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School Enrollment-Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1980 (Advance Report)

This report presents a summary of trends in school enrollment based on data collected in the October 1980 and earlier Current Population Surveys.

In October 1980, about 57.3 million persons 3 to 34 years old were enrolled in school, not significantly different from the number enrolled in October 1979. A downward trend in the late 1970's was caused primarily by the decline in the elementary-school-age and high-school-age populations. There was an increase in preprimary enrollments but no significant change in college enrollment from 1979 to 1980.

Nursery school enrollment reached 2.0 million in 1980, significantly above the 1.1 million enrollment of 1970. Most nursery school enrollment has remained in the private sector, unlike enrollment at other levels. While some fluctuations in kindergarten enrollment occurred during the decade, the 1980 enrollment figure of 3.2 million was not different from the 1970 figure. Elementary school enrollment in 1980 (27.4 million) was about one-fifth below the 1970 figure. This decline of about 6.5 million students enrolled in elementary schools during the decade is entirely the result of the decline in elementary school age population. The decrease in the number of births began in the early 1960's and followed about 15 years of increases in births during the "baby boom." Since 1977, however, the number of births has been climbing slowly.¹ This slight increase in births may cause an end to the decline in elementary enrollment in the next few years. Private elementary school enrollment declined in the decade, mostly in the early years of the decade. In 1980, about 11 percent of elementary school students attended private schools, not significantly different from the proportion in 1970 but significantly less than the 15 percent in 1965.

Total high school enrollment of 14.6 million in 1980 exhibited a 1-year decline of about 560,000 students. The apparent downward trend since 1977 is the result of the

population decline in the eligible age group. There has been a decline of at least 1 million students in high school since the 1975-77 period when enrollment remained around 15.7 million.

College enrollment for persons under 35 years old has been fluctuating around 10 million since 1976. Minor annual shifts in enrollment estimates based on sample data have not been statistically significant over the period. The figure for Blacks enrolled in college has remained around 1 million during the same period. In the first half of the decade the number of Black college students increased by a greater percent than the remainder of the population. Since 1976, the proportion of all college students who were Black (about 10 percent) has been at least equal to the proportion of persons in the eligible population who were Black (14- to 34-year old high school graduates).

In addition to the 10.2 million persons 14 to 34 years old enrolled in college, there were about 1.2 million students 35 years old and over; women outnumbered men 2 to 1. The number of persons 35 years old and over enrolled in college grew rapidly in the early 1970's and has fluctuated some since then. There was some evidence of decline in enrollment for both men and women from 1979 to 1980; this was the first year a decline was evident for women since data on students 35 years old and over were first collected in 1972 (table 4).

In the 1975-80 period, college enrollment of persons 14 to 34 years old and over grew by one-half million as a result of a gain of 1 million women combined with a decline of one-half million men (table 4). For women, there was at least some evidence of an increase for every age group except those under 20 years old. The decrease for men may have been the result of changes in eligibility for the GI Bill among veterans. These changes (announced in 1974) specified that a large group of veterans would no longer be eligible for education benefits after 1975. A sudden surge in college enrollment under the GI Bill occurred shortly after the

¹ National Center for Health Statistics, *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, Vol. 28, No. 13; Vol. 29, No. 1; and Vol. 29, No. 11.

announcement.² By the late 1970's, enrollment of men 25 to 29 had returned to levels of the early 1970's. During the same period, enrollment for women had grown.

Enrollment rates have not exhibited any startling single-year changes since 1975 for any age groups shown in table 2; however, 1980 enrollment rates were substantially higher than 1975 rates among persons below compulsory school attendance ages. For 3- and 4-year-olds, primarily enrolled in nursery school, the enrollment rate grew from 32 to 37 percent in 5 years. The rate has more than tripled since 1965 when it was 11 percent. Whereas some years ago kindergarten enrollment was not universal, recent evidence shows that since the mid-1970's almost all eligible children have been enrolled. In 1980, 96 percent of 5- and 6-year olds were attending school (usually in kindergarten and first grade); in 1965, the figure was 85 percent. Among young children, there were no differences in enrollment between boys and girls.

Because some of the largest cohorts of the "baby boom" era entered college attendance ages in the 1970's, there could have been substantial growth in the number of students without increases in enrollment rates. In fact, if men and women were enrolled in college in 1980 at the same age-specific rates as in 1970 (based on age groups in table 6) taking into account the changes in proportion of young men in the Armed Forces, there would have been about 1.7 million more college students enrolled in 1980 than in 1970. Current enrollment estimates, however, actually show an increase of 2.8 million students from 1970 to 1980, which was caused by changes in enrollment rates as well as by population growth. This involved different contributions of men and women. For men, although the number enrolled rose, the rate of enrollment declined slightly and consequently there were about 400,000 fewer male students 16 to 34 years old than would be expected at the 1970 college enrollment rates. Enrollment for women grew and the actual 1980 number enrolled was 1.5 million greater than would have been expected based on 1970 enrollment rates. Expected total enrollment growth caused only by population growth would have been 22 percent from 1970 to 1980; instead enrollment grew by 37 percent.

College Enrollment of Persons 16 to 34 Years Old

(In thousands)

	1980 expected ¹		1980 actual		Difference 1980 actual— expected	
	1970	Num- ber	Change 1970-80	Num- ber		Change 1970-80
Total	7,414	9,071	1,657	10,174	2,760	1,103
Men	4,401	5,437	1,036	5,023	622	-414
Women	3,013	3,634	621	5,151	2,138	1,517

¹ Based on 1970 enrollment rates.

² Veterans Administration, Office of the Controller, Reports and Statistics Service, *Veterans Benefits Under Current Educational Programs*, Information Bulletins (IB-04-77-3), (IB-04-78-3), (IB-04-79-5), (IB-04-80-6) and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 319, School Enrollment—Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1976*.

As noted previously, among college-age persons, there were increases in the enrollment rates among women and decreases among men in the 1970-80 period. The decreases among men are in part consequences of two events, both involving the military. First, the enforcement of a GI Bill delimiting date caused a sudden rise and then fall in enrollment under the GI Bill in the mid-1970's (discussed above). The second is an artifact of the universe on which the rates were calculated: the civilian noninstitutional population. As young men were discharged from military service after the Vietnam era, they returned rapidly to the civilian population but not as rapidly to the college population, therefore they increased the base but not the numerator for the enrollment rate calculations.³ Consequently, part of the explanation for the drop in rates for men 18 to 21 (table 2) is the change in population base on which the rates are computed. For women, neither of these occurrences involving the Armed Forces had a significant effect on enrollment. Instead, there has been a reasonably steady increase in enrollment rates for women. The percent of the total population enrolled in college or in the Armed Forces in 1970 and 1980 follows:

Year and Age	Men		Women enrolled in college
	Enrolled in college	In Armed Forces	
October 1970			
18 and 19 years. . .	36.6	8.9	34.6
20 and 21 years. . .	31.3	23.4	22.3
22 to 24 years. . .	17.6	14.5	8.9
25 to 29 years. . .	10.0	5.6	3.7
30 to 34 years. . .	4.5	4.6	2.6
October 1980			
18 and 19 years. . .	32.1	6.4	37.6
20 and 21 years. . .	29.0	8.5	28.2
22 to 24 years. . .	16.2	6.0	14.4
25 to 29 years. . .	9.1	3.9	8.3
30 to 34 years. . .	4.9	3.0	6.7

Enrollment rates by age in table 2 include enrollment at all levels of school. At some ages, there is overlap between two levels—most notably among 18- and 19-year-old students of whom 23 percent were enrolled in high school and 77 percent in college in October 1980. For 20- and 21-year-old students, only 4 percent were in high school; the rest were in college. Since high school enrollment rates for these ages have remained fairly stable, it is reasonable to assume that fluctuations in enrollment rates were the result of changes in college enrollment for these ages, rather than high school enrollment, as may be substantiated in detail in the final school enrollment reports issued annually.

³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 3, School Enrollment—Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1979*, table A-3.

In addition to the increase in enrollment during the decade resulting from the rise in the number of women enrolled, one-half of the growth in college enrollment was the result of increases in part-time students (table 1). Most part-time students take only one or two courses. During the first half of the decade, there was some growth in full-time enrollment, but in the second half of the decade, virtually all of the growth was in part-time enrollment. Thirty percent of all college students 14 to 34 years old were attending part time in 1980 compared with 27 percent in 1975 and 22 percent in 1970. For the entire decade, the number of part-time students increased by a substantially greater percentage than the number of full-time students. There was an 84-percent rise for part-time compared with a 24-percent growth in the number of full-time students from 1970 to 1980.

Among undergraduates 14 to 34 years old, about 44 percent of the growth in college enrollment was in 2-year colleges (table 5) during the decade. Two-year college enrollment climbed by 58 percent and 4-year enrollment rose by 27 percent. Among undergraduates, the greatest percent increase has been among persons 25 to 34 years old; their number doubled in the decade. They were most likely to be attending part time (about two-thirds compared with 16 percent of younger undergraduates). About 45 percent of 25- to 34-year-old undergraduates were enrolled in 2-year colleges compared with 28 percent of younger undergraduates.

Enrollment patterns of traditional age undergraduates (under 22 years old) have not changed substantially in the decade. Close to three-fourths (73 percent) were enrolled in 4-year colleges in 1980. There is some evidence that this is only slightly below the proportion in 4-year colleges in 1970. About 90 percent were attending full time in 1980 compared

with 93 percent in 1970. Changes in college enrollment characteristics in terms of full-time status, type of college, and enrollment rates have been caused primarily by patterns of change among older students, rather than by changes among the traditional age students.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES ON PRIVATE SCHOOL AND SPANISH ORIGIN POPULATION

Data distinguishing public and private school enrollment are not presented for high school and college levels in 1980. Because of an error in the public/private enrollment questions on the 1980 questionnaire, the data were not comparable with those for earlier years. Data on enrollment in public and private nursery school, kindergarten, or elementary school were not affected and are shown in this report. A report prepared by the National Center for Education Statistics⁴ shows that private college enrollment did not change substantially from 1979 to 1980.

Since 1972, Spanish origin for children under 14 has been allocated from a parent in the household rather than directly reported. Starting in 1980, Spanish origin is directly reported for all persons. Under the old procedure, the number and proportion of children 3 to 13 years old who were of Spanish origin were underestimated by about 10 percent. The change affects the total number of children enrolled in nursery school, kindergarten, and elementary school reported as Spanish origin but does not affect enrollment rates. Further discussion will appear in the forthcoming report, *School Enrollment—Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1980*.

⁴National Center for Education Statistics, Early release NCES 81-342, *Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities, 1980 (Preliminary Estimates)*.