

# ALIGNING DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS AND COLLEGE PARTICIPATION: INCREASING LATINO DEGREE ATTAINMENT

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Opportunity in the United States—to secure a good job and career and contribute to the community—increasingly depends on having a postsecondary credential. And in the future, the country will thrive only to the extent that we provide this opportunity to the millions of Americans who need it.

To make this happen, the national conversation around higher education needs to double down on increasing access, retention and completion for students of color. The Hispanic/Latino\* population is the largest minority group and the second largest racial/ethnic group in the country, behind whites (21 percent and 56 percent, respectively). [Employment projections](#) predict that 65 percent of all jobs will require a postsecondary credential by 2020. Given the size and continued growth of this

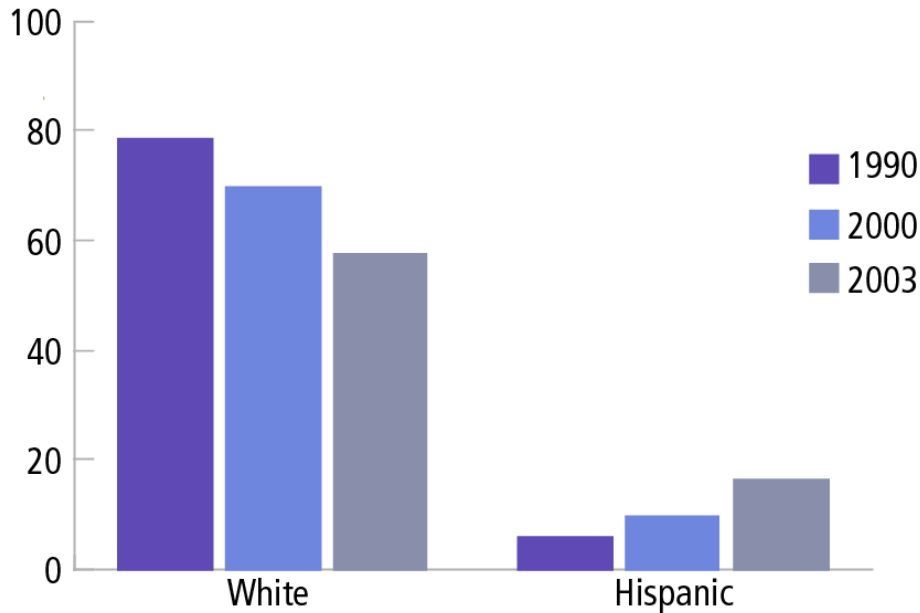
population, Latino degree completion must be a national objective as we build the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

The National Center for Education Statistics' recent report, [\*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2016\*](#), examines education participation, achievement and outcomes by race/ethnicity. Disaggregating postsecondary enrollment and completion data by race/ethnicity allows us to better understand how to serve an increasingly diverse student body. It also allows us to examine how representative the undergraduate student body is, by comparing enrollment trends to larger demographic shifts in the U.S. population. Further, disaggregating data brings attention to attainment gaps between groups and can better inform institutional, state and federal policies that aim to close these gaps.

In 2013, Latinos represented the second largest racial/ethnic group enrolled in postsecondary education, behind whites. Data in Figure 1 depict the distribution of undergraduate student enrollment for Latino and white students. The representation of Latino undergraduate student enrollment has nearly tripled since 1990, increasing from 6 percent to 17 percent. Yet as Latino undergraduate representation has increased, this population remains underrepresented in higher education when compared to their representation in the U.S. population overall.

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**Figure 1:** Percentage distribution of total undergraduate student enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by race/ethnicity: Selected years: 1990 through 2013



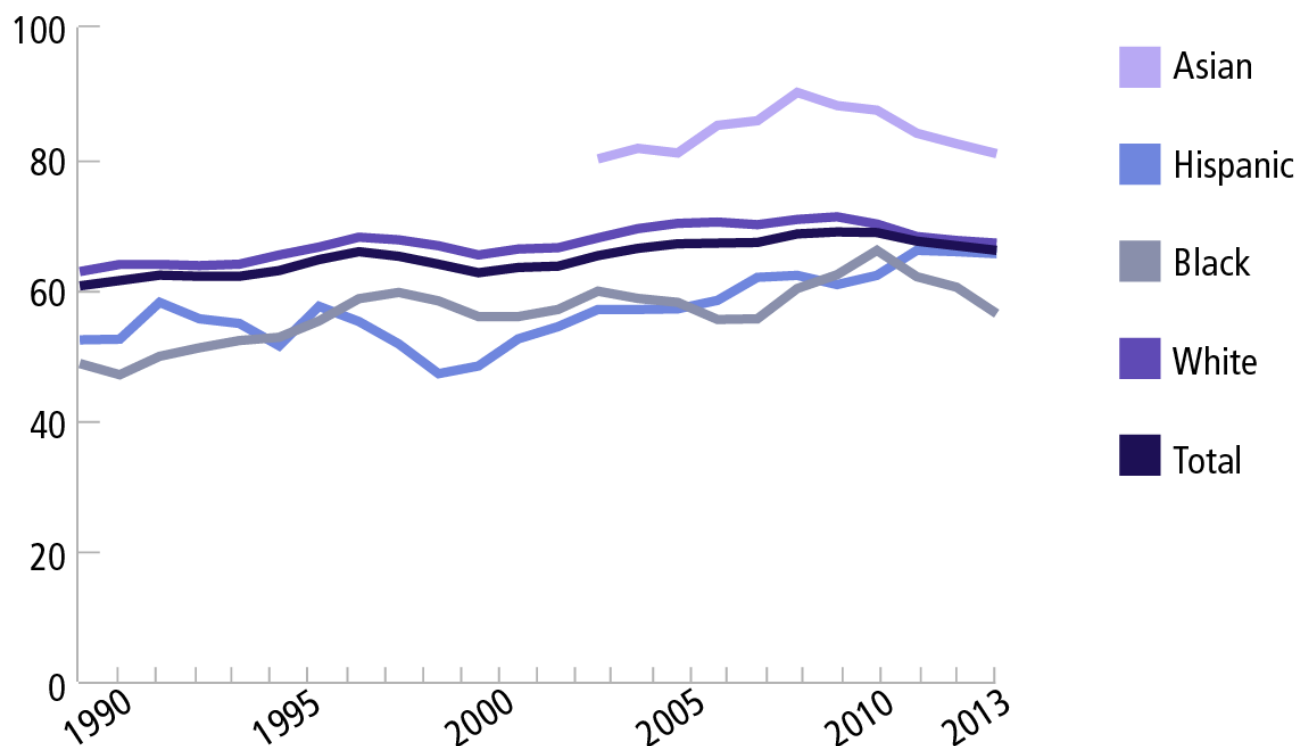
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The good news is that the percentage of Latinos who enroll in higher education in the fall immediately after graduating from high school has increased over the past 25 years. Data in Figure 2 show in 2013, 66 percent of Latinos enrolled in college immediately after graduating high school, an increase from 52 percent in 1990. In fact, Latinos enrolled in college at similar rates to white students in 2013 (66 percent vs. 67 percent).

However, while the percentage of Latino high school graduates enrolling in college has increased, barriers to higher education remain for some students. Many Latino students have limited access to higher education opportunities due to other obligations, such as work and familial responsibilities, or they cannot afford the rising cost of college. Finding innovative ways to increase access to higher education, such as more flexibility in class schedules, would allow for students to attend classes when they are available.

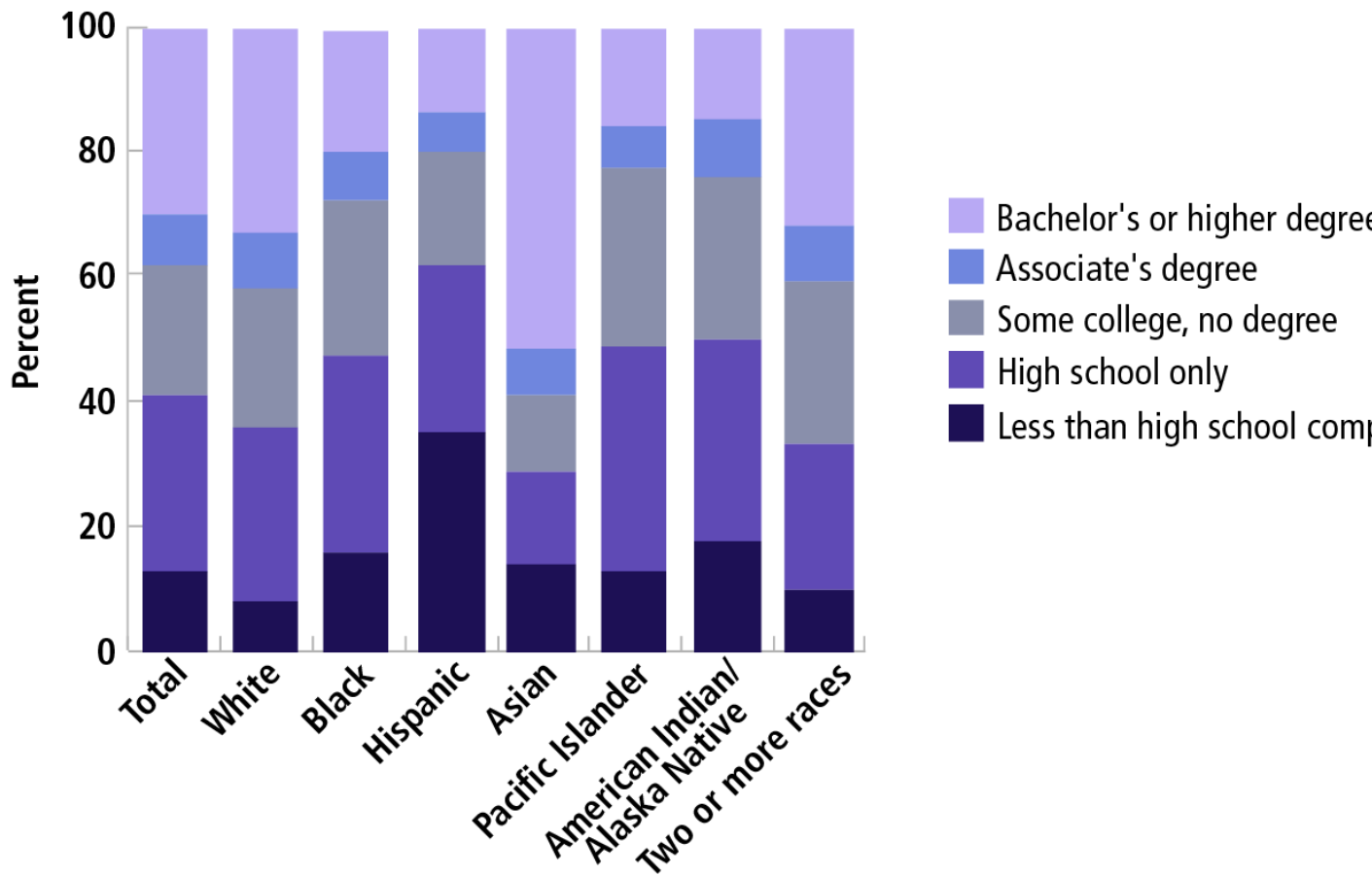
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**Figure 2:** Percentage of high school completers who were enrolled in 2- or 4-year colleges and universities by the October immediately following high school completion, by race/ethnicity: 1990-2013



Despite the recent increase in postsecondary enrollment, Latino educational attainment levels remain low when compared to other groups. Figure 3 shows the educational attainment of adults age 25 and older, by race and ethnicity. In 2013, Latinos, as a racial/ethnic group, had the lowest educational attainment, with only one in five having earned an associate's degree or higher. Latinos were also more likely than other groups to not have completed any postsecondary education. Only 38 percent of Latino adults age 25 and older had completed some form of postsecondary education.

**Figure 3:** Percentage distribution of educational attainment of adults age 25 and older, by race/ethnicity: 2013



As the proportion of Latinos in the overall U.S. population grows and the economy shifts, it is important to consider what can be done to increase Latino postsecondary enrollment and completion. So where do we start?

### Parent & Family Engagement

Parents and families play a critical role in the educational success of Latinos at all levels of education. An [examination](#) of the college and career readiness of Latinos by ACT and Excelencia in Education states that an overwhelming majority of Latino parents and families expect their child to obtain some level of postsecondary education.

The study recommends involving parents and families in their child's education to inform them of expectations for their students and empower them to play supportive roles as their children navigate higher education. Institutions that have seen success in recruiting and retaining Latino students involve parents in new student orientations to ease concerns about their child's well-being on campus. [Research](#) also indicates that institutions have gone a step further by creating orientation programming specifically targeted toward parents and families.

## **Financial Aid**

Many students require financial support to attend postsecondary education, including Latinos. [Recent changes](#) to components of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) make the application accessible at an earlier date and allow students to report family income information from the previous tax year. These two modifications are intended to support students as they go through the college application and enrollment process. It is anticipated these changes will lessen some of the issues students and families face as they gather the necessary documentation to file their taxes and complete the FAFSA on time.

The expansion of the Pell Grant program would also offer additional financial support to Latinos in higher education. According to [2011-12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study data](#), half of all Latino undergraduate students received Pell Grants. Latinos also represented nearly one in five students receiving a Pell Grant. One possible reform to the Pell Grant Program includes the restoration of year-round Pell, an initiative that [ACE supports](#). Reinstating year-round Pell Grants could lower time-to-degree and reduce overall costs for Latinos as well as post-traditional students. It also would allow recipients to continue their studies outside of the traditional two-semester academic year and has potential to decrease the need to take out additional loans to pay for summer courses. Federal policy changes like these can help make college more accessible and affordable for all students.

On an institutional level, colleges and universities have implemented financial literacy and aid policies that help retain Latino students. Institutions include parents and families in financial literacy workshops and connect them with financial aid officers to build awareness around financial aid and funding their child's college education. Financial aid can also be used as a tool for retention, not just access. Some institutions have found opportunities to expand aid for upperclassmen, as they have seen more of these students leave due to increased financial need.

Many Latinos [work](#) while they are enrolled in postsecondary education.

An [examination](#) of the Federal Work-Study (FWS) program by a consortium of higher education researchers has issued recommendations to improve the program that would benefit Latino students. Aligning the FWS program to experiences related to students' career goals would allow students to work while also gaining experience that could help them get a better job after graduation. Their analysis also shows that FWS is more concentrated in private institutions and in geographic regions that tend to have lower Latino populations. Redistributing FWS funds to community colleges and institutions in the southwest region of the country would allow more Latinos the opportunity to take advantage of the program.

## **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals**

With the election of Donald J. Trump, the future of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program has been catapulted to the forefront of recent conversations on how the hot-button issue of immigration will play out in the new administration. DACA, established in 2012 by President Obama via executive order, permits approved young undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children to stay for two years at a time without fear of deportation and allows them to get a work permit.

In response to conversations around the possible repeal of DACA, ACE recently released an [issue brief](#) to provide information on what this could mean for higher education, students and institutions. As a policy that sits at the intersection of immigration and higher education, it was created in part to provide more students access to higher education. Given the current status of this executive order, campuses should continue to engage in conversations about supporting DACA students, in the event DACA is rescinded. Sharing on-campus and off-campus resources and information offers support for students with DACA status and informs them where to get additional information if needed. Institutions can also learn how to further help their students from practices implemented at peer institutions. While only a small percent of the total Latino undergraduate students benefit from DACA, it will likely continue to play an important role in access to higher education.

## **Campus Climate**

The role of campus climate on students' sense of inclusion and overall success has increasingly been in the spotlight in recent years. In response, the Center for Policy Research and Strategy at ACE last year organized a [blog series](#) on how issues involving campus climate are unfolding on college campuses around the country.

Conversations around race-conscious admission practices and college enrollment continue to evolve.

It is critical to consider how institutions can offer not only access, but also a more supportive environment. Studies show that students from underrepresented communities experience challenges navigating the college setting, particularly, when they are one of the few from their group in predominantly white institutions. Creating more culturally engaging and culturally competent environments allows for an increased sense of belonging and can facilitate retention for Latinos and other students of color. Incorporating cultural competency and multiculturalism into curriculum and diversifying faculty can help expand students' thinking and enrich the college experience for students living in a continually diversifying world.

As Latino students continue to make up a larger share of and move through higher education, it is important to consider what institutions and policymakers can do now to increase their college success in the future. Ignoring this vital part of the population potentially will put the United States behind in the global economy, especially with the expanding need for an educated workforce.

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*\*The terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably.*

## Notes on Figures

**Figure 1:** *“White” excludes persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Degree-granting institutions grant associate’s or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs.*

**Source:** Musu-Gillette, L., Robinson, J., McFarland, J., KewalRamani, A., Zhang, A., and Wilkinson-Flicker, S. (2016). *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2016* (NCES 2016-007). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

**Figure 2:** *Percentages for racial/ethnic groups are based on moving averages, which are used to produce more stable estimates. A 3-year moving average is a weighted average of the year indicated, the year immediately preceding, and the year immediately following. Three-year moving averages are presented in all but two*



*instances: the moving average for Asian data in 2003 reflects an average of 2003 and 2004 data and the moving averages for 2013 reflect an average of 2012 and 2013 data. High school completers include GED recipients. Separate data on Asian high school completers have been collected since 2003. From 2003 onward, White, Black, and Asian data exclude persons identifying as two or more races. Total includes other racial/ethnic groups not separately shown. Race categories exclude person of Hispanic ethnicity.*

**Source:** Musu-Gillette, L., Robinson, J., McFarland, J., KewalRamani, A., Zhang, A., and Wilkinson-Flicker, S. (2016). *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2016* (NCES 2016-007). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

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