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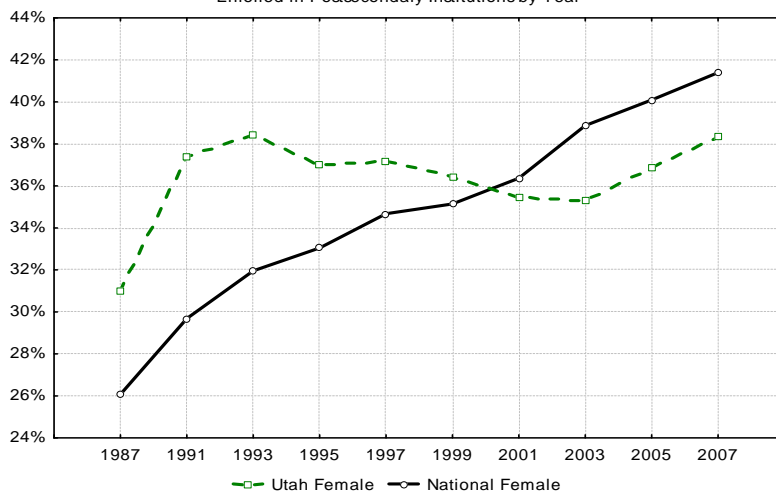
Women and Higher Education in Utah: *A Glimpse at the Past and Present*

According to Lumina Foundation researchers, “The United States has long been the world’s most prosperous and successful nation, in part because our people have typically been the world’s best educated.”¹ The same can be said historically for the State of Utah. Since 1940, Utah has consistently been above the national average in the percentage of adults holding bachelor’s degrees or higher. However, in the last two decades Utah has lost its advantage, and this is particularly true for women in the state. According to the Utah Foundation, from 1940 to 2000 the educational attainment of Utah women was higher than the national average.² Conversely, in 2001 Utah women fell below the national average, and the trend has continued. In 1987, approximately 31 percent of the state’s 18–24-year-old female population attended postsecondary institutions (e.g., colleges, universities, and technical schools) compared to only 26 percent nationally (see Figure 1).

because the percentage of females enrolled in the state declined. Historically the number of Utah women with at least a baccalaureate degree had steadily increased, in part because of the population growth within the state. Presently, more Utah women are seeking postsecondary education, but they are not keeping up with their counterparts across the nation.³ Enrollment numbers have been increasing since 2003, but in 2008 they remained 3 percent below the national average of 41.4 percent.

National statistics show that, among those who attend college, more women (57 percent) enroll than men (43 percent). However, in Utah approximately 49 percent of higher education students are women, with the lowest percentages enrolled at the University of Utah (44 percent) and Utah Valley University (43 percent). Compared to all other states, Utah is last in terms of the percentage of female students enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

Figure 1: Percentage of 18-24-Year-Old Females Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions by Year



The participation of Utah women in higher education continued to increase until 1993, when the percentage began decreasing. By 2001 the percentage of Utah women enrolled in postsecondary education decreased to the point that the national percentage surpassed the Utah percentage. It is important to note that the decline in Utah’s ranking is not because fewer Utah women are enrolled in college, but

An educated citizenry is necessary to remain competitive in today’s state, national, and global economies. Governor Gary R. Herbert expressed his concern about this issue in his January 26, 2010, State of the State Address. He called upon the State Board of Regents and Commissioner William Sederburg to create a plan by fall 2010 to determine how Utah’s colleges and universities will meet the growing need for graduates to address the workforce demands of employers in this knowledge-based economy.⁴ Central to the current State Board of Regent’s emerging plan are strategies to increase higher education participation and completion rates for both genders. The research and efforts of the *Utah Women and Education Project* are closely related to this mission but are focused primarily on Utah women.

The purpose of this brief is to provide data that will help Utahns understand more about women’s educational attainment in the state. The raw data used in this brief were downloaded from the National Center of Educational Statistics IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) for 2008. IPEDS is the core postsecondary

education data collection program in the United States that provides information on colleges, universities, and technical and vocational institutions. This brief includes relevant demographics and research findings related to postsecondary enrollment (participation) and graduation (completion).

Demographics

To understand educational trends in Utah, it is important to consider pertinent Utah demographics. According to the most recent U.S. Census American Communities 2006–08 Survey, Utah has a population of 2,663,500 people.⁵ Among minors, there are slightly more males (50.5 percent), but the genders are split evenly among adults. A large majority of Utahns are White (82.2 percent). The Hispanic or Latino population is the second largest at 11.5 percent; the number of citizens in this group has been rising gradually (it was 9 percent in the 2000 U.S. census count). Other cultural groups include Asians (1.9 percent); American Indians and Alaska Natives (1.1 percent); Blacks or African Americans (0.9 percent); Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders (0.7 percent); and Other Races or Two or More Races combined (1.6 percent).

In 2008, almost 61 percent of females (582,692) 16 years and older were employed. Overall, women comprise 44 percent of the labor force in Utah. Many women continue working after marrying and having children. Slightly more than 50 percent of households with children younger than 6 years old (150,166), and 62.8 percent of households with children 6–17 years old (312,892) have both parents working in the labor force. The percentage of women 15 years and older who are divorced is 10.1 percent compared to the national average of 11.7 percent. While 75 percent of Utah households consist of traditional families, 9.2 percent of households are headed by females only (76,752), and 5.5 percent are headed by females with children under 18 years old (45,593). Families with a single female head of household are more likely to earn incomes below the poverty level (24 percent); the figure rises to 32 percent when children are living in the home. By contrast, only 5.5 percent of married couples with children live below the poverty level.

Several demographic trends are projected to affect the State of Utah over the next decade. Utah’s population growth rate continues to exceed that of the nation—Utah was the second-fastest growing state in the nation in 2009.⁶ According to the 2010 Governor’s Economic Report, Utah also ranked as the youngest state in the nation in 2007 with a median age of 28.5 compared to the national average of 36.6.⁷ Many factors lead to this unique age structure in Utah. Women have more children, there are larger households with a younger population, and Utahns live longer than the national average.⁸ In fact, in 2009 the Utah Governor’s Economic Report projected an increase of

about 160,000 people in the school-age population over the next decade. In the past few years alone, the numbers of students in Utah’s public and higher education systems have increased sharply, and this cohort of students is unlike previous generations. According to Pamela Perlich, Senior Research Economist at the Utah Bureau of Economic and Business Research, “The youth of today are coming of age in a much more multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic society than was experienced by their parents and grandparents.”⁹ Changing demographics requires a more focused analysis of the highlighted data to ensure strategic solutions are developed for future success.

Enrollment

Where are female college students attaining higher education in Utah? Slightly over 66 percent of female college students (73,488) attend USHE institutions (CEU, DSC, Snow, SLCC, SUU, University of Utah, USU, UVU, and WSU), while 23.4 percent (25,906) attend private not-for-profit institutions (BYU, Westminster, LDS Business College, and Western Governors). The remaining female students are attending private for-profits (4.2 percent; 4,662), technical institutions (4.2 percent; 4,630), and cosmetology and massage schools (2.0 percent; 2,249).

Overall, Utah public institutions account for 68 percent of all enrolled students. This presents public higher education with the potential to establish a substantial impact for change in Utah.

What is the percentage of Utah female college students enrolled in postsecondary institutions? As previously mentioned, the percentage of female students enrolled in Utah public institutions is 49 percent,

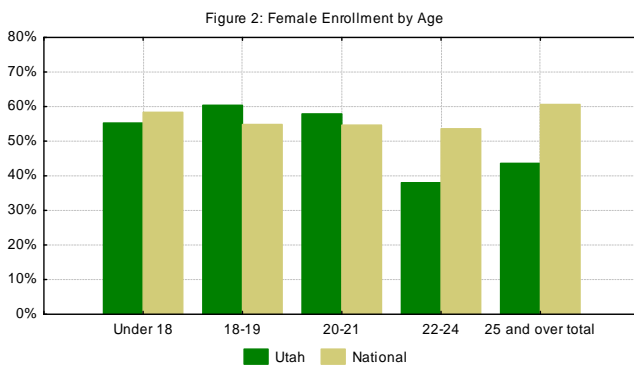
while the national average in public institutions is 57.4 percent. Undergraduate totals are similar, while the numbers are slightly higher for first-time undergraduate females in Utah (51.9 percent). This means that more females are attending college after high school, but they do not stay—enrollment percentages decrease slightly after the first year. In graduate schools, 49 percent of Utah students are women versus 58.8 percent nationally. Utah has a similar disparity in the number of females going to school part-time (50.2 percent) compared to their national counterparts (59.8 percent).

How is Utah doing in terms of female enrollment by racial category compared to the national average? Significant differences emerge when comparing the race of the female students in Utah public institutions to those enrolled in national public institutions. The largest disparity in race is among the African American population; 42 percent of African American students enrolled in Utah postsecondary institutions are females compared to 64.9 percent nationally. The following table outlines the percentages of enrolled females by racial category in Utah public and national public institutions.

When compared to all other states, Utah is last in terms of the percentage of female students enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

Race	Utah Public	National Public	Difference
American Indian or Alaska Native	57.8%	60.2%	-2.4%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	50.8%	53.9%	-3.1%
Black or African American	42.0%	64.9%	-22.9%
Hispanic	52.6%	58.8%	-6.2%
White	48.7%	56.3%	-7.6%
Nonresident Alien	50.1%	46.6%	4.5%

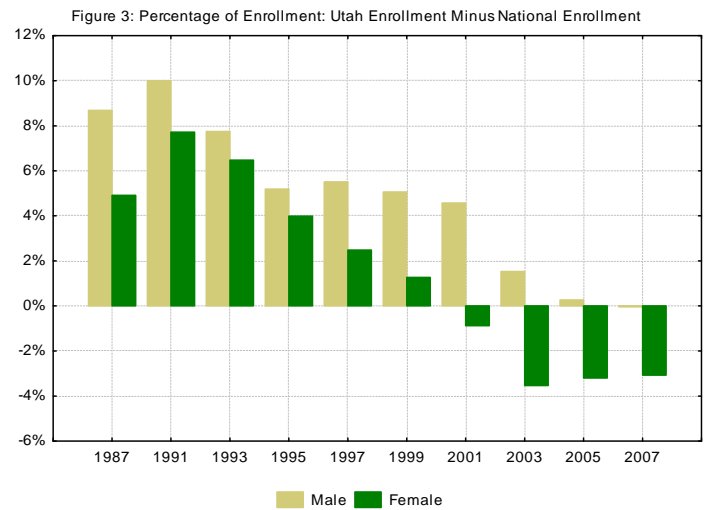
Are female students in Utah below the national average in all age categories? The percentage of female students enrolled in public institutions in Utah by age is unique. Because many young men leave for full-time missions for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), the percentage of females enrolled is actually above the national average among 18–21-year-olds (see Figure 2). However, the percentage of females enrolled decreases dramatically in the 22–24 age category, in part due to young men returning to school after their missions. Part of this discrepancy could possibly be explained by Utah women graduating early; however, female graduation rates in Utah are below the national average, suggesting that women leave school without earning a diploma during these years. Hence, the disparity in enrollment by age is best explained by additional males coming into the system and females exiting the system more quickly.



In what degree programs are Utah females enrolled? Data show that Utah females are not enrolling in higher education to complete degrees in high-demand fields that customarily pay well. For example, 28.8 percent of business management and administration students in Utah public institutions are women, compared to 49.5 percent nationally. The two business management programs in USHE institutions with the highest percentage of enrolled females are SUU (35.9 percent) and Dixie (32.9 percent). Programs with the lowest enrollment percentages include UVU (23.3 percent) and the University of Utah (28.7). Interestingly, BYU has the lowest enrollment percentage of all public and private not-for-profits at 21.7 percent, while Western Governor’s University is the highest at 51.6 percent. Biological and life science is also a problematic area, with Utah’s female enrollment falling 19.5 percent below the national average (Utah 40 percent; U.S. 59.5

percent). Conversely, Utah ranks very high in the percentage of females enrolled in education programs. Statistics suggest that women in Utah accept lower-wage jobs that are often low skilled.¹⁰ Females who want to maximize their employability, increase their wage earning capabilities, and spend minimal time working outside their home need to consider more advanced training in carefully selected disciplines.

What are longitudinal enrollment trends for females and males in Utah? There has been a downward trend for both women and men, as stated in the introduction. It is important to note that the percentage of the overall population of 18–24-year-old Utah males in college has also decreased. The male population in Utah was one of the highest educated groups in the United States for many years. The number of enrolled males began decreasing in 1991, while the national average increased consistently. By 2005, the number of Utah males enrolled in higher education matched the national average and has remained the same. Figure 3 combines Utah male and female data starting in 1987.

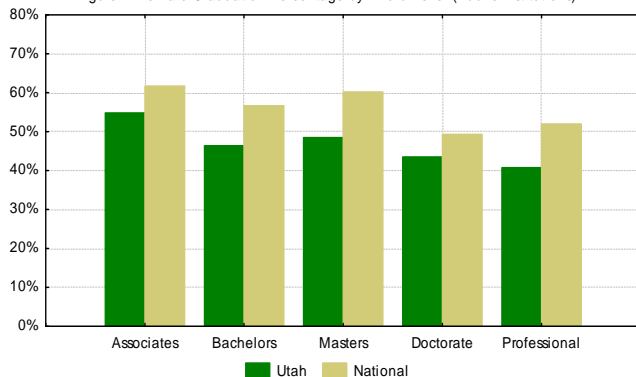


In 1987, the percentages of Utah males and females enrolled in higher education were well above the national average. These percentages for both genders have decreased over time with the female reductions most prominent when compared to the national average. However, looking at the statistics in another way, only 32.1 percent of Utah males 18–24 years old enrolled in postsecondary education compared to 38.3 percent of Utah females. Even with the discrepancy explained partly by the number of Utah males who serve an LDS missions, it is apparent that participation rates for males in Utah should also increase. It is important to note that the higher percentages of women include females in certificate trade programs (e.g., cosmetology, massage, and culinary arts) that are focused on short-term postsecondary training rather than two- and four-year degree programs.

Graduation

What is the graduation rate of Utah women? Utah women trail national female graduation rates in all degree categories (see Figure 4). National statistics illustrate high female graduation rates; nearly 58 percent of women across the United States graduate from public institutions, while the percentage of Utah women graduating is slightly below 50 percent. Of degrees granted across the nation in any type of institution, 59 percent are given to females compared with 53 percent in Utah when private not-for-profit (e.g., BYU) and other types of institutions are included. For example, private for-profit institutions (e.g., AmeriTech, Eagle Gate, Stevens-Henager, Utah Career) award 60 percent of their degrees to females. Among trade schools, 64 percent of applied technology and 88 percent of cosmetology school graduates are female. There is also a disparity across the board when comparing the downward trend of female graduates moving from associate degrees through doctorate degrees. Women receive 55 percent of all associate’s degrees in Utah, 46 percent of baccalaureates, 49 percent of master’s degrees, and 43 percent of doctorates. A similar drop is seen nationally, but the trend begins at 62 percent for the associate degree.

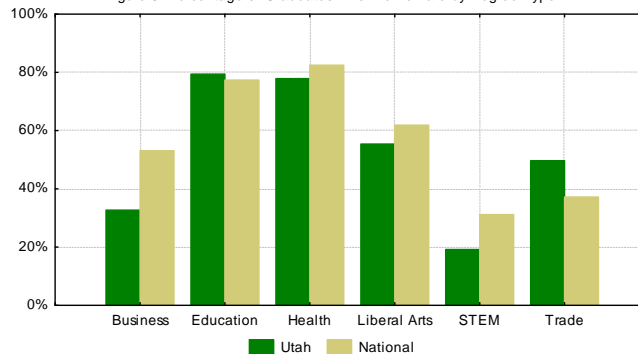
Figure 4: Female Graduation Percentage by Award Level (Public Institutions)



What types of degrees do women earn in Utah? Utah females are not keeping pace with national trends in graduation rates and in the degrees they pursue. Utah females trail their national counterparts in all areas outlined except Education and the Trades (see Figure 5). In education, Utah women at public institutions account for 79.4 percent of all graduates compared to the national average of 77.4 percent. This is commendable, since teachers are in demand due to the state’s growing population.⁶ Utah females graduating at the bachelor’s level are more likely to earn a degree in education, health, or social services.

Interestingly, Utah women enrolled in trade fields account for 49.7 percent of all trade graduates, which is 12.5 percent higher than the national average of 37.2 percent. Utah has high numbers of women earning certificates and degrees in culinary arts and cosmetology. However, in Business, Health, Liberal Arts, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), Utah women have lower graduation rates than their national peers.

Figure 5: Percentage of Graduates Who Are Female by Degree Type



Conclusion

Utah citizens were previously among the best-educated people in the United States. Between 1993 and 2003 the proportion of Utah citizens enrolled in college declined dramatically. While enrollment rates are now increasing, they have not kept pace with the national average. This trend generates broad concern for the future of the state, underscoring the increasing need to prepare “Utah’s workforce for high-growth, high-wage jobs” that are “critical to maintaining both the competitiveness and standard of living of Utah’s workers.”¹¹

Clearly, women are doing well in many aspects of the postsecondary experience. However, to achieve the vision of Utah leaders as well as to meet the needs of Utah employers and families, more women in Utah need to make better educational choices and obtain college degrees. Women who want to maximize their employability and increase their wages, as well as mothers who want flexible working schedules in desirable jobs, need to consider more advanced education in high-demand professions. A college degree also has implications well beyond the workplace.¹² Formal education beyond high school is critical as Utah women continue to seek ways to become more competent and influential contributors within their homes, churches, communities, workplaces, and beyond.

This research and policy brief was written by Susan R. Madsen, Cheryl Hanewicz, Susan Thackeray, and A. David King from the Office of the Utah Women and Education Project at Utah Valley University. Dr. Madsen can be reached for comment at (801) 863-6176 or madsensu@uvu.edu. Funding for this report was provided by a Carl D. Perkins Leadership Grant (2009–2010) through the Utah State Office of Education, Utah Valley University, and the Utah System of Higher Education. For more information about this project, please visit our website at www.uvu.edu/wep. Copyright © 2010 Office of the Utah Women & Education Project.

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