading and mathematics scores among fourth and eighth graders. "But," he said, "persistent challenges remain in educating a growing and increasingly diverse population."

### **The Girls Are All Right**

The report's findings show that women made great strides relative to men over the 10 years leading up to 2005-6. Women account for nearly two-thirds of the increase in the number of bachelor's and master's degrees and 85 percent of the increase in the number of doctorates awarded by higher-education institutions.

Women's share of total undergraduate enrollment has risen to 57 percent and will most likely remain at that level for the next decade, according to the report.

Men continue to outnumber women among recipients of bachelor's degrees in mathematics, the physical sciences, and engineering, but women earn a larger share of degrees in nearly every major field of study than they did in the mid-1990s. The glaring exceptions are in math, statistics, and computer and information sciences,

which men dominate even more than they did before.

Since the 1980s, women have earned more bachelor's degrees than men in the biological and biomedical sciences, and women have nearly caught up in the social sciences, business, and history. And women have increased their lead over men in bachelor's degrees awarded in fields such as education, psychology, and journalism.

Women were still earning fewer doctorates than men as of 2005-6, but just barely, having increased their share of all doctorates received to 49 percent from 40 percent over the past decade.

### **Tough Transitions**

Hispanic students have made the least progress of any group, largely because of problems assimilating, according to the report.

Hispanics born outside the United States account for 7 percent of the nation's population ages 16 through 25, but they make up 28 percent of all U.S. residents in that age group who are not enrolled in high school and have not earned a high-school diploma. They are three times as likely to lack such a credential as Hispanic people whose families have lived in the United States a generation or more.

Of the one-fourth of children in the United States who speak a language other than English at home, more than 70 percent speak Spanish, the report says.

As of 2007, just 34 percent of the nation's Hispanic population in the 25-to-29 age bracket had completed at least some college, compared with 66 percent of white and 50 percent of black U.S. residents in the same age group.

Although Hispanic people have made some gains in this area since the early 1970s, their progress has been slower than that of other groups. Now they are even less likely than white students to enter college the fall after they graduate from high school.

### **Exploiting Growth**

The report predicts that overall growth in degree-granting college programs will reach 15.6 million this fall. With the number of students entering the nation's elementary and secondary schools projected to continue rising through the coming decade—especially in the

South—the Education Department does not project a slackening of demand for higher education anytime soon.

As of the 2005-6 academic year, the report says, the nation's higher-education institutions were awarding 28 percent more bachelor's and associate degrees, 46 percent more master's degrees, and 26 percent more doctorates than they had a decade earlier. Asian-Americans, especially, are far more prevalent in advanced-degree programs now than they were in the mid-1990s.

For-profit colleges have capitalized on that growth. As of 2005-6, they were awarding more than twice as many associate degrees than they had a decade earlier, having increased their share of all such degrees awarded to 15 percent from 9 percent. They were awarding six times as many bachelor's degrees and nearly 12 times as many master's degrees.

The report also described several major shifts in where students attended college from 2000 to 2006.

For instance, the share of part-time college students dropped to 37 percent from 40 percent in the first six years of the current decade, while full-time enrollments grew nearly three times as fast as part-time enrollments.

Enrollments at four-year colleges grew at nearly twice the rate of those at two-year colleges, and enrollments at private colleges grew more than twice as fast as those at public institutions.

Students in most Southern states were far more likely to attend in-state institutions than were students in most parts of the Northeast. But in four states—Alaska, Florida, Nevada, and New Mexico—the share of recent high-school graduates who chose in-state over out-of-state institutions rose by more than 10 percentage points in the decade after 1996.

Among the report's other findings:

- Young adults with bachelor's degrees earned 28 percent more than those with associate degrees and 50 percent more than those with just high-school diplomas in 2006. For the first time, however, there was no measurable difference in the earnings of young white, black, or Hispanic adults with master's degrees or higher, although Asian-Americans with such high levels of education earned more.
- Students with disabilities have made substantial strides in high schools. About 57 percent were earning regular diplomas as of 2006, up from 43 percent a

decade earlier.

- □□□□□ The proportion of school-age children living in two-parent households remained fairly stable, at about 67 percent, over the decade studied, after falling throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.
- □□□□□ About one in three black and Hispanic children and one in four Native American children attended schools with high poverty levels, compared with one in 10 Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders and one in 25 white children.