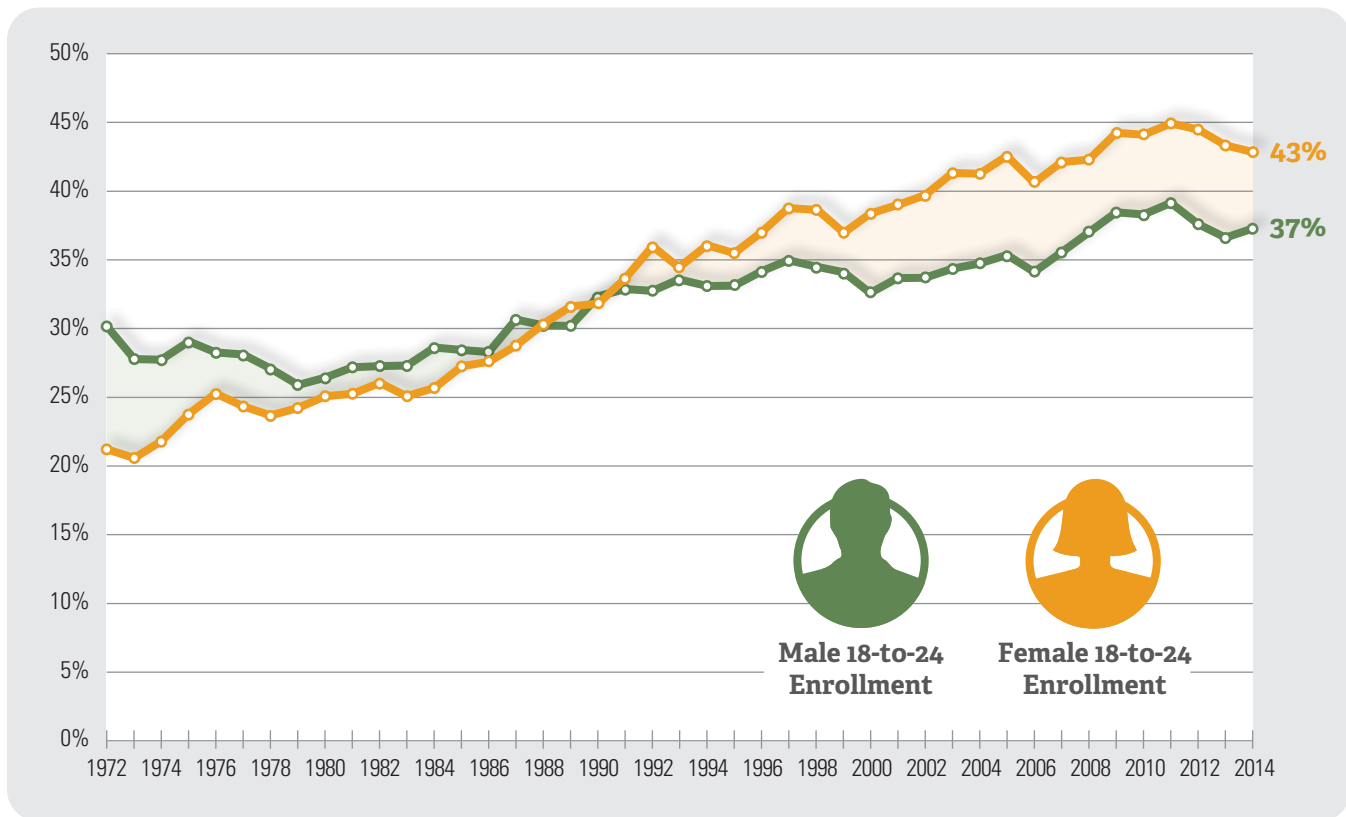


Section Two: Getting into College

Figure B: Undergraduate Enrollment Rates by Gender for 18- to 24-Year-Olds: 1972–2014



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 302.60, “Percentage of 18- to 24-Year-Olds Enrolled in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level of Institution and Sex and Race/Ethnicity of Student: 1970 through 2014,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_302.60.asp?current=yes.

Undergraduate student enrollment increased dramatically over the past several decades, more than doubling from 7.4 million students in 1970 to 17.3 million students today.¹⁹ The student body, including both full- and part-time students, is also increasingly diverse in terms of race and ethnicity and includes stu-

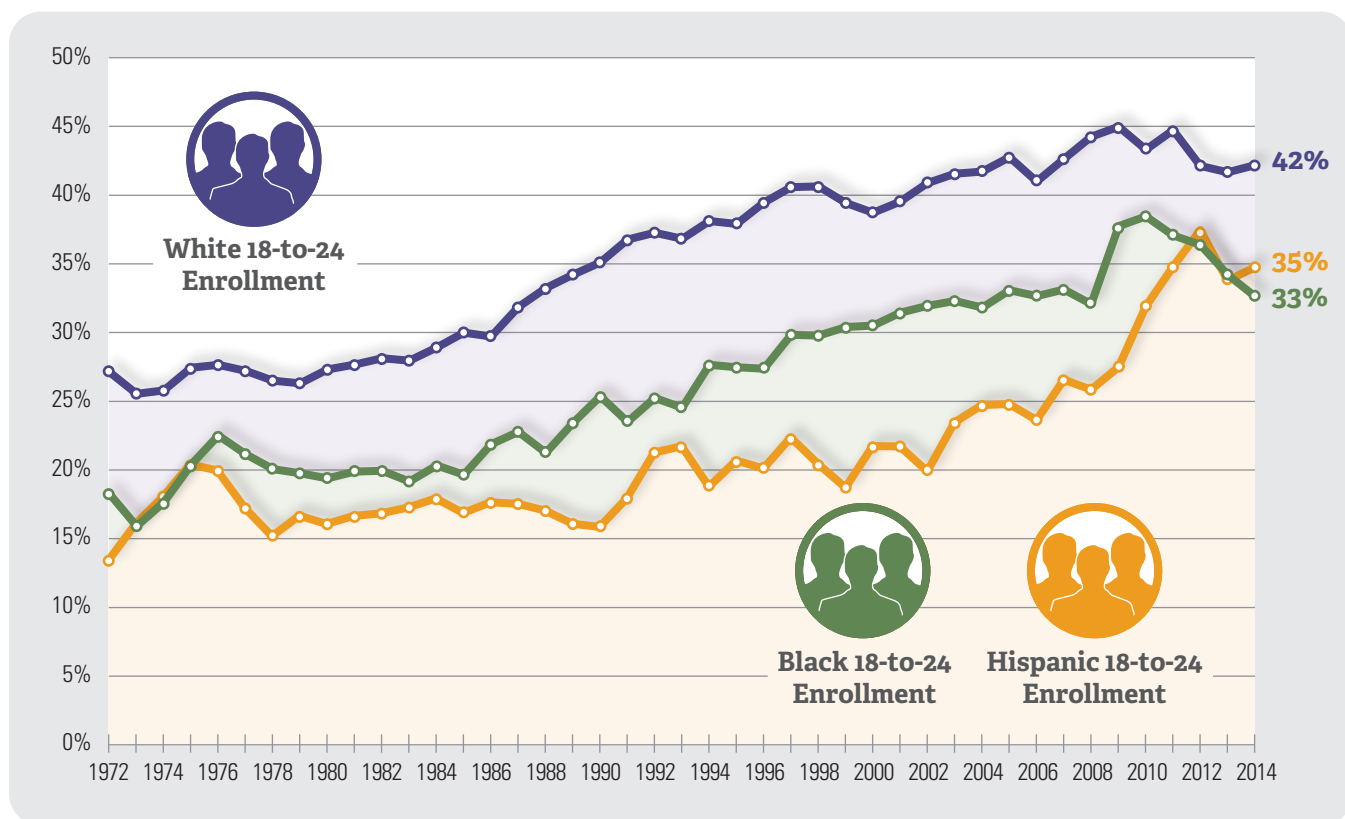
dents of all ages and from a variety of backgrounds. The types of undergraduate institutions have also expanded, with students now attending some 4,700 varied institutions awarding an ever widening array of credentials. This section explores student enrollment trends and the institutions students attend.

TRENDS IN STUDENT ENROLLMENT: GENDER, RACE/ETHNICITY, AND INCOME

The numbers of both men and women enrolling in college have increased over recent decades, but since the late 1980s, women have outpaced men both in terms of high school graduates heading off to college and the propor-

19. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 303.70, “Total Undergraduate Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Attendance Status, Sex of Student, and Control and Level of Institution: Selected Years, 1970 through 2025,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_303.70.asp?current=yes.

Figure C: Undergraduate Enrollment Rates by Race/Ethnicity for 18- to 24-Year-Olds: 1972–2014



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 302.60, “Percentage of 18- to 24-Year-Olds Enrolled in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level of Institution and Sex and Race/Ethnicity of Student: 1970 through 2014,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_302.60.asp?current=yes.

tion of all eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds enrolled in college. By 2014, almost 43 percent of women between eighteen and twenty-four years old were enrolled in college, compared with 37 percent of men (Figure B). Given these trends, it is not surprising that women outnumber men in undergraduate classrooms. In 2013, women made up 56 percent of undergraduate enrollment (9.9 million women and 7.7 million men).²⁰

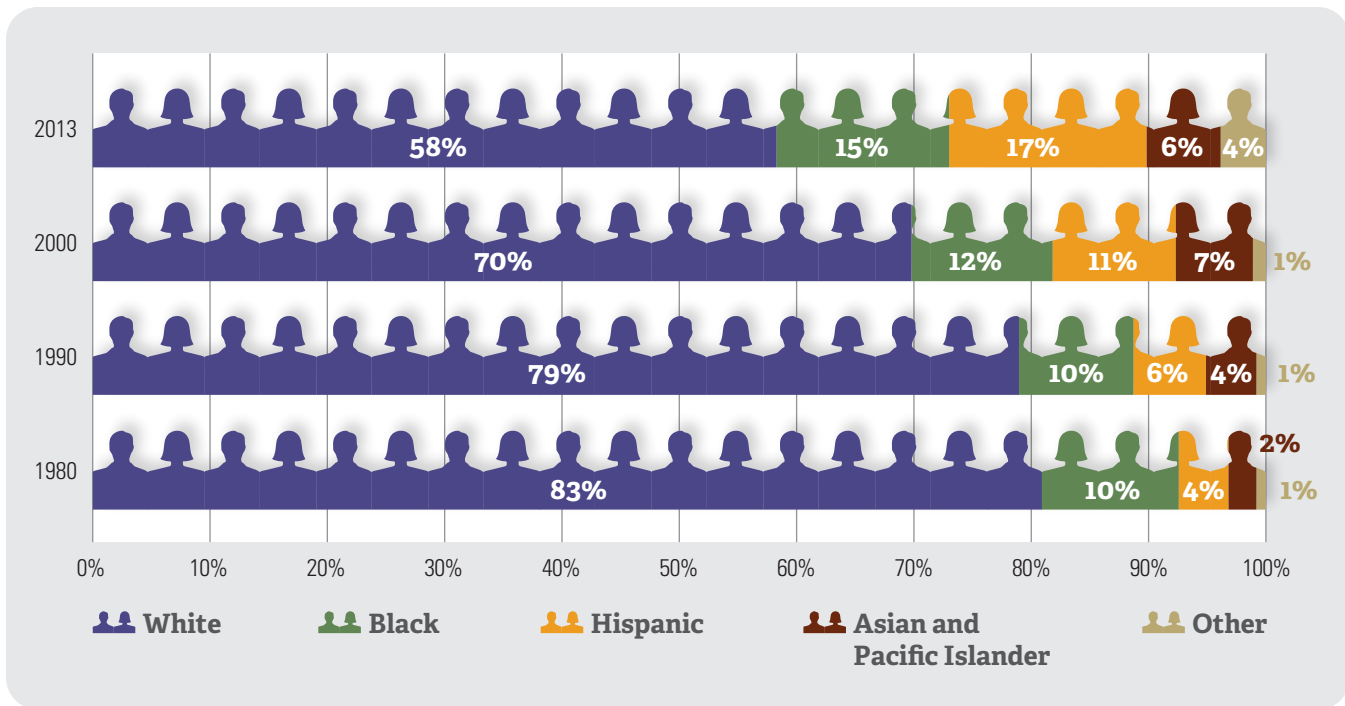
Turning to enrollment trends based upon race and ethnicity, we see overall increases in the proportion of eight-

teen- to twenty-four-year-olds enrolled in college across all groups, but gaps persist. As shown in Figure C, 42 percent of white young adults were enrolled in college in 2014, while only 35 percent of Hispanic and 33 percent of black young adults were enrolled. Although the gaps in access have narrowed over the past fifteen years, they have not been eliminated.

The combined effect of the white population growing more slowly than populations of color and of the more rapid growth of college attendance among minority groups than among whites has resulted in a substantial shift in the racial/ethnic composition of college populations. In 1980, white

20. Ibid.

Figure D: Racial Distribution of Total Undergraduate Enrollment: Selected Years



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 306.10, “Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level of Enrollment, Sex, Attendance Status, and Race/Ethnicity of Student: Selected Years, 1976 through 2014,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_306.10.asp?current=yes. **NOTE:** This table does not include students living in the United States without documentation.

By 2014, 81 percent of high-income high school graduates immediately enrolled in college, compared with 52 percent of low-income students.

students made up 83 percent of undergraduate enrollments, contrasted with 58 percent in 2013 (see Figure D).

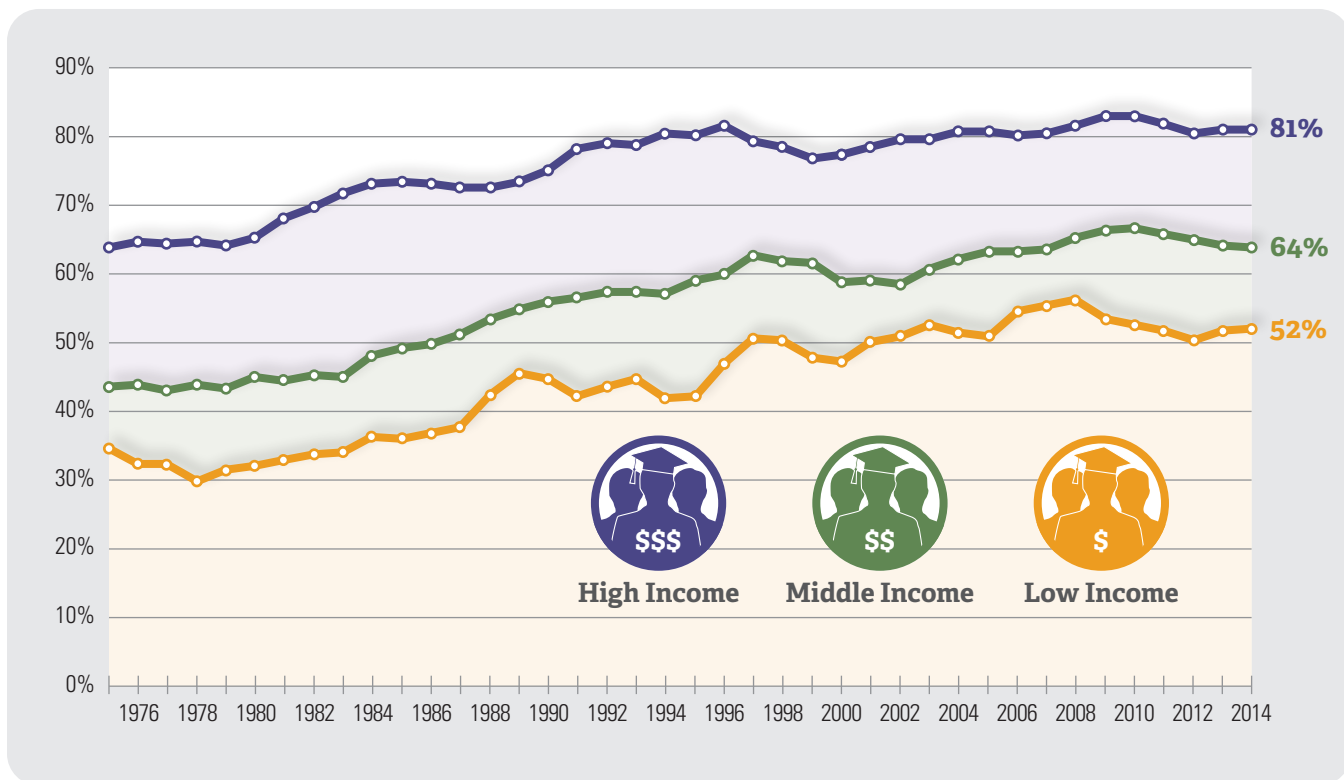
Figure E shows that recent high school graduates across all income levels have been enrolling in college at higher rates over the past several decades. However, significant gaps persist between students from low-income and high-income families. By 2014, 81 percent of high-income high school graduates immediately enrolled in college, compared with 52 percent of low-income students.

Even though all income groups have seen increases in college enrollment over time, Figure F shows that the gap between the lowest and top income quartiles grew from a 39-point gap for students born between 1961 and 1964 (who would have started college around 1980) to a 51-point gap for students born between 1979 and 1982 (who would have started college around 2000).²¹

Many factors may explain the considerably lower rates of enrollment of students from low-income backgrounds compared to their wealthier peers. One study

21. Martha J. Bailey and Susan M. Dynarski, “Inequality in Postsecondary Education,” in *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children’s Life Chances*, ed. Greg J. Duncan and Richard J. Murnane (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011), 117–132. The study defines the college entry rate as the share of each birth cohort that had any college experience by age nineteen or was in school at age nineteen.

Figure E: Percentage of Recent High School Completers Enrolled in College, by Income Level: 1975–2014



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 302.30, “Percentage of Recent High School Completers Enrolled in 2-Year and 4-Year Colleges, by Income Level: 1975 through 2014,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_302.30.asp?current=yes. **NOTE:** Low income refers to the bottom 20 percent of all family incomes, high income refers to the top 20 percent of all family incomes, and middle income refers to the 60 percent in between.

notes that students who grow up in families in the bottom quartile of the income distribution are not only less likely than their more privileged peers to graduate from high school, but are also less likely to take the SAT if they do graduate and less likely to earn a high score if they take the test. In fact, the differences in SAT scores by income level increased from the late 1980s to the early 2000s.²²

ADULT STUDENT ENROLLMENT TRENDS

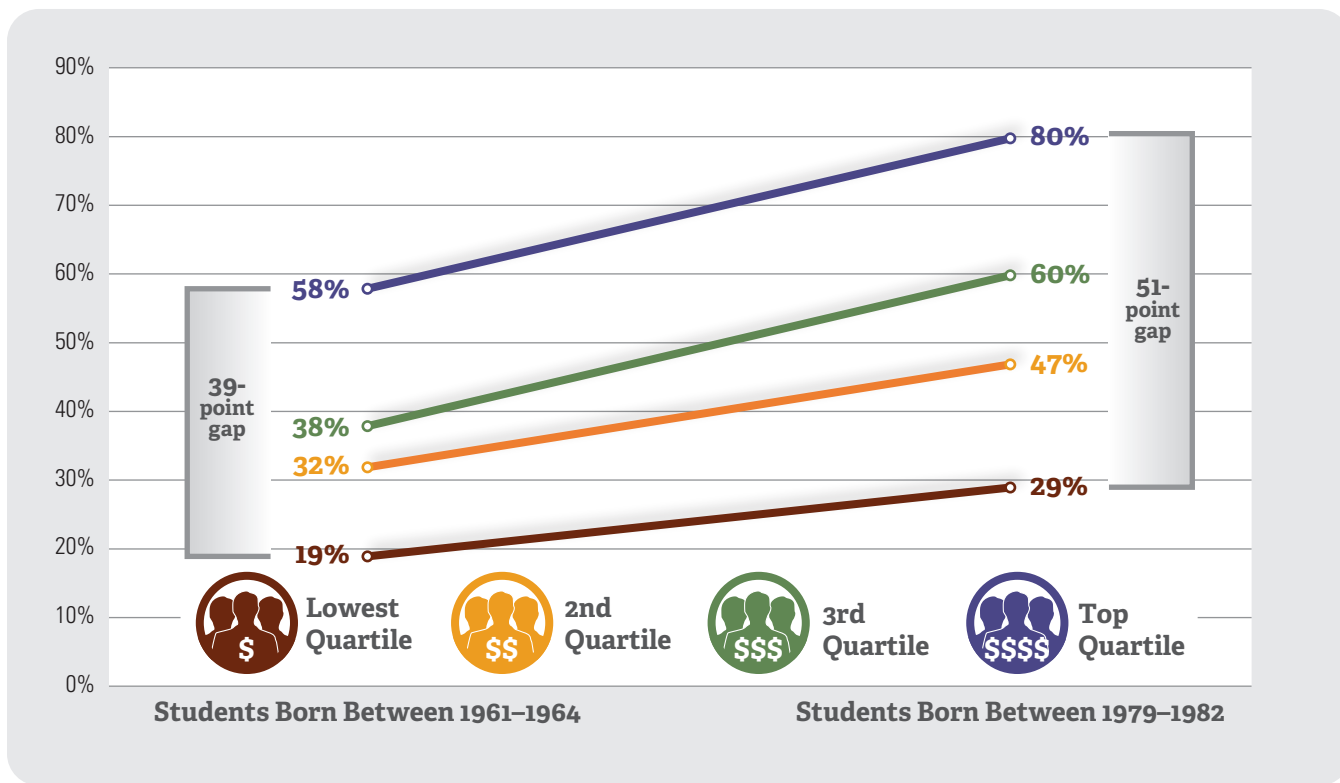
By 2013, though there were about twelve million college students under the age of twenty-five, there were also 5.5 million students twenty-five years old and over, or 31

percent of the total undergraduate enrollment (Figure G). Of students twenty-five years old and older, 60 percent were women and 59 percent enrolled part time.²³ Over the 1993 to 2013 period, enrollment in undergraduate programs by students twenty-five years and older peaked in 2009, likely as a result of students returning to college during the Great Recession. Since that time, enrollments have declined slightly. Additionally, the proportion of adult students as a fraction of the entire undergraduate population has declined somewhat over this time period.

22. William G. Bowen, Martin A. Kurzweil, and Eugene M. Tobin, *Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), Figure 4.3a and 4.3b.

23. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 303.45, “Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level of Enrollment, Sex, Attendance Status, and Age of Student: 2009, 2011, and 2013,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_303.45.asp?current=yes.

Figure F: Proportion of Students with Postsecondary Experience by Income Quartile and Year of Birth



SOURCE: Martha J. Bailey and Susan M. Dynarski, “Inequality in Postsecondary Education,” in *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children’s Life Chances*, ed. Greg J. Duncan and Richard J. Murnane (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011). **NOTE:** This graph uses data from the U.S. Department of Labor’s National Longitudinal Surveys NLSY79 and NLSY97, and the sample includes all students for whom the authors have information about attainment both at age nineteen and twenty-five, which represents 89 percent of NLSY79 and 95 percent of NLSY97.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT TRENDS

The number of international undergraduate students attending American colleges and universities has increased by 67 percent since 2000, from approximately 288,000 students in 2000 to 482,000 in 2013. More than two-thirds of that increase occurred at public universities.²⁴ In fall 2014, China, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea were the top countries sending undergraduates to the United States.²⁵ This increase is

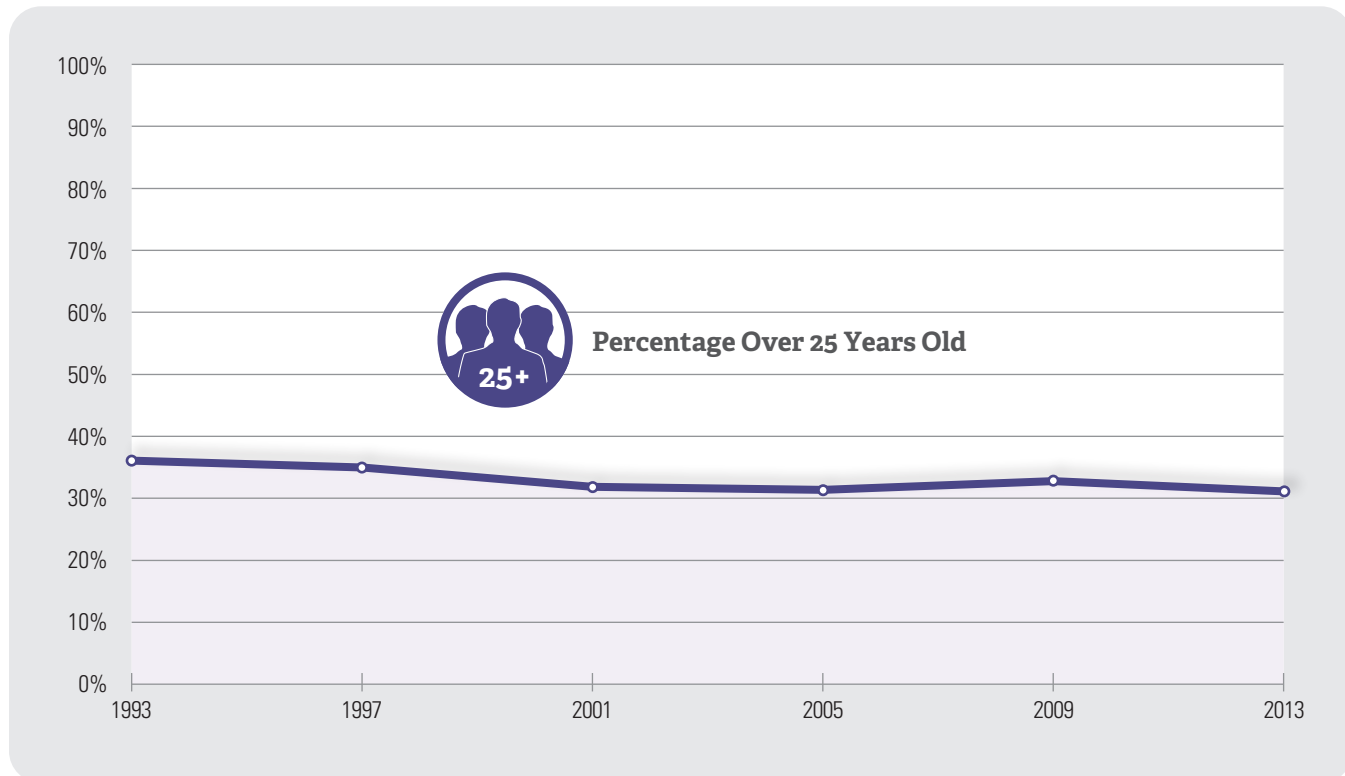
attributed to a combination of the growing affluence and academic preparation of students from the sending countries along with more active recruiting by cash-strapped American public universities of international undergraduates who pay full price to attend college in the United States.²⁶ Researchers at the University of Michigan found that a 10 percent decrease in state appropriations was associated with a 12 percent increase in enrollment of international students at pub-

24. John Bound, Breno Braga, Gaurav Khanna et al., *A Passage to America: University Funding and International Students* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, 2016).

25. National Science Foundation, *Science and Engineering Indicators 2016*, chap. 2, <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2016/nsb20161/#/>.

26. Miriam Jordan, “International Students Stream into U.S. Colleges,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 24, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/international-students-stream-into-u-s-colleges-1427248801>; and Laura McKenna, “The Globalization of America’s Colleges,” *The Atlantic*, November 18, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/11/globalization-american-higher-ed/416502/>.

Figure G: Percentage of Enrolled Students Aged 25 and Older: 1993–2013



SOURCE: Thomas D. Snyder, Cristobal de Brey, and Sally A. Dillow, *Digest of Education Statistics 2014* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), 433, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016006.pdf>; Thomas D. Snyder and Sally A. Dillow, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2011), 294, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011015.pdf>; Thomas D. Snyder, Sally A. Dillow, and Charlene M. Hoffman, *Digest of Education Statistics 2006* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2007), 273, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007017.pdf>; Thomas D. Snyder, Alexandra G. Tan, and Charlene M. Hoffman, *Digest of Education Statistics 2003* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2004), 225, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005025.pdf>; Thomas D. Snyder and Charlene M. Hoffman, *Digest of Education Statistics 1999* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2000), 205, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/2000031.pdf>; and Thomas D. Snyder and Charlene M. Hoffman, *Digest of Education Statistics 1995* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1995), 179, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs95/95029.pdf>.

lic universities between 1996 and 2012.²⁷ This suggests that public universities have reacted to decreases in appropriations by changing the composition of their student body.

AMERICAN STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD

More than 304,000 American students studied abroad for credit during the 2013–2014 academic year. This number has doubled since 2000, and today one in ten undergraduate students study abroad before graduat-

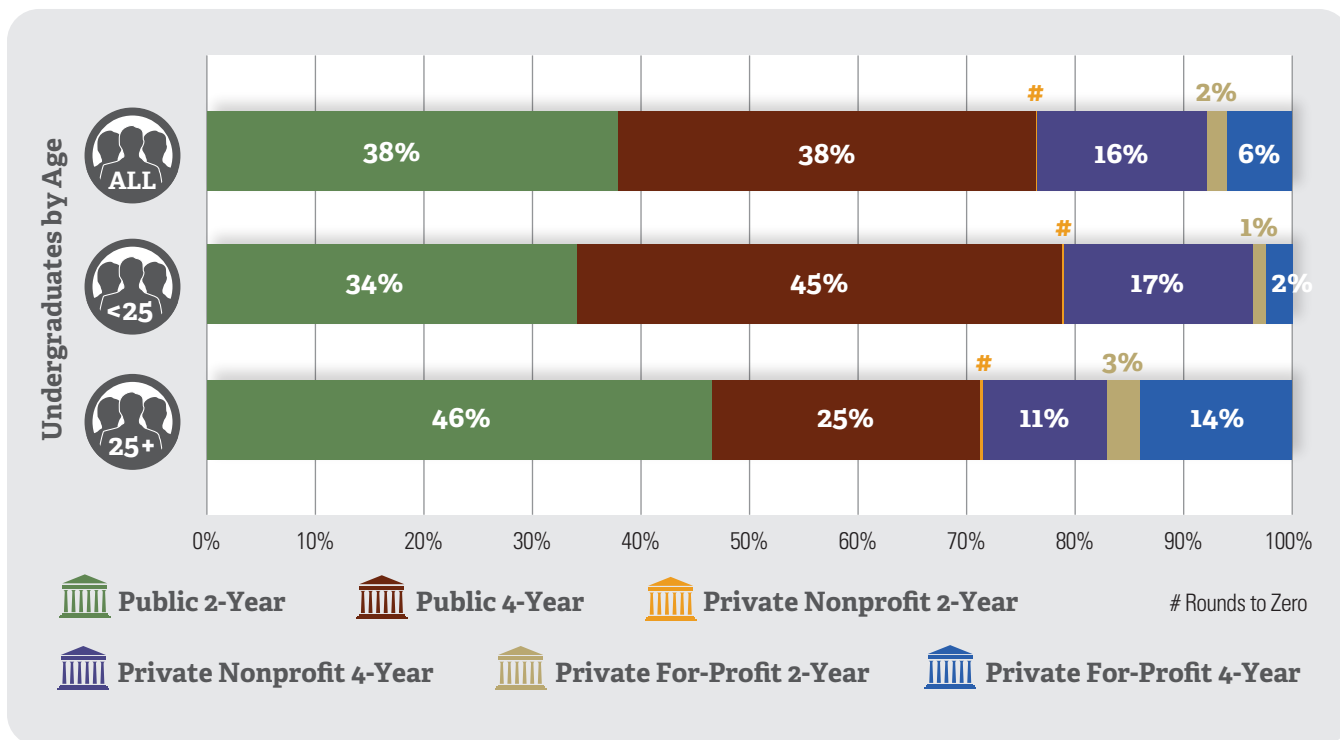
ing.²⁸ The majority of the students studying abroad go to European countries, although Asian countries have become more popular in the last decade.²⁹ In fall 2013,

28. Institute of International Education, *Open Doors: Report on International Educational Exchange* (New York: Institute of International Education, 2015), <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors#.V7YAPygrJ9N>.

29. National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 310.10, “Number of U.S. Students Studying Abroad and Percentage Distribution, by Sex, Race/Ethnicity, and Other Selected Characteristics: Selected Years, 2000–01 through 2013–14,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_310.10.asp?current=yes.

27. Bound et al., *A Passage to America: University Funding and International Students*.

Figure H: Enrollment Rates for Undergraduates by Age and Type of Institution: 2013



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 303.50, “Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level of Enrollment, Control and Level of Institution, Attendance Status, and Age of Student: 2013,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_303.50.asp?current=yes; and National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 303.70, “Total Undergraduate Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Attendance Status, Sex of Student, and Control and Level of Institution: Selected Years, 1970 through 2025,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_303.70.asp?current=yes.

the countries hosting the most American students were the United Kingdom (13 percent), Italy (10 percent), and Spain (9 percent).³⁰ Three-quarters of students who studied abroad in 2014 were white and almost two-thirds were female.³¹

ENROLLMENT ACROSS INSTITUTIONS

In fall 2013, approximately 10.5 million undergraduate students attended a four-year institution (60 percent of undergraduate enrollment), while almost 7 million attended a two-year institution (40 percent of undergrad-

uate enrollment).³² Figure H shows that undergraduate students are as likely to be enrolled at a public two-year as at a public four-year institution, with those two sectors accounting for almost 80 percent of undergraduate fall enrollments. Additionally, undergraduate students over twenty-five years old enroll in public two-year and for-profit institutions at higher rates than younger students.

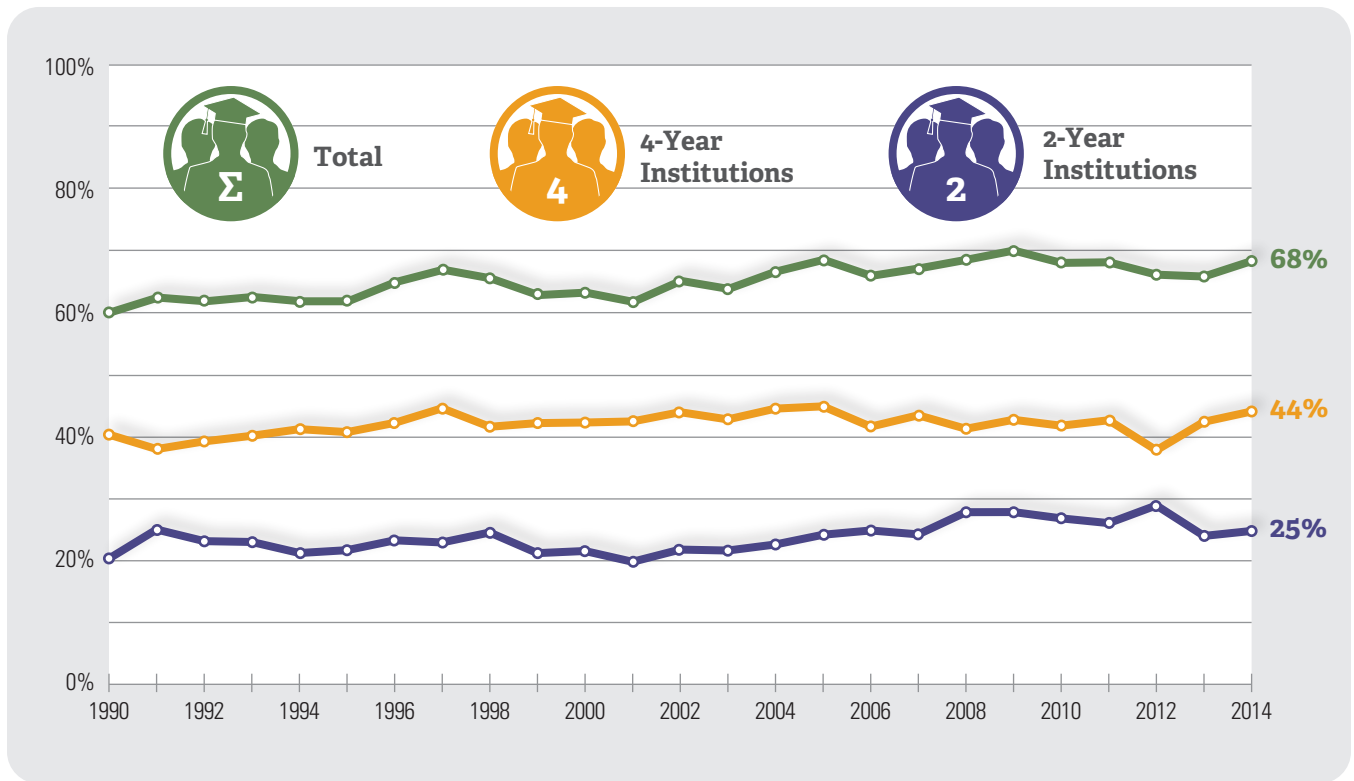
As Figure I demonstrates, enrollment by high school graduates in both two-year and four-year institutions increased between 1990 and 2014. Further, enrollment by recent high school graduates in two-year institutions has increased two and a half times faster than enroll-

30. Institute of International Education, *Open Doors: Report on International Educational Exchange*.

31. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 310.10.

32. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 303.70.

Figure I: Enrollment Rates for Recent High School Graduates in 2-Year and 4-Year Postsecondary Institutions by Level of Institution: 1990–2014



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 302.10, “Recent High School Completers and Their Enrollment in 2-Year and 4-Year Colleges, by Sex: 1960 through 2014,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_302.10.asp?current=yes.

ment in four-year institutions since 1990 (25 percent versus 10 percent) although the growth at public two-year institutions has declined in the past few years.³³

VARIATIONS IN INSTITUTIONAL ENROLLMENT BY RACE/ETHNICITY

Of all undergraduate students in 2013, 58 percent were white, 17 percent Hispanic, 15 percent black, and 6 per-

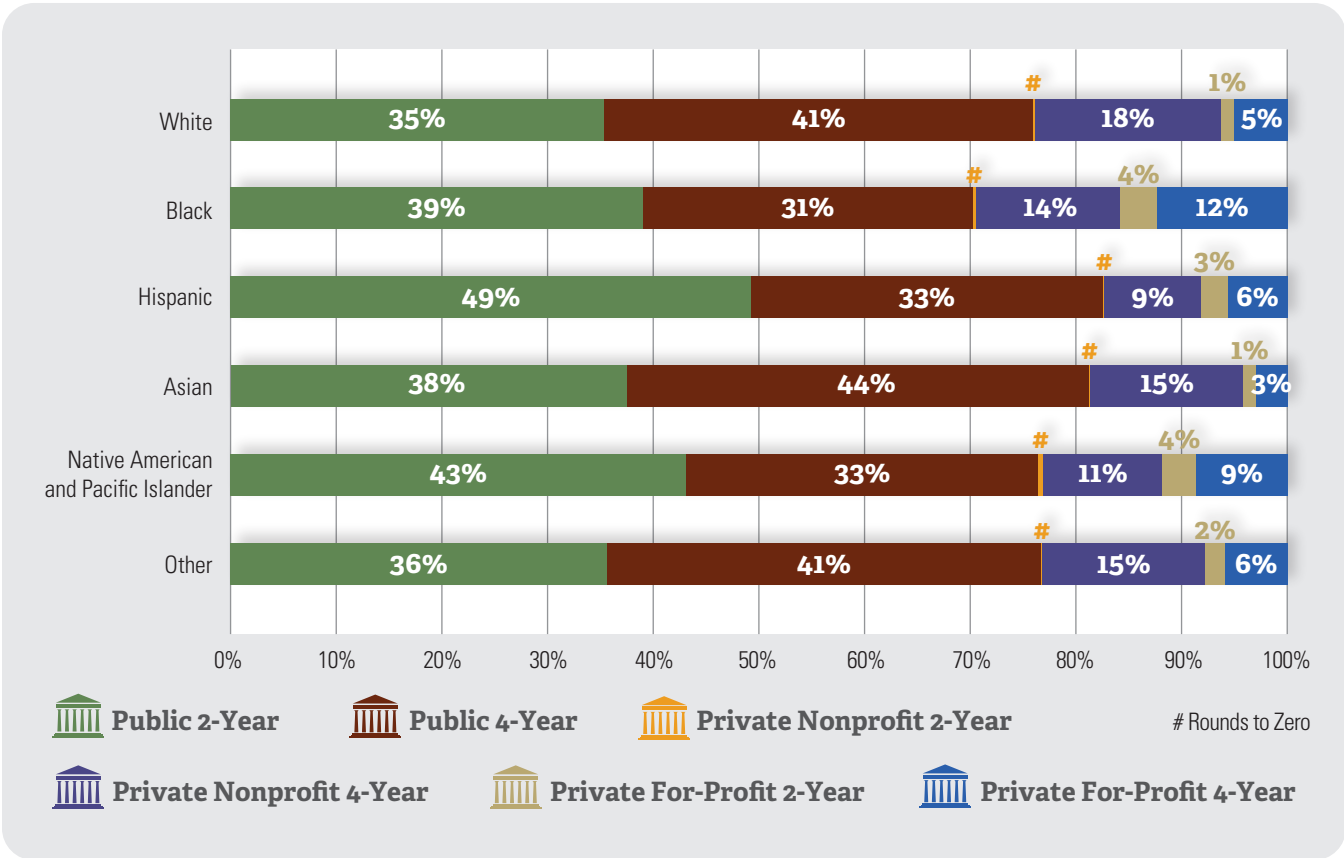
cent Asian.³⁴ Figure J presents the patterns of enrollment for different races and ethnicities by type of institution. Black and Hispanic students enroll in two-year colleges at the highest rates and in public and private four-year colleges at lower rates than their Asian and white counterparts.

Figure K presents the composition of the undergraduate student body by race/ethnicity at various institutional types. White students make up about two-thirds of the student population in public and

33. See National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 302.10, “Recent High School Completers and Their Enrollment in 2-Year and 4-Year Colleges, by Sex: 1960 through 2014,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_302.10.asp; and National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 302.60, “Percentage of 18- to 24-Year-Olds Enrolled in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level of Institution and Sex and Race/Ethnicity of Student: 1970 through 2014,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_302.60.asp?current=yes.

34. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 306.10, “Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level of Enrollment, Sex, Attendance Status, and Race/Ethnicity of Student: Selected Years, 1976 through 2014,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_306.10.asp?current=yes.

Figure J: Enrollment Rates of Undergraduates by Race and Type of Institution: Fall 2013



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 306.50, "Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Control and Level of Institution, Level of Enrollment, and Race/Ethnicity of Student: 2013," https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_306.50.asp?current=yes.

private nonprofit four-year institutions (62 and 67 percent, respectively) and less than one-half at private for-profits (48 percent). Black and Hispanic students make up a much smaller percentage of the student body at public and private four-year institutions, but almost one-half of the student body at for-profit four-year colleges. The only institutional types where black and Hispanic students make up a larger percentage than white students are two-year private for-profit colleges.

PART-TIME STUDENTS

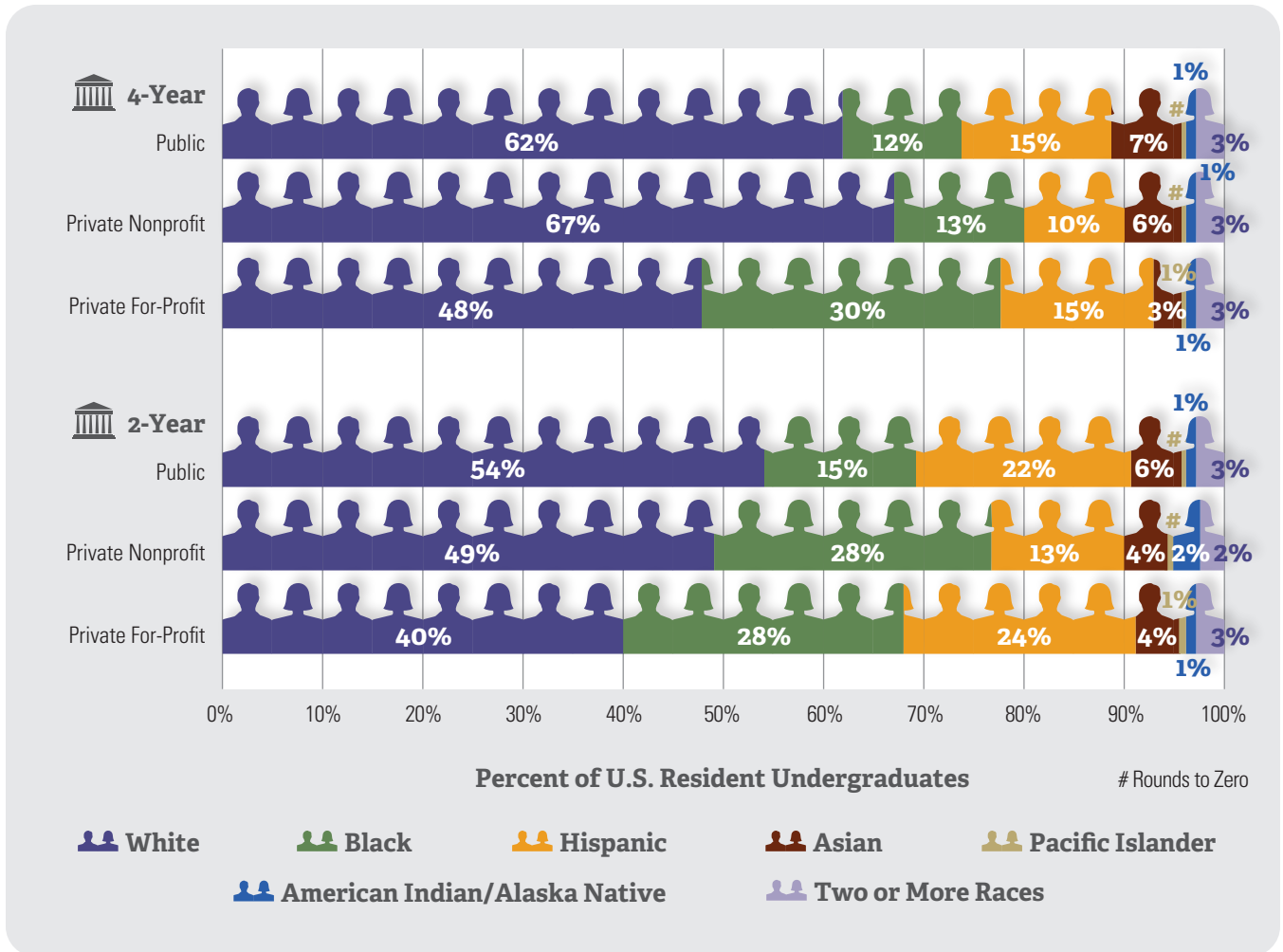
In 2013, 63 percent of the national undergraduate student body was enrolled full time, and the remaining 37 percent studied part time. (The proportion of part-time students has decreased since the early 1990s when it was

five percentage points higher.)³⁵ Age makes a big difference. Seventy-two percent of students under age twenty-five study full time, compared with only 41 percent of older students, as seen in Figure L. Part-time enrollment is more common among older students because they are more likely to face extra demands on their time from family and job responsibilities.

Young adults enroll in full-time study at higher rates than their older counterparts across all institutional types, except at private for-profit four-year institutions, as depicted in Figure M. For example, 88 percent of full-time students at public four-year colleges are under

35. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 303.45.

Figure K: Distribution of Undergraduate Enrollment by Sector and Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2013



SOURCE: Re-creation of Figure 3 in National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2015* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, May 2015), 196. Original data from Digest of Education Statistics, Table 306.50, "Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Control and Level of Institution, Level of Enrollment, and Race/Ethnicity of Student: 2013."

the age of twenty-five, while the remaining 12 percent are twenty-five or older. Similarly, 86 percent of full-time undergraduate students in private nonprofit four-year institutions are under the age of twenty-five.

Even at two-year institutions, younger students study full time at higher rates than older students. The only exception is at private for-profit four-year institutions, where 30 percent of undergraduates who study full time

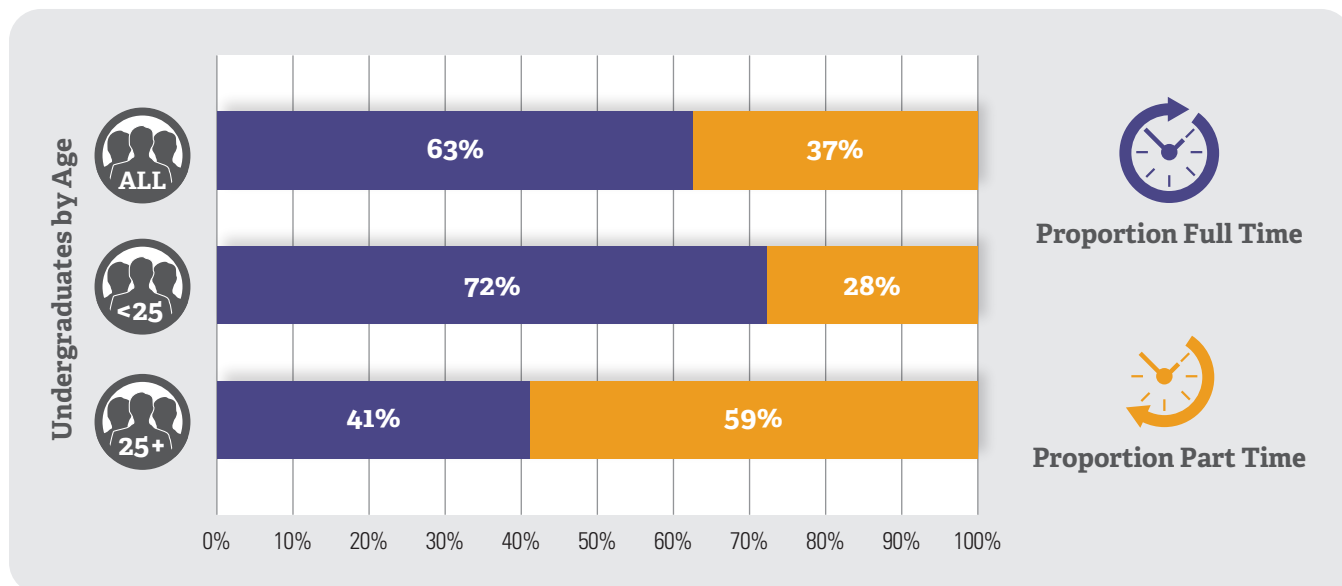
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**The average acceptance rate at four-year colleges is about 65 percent nationwide.**  
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are under twenty-five while 70 percent of those twenty-five and older study full time.

INSTITUTIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

More than 70 percent of undergraduates attend colleges that accept more than half of their applicants; only 3 percent attend schools that accept less than 25 percent and only 1 percent attend colleges that accept less than 10 percent of their appli-

Figure L: Undergraduate Students by Age and Enrollment Intensity: 2013



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 303.45, “Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level of Enrollment, Sex, Attendance Status, and Age of Student: 2009, 2011, and 2013,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_303.45.asp?current=yes.

cants.³⁶ The average acceptance rate at four-year colleges is about 65 percent nationwide.³⁷ A recent study found that black and Hispanic students are underrepresented in the most selective colleges, even after controlling for family income. The probability of enrolling in a highly selective college is five times greater for white students than for black students. Low- and middle-income students are likewise extremely underrepresented in the

most selective colleges.³⁸ Lastly, while many media stories cover students applying to dozens and dozens of colleges to maximize the chance of being accepted, the median number of applications submitted to traditional four-year colleges per student is two.³⁹

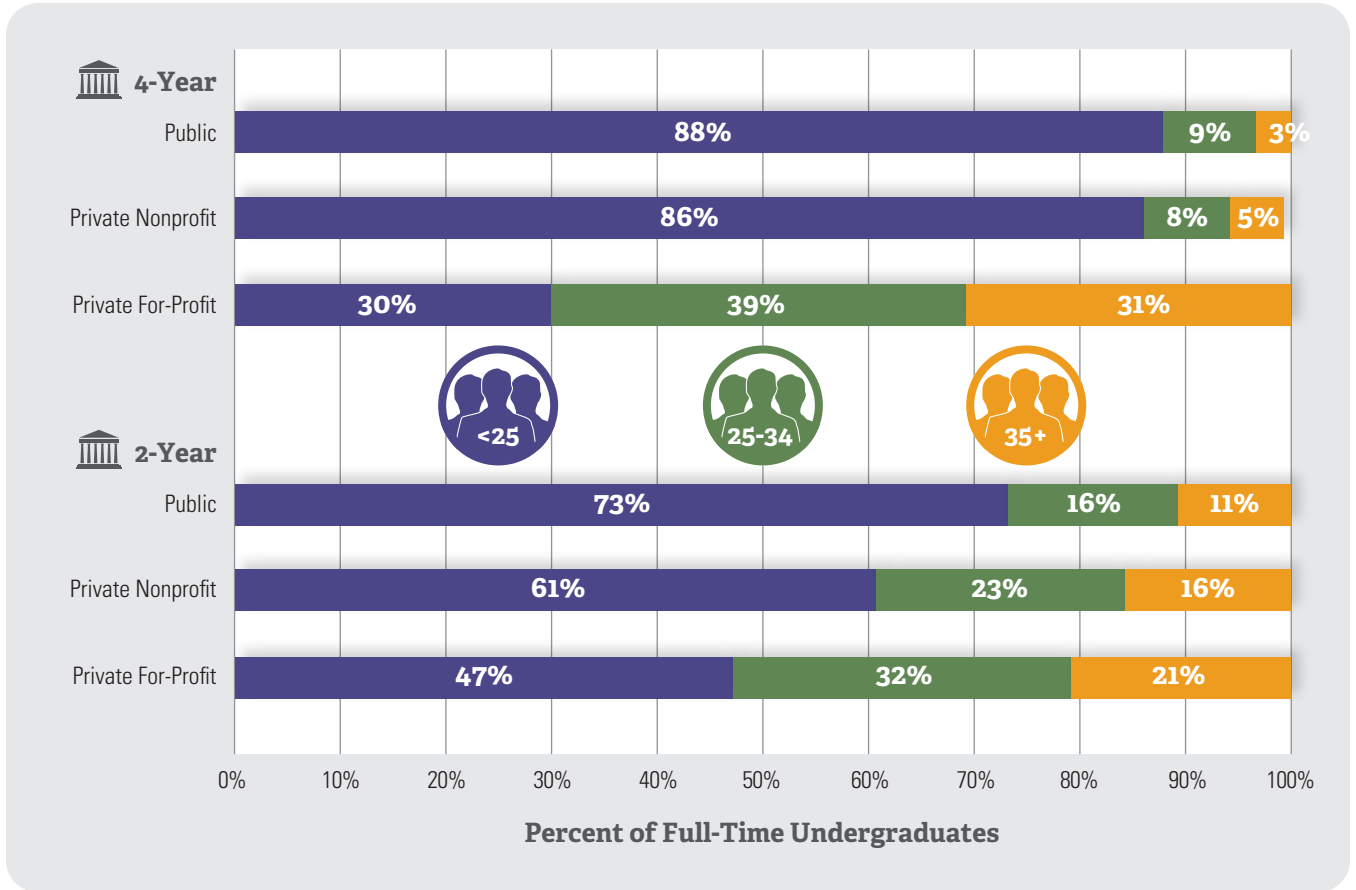
36. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 305.40, “Acceptance Rates; Number of Applications, Admissions, and Enrollees; and Enrollees’ SAT and ACT Scores for Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions with First-Year Undergraduates, by Control and Level of Institution: 2013–14,” https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_305.40.asp?current=yes.

37. Anemona Hartocollis, “Greater Competition for College Places Means Higher Anxiety, Too,” *The New York Times*, April 20, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/21/us/greater-competition-for-college-places-means-higher-anxiety-too.html>.

38. Sean F. Reardon, Rachel Baker, and Daniel Klasik, *Race, Income, and Enrollment Patterns in Highly Selective Colleges, 1982–2004* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Center for Education Policy Analysis, 2012).

39. Christopher Avery, Jessica S. Howell, and Lindsay Page, *A Review of the Role of College Applications on Students’ Postsecondary Outcomes* (New York: College Board, 2014).

Figure M: Percentage Distribution of Full-Time Undergraduate Enrollment, by Institution and Student Age: Fall 2013



SOURCE: Re-creation of Figure 1 in National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2015* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, May 2015), 194. Original data from Digest of Education Statistics, Table 303.50, "Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level of Enrollment, Control and Level of Institution, Attendance Status, and Age of Student: 2013."