



Education Matters

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Minority Student Enrollment, Retention, Degree Rates and Median Income in South Carolina from the Past Decade

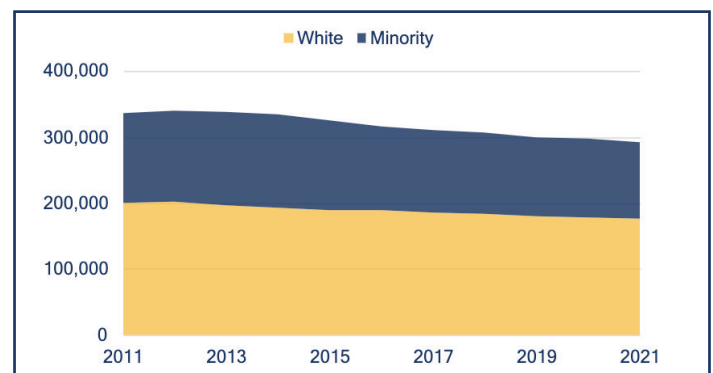
Summary

Over the last decade, higher education has been in the spotlight due to rising costs, dwindling enrollment, and the applicability of certain majors to real-world occupations. This brief examines how minority students have fared relative to several of these metrics, particularly in terms of enrollment, graduation rates, and degrees conferred from 2011 to 2021.

Education is an extremely valuable, but costly asset in today's economy. This is especially true for people identifying as one or more racial/ethnic minority groups. Higher educational attainment levels allow individuals from lower socio-economic strata to open opportunities not typically available in their communities, while also opening the door to higher lifetime income. Although income gaps between white and minority populations exist across the educational attainment spectrum, minorities with higher educational attainment levels are less likely to live in poverty, be unemployed, and live in cost-burdened living situations (see CMA Statistical Profile 2021-22). For instance, in 2021, African Americans who had their high school diploma or GED had a median income of only \$18,000 compared to the \$42,000 earned from African Americans who had at least a bachelor's degree. The median income of all minorities with at least a bachelor's degree increased by a real (inflation adjusted) 8.16% from 2011 to 2021. Nevertheless, there are several challenges that come with obtaining a college degree and for students of color, these challenges are magnified. One of these challenges happen to be coming from rural areas. In 2021, 5.9% of minority students in South Carolina came from rural areas. Compared to the 27.5% of minorities from the suburbs, that number is miniscule. High school students in rural areas have graduation rates just as high as their peers from suburban areas.

However, most schools in rural areas do not provide students with adequate resources that assist them in preparing for college. Rural minority households make less money than those from suburban areas which also increases the relative costs of educational resources, such as internet quality/connectivity, books, etc. Beyond the issues with these underfunded rural schools and the attendant economic issues associated with attending them, the distance between rural areas and colleges/universities often makes attending difficult due to transportation deficiencies.

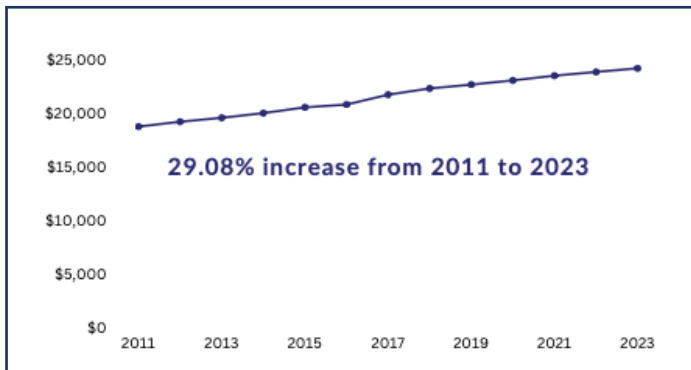
Students Enrolled in Post-Secondary Institutions Annually (Undergraduate)



One of the biggest factors affecting enrollment and graduation rates is poverty. Financial stress is a tremendous burden to carry as a student, and many minority students are afraid to attend college because of it.



Cost of Attendance for Colleges and Universities (In-State)



Poverty can be very difficult to manage if the student comes from a low socio-economical area due to low income at home. Since 2011, the cost of tuition and fees at universities across South Carolina rose an annual 2.42%. Although this was lower than inflation, many financial aid resources have not covered the difference, leaving students dependent on federal and private loans to fill the gap. Federal loans are often easier to work with and offer a variety of repayment plans to help lower-income individuals, but, due to certain limits, may not cover the entire cost of attendance. Furthermore, loans come due whether a person graduates or not, and, as seen on the following page, minorities have lower graduation rates than Whites, in general. When COVID-19 was introduced to us in 2020, students were sent back home in the middle of the semester. Students who lived in poverty had to go back to the limited resources they had at home. Universities froze tuition but students still had to pay for school for the rest of the semester.

Minority college students face everyday challenges as well. They must manage their educational pursuits while juggling all that life throws at them as a college student. All students deal with these problems, but minority students are particularly vulnerable to them. Minority students appear to experience greater psychological distress as a result of the same stresses that White students do, as measured by higher levels of binge drinking, suicidal thoughts, loneliness, and depression (Smith et al., 2014).

In other words, minority students have to adapt to the college life because the environment is often vastly different to what they are accustomed. They have to find a way to fit in socially and culturally, and that can be very challenging for some, especially if they are enrolled at a predominantly white institution. Students tend to dropout of school for this reason. This supports the research showing that white students in South Carolina have up to 2.5 times the likelihood of graduating as compared to students from some minority groups.

Degrees Awarded at Post-Secondary Insitutions

Race/Ethnicity	2011	2021	Change
Asian American/Pacific Islander	836	1,235	(+)399
African American	12,604	11,464	-1,140
Hispanic/Latino	1,080	2,842	(+)1,762
Native American	260	190	-70
Two or More Races	515	1,917	(+)1,402
Total	15,295	17,648	(+)1,021

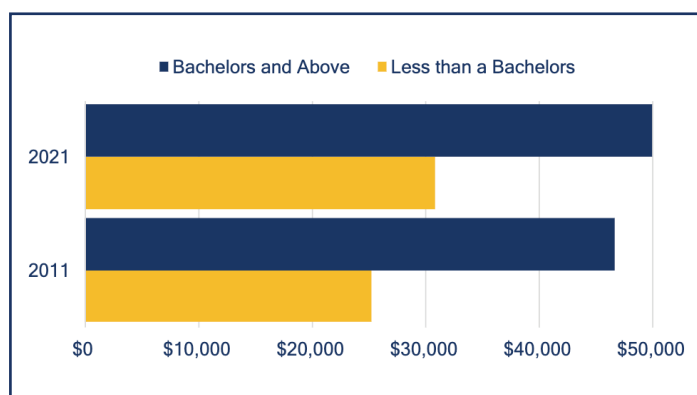
Since 2011, minority student enrollment has decreased at a faster rate than that of the White population. What makes this case interesting is that the minority population is younger than the white population at the state level. Minority students made up 39.94% of all undergraduate students in 2021, 0.88 percentage points less than they did in 2011. The minority student population of all South Carolina colleges and universities experienced a 15% decrease while the White population declined by 11%. Despite the decrease in enrollment, the number of degrees awarded to minority students increased from 2011 to 2021. This number should rise due to the growing population of each minority group in South Carolina and prospective students from out of state. With COVID-19 dying down, there should also be an increase in international students pursuing a degree as well.

Graduation rates from South Carolina colleges have fluctuated since 2011. In some cases, rates decreased, but for African Americans and Native Americans rates either plateaued (AA) or rose slightly (AIAN).



In 2015, the Native American graduation rate was 5.4 percentage points higher than it was 4 years prior, which is the largest increase across any of the minority groups. The state's highest graduation rate, at around 70%, belongs to the Asian American and Pacific Islander population (AAPI). They are the only group to have a higher graduation percentage than the White population. African American students had the lowest graduation rate, hovering around 40% over the decade.

Income for Employed Minorities by Educational Attachment, 2011 & 2021

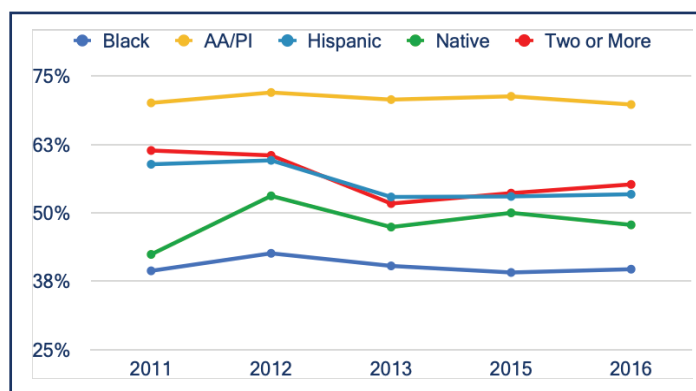


In order to increase graduation rates for our minority students it's important to make them feel secure. Students are able to perform better when they are not struggling academically, emotionally and financially. For improvement, students need to be understood. Universities have students from different backgrounds. Some had the opportunity to take classes that others didn't in high school, some have a better chance at accessing resources.

More affordable ways to obtain course materials and better tutor/mentor those from diverse backgrounds could be a great way to seek improvement.

Possessing a college degree is a difference maker in the workforce, as opportunities are more obtainable and higher salaries are more common. The higher the educational attainment level an individual has, the more money they are likely to earn. Students of color in South Carolina benefit far more from pursuing a degree. It essentially helps minorities achieve more economic and financial stability. As the figure below indicates, minorities with at least a bachelor's degree made significantly more money in 2011 and 2021 than those who did not. Equally important is the fact that educational attainment level significantly reduced minority unemployment rates by nearly half. In 2021, minorities with a bachelors and above had an unemployment rate of 3.6%, for all others that rate was 7.3%.

Graduation Rates for Post-Secondary Institutions in South Carolina



Conclusion

Although, having a postsecondary degree isn't essential in life, there are benefits for it. While minorities already face a benefits gap in South Carolina, furthering one's education is a small step into closing that gap. Minorities students face several challenges while attending college which make the road to a degree very difficult. Statistics show that there has only been 1,021 more degrees awarded at postsecondary institutions in 2021 than in 2011. With the number of young minority adults aged 18-22 rising, we should advocate for resources to help them further their education.