



# The Impact of Demographic Changes on Higher Education

**Summary of Conference  
Discussions  
July 27–28, 2005  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

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# Introduction

One of the unique functions of the College Board is to provide a forum for its members to discuss emerging trends and to consider the potential impact of these trends on their individual institutions, as well as on broader education policy. In conversations with enrollment management professionals over the past year, we heard that, while most were aware of the demographic shifts that have been projected for the next decade, they wanted help in thinking through the specific implications of these changes. As a result of those conversations, the College Board invited a small group of experts to share information and identify potential issues and opportunities that higher education should be preparing for.

During one-and-a-half days of wide-ranging discussions, participants provided national- and state-specific analyses of high school graduation projections, identified factors that might affect college participation rates, exchanged ideas about the impact of demographics on different types of campuses, and outlined a long list of public policy issues. This summary provides an overview of the key topics that were discussed and should be viewed as the first step in a national dialogue on the impact of demographic changes on higher education. Over the next year, the College Board plans to provide additional opportunities to continue these discussions and the exchange of information. A special Web site, [www.collegeboard.com/demographics](http://www.collegeboard.com/demographics), is being developed, and relevant information will be added as it becomes available. Additional meetings and sessions at a variety of professional conferences are also being planned.

Special thanks to Ann Wright for ably serving as chair, and to all of the participants who prepared informative remarks and actively contributed to the conversations. I would also like to acknowledge Don Hossler and Gretchen Rigol for developing the agenda and providing the structure for such a rich and useful discussion. Gretchen also prepared this summary and is helping the College Board develop plans for continued discussions on this important topic.

Fred Dietrich  
Senior Vice President



# Summary of Conference Discussions

During the summer of 2005, the College Board convened a small group of enrollment managers, researchers, faculty, demographers, and policy experts to discuss the implications of the dramatic demographic changes projected for the next 15 years in the U.S. population. Most educators are aware of the general projections highlighted in *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates by State, Income, and Race/Ethnicity, 1988 to 2018* (WICHE 2003).

- Nationally, the number of high school graduates will increase every year until 2009; beginning in 2010, there will be a gradual decline.
- The proportion of minority students is increasing and will account for about half of school enrollments within the next decade.
- High school graduates in the future will include higher percentages from families with low incomes.

While it is relatively easy to project K–12 enrollments for the next 10 to 15 years (after all, these future students have already been born), it becomes somewhat more difficult to project high school graduation and even more difficult to project how many of those graduates will attend college. Factors that might affect the high school graduation data include the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, changes in course requirements, and policies for promotion and graduation (including state testing requirements). School enrollment and graduation data are also affected by the migration of students across state lines and from other countries.

U.S. education has experienced significant increases and decreases in the past, with the major influx of returning GIs immediately after World War II; the baby boom, which crested in the 1960s; and the baby boom echo during the 1980s. These increases and decreases affected the entire education system and were generally spread evenly across

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the country. There have also been changes in the composition of students enrolled in higher education, with an increase in the number of female and black students during the 1960s and 1970s. While there are undoubtedly lessons to be learned from how educators coped with these ebbs and flows in the past, the changes projected for the next decade and beyond are different along several major dimensions.

Most of the major changes in the recent past have been national in scope. This time, however, there are vastly different scenarios projected for different parts of the country. In addition, there will be major differences in the racial/ethnic makeup of school enrollments in many areas. The following snapshot of projections for two states illustrates how vastly different the future will look in different parts of the country.

**Table 1**

	Arizona			Vermont		
	2005	2010	2015	2005	2010	2015
High School Graduates	55,164	66,094	71,661	8,237	7,862	6,821
Percent Change						
2005 to 2010		20%			-5%	
2005 to 2015			30%			-17%
Racial/Ethnic Composition						
American Indian	6%	5%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Asian	3%	3%	4%	2%	2%	3%
Black	5%	5%	5%	0%	1%	1%
Hispanic	29%	36%	41%	1%	5%	9%
White	57%	50%	45%	97%	92%	88%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Immigration patterns have also influenced the characteristics of high school enrollments. Approximately one out of every five children age 18 or younger is either an immigrant or a child of immigrants. Since the 1960s, these immigrants have come mostly from non-European countries. Many of these students will be first-generation college students, as well as first-generation U.S. residents and citizens. In addition, there are unknown numbers of undocumented students—those whose parents may not have appropriate immigration papers, but who have been in the U.S. education system for much, if not all, of their K–12 education. In fact, many of the additional Hispanic and Asian students who will be in U.S. schools and colleges over the next two decades are immigrants—and many may be bilingual or may still be learning English language skills.

As the United States moves toward becoming a “minority majority” country, it is important for educators to develop a more complete understanding of the background, characteristics, and culture of all the major racial/ethnic groups. For example, Asian American students are not a homogenous group representing “model minorities” from professional families that highly value education. Rather, the Asian American population is bifurcated by income and class and includes many different ethnic groups.

In addition, the unfortunate reality is that all students do not receive the same quality of education, preparation for college-level studies, and encouragement to continue their education through high school and beyond. There are major “education gaps” among the racial/ethnic groups as measured in many different ways—from course preparation, grades, various test results, persistence through high school, high school graduation, and college participation. Table 2 illustrates these gaps.

**Table 2**

	<b>American Indian, Alaskan Native</b>	<b>Asian, Asian American, Pacific Islander</b>	<b>African American, Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>White</b>
NAEP Reading (2004, 17-year-olds)			264	264	293
NAEP Math (2004, 17-year-olds)			285	289	313
SAT Verbal	489	511	433	458	532
SAT Math	493	580	431	464	536
ACT Composite	18.7	22.1	17.0	18.6	21.9
Percent of students taking precalculus within the 2005 SAT® cohort	39%	62%	32%	38%	50%
Percent graduating from HS		85%	62%	57%	76%
Percent attending college		86%	58%	55%	68%
Percent of students from the 2005 SAT cohort who are first-generation college-bound	45%	37%	52%	60%	30%

When projecting future scenarios, it's important to take into account the information from both of these tables. For example, the increased number of high school graduates in Arizona might not translate into more students attending colleges—particularly not four-year institutions. There will be about 10,000 more Arizona high school graduates in 2010 compared with 2005, and nearly three-fourths of those students will be Hispanic. Because of lower college-going rates, coupled with the fact that Hispanic students who do enroll in college are more likely to attend community colleges, the four-year institutions within the state may not see anywhere near the growth one might imagine by looking at Table 1 alone. Likewise, the actual numbers of students who enroll in college in Vermont might be even lower than indicated by the projections in high school graduates.

Another trend that has both a positive and negative side is the fact that women now comprise nearly 60 percent of postsecondary enrollment. This is a major reversal from the enrollment patterns of just a few decades ago and is clear evidence that women have become successful in gaining access to higher education. But the flip side is the discouraging fact that men are dropping out of the education system in large numbers. This inequality is particularly pronounced for African American and Hispanic students. For example, only 26 percent of African American men between the ages of 18 and 24 are enrolled in higher education, compared with 36 percent of African American women.

Economic factors can also influence both high school dropout and college-going rates, with students being more likely to stop their education if there are ample opportunities for good paying jobs. As the number of low-income students increase, more students may need to take jobs of any sort in order to help their families pay rent and put food on the table.

An even more important economic consideration relates to college affordability and financial aid policies. Over the past 10 years, average tuition and fees have increased significantly at all levels of higher education. At the same time, median household income has not increased at the same rate, resulting in projections of greater financial need. Compounding the situation is the fact that average incomes for Hispanic students (who will comprise a much larger proportion of high school graduates in the future) are considerably lower than for white students. While the federal Pell Grant program is the cornerstone of aid for low-income students, state grants have increased over the past decade—but an increasing share of state grants are not based on financial need. Because so many of the students in the education pipeline are likely to have significant financial need, one of the most critical implications of the demographic changes is the need to address ways to make college more affordable, to increase funding for financial aid, or to think of other creative approaches that will make it possible for students from all backgrounds to pursue higher education.

For many postsecondary institutions, high school graduates form the pool of potential new students. Thus, if the numbers of high school graduates increase,

college enrollments should be expected to grow in order to accommodate this increased pool. This would be true if college participation rates remained at current levels. Unless there are major departures from the status quo, the projected demographic shifts suggest that college participation rates might decline, particularly in states where there are projected increases in the numbers of low-income and black and Hispanic students.

Another possible consequence of the demographic changes is a modification of how students sort themselves across the types of institutions. One scenario is that more students will turn to community colleges because of low cost and the possibility of developmental and remedial course work. This situation is already playing out in some areas, with community colleges growing rapidly, in large part because of increasing numbers of traditional college-age students. Many community colleges are also adapting to having more students on campus with limited English proficiency. Four-year institutions might study what has occurred at community colleges in anticipation of the changes that they will face over the next few years.

The increase in community college enrollment has created a “transfer bubble” at many public four-year institutions. At some state colleges and universities, more than one-half of their enrolled students are transfers. Not only does this mean there are fewer places for traditional freshmen, it also means there are fewer introductory-level courses that help subsidize the 300- and 400-level courses at many institutions. As community colleges become even more popular over the next decade, these effects are likely to intensify.

The distinctions among the different sectors of higher education also are becoming less clear. For example, some community colleges are now offering bachelor’s degrees, while some four-year liberal arts institutions are adding career and vocationally oriented programs to their offerings. It is likely that institutions of higher education will need to continue to evolve to respond to the public policy environment in their states and the needs of the next generation of new students.

Virtually all public and private colleges and institutions will see changes in their student bodies during the next decade. The only exceptions might be the top-tier, most popular institutions that already have many more highly qualified applicants than available spaces. (The number of applications at those institutions might decline, resulting in less competition—so students might find it somewhat easier to be accepted.) Depending on the institution’s specific location and situation, the following changes are just some of the possible consequences of demographics:

- Some institutions will expand their enrollments to accommodate the growing number of high school graduates in their states or regions.
- Some institutions will enroll student bodies that are less academically prepared than current classes.

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- Some institutions will see shrinking enrollments because of declines in the number of high school graduates in their states or regions.
- Some institutions may need to expand or alter their recruitment strategies and redefine the target populations they seek to attract and enroll.
- The racial and ethnic composition of students on campus may be markedly different from current classes.

Changing demographics is not simply an issue for enrollment managers—and enrollment managers cannot “do magic” to perpetuate the status quo. Trustees, presidents, deans, faculty, and other administrators need to engage in some serious strategic planning to project manageable goals, not only from the institution’s perspective, but also from the perspective of providing access and opportunity to this new group of students. These are just some of the questions that institutions might need to address:

- Are there any curricular changes that should be considered?
- Is our faculty prepared to teach students who have different academic and personal backgrounds from current students?
- If more “at-risk” students are anticipated, are there any changes that might help ensure college completion?
- Does the campus (particularly the faculty and administrators) resemble in any way the composition of future student bodies?
- Does the institution want to intentionally target new groups of students or will it simply adapt to changes as they occur?
- What are the financial resources (including financial aid) necessary to meet the institution’s enrollment goals?

Depending on the answers to those and many other questions, enrollment managers will need to adapt their admissions strategies. This might include changing the content of applications, changing their application deadlines, and/or working with students and families much earlier in the process. Many institutions in areas with no growth or with projected declines will undoubtedly study the demographic charts and target regions of the country where growth is expected. Such analysis, however, needs to take into account the characteristics of the students in high-growth areas and be realistic about the financial needs those students have, as well as their preparation, aspirations, and inclination to attend college far away from home. And despite the recent tightening of student visa requirements, many institutions may also look abroad for students.

Conversely, institutions in growth areas may find themselves becoming more selective and turning away larger numbers of students. While some institutions might welcome this increased popularity, others—particularly public institutions

with a mandate to educate all qualified students within their service areas—will be forced to make difficult decisions. Some may be able to expand their facilities to serve additional students, some may simply crowd more students into their classrooms, some may force students to defer their education, and still others may need to change their missions and serve more limited groups of students.

While there are many steps that individual institutions can take to anticipate and be prepared for the upcoming changes, it may be that intra-institutional and intrastate initiatives will best serve both the education community and high school graduates of the next decade. If higher education were to approach the upcoming challenges as a comprehensive system rather than individually, more students might be served. Rather than competing for the same highly qualified students, some level of cooperation might be more appropriate. However, one of the key issues to this type of cooperation is whether it might be viewed as collusion by federal authorities. Although most agree it would be beneficial, one of the challenges higher education needs to face is whether cooperation can be legally sustained, or whether it is willing to take on the potential challenges.

Although the focus of this conference was on higher education, it was acknowledged that there are similar—and perhaps greater—implications for elementary and secondary education and for numerous public policy issues. One of the recommendations from attendees was the need to broaden the discussion to include all sectors of education, as well as elected officials and others responsible for public policy and the general public.

Another recommendation was the need for the College Board and all of its members to educate the public about the upcoming changes and the implications, not only for all levels and sectors of education, but also for the economic well-being of the country in the immediate and longer-term future. As the U.S. population ages and the retiring baby boomers depend on the young to support the economy (and to pay into social security), any decline in college participation could have a significant negative impact on maintaining current living standards. Thus, it is extremely important to designate resources to improve K–12 education and to support financial aid programs to provide access to college for all students. This will be a major challenge given the growing interest in many areas to reduce government spending, such as TABOR (Taxpayer's Bill of Rights) in Colorado, and other competing demands (such as prisons) on limited resources. Convincing older, primarily white constituents to support public education will not only serve the students of the next few decades, but the total population.

**The Impact of Demographic Changes on Higher Education**

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**Agenda**

<b>Wednesday, July 27, 2005</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome and Introductions</b>	<b>Ann Wright Fred Dietrich</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Setting the Stage: A National Perspective</b> What do we know about the projected demographic changes? What have been the reactions to the release of the WICHE report in January 2004? What additional analyses have been done to help educators and policymakers prepare for these new cohorts? In addition to race/ethnicity and income, what are other dimensions that should be taken into account (language background, immigrant status, socioeconomic status other than income, etc.)?	<b>Panel:</b> Andre Bell Cheryl Blanco Tony Broh Belinda De La Rosa Jamie Lew
<b>3</b>	<b>From Data to Specific Implications and Actions: Case Studies on What Has Been or Could Be Done to Be Prepared for 2008, 2014, and 2018</b> Using three different states/regions, these panels will explore how states or regions can analyze their specific data, moving from broad demographic projections to the composition of future cohort, to participation rates among these populations in different segments of higher education, to revised projections based on these assumptions. Other topics might address possible local, state, or regional policies (related to secondary school preparation, financial aid, articulation agreements, etc.) that should be investigated.	
<b>3a</b>	<b>New York</b>	<b>Panel:</b> David Conklin Don Hossler Wayne Locust
<b>3b</b>	<b>California and Arizona</b>	<b>Panel:</b> David Bousquet Sue Wilbur Elias Lopez
<b>3c</b>	<b>New England</b>	<b>Panel:</b> Richard Pastor Alan Sturtz Michael Thomas

<p><b>4</b></p>	<p><b>Issues in Other States</b>          What are other types of analyses and other issues that have been investigated in other states? What are unique factors that need to be addressed?</p>	<p><b>Panel:</b>          Stephanie Hays          Anderson          Gordon Chavis Jr.          Mary Ontiveros          Ileana Rodriguez</p>
<p><b>5</b></p>	<p><b>Campus Impact—Preparing for Change</b>          What do institutions need to do to prepare for these new cohorts of students? What are the long-term strategic planning implications (such as preparing for expansion or contraction of enrollment)? What will the impact be for enrollment managers (particularly admissions and financial aid)? What are the implications for the curriculum, for instructional practices, and for support services?</p>	<p><b>Panel:</b>          Tracy Harris          Chris Munoz          Greg Perfetto          Carey Thompson</p>
<p><b>6</b></p>	<p><b>Public Policy Issues</b>          The changing composition of students in the upcoming decade suggests a number of policy issues that should be addressed at the nation, state, and/or local levels, for example, secondary school preparation and requirements for postsecondary education, transfer and articulation policies, and state and federal financial aid. What has been done to date to address these issues and what needs to be done?</p>	<p><b>Panel:</b>          Sandy Baum          Becky Brodigan          Paul Shelly</p>
<p><b>7</b></p>	<p><b>Wrap-Up and Next Steps</b>          What are the most significant issues that have been identified? What other topics need to be addressed? What, if anything, can the College Board do to help its higher education members prepare for and be better equipped to serve students in the upcoming decade?</p>	<p><b>Panel:</b>          Jerry Lucido          Nancy McDuff          Nickie Roberson</p>

### Roster of Participants

<b>Stephanie Hays Anderson</b>	Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX
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<b>Jamie Lew</b>	Assistant Professor, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ
<b>Wayne Locust</b>	Vice Chancellor, Enrollment and University Life, State University of New York, Albany, NY
<b>Elias Lopez</b>	Senior Analyst, University of California: Davis, CA
<b>Jerry Lucido</b>	Vice Provost, Enrollment Management, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC
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<b>Nancy McDuff</b>	Associate Vice President, Admissions and Enrollment Management, University of Georgia, Athens, GA
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<b>Ann Wright</b>	Vice President, Enrollment, Rice University, Houston, TX

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### **General Web Pages of Interest**

Population Studies Center—University of Michigan

**<http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/>**

One of the oldest population research centers in the United States.

Population Studies Center—Urban Institute

**<http://www.urban.org/content/PolicyCenters/Population/Overview.htm>**

The Population Studies Center studies how the U.S. population is growing and changing in response to shifts in the economy, the changing roles of men and women in families, and new policy initiatives.

Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity

**<http://ccsre.stanford.edu/>**

Established in November 1996, the CCSRE at Stanford University provides many opportunities for teaching and research on topics of race and ethnicity from both domestic and international comparative perspectives.

Population Reference Bureau

**<http://www.prb.org/>**

The goal of the Population Reference Bureau is to provide timely and objective information on U.S. and international population trends and their implications.

Population Matters: A RAND Labor and Population Program

**<http://www.rand.org/labor/popmatters/>**

The goals of the Population Matters program are to highlight the importance of population policy issues and to supply a more scientific basis for public debate over population policy questions.

