



INTENT MATTERS –

Avoiding the Enrollment Cliff

College  **APP**

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THE CHALLENGE

On February 22, 2007, HSBC, one of the largest mortgage finance companies, filed for bankruptcy, setting off two years of uncertainty and the longest recession in most of our lifetimes. The initial impacts of this recession were positive for colleges and universities as more adults enrolled in the face of unemployment. However, behind the scenes, the dynamics of the recession shifted trends that will have a ripple effect on college enrollment for decades. Reeling from the impacts of the recession, many young people delayed giving birth, resulting in steep declines in the number of births and the overall birth rate, which in 2020 hit an all-time low (Osterman, et al., 2022).

After peaking in 2010, undergraduate enrollment at community colleges has been steadily declining, reaching a low in 2020. This decline is occurring at a time when postsecondary education is more important for individuals and our society than ever. Job stability and wages improve in relationship to postsecondary credential levels (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). Additionally, worker shortages in many skilled professions underscore the importance of education and training to meet our society's economic needs. Yet, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased enrollment in postsecondary education and training programs has not materialized. In fact, unlike prior recessions in which postsecondary enrollment surged, the pandemic-induced recession accelerated declining enrollment trends at many colleges, universities, and technical schools across the country.

There are several reasons for this disconnect:

- Many Americans believed they would get their old jobs back after the early days of the pandemic and did indeed get their jobs back or found new ones. (Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, 2020);
- There is heightened awareness and occasional fear about the costs of postsecondary education and the implications of student debt (Strada Education Network, 2020); and
- Students are concerned about service interruptions and online learning (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2021).

Since 2019, CollegeAPP has been surveying Americans nationwide to identify adults who intend to pursue postsecondary education and training. To understand and identify potential students, CollegeAPP administered more than 150,000 surveys over three years, paired these with publicly and commercially available data sources, and modeled adult-learner demand data at the individual, regional, state, and national level. In short, CollegeAPP uses methods developed for political campaigns and commercial marketing to help states and higher education reach students directly.

CollegeAPP focuses on intent — identifying who plans to enroll in postsecondary education and training, and understanding the kinds of institutions and programs individuals are interested in enrolling in. These data are immensely valuable for helping institutions rethink and support their enrollment management outreach strategies; they also provide essential insight for policymakers and executives, assisting them in ensuring that the nation's education system addresses potential students' needs. Of prime importance are students

historically underserved by postsecondary structures and processes, as well as those who have traditionally not had access to the wage benefits and long-term stability offered by a postsecondary credential.

According to CollegeAPP data:

20% of all U.S. adults and 36% of Black, Indigenous, and persons of color over the age of 18 in the U.S intend to enroll in college in the next two years. Many of them never will, leading to lost potential and widening equity gaps.

The Report

This report uses CollegeAPP's unique data set to help state and institutional higher education leaders, enrollment managers, and other key education stakeholders as they focus their efforts to increase attainment. Typically, enrollment professionals use CollegeAPP data to improve outreach efforts. CollegeAPP pairs survey data with public and commercial data, and models the likelihood of a potential student intending to enroll. Traditional enrollment management models use historical enrollment data which tend to perpetuate existing gaps in higher education access and make it harder to diversify student population (Jaquette, et al., 2022). CollegeAPP's models and accompanying tools give states and institutions an alternative approach, helping them identify previously ignored prospective student populations who intend to enroll in postsecondary education and training, and providing the information they need to enroll more students and diversify their student populations.

This three-part analysis provides essential context and learning from the data behind the models and provides insight into how to turn intent into attainment.

Section 1 offers an analysis of the CollegeAPP survey data with details about who intends to enroll, what programs they are most interested in, and how groups differ by demographic characteristics.

Section 2 provides more detailed CollegeAPP survey data by providing profiles of the responses of specific populations including Hispanic and Latinx, Black and African American, those with a high school diploma but no postsecondary credential, and different incomes.

Section 3 describes the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and offers insight into how CollegeAPP and others can translate data on intent into action and enrollment in postsecondary educational programs.

Though this report does not utilize modeled data, the analysis may assist CollegeAPP and its educational partners to consider further analysis that could increase the utility and impact of CollegeAPP's data centric approach. Additionally, this report provides critical insights so that education stakeholders can identify growth populations and make the right time and monetary investments to increase enrollment (or re-enrollment), improve attainment rates, and close equity gaps.

Key Findings

- Many adults intend to enroll in postsecondary education, but **who intends to enroll** looks different than those who are currently enrolled and targeted in traditional enrollment management models.
- Regardless of age and level of education, Black and African American and Hispanic and Latinx respondents are **more than twice as likely** as white respondents to express intent to enroll.
- Men of all races and ethnicities are **less likely to intend to enroll** than women. White men are the populations least likely to intend to enroll in education and training.
- **Parents, those who are single, those who earn less than a family-sustaining wage, and those who are unemployed or don't have job stability are more likely to intend** to enroll in postsecondary education or training.
- Most students are interested in taking at least some of their college coursework online and **more than half would like to take all of their coursework online**.
- **Intent is a critical indicator** of whether a person will go on to enroll in education and training, but theory suggests it may be insufficient to get someone to enroll.

SECTION 1:

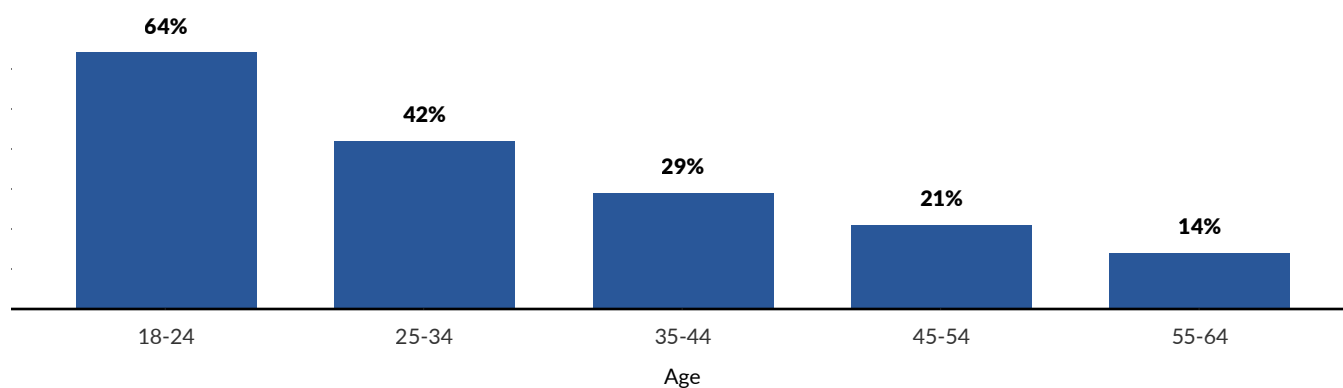
LEARNINGS FROM COLLEGEAPP SURVEY DATA

The Potential

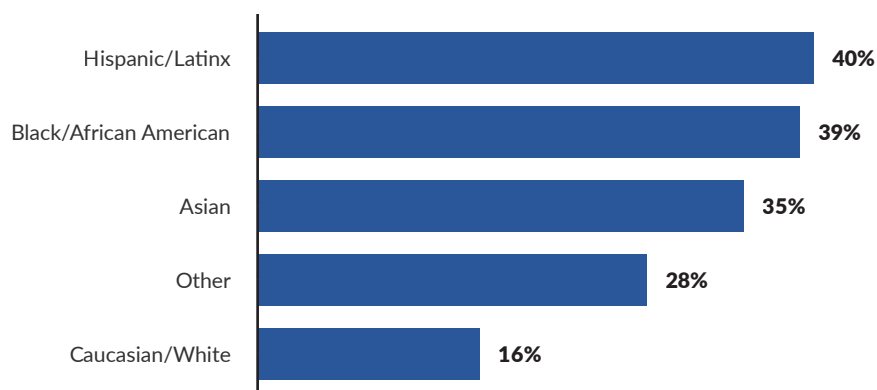
Intent is the hallmark of the CollegeAPP survey, which asks respondents whether they intend to enroll in a college, university, or technical school in the next two years. This section highlights who intends to enroll.

Enrollment management efforts often focus on students just out of high school. CollegeAPP survey data shows that 64 percent of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 plan to enroll. However, according to U.S. Census estimates, only 43 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds are enrolled in education. Older adults are also interested in pursuing more postsecondary education; CollegeAPP survey data show that 42 percent of adults between the ages of 25 and 34 intend to enroll, as well as 29 percent of adults between the ages of 35 and 44. However, just 11 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds and fewer than two percent of those over age 35 are enrolled in college.

Figure 1. Intent to Enroll by Age

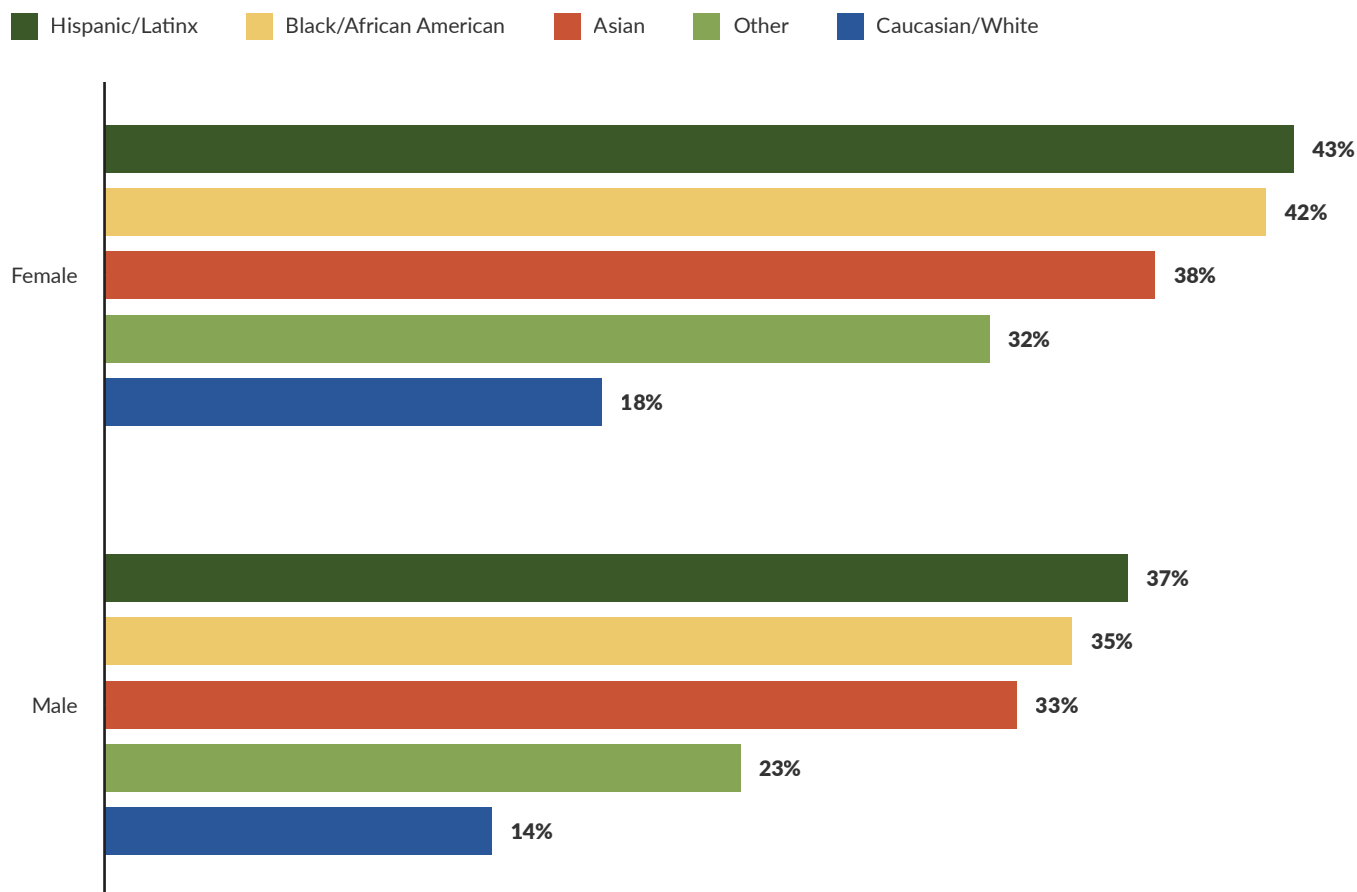


CollegeAPP survey data show that intent varies significantly across race/ethnicity. Forty percent of Hispanic and Latinx adults, 39 percent of Black and African American adults, and 39 percent of Asian adults plan to enroll in postsecondary education, compared to just 16 percent of white adults. These trends hold across age groups, levels of education, and income.

Figure 2. Intent to Enroll by Race/Ethnicity

The gaps between Hispanic/Latinx and Black/African American respondents and their White peers grow as they get older. White respondents are much less likely to intend to enroll as they get older. (See Section 2.)

Women are more likely to intend to enroll than men for all races/ethnicities. The trends in Figure 2 hold across sex as well, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Intent to Enroll by Sex and Race/Ethnicity

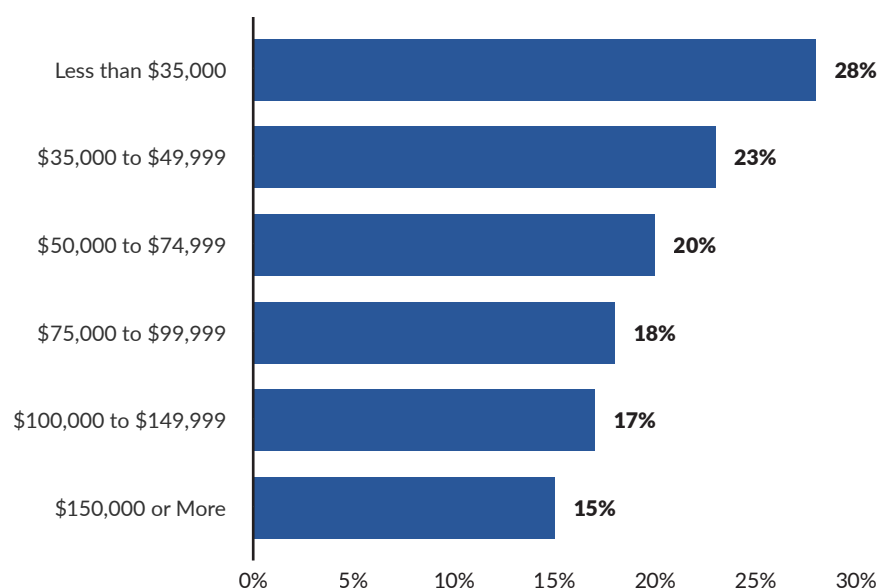
The relationship between current education level and intent to enroll is not linear. Survey respondents with less than a high school degree or with some college experience, but no advanced degree were most likely to intend to enroll within two years.

Figure 4. Intent to Enroll by Current Level of Education



There is a strong relationship between current income and intent to enroll. Adults with lower levels of income are more likely to intend to enroll within two years of survey response. This means that the adults who intend to enroll are more likely to have financial need as well as financial motivations for pursuing education and training.

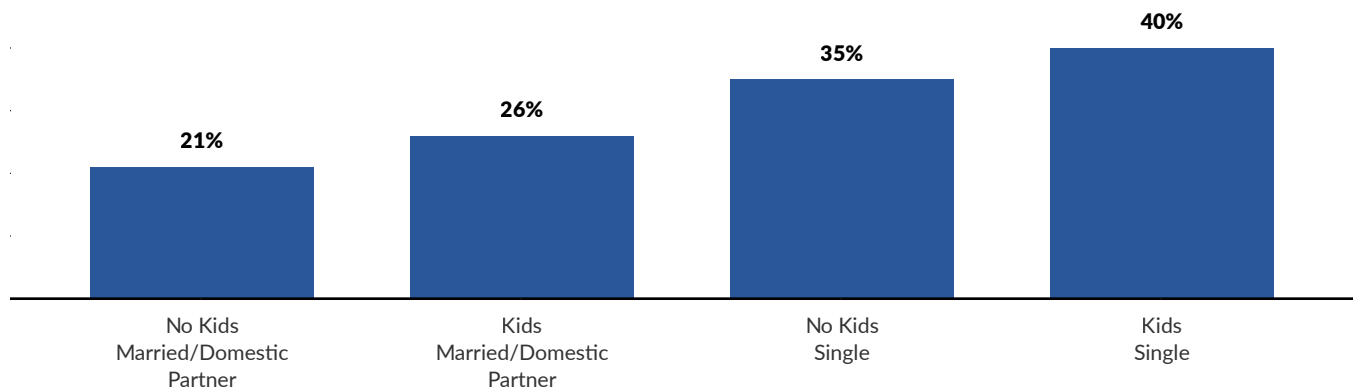
Figure 5. Intent to Enroll for Adults Over 24 by Income



Section 2 provides additional trends in the relationship between intent and income.

For survey respondents between the ages of 25 and 54, single respondents are more likely than married respondents to intend to enroll in college, and respondents with children under the age of 18 are more likely to intend to enroll. This trend underscores the importance of creating additional supports for student parents.

Figure 6. Intent to Enroll by Family Characteristics for Adults Over 24 and Under 55

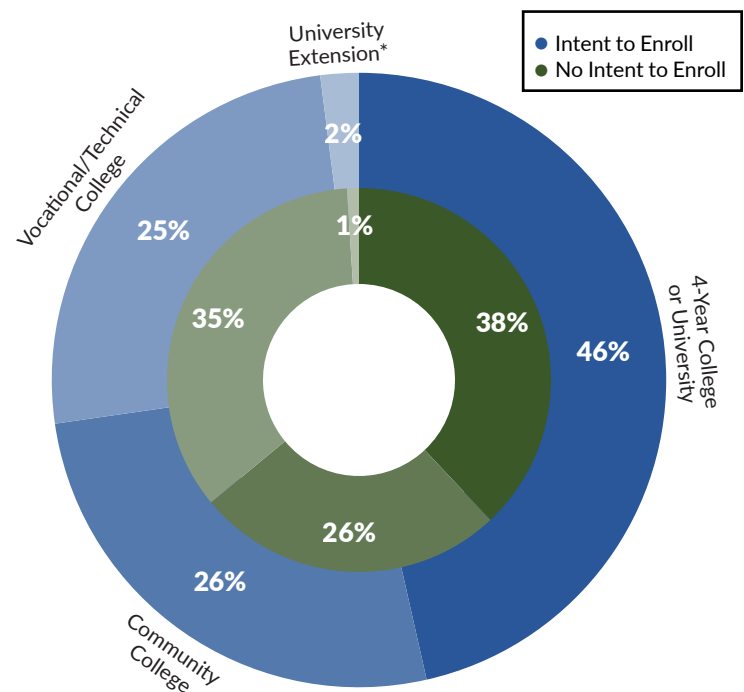


Deeper Dive — Types of Schools and Degree Programs

Of the students who intend to enroll, about half of those students (46 percent) plan to enroll in a four-year college or university, a quarter (26 percent) plan to enroll in a community college, and a quarter (25 percent) plan to enroll in a vocational or technical college. Students who do not intend to enroll were asked which type of institutions they would be most interested in. The largest percentage of non-enrolling survey respondents would be interested in a four-year college (38 percent), but they are also likely to be interested in a vocational or technical college (35 percent), a higher rate than those individuals who intend to enroll.

Virtually all respondents (93 percent) would prefer to enroll in a public postsecondary institution, as opposed to a private institution, if they were to enroll.

Figure 7. Institution of Interest



*University Extension traditionally includes non-credit and skills training

For those individuals who intend to enroll, the types of programs they plan to enroll in vary based on their current education level. Again, the relationship is not linear. Those individuals without a high school diploma and those individuals with a graduate degree are most likely to plan to pursue a non-credit credential or certificate. High school graduates with no college experience, those individuals with some college but no degree, and those individuals with a vocational or technical credential are most likely to plan to pursue an associate degree. Those individuals who already have an associate degree are about equally likely to pursue a certificate or bachelor's degree. Finally, those with a bachelor's degree are most likely to pursue a master's degree.

There are not a lot of differences in the types of programs respondents are interested in across race/ethnicity, but there is a difference in the types of institutions they are interested in. Black and African American respondents are more interested in pursuing degrees at 4-year institutions than other respondents. (See Section 2.)

Figure 8. Degree-Level Intent for Those With Intent to Enroll by Current Level of Education

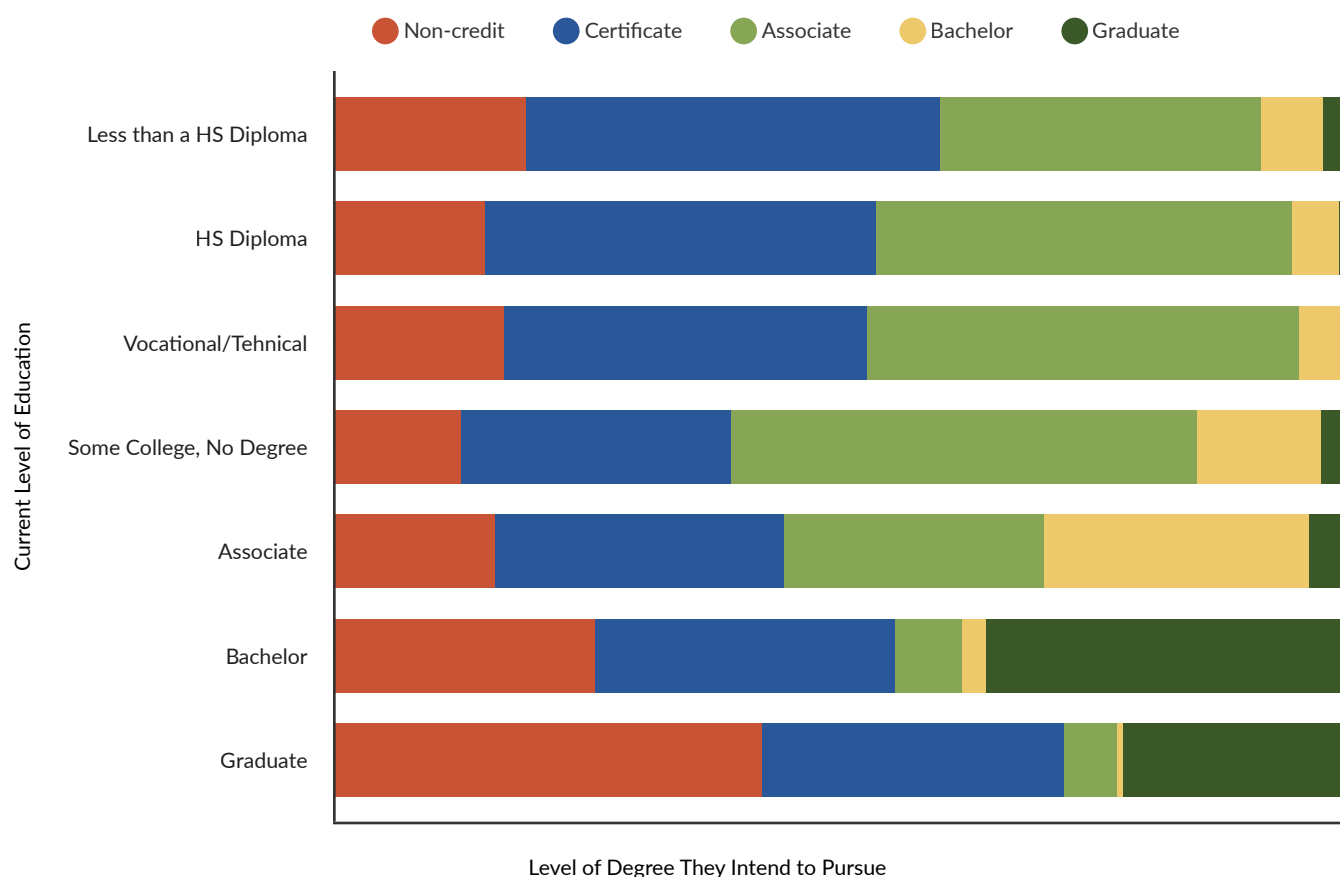
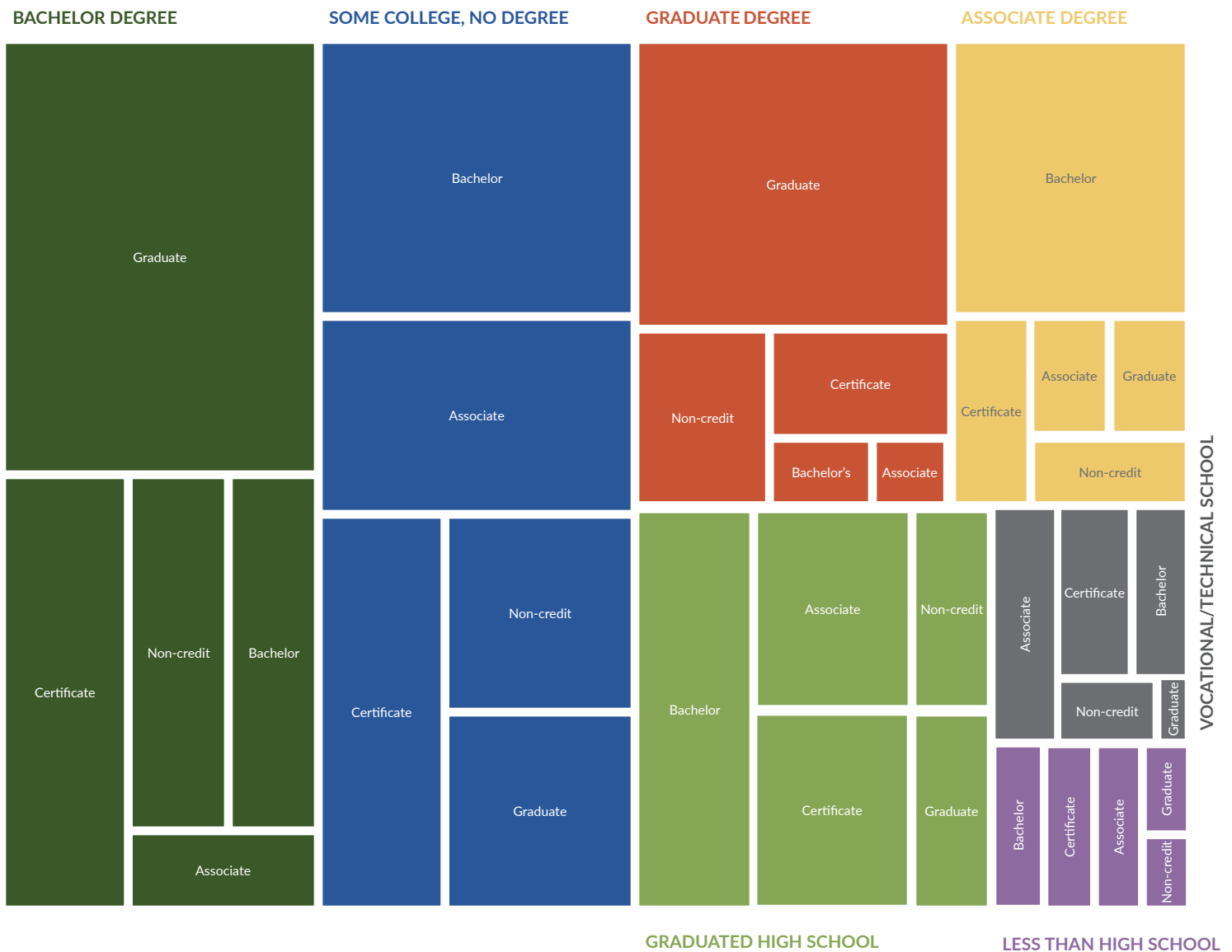


Figure 9 provides additional details about the kinds of programs students intend to enroll in based on education level accounting for the size of each group.

Figure 9. Degree-Level Intent for Those with Intent to Enroll by Current Level of Education for All Students Accounting for the Size of Each Group

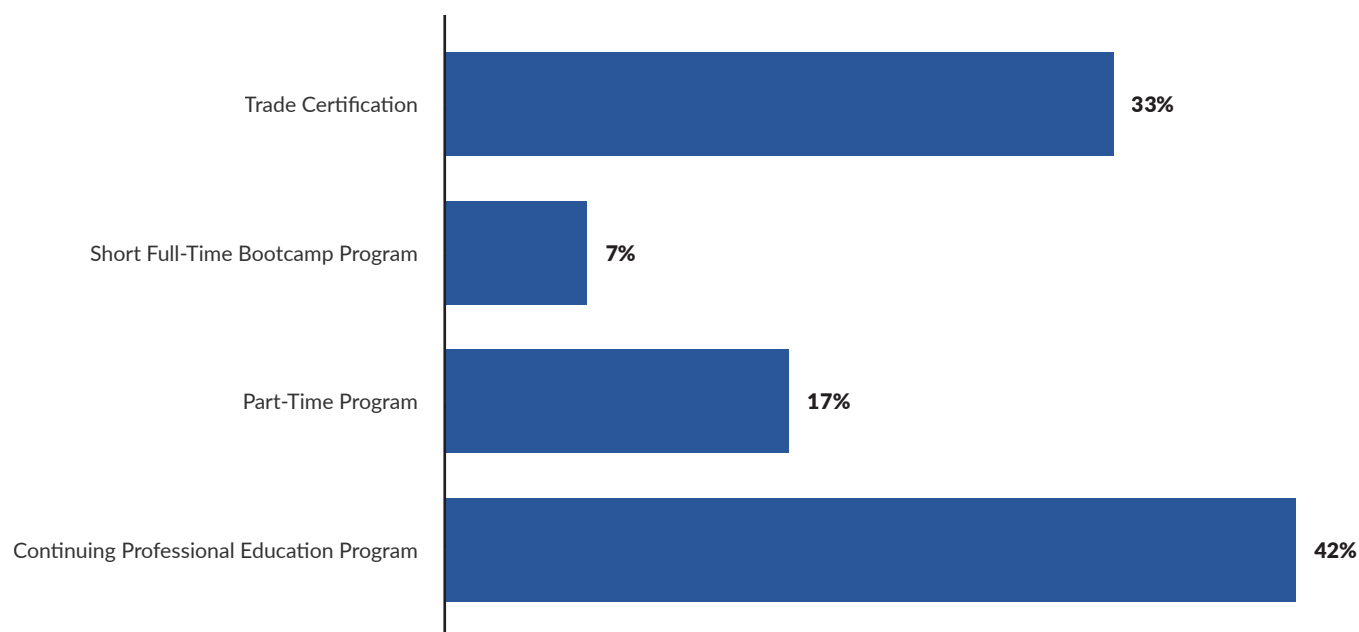


Deeper Dive — Programs of Study

There is a difference between the types of certificate, undergraduate, and graduate programs that respondents are interested in pursuing. Potential students interested in pursuing undergraduate programs are most interested in healthcare, business, and information technology (IT), which aligns with common industry needs. For graduate programs, students are most interested in healthcare, law, and education, followed by business.

Students interested in certificates, including those who already have a postsecondary credential, are most likely to be interested in continuing professional education or trade certification. Only seven percent expressed interest in short, full-time bootcamps. That level of response suggests that it may be wiser to focus on the outcome of a “bootcamp” program than the moniker that has been closely associated with short-term programs.

Figure 10. Types of Certificate Programs



Respondents who intend to enroll in a community college or technical college were asked to weigh in on their interest in enrolling in different types of certificate programs. Business was most popular, with more than 70 percent of respondents who intend to enroll responding that they were “somewhat or very interested.” More than half of respondents expressed interest in general IT, cyber security, and data analytics. Additionally, more than half of respondents were interested in electrical technology. Certificate programs for cosmetology, nursing, and law enforcement had the fewest number of interested respondents.

Deeper Dive – The Impact of Employment or Possible Job Loss

Those individuals who are not employed are more likely to intend to enroll in postsecondary education than those who are employed full-time or part-time. Additionally, respondents who expect to lose their job in the next 12 months were twice as likely to intend to enroll than those who did not expect to lose their job.

The trend in Figure 11 looks different for Black and African American and Hispanic and Latinx respondents. Part-time workers in those demographic groups are equally likely to intend to enroll as unemployed respondents. (See Section 2)

Figure 11. Intent to Enroll by Employment Status

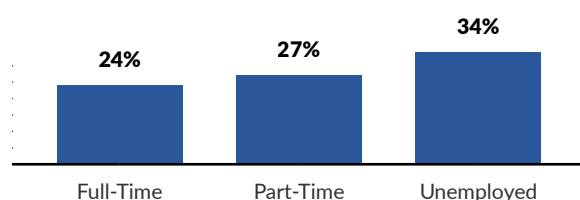
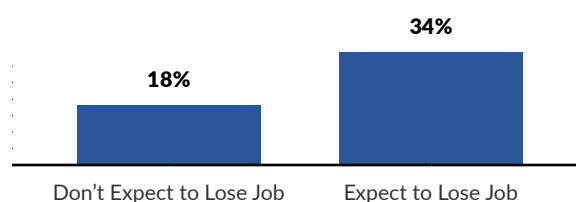


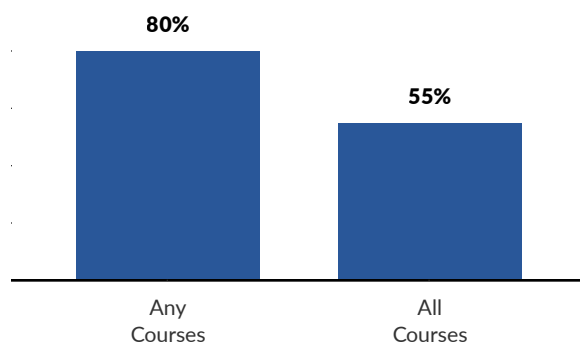
Figure 12. Intent to Enroll by Job Security



Deeper Dive – Delivery Model

Even before the pandemic, online education was of interest to students. Students who intend to enroll have significant interest in using online modalities. Eighty percent of respondents indicated interest in taking courses online, and 55 percent of respondents who intend to enroll are interested in taking all their coursework online. Interest in online coursework was slightly higher in 2020 and 2021, but overall interest has remained high.

Figure 13. Interest in Taking Online Courses



SECTION 2:

POPULATION PROFILES

Survey data shows that there are critical differences in intent to enroll by population subgroup. These findings align with other indicators that suggest the demand for higher education is correlated with factors such as race/ethnicity, current level of education, and income.

Understanding Differences by Race and Ethnicity

Higher education research acknowledges that the decisions of both high school graduates and adult learners to participate in education and training vary by race and ethnicity. Though Hispanic and Latinx and Black and African Americans are under-represented among those who enroll at America's postsecondary institutions, CollegeAPP data as well as other survey data suggest that these populations are actually more interested than other groups in enrolling. Knowing this information along with barriers and motivations to action may help policymakers and institutional leaders respond proactively to convert this interest into enrollment, persistence, and success.

Hispanic and Latinx Intent to Enroll

At all ages, levels of education, and income, Hispanic and Latinx respondents are more likely to intend to enroll in postsecondary education than respondents overall (Figure 14 through 16). Additionally, the gap between intent for those who are parents versus those who are not is smaller for Hispanic and Latinx respondents (Figure 17). This means that parenthood does not have as much impact on intent for this population. This group is also far less likely to plan to pursue non-credit degrees at most levels of education. Additionally, Hispanic and Latinx respondents with an associates degree are more likely to intend to pursue a bachelor's degree (41% versus 26%) and respondents with a bachelor's degree are more likely to plan to pursue a masters degree (52% versus 36%) than respondents overall (Figure 19). Finally, Figure 20 shows that Hispanic and Latinx respondents who work part-time are more likely to intend to enroll in postsecondary training than any other group. For respondents overall, unemployed people are more likely intend to enroll.

Figure 14. Intent to Enroll by Age for Hispanic and Latinx Respondents

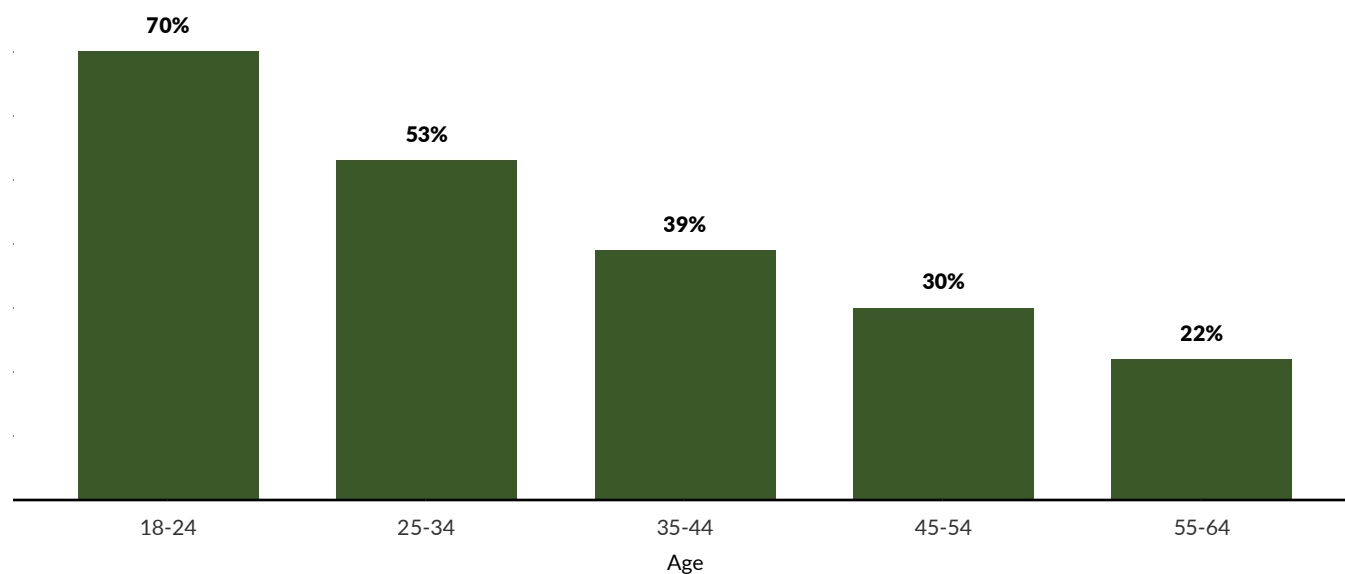


Figure 15. Intent to Enroll by Current Level of Education for Hispanic and Latinx Respondents

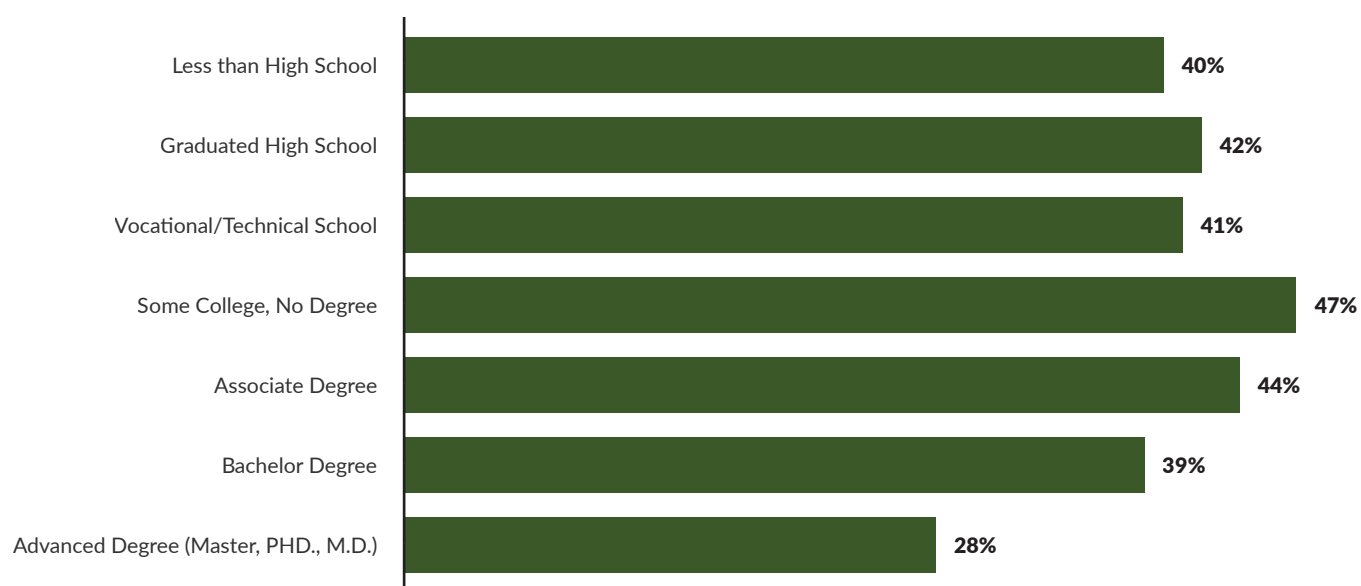


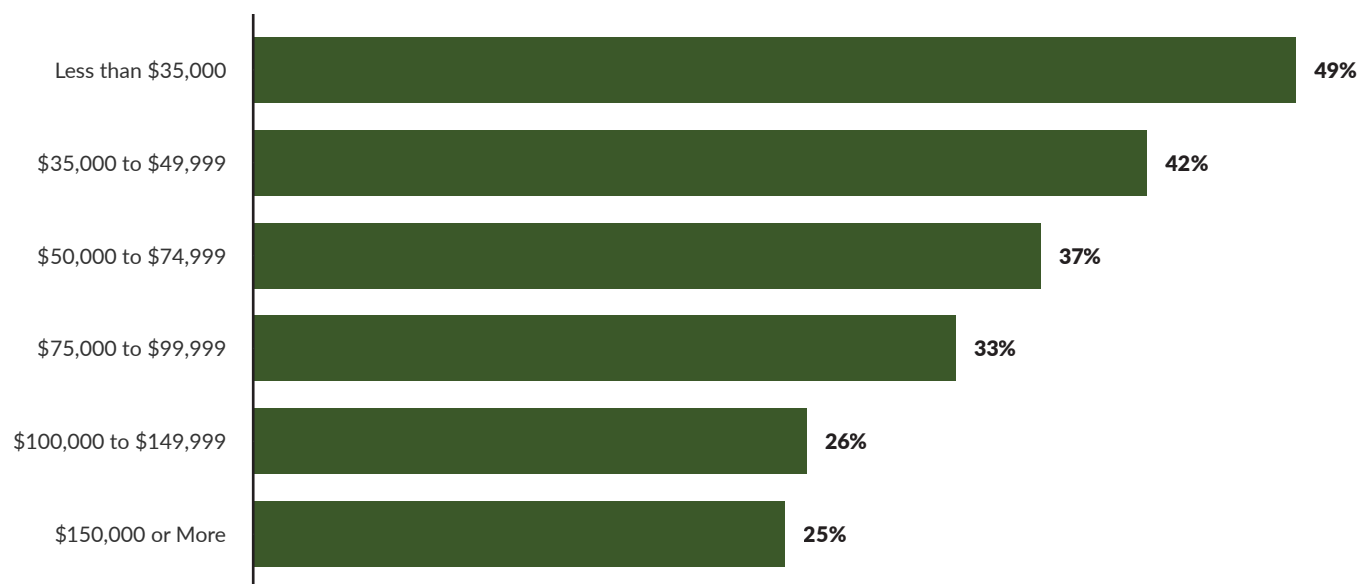
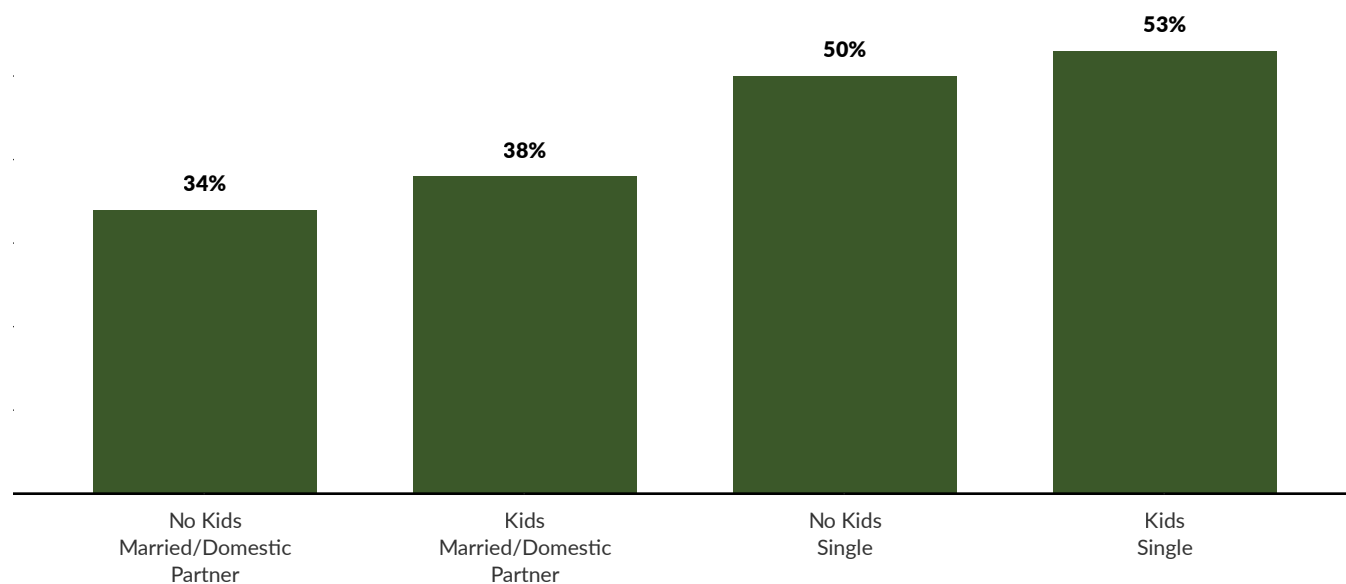
Figure 16. Intent to Enroll for Hispanic and Latinx Respondents Over Age 24 by Income**Figure 17. Intent to Enroll by Family Characteristics for Hispanic and Latinx Respondents Over Age 24 and Under Age 55**

Figure 18. Type of Institution for Hispanic and Latinx Respondents by Intent

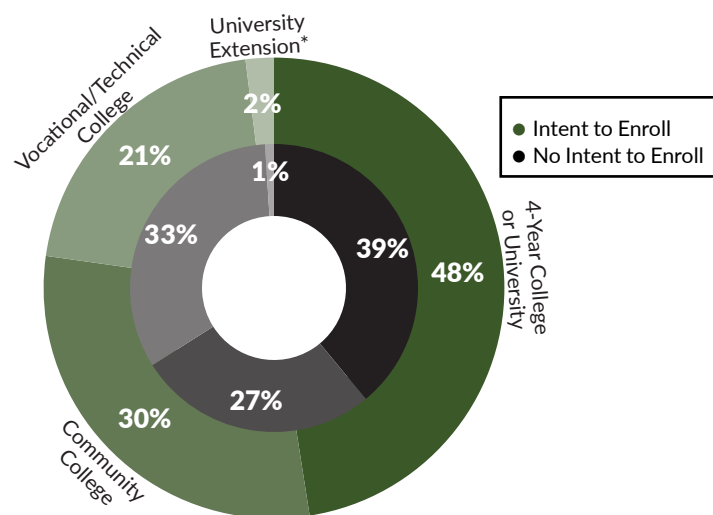


Figure 19. Credential Level Intent for Hispanic and Latinx Respondents With Intent to Enroll by Current Level of Education

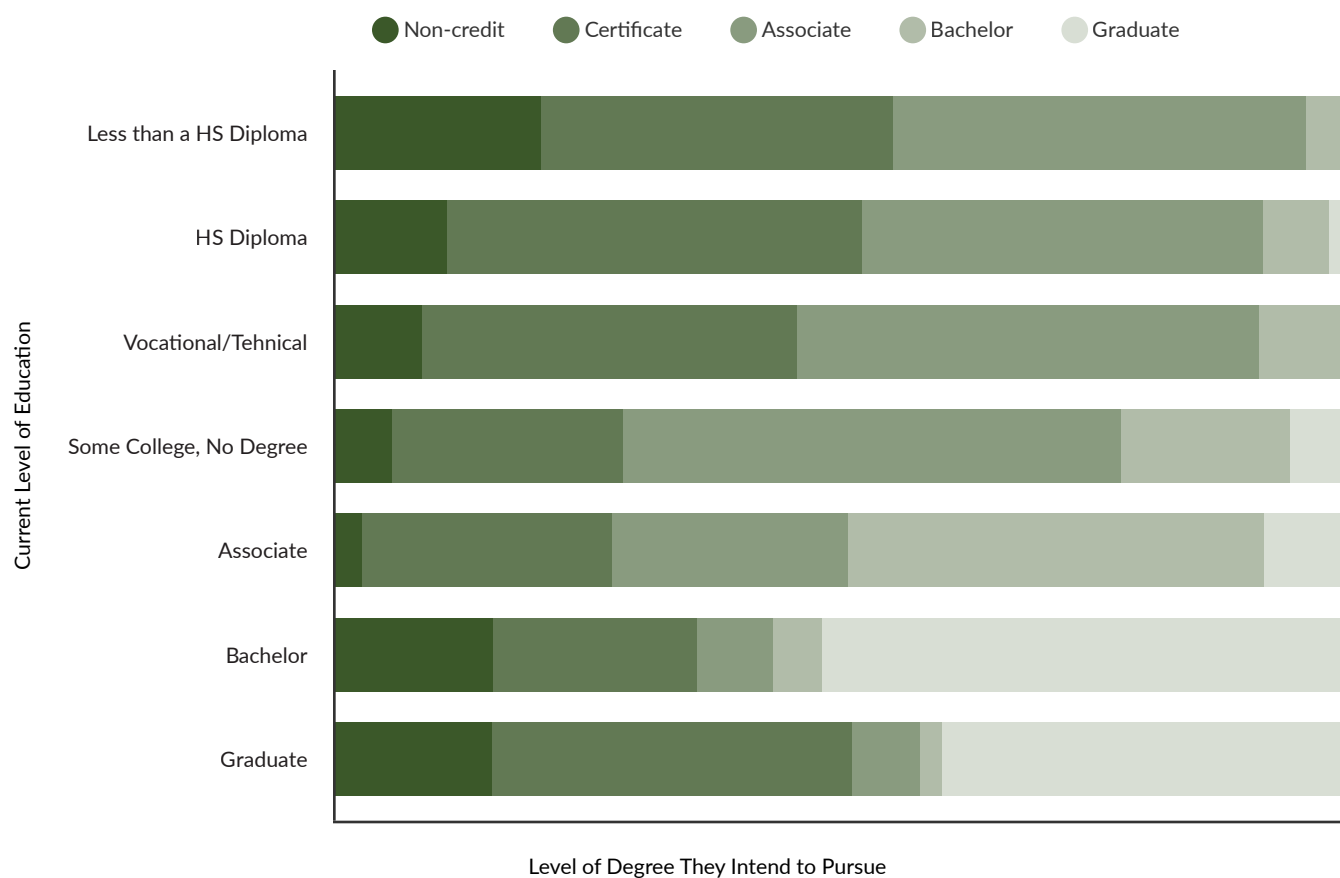
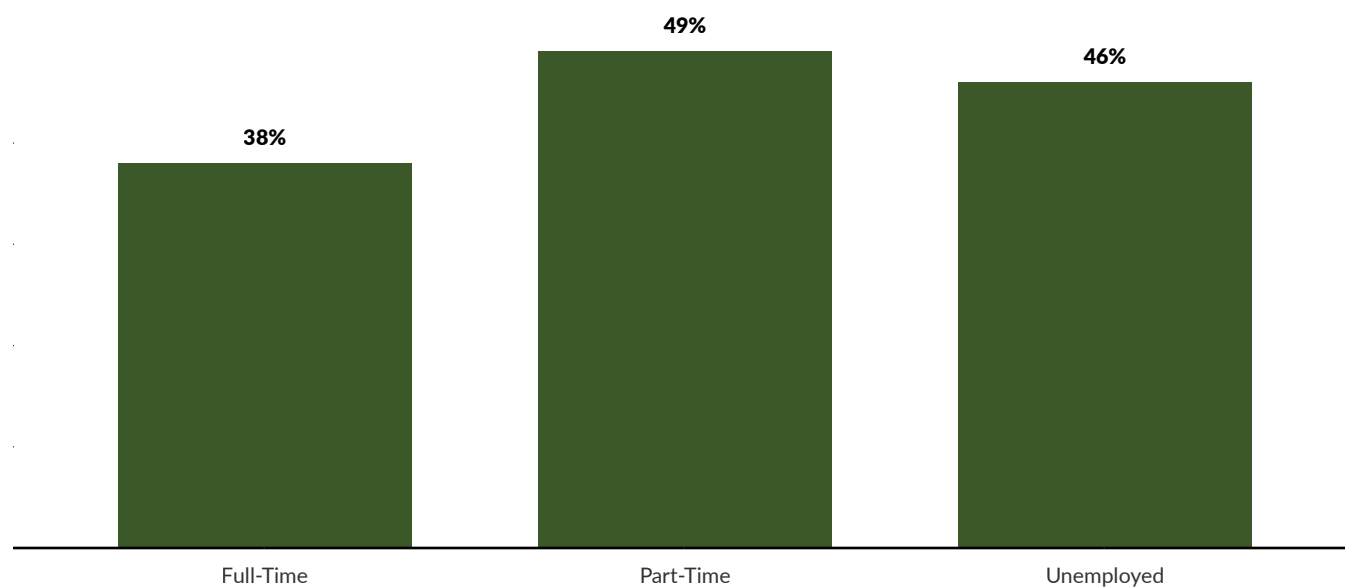


Figure 20. Intent to Enroll for Hispanic and Latinx Respondents by Employment Status

Some of the literature may help explain these trends. There may be aspects of the current culture of the higher education system that do not align with the needs of potential Hispanic and Latinx learners. One study shows that family and job obligations, technology, lack of bilingual outreach material and support for navigating campus structures can be a barrier for many potential Hispanic and Latinx adult learners (Solutions, 2021). Additionally, there are cultural differences that may factor into the intent of potential learners. For example, research shows that family is often a critical motivator and barrier for Hispanic and Latinx Learners (Sagna & Vaccaro, 2022) and life circumstances play heavily into the types of credentials Hispanic and Latinx learners pursue (Fletcher & Tyson, 2021). Additionally, other research has shown that Hispanic adult learners expect support to assist them in establishing a connection with their culture and their campus, furthering family involvement, and assisting Spanish-speaking students (McHenry, 2022).

Black and African American Intent to Enroll

In every age band except 18-24-year-olds, Black and African American respondents are most likely to intend to enroll (Figure 21). Black and African American respondents at all levels of education and income levels are more likely to intend to enroll in postsecondary education than respondents overall (Figures 22 and 23). Additionally, Black and African American respondents who are married are more likely intend to enroll than other populations (Figure 24). The gap in intent to enroll between married and single Black and African Americans is smaller than for overall respondents. Additionally, Black and African American respondents were less likely to intend to enroll in a four-year college (Figure 25). Black and African American respondents who work part-time are also most likely to intend to enroll in postsecondary training whereas for all respondents those unemployed are more likely to intend to enroll (Figure 27).

Figure 21. Intent to Enroll for Black and African American Respondents by Age

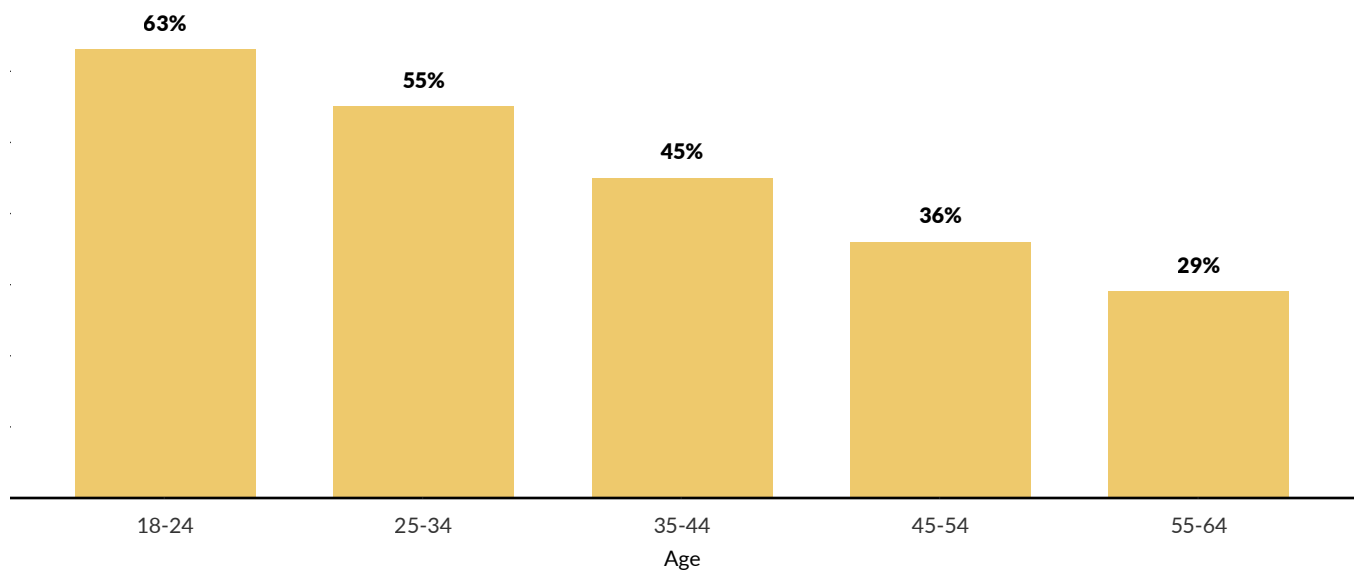


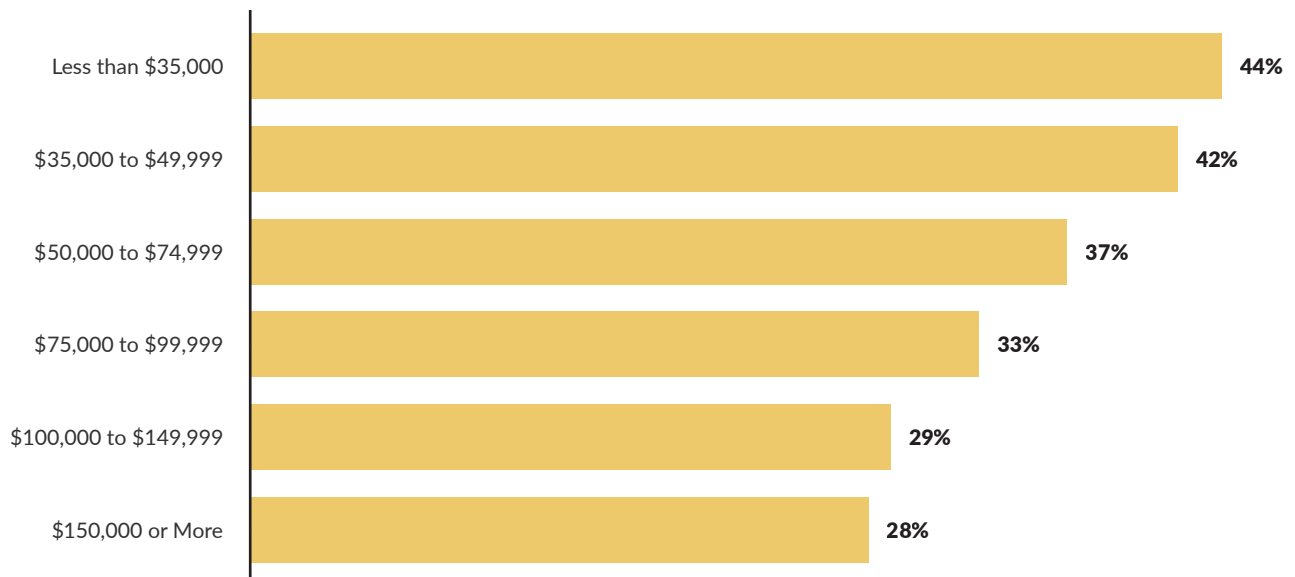
Figure 22. Intent to Enroll for Black and African American Respondents by Current Level of Education**Figure 23. Intent to Enroll for Black and African American Respondents Over Age 24 by Income**

Figure 24. Intent to Enroll by Family Characteristics for Black and African American Respondents Over Age 24 and Under Age 55

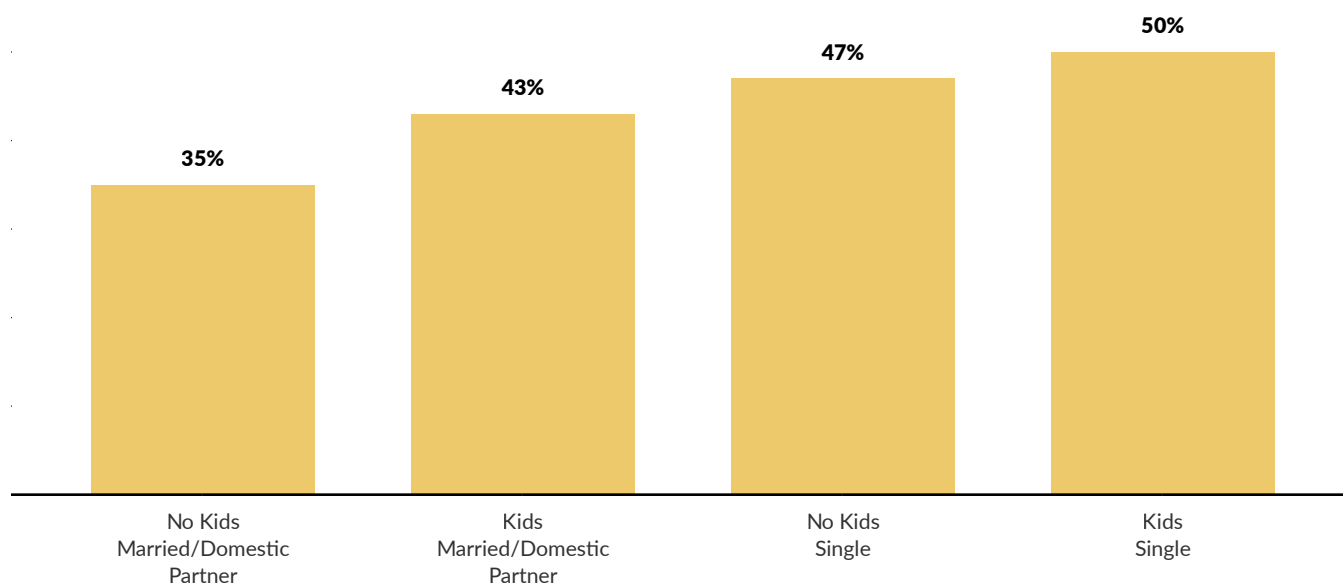


Figure 25. Type of Institution for Black and African American Respondents by Intent

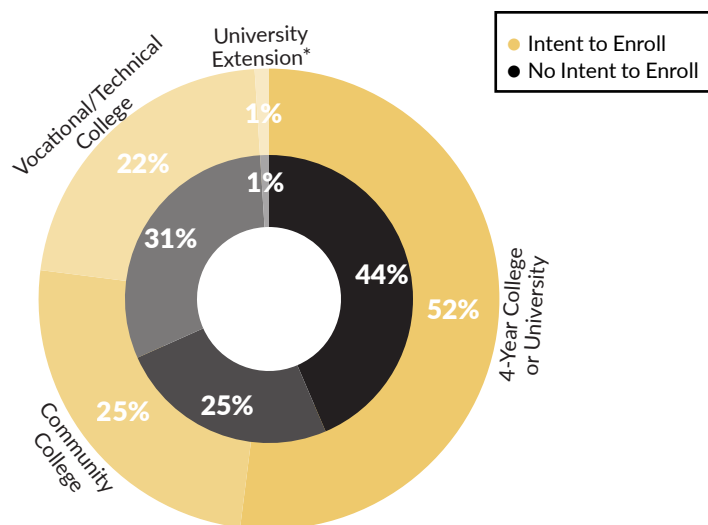


Figure 26. Credential Level Intent for Black and African American Respondents with Intent to Enroll by Current Level of Education

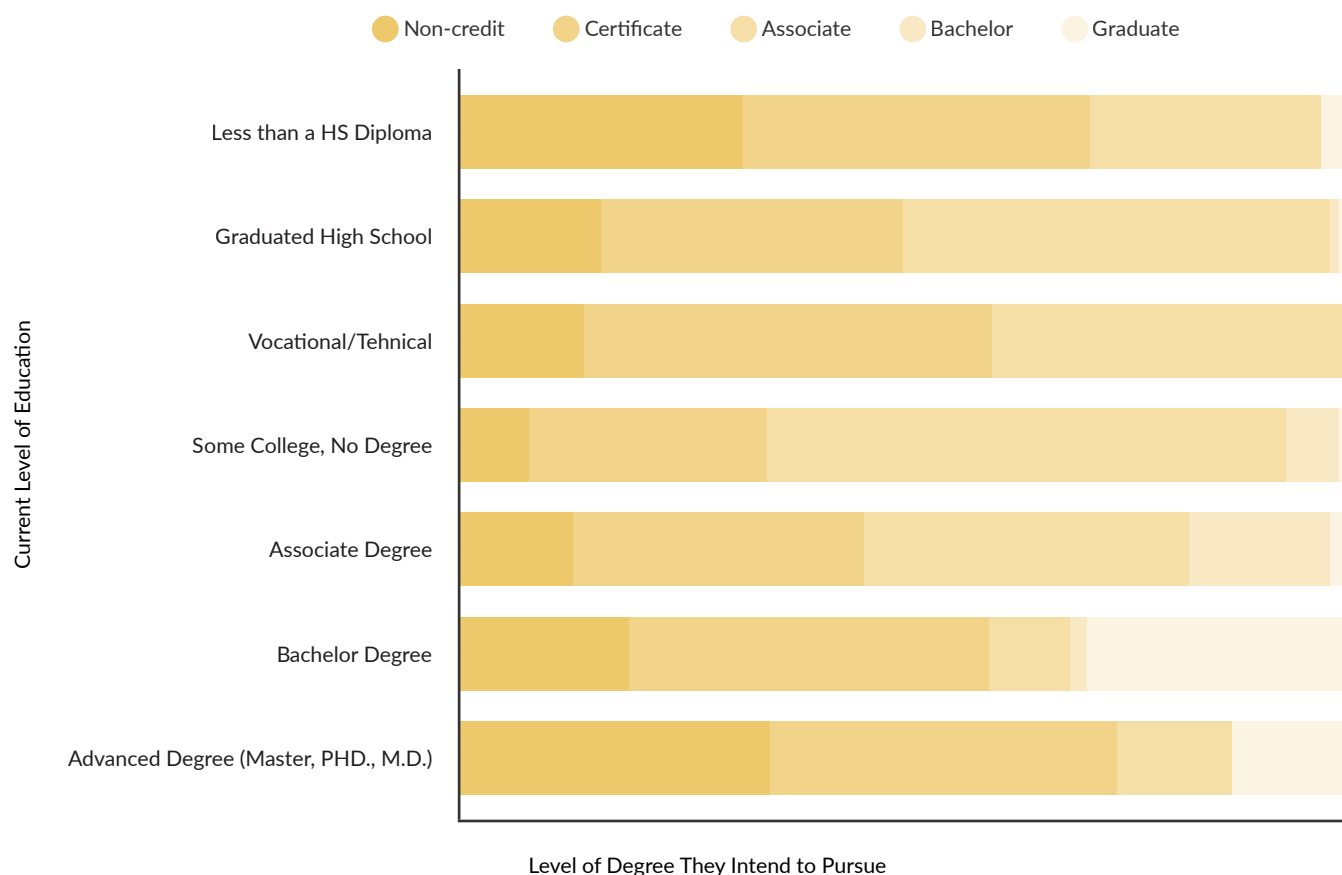
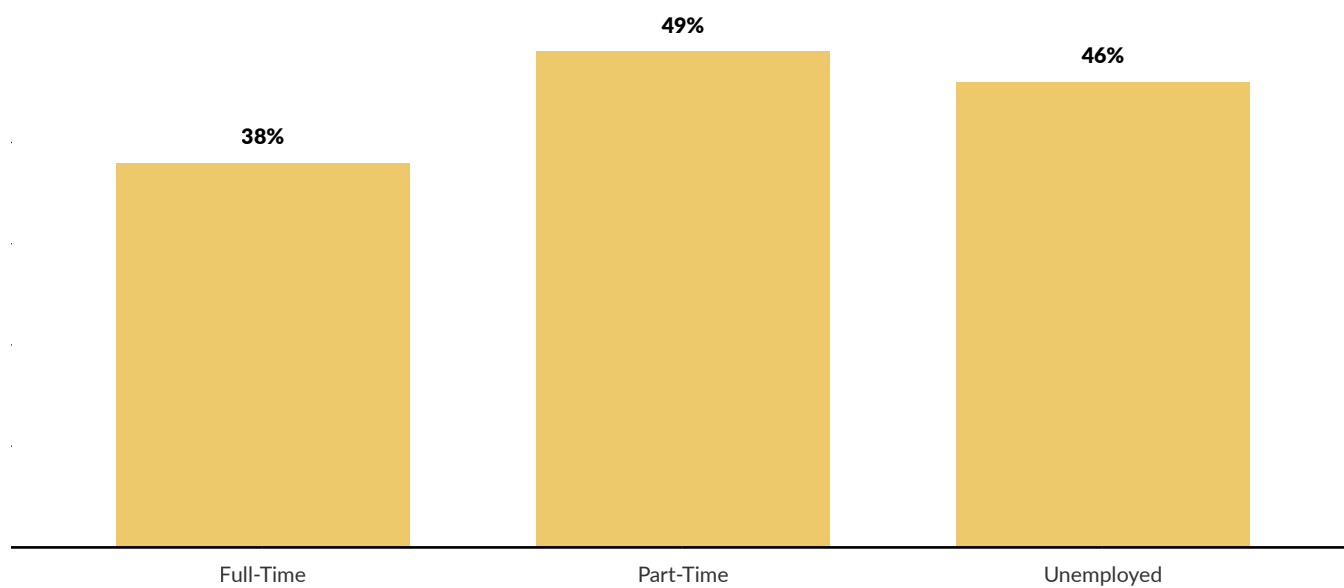


Figure 27. Intent to Enroll for Black and African American Respondents by Employment Status



Among available research, several key themes provide context to these findings. A number of studies show that for Black and African American women, self-development is a central motivating factor for pursuing higher education (Coker, 2003; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013; Hunte et al., 2020). Self-development for both Black and African American men and women included personal empowerment, enhancement of intellectual and critical thinking skills, and increased marketability in the workforce. Self-development also meant a movement toward greater financial stability, especially for those with a fairly stable job/career who want to work their way out of poverty (Coker, 2003). Additionally, for many Black and African Americans, the pursuit of higher education is considered an endeavor that benefits their entire family (Coker, 2003). Finally, though Black and African American students recognized the importance of individual and family development, they also were mindful of the effect their success would have on the larger African American community. The motivation toward achievement was particularly the case, as many Black and African American women regarded themselves as leaders of their community (Coker, 2003; Hunte et al., 2020).

It is important to note that regardless of the rationale for enrolling, Black and African American and Hispanic and Latinx adults still face challenges in postsecondary education and training when they do enroll. Cultural differences, real and perceived bias from fellow students or instructors, and lack of understanding of life circumstances are just a few of the challenges these groups experience. Institutions should be attuned to and respond to these populations and address their unique needs to ensure enrollment leads to success.

Intent to Enroll for Those with Some College but No Degree

According to the US Census (2022) more than 40 percent of Americans have completed high school but don't have a postsecondary degree and about 39 million Americans have some college experience but no degree (National Student Clearinghouse, 2022). Many states and institutions are targeting these populations for re-enrollment, in part because the path to success for these students is shorter. The CollegeAPP data provides insight into the intent of students who have some experience in the postsecondary system but have not completed their credential.

The CollegeAPP data suggest this population is more likely to intend to enroll than respondents overall when they have some college experience but no degree (Figure 28). There are also racial differences. Asian respondents who have some college but not a degree are much more likely than Asian respondents overall to intend to enroll. Hispanic and Latinx and Black and African American respondents with some college are also much more likely to intend to enroll while for White respondents, the numbers are relatively similar for respondents with some college and respondents overall (Figure 29). There is a correlation between respondents' income and their likelihood of intending to enroll; respondents with some college at lower income ranges are much more likely to attend to enroll than all respondents (Figure 30). Those with some college experience are less likely to intend enroll in a four-year college or university in the future than respondents overall. Those who intend to enroll are more likely to return to a community college while those who don't intend to enroll were most interested in a technical credential (Figure 32).

Figure 28. Intent to Enroll for Respondents with Some College but No Degree by Age

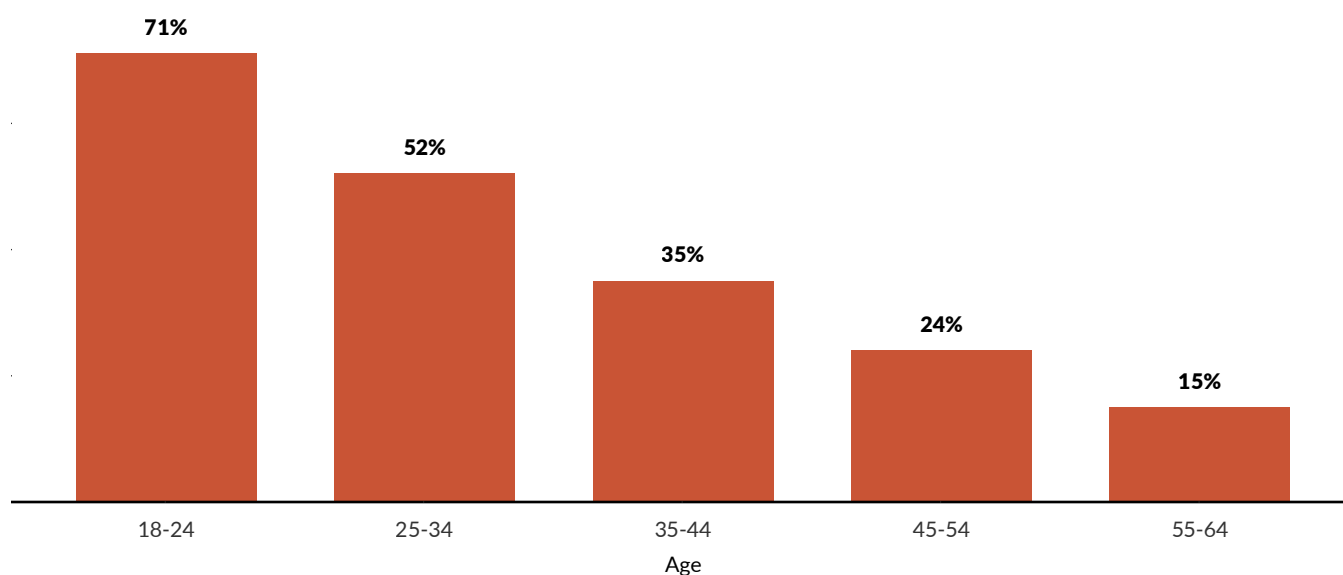


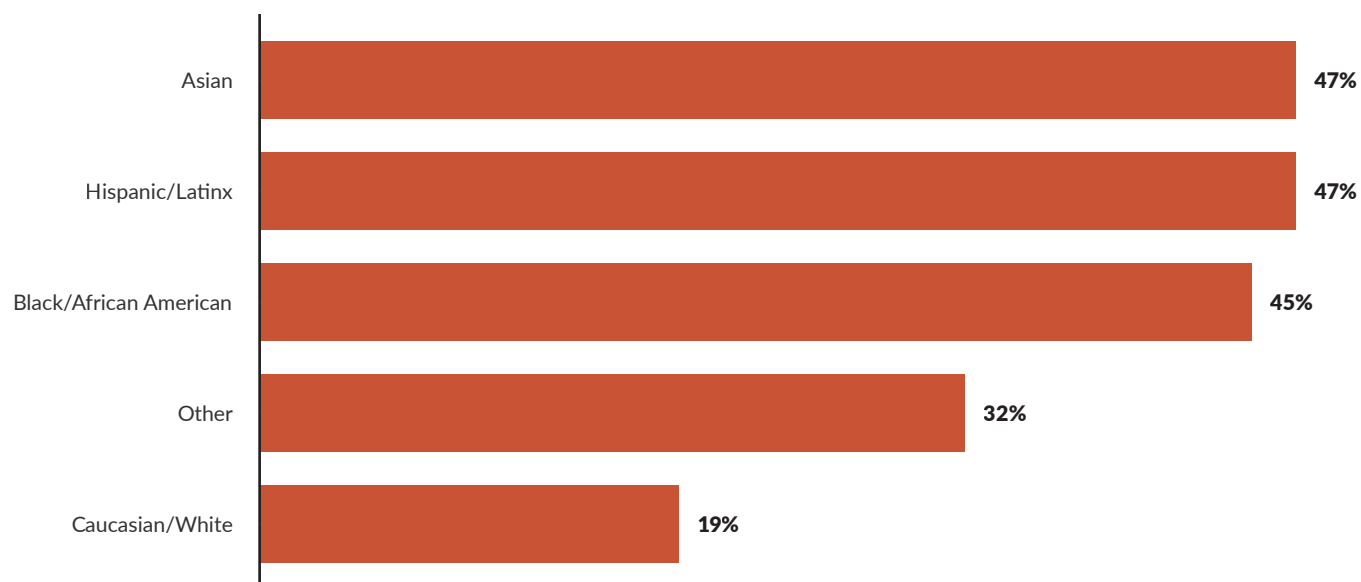
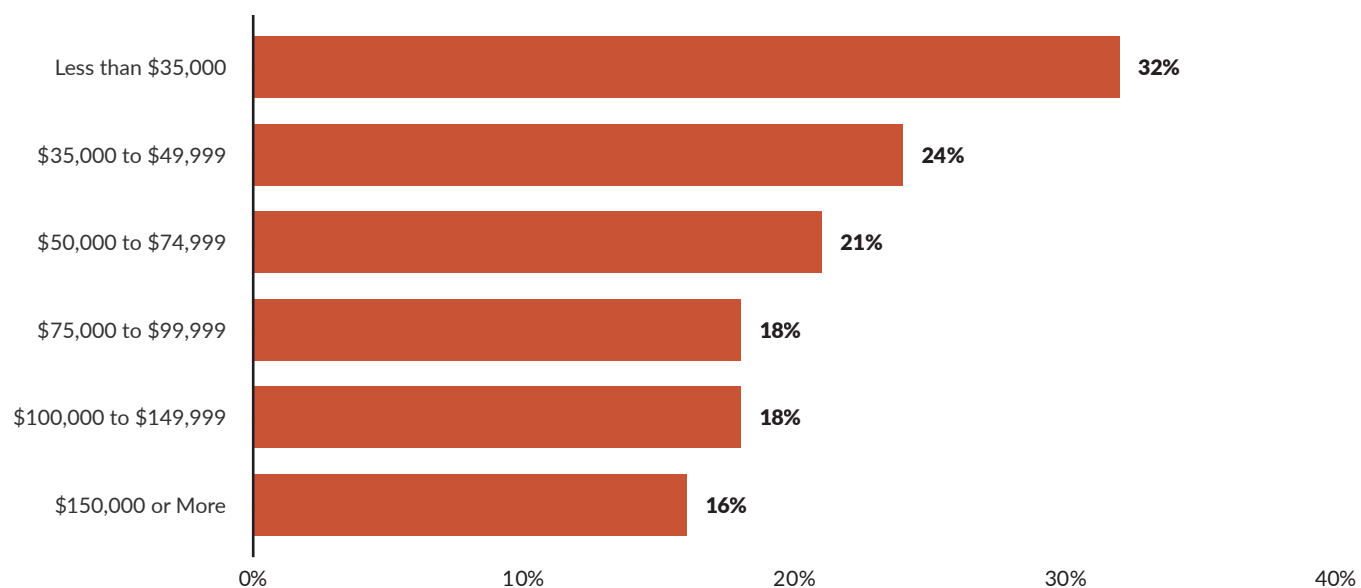
Figure 29. Intent to Enroll for Respondents with Some College but No Degree by Race/Ethnicity**Figure 30. Intent to Enroll for Adults Over 24 With Some College but No Degree by Income**

Figure 31. Type of Institution for Respondents With Some College but No Degree by Intent

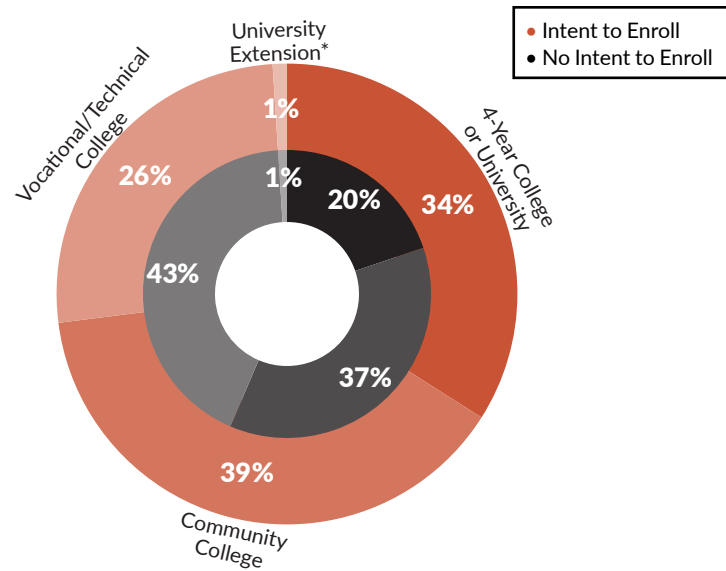


Figure 32. Credential Level Intent for Respondents with Some College but No Degree That Intend to Enroll by Gender

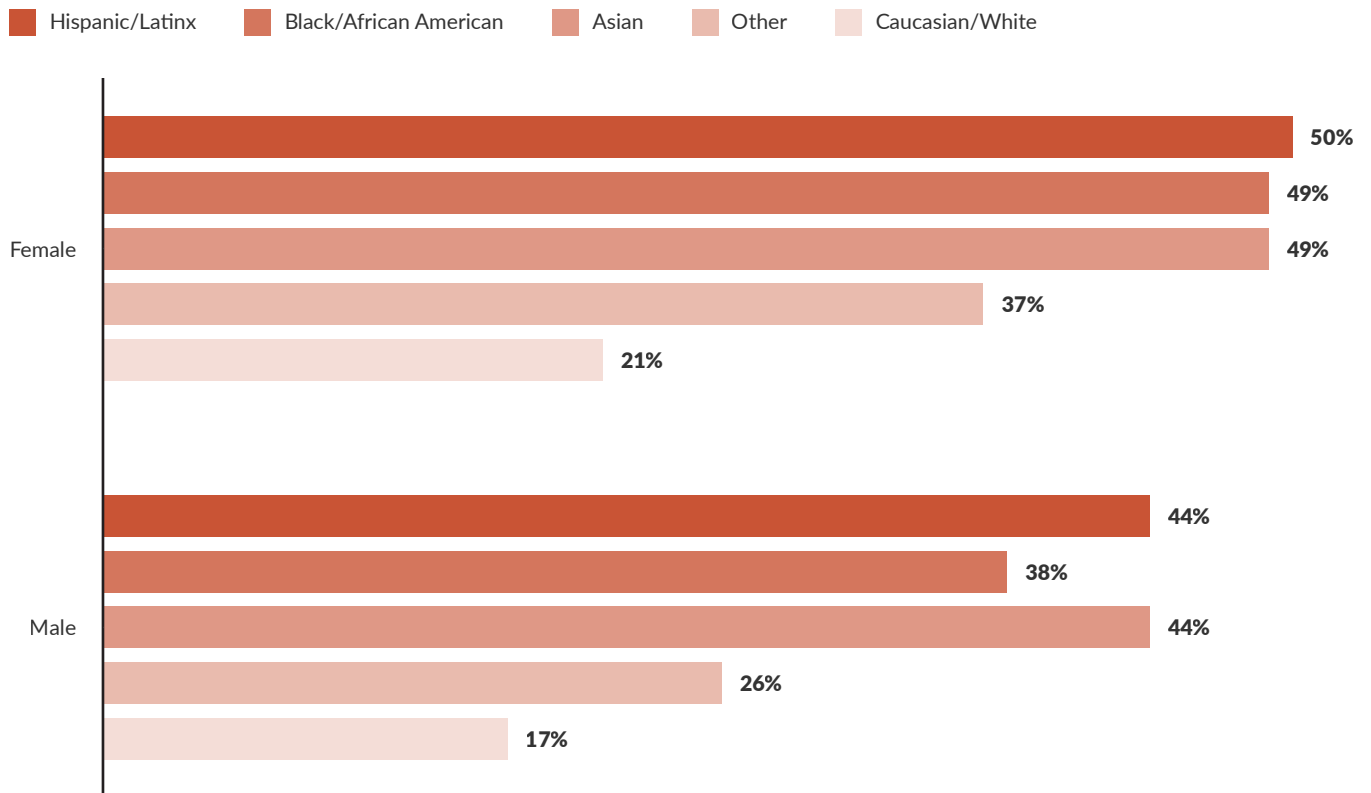
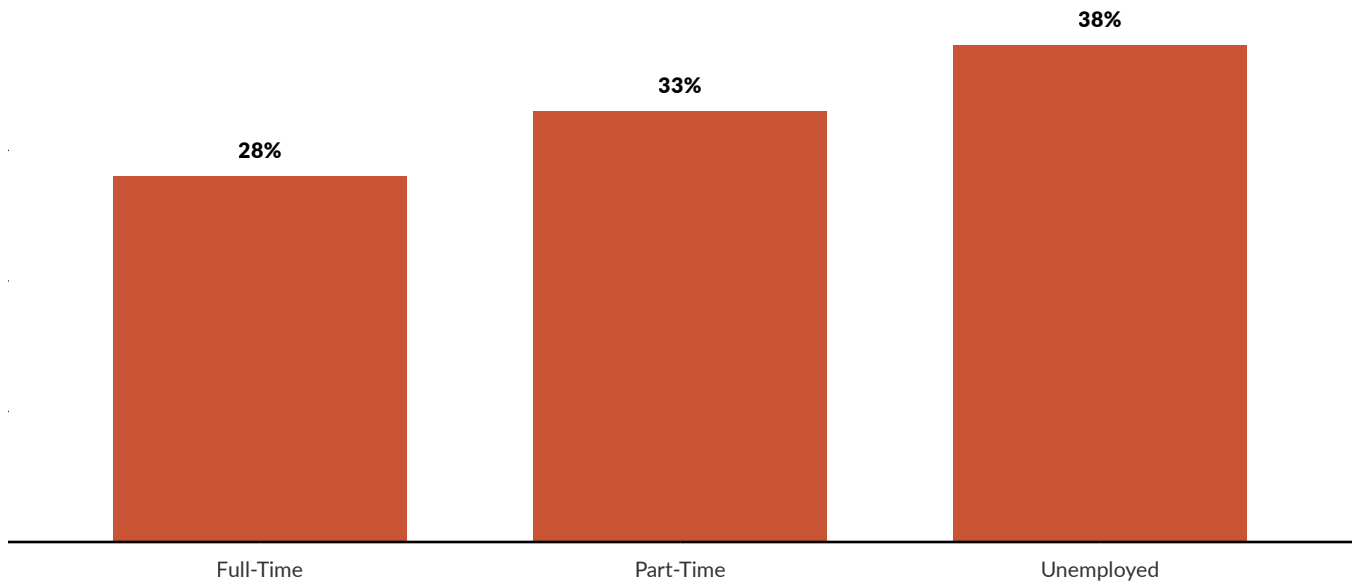


Figure 33. Intent to Enroll for Respondents with Some College but No Degree by Employment Status



A study of students with some college but no degree from the Graduate! Network and New America (2020) showed that completing a goal of finishing college was a primary motivator for returning adults followed by increasing earning potential, supporting a career change, or getting a better job. This study also found that money is often both a motivator and a barrier for this population and that they are looking for clearer pathways to success after they choose to re-enroll. A number of states paired comprehensive outreach and supports for adult students with financial support, first through Adult Promise programs (Carlson and Laderman, 2018) and in more recent years through programs funded by federal stimulus dollars. Unfortunately, the population with some college but no degree continues to be one of the most impacted as it rose dramatically during the pandemic and has not recovered (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020 and 2022).

Intent to Enroll for Those with a High School Credential but No Degree

Current income is an important factor in whether someone intends to enroll in additional education and training. This is not surprising because one of the reasons that many people enroll in postsecondary training is to improve their economic future. This section looks at the differences between those whose incomes are more than \$75,000 and those whose incomes are less.

Not surprisingly, those who make under \$75,000 are much more likely to intend to enroll at all age levels and the differences are most pronounced in middle age, between 25 and 44 (Figure 34). The types of institutions that respondents would consider attending are also different. Those who make more are more likely to be interested in enrolling in a four-year college or university, and while those who make under \$75,000 who intend to enroll do prefer a four-year college or university, they are also more likely to plan to enroll in a community college (Figures 35 and 36). Though the trends overall are the same, Figures 37 and 38 illustrate the impact that income has on intent to enroll based on family characteristics and employment status. In both income categories, those who are unemployed are most likely to intend to enroll in education and training.

Figure 34. Intent to Enroll by Income

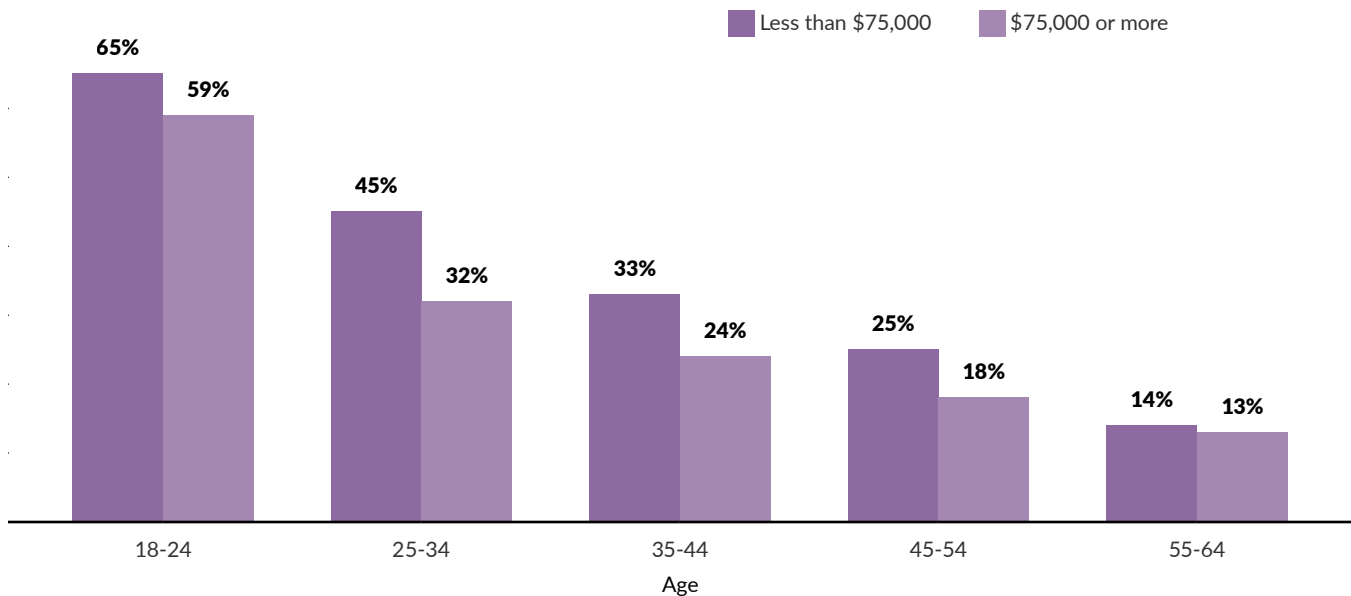


Figure 35. Type of Institution for Individuals With Income Under \$75,000 by Intent

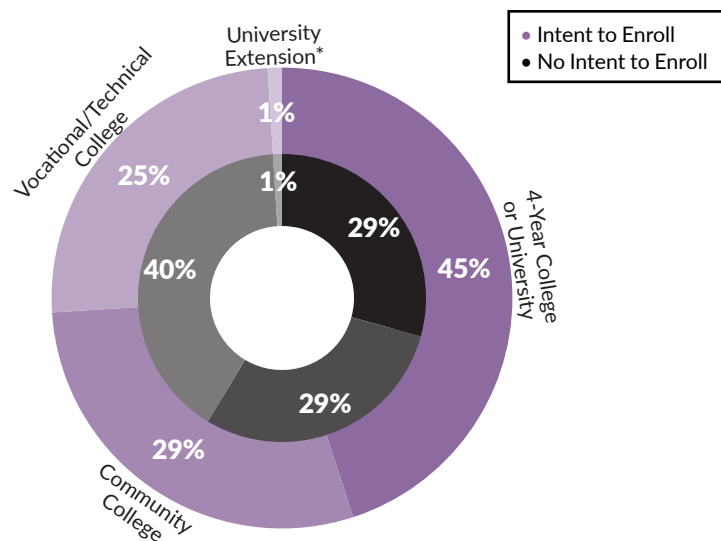


Figure 36. Type of Institution for Individuals With Income \$75,000 or More by Intent

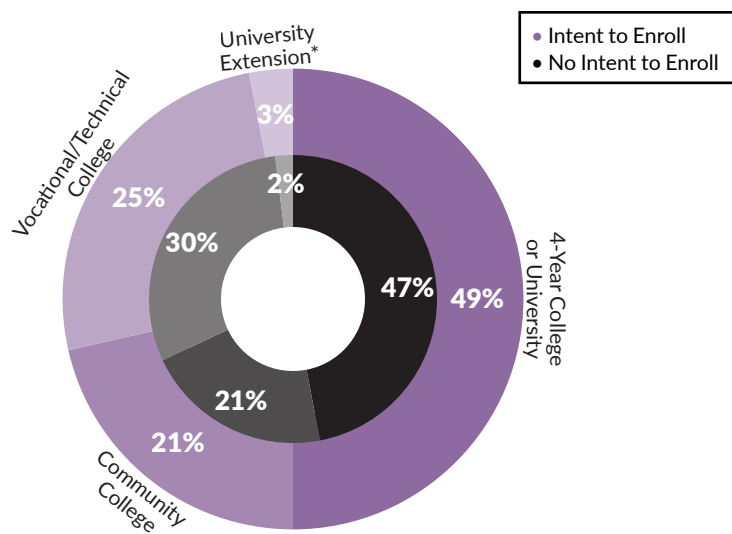


Figure 37. Intent to Enroll by Family Characteristics for Adults Over Age 24 and Under Age 55

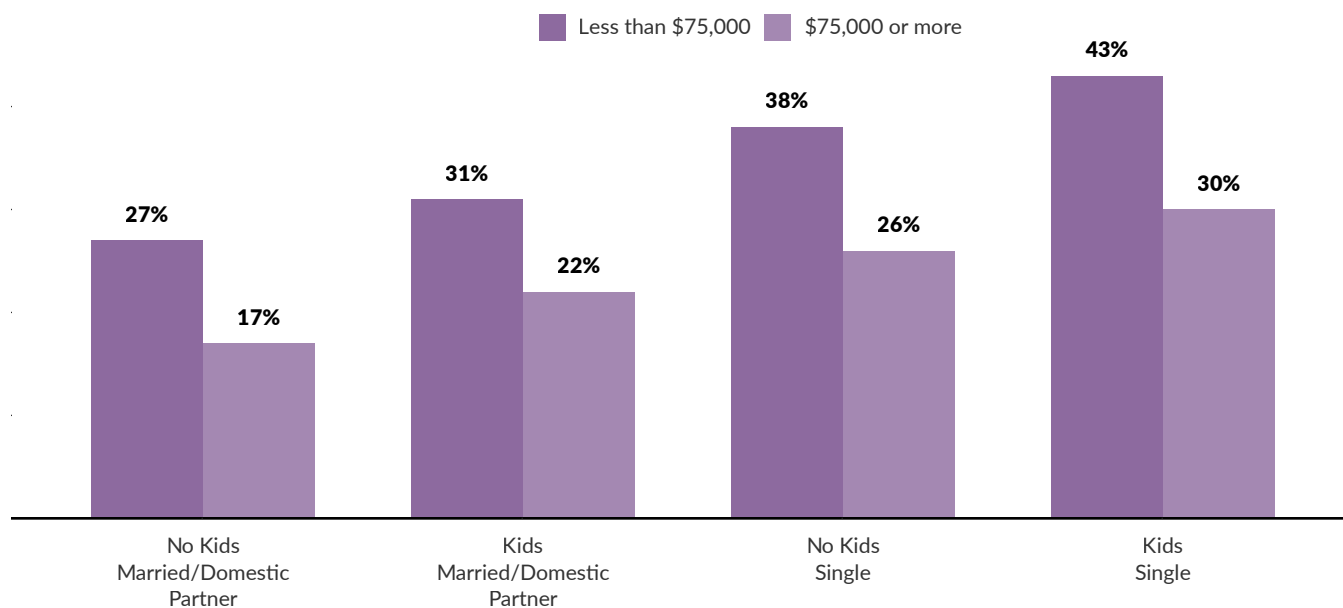
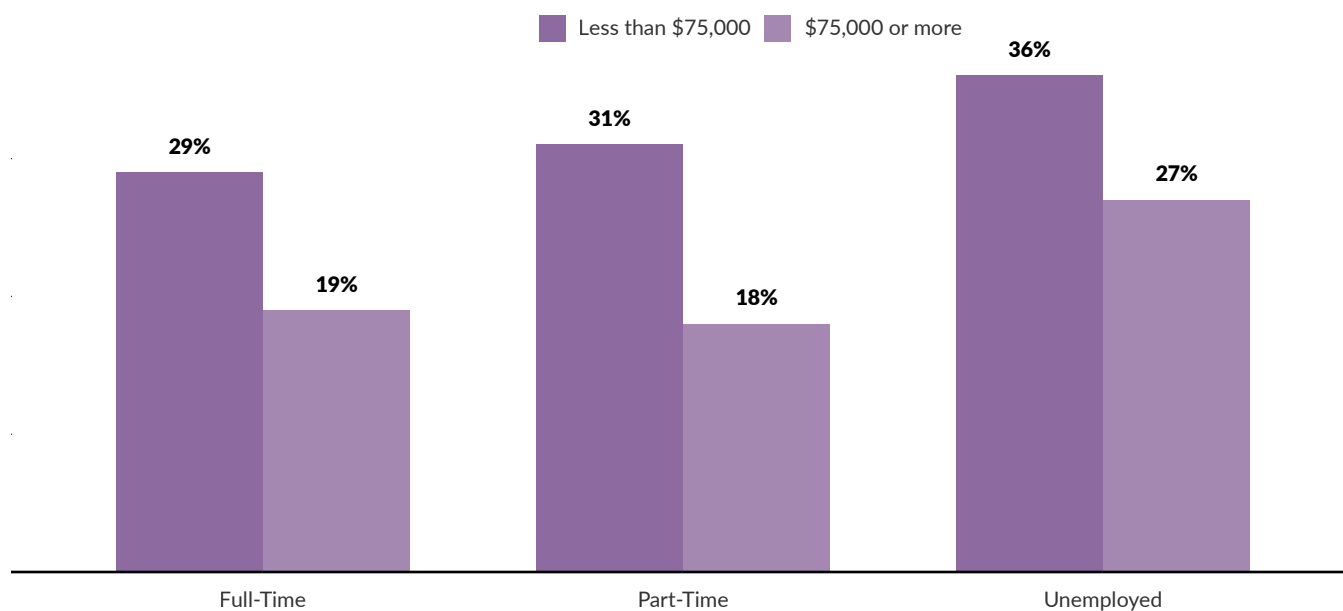


Figure 38. Intent to Enroll by Employment Status and Income



Preferred Delivery Models

Education and training providers have been adding online modalities to their programs for over two decades and this trend was accelerated in the midst of the recent COVID-19 global pandemic. The CollegeAPP survey asks respondents about their preference for online learning either some of the time or all of the time during their educational journey. These data provide important insights of the expectations of today's learners.

The difference in preference for online courses across races and ethnicities is small. Asian respondents were the most likely to respond that they wanted to take at least some courses online and Black and African American respondents were the most likely to want to take all of their coursework online. Respondents who identified as a race or ethnicity other than those listed were least likely to prefer to take online courses some or all of the time (Figure 39). There is a relationship between level of education and preferred delivery model; those with at least some college experience were more likely to prefer to take some or all of their classes online while those with vocational school and no high school diploma were least likely to prefer to take some or all of their classes online (Figure 40). Those with income under \$35,000 were also less likely to prefer to take courses online than respondents with higher incomes (Figure 41). Life circumstances do tend to play a more significant role in whether respondents prefer to enroll in online courses some or part of the time. For example, students who are employed part-time are least likely to want to enroll in all of their courses online (Figure 42). Single respondents without kids are least likely to want to enroll in courses online while single respondents with kids are most likely (Figure 43). These findings provide important insight into the way that different groups of students want to engage in their courses.

Figure 39. Interest in Taking Online Courses for Respondents With Intent By Race and Ethnicity

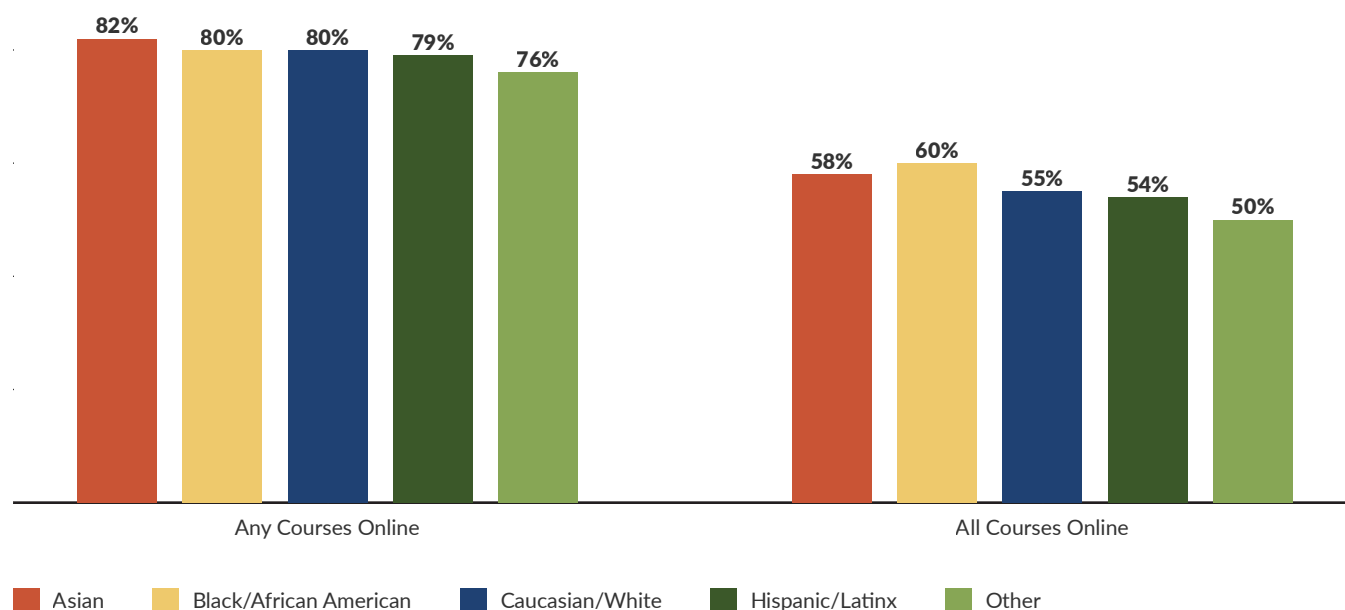


Figure 40: Interest in Taking Online Courses by Respondents with Intent by Current Level of Education

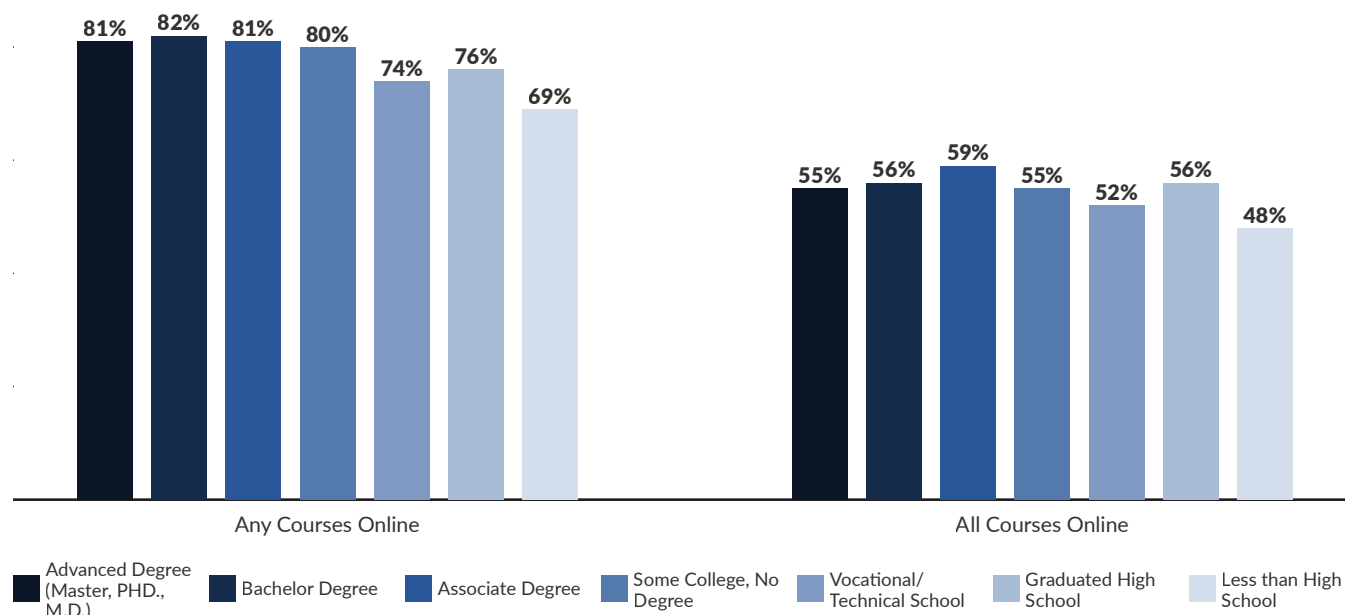


Figure 41: Interest in Taking Online Courses for Respondents with Intent by Income

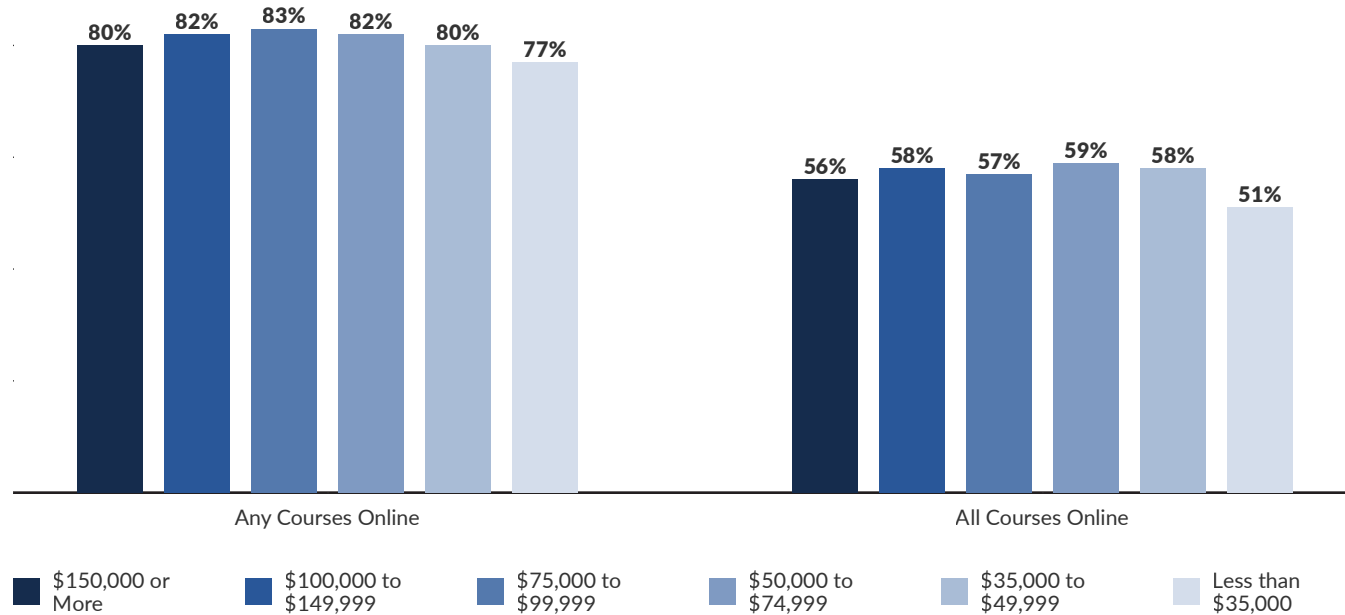


Figure 42: Interest in Taking Online Courses for Respondents with Intent by Family Characteristic

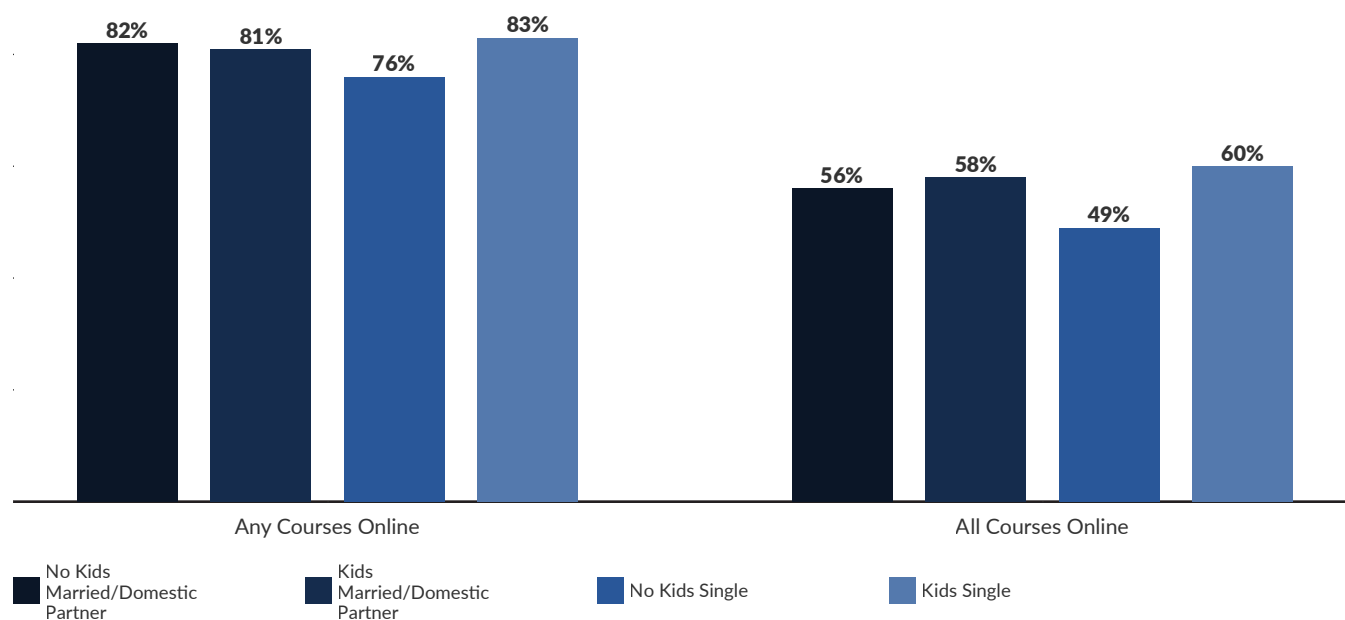
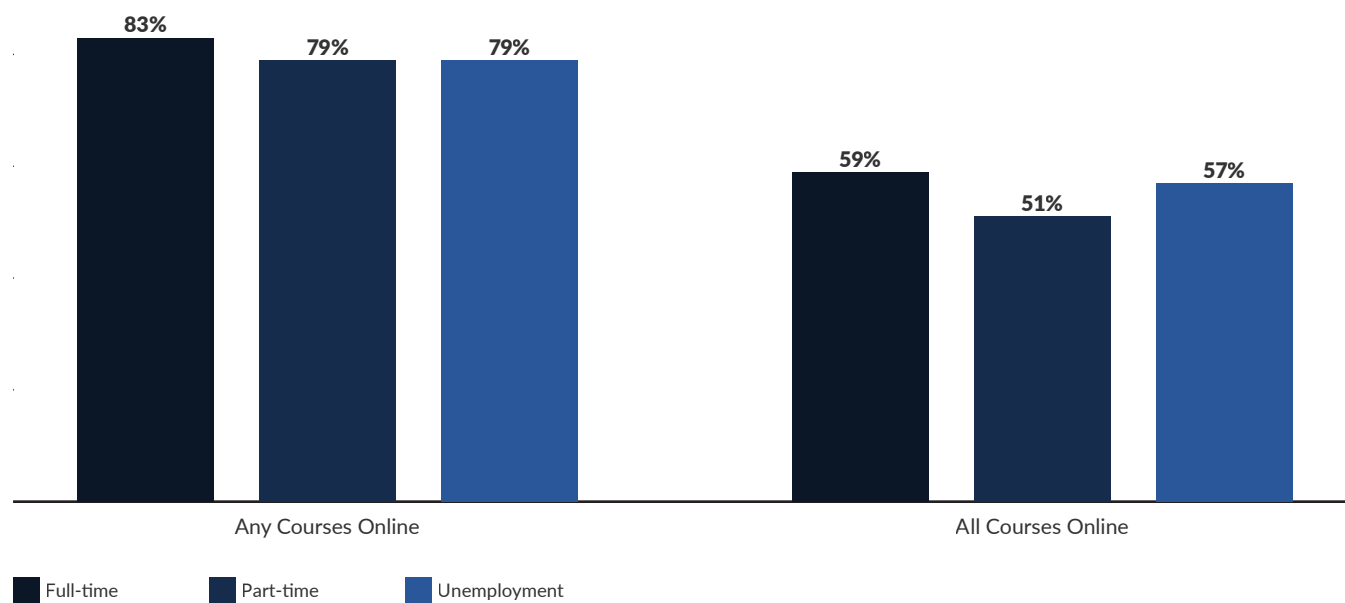


Figure 43: Interest in Taking Online Courses for Respondents with Intent by Employment Status



SECTION 3:

TRANSLATING INTENT TO ACTION

The data suggest that many students who intend to enroll never go on to do so. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB, 1985, 1988, 1991) and his Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA, Azjen and Fishbein, 1975) provide insight into this trend. According to TRA, there are five stages of participation (below). CollegeAPP provides a significant tool to assist postsecondary institutions in identifying individuals who are at Stage 3: "Learning Intention." However, TRA helps both institutions and policymakers understand how they can better translate intention into action and how CollegeAPP data can help facilitate a response.

Stage 1: Need

Discrepancy between current and desired situation

Need can be measured at a person or community level. From the perspective of educational attainment, disparities in income, employment, earnings, home ownership, and health provide a data foundation for the communities that may be struggling to build wealth and quality of life across generations.

Stage 2: Educational Need

Discrepancy is educational in nature

Educational need is shown in the correlation between attainment and the above mentioned measures of income, employment, earnings, home ownership, and health at an individual and community level.

Stage 3: Learning Intention

Desire to satisfy educational need

The individual's intention to enroll, as measured by CollegeAPP, provides the baseline needed to measure the desire to satisfy educational needs. This is a primary factor when considering investments of time and money in enrollment or re-enrollment initiatives by government, educational institutions, community organizations, and the philanthropic sector.

Stage 4: Educational Demand

Formulation of a solution to resolve the educational discrepancy

Even with the intention to enroll, individuals must formalize their plans by identifying education and training options that meet their needs. Formalization of this intent may be influenced externally by the subjective or social norms within the individual's family, peer network, or community.

Stage 5: Educational Participation

Pursuit of the identified solution

Enrollment in (and completion of) education and training.

Stages 3 and 4 are critical to understanding the gap between intention to enroll and actual enrollment. CollegeAPP provides the baseline data needed to measure the desire to satisfy educational needs. The intention to participate in learning is a robust predictor of actual learning participation and commitment to participate in learning. Intention to enroll should be a primary factor when government, educational institutions, community organizations, and the philanthropic sector consider investments of resources in enrollment or re-enrollment initiatives.

The Origin of Intent and Translation to Enrollment

Sanders et al. (2011) found that a person's intention to enroll in education and training is influenced by 1) actual prior participation in training, 2) one's internal attitude toward training, and 3) one's external attitude or social norms toward training (one's peers' perspective on education and training). One's attitude toward training is the individual sum of the advantages and disadvantages of training participation, and some of these factors are not within the control of the individual.

Kyndt and Baert (2013) built on these findings in a meta-analysis of work-related learning and its antecedents, or predictors, of enrollment in education and training. This research identified 116 hypothesized predictors over 56 studies analyzing the intention to participate and participation in education and training. They found that a positive statistically significant relationship exists between learning intention and actual participation. Learning intention is also positively related to a prior learning activity. They then broke the antecedents into categories and identified 13 factors with statistical significance. Below are the antecedent groups and high-level findings. See Appendix III for all antecedents grouped into levels.



Micro characteristics include demographics, personal characteristics, and job characteristics, many of which are collected by CollegeAPP. Age, being female, and having children were all significantly tied to education participation. Like the survey results above, education level was not a significant predictor.



Meso characteristics are experiences the person has either directly related to learning or within the organizations with whom they connect. Many meso characteristics that are factors were found to be significant, including those related to an individual's beliefs, feedback from others, and an individual's career position. This study aligns with the CollegeAPP data showing that individuals who are unemployed or fearful of being unemployed are more likely to intend to enroll.



Macro characteristics are external factors that are one step removed from personal experiences and actions.

Stage 4 of TRA shows that, even with the intention to enroll, individuals must formalize their plans by identifying education and training options that meet their needs. The formalization of this intent may be influenced externally by the subjective or social norms within the individual's family, peer network, or community. The combination of formalization of plans and external influence is critical at this stage of enrollment (or re-enrollment). In other words, intent on its own will only translate into a certain amount of enrollment; potential students also need to have the confidence, support, and belief in education to take action to enroll.

One's intention to participate in educational training in stages 3 and 4 is influenced by 1) actual prior participation in training, 2) one's attitude toward training (internal motivations), and 3) one's subjective or social norms toward training (external influencers) (Sanders et al., 2011). One's attitude toward training is the individual sum of advantages and disadvantages of training participation (Sanders et al., 2011). These factors can manifest in multiple ways, including, but not limited to, the belief in one's ability to succeed in education and training, one's sense of belonging, and social acceptance of participation in education and training.

CollegeAPP's data on intent provide a critical starting point for finding individuals who demonstrate learning intention. Its impact is more powerful when paired with activities that translate intention to demand. Many colleges and institutions are beginning to explore ways to leverage community connections to recruit students.

CONCLUSION

Declining birth rates, changing demographics and an increased skepticism of their value all put postsecondary institutions and the important services they provide at risk. The pandemic highlighted the importance of a national focus on increasing educational attainment at all levels, while also resulting in decreased demand. Institutional leaders know that if they continue to approach enrollment management in the same ways, they are facing a historic enrollment cliff.

The CollegeAPP's data on intent for adults should change the way higher education identifies and prioritizes adult students and recruits them.

CollegeAPP's 150,000 surveys, paired with publicly and commercially available data sources, can model aggregate person-level, adult-learner demand data at the region, state, and neighborhood levels to understand and identify potential students and help states and higher education institutions reach students directly. By focusing on intent, CollegeAPP identifies who plans to enroll in postsecondary education and training, and the types of institutions and programs in which individuals are interested in enrolling. These data are immensely valuable for helping institutions rethink and support their enrollment management outreach strategies, providing essential insight for policymakers and state and institutional higher education leaders, and assisting stakeholders in ensuring the nation's education system addresses potential students' needs, specifically those students historically underserved by postsecondary structures and processes.

Analysis of the CollegeAPP survey data provides details about who intends to enroll, what programs they are most interested in, and how groups differ by demographic characteristic.

Regardless of age and level of education, Black and African American and Hispanic and Latinx respondents are more than twice as likely as white respondents to express intent to enroll. Parents, those who are single, those who make less than a family-sustaining wage, and those who are unemployed or don't have job stability are more likely to intend to enroll in postsecondary education or training. For institutions, localities, and states seeking to increase attainment, higher levels of intent to enroll among traditionally underserved populations is indicative of systemic and social-emotional barriers for these populations.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) offers insight into how CollegeAPP and others can translate data on intent into action and enrollment in postsecondary educational programs.

The Theory of Reasoned Action's five stages of participation – 1) Need, 2) Educational Need, 3) Learning Intention, 4) Educational Demand, and 5) Educational Participation (Sanders et al., 2011; Kyndt, E., & Baert, H., 2013) – provide

a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the movement of individuals from educational need to intent to enroll to participation. Even with the intention to enroll, individuals must formalize their plans by identifying education and training options that meet their needs. The formalization of this intent may be influenced externally by the subjective or social norms within the individual's family, peer network, or community. The combination of formalization of plans and external influence is critical for enrollment or re-enrollment. In other words, intent on its own will only translate into a certain amount of enrollment; potential students also need to have the confidence, support, and belief in education to take action to enroll.

Overall

CollegeAPP survey data provide much-needed insight into populations intending to enroll in education and training. Most importantly, CollegeAPP survey data have the potential to reshape the discussion about which adults should be identified and actively recruited by colleges and universities when used strategically to target students who intend to enroll in education and training, turn their intent into action, and transform their future economic prospects in the process.

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Katie Zaback, Zaback Solutions

[Zaback Solutions](#) is a data- and research-focused policy and strategy consultancy based in Denver Colorado. They are committed to helping organizations translate data and research into impactful policies and strategies that transform systems. Founded on the values of truth, inclusion, and agency, Zaback Solutions works with local, state-based, and national organizations committed to changing the education and workforce sectors to create more economic mobility for more Americans.



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