

Research & Policy Brief

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College Enrollment and Graduation: A Utah Women and Education Update

This is the second in the 2013 series of Utah Women and Education Initiative (UWEI) *Research and Policy Briefs* written to help state leaders, educators, legislators, and community members understand the current state of higher education for women in Utah. The first brief on education attainment of the Utah population included information about Utah's big goal of having 66% of Utah's population with postsecondary degrees or vocational certificates by the year 2020. The purpose of this second brief is to highlight the current enrollment and graduation data of women and men attending postsecondary institutions in Utah.

Enrollment

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems Information reports the percent of high school graduates that go directly to college. The most recent data show Utah at 58.5%, while the U.S. average is 63.3%.¹ The Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) tracked Utah's 2007 high school graduates and found that between fall of 2007 and spring of 2012, 68.1% attended at least one semester of postsecondary study (68.5% females; 67.8% males). For 2008 graduates, 68.3% of females and 64.4% of males attended at least one semester between fall of 2008 and spring of 2012. However, these percentages do not track ongoing college attendance. According to *Complete College America*, 2011, only 53.8% of full-time Utah students in two-year colleges return their second year. At four-year Utah colleges, 58.2% return the second year, 45% for year three, and only 41.5% for their fourth year.² It is important to note that these rates are not adjusted for mission or military service.

College students who graduated from a Utah high school in the previous year comprised 71% of all freshmen enrolled at Utah institutions in the fall of 2010.³ Approximately 92% of Utah freshmen attended colleges in their home state, compared to 81% nationally. It appears Utah students are more likely to stay in Utah and, with completed degrees and certificates, to benefit the Utah economy and quality of life.

Undergraduate enrollment in Utah has consistently increased over the past decade. According to the Utah Foundation, "The number of full- and part-time students enrolled in USHE schools increased by 38% from 126,337 in 2000, to 174,013 in the 2011 academic year."⁴ The Utah Colleges of Applied Technology (UCAT) enrollment also increased 12% from 2000 to 2012. However, according to Dr. Jeff Strohl of the *Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce*,⁵ between 1994 and 2009, the youth (18–24) population in Utah grew by 40%, while first-time college

freshmen grew by 20%. Because enrollment is not keeping up with population growth, Utah may find it difficult to achieve its 66% goal without interventions being put in place.

Strohl found that the enrollment-to-population growth discrepancy is driven primarily by white youth enrollments (10% growth) being much less than the population growth (32%). He also stated that Utah has done a good job of providing college access to the growing multicultural minority population, which increased from 11% to 16% of the youth population. However, a recent publication reported that Utah had the fourth-lowest high school graduation rate for Latinos in the country at 57 percent, so there is still much work that needs to be done.⁶

Nationally, 57% of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions are women.⁷ Accordingly, male enrollments represent a lower percentage of the total—an issue for many states. In Utah, women have increased enrollment in recent years so there is an approximate 50-50 split in women-to-men enrollments. Although this puts Utah in a unique position nationally (the lowest state in the nation when it comes to the percentage of enrolled students who are female), a 50-50 gender split is beneficial for individuals and society. The challenge is that Utah needs more women *and* men enrolling and, more specifically, graduating from college. Table 1 highlights enrollments for men and women.

Table 1: Utah College Enrollment

Population	Utah	Nation
Men	49.4%	43.0%
Women	50.6%	57.0%

Source: *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2012, November 23). Data and analysis: The state of academe. Almanac of Higher Education 2012:

Table 2 provides fall 2011 undergraduate enrollment at the eight public higher education institutions in the state. At a glance, some may mistakenly assume there is no need for concern because there are more females enrolled than males at some institutions. Yet, Utah women enroll in higher percentages as freshmen and sophomores, and then many do not continue. Add this to Utah's unique characteristic of having a large percentage of young men serving two-year LDS missions (ages 19–21), and the enrollment numbers are complex. It is actually no surprise that SLCC and Snow have more women, as two-year community colleges typically have more women enrolled than men. The differences in college programs and institutional missions explain some of this as well, but it is clear that more women than men in Utah seek associate-level degrees.

Table 2: Fall 2011 Third-Week Enrollments

Institution	Fall 2011 Undergraduate Enrollment	
	Female	Male
U of U	45%	55%
USU	55%	45%
WSU	53%	47%
SUU	56%	44%
Snow	52%	48%
DSC	53%	47%
UVU	44%	56%
SLCC	52%	48%
USHE	50%	50%

Source: USHE from data gathered from the USHE database, National Center for Educational Statistics IPEDS survey data, and the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey data.

Data from the *Utah Women and Education Project* statewide study (see Research Snapshots)⁸ found similar beliefs, attitudes, aspirations, and intentions in communities around the state. It is clear that too many women and men still drop out at all Utah institutions. Although women may compare well to men in enrollment at many institutions, particularly during the first two years when many young men are serving missions, they do not compare favorably nationally in terms of graduation and need substantial increases to reach Utah's 66% completion goal.

Graduation

Approximately 43.7% of men and 49% of women who enroll in Utah colleges and universities actually graduate.⁹ This does not compare well nationally for either gender. According to these statistics, bachelor's degree graduation rates for Utah women are 9.5% below the nation and the percentage of men is similar (see Table 3).

Table 3: Graduation Rates at Public 4-year Institutions

Population	Utah	Nation	Gap
Men	43.7%	53.0%	-9.3%
Women	49.0%	58.5%	-9.5%

Source: The Chronicle of Higher Education (2012, Nov 23). Data and analysis: The state of academe. Almanac of Higher Education 2012: Utah.

USHE reports that Utah women receive 55% of the associate degrees awarded in public institutions while only 47% of bachelor degrees—the lowest of all 50 states.¹⁰ Utah also has the lowest percent of doctorate/professional degrees awarded to women in the nation (41%) and is only ahead of the District of Columbia for the percent of master degrees awarded to women (46%).

Table 4 outlines graduation rates by gender and institution based on the calculation of a 3-year rate for associate-degree-seeking students and a 6-year rate for bachelor-degree-seeking students, with some adjustment for missionary or

military service. This source reports a 13% difference between the USHE institutions' graduation rate for women and the national average. Even if additional time is added past the six-year window, it does not substantially reduce the gap for females. Men are facing a 19% gap, which lessens somewhat over time but is still not enough to get Utah to the national average.

Table 4: Graduation Rates by Gender & Institution

Institution	2011 Graduation Rate (150% of Degree Length)	
	Female	Male
U of U	57%	54%
USU	52%	50%
WSU	49%	35%
SUU	37%	29%
Snow	42%	18%
DSC	37%	15%
UVU	30%	28%
SLCC	29%	19%
USHE	43%	32%
USA	56%	51%

Source: USHE from data gathered from the USHE database, National Center for Educational Statistics IPEDS survey data, and the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey data.

Conclusion

Utah college enrollment in the past decade has been increasing. This increase, however, has not kept up with the state population growth. First, strategies to encourage high school graduates to attend college directly after graduation are critical to higher completion rates. Second, encouraging more women and men to enroll and graduate from college is also fundamental to meet Utah's big goal. Finally, encouraging both men and women in older age categories to return and complete college is a strategy Utah needs to explore further. Utah needs to continue to position its residents for success by implementing an integrated approach to help more students complete college.

¹ NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis (n.d.). *College participation rates: College-going rates of high school graduates—Directly from high school: 2008*.

² Complete College America (2011). *Utah 2011: College completion information*.

³ *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2012, November 23). *Data and analysis: The state of academe. Almanac of Higher Education 2012: Utah*.

⁴ Utah Foundation (2012). *Priority issue #6: Higher education*.

⁵ Strohl, J. (2012, October 15). *Keeping pace: One perspective on the challenges and rewards of Utah's education goals*. Presentation made at the 2012 Governor's Education Summit.

⁶ Schencker, L. (2012, November 27). Utah ranks in bottom half of country for high school grad rates: State's rate for Latinos is fourth lowest in nation. *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

⁷ *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2012, November 23).

⁸ Madsen, S. R. et al. (2011). Research snapshots. Utah Women and Education Project. Retrieved from www.utahwomenandeducation.org

⁹ *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2012, November 23).

¹⁰ USHE (2012, August). Analysis of Utah women in education.