

Population Shift Sends Universities Scrambling

Applicant Pool Forecast To Shrink and Diversify

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Colleges and universities are anxiously taking steps to address a projected drop in the number of high school graduates in much of the nation starting next year and a dramatic change in the racial and ethnic makeup of the student population, a phenomenon expected to transform the country's higher education landscape, educators and analysts said.

After years of being overwhelmed with applicants, higher education institutions will over the next decade recruit from a pool of public high school graduates that will experience:

- A projected national decline of roughly 10 percent or more in non-Hispanic white students, the population that traditionally is most likely to attend four-year colleges.
- A double-digit rise in the proportion of minority students -- especially Hispanics -- who traditionally are less likely to attend college and to obtain loans to fund education.

Despite those obstacles, minority enrollment at undergraduate schools is expected to rise steadily, from 30 percent in 2004 to about 37 percent in 2015, some analysts project.

"The majority will become the minority," said Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, president emeritus and professor of public service at [George Washington University](#). "There will be more Hispanics, more African Americans, more Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis, Koreans. I anticipate that the most common last name in the freshman class will be Kim."

The demographic changes will be profound for individual students: Some will probably see their chances of getting into selective schools improve, and others will see opportunities to enroll at the most selective schools decline. And for colleges, the demographic changes will mean new ways of recruiting and educating students.

"One challenge will be looking at the interface between high schools and college and the issue of college readiness, and the other will be the whole issue of the cost of college," said David Ward, president of the nonprofit [American Council on Education](#).

The efforts come as the nonprofit Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education plans to release a report this month that will show a decline in high school graduation next year in most areas of the country, except the West, senior research analyst Brian Prescott said. That is at least a year earlier than in some past projections.

Schools likely to thrive through the changes will be those in popular areas, endowed well enough to continue upgrading facilities and programs, and public flagship universities that offer lower tuition than private colleges, admissions experts say. So will schools with strong workforce programs amid a surge of adult students, said Trinity [Washington University](#) President Patricia McGuire.

Schools in more remote areas, with fewer resources and no particular academic focus, could struggle, said Steven Roy Goodman, an educational consultant and admissions strategist. That is why the 700-student Northland College in [Wisconsin](#) uses its location on Lake Superior to promote it as "the environmental liberal arts college."

"To use the obvious ecological metaphor, we must specialize in our niche, because we can't compete with dramatically better-resourced generalists," Provost Rich Fairbanks said.

Many schools, accustomed to annual increases in the number of high school graduates, are retooling recruitment efforts to focus on states where that population will keep rising.

Although the outlook varies from state to state, the West is projected to have the highest percentage growth, with the Midwest and Northeast experiencing declines. The South is looking at mixed results, according to projections.

At a recent fair for college admissions officers in [Pittsburgh](#), the topic on everyone's lips was increasing out-of-state recruitment, some participants said. Certain states are known to be fertile ground for students wanting to leave. Others are not.

[Virginia](#), for example, is known for retaining most of its high school graduates. According to the latest information from the nonprofit National Center for Higher Education Management systems, Virginia in 2004 lost 11,503 high school graduates but brought in 15,748 from out of state for a net gain of 4,245.

[Maryland](#) has the opposite reputation. Data showed that in 2004 the state lost 15,685 high school graduates and imported 9,731 for a loss of 6,954.

There are no listed data for the District.

Such statistics aggravate C. Dan Mote, president of the [University of Maryland at College Park](#). "The state has not promulgated the fact that it has a world-class university," he said, adding that Maryland officials must improve recruitment in and out of state.

Educators and administrators say that as the student population changes, they will face a range of complicated challenges that go to the heart of the academic mission of higher education institutions and the issue of affordability. Efforts have begun to introduce the notion of college preparation to middle school students and students who traditionally would not have sought out college, Ward said, but more needs to be done to improve K-12 school systems from which many of the students will come.

The cost of college also will require a new collaborative financial aid system that takes into account cultural differences toward borrowing and spending patterns, Ward said.

Non-Hispanic white families are the most likely to borrow money for college, but that is the population that will experience the biggest decline. Hispanic families traditionally have fewer resources to spend and are more averse to borrowing, Ward said.

At Bates College in [Lewiston, Maine](#), President Elaine Tuttle Hansen said the school has started to boost its aid budget by a few percentage points to "keep ahead" of the trend. Out of an \$83 million budget, she said, \$18 million went this year for financial aid.

Officials in the [State University of New York](#), the public higher education system with the more campuses than any other state's, 64, and more than 427,000 students, are focusing their recruitment on population growth areas, said Kitty McCarthy, assistant vice chairman for enrollment marketing.

[Catholic University](#) is in its third year of using specific mail and e-mail campaigns to attract new prospective students, and has started a mail campaign to selected parents, said Victor Nakas, associate vice president for public affairs. George Washington University has built regional admissions offices in [Los Angeles](#), [Atlanta](#), [Chicago](#), [Boston](#) and northern [New Jersey](#), and school officials are spending more time recruiting overseas, said Kathryn M. Napper, executive dean for undergraduate admissions.

[American University](#) officials are devising strategies to increase the school's exposure in population growth areas including [Arizona](#), spokeswoman Maralee Cseller said.

Meanwhile, governors in five Northeastern states are advancing plans to target scholarships to keep in-state students at home, and some state legislatures are spending more -- or proposing an increase in funds -- for public institutions of higher education so they can stay attractive.

"This is all going to be huge for schools in a planning and financial sense," said Hansen, the Bates president. "But we also have to look upon it as an opportunity."