

Minority Enrollment in Colleges More Than Doubled in Past 20 Years, Study Finds

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WASHINGTON
THE NUMBER of minority students enrolled in college has more than doubled since 1980, according to an annual report released last week by the American Council on Education. The report says that in 2000, 4.3 million African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, and American Indian students attended college, up from just under 2 million in 1980.

But "there is significant progress yet to be made" in achieving educational parity among all races, said William B. Harvey, author of the report and director of the council's office of minorities in higher education.

Mr. Harvey noted that gaps between the college-participation rates of white students and those of African-American and Hispanic descent have increased substantially since the council began collecting data for its "Minorities in Higher Education Annual Status Report" more than 20 years ago.

GROWING POPULATIONS

In 1980, there was relatively little difference among the proportions of white, African-American, and Hispanic students attending college: 31.8 percent of white high-

school graduates age 18 to 24 were enrolled in college, compared with 29.8 percent of Hispanics and 27.6 percent of African-Americans. By 2000, the proportion of white students attending college had grown to 44.2 percent, but the growth in African-American and Hispanic students' participation rates lagged behind, Mr. Harvey said, at 39.4 percent and 36.5 percent, respectively.

The proportion of African-American

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school graduates attending college was unchanged from the previous year. The figure for Hispanic students was up from just under 32 percent in 1999.

"We recognize that we still have a big mountain to climb," said David Ward, president of the council.

Mr. Harvey said that, in particular, too few African-American and Hispanic students pursue studies in subjects such as science and engineering. "Those are areas that are

of most concern for us," he said, "as we move into a technology-based economy."

Mr. Harvey attributed increases in college enrollment among minority groups mainly to demographic changes—specifically, growing populations of minority youths—but also to efforts by colleges and universities to reach out to minority students.

Persistent race-based differences in participation rates, he said, may

be tied to socioeconomic gaps between white and minority communities.

RISE IN ASIAN STUDENTS

The racial group that experienced the single biggest jump in enrollment totals was Asian-Americans, with more than three times as many students attending college in 2000 as did so in 1980.

White students experienced the lowest increase among all groups surveyed. Six percent more white

students attended college in 2000 than did 20 years earlier. From 1990 to 2000, the number of white people enrolled in colleges actually dropped by 2.4 percent. (White college enrollment began to rebound in 1999 and 2000, with nearly 1 million more white students attending college in 2000 than in 1998.)

The report also revealed what it called a "striking" difference in the growth rates for college enrollment among Hispanic men and women.

Since 1980, for instance, the number of female Hispanic high-school graduates attending college has increased by more than 10 percent, while male Hispanic high-school graduates are attending college in only slightly higher numbers than they did 20 years earlier, representing an increase of just under 3 percent.

The gender gap for African-American students is the greatest among the three major minority groups, according to the report. Black women outnumbered their male counterparts nearly two to one in 2000.

Mr. Harvey suggested that the gender gap among African-American and Hispanic students reflects a similar, albeit smaller, gap in college populations as a whole. Over

all, nearly two million more women than men were enrolled in 2000, the report said.

The council gathered data for the report from the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

The council also found that:

- The number of associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees awarded to minority students increased by 143, 164, and 180 percent, respectively, from the 1980-81 to the 2000-1 academic year.

- One in five African-Americans who received a bachelor's degree in the 2000-1 academic year attended a historically black college or university.

- The six-year graduation rates for athletes in the NCAA's Division I, its top competitive level, increased four percentage points from 1991 to 2001.

- College enrollment of American Indians jumped 80 percent from 1980 to 2000.

- Nearly 2.3 million minority students attended four-year colleges in 2000, compared with roughly 2.1 million enrolled in two-year institutions that same year. ■