

**The Futures Project: Policy for Higher Education in a Changing World**  
**June 2000**  
**Briefing on Demographics**

**What have we learned?**

*The demographic composition of the United States is changing rapidly, and with that comes a responsibility to adjust our educational system to accommodate a new set of needs.* Projections about the economic and educational characteristics of the U.S. in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can help higher education develop a reflexive and efficient system of education. As the profile of students enrolled in higher education shifts, and as the nature of the skills and knowledge needed for successful participation in American society changes, institutions will be forced to evaluate many of their traditional practices for relevance to their students' needs.

**1) What is the profile of today's higher education students?**

- According to the "1999-2000 Almanac Issue" of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, nearly 15.5 million students were enrolled in higher education institutions in the Fall of 1997. Characteristics of higher education students include:
  - 44% male and 56% female
  - 26% minority
  - 57% over the age of 21
  - 26% at 2-year institutions
  - 42% part-time
  - 3.2% foreign.
- The percentage of minority students increased from 16% in 1976 to 26% in 1996 (National Center for Education Statistics).
- From 1986 to 1996, part-time enrollment increased by 13 percent and full-time enrollment increased by 15 percent (National Center for Education Statistics).
- Bachelor's degrees received by men grew by only 8% between 1985-86 and 1995-96; they grew by 28% for women during the same period (National Center for Education Statistics).
- Community colleges enroll a significant proportion of higher education students. According to an Educational Testing Service report on the history of community colleges, the system has swelled to 1,600 institutions over the course of its hundred-year history. 5.5 million students are enrolled in credit courses at such schools, and over 300,000 faculty are employed by them. Community college students tend to be older and more racially diverse than students in four-year-institutions.
- 37 percent of students that begin a post-secondary education drop out before receiving a certificate or a degree. 29% of African American students, 31% of Hispanic students, and 18% of white students drop out of college after less than one year (Department of Education).
- Of students enrolled in a four-year college in 1989-90:
  - 53% received a four-year degree by Spring of 1994
  - 15% were still enrolled and working toward receiving a four-year degree

- 7% had completed either an associate degree or certificate
- 24% were no longer enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics).
- Of students who graduated from high school in 1990 and then entered college seeking a bachelor's degree, the percentage by ethnicity that completed a degree or were still enrolled in 1994:
  - 69 percent of Asian Americans
  - 65 percent of white students
  - 53 percent of African-American students
  - 54 of Latino students (Carter & Wilson 6).
- Of Ph.D. recipients:
  - 40.6% are women
  - 5% are African American
  - 3.8% are Hispanic
  - 4.9% are Asian
  - .6% are American Indian (Wyatt A17).

2) What will be the profile of tomorrow's higher education students?

- Carnevale and Fry report that 2.6 million new students will enroll in higher education institutions by 2015.
  - Two factors contributing to increased enrollment by 2015 include higher Generation Y births (an anticipated 1,700,000 new undergraduates) and an increase in older students (850,000 new students age 35 and older).
- 80% of the 2.6 million will be minorities. Minority enrollment will rise both in absolute numbers of students (up 2 million) and in percentage terms (it will increase from 29.4% of total enrollment to 37.2%) (Carnevale and Fry).
  - African-American and Hispanic enrollments will increase. The percentage of college students who are African-American will increase from 12.8 in 1995 to 13.2 in 2015, while the percentage of Latino students will rise from 10.6 in 1995 to 15.4 in 2015.
  - In 1996, Hispanic Americans accounted for 1.4 million of the nation's undergraduates. That figure is expected to rise to 2.5 million by 2015, a 73% increase that will make Hispanics the country's largest college-going minority (they will account for one in six undergraduates on campus in 2015).
  - Hispanic undergraduates will outnumber African-American undergraduates for the first time in 2006.
  - Though their enrollment figures are on the rise, the share of 18 to 24 year old Hispanic and African-American undergraduates in 2015 will still be smaller than their proportions in the overall U.S. population.
  - Asian-American enrollment will swell dramatically, increasing 86% over the 1995 level. While Asians made up 5.4% of college students in 1995, they are expected to make up 8.4% of the student body by 2015.
  - The percentage of white students as a proportion of total enrollment will drop 7.8 percentage points between 1995 and 2015.

3) What trends are affecting the demographic make-up of future students?

- The President, in his 2000 State of the Union Address, argued that “Because education is more than ever key to our children’s future, we must make sure that all our children have that key. That means universal preschool and afterschool, the best trained teachers in every classroom, and college opportunities for all our children.”
- New skills required to succeed in the workforce are likely to push more students to return to higher education—or to attend for the first time.
- The proportion of college students 25 and older increased by 16% between 1970 and 1995 (Hansen 2). From 1990-1996, growth in the number of older students enrolling in higher education outpaced the growth of younger students. The enrollment of students aged 25 and over rose by 6%, compared to 2% for students under 25. However, the National Center for Education Statistics expects the number of students under the age of 25 to grow by 20% between 1995 and 2007 (University of Illinois 23).
- The U.S. population is expected to increase by 50% by the year 2050, with minority groups constituting approximately 50% of the population (Department of Labor 2). Rising immigration is boosting campus populations. In the three decades between 1950 and 1980, some 450,000 people immigrated to the U.S. legally each year. By 1980, that number had risen to 800,000 annually. According to Fix and Passel (1994), about 22% of U.S. school-age youth in 2010 will be the children of immigrants, compared to 15% in 1990 (in Carnevale and Fry 15).
- Rising tuition may influence college enrollment projections. A 1995 report by T.J. Kane of the National Bureau of Economic Research found that a \$1,000 increase in tuition at public community colleges produced a 6% drop in undergraduate enrollment.
- Five major factors expected to augment undergraduate enrollment in the coming years include:
  - “A rise in births between 1982 and 1996”
  - “Immigration”
  - “Pressures on older workers to add to their skills”
  - “Better academic preparation among high school students”
  - “Changing characteristics of families” (Carnevale and Fry 13).
- In 1980, the under-18 minority percentage was 24%. In 1995, the under-18 minority percentage had grown to 30% (College Board 5).
- In 1998, 42% of the foreign-born population was of Hispanic origin, with a mean age of 37.6 years (Census Bureau).
- In 1997, 55 percent of the nation's Hispanics, ages 25 and over, had earned at least a high school diploma; 29 percent had at least some college training; and 10 percent had at least a bachelor's degree. Ten years earlier, the respective figures were 51 percent, 22 percent and 8 percent (Census Bureau).
- The U.S. is facing a fertility differential wherein the most educated are reproducing at a lower rate than the least educated (Carnoy 19). The implication is that an increasing proportion of American students will come from families with less educational advantages.

- Increasing attacks on Affirmative Action may decrease the representation of minority students in elite institutions of higher education.
- According to the American Medical Association, there was an 11% decrease in medical school applications from minorities in 1997 (Orfield 8).
- In Texas, elementary and secondary public schools are 53% minority students (Orfield 8). Schools where the student population is 90% African American or Latino are 16 times more likely to have a majority of poor students (10).
- More women than men have attended graduate school since 1984. Over the ten-year period from 1986 and 1996, the number of male full-time graduate students increased by 22 percent, and part-time increased by 1 percent. In comparison, the number of female full-time graduate students grew by 66 percent, with part-time women growing by 17 percent (National Center for Education Statistics).

4) What new knowledge and skills are required of graduates to participate fully in the economic life of the nation as it rapidly transforms into a more complex and global society?

- A key component of the discussion about demographics is the skills that students need in order to participate in the labor force. Please see our briefing on “workforce skills” for that discussion.

### **Policy Questions**

#### **The People**

- What is the profile of today's higher education students? How can we help policymakers to think in terms of today's student?
- What trends will affect the demographic make-up of students in the future?
- What is higher education's responsibility to utilize new approaches to pedagogy that are inclusive of students across race, socioeconomic status, and learner styles?
- How can we work with K-12 to ensure preparedness for all students?
- What policies could be enacted to focus on mastering learning outcomes as a means to measure competency and quality of higher education?

#### **The Skills**

- What new knowledge and skills are required of graduates to participate fully in the economic life of the nation as it rapidly transforms into a more complex and global society?
- What level of skills is required in order to participate fully in the economic life of the nation?
- How can higher education meet the growing demand for more advanced skills for the entire workforce?
- Are some skills once considered necessary by educators for a full, productive life no longer essential?

### **Project Connections and Sources.**

- 1) Martin Carnoy at Stanford University.

- 2) Larry Gladieux at Educational Testing Service.
- 3) National Center for Education Statistics ([www.nces.ed.gov](http://www.nces.ed.gov)).
- 4) Department of Education ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)).

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