

PART ONE

INPUTS

CHAPTER ONE

CHARACTERISTICS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

A hundred years ago, eight and a half percent of American seventeen-year-olds had a high school degree, and two percent of twenty-three-year-olds had a college degree. Now, on any given weekday morning, you will find something like fifty million Americans, about a sixth of the population, sitting under the roof of a public-school building, and twenty million more are students or on the faculty or the staff of an institution of higher learning.

LEMANN, 2010

The current generation of college students not only is the largest ever but also has been called “the most racially and ethnically diverse in this nation’s history” (Debard, 2004, p. 33). Data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Snyder & Dillow, 2009) certainly support these claims. Snyder and Dillow report a 32 percent increase in total enrollment over just the last ten years. Between 1976 and 2008 all racial and ethnic groups saw enrollment increases, with the sharpest increases in the Hispanic and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander populations¹ (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani). These trends are expected to continue through the next decade, with growth in college enrollment by students from traditionally underrepresented racial

¹When referencing social identities and groups of students throughout the book we use contemporary, inclusive, and specific language whenever possible. As is often the case, however, when reviewing the work of other authors we use the language they have used. When reviewing U.S. census data, we use the federal government’s language.

and ethnic groups outpacing the growth by white students (Hussar & Bailey, 2009).

Data on college-going trends suggest student diversity also continues to increase in areas beyond race and ethnicity. This generation includes more openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, and more religiously diverse students, than ever before (Bryant, 2006; Lucozzi, 1998). Financial aid data suggest that more students from lower-income families are enrolling in postsecondary education. The College Board (2009) reported that over 6.1 million college students received a Pell Grant in 2008–2009, up from 3.9 million students in 2000 (King, 2003). Certainly the tough economic times of the late 1990s and early 2000s have had some effect on the number of Pell Grant recipients, but the trend toward higher college-going rates by lower-income students is undeniable.

This increased diversity of students has the potential to lead to increased learning for all, as students learn to manage cross-difference interactions and improve interpersonal relationships (Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, & Gurin, 2003; Milem, 2003), if postsecondary educators can effectively prepare students for such interactions (Allport, 1979). In this chapter we review enrollment trends for higher education in the United States, paying special attention to those trends that have resulted in an increasingly diverse student body. Further, the chapter details projections of college enrollments for different student groups that will, by all accounts, continue to diversify the student population into the next decade.

In the following sections, we have chosen to present groups of students as distinct, both to simplify presentation and for ease in comprehension. We readily acknowledge the inherent limitations of this approach as well. Current models of how students' various and multiple identity statuses affect their higher education outcomes and experiences reveal that a nuanced understanding of the intersection of various identities is needed (see Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Wherever possible in this chapter we highlight intersections of identities, as these intersections affect an understanding of who is coming to higher education, and we strongly encourage the reader to look for these intersections. Although it is true, for example, to say the college-going rates of Latino/a students have increased substantially in the last decade, acknowledging that much of this growth is driven by women (Latinas) is both more accurate and nuanced. For those readers who wish to explore more deeply the demographic trends presented here, we draw attention to the list of resources at the end of this chapter.

One final caution is necessary: when studying college enrollment data and rates, readers should be aware of the populations on which numbers

are being reported. Different studies use different population definitions, which is particularly important to know if the college-going rates of specific populations are being reported. For example, some studies report college enrollment data only for traditional-age college students (students ages eighteen to twenty-four). Data based on the U.S. Census Bureau numbers are likely to reflect this age range (Fry, 2011; Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007). We draw heavily from census data for the discussion in this chapter. Finally, readers should pay careful attention to whether enrollment figures reflect total enrollment (which includes undergraduate, graduate, and professional students) or just undergraduate enrollments. Throughout this chapter, we highlight the different populations reflected in the data we present.

Trends in College Enrollment

The United States has seen growth in the number of students enrolling in higher education. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that between 1998 and 2008 the number of students enrolled in higher education increased from 14.5 million to 19.1 million, a 32 percent increase (Snyder & Dillow, 2009). Undergraduate students made up the vast majority of enrollments: 16.3 million undergraduates were enrolled in 2008 (Aud, Hussar, et al., 2010). NCES projections suggest that the number of students enrolled in higher education will continue to increase over the next decade, reaching an estimated 20.6 million students in 2018 (Hussar & Bailey, 2009). Much of this growth is driven by populations of students who have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

Overall Undergraduate Enrollment

We turn our focus now to undergraduate student enrollments. Because undergraduate students constitute the vast majority of total postsecondary enrollment, the trends in undergraduate enrollment follow—and dictate—the trends mentioned briefly earlier. Undergraduate student enrollment has been increasing over the last forty years and is expected to continue (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). Between 2000 and 2008, for example, total undergraduate enrollment increased 24 percent. Overall undergraduate enrollment is expected to continue to increase over the next decade, growing to an estimated total of 19.5 million students in 2020.

Although all sectors of American higher education are experiencing growth in undergraduate enrollment, that growth is not evenly distributed (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). Private two- and four-year institutions saw a 44 percent increase in enrollment between 2000 and 2008, whereas public institution enrollment increased by 19 percent. Much of the growth in the private sector is driven by growth in enrollments at for-profit institutions. Although the *rate* of increase at private institutions is higher than the *rate* of increase at public institutions, it is important to note that public higher education still enrolls the larger number of undergraduate students (12.6 million students in 2008). Projections indicate that public institutions will continue to educate the majority of students for some time.

Enrollment growth at four-year institutions outpaces enrollment growth at two-year institutions (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). Since 2000, four-year institution enrollment has increased almost 31 percent to a total of 9.4 million undergraduate students in 2008. During the same period, enrollment in two-year institutions increased 19 percent, to a total 7 million students. Both the four-year and two-year sectors of higher education are expected to continue to grow over the next decade. By 2019, four-year institution enrollment is projected to increase 50 percent over 2000 enrollments to 10.8 million students. Similarly, two-year institution enrollment is projected to increase to 8.2 million students in 2019, a 39 percent increase over 2000 enrollments.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity

Enrollment trends related to the racial and ethnic diversity of college students in the United States show an increasing proportion of students of color on college campuses. The growth has been driven by both changes in the demographics of the U.S. population, which is becoming much less white, as well as changes in the college-going rates of several racial and ethnic groups, particularly Latino/a students (Pryor, Hurtado, Sáenz, Santos, & Korn, 2007; Snyder & Dillow, 2009). The distribution of racial groups across the United States is not geographically even, so many of the trends described in this section do not apply to all institutions equally. For example, the Hispanic population made up 16.3 percent of the total U.S. population in 2010 (up from 12.5 percent in 2000), but approximately 41 percent of Hispanic census respondents reside in the western United States, and only 9 percent reside in the Midwest (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, &

Albert, 2011). Growth in enrollment of Hispanic students, therefore, will be greater in institutions in western states.

The percentage of white students in higher education has decreased over the last several decades. In 1976 white students represented 82 percent of all college students; in 2008 white students made up 63 percent (see Table 1.1; Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). Although the overall percentage decreased, the total number of white students actually increased by 34 percent over the same period. Compare the growth in the number of white students to a 560 percent growth in the number of Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander students and a 496 percent growth in Hispanic students, and a picture of greater diversity begins to unfold. During the same period the total number of American Indian and Alaska Native college students increased by 151 percent, and the total number of African American college students increased by 141 percent. This growth continues; according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center (Fry, 2011), Hispanic student enrollment jumped 24 percent in a single year—from fall 2009 to fall 2010.

Students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds tend to enroll in different sectors within higher education, with students of color more highly represented at two-year and for-profit institutions (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). For example, in 2008 black students accounted for approximately 11 percent of all students in public four-year institutions, but 14 percent of students at public two-year institutions, and 27 percent of students at for-profit institutions. White students, however, are more likely to attend four-year, nonprofit, and private institutions. White students make up almost 69 percent of students at private, nonprofit institutions; only 59 percent of students at public two-year institutions; and 52 percent of students at for-profit institutions.

Another way to compare enrollment rates at two- and four-year institutions is to look at the proportion of a group enrolled at each type. Examining enrollment in this way reveals that Hispanic students were the most likely group of students to attend a two-year institution (Fry, 2011). A 2011 report by the Pew Hispanic Center, which focused exclusively on younger students ages eighteen to twenty-four, reported that over 44 percent of all Hispanic students in the United States who fell within that age group in 2010 were enrolled in two-year institutions. Approximately 35 percent of black students in the same age group were enrolled in two-year institutions. Asian American students were the least likely to be enrolled in two-year institutions, with 25 percent. Slightly over 27 percent

TABLE 1.1 ENROLLMENT BY SEX AND RACE

	1976		2000		2008		Percentage Change, 1976 to 2008
	Total Enrollment	Percentage of Enrollment	Total Enrollment	Percentage of Enrollment	Total Enrollment	Percentage of Enrollment	
<i>Total Undergraduates</i>	9,418,970	100.0%	13,155,393	100.0%	16,345,738	100.0%	73.54%
<i>Women</i>	4,521,106	48.0%	7,380,175	56.1%	9,300,725	56.9%	105.72%
<i>Men</i>	4,897,864	52.0%	5,775,218	43.9%	7,045,013	43.1%	43.84%
<i>African American and Black</i>	943,355	10.0%	1,548,893	11.8%	2,269,284	13.9%	140.55%
<i>American Indian and Alaska Native</i>	69,729	0.7%	138,506	1.1%	175,552	1.1%	151.76%
<i>Asian Pacific Islander</i>	169,291	1.8%	845,545	6.4%	1,117,865	6.8%	560.32%
<i>Hispanic</i>	352,893	3.7%	1,351,025	10.3%	2,103,524	12.9%	496.08%
<i>White</i>	7,740,485	82.2%	8,983,455	68.3%	10,339,216	63.3%	33.57%

Source: Adapted from Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010.

of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-old white students were enrolled in two-year institutions in 2010.

American Indian and Alaska Native students are a smaller, and often overlooked, population in U.S. higher education. In 2006 American Indians and Alaska Natives accounted for approximately 1.5 percent of the total U.S. population, concentrated primarily in the western United States (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). That same year, American Indian and Alaska Native students made up less than 1 percent of all students in U.S. higher education (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill). Although this underrepresentation is problematic, trend data suggest that the total enrollment of American Indian and Alaska Native students has doubled since 1977.

Finally, a growing number of college students identify as multiracial (Shang, 2008). Jaschik (2006), citing findings from the 2000 Census—the first year individuals were allowed to check more than one box on the demographic question about race—reported that about 40 percent of the 6.8 million people who identified as multiracial were under the age of eighteen. Data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, which has been tracking the number of multiracial students for over three decades, reported consistent growth in the percentage of college students who identify as multiracial (Pryor et al., 2007). In 1971, for example, 1.3 percent of college students identified as multiracial; in 2006, 7.3 percent identified as such. Coupled with the census data reported by Jaschik, these trends suggest that the percentage of multiracial college students will continue to grow.

International Students

An emphasis on globalization in higher education, and the global aftermath of the terrorist attacks in 2001, has increased attention on international students studying in the United States and U.S. students studying abroad. The percentage, but not the total number, of international students within the total population of U.S. students declined in the years immediately following September 11, 2001. Almost a decade after the terrorist attacks, international student enrollment in U.S. institutions has begun to increase again (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). The downturn after 9/11 notwithstanding, trend data suggest that international student enrollment in U.S. institutions has increased from about 1.6 percent of total students in 1970 to slightly over 3.4 percent of students in 2008. International student enrollment is not evenly distributed across graduate

and undergraduate students, however. The majority of international students enrolled in higher education in the United States are enrolled in graduate programs; international students make up approximately 10.5 percent of all U.S. graduate students (Aud, Hussar, et al., 2010; Planty et al., 2009). By contrast, international students make up only 1.6 percent of undergraduates.

The majority of international students studying at U.S. institutions come from six countries, with India, China, and South Korea accounting for about 40 percent of all international students in the United States (Planty et al., 2009). Students from India, China, and South Korea represent 15, 13, and 11 percent of international students, respectively. Japan, the fourth-most-represented country among international students, accounts for only 5 percent of students.

Sex Differences in Higher Education

Women became the majority of all students in American higher education in 1979, when they accounted for approximately 51 percent of all students (Snyder & Dillow, 2009), and have been a “stable majority” ever since (Pryor et al., 2007, p. 4). By 2008, the percentage of women students had increased to 57 percent of the total undergraduate population, although this percentage was down from a high of 57.4 percent in 2004 (Aud, Hussar, et al., 2010). As is the case for almost all groups we have examined, the total number of women students has been generally increasing. For example, there were 7.4 million undergraduate women enrolled in higher education institutions in 2000; in 2008 the total number of women had increased to over 9.3 million.

Obviously, because the proportion of women represented among undergraduate students has increased, the proportion of men had to have decreased over the last decades. Based on trends of actual enrollment patterns over the last forty years (Freeman, 2004; Peter & Horn, 2005), it is reasonable to expect that total enrollment for women, and perhaps proportional representation of women undergraduates, will increase. This prediction has raised concerns among scholars and popular media about the condition of education for boys and men in the United States (Kellom, 2004; Lamport & Bulgin, 2010). Although the total number of men enrolling in higher education in the United States continues to increase (Freeman, 2004; Hussar & Bailey, 2009), the rate of increase has been considerably lower than that of women. From 2000 to 2009, for example, the undergraduate population of men grew about 31 percent, whereas the

growth for women undergraduates was closer to 35 percent (Aud, Hussar, et al., 2010). Although this discrepancy could be an artifact of women, particularly Latinas (Peter & Horn, 2005), catching up, the call for greater attention to men's achievement in higher education is well heeded.

LGBT Students in Higher Education

Although data tracking the enrollment of openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) college students are difficult to find, many higher education professionals agree that more students are arriving on college campuses already open about their sexuality and gender expression (see, for example, Beemyn, 2005). Estimates of the proportion of college students who identify as LGBT vary widely, and only one national survey—the Harvard College Alcohol Study (HCAS) (Wechsler, 2005)—currently asks a question about sexuality. A recent national study surveyed transgender individuals (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011) but does not make any inferences about transgender college students. Without more information specifically about LGBT college students, current understanding presented in this subsection must be viewed cautiously; these are, at best, estimates.

Part of the problem with tracking students by sexual orientation is definitional; researchers struggle to find ways to operationalize the definitions associated with sexual identity (Black, Gates, Sanders, & Taylor, 2000). Many surveys rely on questions about sexual behavior. The HCAS survey, for example, asks respondents if they have ever engaged in same-sex sexual behavior. Just because a student has engaged in same-sex sexual behavior does not mean that the student is, or would identify as, lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Dilley, 2005). Carpenter (2009), in reporting data from HCAS, correctly discusses “same-sex behaving” (p. 697) men and women, rather than labeling these individuals as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. This critique notwithstanding, the data coming from HCAS are the best currently available.

Using the data from HCAS, Carpenter (2009) reported that 1,800 of the 15,000 college student respondents to this survey (12 percent) over the course of four years indicated that they had previously engaged in same-sex sexual behavior. In a study that allowed students to self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, however, Gonyea and Moore (2007) reported that only about 6 percent of respondents identified as such. Although these two studies allow some understanding of the proportion of LGB and transgender students on college campuses, they also

highlight some of the methodological and definitional issues involved in identifying these students.

Because HCAS was administered three times between 1997 and 2001, the data also provide some insight into enrollment trends for LBG students. The proportion of “same-sex behaving men” increased from 3.3 percent in 1997 to 4.7 percent in 2001. Similarly, the proportion of “same-sex behaving women” increased from 3.7 in 1997 to 6.2 percent in 2001. These percentages appear to align with findings from other surveys that use similar definitions (Black et al., 2000). Again, however, because it is likely that the proportion of “same-sex behaving” students is different from the proportion of students who identify as LGB, these trend data must be understood cautiously and interpreted narrowly.

Although researchers often conflate lesbian, gay, and bisexual with transgender, it is important to note the distinctions between sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression. We discuss these distinctions in more detail in Chapter Seven. Briefly, sexuality relates to whom one finds physically or sexually attractive. Gender identity and gender expression relate to how one identifies and presents oneself in terms of masculinity and femininity (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). In a national study of the climate for LGBT students in higher education, Rankin and her colleagues (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010) allowed respondents to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or straight (sexual identity), but also as men, women, transmasculine, or transfeminine (gender identity). Respondents also presented themselves as masculine, feminine, or other (gender expression). Although the within-sample differences these researchers reported provide some insight into the diversity within the LGBT community, the higher education community still has little understanding of the number of LGBT-identified students.

Family Income Differences Among College Students

The U.S. higher education student population is becoming more bifurcated when it comes to family income, as the median parental income of incoming first-year students continues to rise (Pryor et al., 2007) at the same time as financial aid, and student loans in particular, allow students from lower-income families to attend college at higher rates (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2010; Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Whitmore, 2006). Unfortunately, an enrollment gap still exists for lower-income students, even after accounting for academic achievement (Fox, Connolly, & Snyder, 2005). Academically talented students from lower-income families are less

likely to attend college than equally talented peers from higher-income families.

In general, students at four-year colleges and universities appear to come from families with higher annual incomes than those of community college students (Pryor et al., 2007), even as the total number and percentage of students receiving financial aid at all institutional types continues to increase (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2010). Over three-quarters of undergraduate students at four-year institutions received some form of financial aid in 2007, although these numbers must be understood in relation to the general health of the economy at the time. As one might expect, the percentage was highest at the highest-cost institutions—private, nonprofit four-year institutions (85.3 percent). The percentage was lowest at the public two-year institutions (61.2 percent), which makes some sense given that these institutions have the lowest tuition, but is surprising given the high proportion of lower-income students who attend such institutions (Provasnik & Planty, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Slightly under three-quarters of undergraduate students worked at least part-time in 2008; however, the relationship between income level and work might not be as most observers would assume (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Students from the lowest income levels did not report working the most; in fact, students from middle income levels were most likely to work and to work more hours than students from other income levels. On the one hand, about 68 percent of students from the lowest quartile of family incomes reported working, with about 20 percent working full-time. On the other hand, 70 percent of students in the middle two quartiles of income reported working, with 36 percent working full-time. The effects of limited amounts of need-based financial aid are likely the reason for these counterintuitive relationships.

As one might expect, students' hours worked per week varied based on the type of institution attended; approximately 22 percent of students attending four-year institutions worked full-time (thirty-five hours or more a week), whereas 42 percent of students attending public two-year institutions worked full-time. Similar variance in hours worked is found when the data are examined by race. With the exception of Asian American students, the total percentage of students who worked (full- or part-time) did not vary much by race or ethnicity; approximately 64 percent of Asian American students reported working in 2008 compared to 73 to 75 percent of other racial and ethnic groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). A greater percentage of African American students, however, worked full-time (39 percent) in relation to other racial and ethnic groups.

Adult Students

There is little agreement within higher education research about how to define “adult students.” Enrollment trends indicate that the assumption of an eighteen- to twenty-two-year-old college student is anachronistic (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Horn & Carroll, 1996); definitional ambiguity means that a clear picture of enrollment trends for adult learners is difficult to find. Donaldson and Townsend, for example, present widely varying enrollment figures depending on whether “adult” is defined as “older than twenty-four” or “older than twenty-five.” Further, higher education researchers have paid little attention to the experiences of adult learners within higher education, as is the case with many nonmajority populations (Donaldson & Townsend; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Horn and Carroll (1996), using a very broad definition of adult students as “older than typical” (p. 6) that included some students who might not otherwise have been defined as adult learners, estimated that “older than typical” students constituted about 60 percent of undergraduate students in 1992, up from 54 percent in 1979. Their definition includes students who delayed enrollment after high school for at least two years. Twenty-year-old first-year students were included in these numbers, even though these students fall within the age range for “traditional-age” college students.

The National Center for Education Statistics uses a more conservative definition of adult learners—students twenty-five years of age or older. Using this definition, adult learners totaled approximately seven million students in 2007 (Hussar & Bailey, 2009). Hussar and Bailey estimated a 25 percent enrollment increase for students ages twenty-five to thirty-four, and a 12 percent increase for students over the age of thirty-five. Snyder and Dillow (2009) estimated that adult learners will constitute about 40 percent of undergraduate enrollment in 2019.

Adult learners are often included in discussions of other “nontraditional students,” including students who are financially independent, are parents themselves, or are married. Unfortunately, these other nontraditional characteristics are often used euphemistically in lieu of “at-risk” categories (Choy, 2002; Horn & Carroll, 1996). Given the increasing number of adult learners enrolling in higher education, especially with the increases in returning student veterans discussed in the next subsection, higher education must find ways to address the needs of this population and decrease the risk that they will leave college before achieving their goals.

Returning Student Veterans

The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (commonly known as the GI Bill) was one of the most influential pieces of higher education legislation of its time. Bennett (1966) reported, for example, that by 1946—only two years after the implementation of the GI Bill—over 70 percent of all male college students were veterans, taking advantage of the benefits of the bill. With the number of college-age men and women currently serving the military, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008—the Post-9/11 GI Bill—promises to have a similarly powerful influence. The Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Yellow Ribbon Campus Campaign, which allows institutions of higher education to waive up to half the cost of attending that is not covered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, provide powerful incentives for veterans returning from service to enroll in higher education.

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) received over twenty-five thousand applications for benefits through the Post-9/11 GI Bill program within two weeks of opening the application process in 2009 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009a), portending the future demand for higher education among returning student veterans. Kotok (2008) estimated, based on data released from the VA, that by 2007 more than 270,000 post-9/11 combat veterans had claimed education benefits through the Post-9/11 GI Bill and were applying those toward degree programs. By September 2009, the VA had ruled over 200,000 applicants eligible for benefits and provided over \$50 million to returning veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009b).

Enrollment patterns of student veterans will be unpredictable (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Although a significant number of young adults graduate from high school, enlist in the armed services, and enroll in college on the completion of their duty, contemporary military and homeland security strategies mean this linear trajectory may not be true for most student veterans. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) noted that the heavy reliance on National Guard and reserve personnel for armed conflicts requires many current college students to interrupt their enrollment for a period of time to deploy. Many returning student veterans, therefore, are likely to be reentering college after a sudden disruption, hoping to begin approximately where they left off prior to deployment. This enrollment-to-service-to-enrollment pattern adds to the complex transition issues already faced by student veterans (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). As of 2009, only 22 percent of those colleges and universities with veteran

services had developed expedited reenrollment processes for returning veterans (Cook, Young, & Associates, 2009).

Student veterans will require support in multiple forms as they transition into higher education (Cook et al., 2009). As stated previously, sudden disruptions in enrollment will require colleges and universities to negotiate ways to support the successful return of current students, with minimal disruption to their academic progress, at the same time as they prepare for an influx of new students who are returning veterans. Student veterans often perceive higher education environments as hostile and antimilitary (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). Further, student veterans, particularly those who have seen combat and those who are closer to traditional college age, are at higher risk for stress-related illnesses (Seal, Bertenthal, Miner, Saunak, & Marmar, 2007). Similarly, student veterans are faced with role incongruities as they renegotiate a student identity while often maintaining a soldier identity (which can be a more acute issue if the student is in the National Guard or reserves and faces the possibility of redeployment) (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students are difficult to define and difficult to count, but they remain a large and important segment of the undergraduate college student population in the United States (Davis, 2010). There is little clear consensus on what proportion of college students constitutes first-generation students, although many researchers point to a National Center for Education Statistics report (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) finding that 43.4 percent of first-year students in 1998 held first-generation status. Davis, in his recent book on first-generation college students, suggested the 43.4 percent estimation might actually be low. Davis used a secondary calculation of data presented by Choy (2001) to estimate that more than half of all first-year students in 1992 were first-generation students.

As with some other groups discussed in this chapter, the difficulty in counting first-generation students relates to a difficulty in defining what it means to be a first-generation student. The most common and accepted definition appears to be a student for whom neither parent (or guardian) possesses a four-year degree (Davis, 2010), but there is not widespread consensus. Inkelas and her colleagues (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007), for example, defined first-generation students as those “for whom both parents or guardians have a high school education or less and did

not begin a postsecondary degree” (p. 404). This definition is more conservative than Davis’s definition and would exclude students whose parents began a postsecondary degree regardless of whether they finished (a group Davis’s definition would include). The National Center for Education Statistics (for example, Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) uses three categories to classify students, providing a compromise for the discrepancy just noted: (1) first-generation students, (2) students whose parent or parents have some postsecondary education, and (3) students whose parent or parents have at least a four-year degree (Davis, 2010).

Regardless of the definition used, higher education researchers generally understand that enrollment patterns for first-generation students and the experiences they have once enrolled in higher education are different from those of non-first-generation students. First-generation students also are much more likely to begin their higher education at a two-year institution (Davis, 2010). They are also much more likely to experience difficulty in transitioning to college (Inkelas et al., 2007), and much less likely to engage in activities believed to support academic success and persistence (such as interacting with faculty, studying, and attending workshops) (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

Students with Disabilities and Mental Health Concerns

There is a widely held belief that the proportion of students with disabilities and mental health issues on college campuses is growing. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and increased sensitivity to issues of access have certainly made college attendance a greater possibility for more students who identify as having a disability, although the reality of greater proportions of students with disabilities attending college varies by type of disability. Evans and DeVita (in press) found that, much like many of the groups discussed in this chapter, students with disabilities represent a heterogeneous group. Not only do students with disabilities identify within each of the racial, ethnic, sexuality, and socioeconomic groups discussed earlier but also the differences in disabilities experienced by these students add to the diversity within this student group. Students with physical disabilities (for example, mobility impairments) are likely to be the most recognizable for student affairs and higher education professionals, but students with less visible or invisible disabilities, such as learning disabilities and mental health issues, make up this group as well.

According to the United States Department of Education (Snyder & Dillow, 2011), 11 percent of undergraduates in 2007 reported having a disability. This number was the same as the percentage of students reporting similar disabilities in 2003, indicating that this population of students is growing at a rate similar to the rate of total undergraduate population growth. The Department of Education definition is, however, limited to students who report learning disabilities or one of several physical disabilities (such as deafness or mobility impairments). Looking deeper into these statistics reveals that certain groups of students are more likely to report having a disability than other groups of students. Specifically, white students, older students, and student veterans are overrepresented among students with disabilities, compared to their representation in the overall undergraduate student population.

Although the Department of Education report (Snyder & Dillow, 2011) provided an overview of students with disabilities on college campuses, the narrow definition excludes an important category of students: students with mental health concerns. It is not uncommon to hear higher education professionals discussing the “increase” in the number of students with mental health issues on college campuses, often using an increased use of college counseling services as evidence for such an assertion. No longitudinal research exists to support this claim. Recently, however, the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH, 2012) was established to begin tracking the use of and outcomes associated with college counseling centers.

CCMH, since its inception in 2008, has collected standardized data from approximately 140 college counseling centers. Although it is premature to make judgments about trends in college student mental health, it will eventually be possible to do so. For now, the CCMH data provide a snapshot of mental health issues on campus. In the baseline year of 2008, 19 percent of students seeking mental health counseling at a campus facility had received counseling prior to enrolling in college (CCMH, 2012). Thirty-two percent of students reported serious thoughts of suicide, but the most prevalent issues presented by students included social anxiety and academic distress.

Although research related to the “increasing” numbers of students with disabilities is not available, readily accessible demographic data demonstrate that higher education professionals must be sensitive to and understand the issues of this diverse group of students. Partially in response to this need, helping skills have been identified as an essential competency of student affairs professionals (American College Personnel Association

& National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2010; Reynolds, 2009).

Attitudes and Beliefs of Current College Students

The previous section focused on sociodemographic characteristics of college students. We turn now to the attitudes and values of today's college students. Obviously, students do not enter college as "blank slates"; they come with attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and motivations that influence how they experience college. Much has been made of the belief that this generation of college students is different from any generation that has come before it. Howe and Strauss (2000, 2003), coining the term *Millennial Generation*, have asserted that students of this generation were treated as special and sheltered by their parents; have a sense of confidence in their interactions with authority; are conventional, team-oriented, and achievement-oriented; and experience a great deal of pressure to succeed. These characteristics combine to give the current generation of traditional-age college students (those born between 1980 and 2002) a set of shared values that are very different from those of the generation that immediately preceded them (those born between 1965 and 1980) (Debard, 2004).

Perhaps the most comprehensive longitudinal database of trends in students' attitudes and beliefs is housed at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute: the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). Since 1966, UCLA researchers have administered the CIRP instruments to incoming first-year students on thousands of college and university campuses (Pryor et al., 2007). The CIRP Freshman Survey gathers data on students' characteristics, attitudes, values, and behaviors. The consistent, longitudinal approach to this data collection allows for a comprehensive understanding of trends over time. In recognition of the fortieth anniversary of the CIRP project, Pryor and his colleagues (2007) compiled these trends into a monograph titled *The American Freshman: Forty Year Trends, 1966–2006*. This section highlights some of those findings and explores more deeply the trends identified by the UCLA researchers.

Religion and Spirituality

Even a cursory review of published literature in higher education reveals increasing attention being paid to students' spirituality and spiritual development as outcomes of college, outcomes that many researchers believe

have been neglected (see, for example, Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). Descriptive data published by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute demonstrates that college students may be refocusing on issues of spirituality at the start of the twenty-first century (Pryor et al., 2007). Although some of the research on students' spiritual development was completed prior to 9/11 (Jablonski, 2001), researchers point to the existential crises arising out of the terrorist attacks as well as general characteristics of Millennial Generation college students as precipitators of a renewed emphasis on spirituality (Braskamp, 2007; Nash & Murray, 2010; Parks, 2011).

Higher education scholars draw important distinctions between spirituality and religion that members of the general public, who may use these terms interchangeably, may not recognize. Astin and his colleagues (2011) summarized the scholarly difference between these two concepts. *Religion*, according to these authors, involves "adherence to a set of faith-based beliefs (and related practices) concerning both the origins of the world and the nature of the entity" (p. 5) believed to have created the world. Religion involves membership in a like-minded community, drawn together by shared doctrinal beliefs. Spirituality, by contrast, is not bound by adherence to doctrine and is conceived of, in the higher education literature, as *bigger* than religion. *Spirituality* is the term often used to refer to students' search for meaning in life (Braskamp, 2007). According to Astin and his colleagues (2011), spirituality involves "the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here" (p. 4). Similarly, Nash and Murray (2010) characterized spirituality as the search for purpose in life and have, along with Dalton (2001), linked the search for spiritual purpose to the search for vocational purpose among college students.

In 2003 researchers at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute implemented a seven-year study of how the college experience affects students' spiritual development (Spirituality in Higher Education, 2010). The findings, reported in a 2011 book by Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, indicated that engagement with religious institutions and practices among college students has decreased, whereas a search for spiritual meaning has increased. Of particular note, Astin and his colleagues found that students' inclination to engage in a spiritual quest, defined as actively searching for meaning and purpose in life, grows significantly during the college years.

The findings of the Spirituality in Higher Education (2010) study are supported by trends documented by UCLA's CIRP project (Pryor et al.,

2007). In reviewing data from a forty-year period, Pryor and his colleagues noted that the high mark for religion and spirituality among college students was the late 1960s, when the first-year student survey began. Over 80 percent of all entering first-year college students between 1967 and 1970 reported that developing a meaningful philosophy of life was an essential or very important outcome of college; in 2005 only about 46 percent of entering first-year students placed the same importance on developing a meaningful philosophy—although we must note that the 46 percent finding in 2005 is up from the findings in the 1970s and 1980s. The recent upswing in students' emphasis on developing a meaningful philosophy, combined with findings of other spirituality-related CIRP items, provides empirical support for the belief that college students in the twenty-first century are returning to a quest for spirituality.

The increasing search for spirituality by college students does not mean that students are not also engaging with religion. Although Astin and colleagues (2011) reported that religious engagement decreased over the course of their study, it is important to note that initial data were collected a few semesters after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It is conceivable that religious activities were high following 9/11, inflating the baseline measure in this study; a decline in religious activities over time seems logical and predictable. The reported time spent in prayer or meditation by first-year college students has remained relatively stable since the question was first asked in 1995 (Pryor et al., 2007), although the proportion of students reporting no time spent in prayer or meditation increased slightly between 2003 and 2005.

Research conducted prior to 9/11 highlighted active engagement in formal religious activities among college students (Cawthon & Jones, 2004; Hill, 2009). Hill pointed out that although religious participation declines during college, the decline cannot be attributed directly to college attendance. Further, Hill found that college graduates participate in more religious activities than do individuals who did not attend or did not complete college.

Empirical research findings related to college students' search for spiritual meaning and religious participation are, at best, mixed and are certainly related to contemporary events. General trends indicate a decreased emphasis on religious engagement, with a concomitant overall increase in spirituality. This general trend is supported by much of the contemporary research on students' spirituality (Astin et al., 2011; Nash & Murray, 2010). It is also tempered by findings that the decrease in religious involvement seen during college (Hill, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini,

2005) might be short-lived. Certainly, the importance of spirituality, whether coupled with religious practices or not, during the lives of traditional-age college students is supported by student development theories that suggest a search for meaning occurs normally during this stage of life (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Jablonski, 2001; Parks, 2011). Spirituality and religion are likely to remain important topics for college students and those of us who study them for some time to come.

Political Attitudes

College students in 1990 complained, “Our generation hasn’t had any defining moment to really galvanize us” (Levine & Cureton, 1998, p. 138). Levine and Cureton painted a picture of college students in the 1990s who focused their political activism on local, campus issues related to financing higher education, multiculturalism and diversity education, and administrative policies that directly affected their lives. Of course, 9/11 provided the current generation with a “defining moment,” but did it change the focus of their political involvement? Two wars, the constant threat of international terrorism, and an economic recession certainly offer reasons to look beyond local issues.

In an update of Levine and Cureton’s 1998 study, Levine and Dean (2012) found that current students were still acting on local issues but had begun to contextualize these issues more broadly. Levine and Dean used the “Occupy Movement” as an example of this phenomenon. Students engaged in the Occupy Movement were generally acting on issues of immediate concern to them (for example, cost of college and financial aid), but discussed these issues as part of the larger economy (for example, tax reform and income inequity).

CIRP trend data (Pryor et al., 2007) indicate that the current generation of college students is more politically polarized than any other in the past thirty years. Increasing percentages of incoming first-year students indicate that they are either “conservative/far right” or “liberal/far left” rather than “middle of the road” (p. 28) politically, although college students do not seem to adhere to any political ideology dogmatically. According to Pryor and his colleagues, “Conservative/far right and liberal/far left students are more polarized on abortion and gay rights, and less polarized on issues to do with the use of affirmative action in college admissions and the legalization of marijuana” (p. 31). Although there has been a slight decline in the number of students self-reporting as liberal since the election of President Barack Obama (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo,

Palucki Blake, & Tran, 2009), longer-term trends suggest that political polarization will be a constant on college campuses for some time to come.

Attitudes Toward and Experiences with Civic Engagement

Beliefs about the importance of community service are a subsection of political beliefs that appear to transcend party affiliation or ideology. Community service and service learning have also become pedagogical tools for educators hoping to instill civic and democratic values in college students (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Kuh, 2008). Although Millennial Generation students have been criticized as being self-absorbed (Levine & Cureton, 1998), data suggest that these students both value community engagement and actively participate in their communities. Dey and Associates (2009) found that 93 percent of students responding to a survey supported the notion that “contributing to a larger community should be a major focus” (p. 3) of a college education. This belief strengthens as students progress through their education, with seniors indicating stronger support for this assertion than first-year students. Findings from CIRP data support the conclusions of Dey and Associates: over the last two decades the percentage of first-year students indicating that there was a very good chance they would engage in volunteer work during college increased from 17 percent to 31 percent (Pryor et al., 2009).

Attitudes Toward and Experiences with Diversity

College has long been assumed to be a liberalizing force when it comes to attitudes about diversity (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Pascarella and Terenzini have reported that attending higher education appears to move students toward more progressive attitudes and beliefs about gender roles, race and ethnicity, and homosexuality (see Chapter Nine for more detailed analysis of the effects of college on students). Recent trend data also suggest that students are entering college with what would be considered more liberal attitudes toward these topics, although this phenomenon does not apply to all issues (Pryor et al., 2007).

In general, contemporary college students are less likely than previous students to believe that racial discrimination is a major problem in the United States (Pryor et al., 2007). Compared to the early 1990s, when about 12 percent of incoming students believed that racial discrimination was no longer a problem, almost 20 percent of students indicated that racial discrimination was no longer a problem in 2005 and 2006. On a

related trend, fewer students indicate that helping to promote racial understanding is an essential or very important goal of a college education. In 2006, for example, only 34 percent of students reported that promoting racial understanding was an essential or important goal, a slight uptick from a low of 29.7 percent in 2004, but certainly on a generally lower trend since the early 1990s.

The finding that current students are less likely than students from previous generations to believe that racial discrimination is a major problem is difficult to interpret with any degree of certainty. It very well could be, as some might argue, that this finding indicates a lack of sensitivity to an ongoing problem in society. Levine and Dean (2012) concluded, however, that the multicultural divide between students that was so prevalent in the 1990s (Levine & Cureton, 1998) has begun to close. Although Levine and Dean did concede that current students lack an understanding of the historical context of racial issues in the United States and still engage in voluntary segregation on campuses, these authors found that students' beliefs and attitudes are less polarized by racial identity and that students are more likely to engage across racial and ethnic differences.

Trend data suggest that college students are becoming increasingly more progressive in their attitudes about lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues (Pryor et al., 2007). In 2006, 25.6 percent of students indicated it was important to have laws limiting same-sex relationships, compared to over 50 percent of students in 1986 and 1987. Similarly, between 1996 and 2006 the proportion of college students who believed that same-sex couples should have the right to legally marry increased from 50.9 percent to 61.2 percent. These trends suggest that college students are becoming more open and accepting of LGB people, although a closer look at the data reveals some clear trends related to gender. Men were more likely to believe that it was important to have laws prohibiting same-sex relationships (33.4 percent in 2006) and less likely to believe that same-sex couples should have the right to marry (52.9 percent in 2006) than were women (19.3 percent and 67.9 percent in 2006, respectively).

Conclusion

Students entering colleges and universities in the early years of the twenty-first century are certainly “the most racially and ethnically diverse in this nation’s history” (Debard, 2004, p. 33). Enrollment trends suggest that

students are diverse in manifold sociodemographic categories, including sex, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. Students also bring with them experiences, attitudes, and beliefs that further complicate the landscape of higher education. The recent military actions have increased, and will continue to increase, the number of student veterans attending colleges and universities. Further, the political polarization and subsequent discord of the larger society is evident on U.S. campuses. On a positive note, students enter colleges and universities today more committed than ever to understanding diversity (Levine & Dean, 2012) and engaging with the larger society through voluntary service (Dey & Associates, 2009).

We leave this chapter with a reminder of the caution with which we began: treating a student as a product of a single identity group, without a complex understanding of how multiple identity groups intersect and individual differences manifest themselves to influence students' experiences, is dangerous and ill-advised. This caveat does not mean that the information reported in this chapter, separated as it was for ease of reading and comprehension, is not useful to higher education professionals. As we continue through this text, exploring how the student "inputs" presented in this chapter affect the "environments" and ultimately the "outcomes" of college, readers will begin to see how understanding the sociodemographic characteristics and attitudes and beliefs of college students can inform policies and practices.

Points of Discussion

Implications for Students

- What are the implications of changing demographics for students' experiences and learning during college?
- How does the location of a higher education institution affect the relationship between changing demographic characteristics and student experiences?

Implications for Institutions

- How do institutions meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body? What are the possible financial implications of providing the necessary support services?
- What role should institutions of higher education have in influencing the sociopolitical attitudes of college students?

- Given that with greater diversity comes the potential for greater conflict, what responsibilities do institutions have to avoid possible conflicts or facilitate learning during conflict? How might higher education administrators do this?

Implications for Policy and National Discourse

- What are the policy implications (positive and negative) of allowing students to self-identify and check all boxes that apply on survey items related to race and ethnicity?
- What is the role of federal and state governments in supporting the educational pursuits of returning student veterans?
- Is it appropriate to ask students to report sexual identity on federal forms or on institutional application materials? What are the possible implications of doing so?

Learning Activity

- Identify an institution you would like to explore; it can be one you attended, your current institution, or one at which you hope to work someday. Explore the data concerning student characteristics available on the institutional Web site. Think about how the institution displays this information and what questions are left unanswered by these available data. Using the information available in this chapter and data from other Web sites, determine how well the institution's student population represents the general population of the region in regard to demographic characteristics important to you.

Resources Related to Student Demographics

Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (www.heri.ucla.edu/index.php)

Specific reports and projects of the Higher Education Research Institute at <http://gseis.ucla.edu/heri/publications-brp.php> include

- *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2011* (brief available free; full document available at a cost; www.heri.ucla.edu/tfsPublications.php)

- Your First College Year (full report of 2009 findings and summary of 2011 findings available free of charge; www.heri.ucla.edu/yfcyPublications.php)
- Spirituality in Higher Education (www.spirituality.ucla.edu/)

National Center for Education Statistics (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)

Specific reports and projects of the National Center for Education Statistics include

- *Digest of Education Statistics 2009* (<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/>)
- *Projection of Education Statistics to 2018* (<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/projections/projections2018/>)
- Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>)

Pew Hispanic Center (www.pewhispanic.org)

The Pew Hispanic Center is a project of the Pew Research Center (<http://pewresearch.org>). According to its Web site, the Pew Hispanic Center is designed “to improve understanding of the U.S. Hispanic population and to chronicle Latinos’ growing impact on the nation. The Center conducts social science research, including economic, demographic and public opinion studies.” Much of the research presented by the Pew Hispanic Center focuses on college-going trends within the Hispanic population.