

Trends of Population Growth and Student Demographic Change in the State of California

Andrew M. Wells

The past two decades have seen considerable change in the demographics of the state of California. The changes in the state's various racial and ethnic communities, however, have not been mirrored by the population of students that are enrolled in the state's public institutions of post-secondary education. This article will clarify the differences between the state's entire population and its efficacy in serving all the constituent communities within that population. The author will challenge the effectiveness with which the state's educational system serves the people of California, using state census data and enrollment information to clarify the past fifteen years' trends. The consistency of the trends indicates that the problems that exist now, and the policies that cause them, will continue to be issues for the state in the future. Therefore, I make proposals for how to improve the state institutions' capacity to serve the populations that are currently not adequately represented in higher education.

Over the past 14 years, the state of California has undergone considerable demographic change. The percentage of people of color in the state has increased as the numerical overrepresentation of White people, relative to other ethnic and racial communities in the state, has diminished. This change in the racial composition of California will continue in the coming years, and it is important to understand how the system of public higher education—the Community College, California State University (CSU), and University of California (UC) systems—will be impacted. The California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC), which is charged with monitoring the state's public post-secondary institutions and advising educational policy-makers, has collected almost 15 years worth of data about the state's population of students. This information, available via the commission's website, is sufficient to conduct an analysis of the trends in growth and demographic change in the state's overall population, as well as within the population of students enrolled in the three aforementioned systems of public higher education. "Although record college enrollments were reported for racial/ethnic minorities at the beginning of the 1990s, the gaps in the college participation rate and attainment levels among white, African-American, and Latino students have widened over the past decade" (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999, p. 1).

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To increase access to education for diverse populations and improve campus climates for the many underrepresented campus communities, administrators and legislators must understand the composition of the state's campuses. To understand how these demographic issues impact the current state of education in California, and the implications for the future of higher education in the state, administrators and policy-makers must gain an understanding of how representative or unrepresentative public education is in California. How are the state's myriad racial and ethnic communities represented in the university and college systems? Are some populations overrepresented or underrepresented? How does population change and growth affect campuses in the state? Are new campuses being developed in geographic regions such that they will serve diverse communities and increase access to education for underrepresented groups? This is exemplified by the opening of new campuses by both the UC and CSU systems within the past five years.

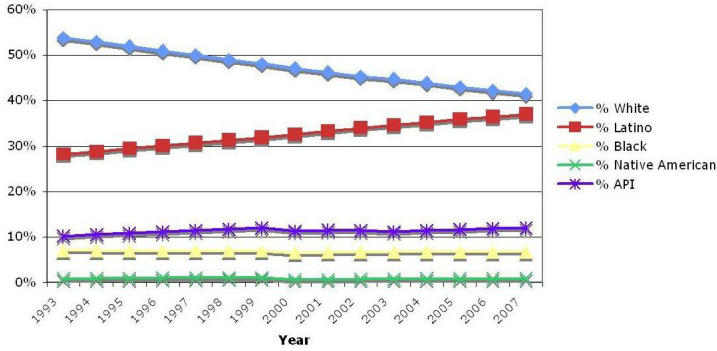
To address these questions I collected statistics on population growth and enrollment rates in the state by accessing two distinct sets of CPEC records. The first set describes the enrollment rates of Black, Latino, Asian and Pacific-Islander (API), and White students in the state's public higher education system from 1992 through 2006. These data describe the enrollment rates of these populations as a percentage of overall enrollment, but do not delineate how those enrollment rates are distributed amongst the three separate systems that exist in the state: the UC system, the CSU system, and California Community Colleges. Additionally, they do not reflect matriculation rates. The second data set used is the demographic and census records of California's population from 1993 through 2007, breaking the state's population down by race: Latino, Black, API, Native American, Filipino, Unknown, and White.

Analysis

According to the Commission data, the past 14 years have seen a steady shift in the demographic composition of the state of California. During this period, the state population has grown with various racial groups growing at faster rates than others. After comparing the racial composition of the state from each year and analyzing the changes, a very clear trend emerges. The percentage of the state population that identifies as "White" has decreased steadily from 53.8% in 1993 to 41.5% in 2007. Conversely, the state's Latino population has increased from below 30% in the early 1990s to nearly 40% in 2007. Black, Native American, and Asian Pacific-Islander populations did not grow substantially as a percentage of the state's population, however their communities did grow in terms of sheer numbers. Figure 1.1 illustrates the increasingly diverse nature of California's population.

Figure 1.1

State Population by Race/Ethnicity



As Figure 1.1 demonstrates, the shifting distribution of racial identities in the state has been gradual and steady. Barring any substantial changes to state and federal laws that govern immigration, it is highly unlikely that these patterns will change within the near future. States in the southwest would clearly be most affected by tightened restrictions on immigration from South and Central America, although the impact of such legislation on the population of Latino students in California’s public higher education system is unclear. The census data indicate an eventual change from Whites being the ethnic majority in California to being an ethnic minority. While this does not necessarily mean that Whites will experience the underrepresentation and marginalization that many people of color experience in the state, it does have an impact on the identity and attitudes of the White population in the state, especially within the portion of that population that embraces their majority status and rejects the value and benefits of promoting a diverse population.

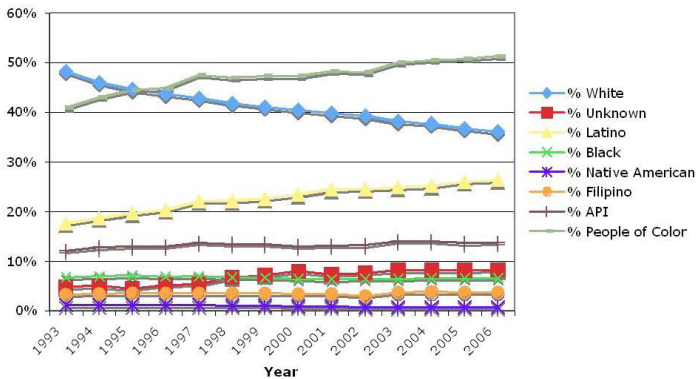
Student Demographics and Racial Affiliations

Despite increases in the overall Latino population in California, there has been a slower increase in the proportion of students of color enrolling in the state’s three higher education systems. These data reflect the percentages of students, identified by race, who were enrolled at the time the data were collected. This information does not account for retention rates, nor does it delineate between the three tiers of the educational system. Instead of examining only one aspect of the public higher education system in the state, the author chose to analyze the representation of various racial communities in higher education throughout the state’s three aforementioned systems. The UC, CSU, and California Community College institutions all serve different purposes, but these purposes are not intrinsically linked to the racial identities of their students, so it is unnecessary to differentiate between the various bodies for the sake of this study.

As Figure 1.2 indicates, the proportion of the student body in California comprised of White people is gradually declining. In fact, a comparison of the two sets of data shows that White students' representation in the state's educational system is declining at roughly the same rate as their percentage of the state's population. At the same time, the percentage of Latino students enrolled in the state is increasing at roughly the same rate as their representation within the state at large. As the Latino community's share in higher education grows, however, other historically marginalized communities are not experiencing growth in their participation relative to Whites and Latinos.

Figure 1.2

Student Population by Race/Ethnicity



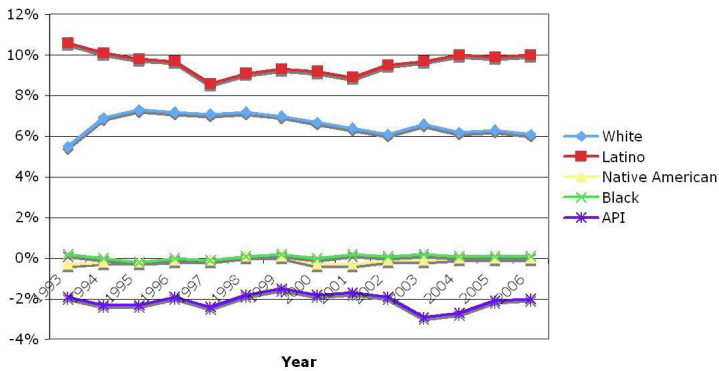
Does this information mean that Latino students, and students of color in general, are being represented in the state's educational system at an increasing rate? Unfortunately, the data do not support this conclusion. By examining the growth rate of the community in general versus the growth rate of that community's representation in higher education, that information can be interpreted to reflect that students of color are not gaining access to higher education. If Black students were experiencing growth in their access to, and presence within, the state's post-secondary education systems, their growth rate as indicated in Figure 1.2 would reflect a higher rate of increase than that of Figure 1.1. Examining the Latino population, which has experienced the most growth within the state at large, indicates that their representation in education has not exceeded that of their population in the state. In fact, Latinos are still present in California's educational system at a rate 10% lower than their share of the state's population. Researcher Paul Hoogaveen (2007) compared these statistics to national trends:

Nationwide, Latino [college] enrollment alone grew from 353,000 in 1974 to 1.7 million in 2004. But...those numbers warrant closer consideration - because while they might appear to dem-

onstrate significant growth, they do not reflect the major demographic shift occurring during that period of time. (p. 1) Figure 1.3 represents the disparity between the various racial identities' representation in the state's public universities and colleges versus the race group's presence within the state's total population. On this chart, the "disparity value" is best explained as the difference between the racial/ethnic identity's representation within the state and their representation within the state's higher education system. A positive percentage indicates that the community's proportion of the state population is less than their proportion of the college population. In essence, they are being underrepresented in the college system. A negative percentage indicates that a higher proportion of the post-secondary system is comprised of that race.

Figure 1.3

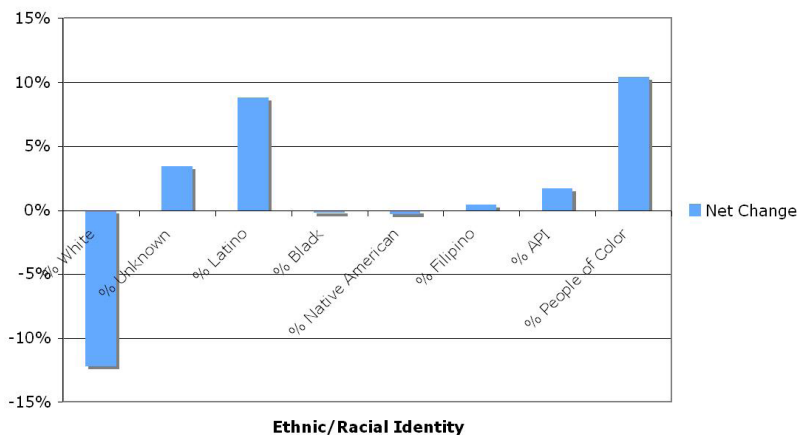
Disparity between "% of State Population" and "% Enrolled Students" by Race/Ethnicity



As Figure 1.3 depicts, the Latino community in California is still consistently underrepresented in the higher education system, despite this population's steady increase in size within the state's overall population. The API, Black, and Native American communities have not experienced enough substantial growth for any conclusions to be made about their relative representation in higher education in California. Figure 1.4, however, reflects an overall increase in the representation of people of color by 10% in the past thirteen years.

Figure 1.4

Change in Race Representation in Higher Ed



Recommendations

There is considerable room for growth in access to state systems for students of color. Studies show that a racially diverse campus is more likely to result in greater learning for all students involved. Additionally, students of color will be more successful on a campus in which they do not feel isolated from other members of their community. It is not enough for the state system to proportionally reflect the state's various racial communities. Greater efforts must be made to increase the enrollment rates as well as retention rates of students of color. This is a social responsibility as well as good legislative sense. According to Hoogeveen (2007),

The [American Council on Education] annual status report similarly states that, in fact, Hispanics in general have seen an increase in the percentage of students who left college without earning a degree, rising from 39.6% to 54.9%, when comparing students who enrolled in 1989 to those who enrolled in 1995. (p. 1)

Numerous strategies can be employed by colleges and universities in California to increase representation of students of color. Campus administrators can work to improve campus climate by supporting diversification initiatives. Programs and student services that support students of color, which already exist on many campuses, can collaborate with campus admissions and recruitment offices to promote diversity. At the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), for example, high school students from underserved and economically depressed areas of the state are brought to campus for outreach and recruitment. The author has given informa-

tional presentations at these events in order to promote interest in the UCSB experience for these students. As successful as these outreach efforts can be, the sheer size of the state precludes satisfactory diversity-enhancing recruitment strategies.

The onus to improve support for recruiters in admissions offices is on administrators. Only by hiring dedicated recruiters and allocating the resources to conduct outreach to ethnically diverse high school and community college students can the university establish and foster relationships with prospective students of color. An additional component of this factor of recruitment lies in the issue of the “face” of the university; simply put, increasing diversity of staff and faculty will affect the diversity of the student population (Hurtado et al., 1999). A more representative staff will not only be better equipped to support students of color, it will improve recruitment efforts and enhance retention of students of color.

There is a historical precedent for state involvement in admissions and enrollment rates, aside from Affirmative Action. In 2001, six years after Affirmative Action was rescinded, the University of California Board of Regents approved a new admissions policy that guaranteed admission to a UC campus to the top 12.5% of every graduating high school class in the state. According to the *Journal of Black Issues in Higher Education*, “University officials estimate that up to 36 percent of students eligible under the new policy would be Black, Hispanic or American Indian” (2001, p.1). If the governing bodies of the UC and CSU systems choose to recognize the importance of racial diversity on their campuses and the need for the public institutions to be representative of the state’s population, then they can continue to enact policies and practices that encourage post-secondary educational pursuits among the high school students that live in diverse cities and counties.

The experience of students of color in high school is also an issue. Programs and grants to create new (or improve existing) college preparatory opportunities, to stress the value and importance of education, and to educate first-generation students about educational access and opportunities will have long-term positive effects and should be strongly considered. Counseling around financial aid for higher education should be standard for all high school juniors and seniors. School counselors, teachers, and administrators have the capacity to exercise their own knowledge of higher education to encourage their students to pursue post-secondary education. Factors such as immigration, state economic climate, and public policy are major factors that impact the culture of campuses in the state. Regardless of the developments in the state and federal legislatures, campus administrators and student affairs personnel can, and should, continue to reach out to underrepresented populations within the state. Doing so ensures healthier campus communities, richer learning, and greater student success.

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