

## Characteristics of Postsecondary Students

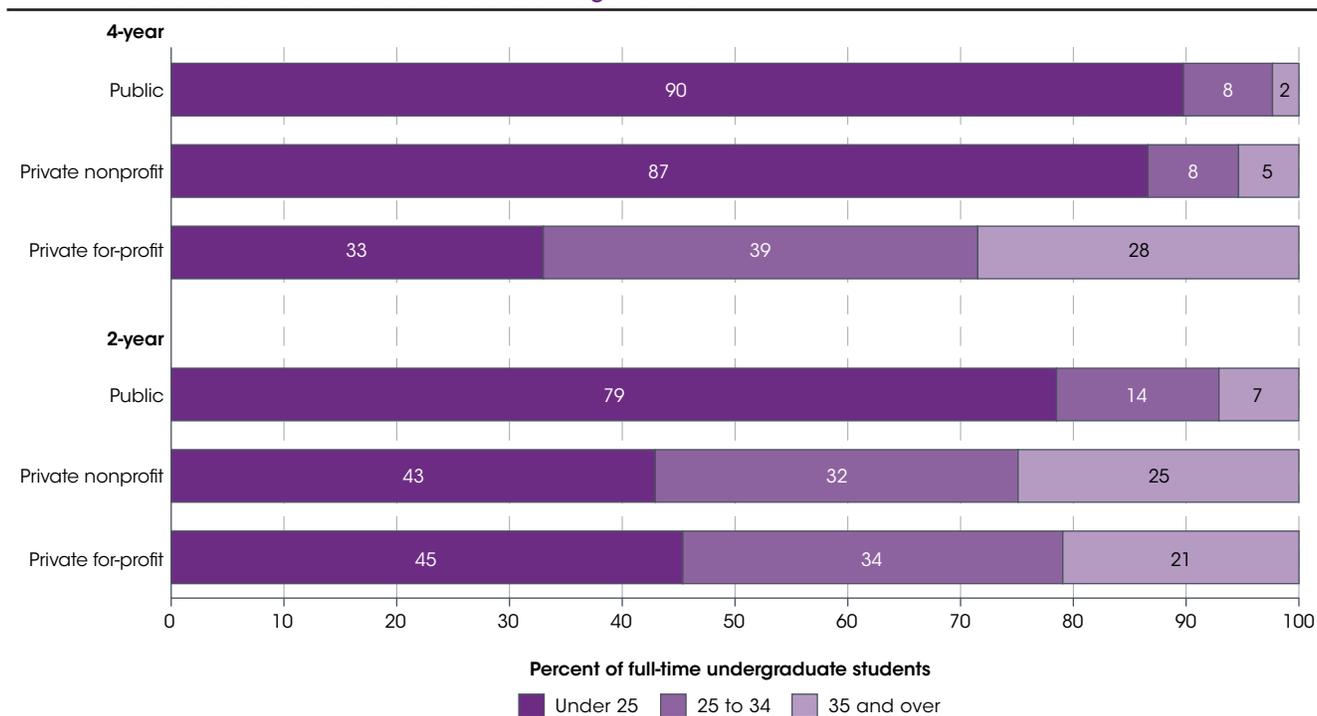
*In fall 2017, some 75 percent of the 10.8 million undergraduate students at 4-year institutions were enrolled full time, compared with 37 percent of the 5.9 million undergraduate students at 2-year institutions.*

In fall 2017, there were 16.8 million undergraduate students and 3.0 million postbaccalaureate (graduate) students attending degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The characteristics of students, such as their age and race or ethnicity, varied among public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit 2- and 4-year institutions.

(35 percent) attended 2-year institutions in fall 2017. Of the undergraduate students at 4-year institutions, 8.1 million (75 percent) attended full time and 2.7 million (25 percent) attended part time. Of the undergraduate students at 2-year institutions, 2.2 million (37 percent) attended full time and 3.7 million (63 percent) attended part time.

Some 10.8 million (65 percent) undergraduate students attended 4-year institutions, and 5.9 million

**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of full-time undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and student age: Fall 2017**

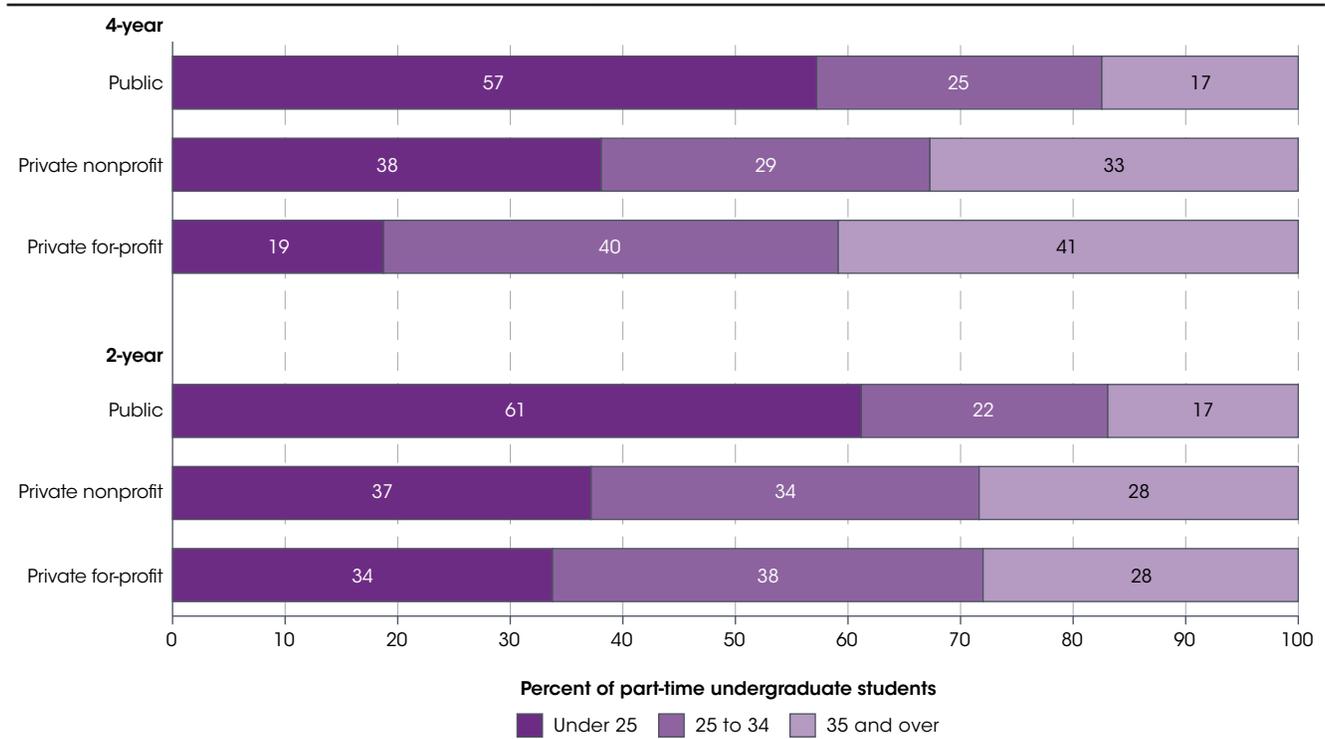


NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Percentage distributions exclude students whose age is unknown. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2018, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 303.50.

At 4-year institutions, the percentage of full-time undergraduate students in fall 2017 who were under age 25 was higher at public institutions (90 percent) and private nonprofit institutions (87 percent) than at private for-profit institutions (33 percent).<sup>2</sup> At both public and private nonprofit 4-year institutions, 8 percent of full-time undergraduate students were ages 25 to 34. In contrast, at private for-profit 4-year institutions, undergraduate students ages 25 to 34 made up the largest age group of those enrolled full time (39 percent).

In fall 2017, the percentage of full-time undergraduate students who were under age 25 was higher at public 2-year institutions (79 percent) than at private for-profit (45 percent) and private nonprofit (43 percent) 2-year institutions. On the other hand, lower percentages of full-time undergraduate students were ages 35 and over at public 2-year institutions (7 percent), compared with private for-profit (21 percent) and private nonprofit (25 percent) 2-year institutions.

**Figure 2. Percentage distribution of part-time undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and student age: Fall 2017**

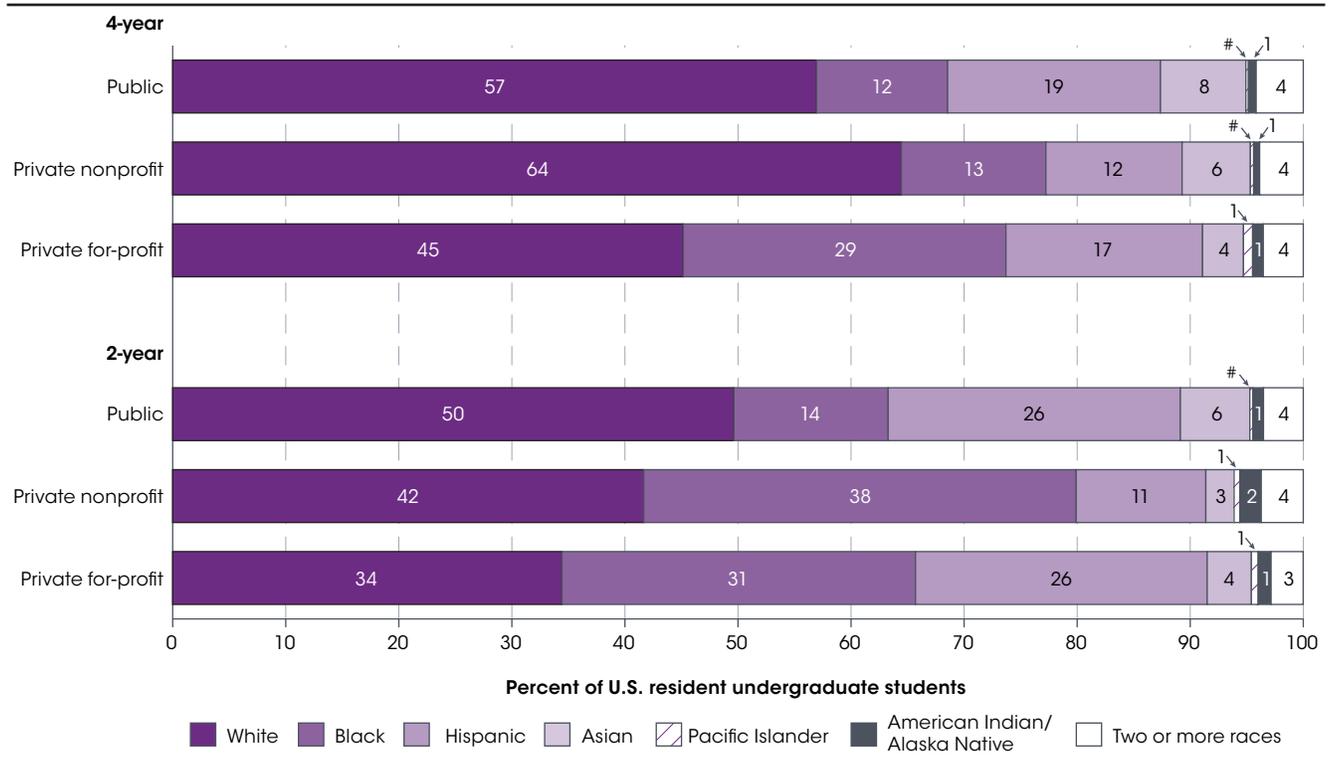


NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Percentage distributions exclude students whose age is unknown. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2018, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 303.50.

At public 4-year institutions, the percentage of part-time undergraduate students who were under age 25 (57 percent) in fall 2017 was higher than at private nonprofit (38 percent) and private for-profit (19 percent) 4-year institutions. The percentage of part-time undergraduate students who were ages 25 to 34 was lower at public (25 percent) and private nonprofit (29 percent) institutions than at private for-profit (40 percent) institutions. The percentage of part-time undergraduate students who were ages 35 and over was lower at public institutions (17 percent) than at private nonprofit (33 percent) and private for-profit (41 percent) institutions.

At public 2-year institutions, the percentage of part-time undergraduate students who were under age 25 (61 percent) in fall 2017 was higher than at private nonprofit (37 percent) and private for-profit (34 percent) 2-year institutions. The percentage of part-time undergraduate students who were ages 25 to 34 was lower at public institutions (22 percent) than at private nonprofit (34 percent) and private for-profit (38 percent) institutions. Similarly, the percentage of part-time undergraduate students who were ages 35 and over was lower at public institutions (17 percent) than at private nonprofit and private for-profit institutions (28 percent each).

**Figure 3. Percentage distribution of U.S. resident undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and student race/ethnicity: Fall 2017**



# Rounds to zero.

NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

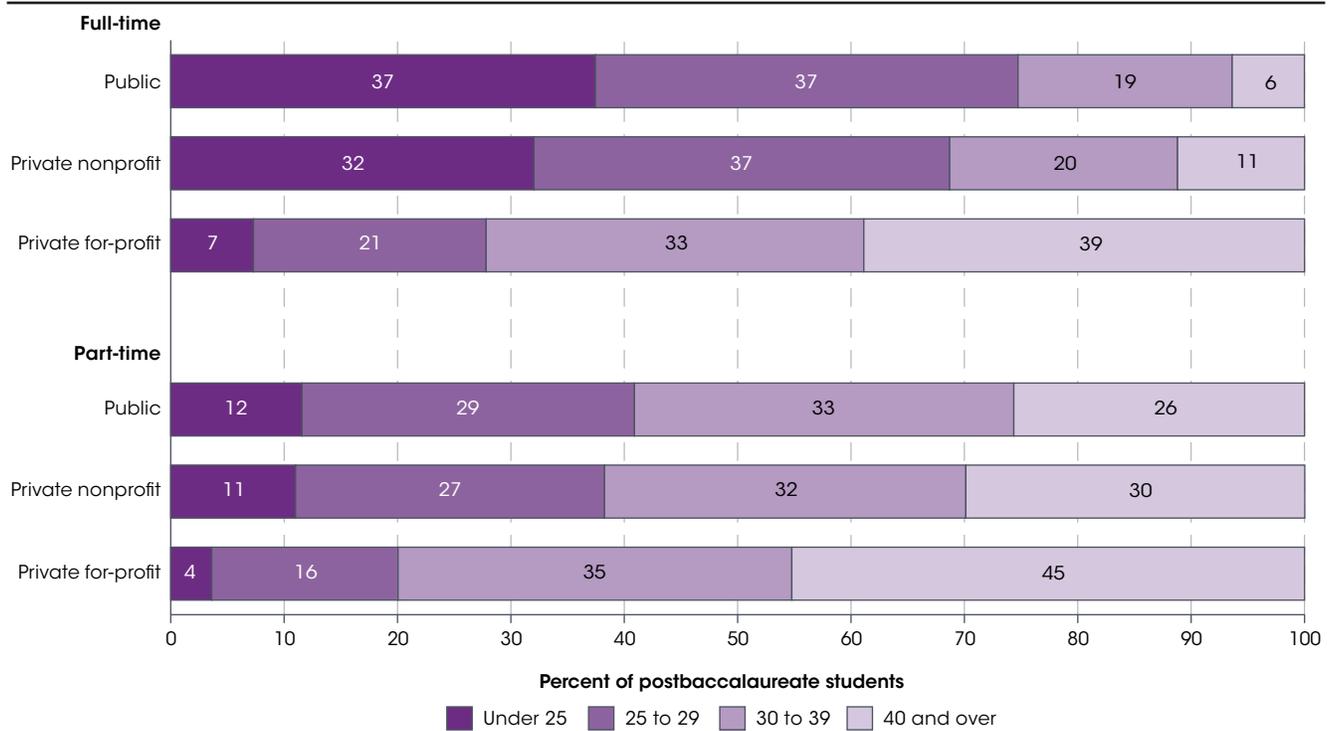
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2018, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 306.50.

The distribution of U.S. resident undergraduate students (full- and part-time) by racial or ethnic groups varied among public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit institutions and between 2- and 4-year institutions.<sup>3</sup> Sixty-four percent of undergraduates at private nonprofit 4-year institutions in fall 2017 were White, which was higher than the percentages of White undergraduates at public (57 percent) and at private for-profit (45 percent) 4-year institutions. The percentage of undergraduates at private for-profit 4-year institutions who were Black (29 percent) was more than twice the percentages at private nonprofit (13 percent) and public (12 percent) 4-year institutions. The percentages of undergraduates at public 4-year institutions and private for-profit 4-year institutions who were Hispanic (19 and 17 percent, respectively) were higher than the percentage at private nonprofit 4-year institutions (12 percent). The percentages of undergraduates at public 4-year institutions and private nonprofit 4-year institutions who were Asian (8 and 6 percent, respectively) were higher

than the percentage at private for-profit 4-year institutions (4 percent).

In fall 2017, the percentages of both White and Asian U.S. resident undergraduate students at public 2-year institutions (50 and 6 percent, respectively) were higher than the corresponding percentages at private nonprofit 2-year institutions (42 and 3 percent, respectively) and at private for-profit 2-year institutions (34 and 4 percent, respectively). In contrast, the percentage of undergraduates at private nonprofit 2-year institutions who were Black (38 percent) was higher than the corresponding percentages at private for-profit 2-year institutions and public 2-year institutions (31 and 14 percent, respectively). A higher percentage of undergraduates at public 2-year institutions and private for-profit 2-year institutions (26 percent each) were Hispanic than at private nonprofit 2-year institutions (11 percent).

**Figure 4. Percentage distribution of full-time and part-time postbaccalaureate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by control of institution and student age: Fall 2017**

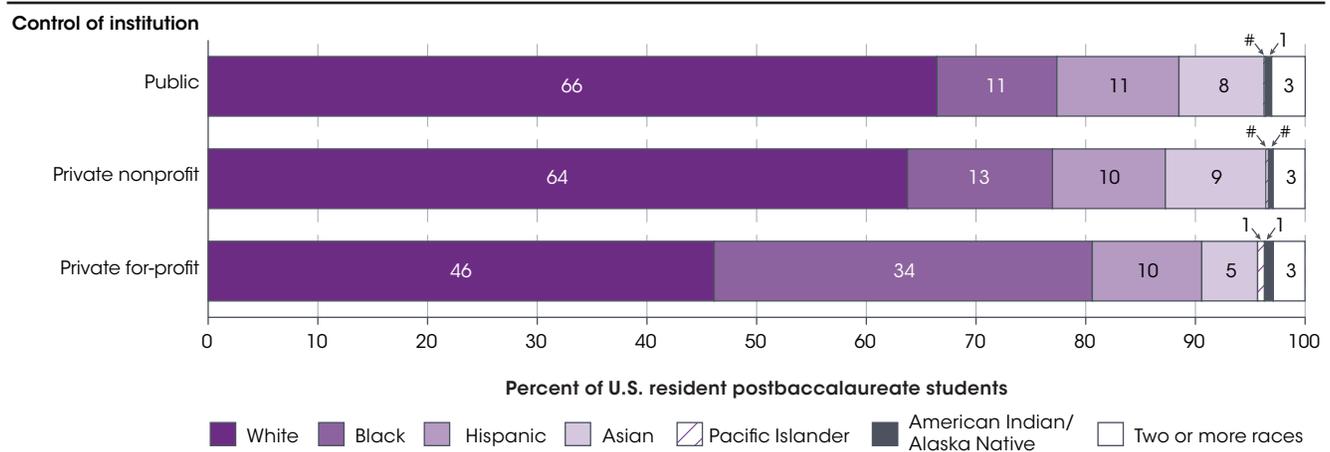


NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Percentage distributions exclude students whose age is unknown. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2018, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 303.50.

In fall 2017, some 49 percent of all postbaccalaureate (graduate) students attended public institutions, 43 percent attended private nonprofit institutions, and 9 percent attended private for-profit institutions. The majority of full-time graduate students at public institutions were under age 30 (37 percent were under age 25 and 37 percent were ages 25 to 29); the same was true at private nonprofit institutions, where 32 percent were under age 25 and

37 percent were ages 25 to 29. In contrast, the majority of full-time graduate students at private for-profit institutions were older: 33 percent were ages 30 to 39 and 39 percent were ages 40 and over. Among part-time graduate students, 80 percent of students at private for-profit institutions were ages 30 and over, as were 62 percent at private nonprofit institutions and 59 percent at public institutions.

**Figure 5. Percentage distribution of U.S. resident postbaccalaureate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by control of institution and student race/ethnicity: Fall 2017**



# Rounds to zero.

NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate’s or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2018, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 306.50.

In fall 2017, approximately two-thirds of U.S. resident graduate students at both public institutions and private nonprofit institutions were White (66 and 64 percent, respectively), compared with less than one-half of students at private for-profit institutions (46 percent). The percentage of graduate students at private for-profit institutions who were Black (34 percent) was higher than the percentages at private nonprofit institutions

(13 percent) and public institutions (11 percent). Hispanic students accounted for 11 percent of graduate enrollment at public institutions and 10 percent at both private nonprofit and private for-profit institutions. Asian students accounted for 9 percent of graduate enrollment at private nonprofit institutions, 8 percent at public institutions, and 5 percent at private for-profit institutions.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> For more information on how postsecondary enrollment has changed over time, see indicators [Undergraduate Enrollment](#) and [Postbaccalaureate Enrollment](#).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this indicator, students of unknown ages are excluded from the age analysis.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this indicator, comparisons by race/ethnicity exclude nonresident alien students.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, tables 303.50 and 306.50; *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 306.50

**Related indicators and resources:** [Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty](#); [Postbaccalaureate Enrollment](#); [Spotlight B: Characteristics of Postsecondary Institutions Serving Specific Minority Racial/Ethnic Groups](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Undergraduate Enrollment](#)

**Glossary:** College; Control of institutions; Enrollment; Full-time enrollment; Part-time enrollment; Postbaccalaureate enrollment; Postsecondary institutions (basic classification by level); Private institution; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group; Undergraduate students