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# 21ST-CENTURY TRENDS IN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS AND ENROLLMENT

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# Our Admissions System?

- Every fall (& especially this fall) stories about new student enrollments.
  - ▣ Up?
  - ▣ Down?
  - ▣ Stable?
- Another story?
  - ▣ What do these patterns mean for sectors
  - ▣ What do they mean for the overall health of our postsecondary system
  - ▣ For our nation



# To Answer These Questions

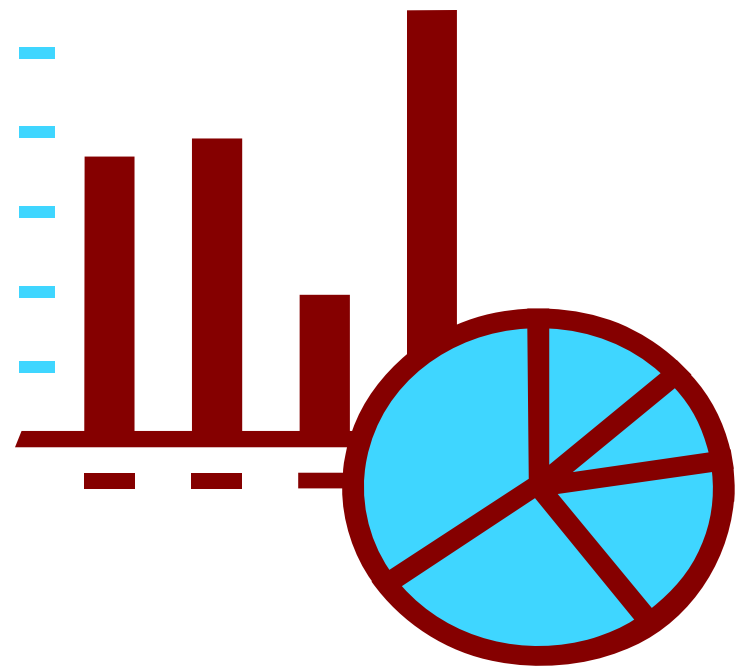
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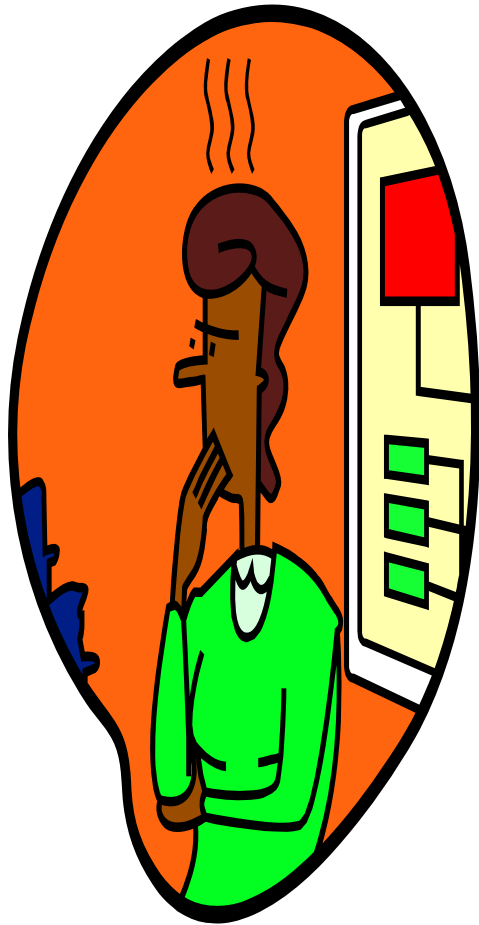
- We examined the intersection of
  - High school graduation rates
  - Application patterns
  - Acceptance rates
  - Yield rates
  - Aggregate enrollment rates

# Methods/Sources

- Data sources
  - IPEDS (2001-2008, n=4,022 schools)
  - NCES
  - Census Bureau
  - WICHE
- Not able to employ correlational or causal analytic techniques
- Looking for descriptive patterns & trends



# Some Limitations



- Limited data for community colleges – less than 5% submit data to IPEDS & they are under-represented in CIRP & NACAC surveys
- Only 30% of for-profit sector institutions provided admissions data & they are invisible in CIRP and NACAC surveys
- In a more complex admissions world this limits our ability to present a picture of patterns & to offer observations about our postsecondary system.

# Overview of Demographic Patterns

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- South saw a 20-percent increase in the number of high school graduates between 2000 and 2007, followed by the West (19%), the Northeast (16%), and the Midwest (11%).
- Number of Latino high school graduates increased by 57 percent between 2000 and 2007, followed by African Americans (30%), American Indians/Alaska Natives (29%), Asian /Pacific Islanders (26%), and White non-Latinos (7%).

# College Participation Rates

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- Among high school graduates, college participation increased gradually between 1972 and 2005 from about 32 to 47 percent.
- In 2005, about 49 percent of White non-Latino high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary education compared to 38 percent of Latino high school graduates and 42 percent of African American high school graduates.
- Between 2000 and 2005, the postsecondary enrollment gap grew from 8 to 11 percent between White and Latino high school completers and from 5 to 7 percent between White and African American high school completers.

# Application Patterns

**Change in Median Number of Applications to Four-Year Institutions by Institution Type and Selected Characteristics, 2001-2008**

Institution Type and Selected Characteristics		2001-2002	2003-2004	2005-2006	2007-2008	Annual Average	2001-2008
Control of Institution	Public	7%	7%	-2%	12%	6%	47%
	Private not-for-profit	10%	9%	8%	11%	8%	70%
	Private for-profit	11%	19%	8%	-1%	8%	69%
Region	West	16%	23%	-6%	7%	6%	49%
	Midwest	9%	11%	9%	5%	7%	56%
	South	15%	-1%	7%	12%	8%	73%
	Northeast	3%	6%	7%	7%	7%	64%
	Puerto Rico	16%	6%	2%	25%	10%	88%
SAT Composite, 75th Percentile	Missing	12%	11%	3%	2%	7%	59%
	Less than 1078	20%	1%	6%	12%	8%	64%
	1078-1159	10%	5%	7%	5%	7%	58%
	1160-1259	5%	6%	10%	9%	7%	64%
	1260 or higher	9%	7%	7%	5%	6%	53%
Historically Black Colleges & Universities		17%	5%	9%	8%	7%	58%
Hispanic-Serving Institutions		28%	17%	10%	8%	12%	111%

Data source for authors' calculations: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

# Postsecondary Acceptance Patterns 2001-2008

**Percentage Change in Median Acceptance Rate at Four-Year Institutions by Institution Type and Selected Characteristics, 2001-2008**

Institution Type and Selected Characteristics		2001-2002	2003-2004	2005-2006	2007-2008	Annual Average	2001-2008
Control of Institution	Public	-2%	-1%	-1%	-2%	-1%	-7%
	Private not-for-profit	-2%	-2%	-3%	0%	-2%	-10%
	Private for-profit	-31%	-3%	-2%	8%	-5%	-33%
Region	West	-6%	-2%	-3%	2%	-1%	-10%
	Midwest	-2%	0%	-2%	-1%	-1%	-8%
	South	-3%	-3%	0%	-1%	-2%	-14%
	Northeast	-1%	1%	-4%	-1%	-1%	-8%
	Puerto Rico	-12%	-11%	5%	-12%	-3%	-25%
	Other US territories	-6%	3%	0%	4%	3%	20%
SAT Composite, 75th Percentile	Missing	-4%	-1%	0%	0%	-1%	-8%
	Less than 1078	-1%	-1%	0%	0%	-1%	-7%
	1078-1159	-4%	0%	-3%	0%	-1%	-10%
	1160-1259	-3%	-3%	-3%	-1%	-2%	-11%
	1260 or higher	-3%	-1%	-2%	-1%	-2%	-13%
Historically Black Colleges & Universities		-12%	-8%	11%	7%	-1%	-12%
Hispanic-Serving Institutions		-13%	-5%	-1%	2%	-3%	-19%

# Yield Patterns for 2001 to 2008

**Median Yield Rate at Four-Year Institutions by Institution Type and Selected Characteristics,**

<b>Institution Type and Characteristics</b>		<b>2001</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>Average</b>
Control of Institution	Public	48%	47%	45%	44%	43%	45%
	Private not-for-profit	40%	39%	37%	36%	35%	38%
	Private for-profit	69%	99%	90%	97%	100%	94%
Region	West	48%	50%	46%	47%	46%	48%
	Midwest	46%	44%	42%	40%	40%	43%
	South	46%	47%	45%	45%	43%	46%
	Northeast	37%	37%	36%	34%	34%	36%
	Puerto Rico	87%	88%	81%	83%	81%	85%
SAT Composite, 75th Percentile	Missing	62%	81%	75%	75%	69%	74%
	Less than 1078	47%	45%	42%	40%	40%	43%
	1078-1159	41%	41%	38%	37%	36%	39%
	1160-1259	40%	38%	36%	36%	35%	37%
	1260 or higher	38%	37%	36%	35%	34%	36%
Historically Black Colleges & Universities		39%	38%	38%	40%	36%	38%
Hispanic-Serving Institutions		63%	77%	73%	78%	72%	74%

Data source for authors' calculations: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

# Postsecondary Enrollment Patterns 2001-2008

- Entering class size for all types of four-year institutions grew between 2001 and 2008, with for-profit institutions seeing the greatest increases.
- The West saw the largest increase in enrollments (51%) from 2001 to 2008.
- The median size of entering first-year classes at the most selective institutions increased by 12 percent between 2001 and 2008.



# Our Research Questions



- Are increases in applications a function of more students applying to colleges or of more students applying to more colleges?
- If yield rates among admitted students are dropping, is it because more students are submitting multiple applications, because more students accepted at four-year nonprofit institutions are attending two-year or for-profit institutions instead, or because many colleges and universities are expanding their student bodies—resulting in “fewer students to go around.”
- Are there variations by institutional locus of control (public or private), by institutional selectivity, and by geographic region in how student application patterns and institutional enrollment decisions are influencing college admissions?

# Conclusions Re: Postsecondary Participation Rates

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- Number of HS graduates in the U.S. has been increasing since 2000 and postsecondary participation rates are slowly rising.
- Trends imply an increasing # of students applying for college admissions & possibly higher application rates at CC's, for-profits, & regional four-year public institutions.
- Large increase in Latino students & their typical enrollment patterns indicate that majority of increases should be concentrated in regional, less selective, 2- and 4-year colleges.
- These demographic and societal shifts alone cannot fully account for the approximately 34-percent increase between 2001 and 2008 in the median number of applications received by two- and four-year postsecondary institutions reporting data to IPEDS.

# Application Patterns at Four-Year Institutions



- Most growth has taken place at less selective & open admissions for-profit & not-for-profit private 4-year IHEs
- Posit that application growth is function of larger number of students applying for college & larger number of recent high school graduates submitting multiple applications.
- Proportion of ethnic minorities & lower-income students submitting applications to more than one institution resulting in more competition for local commuting

# More on Application Patterns

- Highly selective IHES have seen large increase in apps, outstripping number of HS students with high test scores. Chance of being admitted to an elite institution continues to allure many high-ability students.
- Limited trend data for for-profit IHES suggests dramatic increases in applications. May reflect the extensive marketing efforts & an increasing acceptance of these institutions by the college-going population.
- Limited data indicates the greatest growth appears to have occurred in the public sector and in the South.



# IHE Admit Rates

- Across all sectors of four-year institutions (including private not-for-profits) acceptance rates declined from 2001 to 2008
- Most selective schools reported the largest increases in the number of students rejected.
- For- Profit Institutions?
  - ▣ Idiosyncratic to the small proportion of them that submitted data?
  - ▣ Reflects greater caution in admitting students who might be at risk of defaulting on student loans?
  - ▣ Denying because of limited capacity?
- Most two-year colleges are open-access institutions with high rates of acceptance & little variation



# Yield Rates

- Yield rates at community colleges continue to be high
- Possible reasons for high yield rates for for-profit institutions:
  - Effective recruitment
  - most applicants to for-profit schools apply to fewer institutions
  - This group of IHEs had unusually high yields for this sector
- Admission yield rates for nonprofit institutions decreased - but difference between the public & the private sector are small - 11% & 12%
- Decline in yield rates across most four-year sectors & geographic regions suggests may be more competition for limited number of students who aspire to attend nonprofit four-year colleges and universities.

# Enrollment Trends

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- Entering class generally increased at public and private nonprofit two-year colleges compared to for-profit colleges—which saw a moderate decrease. Regional differences in enrollment trends are pronounced.
- Puerto Rico saw an 88-percent increase in median enrollments & the Northeast also saw increases, but not as dramatic (37%). 2-year institutions in West & South saw an overall decrease in enrollments, but could be because of the small number of respondents.
- For-profit institutions seeing the greatest increases

# More on Enrollment Trends

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- Increase in median enrollments at public & private nonprofits is not surprising
  - Decline in public funding per enrolled student & have delineated growing reliance among the four- & two-year IHES on marginal increases in enrollment & tuition in balancing precarious budgets.
  - They lack robust endowments & thus use enrollment increases and the attendant increases in tuition revenue to balance their budgets.
- More surprising is the increase in the median size of the first-year class at the most selective institutions (12%). The reasons may range from efforts to increase socioeconomic diversity through larger enrollments to reducing criticism for rejecting so many students—and probably in some cases even increasing marginal tuition revenue.

# Some Closing Thoughts

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- Because of data limitations we are reluctant to say anything with too much certainty about CC's & for profits
  - CC's, for-profits, & less-selective publics 4-years might be heavily influenced by increased number of traditional age HS students pursuing postsecondary education.
  - # of students submitting multiple applications is unlikely to be the primary reason for the growth in applications at these institutions. A more likely is increase in the number of first-generation Latino HS graduates applying.
- For more selective public and private nonprofit institutions the most viable explanation for the increase in applications is that an ever-increasing number of students are applying to more institutions. This increase in multiple applications is leading to more students not being admitted and, in all likelihood, lower yields.

# Some Tough Questions



- From the student point of view, does the increased number of applications and the likelihood of more postsecondary options lead to a more informed student choice? In other words, are students making more informed choices toward a better student-institution fit?
- From the institutional perspective, does the increase in applications, the decrease in the number of students accepted, and the decline in yields reflect an increasingly inefficient system of postsecondary admissions because of the costs associated with admissions marketing and the costs of reviewing student applications?

- The growth in the number of Latino and African American students applying to and matriculating at postsecondary institutions would be expected to result in increases in new college enrollees who are:
  - More likely from low- and moderate-income families
  - Less likely to have access to rigorous academic preparation
  - More likely to stay close to home and attend commuter institutions—all attributes associated with less selective colleges and universities.
- This should give pause to all who care about equality of educational opportunity.
  - Less selective, predominantly public institutions that are seeing significant increases in applications for admission are two- and four-year institutions that receive less funding per enrolled student and yet may enroll a greater proportion of students who need more assistance and attention to be successful. Recent work by St. John and colleagues (2006) demonstrates that many of these underfunded institutions lack the resources to adequately meet the needs of their growing student bodies.
  - The recent work of Bowen, Chingos, McPherson, and Leonhardt (2009) concludes with a strong assertion that more resources are associated with higher levels of student success.

# Impact of Trends

- ❑ Rejecting more students and lower yield rates do not bode well for the allocation of resources at postsecondary institutions and for the health of postsecondary opportunity.
- ❑ As yield rates decline, it is axiomatic that to assure sufficient enrollments colleges and universities will spend more money on recruitment, causing academic programs to compete with recruitment for general fund dollars.
- ❑ The rise in selectivity, will close doors of opportunity for more low-income, first-generation students in all institutional sectors, even community colleges. They are typically less certain of their academic goals, received less rigorous college preparation, and have lower self-efficacy and less ability to negotiate collegiate bureaucracies—are also least likely to benefit from the opportunity of online education, promoted by the federal government.



# Food for Thought

- The number of Latino students will continue to grow in many parts of the country, while the proportion of non-Latino Whites will continue to decline. This will likely result in declines in applications to moderately selective private four-year institutions and possibly even to some moderately selective public institutions in rural areas.
- If current economic downturn continues, these changes could alter patterns in application, acceptance, & yield. This intersection of demographic and economic pressures could create policy challenges in the years ahead.
- Results raise questions regarding the public interest. Is it desirable that so many students apply to multiple institutions only to be rejected by more institutions, making the application process more costly for students and families as well as for institutions?
  - One argument for multiple applications is that students' exploration of more options leads to better student-institution fit but the empirical evidence for this argument is weak
  - By applying to more institutions students may be more likely to enroll in the best school to which they can be admitted. On the other hand, students may also be looking for the school that will provide the best aid package increasing financial aid competition.
  - While this competition for aid may benefit students, there is growing evidence that financial aid investments are outstripping investments in teaching and learning in the classroom.

# Final Musings



- This kind of work provides useful insights for institutional policy makers but also a window into our postsecondary educational system
- Until political will matches the political rhetoric regarding the need for a more educated workforce, we are unlikely to see substantive improvements in the enrollment and graduation rates for two-year colleges.
- Mounting evidence that for-profit institutions are successfully competing with nonprofit institutions, both public and private. These trends merit further study in future research which will require better data.
- While more applications, fewer admissions, and lower yields may help establish positions in *U.S. News & World Report's* these trends may indicate inefficiencies and excess expenditures in college admissions. In tough economic times it is reasonable to question this use of scarce resources when we should be improving the quality of educational experiences and increasing graduation rates. Once again, the lack of integrated databases with student- and institutional-level variables hampers our ability to explore these critical issues.

- Making four-year institutions more efficient—especially among less selective, regional, commuting institutions with the largest increases in application and enrollment—will prove insufficient to offset the growing unwillingness of states and their citizens to fund public sector institutions as more and more students enroll.
- More research on these patterns is needed. Institutional policy making is heavily influenced by myths, institutional history, or critical events—and the resulting policies are not likely to reflect actual patterns or the institution’s best interests. If we accurately determine what is happening in college admissions across the full range of institutional sectors, we will be better equipped to craft sound policy.
- Greater effort needs to be made to find reasonable measures of enrollment patterns at community colleges and for-profit institutions & they should be required to provide data to IPEDS. Without better data we lack the ability to fully understand the health and vitality of our postsecondary system.