



**POLICY  
MATTERS**

## Enrollment Trends at AASCU Campuses, 1994–2004

*As K-12 schools and the nation continue to expand, state colleges and universities are facing the task of educating a growing number of students. The importance of understanding how our student communities have changed and how they will evolve is unquestionable as leaders in both higher education and legislatures set the foundations for building tomorrow's colleges and universities.*

### Context

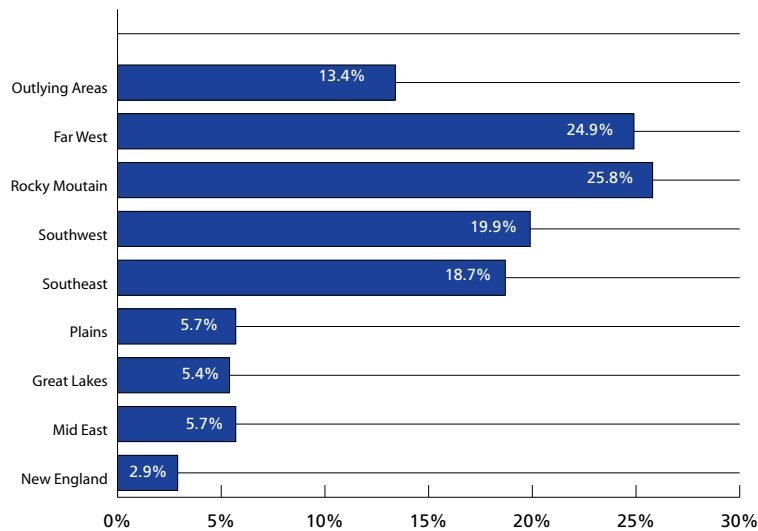
College enrollment continues to jump leaps and bounds, as the number of students attending public four-year higher education institutions reached 6.8 million in the 2004 academic year. Fueled by significant enrollment increases by minority and female students, as well as recent high school graduates and adult students, the number of students at AASCU campuses across the country increased 13.7 percent over the past 10 years, reaching 3.7 million.

AASCU analyzed the most recent data available from the U.S. Department of Education to identify enrollment trends among its member institutions. While AASCU institutions differ in size, mission and composition, they can be seen as a bellwether of change for American higher education.

### Observations

**While college campuses have become more diverse over the years, students from some minority groups continue to lag behind their peers and the number of enrolled white males fell.** AASCU institutions have seen an upsurge in the number of minority students enrolled, an increase of 30.5 percent from 1994 to 2004, according to the U.S. Department of Education (ED). This growth was found among all minority groups, with the largest increase found among Hispanic students (44.6 percent), followed by Asians/Pacific Islanders (27.7 percent), American Indians/Alaskan Natives (24.3 percent), and African-Americans (23.4 percent). At the same time, the number of white, non-Hispanic students dropped 0.3 percent, due in large part to a decline among males (-3.8 percent), compared to females in that group (an increase of 2.3 percent). A similar disparity among gender was found among all

### Enrollment Increases at AASCU Colleges and Universities by Geographic Region, Fall 1994 to Fall 2004



**Source:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 1994 and 2004 Enrollment Surveys.

racial and ethnic groups, with the number of enrolled female students persistently topping those of their male counterparts.

These double-digit increases are welcome news for a higher education community that has worked to provide access to students from all backgrounds. However, the student enrollment rates of several minority groups remain woefully behind those of their white peers. ED analysis shows that while 68.8 percent of white high school graduates enroll in college within 12 months of graduating, the same is true for just 62.5 percent of blacks and 61.8 percent of Hispanics. Projections by the U.S. Census Bureau suggest that by 2010 minorities will make up more than a third of the country's population and by 2050 that number will reach one-half. While the past decade's growth is good news, higher education institutions, legislators and the rest of the education community will need to continue its work to ensure that all minority groups are able to take advantage of a college education.

**Echoes of the baby boom generation continue to reverberate in higher education as AASCU institutions have seen the greatest enrollment growth in that generation and their children.** Between 1993 and 2003 (the latest year of available data) the greatest increases

in college enrollment were found among those under the age of 20 (30.4 percent) and over the age of 50 (56.4 percent). Students under the age of 24 made up 65.9 percent of the total student population, up from 62.0 percent ten years earlier.

Additionally, more students are attending college full-time, as the number of full-time students in 2004 grew 21.4 percent from a decade earlier. On the other hand, the number of part-time students fell 1.2 percent during that same time period. The growth in the number of students enrolled to earn a postbaccalaureate degree (18.3 percent) surpassed the increase in the number of undergraduates (12.8 percent).

**Distinct regional enrollment differences are creating capacity challenges for some schools while others look to counter expected declines in matriculation.** Over the past ten years, AASCU institutions in the western and southeastern parts of the country saw double-digit college enrollment increases. From 1994 to 2004 the greatest growth was found in the Rocky Mountain states, with an enrollment increase of 25.8 percent. Institutions in the Far West and the Southwest followed, with increases of 24.9 percent and 19.9 percent, respectively. States in the Northeast and Midwest followed a different path. While these regions did

have some enrollment growth, they were significantly smaller. New England saw the lowest with a 2.9 percent increase, followed by the Great Lakes (5.4 percent).

Some states are looking at new ways to deal with these changes. In Arizona, a state where the number of high school graduates is expected to grow by 33 percent from 2004 to 2014, administrators at some schools have discussed capping enrollment, while legislators vetoed a plan allowing community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees. Similarly, Nevada built the brand new Nevada State College in 2002 to deal with the expected 60.5 percent jump in high school graduates over those same years.

Other states are looking at ways to recruit students. In South Dakota, where the number of high school graduates is expected to decrease by 12.4 percent from 2004 to 2014, recruiters have increased their efforts in states like California, where capacity challenges have arisen because of a sizeable influx of new college students. South Dakota also has entered into agreements with other states, including Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota and California to offer a discounted tuition rate to students who may otherwise have a hard time finding space at their state's universities.

## Conclusion

Change in higher education is constant, as the importance of a college degree and the number of students enrolled keeps rising. While these new students bring innovative ideas and fresh perspectives, they also drive higher education leaders and policymakers to question the best ways to educate the ever-changing campus community. This is particularly true now, during the current growth period, as enrollment increases are uneven among students of different backgrounds, ages and in different regions of the country. College leaders need to focus on the changing face of today's students to ensure they can meet the needs of tomorrow's college students.

## Resources

**U.S. Department of Education Statistics (ED).** Through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), ED provides a wide array of data covering pre-kindergarten through graduate school in its various publications and surveys.

The annual *Digest of Education Statistics* expansively chronicles college enrollment by various measures, including enrollment rates of recent high school graduates, attendance and retention rates of college students and statistics on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Minority Serving Institutions and tribally controlled institutions. [nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d05\\_tf.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d05_tf.asp)

NCES also collects enrollment data annually from all Title IV-participating higher education institutions. That data, from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, is publicly available and includes information on enrollment by race, gender, enrollment status, age and residence.

[nces.ed.gov/ipeds/pas/](https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/pas/)

**U.S. Bureau of the Census.** Based on the 2000 national census, the Census Bureau publishes projected population changes of the United States through 2050. Projections include estimates on age, sex, race and Hispanic origin.

[census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/](https://census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/)

**Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education**

**(WICHE).** WICHE's *Knocking at the College Door-2003* projects the number of high school graduates by state and race/ethnicity through the 2017 academic year. [wiche.edu/](https://wiche.edu/)

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