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School Enrollment — Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1982

(Advance Report)

This report presents summary data on school enrollment for 1982 and features some of the important changes that have occurred in recent years. The data are from the October school enrollment supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS). Data on school enrollment of the civilian population have been collected in the CPS annually since 1946 and regularly reported in this series (P-20). Additional information on school enrollment as well as detailed statements on sampling variability and limitations of the data will appear in a subsequent detailed report on the October 1982 enrollment survey. Some highlights of the topics discussed in this report are:

- In October 1982, there were 57.9 million students 3 to 34 years old enrolled in nursery school through college.
- Since 1975, one of the years of highest total enrollment¹ when 61 million persons were enrolled, the numbers of persons in nursery school and college have grown, the numbers in elementary and high school have declined and the number in kindergarten has not changed significantly.
- More than half of the increase in the number of college students from 1972 to 1982 was among students 25 years old and over.
- In 1982, students 25 years old and over constituted 36 percent of all college students, compared with 28 percent 10 years earlier.
- Women grew from 43 percent to 52 percent of all college students between 1972 and 1982.

Elementary and high school students. Elementary school enrollment has been declining for more than a decade with 1982 enrollment 19 percent below the 1970 peak. High school enrollment reached an apparent peak in 1976 and 1977 and dropped by 10 percent by 1982. The declines in enrollment at both the elementary and high school levels are the result of the decline of the population of eligible ages for

enrollment. Nursery school and kindergarten enrollments were as high in 1982 as they have ever been, as fluctuations in the number of persons of eligible age and increased rates of enrollment among 3- to 5-year-olds kept the numbers high. College enrollment has increased slowly. A large change in college enrollment in any one year is unlikely, but there is the possibility of growth in college enrollment caused by growth in enrollment rates rather than population. Currently, less than 60 percent of the eligible population (high school graduates) attends college.

College students. The number of college students of all ages increased by 3 million in the decade from 1972 to 1982. The change appears to be caused by both an increase in the population of eligible age and an increase in enrollment rates. While the increase in male and female populations of eligible age was substantial and may have been responsible for one-half of the change in the number of students, the enrollment rates of women rose sharply and also greatly influenced the changes in the total number of students. About four-fifths of the total increase in enrollment was accounted for by the increase in the number of women enrolled.

More than half of the observed increase in the number of college students was among students 25 years old and over. In fact, the increase in the number of older women (25 years old and over) alone constituted about 44 percent of the total growth in the number of persons enrolled in college over the decade. The relatively low increase in enrollment of men in the decade was due in part to the fact that during the Vietnam Era, young men's enrollment rates were higher than normal.

During the decade the basic demographic composition of the college population changed, reflecting the disproportionate growth in enrollment among women and older students. In 1982, women outnumbered men in college; women constituted 52 percent of all college students 14 years old and over in that year, compared with 43 percent in 1972, the first year data were collected for students of all ages (table 4). Students 25 years old and over rose from 28 percent to 36 percent of all college students in the same

¹Enrollment also reached this level in 1971.

period. While young women represented about 32 percent of all students in both 1972 and 1982, women 25 years old and over increased from 11 percent to 20 percent of students during the period. The proportion of students who were older men remained essentially the same in both years (17 and 16 percent, respectively). The increase in the share held by older women was at the expense, therefore, of the share held by young men; the proportion of young men dropped from 40 to 32 percent of all students during the decade.

At the same time that there was a change in student demographics, the distribution of students attending institutions of various types changed between 1972 and 1982. The number of undergraduates 14 to 34 years old enrolled in 2-year colleges rose by 58 percent in the period to 3.0 million by 1982, compared with an increase of 20 percent among other undergraduates. Enrollment in 2-year, junior and community colleges shifted from 27 percent of undergraduates to 33 percent (table A).

Although the proportion of all undergraduates enrolled in 2-year colleges has risen and the proportion in 4-year colleges and universities has declined, overall growth has been sufficient so that the numbers enrolled in 2-year colleges and in 4-year colleges have grown. Undergraduate enrollment of persons 14 to 34 years old in 4-year colleges grew by about 1 million to 6.1 million between 1972 and 1982. Graduate students, all of whom attend 4-year colleges and universities (or professional schools) and not 2-year colleges in these data, increased by one-half million to 1.8 million from 1972 to 1982.

Another important change from 1972 to 1982 was the increase in the proportion of college students who attended part-time. The proportion of all students 14 to 34 years old who attended part-time in 1982 was 29 percent, up from 24 percent in 1972. Among undergraduates the fraction rose from 19 to 25 percent. But the number of part-time students did not increase at the expense of the number of full-time students; both part-time and full-time enrollment rose by about 1 million.

Two-year colleges absorbed half of the growth in undergraduate enrollment from 1972 to 1982. Two-year colleges have traditionally enrolled part-time students in greater proportions than have 4-year colleges (table A), and in 1982, 42 percent of all 2-year college students were attending part-time, compared with 17 percent of 4-year college undergraduates (table 5). Although only one-third of all undergraduates attended 2-year colleges in 1982, over half (55 percent) of part-time students were in 2-year colleges.

Part-time students have fewer needs than do full-time students and, therefore, on a per capita basis, use less of a college's resources. Part-time students take fewer courses, require smaller faculties, and consume fewer school resources per student than do full-time students. Therefore, although 2-year colleges enrolled one-third of all undergraduates in 1982, from the standpoint of administration or resources consumed, they enrolled roughly 29 percent of all full-time equivalent students (2.8 part-time = 1 full-time).² In full-time

²National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1983-84*.

Table A. Selected Characteristics of College Students: October 1982 and 1972

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Number		Percent who are--							
			Women		Part-time students		2-year college undergraduates		25-to-34-year-old students	
	1982	1972	1982	1972	1982	1972	1982	1972	1982	1972
All students, 14 years and over.....	12,308	9,096	52.1	42.6	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	24.3	19.3
All students, 14-34 years.....	10,919	8,308	50.5	41.6	29.2	24.0	27.6	23.0	27.4	21.2
Undergraduates, 14-34 years.....	9,110	6,992	51.1	43.0	25.3	18.8	33.1	27.3	19.1	14.5
Men.....	4,449	3,982	--	--	22.5	18.9	30.6	28.3	18.5	16.8
Women.....	4,660	3,010	100.0	100.0	28.0	18.8	35.5	26.1	19.7	11.2
Two-year college.....	3,011	1,910	54.9	41.1	42.3	34.3	100.0	100.0	27.4	22.3
Four-year college ¹	6,098	5,082	49.3	43.8	16.9	12.9	--	--	15.1	11.5
Full time.....	6,807	5,678	49.3	43.1	--	--	25.5	22.1	9.7	7.3
Part time.....	2,304	1,314	56.6	42.9	100.0	100.0	55.3	49.8	47.0	45.6
14 to 24 years.....	7,365	5,981	50.8	44.7	16.6	12.0	29.7	24.8	--	--
25 to 34 years.....	1,745	1,011	52.7	33.4	62.0	59.2	47.3	42.1	100.0	100.0
Graduate students, 14-34 years...	1,810	1,320	47.0	34.1	48.6	52.0	(X)	(X)	68.7	56.7
Men.....	960	872	--	--	40.8	44.8	(X)	(X)	66.1	58.3
Women.....	850	450	100.0	100.0	57.4	65.6	(X)	(X)	71.6	53.8

-- Represents zero or rounds to zero.

X Not applicable.

NA Not available.

¹ Includes some persons for whom type of college was not reported.

equivalents, 2-year colleges enroll about 2.2 million students and 4-year colleges enroll 5.4 million students as undergraduates.

Among undergraduates, women were more likely than men to attend college part time in 1982 (28 percent and 22 percent, respectively); women constituted the majority of part-time undergraduates (57 percent). They were also the majority of undergraduates in 2-year schools (55 percent) and

constituted half of those in 4-year schools (49 percent). Ten years earlier, however, women constituted less than half of each group: 43 percent of part-time undergraduates, 41 percent of undergraduates in 2-year schools, and 44 percent of undergraduates in 4-year institutions. (These proportions are not significantly different from each other.) (See table A.) The proportion of all graduate students who were women increased from 34 percent in 1972 to 47 percent in 1982.