

California Higher Education: An Overview

California is home to nearly 150 state colleges and universities (i.e., California community colleges, California State University, and University of California) and more than 1,500 private post-secondary institutions. Approximately 3 million people are currently enrolled in classes at these schools. This Short Subject analyzes the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009-2011 American Community Survey (ACS) data to present information about Californians' participation in higher education, map participation by county, and identify the Bachelor's degrees earned most frequently by recent graduates.

POST-SECONDARY ENROLLMENT RATES

Figure 1 presents data about the percentage of Californians between the ages of 18 and 24 who are enrolled in post-secondary education programs. To identify variation in participation across different groups, the figure disaggregates the data by sex category, race/ethnic category, and veteran status. Overall, approximately 45 percent of Californians between the ages of 18 and 24 are enrolled in undergraduate or graduate courses. Women (50 percent) are more likely than are men (41 percent) to be enrolled in post-secondary classes.

Variation in participation by race/ethnic category is also apparent. American Indians/Alaska Natives and Latinos are the least likely to be enrolled in undergraduate or graduate courses (33 percent and 35 percent, respectively) while Asian Americans are the most likely (68 percent). Across all race/ethnic categories, with the exception of Asian Americans, women are significantly more likely to participate in higher education than are men.

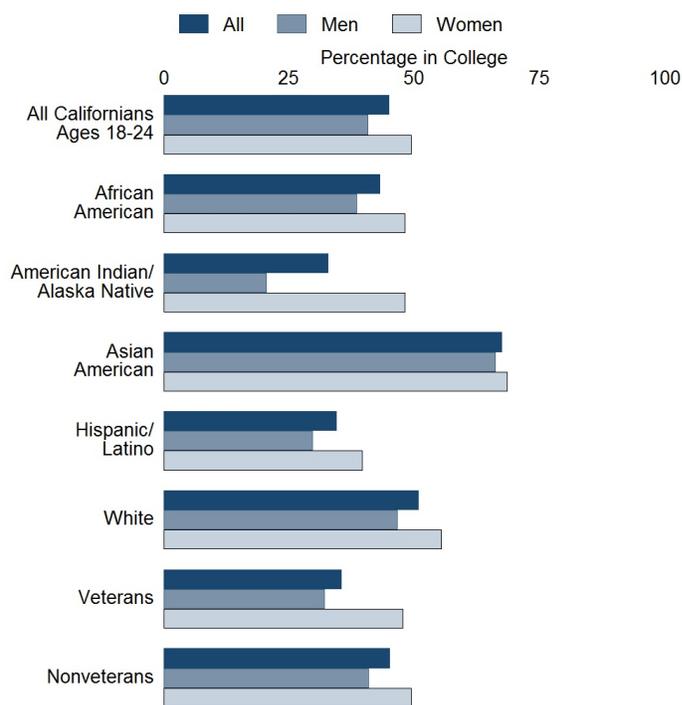
As a group, nonveterans between the ages of 18 and 24 are more likely to be enrolled in post-secondary courses (45 percent) than are veterans (36 percent). There is no definitive difference between the percentage of women veterans and nonveteran women participating in higher education. However, women

veterans (48 percent) are much more likely than are veterans who are men (32 percent) to be enrolled in higher education.

POST-SECONDARY ENROLLMENT BY COUNTY

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of each county's population currently enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and professional higher education programs. In California as a whole, approximately 9 percent of the population is enrolled in some form of post-secondary education at any given time. Sierra, Mono, Colusa, and Mariposa Counties have the lowest enrollment rates. Yolo, Butte, and San Luis Obispo Counties have the highest. Unsurprisingly, these are counties with relatively small overall populations and college campuses with more than 15,000 students.

Figure 1. College Enrollment Among Californians Ages 18-24¹



Note: Estimated percentages are based on survey data and contain varying amounts of sampling error.

POPULAR POST-SECONDARY FIELDS

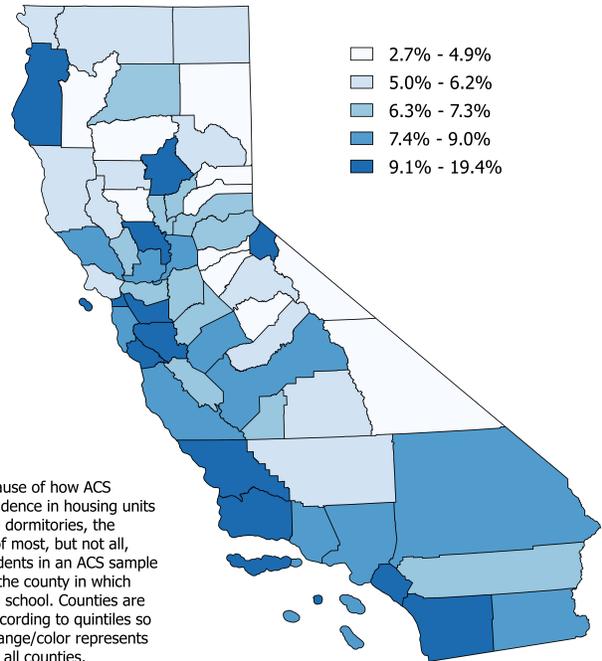
Table 1 reports information about the top ten fields in which recently graduated women and men earned their degrees (we define "recent graduates" as individuals between 25 and 35 with a Bachelor's degree). Business, social sciences, and fine arts appear as popular fields for both women and men. Within these fields, business management and administration, economics, political science, sociology, and graphic design are the most commonly earned Bachelor's degrees.

Despite commonalities, there are differences in the top fields in which women and men choose to major. Women are more likely than are men to obtain degrees in medical and health services, education, and liberal arts. The most common degrees women earn in these fields are nursing and early education. More common among men than women are the engineering, computer and information systems, and physical science fields. The most common degrees men earn in these fields are electrical engineering, computer science, and physics.

Women		
Field	Number	Percentage
Business	99,960	16.37%
Social Sciences	63,458	10.39%
Psychology	52,071	8.53%
Fine Arts	46,148	7.56%
Communications	40,946	6.71%
Biology	40,707	6.67%
Medical and Health Services	39,457	6.46%
Education	31,670	5.19%
English Language and Literature	24,095	3.95%
Liberal Arts	23,171	3.79%
Men		
Field	Number	Percentage
Business	98,569	19.78%
Engineering	68,932	13.83%
Social Sciences	55,762	11.19%
Computer and Information Systems	38,553	7.74%
Fine Arts	36,020	7.23%
Biology	26,571	5.33%
Communications	26,450	5.31%
Psychology	16,495	3.31%
Physical Sciences	14,885	2.99%
English Language and Literature	13,735	2.76%

Note: To focus on "recent" college graduates, we limit the analysis to include ACS respondents between the ages of 25 and 30. Estimated counts and percentages are based on survey data and contain varying amounts of error.

Figure 2: Percentage of County Population Currently in College²



Earning an undergraduate degree in a field does not ensure getting a job in that field. It remains to be seen from the data reported here how an educational major or field relates to an occupation, a potential indicator of earnings differences between women and men.

FURTHER READING

Defunding Higher Education: What Are the Effects on College Enrollment, Hans Johnson, Public Policy Institute of California, 2012.

REFERENCES

- 1 U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2011 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata, 2012.
- 2 U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2011 American Community Survey Summary Files, 2012.

This short subject was requested by the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls.
www.women.ca.gov

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