

Diversity in Higher Education

The representation of diversity on college campuses continues to be a relevant topic even as campuses are becoming more diversified. For example, women are now 24.7% more likely than men to attend college and there have been steady increases in enrollment from minority populations such as Hispanics and African Americans. Dickinson's enrollment rates reflect these statistics. According to the latest 2020 enrollment report, 60% of students are women and 25% are students of color. These numbers have increased from the last four years, and this suggests that the number will continue to increase.

More efforts are in play to even the playing field to attract students from non-traditional backgrounds. There are non-profit organizations that guide high-achieving minority students through the college process. Additionally, there are projects and reform recommendations to equalize the process for students. For example, "Turning the Tide," a coalition of elite colleges, released a report that provides a list of recommendations for evaluating college admissions. In this report, they highlight that admissions officers should consider community engagement, the familial responsibilities of students, and avoid the over-coaching of applications. A popular option is to make college admissions test-optional, an approach Dickinson has adopted since 1994. During the pandemic, more colleges and universities also became test optional, and applications boomed. Colleges and universities, in turn, became more selective and acceptance rates decreased.

Despite these ideas and efforts, race, class, and financial background, among other factors, impact who is represented on college campuses. A recent example is the college admissions scandal of 2019 involving fake athletic scholarships, and it has reignited the conversation about how legacy status, wealth and privilege affect who is represented on campus. Lack of access to resources and counseling remain a problem for many first generation and low-income students from under-funded high schools. And while college enrollment has increased overall, systemic and historical barriers remain for many students.

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Information gathered from: "History of College Education," Britannica (ProCon.org); "College Enrollment & Student Demographic Statistics," Education Data Initiative (educationdata.org); Annika Neklason's "The History of Privilege in Elite-College Admissions" in The Atlantic, March 18, 2019; Matt Feeney's "The Abiding Scandal of College Admissions" in The Chronicle, April 16, 2021; "Enrollment Data," Dickinson College (dickinson.edu); Melissa Korn and Jennifer Levitz's Unacceptable: Privilege, Deceit and the Making of the College Admissions Scandal (Penguin Publishing Group, 2020); Jared Furuta's "Rationalization and Student/School Personhood in U.S. College Admissions: The Rise of Test-Optional Policies, 1987 to 2015" in Sociology of Education, vol. 90, no. 3, 2017; Rhonda Vonshay Sharpe and Omari H. Swintons's "Education, Diversity in Higher" in Encyclopedia of Race and Racism, Vol. 2 2nd ed, (Gale, 2013).