

# Shared Gains

## Immigrant-Origin Students in U.S. Colleges

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### Executive Summary

U.S. college enrollment has gone through periods of growth and decline over the past two decades, driven by changes in the nation's demographics and economy and by shifting views of a college degree's value. Total college enrollment increased by 37 percent from 2000 to 2011 but declined by 11 percent between 2011 and 2021. The post-2011 decline, however, would have been more pronounced if it were not for the rapid rise in the college enrollment of immigrant-origin students—a population consisting of students from the first and second immigrant generations (that is, students who were born abroad, including international students, and those born in the United States to one or more foreign-born parents).

This issue brief documents the rising, often overlooked presence of immigrant-origin students in the nation's two- and four-year college systems from 2000 through 2021. During the 2000–21 period, immigrants and their children went from being one in five college students to one in three. This rise is attributable to a broad, steady expansion of the second generation, many of whom are Latino, Black, or Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI). Increased shares of students with immigrant origins

are also attributable to declining enrollment among third-and-higher-generation adults (that is, U.S.-born adults with U.S.-born parents), who are predominantly White. Together, these changes have led to an increasingly diverse postsecondary student population and to postsecondary institutions' expanding reliance on the enrollment of immigrant-origin students.

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*During the 2000–21 period, immigrants and their children went from being one in five college students to one in three.*

This brief uses the U.S. Census Bureau's 2000–21 Current Population Survey to examine enrollment patterns within the first, second, and third-and-higher generations, including enrollment by race and ethnicity and attendance in two-year versus four-year institutions. Data from the pooled 2012/2014/2017 Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) are also used to explore the relationship between parental education and college enrollment of U.S. adults by immigrant generation—an increasingly pertinent topic, given the rising education levels of recent immigrants.

This analysis highlights four key stories:

**Immigrant-origin students have been a vital source of growth for the U.S. college population for two decades, one that has reduced the potential institutional impacts of post-2011 enrollment declines and drops during the pandemic.**

- ▶ The number of immigrant-origin students rose by 78 percent between 2000 and 2021, from 3.4 million to almost 6.1 million. During the same period, total U.S. college enrollment increased by 22 percent, from 15.3 million to 18.7 million. As such, immigrant-origin students accounted for 79 percent of the increase in the total number of U.S. college students.
- ▶ Immigrant-origin adults are overrepresented among postsecondary enrollees: although they made up 28 percent of adults ages 18 to 54 in 2021, they were 33 percent of college students.
- ▶ Even before the drastic changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, total U.S. college enrollment had fallen from 21 million in 2011 to 19.6 million in 2019 (or by 7 percent), driven principally by the shrinking number of third-and-higher-generation students. This decline would have been larger if it were not for an increase in the number of students from immigrant families.
- ▶ Enrollment fell further during the first two years of the pandemic, with the impact varying by immigrant generation. Between 2019 and 2021, the number of second-generation students grew slightly (by 2 percent), while the number of first-generation and third-and-higher-generation students fell (by 2 percent and 7 percent, respectively).

**Immigrant-origin student enrollment has been robust at four-year colleges and universities over the past two decades, while also mitigating declines at two-year colleges between 2011 and 2021.**

- ▶ While the number of four-year college students has risen throughout the past two decades, the number of students attending community colleges began to decline after the end of the Great Recession of 2007–09. Immigrant-origin students contributed to the growth of the former and slowed the decline of the latter.
- ▶ The immigrant-origin share of community-college enrollees rose steadily, from 22 percent in 2000 to 34 percent in 2021. Similarly, their share of four-year college enrollment rose from 22 percent in 2000 to 32 percent in 2021.
- ▶ The second generation largely drove the rising immigrant-origin shares of students at both two- and four-year colleges. The second generation's share of overall enrollment doubled in community colleges from 11 percent in 2000 to 22 percent in 2021, and at four-year colleges it rose from 10 percent to 19 percent.

**Immigrant-origin students, most of whom are racial and ethnic minorities, contribute to a more diverse student body on U.S. college campuses.**

- ▶ The immigrant-origin Latino share of all students doubled from 9 percent in 2000 to 18 percent in 2021 at community colleges and from 6 percent to 12 percent at four-year colleges. The Black and AAPI immigrant-origin shares of all students at four-year colleges also grew, from 2 to 5 percent and from 8 to 10 percent, respectively.

- ▶ The White third-and-higher-generation share of students fell between 2000 and 2021, from 58 percent to 44 percent among community college students and from 62 percent to 49 percent among four-year college students.

**Immigrant and U.S.-born racial and ethnic minority groups are likely to continue to boost postsecondary enrollment and student populations' diversity in the future.**

- ▶ The pool of potential future students will increasingly be composed of immigrant-origin and minority students. The groups with the youngest average ages are second-generation Black, Latino, and AAPI individuals (at about 20–25 years in 2022). By contrast, the third-and-higher-generation White population had an average age of 42.
- ▶ Nearly half of recently arrived immigrants have a bachelor's degree or higher. Analysis of the PIAAC data shows a positive relationship between parental education and college enrollment, while other research shows that immigrant parents have higher expectations for their children's college attainment than U.S.-born parents. These findings suggest that the children of these highly educated newcomers will enroll in postsecondary institutions at relatively high rates.

To promote the postsecondary credential attainment of the large and growing immigrant-origin population, policymakers and practitioners in both the higher education and immigration fields should consider the educational attainment barriers and opportunities of three key groups: the 6.1 million currently enrolled immigrant-origin students; an additional 6.1 million immigrant-origin youth (ages 14–18) who are approaching college-going age; and the 20.6 million immigrant-origin high school graduates currently without a postsecondary credential.

In addition to these populations already present within the United States, shifting immigration trends will also influence enrollment patterns. This includes the rebound in international student arrivals after a pandemic-induced drop, revived issuance of other kinds of visas, and the record number of people in the country with “liminal” statuses (e.g., Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals [DACA] and Temporary Protected Status [TPS] recipients, and beneficiaries of humanitarian parole programs). How long these immigrants remain in the country and the barriers they face to postsecondary education and training will shape their presence on U.S. college campuses.

## 1 Introduction

College enrollment trends in the United States have been a subject of ongoing policy concern, given the role higher education plays in shaping the future workforce. Most jobs today that provide a family-sustaining wage, job security, and occupational mobility require some level of postsecondary education. However, there is less consensus now than in the past regarding the value of college degrees, especially at the bachelor's or higher level.<sup>1</sup> The current U.S. economy offers plenty of well-paying jobs available to graduates of career-focused programs and vocational training. Meanwhile, a significant concern<sup>2</sup> is the burden of student debt related to the rising cost of college education, which grew by 158 percent at public four-year colleges and by 65 percent at public two-year colleges over the past three decades.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to individuals' decision to pursue higher education, current and future enrollment patterns reflect a complex interplay of factors, including economic conditions, demographic shifts, education and workforce training policy priorities, and renewed immigration. As the U.S. economy rebounds from the COVID-19 pandemic, labor shortages have reemerged across several key sectors, including

health care, education, and construction.<sup>4</sup> Most new jobs are expected to require a greater level of skills, beyond a high school education.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, automation, digitalization, and the wider adoption of artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT) are expected to have a profound, if thus far poorly understood, impact on the nature of work across skill levels.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, pre-pandemic demographic trends—an aging population and slower population growth—present their own economic and labor force challenges. The Supreme Court’s June 2023 reversal of affirmative action in college admissions may also alter enrollment trends.<sup>7</sup>

Immigration patterns are also changing. Following declines during the Trump administration and the pandemic, immigration has been restored to pre-pandemic levels. The new flows are diverse in terms of visa and legal status. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) researchers estimate that nearly 2.4 million new noncitizens received U.S. visas in fiscal year (FY) 2022 that allow them to work. These new arrivals include new legal permanent residents, temporary high- and low-skilled workers, and refugees who arrived through the resettlement program.<sup>8</sup> As of 2023, there were also 1.9 million people in the country on provisional or “liminal” statuses, including 579,000 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) holders, 611,000 Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients, and about 710,000 individuals admitted to or permitted to remain in the country via various humanitarian parole or deferred action programs (e.g., for Ukrainians and Afghans).<sup>9</sup> These immigrants already have or are eligible for a work permit. Some are also eligible for education benefits, though eligibility varies by immigrants’ legal status, country of origin, and state of residence. And, of course, their status as well as their eligibility for educational benefits are subject to future decisions by the U.S. Congress, the administration, and the courts.<sup>10</sup> Still, at least some of these newcomers will

and presumably are adding to the number of post-secondary students in the United States.

## A. *Study Questions*

With these trends as context, this issue brief seeks to answer the following questions related to immigrant integration and higher education:

- ▶ How have college enrollment trends changed over the past two decades? Which racial, ethnic, and generational student groups are growing or declining, and how did the pandemic affect their enrollment?
- ▶ How do these enrollment patterns vary across institutions, specifically two- and four-year colleges?
- ▶ What impact does parental education have on postsecondary enrollment across immigrant generations within a context of rising education levels among recent immigrants?
- ▶ What role are immigrant-origin students likely to play in shaping future enrollment trends, and how might recent immigration patterns alter the current trends?

## B. *Study Population and Data*

The study focuses on civilian adults ages 18 to 54 with at least a high school degree or equivalent who were enrolled in two- and four-year colleges from 2000 to 2021—a period encompassing the Great Recession of 2007–09, the subsequent economic recovery, and the first two years of the pandemic. For the discussion of enrollment rates, MPI researchers limited the study population to adults ages 18 to 34 because of the differing age structures of the generations (the average age of the second generation is significantly lower than that of the first and the third-and-higher generations).

**BOX 1****Datasets and Key Definitions****Data**

*Current Population Survey (CPS).* The CPS October School Enrollment Supplement, the brief's principal data source, offers consistent definitions over time for key study variables, including college enrollment and immigrant generation. The survey enables researchers to track enrollment over time and disaggregate first-, second-, and third-and-higher immigrant generations. The analysis adjusted CPS estimates to match the number of enrolled students by institution type, as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). It used the CPS March Annual Social and Economic Supplement to describe the average age of the U.S. population by immigrant generation and race and ethnicity in 2022 and the implications for future college enrollment trends.

*Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).* Unlike the CPS, the PIAAC asks respondents about both their own educational attainment and that of their parents. Using the pooled 2012/2014/2017 PIAAC, Migration Policy Institute (MPI) researchers were thus able to explore the impact of parental education on U.S. adults' college enrollment.

**Key Definitions**

*College enrollment.* This variable was constructed from answers to two CPS questions. First, survey respondents were asked if they are attending or enrolled in a school that leads to a high school diploma or college degree. Second, enrolled respondents were asked if they are attending a two-year college (also referred here as community college) or a four-year college or university. Unless stated otherwise, the study population is composed of adults between ages 18 and 54 with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in college courses and pursuing a college degree. This definition does not include people who are enrolled in other types of postsecondary courses that do not lead to a college degree (vocational training or apprenticeship programs, for example).

*Immigrant generations.* The *first generation* (also referred to as immigrants) is comprised of people who were not U.S. citizens at birth. Immigrants include naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents (or green-card holders), refugees and asylees, certain legal nonimmigrants (including those on student, work, or other temporary visas), and persons residing in the country without authorization. Estimates of this group include international students, who came to the United States to pursue an education. The *second generation* is composed of persons born in the United States to one or more immigrant parents. Together, the first and second generations make up the *immigrant-origin* population. Adults born in the United States to only U.S.-born parents are described here as the *third-and-higher generation*.

*Race and ethnicity.* The CPS asked respondents about their race and ethnicity. Latinos can be of any race. In this analysis, the other racial groups refer to non-Latinos. Black refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as "Black" or "Black" in combination with other races. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as "AAPI" or "AAPI" in combination with other races except for Black. White refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as "White." This group also includes a numerically small category of respondents who identified as American Indian or other races.

*Parental educational attainment.* PIAAC respondents were asked about the highest level of education of their fathers or male guardians and mothers or female guardians. The choices were "less than high school diploma," "high school diploma/some college but no degree," or "college degree or higher (associate, bachelor, doctorate)." Using responses to these questions, MPI researchers identified PIAAC respondents who had one or more parents with a postsecondary education (associate degree or higher).

Sources: For additional information about the CPS October Supplement, see NCES, "[NCES Handbook of Survey Methods: Current Population Survey \(CPS\) October Supplement](#)" (supplement to *NCES Handbook of Survey Methods*, NCES, Washington, DC, updated August 2018). For additional information about the PIAAC survey and the U.S.-focused analyses, see Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Time for the U.S. to Reskill? What the Survey of Adult Skills Says* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2013). For total Fall enrollment numbers over time, see NCES, "[Table 306.20. Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level and Control of Institution and Race/Ethnicity or Nonresident Status of Student: Selected Years, 1976 through 2021](#)," accessed May 1, 2023.

The analysis employs the most recent, publicly available data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2000–21 Current Population Survey (CPS) October School Enrollment Supplement and from the 2012/2014/2017 Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). The PIAAC survey uniquely allows researchers to examine the relationship between parental education and adults' postsecondary enrollment by immigrant generation. (See Box 1 for more details about the surveys used in this issue brief and definitions of key terms.)

## 2 College Enrollment Trends: 2000–21

College enrollment in the United States fluctuated between 2000 and 2021, driven by a range of factors including demographic trends, the strength of the labor market, shifts in educational policies, and the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup> The year 2011 marked an important tipping point: while total college enrollment increased by 37 percent from 2000 to 2011, it declined afterwards, dropping by 11 percent between 2011 and 2021.

### A. Overall Enrollment

In terms of enrollment, four periods can be distinguished: 2000–07 (pre-Great Recession); 2007–11 (Great Recession and early recovery); 2011–19 (economic recovery); and 2019–21 (COVID-19 pandemic). Between 2000 and 2007, overall college enrollment rose steadily (see Figure 1), partly reflecting the rising number of total adults ages 18–54 in the country. During this period, the number of adults in this age range increased by 6 percent, and the number of college students grew by 19 percent (see Appendix Table A–1). Following the onset of the Great Recession, an even greater number of U.S. adults enrolled in college, many seeking to improve their skills and job prospects in a weak job market. The

number of enrolled college students increased by 15 percent between 2007 and 2011. As the economy started to improve, college enrollment began a slow decline, falling by 7 percent between 2011 and 2019. This decline also reflected a slowing in the growth of the total U.S. adult population.

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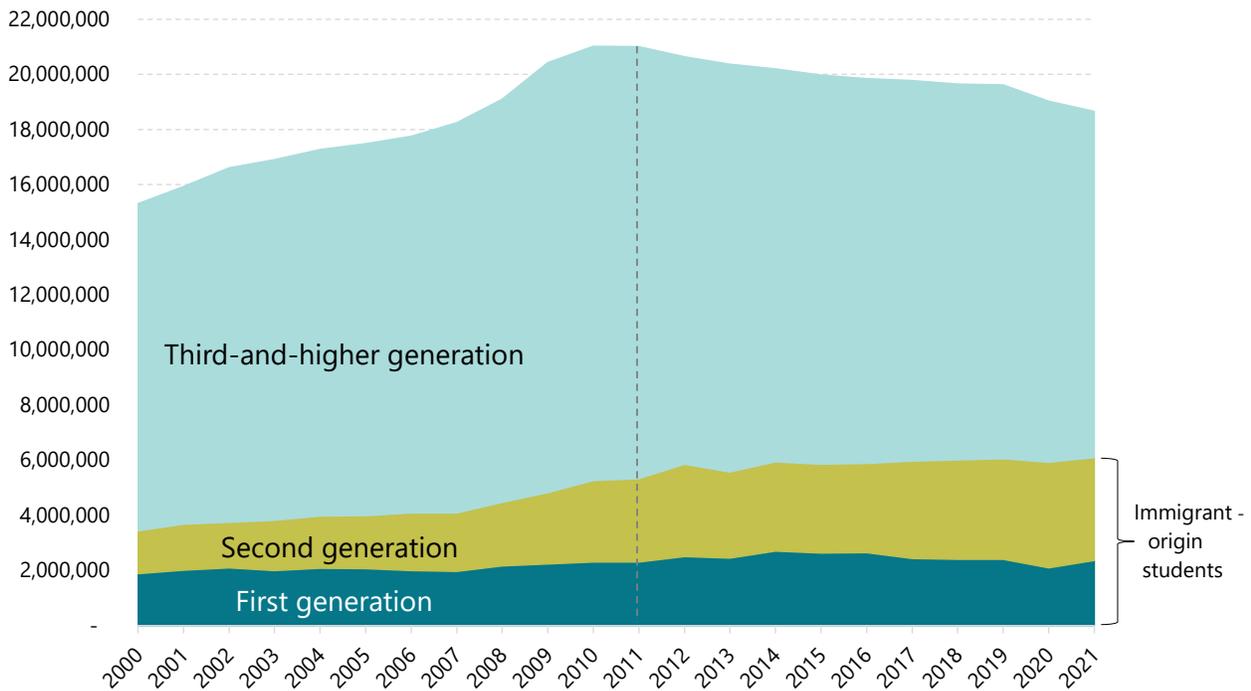
*The pandemic's shock to enrollment may be short lived, but underlying trends such as slower population growth, rising higher education costs, and a perceived decline in the return on investment of a college degree will continue to shape enrollment.*

The pandemic accelerated the decline in college enrollment, which fell by 5 percent between 2019 and 2021 to about the same level as before the Great Recession (that is, slightly less than 18.7 million in 2021 versus 18.2 million in 2007, as shown in Appendix Table A–1). The pandemic affected the enrollment of students of different immigrant generations to different extents: between 2019 and 2021, the number of second-generation students grew slightly (by 2 percent), while the number of first- and third-and-higher-generation students fell (by 2 percent and 7 percent, respectively). Recent evidence suggests that the pandemic's shock to enrollment may be short lived, but underlying trends such as slower population growth, rising higher education costs, and a perceived decline in the return on investment of a college degree will continue to shape enrollment.<sup>12</sup>

Excluding the pandemic years, the post-2011 decline in total U.S. college enrollment—from 21 million in 2011 to 19.6 million in 2019—would have been even sharper if not for a rise in the number of immigrant-origin students from 5.3 million to slightly more than 6 million. Throughout the entire 2000–19

FIGURE 1

**Number of Adults (ages 18–54) Enrolled in U.S. Colleges, by Immigrant Generation, 2000–21**



**Population change over time**

|                           |                 |                 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Total students            | + 37% (2000–11) | – 11% (2011–21) |
| Immigrant-origin students | + 55% (2000–11) | + 14% (2011–21) |

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS) October School Enrollment Supplement 2000–21.

period, both the number of total immigrant-origin adults in the country and those enrolled in college rose significantly, by 65 percent and 76 percent, respectively (see Table 1). The second-generation college student population grew the fastest of all groups: from 1.5 million in 2000 to 3.6 million in 2019, or by 135 percent. By contrast, the number of third-and-higher-generation students has been on a downward trajectory since 2011, falling by 13 percent between 2011 and 2019 and by an additional 7 percent between 2019 and 2021 (see Appendix Table A–1).

The number of immigrant-origin students stood at approximately 6.1 million as of 2021. During the

entire 2000–21 period, the total U.S. college student population grew from 15.3 million to 18.7 million, with the immigrant-origin population accounting for 79 percent of this increase.<sup>13</sup>

Because the number of third-and-higher-generation students was falling while the number of the immigrant-origin students was rising, the immigrant-origin share of all U.S. students rose significantly, from 22 percent in 2000 to 33 percent in 2021 (see Table 2). This growth is driven principally by the rapid rise of the second generation, whose share of all enrolled students doubled from 10 percent to 20 percent during this period.

TABLE 1

**Number and Percent Change of Total Adults and Adults Enrolled in U.S. Colleges (ages 18–54), by Immigrant Generation, 2000–21**

|                             | Number             |                    |                    |                    | Percent Change |            |            |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------|------------|
|                             | 2000               | 2011               | 2019               | 2021               | 2000–11        | 2000–19    | 2000–21    |
| <b>Total adults</b>         | <b>128,192,000</b> | <b>136,656,000</b> | <b>141,726,000</b> | <b>141,908,000</b> | <b>7%</b>      | <b>11%</b> | <b>11%</b> |
| Immigrant origin            | 23,016,000         | 31,362,000         | 38,036,000         | 39,784,000         | 36%            | 65%        | 73%        |
| First generation            | 14,821,000         | 19,474,000         | 22,366,000         | 22,926,000         | 31%            | 51%        | 55%        |
| Second generation           | 8,194,000          | 11,888,000         | 15,670,000         | 16,858,000         | 45%            | 91%        | 106%       |
| Third-and-higher generation | 105,176,000        | 105,294,000        | 103,690,000        | 102,124,000        | 0%             | -1%        | -3%        |
| <b>Enrolled in colleges</b> | <b>15,312,000</b>  | <b>21,011,000</b>  | <b>19,630,000</b>  | <b>18,660,000</b>  | <b>37%</b>     | <b>28%</b> | <b>22%</b> |
| Immigrant origin            | 3,426,000          | 5,322,000          | 6,047,000          | 6,087,000          | 55%            | 76%        | 78%        |
| First generation            | 1,879,000          | 2,303,000          | 2,403,000          | 2,362,000          | 23%            | 28%        | 26%        |
| Second generation           | 1,547,000          | 3,019,000          | 3,644,000          | 3,725,000          | 95%            | 135%       | 141%       |
| Third-and-higher generation | 11,886,000         | 15,689,000         | 13,584,000         | 12,573,000         | 32%            | 14%        | 6%         |

Notes: The bottom section of this table shows adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities. For data on additional years within the 2000–21 range, see Appendix Table A–1.

Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s CPS October Supplement 2000, 2011, 2019, and 2021.

Along with the rising demographic prominence of the immigrant-origin population, increased enrollment may also be attributable to greater access to educational support that helped open pathways to postsecondary education for immigrant-origin students. These new opportunities include targeted scholarships and mentorship programs for racial and ethnic minority students, many of whom come

from immigrant families.<sup>14</sup> In addition, policy changes—such as the introduction of the DACA program in 2012 and the availability in some states of in-state tuition and expanded financial aid for eligible unauthorized immigrant students—have reduced barriers to college education for some unauthorized immigrants.<sup>15</sup>

TABLE 2

**Share of Total Adults and Adults Enrolled in U.S. Colleges (ages 18–54), by Immigrant Generation, 2000–21**

|                             | Enrolled in College |                   |                   | All Adults         |                    |                    |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|                             | 2000                | 2011              | 2021              | 2000               | 2011               | 2021               |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>15,312,000</b>   | <b>21,011,000</b> | <b>18,660,000</b> | <b>128,192,000</b> | <b>136,656,000</b> | <b>141,908,000</b> |
| Immigrant origin            | 22%                 | 25%               | 33%               | 18%                | 23%                | 28%                |
| First generation            | 12%                 | 11%               | 13%               | 12%                | 14%                | 16%                |
| Second generation           | 10%                 | 14%               | 20%               | 6%                 | 9%                 | 12%                |
| Third-and-higher generation | 78%                 | 75%               | 67%               | 82%                | 77%                | 72%                |

Note: The left panel of this table shows adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the CPS October Supplement, 2000, 2011, and 2021.

## B. Enrollment by Institution Type

College enrollment trends also vary by institution type. While enrollment rose for both two- and four-year colleges between 2000 and 2011, the trends diverged in the aftermath of the Great Recession.<sup>16</sup> The number of four-year college students continued to rise after 2011, although at a slower pace than in prior periods (see Table 3 and Appendix Table A-2). At the same time, the two-year college student population declined by 26 percent between 2011 and 2019 and fell further during the pandemic years.

Between 2000 and 2021, the number of immigrant-origin enrollees rose by 115 percent in the nation's four-year colleges and by 20 percent in two-year colleges (see Table 3 and Figure 2.1). Thus, they played an important role in sustaining enrollment at four-year colleges and mitigating the overall enrollment declines in the community college system.

Within the immigrant-origin population, the second generation played the largest role in boosting four-year enrollment and slowing declines at community

colleges. Trends in the enrollment of second-generation students in four-year colleges are particularly notable because their enrollment numbers have risen steadily, nearly tripling from 918,000 in 2000 to 2.7 million in 2021 (or by 195 percent; see Table 3 and Figure 2.2). The second generation's growth was slower within two-year colleges, rising from about 648,000 to 1 million during the same period. By 2021, the number of second-generation students in four-year colleges was 2.6 times larger than the number enrolled in community colleges, compared to 1.4 times larger in 2000.

Between 2000 and 2021, growth in the number of first-generation students enrolled in four-year colleges was also significant, if somewhat more modest (from 1.2 million to 1.8 million, or by 52 percent). During this period, the number enrolled in community colleges fell by 17 percent (from 672,000 to 557,000; see Table 3). Although the number of the third-and-higher-generation students enrolled in four-year colleges rose 30 percent between 2000 and 2021, the number in two-year colleges fell by 33 percent.

**TABLE 3**  
**Students (ages 18–54) Enrolled in U.S. Colleges, by Institution Type and Immigrant Generation, 2000–21**

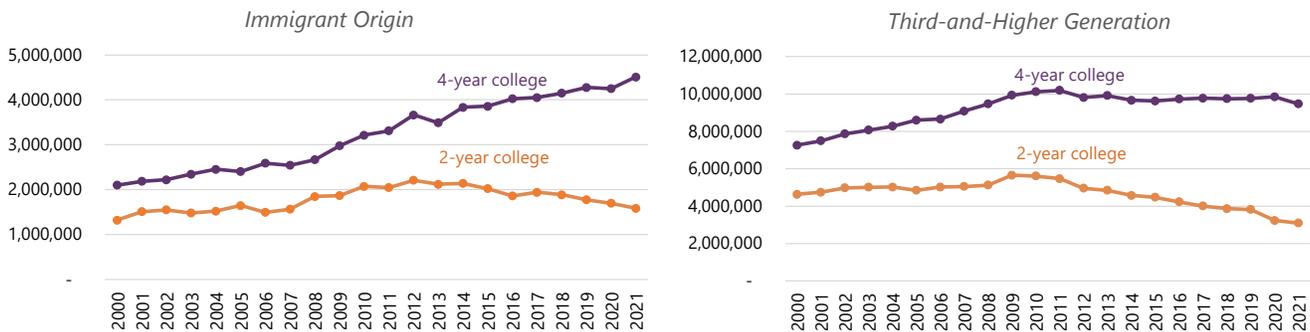
|                             | Number           |                   |                   |                   | Percent Change |            |             |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------|-------------|
|                             | 2000             | 2011              | 2019              | 2021              | 2000–11        | 2000–19    | 2000–21     |
| <b>Four-year colleges</b>   | <b>9,364,000</b> | <b>13,499,000</b> | <b>14,039,000</b> | <b>13,977,000</b> | <b>44%</b>     | <b>50%</b> | <b>49%</b>  |
| Immigrant origin            | 2,102,000        | 3,312,000         | 4,279,000         | 4,509,000         | 58%            | 104%       | 115%        |
| First generation            | 1,184,000        | 1,504,000         | 1,700,000         | 1,800,000         | 27%            | 44%        | 52%         |
| Second generation           | 918,000          | 1,808,000         | 2,579,000         | 2,709,000         | 97%            | 181%       | 195%        |
| Third-and-higher generation | 7,262,000        | 10,188,000        | 9,760,000         | 9,469,000         | 40%            | 34%        | 30%         |
| <b>Two-year colleges</b>    | <b>5,948,000</b> | <b>7,511,000</b>  | <b>5,591,000</b>  | <b>4,683,000</b>  | <b>26%</b>     | <b>–6%</b> | <b>–21%</b> |
| Immigrant origin            | 1,320,000        | 2,044,000         | 1,774,000         | 1,585,000         | 55%            | 34%        | 20%         |
| First generation            | 672,000          | 792,000           | 705,000           | 557,000           | 18%            | 5%         | –17%        |
| Second generation           | 648,000          | 1,253,000         | 1,069,000         | 1,028,000         | 93%            | 65%        | 59%         |
| Third-and-higher generation | 4,628,000        | 5,467,000         | 3,817,000         | 3,098,000         | 18%            | –18%       | –33%        |

Notes: This table shows adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities. For data on additional years within the 2000–21 range, see Appendix Table A-2.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the CPS October Supplement, 2000, 2011, 2019, and 2021.

FIGURE 2.1

**Immigrant-Origin and Third-and-Higher-Generation Students (ages 18–54) Enrolled in U.S. Colleges, by Institution Type, 2000–21**

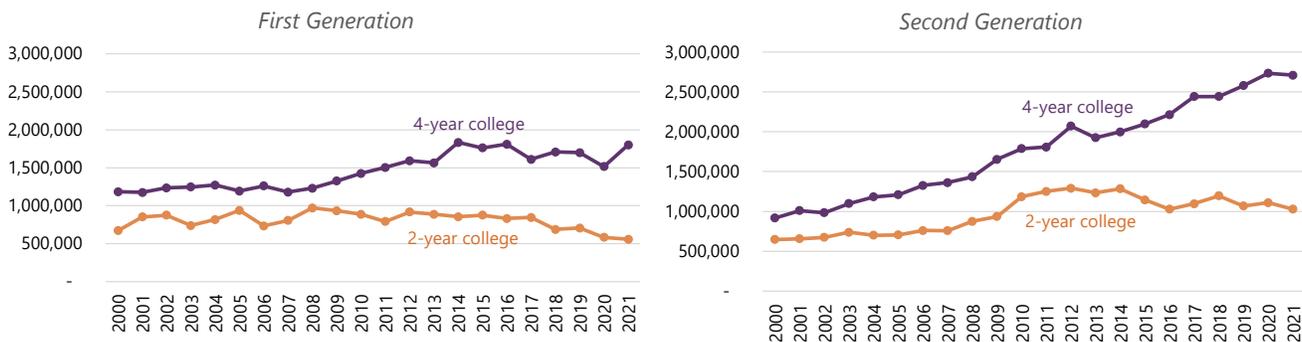


Note: This figure shows adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the CPS October Supplement, 2000–21.

FIGURE 2.2

**First- and Second-Generation Immigrant Students (ages 18–54) Enrolled in U.S. Colleges, by Institution Type, 2000–21**



Note: This figure shows adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the CPS October Supplement, 2000–21.

Trends also differed by immigrant generation during the pandemic years. (See Box 2 for details on how first-generation students’ enrollment was affected by fluctuating numbers of international students.) Enrollment fell slightly among first-generation students at the four-year college level but then rebounded (see Figure 2.2), but it remained relatively steady among second-generation students. Community college enrollment fell among students from both the first and second immigrant generations.

The pandemic’s disruptions, including remote learning challenges and economic hardship, hit students from low-income families and racial and ethnic minorities particularly hard.<sup>17</sup>

While the number of the third-and-higher-generation students has been declining in both two- and four-year college systems since 2011 (see Figure 2.1), the number of immigrant-origin students has been rising in four-year colleges and declining at a slower

TABLE 4

**Share of All Students (ages 18–54) at U.S. Four- and Two-Year Colleges, by Immigrant Generation, 2000–21**

|                             | Four-Year Colleges |                   |                   | Two-Year Colleges |                  |                  |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                             | 2000               | 2011              | 2021              | 2000              | 2011             | 2021             |
| <b>Enrolled</b>             | <b>9,364,000</b>   | <b>13,499,000</b> | <b>13,977,000</b> | <b>5,948,000</b>  | <b>7,511,000</b> | <b>4,683,000</b> |
| Immigrant origin            | 22%                | 25%               | 32%               | 22%               | 27%              | 34%              |
| First generation            | 13%                | 11%               | 13%               | 11%               | 11%              | 12%              |
| Second generation           | 10%                | 13%               | 19%               | 11%               | 17%              | 22%              |
| Third-and-higher generation | 78%                | 75%               | 68%               | 78%               | 73%              | 66%              |

Note: This table shows adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the CPS October Supplement, 2000, 2011, and 2021.

rate in two-year colleges. The combination of these trends has meant that the immigrant-origin share of the overall postsecondary student population rose from about one-fifth in 2000 to one-third by 2021 (see Table 4). The second generation has largely

driven the rising immigrant-origin share of students in both two- and four-year colleges—their share of overall enrollment doubled in community colleges from 11 percent in 2000 to 22 percent in 2021 and from 10 percent to 19 percent in four-year colleges.

**BOX 2****International Students Enrolled in U.S. Colleges and Universities**

The number and share of first-generation immigrants enrolled in U.S. colleges—especially at four-year institutions—is driven partly by trends in international student enrollment. According to the Institute of International Education, nearly 548,000 international students were either enrolled or doing their optional practical training in the United States in school year 2000/01, representing 3.6 percent of the 15.3 million students at U.S. colleges and universities. Their number grew to 949,000 or 4.7 percent of the 20.3 million students at these institutions by school year 2021/22.

Global and U.S. policy developments have helped shape these trends. The enrollment of international students fell after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the global recession of 2007–09. It increased after the recession, in part because of improved economic conditions in the United States and their families' rising incomes. The number of enrolled international students fell again between 2016 and 2019 for several reasons, including student visa delays and denials during the Trump administration; the rising cost of higher education in the United States; and expanded opportunities to study in the European Union, Canada, and other destinations. The COVID-19 pandemic limited international student enrollment further. However, visa data from the U.S. State Department show that the number of international student visas has rebounded from 121,000 in fiscal year 2020 to 437,000 in fiscal year 2022.

Sources: Institute of International Education (IIE), *"International Students: Enrollment Trends,"* accessed May 25, 2023; Jeanne Batalova, *"Temporary Visa Holders in the United States," Migration Information Source*, September 15, 2022; U.S. State Department, Bureau of Consular Affairs, *"Nonimmigrant Visa Issuances by Visa Class and by Nationality,"* accessed May 28, 2023; Leah Mason, *International Student Mobility Flows and COVID-19 Realities* (Washington, DC: IIE, 2021).

## C. Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity

College enrollment rose among racial and ethnic minority populations from 2000 to 2021. Latino, Black, and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students made significant strides in accessing higher education.<sup>18</sup> Efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, coupled with targeted recruitment and retention initiatives, contributed to these trends.<sup>19</sup>

As immigrant-origin students, many of whom are members of racial and ethnic minorities, have become a more prominent part of the overall postsecondary student population, the population's growth has contributed to rising numbers and shares of Latino, Black, and AAPI students in U.S. colleges. The immigrant-origin Latino share of enrollment doubled from 6 percent in 2000 to 12 percent in

2021 among four-year college students and from 9 percent to 18 percent among two-year college students (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2). The number of Black and AAPI immigrant-origin students and their share of four-year college students also increased over time, as did the proportions of Latino and AAPI third-and-higher-generation students among all students at four-year institutions. By contrast, the White third-and-higher-generation share of students fell from 58 percent in 2000 to 44 percent in 2021 among community-college students and from 62 percent to 49 percent among four-year college students.

Despite rising college enrollment among immigrant-origin adults who are members of racial and ethnic minorities, challenges in postsecondary education access and completion persist.<sup>20</sup> These students are disproportionately likely to come from low-income families, and some are older and need to balance their education with family and work

**TABLE 5.1**  
**Enrolled Adults (ages 18–54) in U.S. Four-Year Colleges, by Immigrant Origin and Race and Ethnicity, 2000, 2011, and 2021**

|                                     | Number           |                   |                   | Shares      |             |             |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                                     | 2000             | 2011              | 2021              | 2000        | 2011        | 2021        |
| <b>Four-year college enrollment</b> | <b>9,364,000</b> | <b>13,499,000</b> | <b>13,977,000</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <b>Immigrant origin</b>             | <b>2,102,000</b> | <b>3,312,000</b>  | <b>4,509,000</b>  | <b>22%</b>  | <b>25%</b>  | <b>32%</b>  |
| Latino                              | 520,000          | 1,055,000         | 1,702,000         | 6%          | 8%          | 12%         |
| Black                               | 188,000          | 479,000           | 632,000           | 2%          | 4%          | 5%          |
| AAPI                                | 703,000          | 891,000           | 1,400,000         | 8%          | 7%          | 10%         |
| White                               | 691,000          | 887,000           | 775,000           | 7%          | 7%          | 6%          |
| <b>Third-and-higher generation</b>  | <b>7,262,000</b> | <b>10,188,000</b> | <b>9,469,000</b>  | <b>78%</b>  | <b>75%</b>  | <b>68%</b>  |
| Latino                              | 396,000          | 507,000           | 784,000           | 4%          | 4%          | 6%          |
| Black                               | 1,030,000        | 1,435,000         | 1,510,000         | 11%         | 11%         | 11%         |
| AAPI                                | 60,000           | 119,000           | 263,000           | 1%          | 1%          | 2%          |
| White                               | 5,777,000        | 8,126,000         | 6,912,000         | 62%         | 60%         | 49%         |

Notes: This table shows adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities. Latinos can be of any race. In this analysis, Black refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as "Black" or "Black" in combination with other races. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as "AAPI" or "AAPI" in combination with other races except Black. White refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as "White." This group also includes a numerically small category of respondents who identified as American Indian or other races.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the CPS October Supplement, 2000, 2011, and 2021.

TABLE 5.2

**Enrolled Adults (ages 18–54) in U.S. Two-Year Colleges, by Immigrant Origin and Race and Ethnicity, 2000, 2011, and 2021**

|                                    | Number           |                  |                  | Shares      |             |             |
|------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                                    | 2000             | 2011             | 2021             | 2000        | 2011        | 2021        |
| <b>Two-year college enrollment</b> | <b>5,948,000</b> | <b>7,511,000</b> | <b>4,683,000</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <b>Immigrant origin</b>            | <b>1,320,000</b> | <b>2,044,000</b> | <b>1,585,000</b> | <b>22%</b>  | <b>27%</b>  | <b>34%</b>  |
| Latino                             | 527,000          | 1,051,000        | 866,000          | 9%          | 14%         | 18%         |
| Black                              | 102,000          | 225,000          | 168,000          | 2%          | 3%          | 4%          |
| AAPI                               | 363,000          | 313,000          | 296,000          | 6%          | 4%          | 6%          |
| White                              | 328,000          | 455,000          | 255,000          | 6%          | 6%          | 5%          |
| <b>Third-and-higher generation</b> | <b>4,628,000</b> | <b>5,467,000</b> | <b>3,098,000</b> | <b>78%</b>  | <b>73%</b>  | <b>66%</b>  |
| Latino                             | 408,000          | 569,000          | 387,000          | 7%          | 8%          | 8%          |
| Black                              | 743,000          | 1,111,000        | 591,000          | 12%         | 15%         | 13%         |
| AAPI                               | 39,000           | 59,000           | 59,000           | 1%          | 1%          | 1%          |
| White                              | 3,439,000        | 3,729,000        | 2,061,000        | 58%         | 50%         | 44%         |

Notes: This table shows adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities. Latinos can be of any race. In this analysis, Black refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “Black” or “Black” in combination with other races. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “AAPI” or “AAPI” in combination with other races except Black. White refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “White.” This group also includes a numerically small category of respondents who identified as American Indian or other races.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the CPS October Supplement, 2000, 2011, and 2021.

responsibilities.<sup>21</sup> Immigrant adults who are unauthorized or hold a “liminal status,” such as DACA recipients or beneficiaries of recently created humanitarian parole programs, face additional challenges because changes in their legal status can upend their educational prospects.<sup>22</sup>

### 3 College Enrollment Rates by Immigrant Generation

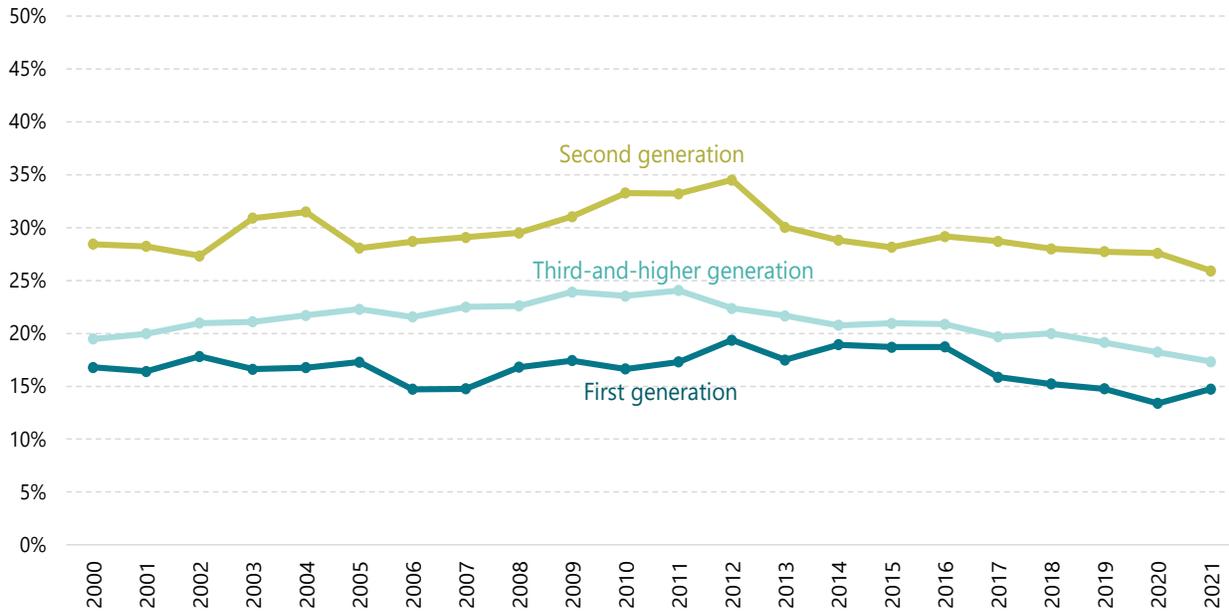
This analysis has so far focused on the absolute size and changes in college enrollment by immigrant generation. Another lens for examining college enrollment is trends in the enrollment rates of differing groups. For the purposes of this discussion, the analysis focuses on younger adults ages 18–34 who are high school graduates and who are pursuing an undergraduate degree.<sup>23</sup>

#### A. Enrollment Rates by Race and Ethnicity

Regardless of their immigrant generation, young adults’ enrollment rates in U.S. colleges and universities did not change meaningfully between 2000 and 2021, although they fluctuated over that period (see Figure 3). Between 2000 and 2021, the share of first-generation young adults who were enrolled in an associate or bachelor’s degree program held largely steady at 15–17 percent in most years. Enrollment rates for the second generation rose significantly from 28 percent in 2000 to 35 percent in 2012 but then declined to 26 percent in 2021. The third-and-higher generation’s enrollment rates also rose between 2000 and 2009–11 (from 19 percent to 24 percent) but then declined to 17 percent by 2021. At the same time, second-generation young adults were much more likely to pursue college degrees than their first- or third-and-higher-generation peers over the entire study period.

FIGURE 3

**Share of Young Adults (ages 18–34) Enrolled in Undergraduate Degree Programs at U.S. Colleges, by Immigrant Generation, 2000–21**



Note: This figure shows the share of young adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities at the associate or bachelor’s level.  
 Source: MPI tabulation of data from the CPS October Supplement, 2000–21.

When race and ethnicity are considered, second-generation Black young adults had the highest college enrollment rates in 2021 (33 percent), followed by second-generation AAPI young adults (28 percent; see Table 6). Across almost all racial and ethnic groups, second-generation adults were

notably more likely to be enrolled than members of either the first or the third-and-higher generation. To illustrate, the share of second-generation Latino young adults enrolled in college was almost twice as high as the share for first-generation Latinos (25 percent versus 13 percent) and also higher than the

TABLE 6

**Share of Young Adults (ages 18–34) Enrolled in Undergraduate Degree Programs at U.S. Colleges, by Immigrant Generation and Race and Ethnicity, 2021**

|                             | Latino     | Black      | AAPI       | White      | Total      |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <b>Young adults (18–34)</b> | <b>19%</b> | <b>19%</b> | <b>22%</b> | <b>17%</b> | <b>18%</b> |
| First generation            | 13%        | 21%        | 15%        | 16%        | 15%        |
| Second generation           | 25%        | 33%        | 28%        | 22%        | 26%        |
| Third-and-higher generation | 17%        | 17%        | 27%        | 17%        | 17%        |

Notes: This table shows the share of young adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities at the associate or bachelor’s level. Latinos can be of any race. In this analysis, Black refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “Black” or “Black” in combination with other races. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “AAPI” or “AAPI” in combination with other races except Black. White refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “White.” This group also includes a numerically small category of respondents who identified as American Indian or other races.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the CPS October Supplement 2021.

share for third-and-higher-generation Latinos (17 percent). And among Black young adults, the share of the second generation enrolled in college was almost double that of the third-and-higher generation (33 percent versus 17 percent), in addition to being higher than the rate for the first generation (21 percent).

## B. *Effects of Parental Education on Enrollment Rates*

Prior MPI research found striking gains in education levels among recent immigrants compared to those who arrived in earlier periods.<sup>24</sup> In 2021, almost half of recently arrived immigrants (that is, those who entered between 2017 and 2021) had at least a bachelor's degree—more than double the rate in 1990.<sup>25</sup>

Alongside this trend, education research shows a strong link between parental education and children's educational outcomes for the general U.S. population.<sup>26</sup> PIAAC data provide a particularly useful lens for examining the relationship between adults' postsecondary enrollment and their parents' educational attainment. This analysis finds that, on average, U.S. young adults (ages 18–34) with a parent holding at least an associate degree are more likely to be enrolled in an undergraduate degree

program than those whose parents did not have a college degree (27 percent versus 21 percent, see Table 7).

PIAAC data also indicate that parental education levels are a better predictor of enrollment for the first and third-and-higher generations than for the second generation. For first-generation immigrant adults, the enrollment rate gap between those with higher- versus lower-educated parents was 20 percentage points (33 percent versus 13 percent). For the third-and-higher generation, there was an 11-percentage point difference. By contrast, the college enrollment of the second generation seems to be less contingent on parent education: the share attending college among those whose parents had no more than a high school degree was almost the same as the share of those whose parents held postsecondary degrees (32 percent and 34 percent, respectively). Unlike many first-generation immigrants, the second generation has the advantage of growing up in the United States and speaking English from a young age. These advantages, combined with the fact that immigrant parents tend to have higher expectations for their children's college enrollment than U.S.-born parents,<sup>27</sup> may contribute to the high college rates observed among the second generation, independent of parental postsecondary education.

TABLE 7

### Share of Young Adults (18–34) Enrolled in Undergraduate Degree Programs at U.S. Colleges, by Parental Education and Immigrant Generation, 2012/2014/2017

|                             | All Adults | Neither Parent Has More than a High School Education | At Least One Parent with an Associate or Higher Education |
|-----------------------------|------------|--|---|
| <b>Young adults (18–34)</b> | <b>24%</b> | <b>21%</b>   | <b>27%</b>  |
| First generation            | 21%        | 13%  | 33%   |
| Second generation           | 34%        | 32%  | 34%   |
| Third-and-higher generation | 23%        | 17%  | 28%   |

Notes: This table shows the share of young adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities at an associate or bachelor's level. This table describes PIAAC participants with valid answers on both immigrant generation and enrollment questions.

Source: MPI tabulation of pooled PIAAC data for 2012/2014/2017.

TABLE 8

**Average Age of the Total U.S. Population, by Immigrant Generation and Race and Ethnicity, 2022**

|                         | <b>First<br/>Generation</b> | <b>Second<br/>Generation</b> | <b>Third-and-Higher<br/>Generation</b> |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Total population</b> | <b>46</b>                   | <b>28</b>                    | <b>40</b>                              |
| Latino                  | 45                          | 22                           | 29                                     |
| Black                   | 44                          | 20                           | 36                                     |
| AAPI                    | 47                          | 25                           | 29                                     |
| White                   | 49                          | 41                           | 42                                     |

Note: Latinos can be of any race. In this analysis, Black refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “Black” or “Black” in combination with other races. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “AAPI” or “AAPI” in combination with other races except Black. White refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “White.” This group also includes a numerically small category of respondents who identified as American Indian or other races.

Source: MPI tabulation of the CPS March Annual Social and Economic Supplement 2022.

## 4 Looking to the Future

The fast-growing immigrant-origin population has broadly increased its share of college-enrolled students over the past two decades. Much of this growth in postsecondary enrollment can be attributed to the population’s increased numbers and, in particular, to the relatively high, sustained enrollment rates of the second generation. The second generation’s younger average age (28 as of 2022) compared to that of the first generation (46) and third-and-higher generation (40) will likely contribute to its rising prominence among U.S. students for years to come (see Table 8).

Driven partly by growth in the number of students from immigrant families, as documented in this brief, the U.S. college student population has become more diverse over the past two decades—a trend that will continue, barring major reversals in immigration and education policies. Enrollment growth will be driven by the youngest groups, which include second-generation Black, Latino, and AAPI individuals, whose average ages range from 20 to 25 years (see Table 8). The next youngest demographic groups are third-and-higher-generation Latino and AAPI individuals, with an average age of 29. By con-

trast, the average age for White U.S. residents of all three immigrant generation groups is over 40. Thus, they will comprise a declining share of the pool of adults likely to enroll in college. (See Appendix Table A-3 for a detailed breakdown by immigrant generation, race/ethnicity, and age.)

## 5 Conclusion and Implications

Against the backdrop of post-2011 college enrollment declines exacerbated starting in 2020 by the pandemic, immigrant-origin students in the United States have been a significant yet often overlooked presence on U.S. college campuses. These first- and second-generation students, many of whom are racial and ethnic minorities, have played a crucial role in bolstering student numbers in four-year institutions and mitigating enrollment declines in two-year colleges. Led by Latino, Black, and AAPI populations, the rapidly growing second generation (U.S.-born students with immigrant parents) has played and will continue to play a vital role in shaping enrollment patterns, especially at four-year colleges, where their enrollment has steadily increased since 2000.

*These first- and second-generation students, many of whom are racial and ethnic minorities, have played a crucial role in bolstering student numbers in four-year institutions and mitigating enrollment declines in two-year colleges.*

These educational trends serve as indicators of greater social mobility and equity, given the well-documented value of postsecondary credentials in the U.S. economy and society.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, robust enrollment growth can be seen as a marker of successful integration across immigrant generations.<sup>29</sup> However, it is important to note that while the number of immigrant-origin students has risen over the past two decades, the rate at which immigrant-origin young adults (ages 18–34) are enrolling in college to obtain an undergraduate degree has not risen since 2000. Meanwhile, the enrollment rate of U.S.-born young adults with U.S.-born parents (the third-and-higher generation) has been similarly flat—a trend that, coupled with the shrinking size of the overall third-and-higher-generation adult population (18–54), has contributed to the declining number of college enrollees nationwide since 2011.

These enrollment trends occur within the context of sustained shortages of mid- and high-skilled workers, an aging U.S. population, and declines in the number of children under 18 and young, college-age adults.<sup>30</sup> Looking ahead, the groups most likely to enroll in postsecondary institutions are those with the lowest average ages, including second-generation Black, Latino, and AAPI individuals, whose average ages were between 20 and 25 in 2022. By contrast, the average age for the third-and-higher-generation White population, which has historically fueled college admissions, was 42.

Immigration policies that shape the number and characteristics of new arrivals also play a crucial role in postsecondary enrollment. Following declines during the Trump administration and the pandemic, immigrant admissions have rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, including a growing number of international students. Additionally, nearly half of recently arrived immigrants (those who arrived within the past five years) possess a bachelor's degree or higher. Given the positive relationship between parental education and college enrollment and completion,<sup>31</sup> it is likely that the children of these highly educated newcomers will enroll in postsecondary institutions at relatively high rates.

As U.S. colleges and universities grapple with the pandemic's lasting repercussions for student enrollment and the related impact on institutional finances, understanding who the nation's future college enrollees are likely to be has become a focal point for higher education policymakers and practitioners.<sup>32</sup> While enrollment may have stabilized, the pandemic and long-term demographic changes have left a lasting impact on postsecondary institutions. Navigating these trends and boosting enrollment will require, among other things, greater attention to current and prospective students from immigrant families.

Strategies to promote the college enrollment and completion of immigrant-origin students should include a focus on three distinct demographic groups. The first group consists of the 6.1 million immigrant-origin students already enrolled in college (the main focus of this issue brief). The second group comprises another 6.1 million immigrant-origin youth ages 14 to 18, most of whom will be graduating from high school in the coming years (see Appendix Table A–3) but whose college prospects may be at risk because of pandemic-related learn-

ing gaps.<sup>33</sup> The third population includes the 20.6 million immigrant-origin adults ages 16 to 64 who have a high school education but no postsecondary credential.<sup>34</sup>

Addressing barriers to college enrollment and completion—both those that affect all students as well as those particularly relevant to students from

immigrant families, such as language barriers and legal status—will help create a strong pool of workers able to navigate the evolving world of work and social change.<sup>35</sup> And because most immigrant-origin adults are racial and ethnic minorities, their success signals not just successful immigrant integration but also progress toward racial equity.

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*Addressing barriers to college enrollment and completion—both those that affect all students as well as those particularly relevant to students from immigrant families, such as language barriers and legal status—will help create a strong pool of workers able to navigate the evolving world of work and social change.*

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## Appendix. Additional Data Tables

TABLE A-1

**Number and Percent Change of Total Adults and Adults Enrolled in U.S. Colleges (ages 18–54), by Immigrant Generation, 2000–21**

|                             | Number             |                    |                    |                    |                    | Percent Change |            |            |            |            |            |            |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
|                             | 2000               | 2007               | 2011               | 2019               | 2021               | 2000–07        | 2007–11    | 2011–19    | 2019–21    | 2000–11    | 2000–19    | 2000–21    |
| <b>Total adults</b>         | <b>128,192,000</b> | <b>135,768,000</b> | <b>136,656,000</b> | <b>141,726,000</b> | <b>141,908,000</b> | <b>6%</b>      | <b>1%</b>  | <b>4%</b>  | <b>0%</b>  | <b>7%</b>  | <b>11%</b> | <b>11%</b> |
| Immigrant origin            | 23,016,000         | 28,958,000         | 31,362,000         | 38,036,000         | 39,784,000         | 26%            | 8%         | 21%        | 5%         | 36%        | 65%        | 73%        |
| First generation            | 14,821,000         | 18,800,000         | 19,474,000         | 22,366,000         | 22,926,000         | 27%            | 4%         | 15%        | 3%         | 31%        | 51%        | 55%        |
| Second generation           | 8,194,000          | 10,159,000         | 11,888,000         | 15,670,000         | 16,858,000         | 24%            | 17%        | 32%        | 8%         | 45%        | 91%        | 106%       |
| Third-and-higher generation | 105,176,000        | 106,810,000        | 105,294,000        | 103,690,000        | 102,124,000        | 2%             | –1%        | –2%        | –2%        | 0%         | –1%        | –3%        |
| <b>Enrolled in colleges</b> | <b>15,312,000</b>  | <b>18,248,000</b>  | <b>21,011,000</b>  | <b>19,630,000</b>  | <b>18,660,000</b>  | <b>19%</b>     | <b>15%</b> | <b>–7%</b> | <b>–5%</b> | <b>37%</b> | <b>28%</b> | <b>22%</b> |
| Immigrant origin            | 3,426,000          | 4,086,000          | 5,322,000          | 6,047,000          | 6,087,000          | 19%            | 30%        | 14%        | 1%         | 55%        | 76%        | 78%        |
| First generation            | 1,879,000          | 1,962,000          | 2,303,000          | 2,403,000          | 2,362,000          | 4%             | 17%        | 4%         | –2%        | 23%        | 28%        | 26%        |
| Second generation           | 1,547,000          | 2,124,000          | 3,019,000          | 3,644,000          | 3,725,000          | 37%            | 42%        | 21%        | 2%         | 95%        | 135%       | 141%       |
| Third-and-higher generation | 11,886,000         | 14,162,000         | 15,689,000         | 13,584,000         | 12,573,000         | 19%            | 11%        | –13%       | –7%        | 32%        | 14%        | 6%         |

Note: The bottom panel of this table shows adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities.  
Source: MPI tabulation of the CPS October Supplement, 2000–21.

TABLE A-2

Students Enrolled in U.S. Colleges (ages 18–54), by Institution Type and Immigrant Generation, 2000–21

|                             | Number           |                   |                   |                   |                   | Percent Change |            |             |             |            |            |             |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|
|                             | 2000             | 2007              | 2011              | 2019              | 2021              | 2000–07        | 2007–11    | 2011–19     | 2019–21     | 2000–11    | 2000–19    | 2000–21     |
| <b>Four-year colleges</b>   | <b>9,364,000</b> | <b>11,630,000</b> | <b>13,499,000</b> | <b>14,039,000</b> | <b>13,977,000</b> | <b>24%</b>     | <b>16%</b> | <b>4%</b>   | <b>0%</b>   | <b>44%</b> | <b>50%</b> | <b>49%</b>  |
| Immigrant origin            | 2,102,000        | 2,542,000         | 3,312,000         | 4,279,000         | 4,509,000         | 21%            | 30%        | 29%         | 5%          | 58%        | 104%       | 115%        |
| First generation            | 1,184,000        | 1,180,000         | 1,504,000         | 1,700,000         | 1,800,000         | 0%             | 27%        | 13%         | 6%          | 27%        | 44%        | 52%         |
| Second generation           | 918,000          | 1,362,000         | 1,808,000         | 2,579,000         | 2,709,000         | 48%            | 33%        | 43%         | 5%          | 97%        | 181%       | 195%        |
| Third-and-higher generation | 7,262,000        | 9,088,000         | 10,188,000        | 9,760,000         | 9,469,000         | 25%            | 12%        | -4%         | -3%         | 40%        | 34%        | 30%         |
| <b>Two-year colleges</b>    | <b>5,948,000</b> | <b>6,618,000</b>  | <b>7,511,000</b>  | <b>5,591,000</b>  | <b>4,683,000</b>  | <b>11%</b>     | <b>13%</b> | <b>-26%</b> | <b>-16%</b> | <b>26%</b> | <b>-6%</b> | <b>-21%</b> |
| Immigrant origin            | 1,320,000        | 1,565,000         | 2,044,000         | 1,774,000         | 1,585,000         | 19%            | 31%        | -13%        | -11%        | 55%        | 34%        | 20%         |
| First generation            | 672,000          | 806,000           | 792,000           | 705,000           | 557,000           | 20%            | -2%        | -11%        | -21%        | 18%        | 5%         | -17%        |
| Second generation           | 648,000          | 759,000           | 1,253,000         | 1,069,000         | 1,028,000         | 17%            | 65%        | -15%        | -4%         | 93%        | 65%        | 59%         |
| Third-and-higher generation | 4,628,000        | 5,053,000         | 5,467,000         | 3,817,000         | 3,098,000         | 9%             | 8%         | -30%        | -19%        | 18%        | -18%       | -33%        |

Note: This table shows adults with at least a high school degree or equivalent who are enrolled in either two- or four-year colleges and universities.

Source: MPI tabulation of the CPS October Supplement, 2000–21.

TABLE A-3

**Number and Share of Children and Young Adults in the United States, by Immigrant Generation, Race and Ethnicity, and Selected Age Groups, 2022**

|                                    | Estimate                        |                     |                                       |                      | Share of the Age Group          |                     |                                       |                      |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
|                                    | Middle School or Younger (0-13) | High School (14-18) | Traditional College-Going Age (19-24) | Young Adults (25-34) | Middle School or Younger (0-13) | High School (14-18) | Traditional College-Going Age (19-24) | Young Adults (25-34) |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>55,528,000</b>               | <b>22,146,000</b>   | <b>24,774,000</b>                     | <b>44,583,000</b>    | <b>100%</b>                     | <b>100%</b>         | <b>100%</b>                           | <b>100%</b>          |
| <b>First generation</b>            | <b>1,736,000</b>                | <b>1,223,000</b>    | <b>2,548,000</b>                      | <b>7,204,000</b>     | <b>3%</b>                       | <b>6%</b>           | <b>10%</b>                            | <b>16%</b>           |
| Latino                             | 779,000                         | 555,000             | 1,306,000                             | 3,383,000            | 1%                              | 3%                  | 5%                                    | 8%                   |
| Black                              | 232,000                         | 178,000             | 276,000                               | 686,000              | 0%                              | 1%                  | 1%                                    | 2%                   |
| AAPI                               | 411,000                         | 270,000             | 631,000                               | 2,021,000            | 1%                              | 1%                  | 3%                                    | 5%                   |
| White                              | 314,000                         | 219,000             | 336,000                               | 1,114,000            | 1%                              | 1%                  | 1%                                    | 2%                   |
| <b>Second generation</b>           | <b>13,111,000</b>               | <b>4,859,000</b>    | <b>4,685,000</b>                      | <b>5,893,000</b>     | <b>24%</b>                      | <b>22%</b>          | <b>19%</b>                            | <b>13%</b>           |
| Latino                             | 6,855,000                       | 2,838,000           | 2,615,000                             | 3,143,000            | 12%                             | 13%                 | 11%                                   | 7%                   |
| Black                              | 1,380,000                       | 448,000             | 439,000                               | 508,000              | 2%                              | 2%                  | 2%                                    | 1%                   |
| AAPI                               | 2,775,000                       | 827,000             | 886,000                               | 1,115,000            | 5%                              | 4%                  | 4%                                    | 3%                   |
| White                              | 2,101,000                       | 746,000             | 746,000                               | 1,128,000            | 4%                              | 3%                  | 3%                                    | 3%                   |
| <b>Third-and-higher generation</b> | <b>40,681,000</b>               | <b>16,064,000</b>   | <b>17,540,000</b>                     | <b>31,486,000</b>    | <b>73%</b>                      | <b>73%</b>          | <b>71%</b>                            | <b>71%</b>           |
| Latino                             | 6,699,000                       | 2,164,000           | 2,020,000                             | 2,927,000            | 12%                             | 10%                 | 8%                                    | 7%                   |
| Black                              | 7,521,000                       | 2,821,000           | 2,974,000                             | 5,372,000            | 14%                             | 13%                 | 12%                                   | 12%                  |
| AAPI                               | 1,088,000                       | 332,000             | 305,000                               | 527,000              | 2%                              | 2%                  | 1%                                    | 1%                   |
| White                              | 25,373,000                      | 10,747,000          | 12,241,000                            | 22,660,000           | 46%                             | 49%                 | 49%                                   | 51%                  |

Note: Latinos can be of any race. In this analysis, Black refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “Black” or “Black” in combination with other races. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “AAPI” or “AAPI” in combination with other races except Black. White refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “White.” This category also includes a numerically small category of respondents who identified as American Indian or other races. Source: MPI tabulation of the CPS March Supplement 2022.

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