COLLEGE STUDENTS TODAY
A National Portrait
FOR MEDIA USE ONLY
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The American Council on Education (ACE), as part of its continuing commitment to access, equity, and diversity in U.S. higher education, is pleased to present this national portrait of college students in the United States. **ACE is grateful to the Microsoft Corporation for its generous support of this publication.**

It is difficult for those outside higher education to imagine the complex mosaic that is the U.S. college student population. The diversity of these students is startling, even to those who work on college campuses. For example, 25 years ago, only 17 percent of American college students were minorities. Today, a third of the student population is nonwhite. Thirty-five years ago, only a quarter of college students were aged 25 or older. Today, approximately 39 percent of students are aged 25 or older. Beyond these basic demographics, today’s college students are diverse in terms of income, family structure, and immigration status, among many other characteristics.

*College Students Today: A National Portrait* is designed to help members of the education, policy and business communities, as well as the general public, quickly gain a general understanding of this rich diversity. Drawing upon data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2003–04, each section that follows profiles a major subgroup within higher education. ACE offers this national portrait in the hope that it will spark interest in additional information about American higher education and the U.S. student population. For access to ACE’s broad array of research, publications, and online information resources, please visit www.acenet.edu.
There are more than 6,400 Title IV program–participating institutions in the United States, with a total enrollment of more than 17.5 million undergraduates.

- **2,500** are four-year institutions.
  - **1,600** are private not-for-profit, **600** are public, and more than **300** are private for-profit institutions.

- **2,200** are two-year institutions.
  - **1,200** are public, **800** are private for-profit, and **200** are private not-for-profit institutions.

- **1,700** are less-than-two-year institutions.
  - **1,300** are private for-profit, fewer than **300** are public, and **100** are private not-for-profit institutions.

Note: Throughout this report, details may not add to totals due to rounding. All data in this report are from the 2003–04 academic year and refer to students enrolled for credit at accredited institutions.
A National Portrait

Undergraduates in the United States

- 87 percent of all postsecondary students in the United States are undergraduates.
- 58 percent of undergraduates are women.
- 36 percent of undergraduates are students of color.
  - 14 percent are African American, 13 percent are Hispanic,
  - 6 percent are Asian American,* 1 percent are American Indian, and 2 percent are of other races and ethnicities.
- 39 percent of undergraduates are aged 25 or older.
- 34 percent of undergraduates are married and/or have children.
  - 15 percent are married with children,
  - 11 percent are single parents, and
  - 8 percent are married with no children.
- 43 percent of undergraduates attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, 40 percent attend community colleges, 8 percent attend private for-profit institutions, and 9 percent attend other types of institutions.

*Note: Throughout this report, the “Asian American” category includes Pacific Islanders.

College Students Today A National Portrait
53 percent of undergraduates are enrolled in something other than a bachelor’s degree program.
- **36** percent are in associate degree programs, **10** percent are in non-degree/certificate programs, and **7** percent are in certificate programs.

59 percent of undergraduates attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis.
- **23** percent attend part time for the full academic year, **22** percent attend part time for part of the year, and **14** percent attend full time for part of the year.

### Undergraduates, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
61 percent of undergraduates in the United States are younger than 25.

55 percent of undergraduates younger than 25 are women.

34 percent of undergraduates younger than 25 are students of color. 13 percent are Hispanic, 13 percent are African American, 6 percent are Asian American, 1 percent are American Indian, and 2 percent are of other races and ethnicities.

10 percent of undergraduates younger than 25 are married and/or have children. 4 percent are single parents, 4 percent are married with no children, and 2 percent are married with children.

53 percent of undergraduates younger than 25 attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, 34 percent attend community colleges, 5 percent attend private for-profit institutions, and 8 percent attend other types of institutions.
44 percent of undergraduates younger than 25 are enrolled in something other than a bachelor's degree program.
- 32 percent are in associate degree programs, 7 percent are in non-degree/certificate programs, and 5 percent are in certificate programs.

46 percent of undergraduates younger than 25 attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis.
- 17 percent attend part time for the full academic year, 15 percent attend part time for part of the year, and 14 percent attend full time for part of the year.

Undergraduates Younger than 25, by Race/Ethnicity and Institution Level

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
39 percent of undergraduates in the United States are aged 25 or older.

62 percent of undergraduates aged 25 or older are women.

42 percent of undergraduates aged 25 or older are students of color.

- 20 percent are African American,
- 13 percent are Hispanic,
- 5 percent are Asian American,
- 1 percent are American Indian,
and 2 percent are of other races and ethnicities.

69 percent of undergraduates aged 25 or older are married and/or have children.

- 33 percent are married with children,
- 21 percent are single parents,
and 14 percent are married with no children.

51 percent of undergraduates aged 25 or older attend community colleges,
29 percent attend public and private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities,
12 percent attend private for-profit institutions,
and 9 percent attend other types of institutions.
67 percent of undergraduates aged 25 or older are enrolled in something other than a bachelor’s degree program.
- 43 percent are in associate degree programs, 15 percent are in non-degree/certificate programs, and 10 percent are in certificate programs.

80 percent of undergraduates aged 25 or older attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis.
- 32 percent attend part time for the full academic year, 35 percent attend part time for part of the year, and 13 percent attend full time for part of the year.

**Undergraduates Aged 25 or Older, by Race/Ethnicity and Degree Program**

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Female Undergraduates in the United States

- 58 percent of undergraduates in the United States are women.
- 37 percent of female undergraduates are students of color.
  - 16 percent are African American, 13 percent are Hispanic, 6 percent are Asian American, 1 percent are American Indian, and 2 percent are of other races and ethnicities.
- 42 percent of female undergraduates are aged 25 or older.
- 39 percent of female undergraduates are married and/or have children.
  - 16 percent are single parents, 15 percent are married with children, and 8 percent are married with no children.
  - 73 percent of female undergraduates aged 25 or older are married and/or have children, compared with 14 percent of female undergraduates younger than 25.
- 41 percent of female undergraduates attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, 41 percent attend community colleges, 8 percent attend private for-profit institutions, and 9 percent attend other types of institutions.
55 percent of female undergraduates are enrolled in something other than a bachelor’s degree program. 
- 38 percent are in associate degree programs, 10 percent are in non-degree/certificate programs, and 7 percent are in certificate programs.

60 percent of female undergraduates attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis.
- 24 percent attend part time for the full academic year, 23 percent attend part time for part of the year, and 13 percent attend full time for part of the year.

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
42 percent of undergraduates in the United States are men.

- 33 percent of male undergraduates are students of color.
  - 12 percent are African American, 12 percent are Hispanic, 7 percent are Asian American, 1 percent are American Indian, and 2 percent are of other races and ethnicities.

- 35 percent of male undergraduates are aged 25 or older.

- 25 percent of male undergraduates are married and/or have children.
  - 12 percent are married with children, 7 percent are married with no children, and 6 percent are single parents.
  - 94 percent of male undergraduates younger than 25 are single and have no children, compared with 40 percent of men aged 25 or older.

- 46 percent of male undergraduates attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, 39 percent attend community colleges, 7 percent attend private for-profit institutions, and 8 percent attend other types of institutions.
50 percent of male undergraduates are enrolled in something other than a bachelor’s degree program. 34 percent are in associate degree programs, 10 percent are in non-degree/certificate programs, and 6 percent are in certificate programs.

57 percent of male undergraduates attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis. 22 percent attend part time for part of the academic year, 21 percent attend part time for the full academic year, and 15 percent attend full time for part of the year.

**Male Undergraduates, by Age and Family Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Single, no children</th>
<th>Married, no children</th>
<th>Single parent</th>
<th>Married with children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All men</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger than 25</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 25 or older</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
White Undergraduates in the United States

- 63 percent of undergraduates are white, non-Hispanic.
- 56 percent of white undergraduates are women.
- 37 percent of white undergraduates are aged 25 or older.
- 31 percent of white undergraduates are married and/or have children.
  - 14 percent are married with children, 9 percent are married with no children, and 8 percent are single parents.
- 48 percent of white undergraduates attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, 38 percent attend community colleges, 6 percent attend private for-profit institutions, and 8 percent attend other types of institutions.
- 84 percent of white undergraduates are enrolled in degree programs.
  - 50 percent are in bachelor’s degree programs and 34 percent are in associate degree programs.
56 percent of white undergraduates attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis.

- 22 percent attend part time for the full academic year,
- 22 percent attend part time for part of the year, and 13 percent attend full time for part of the year.

**White Undergraduates, by Attendance Pattern and Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full time, full year</th>
<th>Full time, part year</th>
<th>Part time, full year</th>
<th>Part time, part year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
A National Portrait

African-American Undergraduates in the United States

- 14 percent of undergraduates are African American.
- 64 percent of African-American undergraduates are women.
- 50 percent of African-American undergraduates are aged 25 or older.
- 44 percent of African-American undergraduates are married and/or have children.
  - 26 percent are single parents, 13 percent are married with children, and 5 percent are married with no children.
- 44 percent of African-American undergraduates attend community colleges, 35 percent attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, 13 percent attend private for-profit institutions, and 8 percent attend other types of institutions.
- 83 percent of African-American undergraduates are enrolled in degree programs.
  - 44 percent are in associate degree programs and 39 percent are in bachelor’s degree programs.

College Students Today A National Portrait
65 percent of African-American undergraduates attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis.
- 25 percent attend part time for the full academic year,
- 23 percent attend part time for part of the year, and 17 percent attend full time for part of the year.

**African-American Undergraduates, by Degree Program and Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not in a degree program</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
13 percent of undergraduates are Hispanic.

- 59 percent of Hispanic undergraduates are women.
- 39 percent of Hispanic undergraduates are aged 25 or older.
- 35 percent of Hispanic undergraduates are married and/or have children.
  - 14 percent are married with children, 14 percent are single parents, and 7 percent are married with no children.
- 46 percent of Hispanic undergraduates attend community colleges, 34 percent attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, 12 percent attend private for-profit institutions, and 9 percent attend other types of institutions.
- 77 percent of Hispanic undergraduates are enrolled in degree programs.
  - 40 percent are in associate degree programs and 37 percent are in bachelor’s degree programs.
65 percent of Hispanic undergraduates attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis.

- 26 percent attend part time for the full academic year,
  - 24 percent attend part time for part of the year, and
  - 15 percent attend full time for part of the year.

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Asian-American Undergraduates in the United States

- **6 percent** of undergraduates are Asian American.
- **54 percent** of Asian-American undergraduates are women.
- **35 percent** of Asian-American undergraduates are aged 25 or older.
- **25 percent** of Asian-American undergraduates are married and/or have children.
  - **12 percent** are married with children, **9 percent** are married with no children, and **5 percent** are single parents.
- **42 percent** of Asian-American undergraduates attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, **40 percent** attend community colleges, **6 percent** attend private for-profit institutions, and **12 percent** attend other types of institutions.
- **82 percent** of Asian-American undergraduates are enrolled in degree programs.
  - **48 percent** are in bachelor’s degree programs and **34 percent** are in associate degree programs.

*College Students Today* A National Portrait
56 percent of Asian-American undergraduates attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis.
- 22 percent attend part time for the full academic year,
- 22 percent attend part time for part of the year, and 12 percent attend full time for part of the year.

### Asian-American Undergraduates, by Attendance Pattern and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full time, full year</th>
<th>Full time, part year</th>
<th>Part time, full year</th>
<th>Part time, part year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
American Indian Undergraduates in the United States

- **1** percent of undergraduates are American Indian.
- **63** percent of American Indian undergraduates are women.
- **51** percent of American Indian undergraduates are aged 25 or older.
- **42** percent of American Indian undergraduates are married and/or have children.
  - **17** percent are married with children, **13** percent are single parents, and **11** percent are married with no children.
- **45** percent of American Indian undergraduates attend community colleges, **37** percent attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, **5** percent attend private for-profit institutions, and **13** percent attend other types of institutions.
- **81** percent of American Indian undergraduates are enrolled in degree programs.
  - **41** percent are in associate degree programs and **40** percent are in bachelor’s degree programs.
66 percent of American Indian undergraduates attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis.

26 percent attend part time for part of the academic year, 
23 percent attend part time for the full academic year, and 
16 percent attend full time for part of the year.

American Indian Undergraduates, by Family Status and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Single, no children</th>
<th>Married, no children</th>
<th>Single parent</th>
<th>Married with children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Foreign Undergraduates in the United States

- 2% of undergraduates in the United States are foreign students.
- 51% of foreign undergraduates are men.
- 65% of foreign undergraduates are aged 25 or younger.
- 21% of foreign undergraduates are married and/or have children.
  - 11% are married with no children,
  - 6% are married with children, and
  - 4% are single parents.
- 48% of foreign undergraduates attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, 39% attend community colleges, 3% attend private for-profit institutions, and 10% attend other types of institutions.
- 52% of foreign undergraduates are enrolled in something other than a bachelor’s degree program.
  - 36% are in associate degree programs,
  - 10% are in non-degree/certificate programs, and 5% are in certificate programs.

College Students Today A National Portrait
49 percent of foreign undergraduates attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis.

20 percent attend full time for part of the academic year,
15 percent attend part time for the full academic year, and
14 percent attend part time for part of the year.

**Foreign Undergraduates, by Institution Type and Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public four-year</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private not-for-profit four-year</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public two-year</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private for-profit</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Low-Income Undergraduates in the United States

- 40 percent of all undergraduates in the United States are from low-income families.
- 58 percent of low-income undergraduates are women.
- 48 percent of low-income undergraduates are students of color.
  - 21 percent are African American, 17 percent are Hispanic, 7 percent are Asian American, 1 percent are American Indian, and 2 percent are of other races and ethnicities.
- 39 percent of low-income undergraduates are aged 25 or older.
- 38 percent of low-income undergraduates are married and/or have children.
  - 22 percent are single parents, 12 percent are married with children, and 4 percent are married with no children.
- 37 percent of low-income undergraduates attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, 43 percent attend community colleges, and 11 percent attend private for-profit institutions.

*Note: “Low-income” is defined as families whose income is 200 percent or less of the federal poverty line. For example, in 2002, that would be a family of four (including two children under age 18) who earned $36,488 or less.
60 percent of low-income undergraduates are enrolled in something other than a bachelor’s degree program.
- 41 percent are in associate degree programs,
- 9 percent are in certificate programs, and 9 percent are in non-degree/certificate programs.

61 percent of low-income undergraduates attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis.
- 24 percent attend part time for the full academic year, 21 percent attend part time for part of the year, and 16 percent attend full time for part of the year.

Low-Income Students, by Race/Ethnicity and Degree Program

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
12 percent of all undergraduate students in the United States are first-generation Americans.

- 58 percent of undergraduates with foreign-born parents are women.
- 33 percent of undergraduates with foreign-born parents are aged 25 or older.
- 27 percent of undergraduates with foreign-born parents are married and/or have children.
  - 10 percent are married with children, 10 percent are single parents, and 7 percent are married with no children.
- 38 percent of undergraduates with foreign-born parents attend public or private not-for-profit four-year colleges and universities, 43 percent attend community colleges, 9 percent attend private for-profit institutions, and 10 percent attend other types of institutions.
- **54** percent of undergraduates with foreign-born parents are enrolled in something other than a bachelor’s degree program. 
  - **35** percent are in associate degree programs, **12** percent are in non-degree/certificate programs, and **7** percent are in certificate programs.

- **60** percent of undergraduates with foreign-born parents attend on less than a full-time, full-year basis. 
  - **23** percent attend part time for the full academic year, **23** percent attend part time for part of the year, and **14** percent attend full time for part of the year.

### Undergraduates with Foreign-Born Parents, by Institution Type and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public four-year</th>
<th>Private not-for-profit four-year</th>
<th>Public two-year</th>
<th>Private for-profit</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

13 percent of all postsecondary students are graduate or professional students.

58 percent of graduate and professional students are women.

62 percent of graduate and professional students are enrolled in master’s degree programs, 14 percent are in doctoral degree programs, and 12 percent are in professional programs in fields such as law and medicine.

31 percent of graduate and professional students are students of color.

11 percent are Asian American, 10 percent are African American, 8 percent are Hispanic, 1 percent are American Indian, and 2 percent are of other races and ethnicities.

49 percent of graduate and professional students are aged 30 or older.

11 percent of graduate and professional students are not U.S. citizens.

7 percent are foreign students and 4 percent are permanent residents.
51 percent of graduate and professional students are married and/or have children. 24 percent are married with children, 19 percent are married with no children, and 8 percent are single parents.

**Graduate and Professional Students, by Degree Program**

- Master’s: 62
- Doctoral: 14
- Professional: 12
- Post-baccalaureate certificate: 5
- Non-degree/certificate program: 8

Note: Details may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
About ACE

The American Council on Education (ACE) represents all sectors of higher education including public, private, two-year, and four-year institutions. It represents approximately 1,600 accredited, degree-granting colleges and universities and also includes 200 higher education–related associations, organizations, foundations, and corporations. Three strategic priorities drive the Council’s activities: representation, leadership development, and service.

Core Values

ACE values inclusiveness and diversity, recognizes higher education’s responsibility to society, and embraces the belief that widespread access to excellent postsecondary educational opportunities is the cornerstone of a democratic society.

Vision

ACE aims to foster greater collaboration and new partnerships within and outside the higher education community to help colleges and universities anticipate and address the challenges of the 21st century and contribute to a stronger nation and a better world.

Mission

ACE, the major coordinating body for all the nation’s higher education institutions, seeks to provide leadership and a unifying voice on key higher education issues and to influence public policy through advocacy, research, and program initiatives.
The American Council on Education (ACE) is grateful to Microsoft for its generous support of this project.