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ABSTRACT

This report provides a statistical profile of today's college students disaggregated by sector, namely students at public two-year colleges, public four-year colleges, independent four-year colleges, and graduate students at public and private universities. It found that about 41 percent of community college students and 10 percent of four-year college students carried less than a half-time course load in 1991. About 20 percent of community college and 5 percent of four-year college students were non-degree seekers. Students classified as financially independent accounted for nearly half of all undergraduates, representing 66 percent of the students at community colleges, 48 percent at independent 4-year colleges, and 37 percent at public four-year colleges. It also found that 20 percent of undergraduates at four-year institutions were 25 years of age or older, and that students from racial/ethnic minority groups represented 25, 20, and 14 percent of the enrollment at community colleges, four-year colleges, and graduate schools, respectively. Students with disabilities represented 8, 5, and 6 percent of the enrollment at community colleges, public four-year colleges, and independent four-year colleges, respectively. (MDM)

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Overall, about 41 percent of community college students carry a less-than-half-time course load; at four-year institutions, about 10 percent of undergraduate students do so.
- About 20 percent of community college students and over 5 percent of undergraduate students at four-year institutions are non-degree seekers.
- Students classified as financially independent account for nearly half of all undergraduates. At community colleges, they represent 66 percent: at independent institutions, 48 percent; and at four-year public institutions, 37 percent.
- One in five undergraduates at four-year institutions is now 25 years of age or older, and an even higher percentage of older students attend community colleges and graduate schools.
- Students from racial/ethnic minority groups account for 25 percent of the undergraduate enrollment at community colleges; about 20 percent at four-year institutions; but only 14 percent of the graduate-level student body at all institutions.
- Students with disabilities represent 8 percent of the enrollment at community colleges; 5 percent at public four-year institutions; and 6 percent at independent four-year institutions.

Today's College Students: Varied Characteristics by Sector

EBO OTUYA AND ALICE MITCHELL

ost reports in higher education focus on trends related to dynamic changes in the college student population, giving less attention to other issues that, while less dramatic, are equally important to the higher education community. For example, trends of student characteristics such as gender, race, and age have been well documented. What has received less attention however, is a clear description of the extent to which these characteristics and many others cut across institutional types.

This brief provides a statistical profile of today's college students disaggregated by sector. Enrollment figures are analyzed separately for each of three sectors and by each distinctive group of students protuled.

The data sources used for which the most recent data tapes are available include the Fall 1991 Enrollment Survey from the NCES Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS); comparable data from the 1989–90 NCES National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the ACE/UCLA Cooperative Institutional Research Program's American Freshman Survey for Fall 1992.

A Snapshot of Total Enrollment

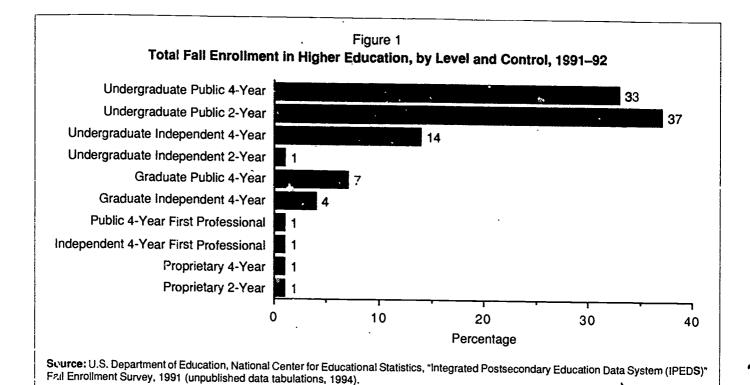
This research brief profiles four distinctive groups of students, including:

- Students at public two-year colleges;
- Undergraduate students at public four-year institutions;
- Undergraduate students at independent four-year institutions; and
- Graduate students at public and independent universities.

These institutional distinctions are valuable because often, important differences between sectors and among students enrolled in these sectors are hidden in aggregate statistics. For example, graduate students are frequently lumped

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together with undergraduate students at four-year institutions. This limits our understanding of differences that exist across sectors and levels of student. Selected student characteristics analyzed in this report include sex, race, age, attendance status, foreign student status, dependency status,

In the 1991–92 academic year, about 14 million students were enrolled in American colleges and universities, distributed by sector as follows (Figure 1):

disability status, and language spoken at home. 1

- 37 percent (5,404,000) attended public two-year institutions;
- 33 percent (4,743,000) were undergraduate students at public four-year institutions;
- ₱ 14 percent (2,044,000) were undergraduates at independent four-year institutions; and
- 7 percent (1,050,000) were graduate students at public four-year institutions and 4 percent (589,000) attended independent four-year institutions as graduate students.

The four groups of students profiled in this research brief represent most of today's college students. Not included in this discussion are the following sectors (Figure 1):

- ¹The language spoken at home variable was not analyzed for community colleges due to small sample size.
- ²Students in this category carry course loads ranging from half time to just below full time.

- Independent two-year colleges (95,000 students);
- Public four-year first professional schools (111,482 students);
- Independent four-year first professional schools (169,049 students);
- Proprietary four-year institutions (75,000 students);
- Proprietary two-year colleges (135,000 students).

Major Differences in the Characteristics of Today's Students by Sector

The data reveal some important differences in the characteristics of students who attend public two-year, public four-year, and independent four-year institutions.

Public Two-year Versus Public Four-year Institutions

Undergraduate students who attend community colleges are different from their counterparts at public four-year institutions in a variety of ways. Students in these two sectors differ vastly by both attendance and their reason for attending. As many as 41 percent of community college students carry less-than-half-time course loads, compared with only 10 percent of their counterparts at public four-year institutions. One of every five community college

students (19 percent) is not seeking a degree, compared with only 5 percent of students attending public four-year institutions.

Students also differ by dependency status. At community colleges, about two-thirds (66 percent) of the students are financially independent, compared with slightly more than a third (37 percent) of the students attending public four-year institutions. However, almost two-thirds (65 percent) of the financially independent students at public four-year institutions have household incomes of less than \$20,000, compared with just over a half (53 percent) at community colleges.

A major difference between the students at these two sectors is in their age. Students 25 years of age and older make up 51 percent of community college students, but only 24 percent of undergraduates at public four-year institutions.

Public Four-year Institutions Versus Independent Four-year Institutions

At the undergraduate level, nearly half (48 percent) of the students at independent four-year institutions are financially independent, compared with about a third of their counterparts at public four-year institutions. A slightly higher percentage (69 percent) of the independent students at independent four-year institutions have annual household incomes of less than \$20,000, compared with 65 percent of the students at public four-year institutions.

At the graduate level, public four-year institutions enroll a larger share of female students (58 percent), as well as non-degree seeking students (23 percent) than independent four-year institutions, where comparable figures are 53 percent and 12 percent, respectively.

A Profile of Undergraduate Students

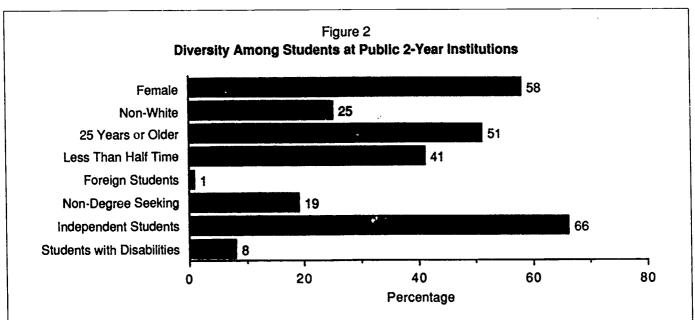
The following discussion focuses on undergraduate students enrolled at public two-year, public four-year, and independent four-year institutions. (See Figure 1.) The data that follow describe selected characteristics of U.S. and foreign undergraduate students by sector.

A Profile of Today's Students at Public Two-Year Institutions

In 1991, a total of 5,404,000 students attended community colleges. Of this, U.S. students represented 99 percent (5,334,000); and foreign students accounted for 1 percent (70,000). The following characteristics help to define some of the differences among U.S. students who attend community colleges (Figure 2):

- Over half (58 percent) are women.
- ♦ One in four belongs to a racial/ ethnic minority group.
- More than half are at least 25 years old; and only 13 percent are between the ages of 22 and 24 years.
- Two in five (41 percent) attend school less than half time; 29 percent attend at least half time², and 30 percent attend full time.
- Almost one in five (19 percent) is a non-degree seeker; and 58 percent of the non-degree seekers are women.

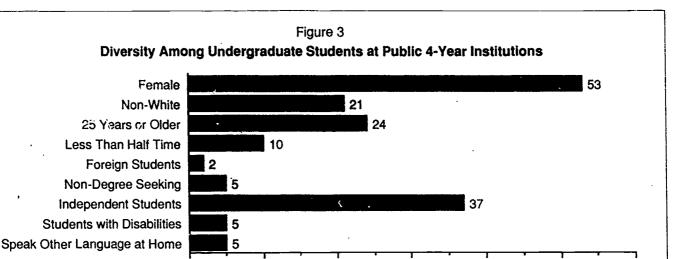
Among foreign students, more than half (52 percent) are men; a majority attend school full time; and only a small proportion (7 percent) are non-degree seekers.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, "Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)" Fall Enrollment Survey, 1991 (unpublished data tabulations, 1994).



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Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, "Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)" Fall Enrollment Survey, 1991 (unpublished data tabulations, 1994); 1990 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (unpublished data tabulations, 1994); and Cooperative Institutional Research Program/American Council on Education, "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1992" (unpublished data tabulations, 1994).

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One little understood aspect of diversity among students relates to their financial dependency status. In 1989 90, about two-thirds (66 percent) of the students at public two-year colleges were financially independent.

Independent students rely on their personal resources for support, while dependent students rely on their parents' income for support. Among these students:

- Women account for 59 percent of the financially independent students.
- Twenty percent of the independent students; and 27 percent of the dependent students are racial/ethnic minorities.
- Four in five (80 percent) of the independent students are at least 25 years old.

Independent and dependent students at community colleges differ in attendance status, living arrangements and family income backgrounds.

- Among the independent students:
 - Half attend school less than half time, and only 20 percent carry a full-time load;
 - A majority (86 percent) live off campus on their own, while 13 percent live with parents; and
 - More than half (53 percent) report annual household incomes of less than \$20,000, and only 9 percent report incomes of \$50,000 or more.

For dependent students:

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Percentage

 Twenty-two percent attend school less than half time, while nearly half (49 percent) attend full time;

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- Almost a quarter (23 percent) live off campus on their own, while a majority (74 percent) live with parents; and
- Only one quarter (25 percent) come from low-income families (income less than \$20,000), and 30 percent are from families with incomes of \$50,000 or more.

Data from the 1989-90 NPSAS study indicate that about 8 percent of all students enrolled at public two-year institutions have some form of disability. Among the students with disabilities:

- More than half (53 percent) are men.
- Racial/ethnic minority students make up 16 percent of students with disabilities.
- Sixty-eight percent are at least 25 years old.
- More than 42 percent attend school less than half time; 28 percent attend at least half time; and 30 percent attend full time.
- About three-quarters live off campus on their own, while one-quarter live at home with parents.

- Over half (55 percent) of the independent students with disabilities have annual household incomes of less than \$20,000; 37 percent earn \$20,000 to \$49,999; and only 7 percent report incomes of \$50,000 or more.
- Of the dependent students with disabilities, 21 percent come from families with annual incomes of less than \$20,000; 46 percent are from families in the \$20,000 to \$49,999 income bracket; and about a third come from families with incomes of \$50,000 or more.
- The distribution of disability by type at community colleges include orthopedic (32 percent); hearing (21 percent); learning (18 percent); sight (8 percent); speech (4 percent); and other (18 percent).

A Profile of Today's Undergraduate Students at Public Four-Year Institutions

In 1991, a total of 4,743,000 undergraduate students were enrolled at public four-year institutions. Of these, U.S. students represented 98 percent (4,654,000); and foreign students accounted for 2 percent (89,000). Among U.S. undergraduates at this type of institution (Figure 3):

- More (53 percent) are women.
- Twenty-one percent come from a racial/ethnic minority group.
- More than half (56 percent) are 21 years old or younger, and about a quarter (24 percent) are at least 25 years old.
- A majority (73 percent) attend school full time; 16 percent attend at least half time; and 10 percent carry less-than-half-time loads.
- Five percent are non-degree seekers.
- Among undergraduate foreign students, 60 percent are men; a majority (82 percent) attend school full time; and only 5 percent are non-degree seekers.

More undergraduate students at public four-year institutions are financially dependent than independent.

- Slightly less than two-thirds (63 percent) are financially dependent.
- Women make up 52 percent of the financially dependent students and 56 percent of the independent students.
- Twenty percent of the dependent students come from a racial/ethnic minority group. Of the independent students, 22 percent are racial/ethnic minorities.
- Sixty-seven percent of the independent students are at least 25 years old.

Attendance patterns, residential arrangements, and family incomes of independent students are different from those of dependent students at public four-year institutions.

- Among independent students:
 - About one in five (22 percent) attends school less than half time, although more than half (52 percent) carry a full-time load;
 - A majority (79 percent) live off campus on their own, and only 15 percent live with parents; and
 - Slightly less than two-thirds (65 percent) report annual household incomes of less than \$20,000, and only 5 percent report incomes of \$50,000 or more.
- Among dependent students:
 - Only 3 percent attend school less than half time, while a majority (86 percent) attend full time;
 - About a third (36 percent) live off campus on their own, while 29 percent live with parents; and
 - Or 'v 21 percent come from low-income families (income less than \$20,000), and 30 percent are from families with incomes of \$50,000 or more.

According to NPSAS data, 5 percent of the undergraduate students who attend public four-year institutions have some form of disability. Among these students:

- ▶ Slightly more than half (53 percent) are men.
- Racial/ethnic minority students account for 16 percent.
- Younger students (24 or younger) represent the majority (61 percent) of the students with disabilities.
- Seventy percent attend school full time; 19 percent attend at least half time; and only 11 percent attend less than half time.
- Sixty-one percent of students with disabilities live off campus on their own; 20 percent live at home with parents; and 19 percent live in campus housing.
- Of the independent students with disabilities, 70 percent report annual household incomes of less than \$20,000; 26 percent fall within the \$20,000 to \$49,999 bracket; and only 4 percent have household incomes of \$50,000 or more.
- Only 19 percent of the dependent students with disabilities come from low-income families (annual



income of less than \$20,000); 43 percent are from families with incomes of \$20,000 to \$49,999; and 38 percent come from families earning \$50,000 or more.

The distribution of student disability by type at public four-year institutions include orthopedic (29 percent); hearing (19 percent); learning (16 percent); sight (13 percent); speech (3 percent); and other (20 percent).

Data from the Freshman Survey (1992) indicate that a majority of undergraduate students (96 percent) who enroll full time for the first time at public four-year institutions are native English speakers. However, 5 percent of these students speak languages other than English at home.

- Of the students who speak other languages at home, 97 percent are of traditional college age, and 52 percent are women.
- Two percent of white students; 4 percent of African American students; 37 percent of Hispanic students; 49 percent of Asian American students; and 6 percent of Native American students speak languages other than English at home.

A Profile of Today's Undergraduate Students at Independent Four-Year Institutions

A total of 2,044,000 undergraduate students were enrolled at independent four-year institutions in the 1991–92 academic year. Of these, U.S. students accounted for 97 percent (1,974,000), and foreign students made up 3 percent

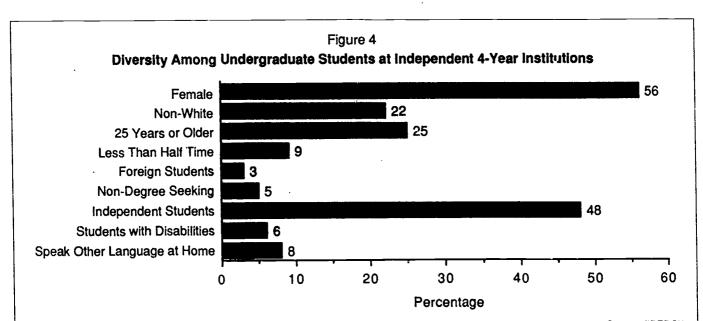
(70,000). Among U.S. students at this type of institution (Figure 4):

- More than half (56 percent) are women.
- Twenty-two percent come from a racial/ethnic minority group.
- Younger students (21 years or younger) account for 61 percent and 25 percent are at least 25 years old.
- A majority (79 percent) attend school full time; 12 percent attend at least half time; and 9 percent attend less than half time.
- Only 5 percent are non-degree seekers.

Among undergraduate foreign students, more than half (58 percent) are men; 88 percent attend school full time; and only 7 percent are non-degree seeking students.

More students at independent four-year colleges are financially dependent than financially independent. NCES (NPSAS 1989-90) data show that:

- Half (52 percent) of the dependent students are women. Among the independent students, 62 percent are women.
- Twenty-three percent of the dependent students are racial/ethnic minorities. Among independent students, more than a third (35 percent) are racial/ethnic minorities.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, "Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)" Fall Enrollment Survey, 1991 (unpublished data tabulations, 1994); 1990 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (unpublished data tabulations, 1994); and Cooperative Institutional Research Program/American Council on Education, "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1992" (unpublished data tabulations, 1994).

A majority (87 percent) of the dependent students are 21 years old or younger.

Independent and dependent students at independent four-year institutions differ in attendance status, living arrangements, and family income backgrounds.

- **♦** Among independent students:
 - Only 15 percent attend school less than half time, while about two-thirds (65 percent) percent carry a full-time load;
 - A majority (78 percent) live off campus on their own, and only 17 percent live with parents; and
 - Over two-thirds (69 percent) report annual household incomes of less than \$20,000, and only 5 percent report incomes of \$50,000 or more.
- For dependent students:
 - Only 3 percent attend school less than half time, while a majority (92 percent) attend full time;
 - Twenty-two percent live off campus on their own, while 29 percent live with parents; and
 - While 28 percent come from low-income families (income less than \$20,000), more than a third (35 percent) are from families with incomes of \$50,000 or more.

The NCES (NPSAS 1989–90) data show that 6 percent of the students at independent four-year institutions have disabilities. Among these students:

- Women account for half of the students with disabilities.
- Nineteen percent belong to a racial/ethnic minority group.
- Slightly over half (54 percent) are 24 years of age or younger.
- A majority (77 percent) attend school full time; 13 percent attend at least half time; and 10 percent carry less-than-half-time loads.
- Only 23 percent of the students with disabilities live in campus housing; 22 percent live at home with parents; and over half (55 percent) live off campus on their own.
- A majority (70 percent) of the independent students with disabilities have annual household incomes of less than \$20,000; 26 percent have incomes of \$20,000 to \$49,999; and only 4 percent have incomes of \$50,000 or more.

- However, 22 percent of the dependent students with disabilities come from families with annual incomes of less than \$20,000; 43 percent are from families with incomes of \$20,000 to \$49,999; and 35 percent are from families with incomes of \$50,000 or more.
- The distribution of student disability by type at independent four-year institutions include orthopedic (30 percent); hearing (18 percent); learning (16 percent); sight (10 percent); speech (4 percent); and other (22 percent).

Most undergræduate students (93 percent) who enrolled full time for the first time at independent four-year institutions are native English speakers. However, about 8 percent of these students speak languages other than English at home.

- Of the students who speak other languages at home, 98 percent are of traditional college age, and 53 percent are women.
- Four percent of white students; 4 percent of African American students; 51 percent of Hispanic students; 50 percent of Asian American students; and 4 percent of Native American students speak languages other than English at home.

A Profile of Graduate Students at Public Four-Year Institutions

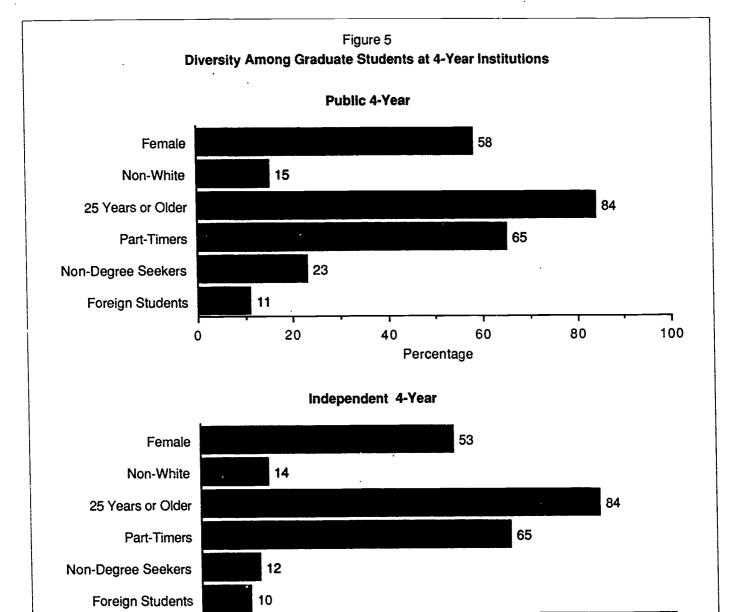
Little attention is given to data analysis related to the graduate student population in higher education. In this report, an effort is made to examine selected characteristics of graduate students at public and independent four-year institutions. According to the data shown in Figure 1, graduate students accounted for 11 percent of all students enrolled in the 1991–92 academic year. The following data describe characteristics of U.S. and foreign graduate students by sector.

A Profile of Graduate Students at Public Four-Year Institutions

In 1991, there were 1,050,000 graduate students enrolled at public four-year institutions. Of this, U.S. graduate students accounted for 89 percent (934,000) and foreign graduate students made up 11 percent (116,000). Among U.S. graduate students (Figure 5):

- More than half (58 percent) are women.
- Whites (85 percent) far outnumber racial/ethnic minority students (15 percent) in graduate schools.
- Six percent of the graduate students at public four-year institutions are African American, 4 percent are Hispanic, 4 percent are Asian American, and 1 percent are Native American.





Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, "Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)" Fall Enrollment Survey, 1991 (unpublished data tabulations, 1994).

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More than half (55 percent) are at least 30 years old; 29 percent are between 25 and 29; and 16 percent are 24 years old or younger.

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- Most (65 percent) attend school part time.
- **♦** Twenty-three percent are non-degree seekers.

Among foreign graduate students:

Male graduate students (70 percent) far outnumber their female counterparts. ♦ Most (71 percent) attend school full time.

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Percentage

• Only 3 percent are non-degree seekers.

A Profile of Graduate Students at Independent Four-Year Institutions

In 1991, there were 589,000 graduate students enrolled at independent four-year institutions. Of this, U.S. graduate students made up 90 percent (529,000), and foreign graduate students accounted for the remainder (60,000). Among U.S. graduate students at this type of institution (Figure 5):

80

- Women account for 53 percent of the graduate enrollment.
- Racial/ethnic minority students represent only 14 percent of the graduate enrollment.
- As at public four-year institutions, 6 percent of the graduate students at independent four-year institutions are African American, 4 percent are Hispanic, 4 percent are Asian American, and less than 1 percent are Native American.
- More than half (53 percent) are at least 30 years old; slightly less than a third (31 percent) are 25 to 29 years old, and 16 percent are 24 years old or younger.
- ▶ Most (65 percent) attend school part time.
- Only 12 percent are non-degree seekers.

Among foreign graduate students:

- Two-thirds (68 percent) are men.
- ▶ Far more foreign graduate students (75 percent) than U.S graduate students attend school full time.
- Only 5 percent are non-degree seekers.

Conclusions

The data reveal important characteristics that define today's college students across all types of institutions. This sector-by-sector analysis presents a rich source of information to the higher education community about the students that colleges and universities serve. However, undergraduate students at community colleges and their peers at four-year institutions show major differences in attendance status, degree-seeking status, dependency status, and age.

As many as 41 percent of community college students attend school less than half time, and only 10 percent of their peers at four-year institutions do so. One of every five community college students (19 percent) is not seeking a degree, compared with only 5 percent of students attending four-year institutions. More students (66 percent) at community colleges are classified as financially independent than among their peers (less than half) at four-year institutions. Over half (51 percent) of community college students are at least 25 years old, compared with only 24 percent of their counterparts at four-year institutions.

Graduate students at public four-year institutions are different form their peers at independent four-year institutions in degree-seeking status. Almost a quarter (23 percent) of the graduate students at public four-year institutions are non-degree-seeking students, compared

with only 12 percent of their counterparts at independent four-year institutions.

Despite these differences, today's college students share some common characteristics across all sectors. For example, women make up the majority of the student body; racial/ethnic minority students are underrepresented in graduate programs; a large number of financially independent students report low household incomes; and every sector enrolls students with disabilities.

As the higher education community attempts to understand the diverse characteristics of the college student body, the high number of students carrying less-than-half-time loads, the low representation of racial/ethnic minority students in graduate programs; the high proportion of low-income students; and a variety of issues related to women and students with disabilities on campuses deserve greater attention.

Resources

- The National Center for Education Statistics' Digest of Education Statistics provides a compilation of statistical information covering the broad field of American education from kindergarten through graduate school. The Digest includes a selection of data from government and private sources, and draws especially on the results of surveys conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. For more information, contact the National Center for Education Statistics, Education Information Branch, (800) 424-1616. To order the Digest, contact the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. Telephone: (202) 275-3054.
- 2) In 1990, the National Center for Education Statistics conducted the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), which surveyed students enrolled in American postsecondary institutions in the 1989-90 academic year. The survey was designed to gather information on students' financial aid status. A report from this survey, A Profile of Undergraduates in American Postsecondary Institutions, is available. NPSAS is scheduled to be conducted every three years. For information, contact: Dennis Carroll, Chief, Longitudinal Studies Branch, NCES, 555 New Jersey Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20208. Telephone: (202) 219-1774.
- 3) The American Freshman is an annual report of national data on the characteristics of students attending American colleges and universities as first-time, full-time freshmen. Initiated in 1966, this series is a project of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), sponsored by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. For more information, or to order copies of this report (\$20.00)



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- plus \$3.00 shipping), contact the Higher Education Research Institute, Graduate School of Education, 320 Moore Hall, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1521. Telephone: (310) 825-2228.
- 4) The Institute of International Education's (IIE) Open Doors reports on foreign students from more than 200 countries who are enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. Data included are the results of an annual survey that asks about students' national origin, sources of financial support, fields of study, and enrollments. IIE maintains a research and reference library, conducts seminars and conferences, and produces publications related to the field of international education. For more information, contact the Research Division, IIE, 809 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017-3580. Telephone: (212) 984-5345.
- 5) The American Council on Education's Office of Minorities in Higher Education monitors the progress of African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, and Asian Americans in postsecondary education and engages in efforts to improve their educational and employment opportunities in higher education. OMHE publishes an annual status report, Minorities in Higher Education. For more information, contact ACE/OMHE, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036-1193. Telephone: (202) 939-9395.
- 6) The American Council on Education's HEATH Resource Center is a national clearinghouse that collects and disseminates information about disability issues in postsecondary education. *Information from HEATH* is a newsletter published three times a year and distributed nationally, free of charge. The newsletter highlights campus programs, provides information about new or pending legislation, and offers reviews of new publications and other media products. HEATH can be reached Monday-Friday, 9 a.m-5 p.m. Eastern Time at (800) 544-3284; or, in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, at (202) 939-9320. Inquiries may also be mailed to ACE/HEATH, One Dupont Circle, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036-1193.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law on July 26, 1990, and is now P.L. 101-336. ADA extends to people with disabilities the same civil rights protection given to others against discrimination based on race, sex, national, origin, and religion. ADA will provide people with disabilities access to mass transportation, public accommodation services including telecommunications, and state and local government. For general information about the ADA, contact the Office on the Americans with Disabilities Act, Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice, P.O. Box 66118, Washington, DC 20035-6118. Telephone: (202) 514-0301 (voice); (202) 514-0381 (TDD).

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