

Characteristics of Postsecondary Students

In fall 2021, some 73 percent of the 10.8 million undergraduate students at 4-year institutions were enrolled full time, compared with 35 percent of the 4.7 million undergraduate students at 2-year institutions.

In fall 2021, approximately 15.4 million undergraduate students and 3.2 million postbaccalaureate (graduate) students enrolled at degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States.^{1, 2} Unless otherwise noted, enrollment includes both U.S. resident students and nonresident students. The characteristics of students, such as their age and race/ethnicity,³ varied among public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit institutions and between 4- and 2-year institutions.

In fall 2021, approximately 10.8 million undergraduate students (70 percent) enrolled at 4-year institutions and

4.7 million undergraduate students (30 percent) enrolled at 2-year institutions. At 4-year institutions,

- 7.9 million (73 percent) attended full time; and
- 2.9 million (27 percent) attended part time.

At 2-year institutions,

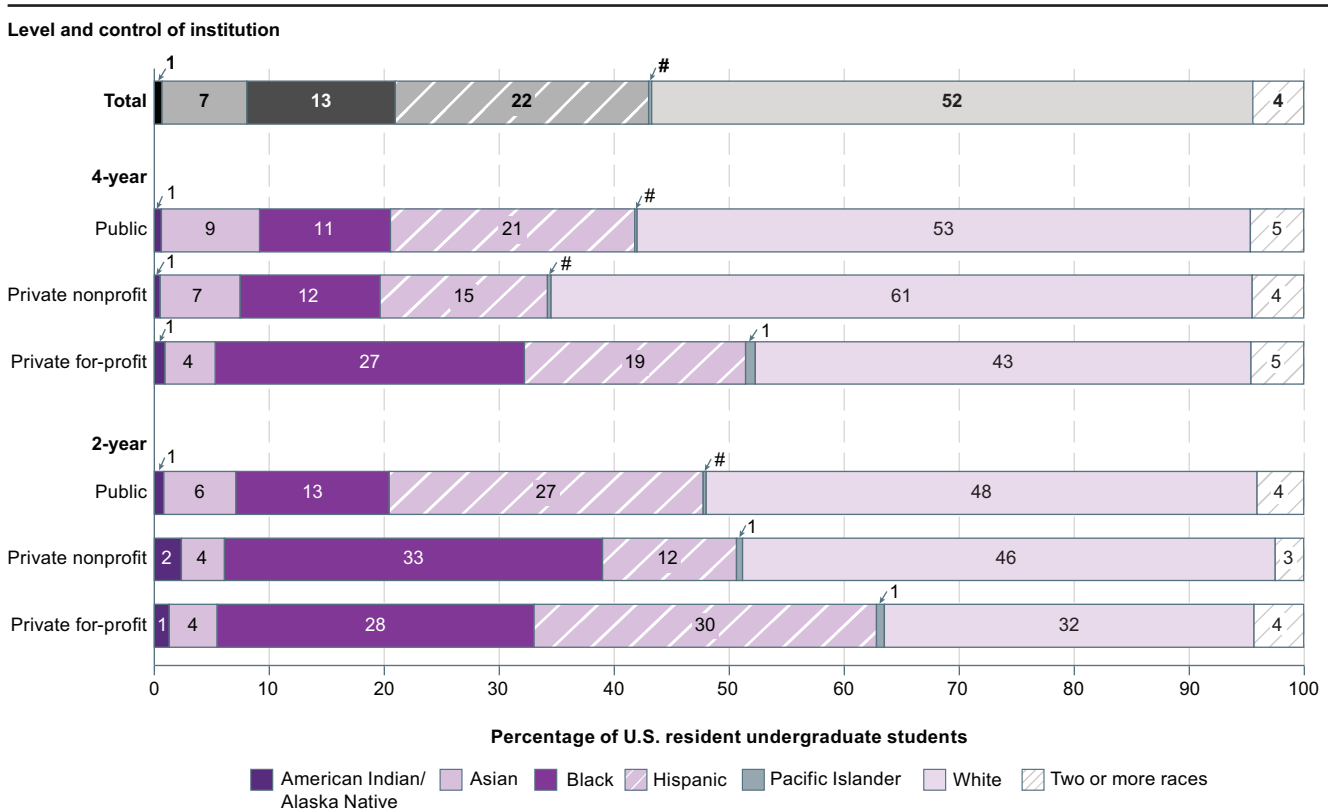
- 1.6 million (35 percent) attended full time; and
- 3.0 million (65 percent) attended part time.

Of the 3.2 million graduate students,

- 1.8 million (57 percent) attended full time; and
- 1.4 million (43 percent) attended part time.

U.S. Undergraduate Students

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of U.S. resident undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and student race/ethnicity: Fall 2021



Rounds to zero.

NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. 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. This figure excludes 122 institutions with missing data on Carnegie classifications, with 38,778 students enrolled. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. 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 2022, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 306.50.

In fall 2021, the overall U.S. resident undergraduate student population was

- 52 percent White;
- 22 percent Hispanic;
- 13 percent Black;
- 7 percent Asian;
- 4 percent Two or more races;
- 1 percent American Indian/Alaska Native; and
- less than one-half of 1 percent Pacific Islander.

The racial/ethnic distribution of undergraduate students varied among public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit institutions and between 2- and 4-year institutions.

In fall 2021, nearly all undergraduate students (95 percent) attending degree-granting institutions were enrolled across three sectors of institutions: public 4-year (48 percent), public 2-year (29 percent), or private nonprofit 4-year (17 percent) institutions. The racial/ethnic makeup of enrollment at public 4-year institutions was most representative⁴ of the racial/ethnic makeup of enrollment of the undergraduate population overall. In comparison, public 2-year institutions enrolled a percentage of Hispanic students (27 percent) that was higher than the percentage of Hispanic students in the overall undergraduate population. The reverse was true at private nonprofit 4-year institutions, which enrolled a lower percentage of Hispanic students (15 percent) than was enrolled in the overall undergraduate population.

Private nonprofit 4-year institutions also enrolled a higher percentage of White students (61 percent) than was enrolled in the overall undergraduate population.

Specifically, at private nonprofit 4-year institutions,

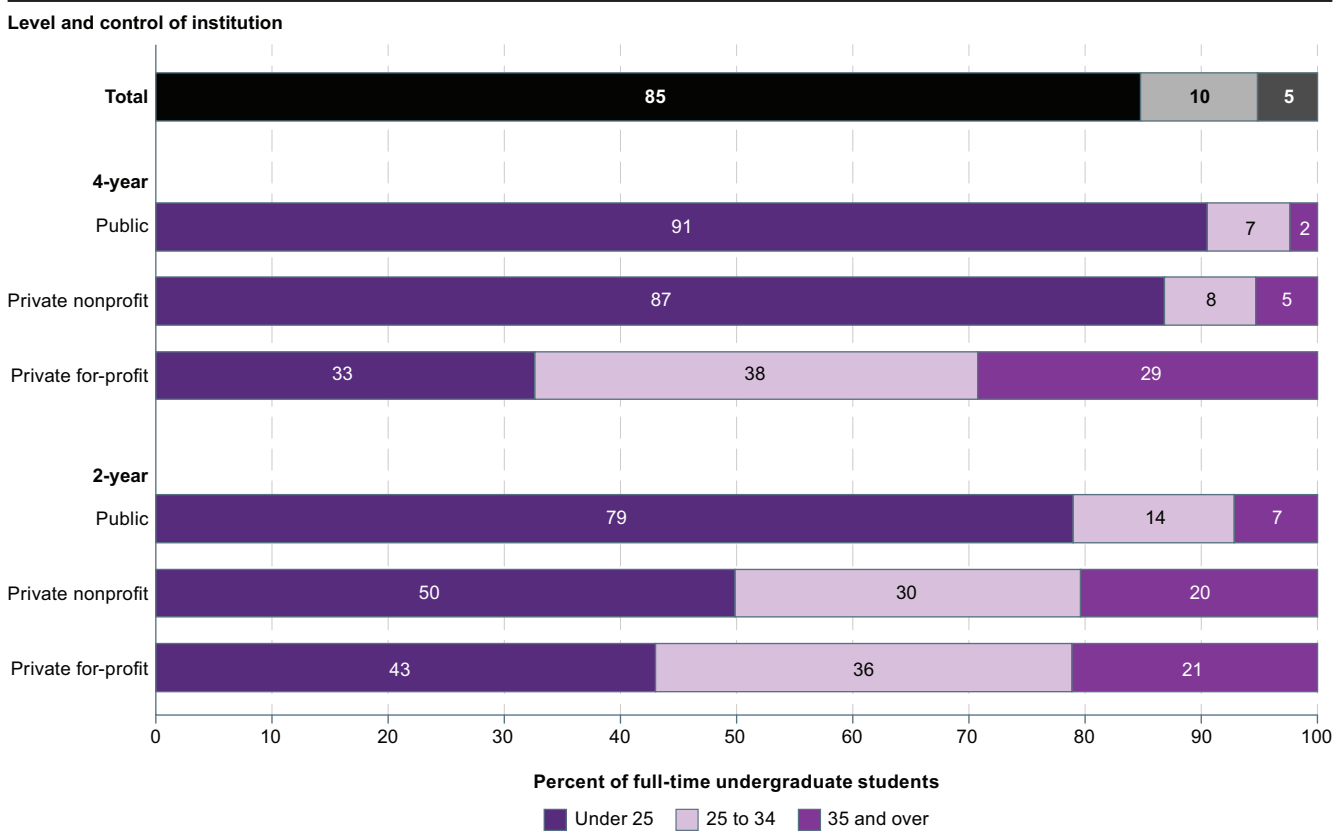
- 61 percent of students were White;
- 15 percent were Hispanic;
- 12 percent were Black;
- 7 percent were Asian;
- 4 percent were of Two or more races;
- 1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native; and
- less than one-half of 1 percent were Pacific Islander.

The remaining 5 percent of undergraduate students in fall 2021 were distributed across private for-profit 2- and 4-year institutions and private nonprofit 2-year institutions. These institutions enrolled lower percentages of White and Asian students and higher percentages of Black students, compared with the overall undergraduate population. For example, at private for-profit 4-year institutions

- 43 percent of students were White;
- 27 percent of students were Black;
- 19 percent of students were Hispanic;
- 5 percent of students were of Two or more races;
- 4 percent of students were Asian;
- 1 percent of students were American Indian/Alaska Native; and
- 1 percent of students were Pacific Islander.

Full-Time Undergraduate Students by Age

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of full-time undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and student age: Fall 2021



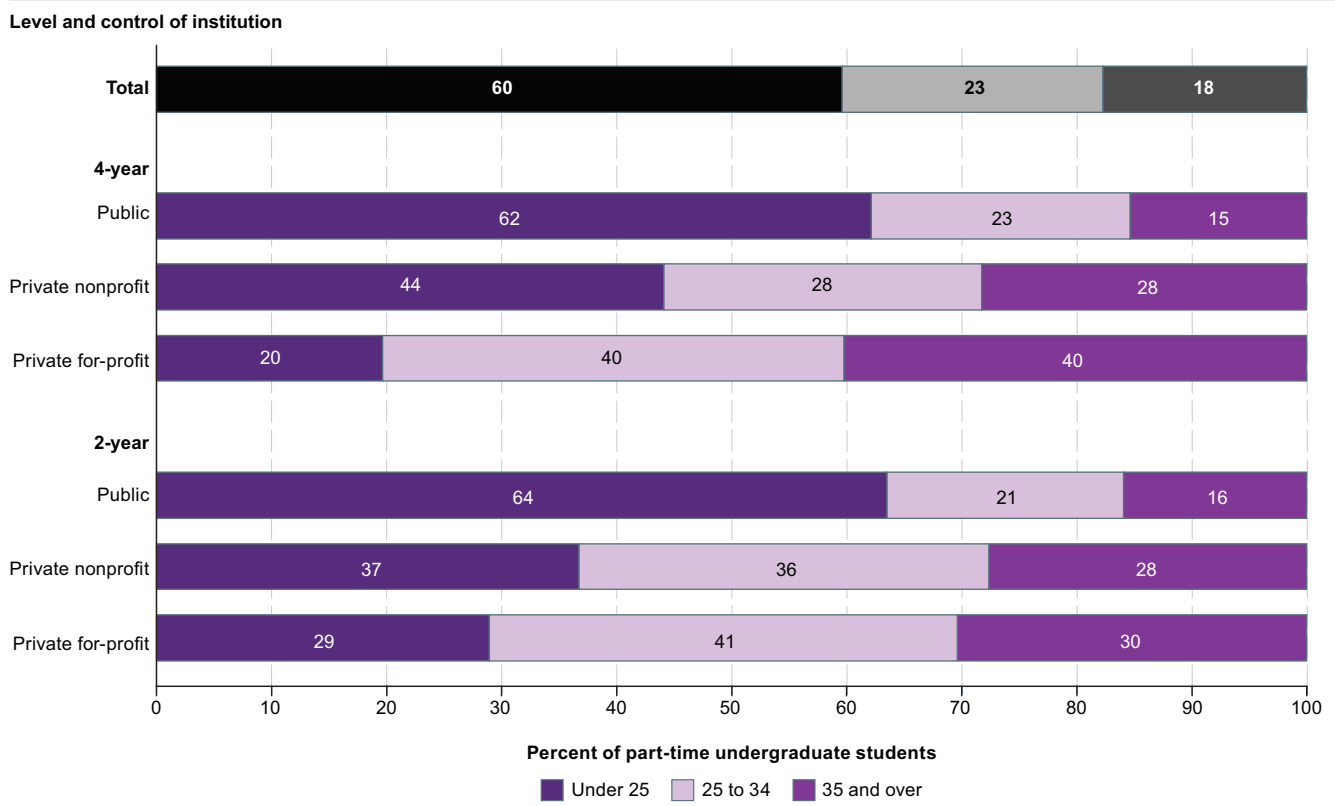
NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Excludes students whose age is unknown. Enrollment includes both U.S. resident students and nonresident students. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. 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 2021, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 303.50.

In fall 2021, the age distribution of undergraduate students differed by attendance status and level and control of the institution.⁵ Ninety-one percent of full-time undergraduate students at public 4-year institutions were under the age of 25, compared with 87 percent at private nonprofit 4-year institutions and 79 percent at public 2-year institutions. Of the remaining full-time students at these institutions, most were between the ages of 25 and 34 (ranging from 7 to 14 percent). No more than 7 percent were age 35 and over at these institutions (ranging from 2 to 7 percent).

In contrast, students under age 25 made up 50 percent or less of full-time students at private nonprofit and for-profit 2-year institutions, although they were still the largest age group. At these institutions, around one-third of full-time students were between the ages of 25 and 34 (30 and 36 percent, respectively) and around one-fifth were age 35 and over (20 and 21 percent, respectively). Private for-profit 4-year institutions were the only institutions where students under age 25 did not make up the largest percentage of full-time students. Full-time undergraduate students ages 25 to 34 made up the largest age group at these institutions (38 percent).

Part-Time Undergraduate Students by Age

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of part-time undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and student age: Fall 2021



NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Excludes students whose age is unknown. Enrollment includes both U.S. resident students and nonresident students. 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. 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 2021, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 303.50.

Overall, in fall 2021, higher percentages of part-time students than of full-time students were age 25 and over. Specifically, 23 percent of part-time students were ages 25 to 34, and 18 percent were age 35 and over, compared with 10 and 5 percent, respectively, for full-time students.

As with full-time students, the age of part-time undergraduate students varied by level and control of the institution. For example, the majority of part-time students at public institutions were under age 25:

- 62 percent at 4-year institutions were under age 25; and
- 64 percent at 2-year institutions were under age 25.

At private nonprofit institutions, those under age 25 also made up the largest percentages of part-time students, although they were not a majority:

- 44 percent at 4-year institutions were under age 25; and
- 37 percent at 2-year institutions were under age 25.

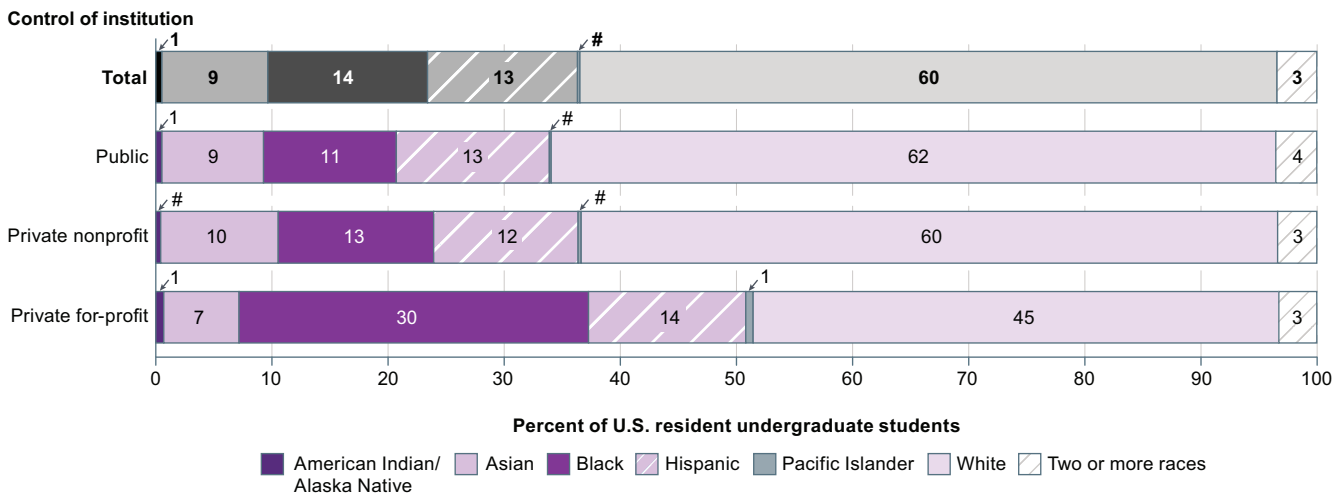
In contrast, at private for-profit institutions, those under age 25 made up the smallest group of part-time students:

- 20 percent at 4-year institutions were under age 25; and
- 29 percent at 2-year institutions were under age 25.

At 2-year private for-profit institutions, those ages 25 to 34 made up the largest percentage of part-time students (41 percent). At 4-year for-profit institutions, those ages 25 to 34 and those age 35 and over each made up 40 percent of part-time students.

U.S. Graduate Students

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of U.S. resident postbaccalaureate (graduate) enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by control of institution and student race/ethnicity: Fall 2021



Rounds to zero.

NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. 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. This figure excludes 122 institutions with missing data on Carnegie classifications, with 38,778 students enrolled. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. 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 2022, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 306.50.

In fall 2021, of all graduate students,

- 50 percent enrolled at public institutions;
- 43 percent enrolled at private nonprofit institutions; and
- 7 percent enrolled at private for-profit institutions.

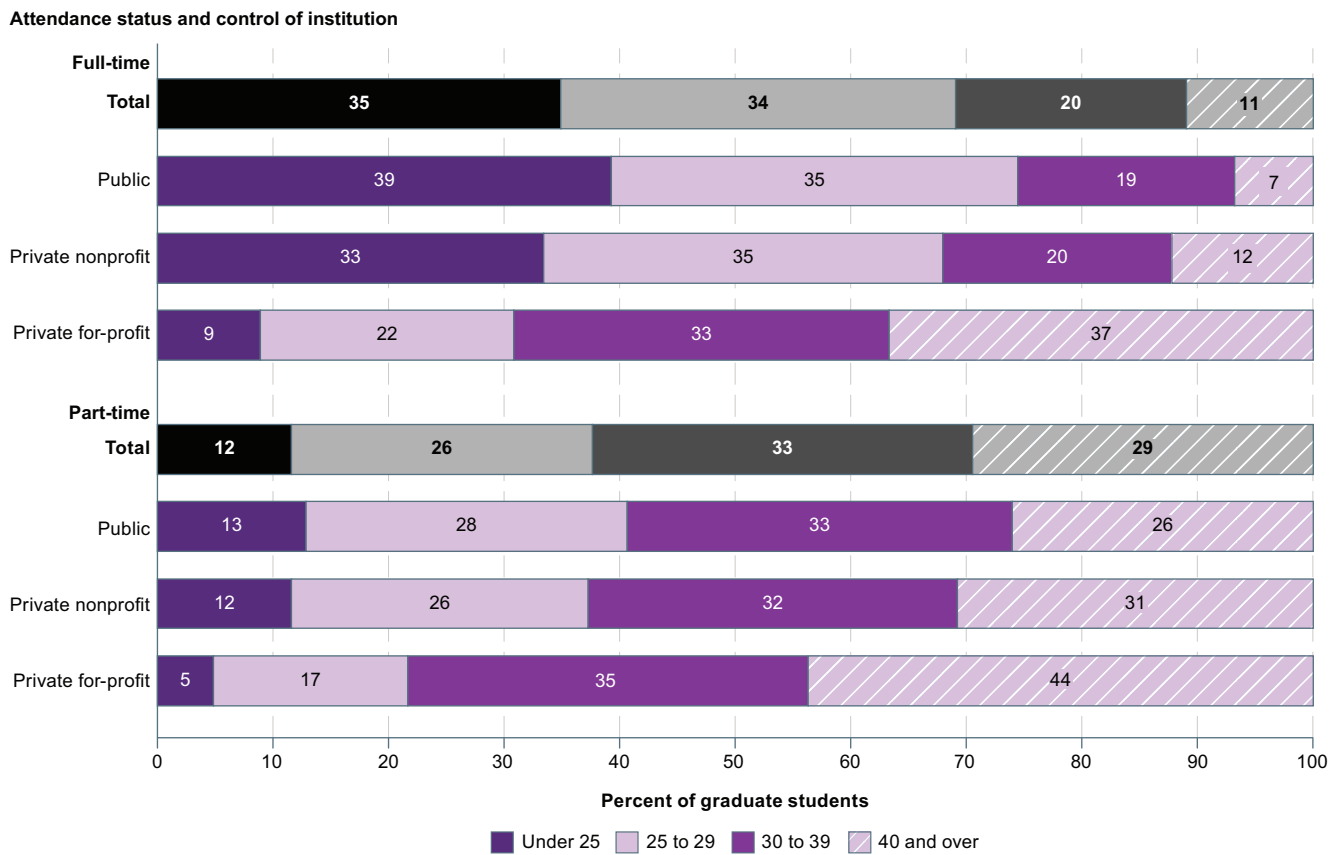
The racial/ethnic distribution of U.S. resident graduate students overall was

- 60 percent White;
- 14 percent Black;
- 13 percent Hispanic;
- 9 percent Asian;
- 3 percent Two or more races;
- 1 percent American Indian/Alaska Native; and
- less than one-half of 1 percent Pacific Islander.

This distribution varied by institutional control. The percentage of U.S. resident graduate students who were Black was more than twice as high at private for-profit institutions (30 percent) compared to private nonprofit (13 percent) and public (11 percent) institutions. Additionally, the percentages of graduate students who were White (45 percent) and Asian (7 percent) were lower at private for-profit institutions compared with graduate enrollment overall.

Full-Time and Part-Time Graduate Students by Age

Figure 5. Percentage distribution of full-time and part-time postbaccalaureate (graduate) enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by attendance status, control of institution, and student age: Fall 2021



NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Excludes students whose age is unknown. Enrollment includes both U.S. resident students and nonresident students. 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. 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 2021, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 303.50.

In fall 2021, at least two-thirds of full-time graduate students at public and private nonprofit degree-granting institutions were under age 30. In contrast, over two-thirds of full-time graduate students at for-profit institutions were age 30 and over. Specifically, of full-time graduate students

- at public institutions, 74 percent were under age 30 (including 39 percent under age 25);
- at private nonprofit institutions, 68 percent were under age 30 (including 33 percent under age 25); and
- at private for-profit institutions, 69 percent were age 30 and over (including 37 percent age 40 and over).

Among part-time graduate students, 78 percent were age 30 and over at private for-profit institutions, as were 63 percent at private nonprofit institutions and 59 percent at public institutions.

Endnotes:

¹ Data in this indicator represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

² For more information on how postsecondary enrollment has changed over time, see indicators [Undergraduate Enrollment](#) and [Postbaccalaureate Enrollment](#).

³ Throughout this indicator, comparisons by race/ethnicity exclude nonresident students.

⁴ Throughout this indicator, differences from the overall undergraduate population in terms of racial/ethnic composition are generally presented if the difference is at least 15 percent and at least 1 percentage point.

⁵ Throughout this indicator, students of unknown ages are excluded from the age analysis.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 303.50, 303.60, and 306.50; *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 306.50

Related indicators and resources: [Characteristics of Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions](#); [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; U.S. nonresident; U.S. resident