LATINO STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In 2019, 21.7% of U.S. undergraduate college students were Latino, the second largest ethnic group enrolled at the undergraduate level. While the number of Latino college students is increasing overall, these students continue to be overrepresented in open-access and community colleges and underrepresented in four-year institutions.

ENROLLMENT/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- Thirty-six percent of Latinos aged 18–24 enrolled in college in 2019, decreasing the enrollment gap between Latino students and Whites to 5 percentage points since 2010.
- 275,000 Latinos (11% of all enrolled students) enrolled in postsecondary education in fall 2017, and 292,400 (10.4% of all enrolled students) enrolled in fall 2018.
- Between 2000 and 2018, Hispanic postbaccalaureate enrollment increased by 164% (from 111,000 to 292,000 students).
- College enrollment rates were higher in 2019 than in 2010 for men who were Hispanic (33% vs. 28%) and lower in 2019 than in 2010 for those who were White (37% vs. 41%). The rate was not measurably different among Hispanic and White women.
- Latino students tend to be concentrated in public institutions: 85% of Latino students enrolled in public institutions in 2016, a higher percentage than any other race/ethnicity group for that same year.
  - In fall 2018, 20% of Latino students were enrolled in public four-year institutions and 27% were enrolled in public two-year institutions.
  - Latinos comprised 18% of all full-time students and 23.1% of all part-time enrolled students.
- Sixty-seven percent of all Latino undergraduates attended Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) in the 2019–2020 academic year.
  - Forty-six percent of students enrolled at HSIs are Latino.
- Completion rates are increasing among Latinos.
  - The percentage of Latinos aged 25–29 with at least an associate’s degree increased from 15% to 31% from 2000 to 2019.
    - The number of White students of the same age who had earned at least an associate degree increased from 44% to 56% over the same time period, leaving the current attainment gap intact.
- Latinos aged 25–29 who had attained at least a bachelor’s degree increased from 10% in 2000 to 21% in 2019.
  - By comparison, the proportion of White students of the same age with at least a bachelor’s degree increased more, from 34% to 45% over the same time period.
- Latino students are overrepresented in public two-year associate degree programs.
  - As of fall 2018, 27% of Latino students were in public two-year associate degree programs, compared to 49% of White students, 6% of Asian students, and 14% of Black students.
- Latino students are underrepresented in bachelor’s degree programs.
As of fall 2018, 20% of Latino students are enrolled in public four-year bachelor’s degree programs compared to 56% of White students, 8% of Asian students, and 12% of Black students.

Despite increased completion rates for Latinos overall, foreign-born Latinos are less likely to have earned an associate degree or bachelor’s degree than Latinos born in the United States.

As of 2009, 4% of the immigrant Latino population had earned associate degrees compared with 8% of the U.S.-born Latino population.

As of 2012, 11% of the immigrant Latino population had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher compared with 18% of U.S.-born Latinos.

A recent report found that degree attainment for white adults is 24.5% higher than that of Latino adults and 16.3% higher than that of Black adults.

In 2019, the Latino share of attained degrees decreased at every degree level, from associate degrees to doctoral degrees.

Latinos earned 23.8% of associate degrees compared to 51.2% of white students, 12.1% of Black students, 6.2% of Asian/Pacific Islander students, and 0.87% of Native students.

Latinos earned 14.2% of bachelor’s degrees compared to 59.1% of white students, 9.8% of Black students, 7.8% of Asian/Pacific Islander students, and 0.46% of Native students.

Latinos earned 9.5% of master’s degrees compared to 53.7% of white students, 11.2% of Black students, 6.3% of Asian/Pacific Islander students, and 0.41% of Native students.

Latinos earned 7.5% of doctoral degrees compared to 57.4% of white students, 8.1% of Black students, 11.2% of Asian/Pacific Islander students, and 0.38% of Native students.

**FIRST-GENERATION STATUS**

Latinos are much more likely to be first-generation college students than other racial/ethnic groups. In the 2015–16 academic year, almost half of Latinos (44%) were the first in their family to attend college, compared to Black (34%), all (29%), Asian (29%), and White (22%) students.

In 2018, 23% of Hispanic children under age 18 lived in households where no parent had completed high school, a higher rate than that of children of other racial/ethnic groups.

Eleven percent of American Indian/Alaska Native children, 10% of Pacific Islander children, 9% of Black children, 6% of Asian children and 3% of White children under age 18 lived in households where no parent had completed high school.

**FINANCIAL CHALLENGES**

Latinos often face many financial hurdles.

60% of Latino students receive some type of federal aid, compared to 53% of White students, 44% of Asian students, and 73% of Black students.

40% of Latino college students receive a Pell Grant. Overall, they make up 20% of all Pell Grant recipients.

40% of Latinos holding at least an associate degree report having student loan debt.

The average debt of a Latino graduate in 2012 was $23,441; that number rises to over $36,000 if the student attended a for-profit institution.

A significant percentage of Latino students enter college as low-income students.

34% of independent Latino students make less than $30,000 per year.

50% of dependent Latino students make less than $40,000 per year.

A majority of Latino students worked more than 30 hours a week, in some cases overtime, to finance their education. Thirty-two percent of Latino students worked 40 hours or more, 19% worked 30 to 39 hours, 26% worked 20 to 29 hours, and 23% worked 1 to 19 hours.
• Latinos received the lowest average financial aid award among all racial/ethnic groups at $10,256. Average total aid for all students was $12,262, and Asian students received the highest average at $13,016.
  o Latinos received the lowest average amount of federal aid when compared to all students. While the average federal aid award to all students was $8,584, Latinos received $7,544, over $1,000 less.

SOURCES


From Capacity to Success: HSIs, Title V and Latino Students. Excelencia in Education, May 2016.


Updated July 2021

Terms used in this report (Latino, Hispanic) reflect the terms found in the data source material.