



Utah's Growing Opportunity Gap

The impact of shifting demographics on Utah's postsecondary educational attainment

Utah's population will become increasingly diverse in the coming decades. By 2065, the percent of minorities in Utah (age 18-35) will nearly double. There is already a postsecondary education enrollment and completion gap between minority populations and the white population at colleges and universities in the Utah System of Higher Education. If differences in the college participation rates of minority populations continue to persist, then, as the state's demographic makeup changes, the enrollment gap at USHE institutions will continue to increase.

The same pattern can be expected for completion rates, resulting in Utah forgoing an estimated 290,000 degrees and awards from 2020-2065.

This study looks at the long-range impact of shifting demographics within Utah's population on enrollments and completions in the Utah System of Higher Education.

Method

This analysis utilizes Utah population projections provided by the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, which contains yearly estimates broken down by age, gender, and ethnicity from 2010 to 2065.¹ The population age range of 18-35 is the focus of this analysis. This analysis also uses computed ratios of estimated state populations to USHE student enrollments, and the ratio of USHE student enrollment to USHE graduates to estimate future postsecondary educational attainment in Utah. These ratios were used to estimate future enrollments and completions. Ratios were computed for each combination of age, gender, and race/ethnicity category. Detail data was then summarized for the entire 18-35 population.

The targeted rates are set based on a five-year average (2014-2018) of enrollment and completions for the white population. While this data is used to identify gaps between white and minority populations, the analysis does not discuss the acceptability of the current participation and completion rates of the white population.

Findings

Demographic shifts

In 2018, minorities made up 23%-25% of the 18-35 age population in Utah. By 2065, the percent of minorities in this age range will increase to 39-41% of the population (figure 1).

1. Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. "Race/Ethnicity Projections," Accessed July 2019. <https://gardner.utah.edu/demographics/population-projections/raceethnicity-projections/>.

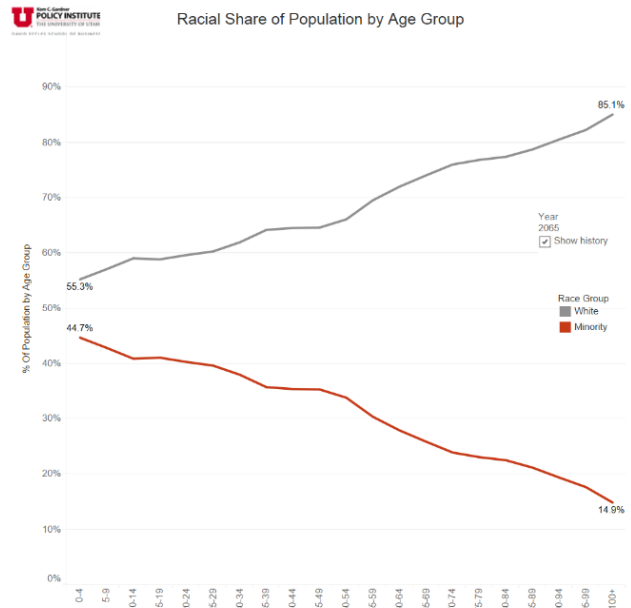
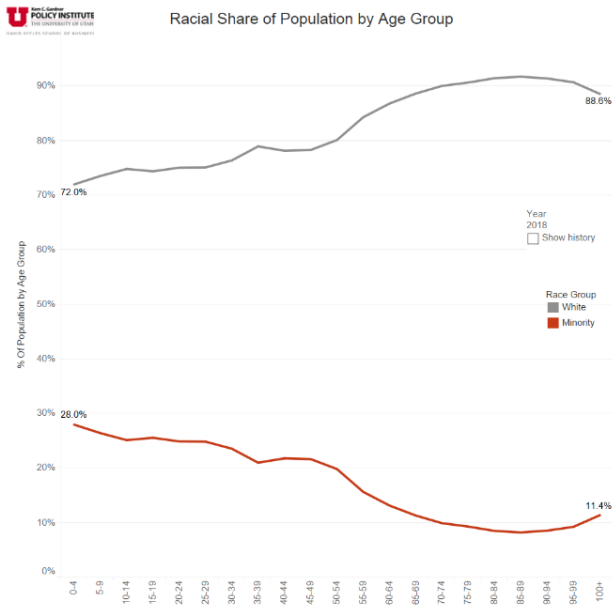


Figure 1 - Population trends of Utahans ages 18-35

Impact on enrollments

Utah’s white population, age 18-35, has enrolled in college at an average rate of 15.1% over the last five years. In contrast, Utah’s minority population has enrolled at an average rate of 11.6% over the same time period.

Male ethnic minorities in Utah have the lowest percent of their population attending a USHE institution. Male Native American (8.52%), male Hispanic (8.72%), and male Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (9.74%) represent three of the bottom four categories for participation at a USHE institution. Only female, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander had a lower participation rate (8.48%) (table 1).

Table 1 - Percent of state population (18-35) enrolled at a USHE institution, 2018

Race/Ethnicity	Ages 18-35		
	Female	Male	Total
White	14.56%	15.61%	15.09%
Hispanic	10.45%	8.72%	9.59%
Asian	13.43%	13.01%	13.22%
Black	14.57%	11.43%	13.00%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	8.48%	9.74%	9.11%
Native American	10.98%	8.52%	9.75%
Two or More	14.66%	14.87%	14.76%
Total Average	12.45%	11.70%	12.07%

If differences between the participation rates of minority populations at USHE institutions compared to that of the white population continue to persist, then, as the state’s demographic makeup changes, the gap between the number of Utah residents expected to enroll at a USHE institution and the number that actually enroll will continue to increase (figure 2).

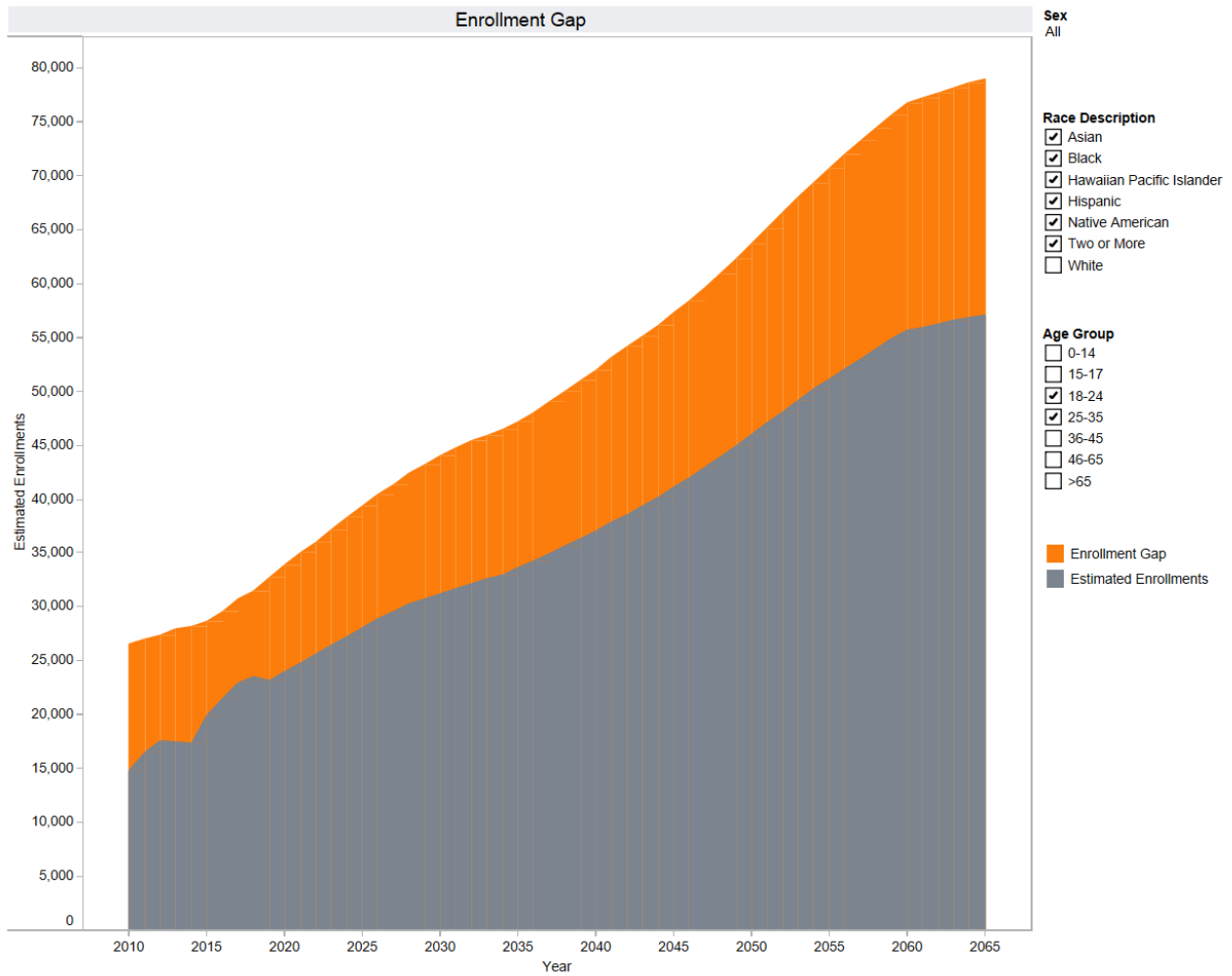


Figure 2 - Estimated Enrollment Gap - Utah Population 18-35

The estimated enrollment gaps also increase when data are broken down by gender and ethnicity and the age range is expanded to 15-35 to take into account potential high school students participating in Concurrent Enrollment (figure 3, figure 4).

Enrollment Gap: Males age 15-35

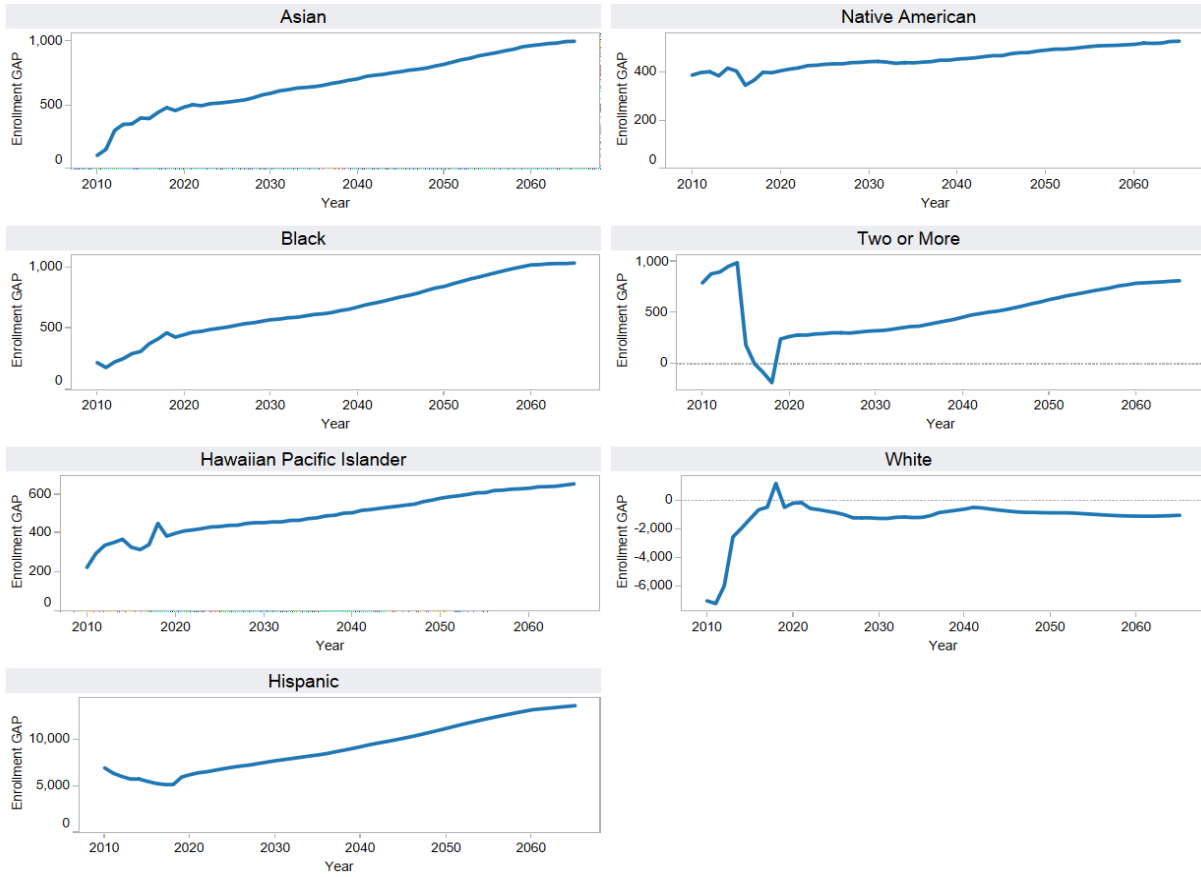


Figure 3 –Enrollment Gaps Utah Population by Male & Ethnicity

Enrollment Gap: Females age 15-35

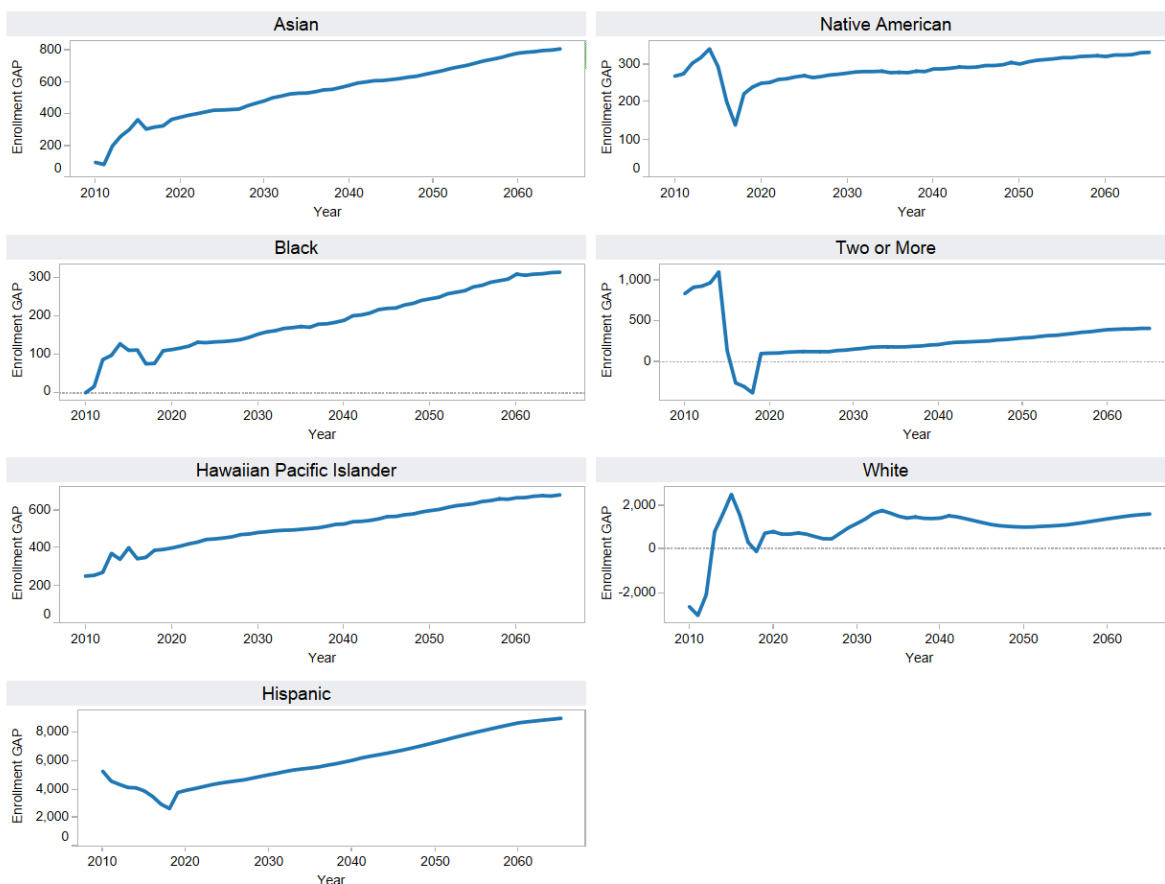


Figure 4 - Enrollment Gaps Utah Population by Female & Ethnicity

Impact on completions

Similar gaps exist in completion rates of students at USHE institutions. For the past five years, white USHE students completed at an average rate of 32.1%. Over the same time, USHE students from minority populations completed at an average rate of 25.7%.

For completions, the “two or more” race/ethnicity category had the highest completion rate at 34% while the Hawaiian/Pacific Islander category was 21%, a 13% difference. Women outpaced men in the completion category at 28% of the enrolled population completing an award each year, compared to 25% for men (table 2).

Table 2 – Estimated average completion rates of enrolled populations each year

Race/Ethnicity	Ages 18-35		
	Female	Male	Total
White	33.94%	30.32%	32.13%
Hispanic	23.22%	20.98%	22.10%
Asian	31.17%	30.77%	30.97%
Black	24.77%	21.23%	23.00%
Hawaiian Pacific Islander			
Islander	22.30%	19.28%	20.79%
Native American	26.24%	20.72%	23.48%
Two or More	33.84%	33.44%	33.64%
Total Average	27.93%	25.25%	26.59%

Similar to the enrollment trends, if current completion trends continue and the state’s population demographics shift, then the gap between expected completions and actual completions will become increasingly larger (figure 5).

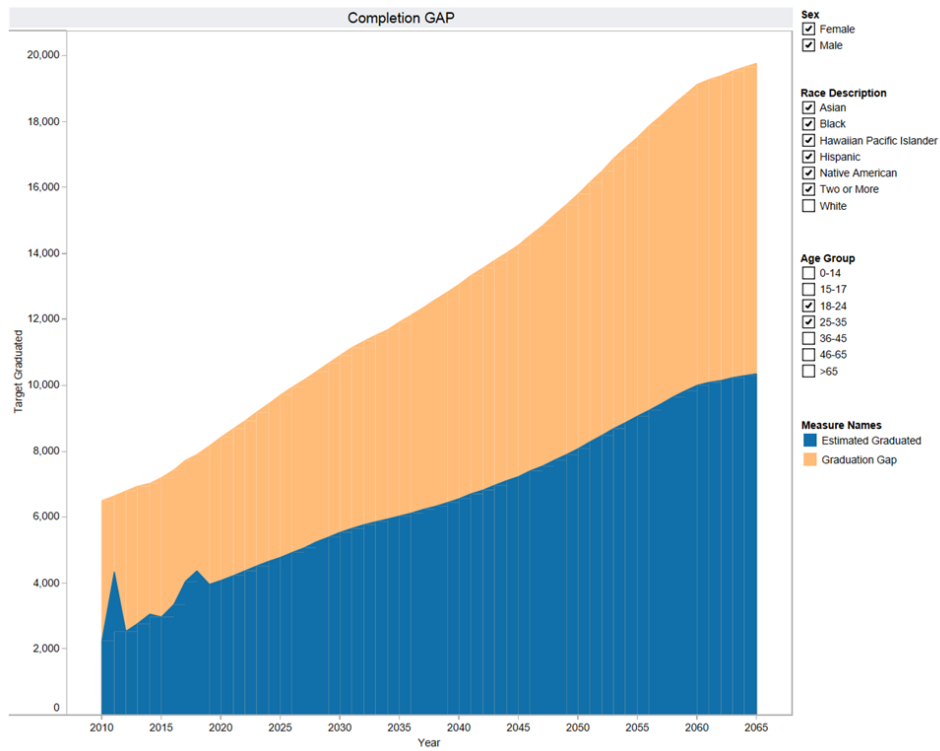


Figure 5 - Growing Completion Gap in Non-white Populations

Conclusion

The differences in enrollment and completion rates between the race/ethnic/sex groups will have long-term implications for the State of Utah as the population's demographics shift. Over time, the estimated percent of total Utah residents ages 18-35 who enroll at a USHE institution will decrease by approximately 1.6% and the percent of total residents ages 18-35 who complete a certificate or degree each year will decrease by 0.1% between 2010 and 2065 (figure 6).

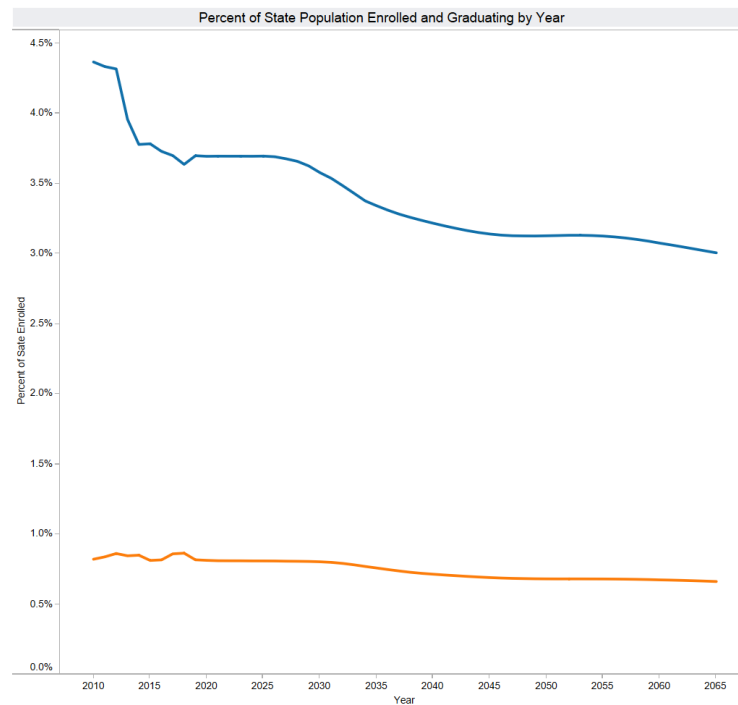


Figure 6 – Utah population (ages 15-35), USHE enrollment and completion trend 2010 - 2065

Utah's population is projected to grow to over 3.5 million by 2065. The potential impact of predicted changes in Utah's demographics would be 22,377 lost enrollments and 11,265 lost completions in the year 2065 alone.

Due to the observed gaps in enrollment and completion between Utah's white population and minority population, it is estimated that Utah has missed the opportunity for approximately 36,000 additional degrees and awards in its minority population between 2010 and 2019 academic years.

If this trend continues, Utah will forgo an estimated 290,000 degrees and awards between 2020 and 2065.