

Rising Number of Latino College Students in Midst of Major U.S. Enrollment Declines

Guest Blog by Rogelio Sáenz, Ph.D.

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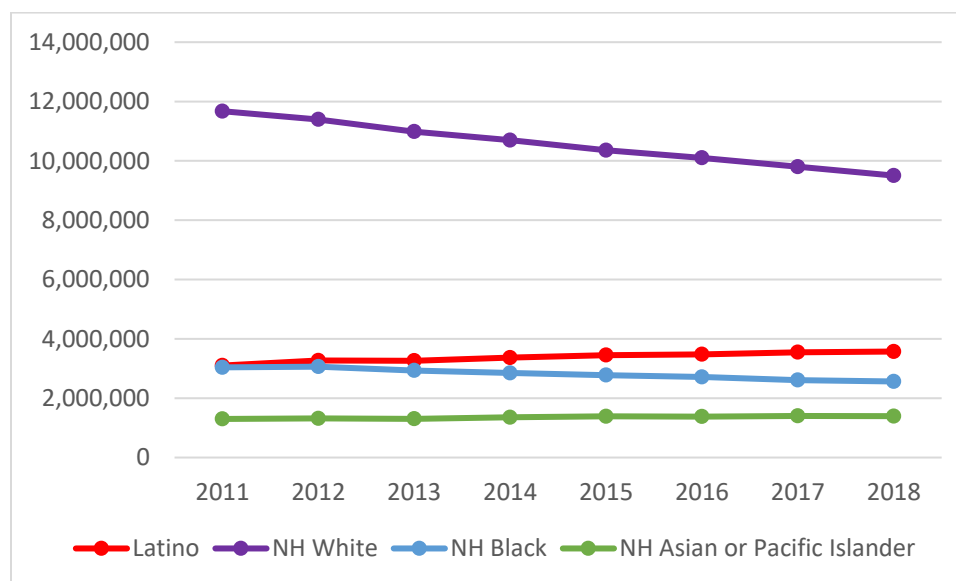
For decades, Latinos have been distinguished by relatively low levels of education. Not long ago, Latinos with a college degree were relatively rare. This is rapidly changing. The percentage of Latinos 25 and older with a bachelor’s degree or higher climbed from 9% in 1990 to 17% in 2018. More Latinos are attending college and their numbers are rising in the midst of declines among students from other groups. A new article titled “Latino Continual Demographic Growth: Implications for Educational Practices and Policies” that I just published in *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* shows that Latinos are leading the way in undergraduate enrollment today in the country.¹

I draw on the findings of my article below and add more recent data from the 2018 American Community Survey to provide updated information.²

Fewer College Students, but More Who are Latino

The number of undergraduate students in the nation peaked in 2011 and has fallen annually since then.² There were nearly 1.8 million fewer college undergraduates in 2018 than in 2011, a drop of 9% during this period. This downturn was due to a massive decline of 2.2 million white (a 19% decrease) and 474,000 black (a 16% reduction) undergraduate students between 2011 and 2018 (Figure 1). In contrast, during this eight-year period, the number of Latino college undergraduates rose by 472,000 (a 15% increase) with Asian and Pacific Islander enrollment increasing by 92,000 (a 7% rise).

Figure 1. College undergraduate enrollment by race and ethnic group, 2011-2018²



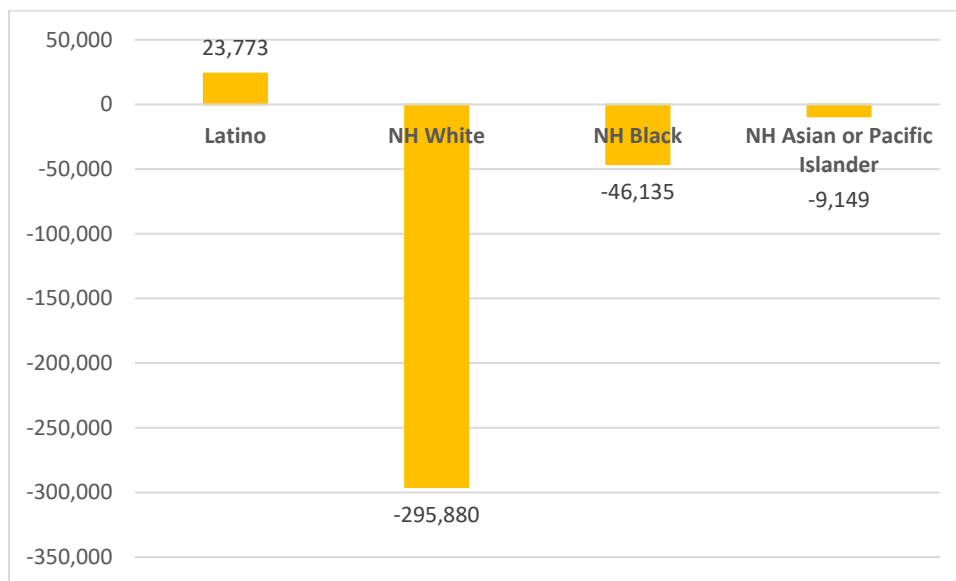
Why the declining enrollment of white and black college students?

These changes reflect the rapidly aging white and black populations associated with a significant decline in their child populations. The number of white children less than 18 years of age fell by 7.2 million (a decline of 16.4%) between 2000 and 2018 and that of black children declined by 698,000 (a 6.7% drop). On the other hand, there were 6.4 million more children in 2018 than in 2000, an increase of 52%.

Increase of Latino Students and Decrease of All Others in Last Year

For the first time, during the last year, the number of Latino college undergraduate students rose while those of other racial and ethnic groups fell. While there were 24,000 more Latino students in 2018 than in 2017, there were 296,000 fewer whites, 46,000 less blacks, and 9,000 fewer Asians (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Undergraduate Enrollment Change between 2017 and 2018 by Race/Ethnic Group²



A Growing Share of Latinos among College Students

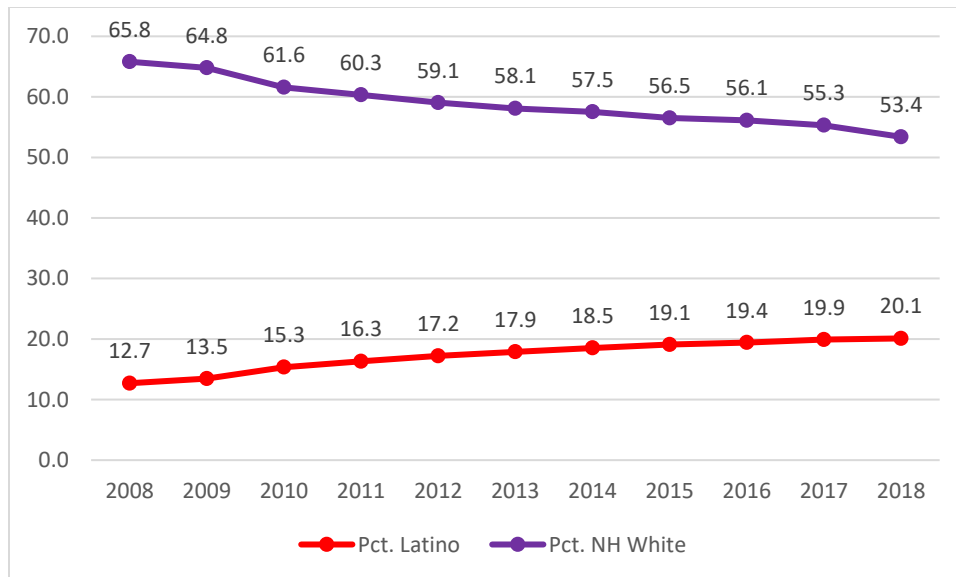
Over the last decade, there has been a significant shift in the racial and ethnic makeup of college undergraduates. The percentage of college students who are white fell from 65.8% in 2010 to 53.4% in 2018, while the percentage who are Latino rose from 12.7% to 20.1%. These percentages will continue to divert in the near future.

Conclusions

Declining numbers of children over the last two decades have resulted in a significant decline of college undergraduate students beginning in 2011. During this time, the number of white and black college students has dropped substantially, but the volume of Latinos in college campuses has risen. Latinos have helped colleges around the country as colleges have increasingly competed for a smaller pool of potential students. Yet, it is estimated that approximately half of Latino college students are enrolled in two-year community colleges.³ It is

essential that paths are created to facilitate the movement of Latino students from two- to four-year institutions where they can earn bachelor's degrees and enhance their economic resources and career choices.

Figure 3. Percent of College Undergraduate Who are White or Latino, 2010-2018²



Endnotes

¹ Saenz, R. (2020). Latino continual demographic growth: Implications for educational practices and policies. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 19(2), 134-148.

² The data used in the analysis were obtained from the 2008 to 2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates public use files accessed online from IPUMS at the University of Minnesota (<https://usa.ipums.org/usa>).

³ Krogstad, J. M. (2016, July 28). 5 facts about Latinos and education. Pew Research Center *FACTTANK*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/28/5-facts-about-latinos-and-education/>.

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