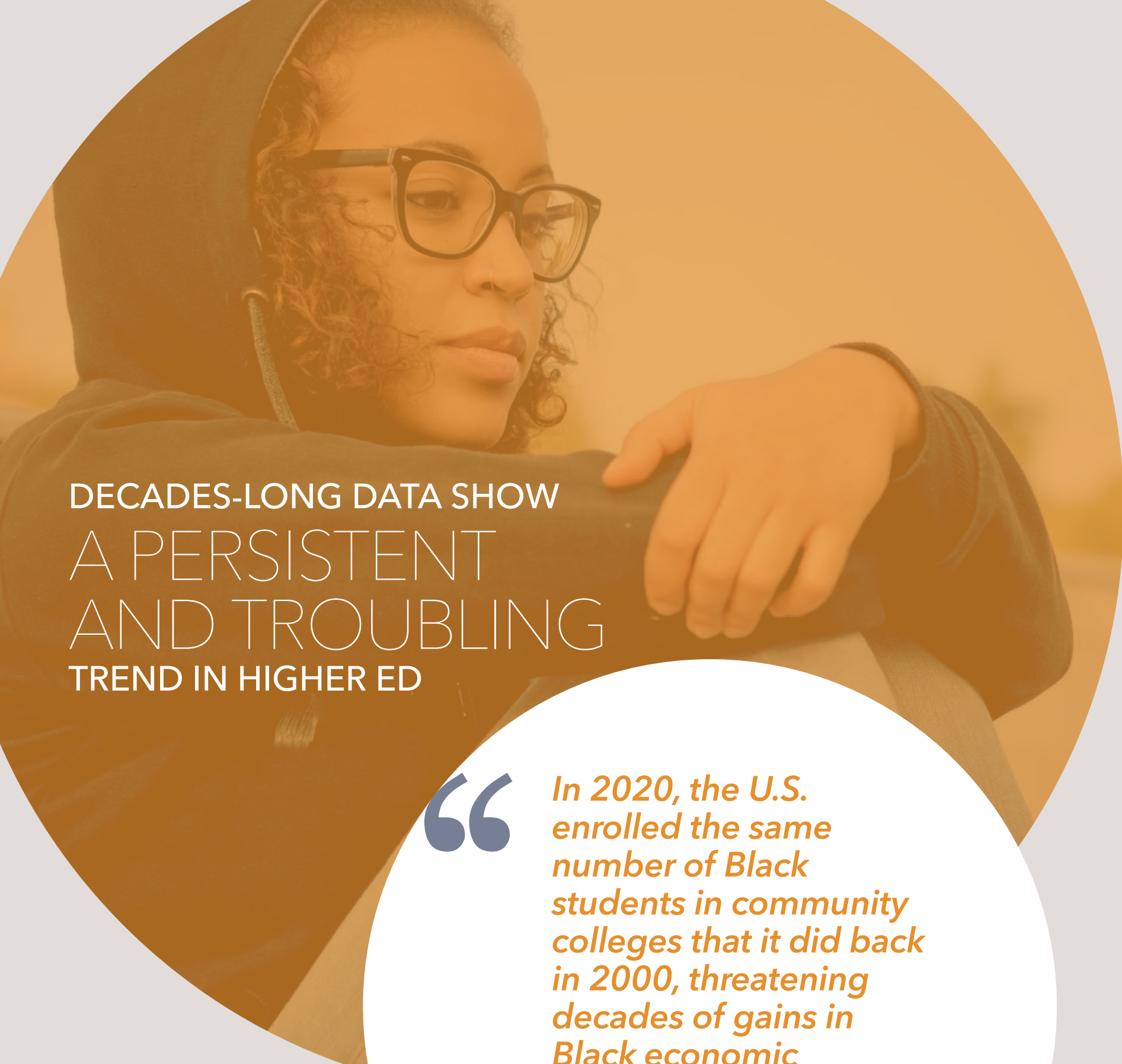




A NATIONAL
IMPERATIVE:

ADDRESSING
BLACK STUDENT
ENROLLMENT





DECADES-LONG DATA SHOW
A PERSISTENT
AND TROUBLING
TREND IN HIGHER ED

“

In 2020, the U.S. enrolled the same number of Black students in community colleges that it did back in 2000, threatening decades of gains in Black economic opportunity through college enrollment.

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS CONTINUALLY THREATEN EQUITABLE PROGRESS FOR BLACK LEARNERS

Steep declines in college enrollment are a common part of the COVID-19 story. However, what is often missing from the critical storyline is the reality that, while the pandemic accelerated these declines, they started years before. Even more troubling is the fact that decreases in college enrollment, both before and during the pandemic, are particularly stark and disproportionate for Black students. Black student enrollments in U.S. postsecondary education have been declining precipitously since 2011, particularly at community colleges. In 2020, the U.S. enrolled the same number of Black students in community colleges that it did back in 2000, threatening decades of gains in Black economic opportunity through college enrollment.

These alarming data are not new, but our national response must be.

While many researchers and scholars have examined and documented these concerning enrollment declines for Black learners, they have not been met in magnitude with the national attention, investment, and systemic solutions that should be expected and warranted. This brief serves as a foundation for moving from awareness to collective action.

FOCUS ON COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Do the data reveal a large and disproportionate decline in enrollments in community colleges for the Black population?

YES. Total Black undergraduate enrollment in public community colleges dropped by 26% between 2011-2019. The following data offer comparative context for the 2011-2019 time period:

- Total undergraduate enrollments for all races and ethnicities in public community colleges decreased 13%.
- Total undergraduate enrollments for all races and ethnicities in public 4-year colleges and universities: increased 6%.
- Total undergraduate enrollments for Black students in HBCUs declined 16%.
- Total undergraduate enrollments for Black students in public 4-year colleges and universities did not increase.

To better illustrate the decline in Black community college enrollments, the 26% drop represents almost 300,000 students, putting 2019 Black community college enrollments at levels similar to 2006-07. Adding in the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, Black community college enrollment in 2020 dropped by another 100,000 students, bringing the enrollment levels back to where they were in 2000-01. Two decades of progress in educational opportunity and economic mobility erased.

Importantly, declines in Black student enrollments are not a result of changes in the college-age population.

The Black 18-34-year-old population has steadily grown, from 9 million in 2000 to nearly 11.5 million in 2020.

These data demand action. As relatively affordable, open-access institutions, public community colleges historically represent a critical access point for Black Americans. Declining enrollments of Black students, coupled with persistent gaps in wealth and educational attainment, create deeper divides in opportunity across racial and ethnic lines. Without action the risk extends to the community colleges themselves as well, whose viability may be in question if enrollments fall too low.

Are Black students enrolling in other sectors instead of public community colleges?

NO. The majority of Black students not enrolling appear to be disconnected from the 2-year and 4-year postsecondary systems altogether. While total undergraduate enrollments for Black students in public 4-year colleges and universities have held steady over this time period, Black students do not appear to be moving to for-profits or other 4-years proportionate to the decrease in the community college sector.



ARE
BLACK STUDENTS
ENROLLING IN OTHER
SECTORS INSTEAD OF PUBLIC
COMMUNITY COLLEGES?

Black Student Enrollment Declines Across All Higher Ed Sectors: 2011-2019

| Institution | Public | | For Profit | | Non-Profit | | GRAND TOTAL |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| | Primarily Associate's & Certificates | Bachelor's & Above | Primarily Associate's & Certificates | Bachelor's & Above | Primarily Associate's & Certificates | Bachelor's & Above | |
| Change in Enrollment 2011-2019 | -295,835 | -1,169 | -172,327 | -76,510 | -7,084 | -18,164 | -571,089 |

Percent Change in Enrollment Since 2011 by Enrollment Category, Black Students and All Students, Public Community Colleges

| | First-Time Degree-Seeking Undergraduate | | Other Undergraduate | |
|------|---|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| | ALL STUDENTS | BLACKS STUDENTS | ALL STUDENTS | BLACKS STUDENTS |
| 2019 | -15% | -29% | -13% | -24% |
| 2020 | -29% | -46% | -19% | -30% |

Do the data show similar impacts or declines in Black student completion at community colleges?

NOT YET. Completions by Black students at public community colleges increased from 2011 to 2019 while enrollments declined, before a small downturn in 2020. This positive trend indicates that for individuals able to gain access to college, the heightened focus on student success is paying off. But improving completion rates will not be enough if enrollment drops, as the 2020 numbers worryingly suggest.

We must not lose sight of the first step on the journey – equitable access, particularly for Black students. The pandemic has made this step especially challenging for new college students, with first-time enrollment of Black community college students cut nearly in half. With fewer Black first-time degree seeking students, it will be even more challenging for the nation to diversify its workforce, meet skill demands and deliver on the promise of equal economic opportunity on which most Americans agree.

The number of Black first-time degree seekers has declined dramatically, presenting potential longer-term implications for college completion and attainment for the Black population.



ENROLLMENT DECLINES CANNOT BE ATTRIBUTED TO IMPROVED LABOR MARKETS

Are Black Americans getting self-sustaining jobs instead of enrolling in community colleges?

NO. Individuals may be entering the workforce instead of enrolling in community colleges, however, these individuals are not employed in high-wage jobs.

- Nearly two-thirds of Black young adults without a degree are in jobs paid low wages; they also are not enrolling in college.
- Black community college enrollment typically tracks closely with Black unemployment rates (i.e., when unemployment is high, more people tend to enroll in community college). This trend has not been seen during the economic impacts of COVID-19.

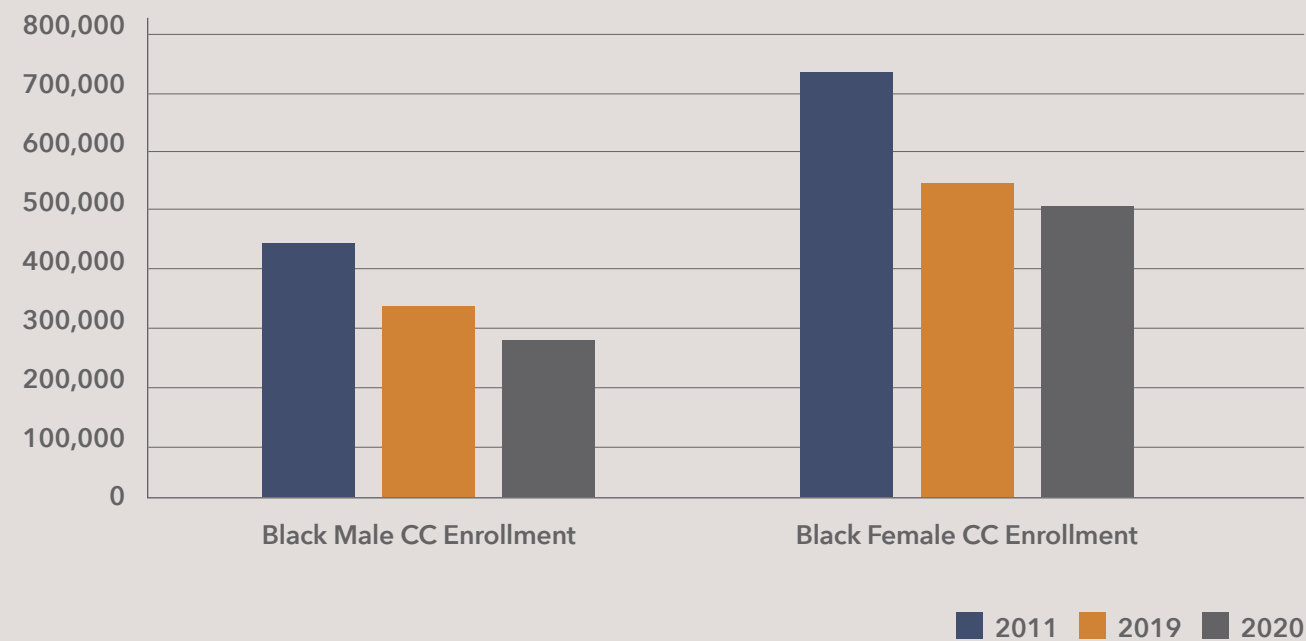


ENROLLMENT TRENDS BY SEX

Do the data demonstrate similar declines for Black males and Black females?

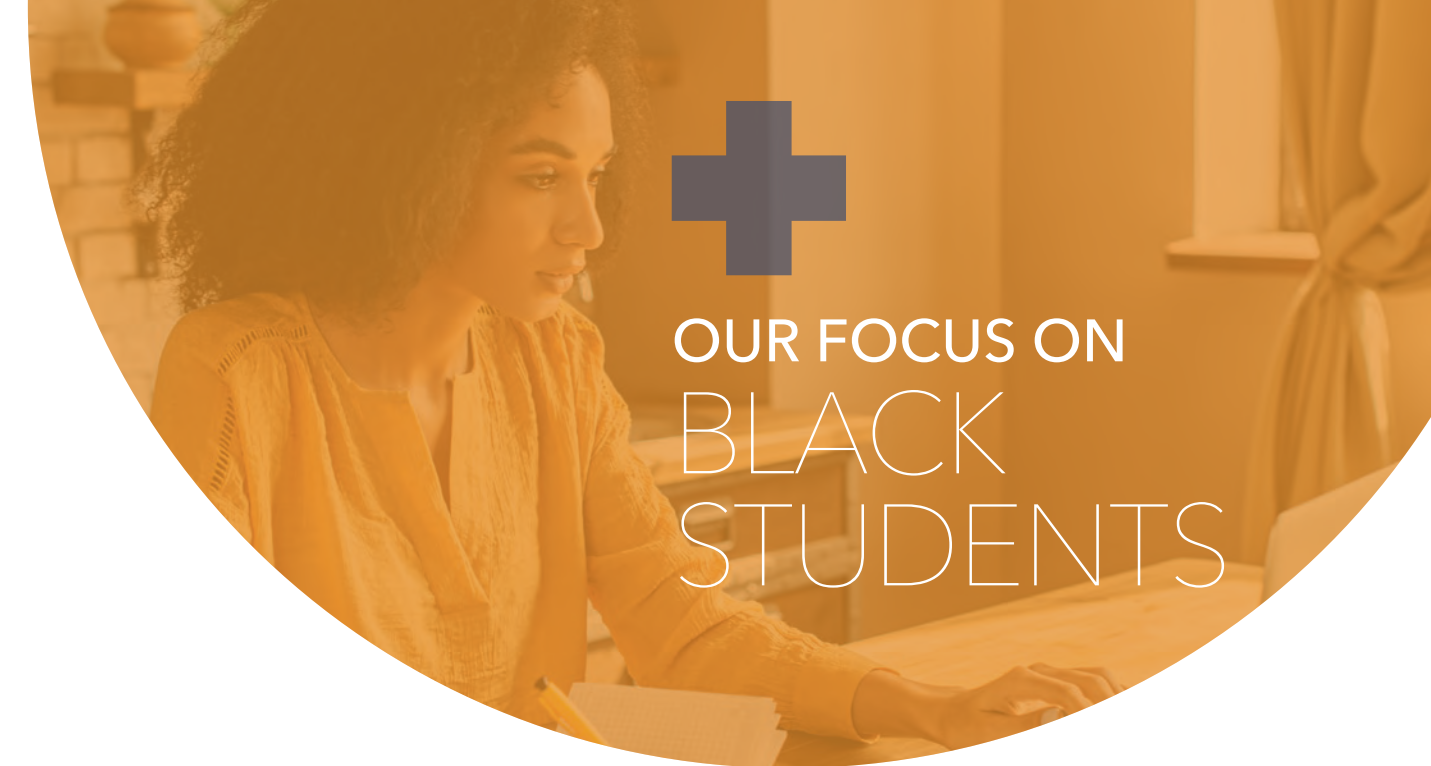
YES. While Black female enrollment in community colleges is higher than that of Black males, both have experienced similar magnitudes of decline from 2011-2019, though the effects of COVID-19 on enrollments appears to be more pronounced for Black males.

Community College Enrollment Declines Comparing Black Males & Black Females



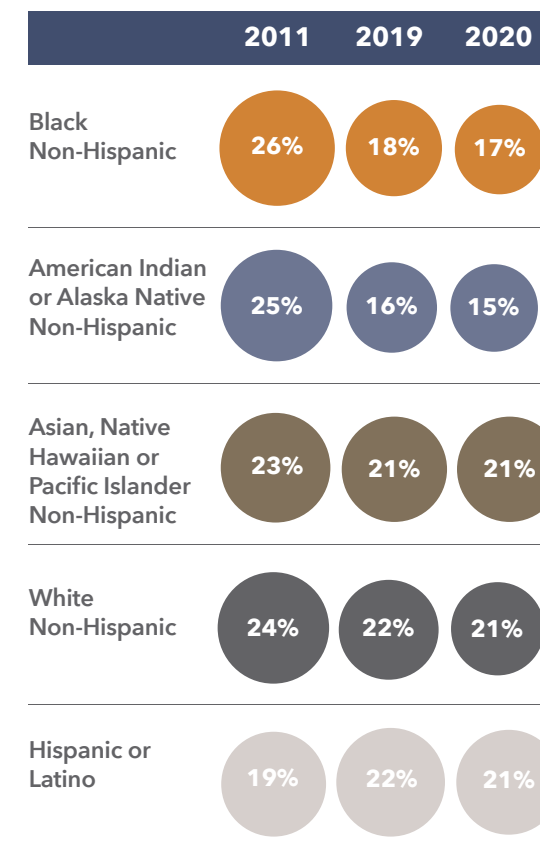
Black male and female enrollments follow the same patterns in the 2000-2019 time period in public community colleges:

- Steady increases from 2000 to a peak in 2011;
- Then, enrollments for both men and women declined every year from 2011 to 2019 (and 2020). Black male enrollments saw a 25% and 39% decline between 2011-19 and 2011-20, respectively. While total female enrollments remain higher, they experienced similar rates of decline: 26% and 32% between 2011-19 and 2011-20, respectively.



OUR FOCUS ON BLACK STUDENTS

Enrollment Declines Affect Every Sector of the Population: Undergraduate Enrollment as Percentage of Young Adults (18-34)



Is the Black population the only population affected by declining enrollments?

NO. The data reveal troubling trends for other races and ethnicities that must be addressed as well, particularly for American Indian or Alaska Native students. Between 2011-2019, total undergraduate enrollments declined for several races/ethnicities. When controlling for the size of the population, it is the nation's most marginalized populations - our Black and American Indian or Alaska Native young adults - that experienced the largest declines in enrollments (29% and 35%, respectively).

After extensive review of national data sources, this brief elevates the glaring and disproportional decline in Black college enrollment, and particularly enrollment at the nation's higher education gateway—technical and community colleges. Subsequent analysis of the causes of this decline will focus on integrated, holistic solutions for policy leaders and funders. This systematic approach is vital as we acknowledge the role that enslavement, systemic racism, oppression, and persistent racial wealth gaps play in access and success in postsecondary education attainment. Understanding and addressing these underlying causes, we believe, will not only serve Black individuals more justly, but all learners.



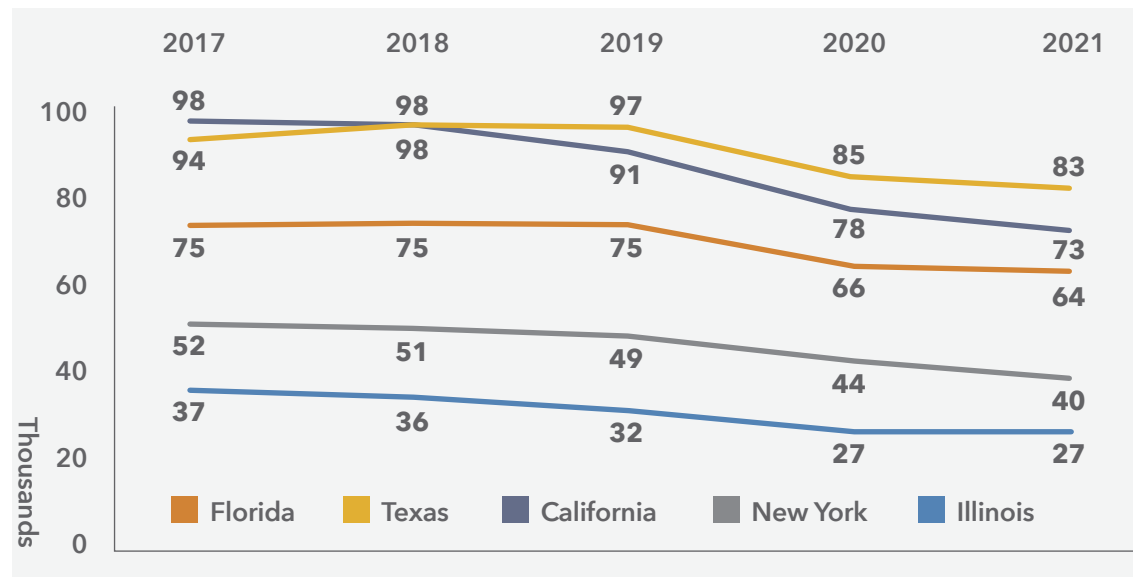
LOOKING AHEAD WITH CONTINUED ALARM

As more public data are released for the initial years of the pandemic (2020-2022), does the data foretell any improved outcomes in Black student enrollment trends?

NO. While the economic, health and learning disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic have elevated the discourse about overall enrollment declines in American higher education, early data show that declines and systemic barriers persist in Black student enrollment, including access to a baccalaureate degree. Analysis of the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) spring 2021 and 2022 freshman enrollment data, fall 2022 transfer data, and state-reported fall 2021 enrollment data spotlight the crisis the nation must address now.

- Preliminary fall 2021 data show the negative trends continuing.
- Black student enrollment declined in most large state community college systems between 2020-21, with state-reported data showing drops in California, Florida, Texas and New York. Black community college enrollment was flat in Illinois from 2020-21 but that comes after one of the worst preceding downward trends, with a 55% decline from 2011-2020.
- At 4-year public colleges and universities, the trends are not as drastic, but do not make up for the declines in the 2-year sector. From 2020-21, Black enrollment was roughly flat in Florida, New York, Texas and Illinois, but continued to decline in California.
- There are some early signs of a national “leveling out” of enrollment in 2022, with the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) showing overall spring enrollment flat relative to 2021 (data not available by race).
- Spring 2022 community college enrollment, however, was down nearly 6%.
- First-time freshman enrollment in the spring 2022 NSC report was down for all races and ethnicities, including an 18% drop for Black students (though fall is a more typical term for students to start).
- At the 64 out of 73 California Community College Districts that have reported spring 2022 data, Black enrollment was down another 8.4% from spring 2021, in line with overall enrollment declines and indicating no immediate end to the downward trend.
- As of the end of July 2022, spring data were not available from most state systems yet.

Fall 2021 State Enrollment Data (NSC) Show Continuous Decline for Black Community College Students in Many States



OUR PURPOSE: ACTIONABLE CHANGE

How do we move from information to collective action?

Data at the national and state levels point to a lack of systematic and coordinated efforts to meaningfully increase Black student access and success. Currently, no state is an exemplar for increasing Black enrollments in the community college sector or beyond. While some institutions are markedly increasing Black enrollments, overall enrollment numbers continue to decline without any clear plan to best improve outcomes for Black students. And while improving community college access is not an all-encompassing solution for equity in economic opportunity through higher education, we know it is a crucial step in dismantling the many systemic barriers that affect the lives of Black Americans. The realization that the problem and the solutions of college access are not borne solely by community colleges must also be acknowledged.

Over the next year our organizations, **HCM Strategists** and **Lumina Foundation**, will collaborate and build on research grounded in data and centered around student perspectives.

Sources: Analysis of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) and the American Community Survey (ACS) by Postsecondary Analytics and HCM Strategists, 2022. Of note, some enrollment change is attributable to changes in data, definitions and reporting categories.



“The barriers to college access and opportunity are systemic. The solutions must be as well.”

We will galvanize diverse, bipartisan national leaders to evaluate, refine and elevate this call to action, and focus systemic recommendations on federal and state policymakers. Last, we will coalesce anti-poverty, racial justice, economic opportunity and higher education funders to support this call to action for systemic reform and advancement to better serve Black learners and ultimately all learners who chose to continue their educational pursuits beyond high school.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brief captures the lived experiences, professional insights and values of our team at HCM Strategists. It is with gratitude that we acknowledge our colleagues: Cristen Moore, Martha Snyder, Kristin Hultquist, Katie Lynne Morton, Nicole Basurto Brown, and Terrell Halaska Dunn. We are grateful to our former colleagues, Dr. Toya Barnes-Teamer and Dr. Lara Couturier, for their leadership in bringing this imperative to the forefront of HCM's policy priorities. They were instrumental in shepherding, refining and elevating this work. To our colleague, Dr. Nate Johnson and his team at Postsecondary Analytics, thank you, as always, for your thoughtful and meticulous analysis of the data in driving the research behind this urgent call to action.

We are grateful for our long-standing partnership with Lumina Foundation and their support in advancing this work. We especially want to thank Dr. Frank Swanzy Essien, Jr. for his project stewardship and his colleagues Dr. Courtney Brown, Tracy Chen, Kevin Corcoran and Dr. Wendy Sedlak for their strategic advice and counsel.

Lastly, we would like to thank Dr. Kelley Ditzel and Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis for their expertise as we move from research to collective action.

About HCM Strategists

HCM Strategists, founded in 2008, is an impact-driven consulting firm that believes in the transformative power of education and work-based learning to improve social and economic mobility for communities that have been marginalized or historically underserved. Our work delivers a consequential impact on the national narrative, policy options and leaders responsible for change.

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS PUBLICATION ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHORS AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THOSE OF LUMINA FOUNDATION, ITS OFFICERS, OR EMPLOYEES.



501 Congress Avenue Austin, TX 78701
T 202.547.2222 HCMStrategists.com

