

Educational Attainment, 2000

Americans are more educated than ever before.

Greater educational attainment spells greater socioeconomic success for individuals and the country. For every progressively higher level of education, earnings are higher.¹ This relationship holds true, not only for the population as a whole, but also for population subgroups, including men and women and various racial and ethnic groups.

Although the overall trend has been toward a more educated society, significant differences exist among various population segments. Nevertheless, the educational attainment of young adults, those aged 25 to 29, provides a glimpse of our country's future and indicates continued dramatic improvements by groups who historically have been less well educated.

The percentage of the adults who are high school graduates continued to rise in 2000.

The Current Population Survey (CPS)² has tracked improvements in educational levels since 1947. By 2000, over four-fifths of all adults aged 25 and older had completed at least high school. More than one in four adults held a bachelor's degree or higher.

However, the educational attainment of young adults may be leveling off. The percentage of people aged 25 to 29 in 2000 who had completed high school was 88 percent, no different than it was in 1998 or 1999. The percentage of young adults who had completed a bachelor's degree was 29 percent in 2000, compared with 28 percent in 1999 and 27 percent in 1998.³

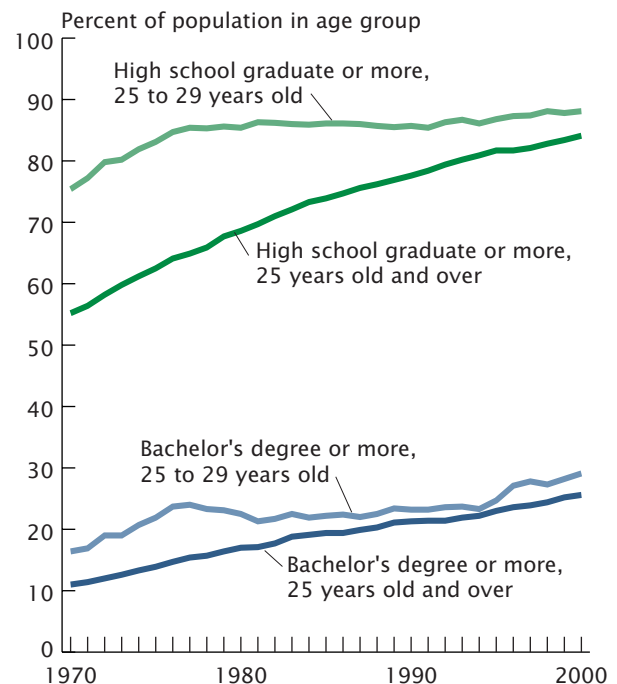
¹ See chapter on income.

² Estimates in this chapter are calculated using sample data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), weighted by population controls based on the 1990 decennial census. The population universe for the March CPS is the civilian noninstitutional population plus armed forces living off base or with their families on post. As a result, these estimates will differ from population estimates computed from either the intercensal estimates program or the 2000 decennial census.

³ The percentage of adults aged 25 to 29 in 2000 was not statistically different than it was in 1999, nor was 1999 statistically different than 1998.

Men and women aged 25 and older were equally likely to have completed high school — 84 percent in 2000. However, men were more likely than women to have

Figure 9-1.
High School and College Graduates:
1970 - 2000



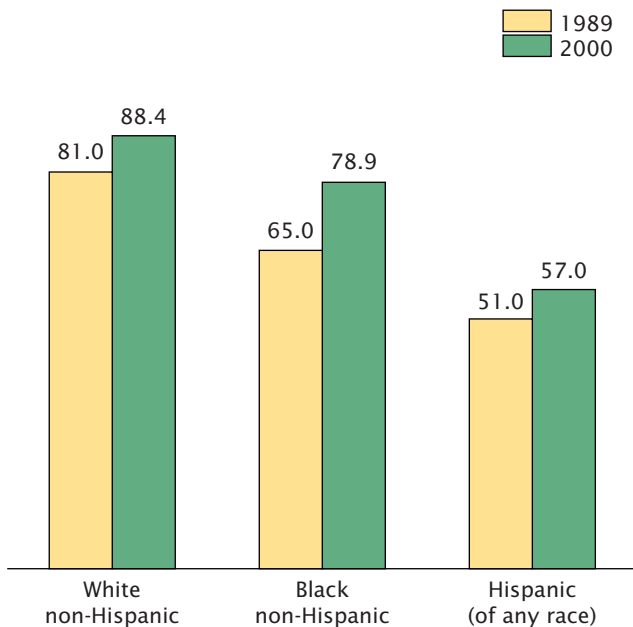
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1970 to March 2000.

Words That Count

- Educational attainment** is reported for the population aged 25 and older. It is derived from a single question asked in the Current Population Survey: "What is the highest grade of school ... completed, or the highest degree ... received?" Before 1992, educational attainment was measured in the CPS only by years of schooling completed.

Figure 9-2.
People Aged 25 and Older Who Have Completed High School or More for Selected Racial and Ethnic Groups: 1989 and 2000

(Percent of population aged 25 and older)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1989 and 2000.

completed college, 28 percent compared with 24 percent. The situation was quite different among adults aged 25 to 29. In 2000, 89 percent of young women were high school graduates and 30 percent had completed a bachelor's degree or higher. Among young men, 87 percent were high school graduates and 28 percent held a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴

Educational attainment differs by race and ethnicity.⁵

Among White non-Hispanics, 88 percent were high school graduates, surpassing the record high reached in 1999. The percentage of Blacks who were high school graduates was 79 percent, also a new record high for this group. Over the past decade, the differences in the percentages of Blacks and White non-Hispanics who had completed high school narrowed as Black high school graduation rates improved. For the population aged 25 and older, the difference between the two groups decreased from 16 percentage points in 1989 to about 10 percentage points in 2000.

⁴ The percentage of men aged 25 and older who hold a bachelor's degree or higher is not statistically different than the percentage of men aged 25 to 29 who hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

⁵ The racial categories used in this chapter (White non-Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic, and Asian and Pacific Islander non-Hispanic) exclude Hispanics.

In 2000, 86 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders held a high school diploma or better — not significantly different from the peak reached in 1998. However, Asians and Pacific Islanders have the greatest proportion of college graduates. Among those aged 25 and older, 44 percent held a college degree or more education in 2000. In contrast, 28 percent of White non-Hispanics and 17 percent of Blacks in this age group were college graduates.

The Hispanic population was less likely than other groups to have completed high school or college. In 2000, 57 percent of Hispanics aged 25 and older were high school graduates — a significant improvement over the 1989 share of 51 percent. However, the percentage of Hispanics that held a bachelor's degree or higher, 11 percent, was not significantly different than the percentage in 1989.

SPOTLIGHT ON EDUCATION AND EARNINGS

As the economic rewards of education continue to rise, so do the numbers of people with degrees and credentials.

In 1996, more people in the United States held postsecondary education credentials than ever before,⁶ according to the 1996 Panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).⁷ Thirty-one percent of the population aged 18 and older had degrees or certificates above the high school level in 1996 — up from 21 percent in 1984, the first year covered by a report from this series. Bachelor's degrees, associate degrees, and vocational degrees accounted for most of the increase.

Business was a popular field of training at all levels beyond high school. This major was the most popular choice of those with associate and bachelor's degrees

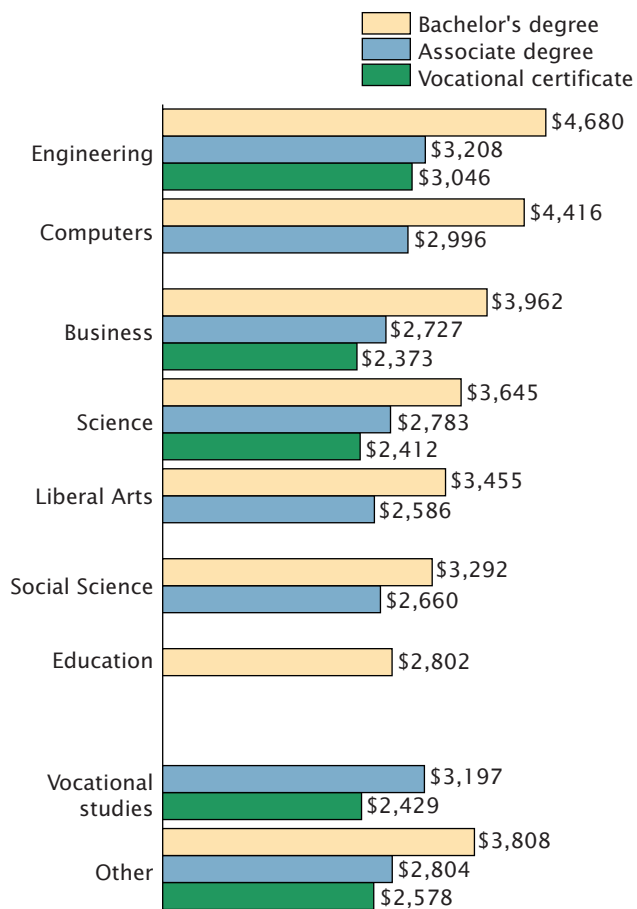
⁶ The 31.2 percent of people over age 18 with postsecondary degrees in the 1996 SIPP data is significantly greater than the percentage in earlier SIPP surveys dating back to 1984. The percentage of people with postsecondary credentials did not exceed 25 percent before 1984, according to estimates that can be calculated from the report *Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1999*.

⁷ This sidebar includes estimates that are calculated using sample data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation, weighted by population controls based on the 1990 decennial census. As such, these estimates will differ from population estimates computed from either the intercensal estimates program, or the 2000 decennial census.

Figure 9-3.

Monthly Earnings by Field of Training for Selected Education Levels: 1996

(Average earnings in dollars for people employed full-time for the previous 4 months)



Note: All levels of education do not apply to every field of training. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 1996 Panel.

and was one of the most common majors among those with vocational certificates. In 1996, 7.5 million adults held bachelor's degrees in business, 2.8 million held associate degrees, and 1.9 million held MBAs or other advanced degrees in business. Other common degrees and certificates were in education, engineering, and health care. By contrast, few people had degrees in computer science and computer related subjects. This may be partially due to the fact that computer science degrees were relatively rare before 1975.⁸

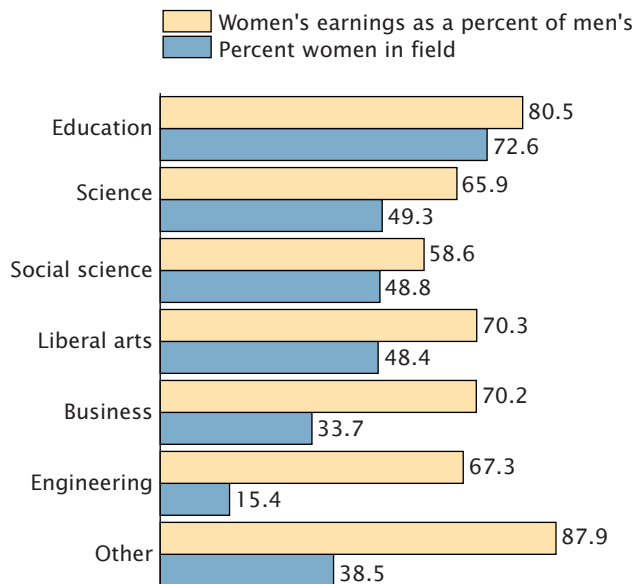
Some fields of training are more likely than others to lead to higher degrees. Seventy-two percent of people who reported their college major as "preprofessional"

⁸ In 1970, around 0.3 percent of bachelor's degrees awarded were in computer and information sciences, compared with 2.3 percent in 1998. See National Center for Education Statistics, 1999, NCES 2000-031, by Thomas D. Snyder and Charlene M. Hoffman, Washington, DC, 2000, Table 255, p. 292.

Figure 9-4.

Relative Earnings and Proportion of Bachelor's Degree Holders Who Are Women by Field of Training: 1996

(Percents are based on women and men aged 18 and older, whose highest degree is a bachelor's degree, with earnings, employed full-time for the previous 4 months)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 1996 Panel.

(such as premedicine or prelaw) went on to get an advanced degree. However, only 20 percent of people with degrees in art or architecture, business, communications, or computer science went on for advanced degrees. Between 25 and 50 percent of people with other fields of training completed advanced degrees.⁹

One reason that people pursue higher education is to gain access to professional and managerial occupations.

Of all adults with managerial jobs, 46 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. Of the people in professional occupations, 71 percent had this much education. By comparison, no more than 8 percent of those in craft, service, farm, and production occupations held at least a bachelor's degree.

⁹ Although art/architecture, business, communications, and computer sciences are classified at 20 percent, and agriculture and health sciences are classified as 25 percent or higher, the only significant difference is between health care and business majors completing advanced degrees. All other differences between the proportion of these six majors completing advanced degrees were not significant.

In 1996, the average monthly earnings of full-time workers with professional degrees were approximately \$7,000, compared with \$2,000 for full-time workers who did not complete high school. Even small amounts of postsecondary education were associated with higher earnings. People who had “some college, but no degree” studied, on average, less than 1 year past high school. However, this additional education was enough to increase their earnings by \$340 per month.

Women earned less than men did at every degree level. Women with a high school diploma or less education earned just under \$600 per month less than men with comparable schooling. Women with bachelor’s degrees earned, on average, \$1,400 less per month than men. Among those with advanced degrees, the difference was about \$2,000 per month. The fact that men pursued fields with higher earnings is part of the reason that men’s earnings were higher overall. However, if women with bachelor’s degrees had pursued fields of training in the same proportion as men with bachelor’s degrees, the earnings gap at that level would drop from \$1,380 to \$1,250 — a decline of only 9.5 percent.

.....

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

- For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Reports: *Educational Attainment in the United States (Update): March 2000* by Eric C. Newburger and Andrea E. Curry and *What’s It Worth? Field of Training and Economic Status* by Kurt J. Bauman and Camille L. Ryan.
- Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau’s World Wide Web site (www.census.gov). Click on “E” and select “Educational Attainment.”
- Contact the Education and Social Stratification Branch of the U.S. Census Bureau at 301-457-2464 or e-mail pop@census.gov.
- For information on publications and other resources, see Appendix A.