The Future of Fair Admissions

A First Look at College Enrollment Outcomes After the End of Affirmative Action

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Executive Summary

The release of federal data on college enrollment in 2024 makes it possible to evaluate the impact of the 2023 Supreme Court decision in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows Of Harvard College* (*SFFA*) on the entire college admissions ecosystem, not merely a few dozen elite institutions. Using new data on over 3,000 colleges and universities, this report from Class Action compares the post-*SFFA* enrollment outcomes in 2024 to those of 2022 and 2023 in order to analyze the immediate impact of the Supreme Court's elimination of race-conscious admissions practices using this data on over 3,000 colleges and universities. It makes several significant findings:

- Both the number and the percentage of underrepresented students of color significantly declined at highly selective institutions and even more sharply at Ivy Plus schools. The largest declines were among Black students.

- The number and share of underrepresented students of color increased almost everywhere else, most notably at state flagship universities. For example, Black freshman enrollment increased by 30% at LSU and 50% at The University of Mississippi, while Hispanic enrollment increased by more than a third at the University of Tennessee and the University of South Carolina.

- Total enrollment and Black enrollment both declined in aggregate at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

- Hispanic enrollment increased in aggregate at more selective institutions that did not provide a legacy preference and declined at those that did. This disparity was not observed for Black students.

- The number and share of White and Asian American freshmen remained relatively flat across the board, although there was a slight uptick in the number and share of Asian American freshmen at Ivy Plus schools.

- There was a slight shift in Black freshman enrollment toward institutions with lower graduation rates and expected earnings after college.

- These enrollment patterns reflect a phenomenon known as a cascade effect, in which highly qualified students of color who would have been much more likely to be admitted to highly selective institutions pre-*SFFA* ended up enrolling in less selective institutions, thus displacing students there and pushing them to less selective institutions.

- Enrollment outcomes following the Supreme Court decision are a reminder that college admissions were never "race-based" and that a comparison of pre- and post-*SFFA* enrollment numbers is far from sufficient to determine why these numbers changed at a particular institution. College admissions and enrollment occur within a complex ecosystem where the actions and decisions of admissions officers, financial aid officers, and students themselves shape and are shaped by each other.

Class Action has created the Post-*SFFA* Enrollment Dashboard on our website. It allows you to compare enrollments by race and gender over time at more than 3,000 institutions and in hundreds of different groupings.

Glossary

Admit (n.): An applicant who has been accepted to a college.

Admit rate/Acceptance rate: The percentage of applicants who are invited to enroll in a college. Not all colleges report admit rates.

College: While this term technically indicates a two- or four-year program without postgraduate degrees, we do use the term colloquially in this report to refer to all postsecondary education. When the distinction matters, we have been careful to note it.

Common Data Set (CDS): An annual survey run by data providers in the higher education community and publishers. Many institutions publish their responses to the CDS on their site.

HBCU: Historically Black college or university, an official federal designation.

Highly Selective: In this report, this category indicates colleges that admitted 25% or less of applicants in 2024.

IPEDS: The Integrated Post Secondary Education Data System, an annual survey administered by the U.S. Department of Education that gathers data from every institution of higher education that participates in federal financial aid programs.

Ivy Plus: The 8 Ivy League colleges plus Duke University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, and the University of Chicago.

Land Grant: A land-grant college or university is an institution that has been designated by its state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, or the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994. In this report, land grants that are also HBCUs or Tribal Colleges are designated as the appropriate latter category.

Race-conscious admissions: The practice of considering the racial identity of an applicant as one of many factors in admissions decisions.

Sector: In this report, sector refers to whether an institution is public, private not-for-profit, or for-profit and to its predominant degree type: certificate, associate's, or bachelor's.

State Flagship University: A conventional, non-technical term used to indicate the most prestigious and/or largest public research university in the state. A few states officially designate more than one. Also a good term for stirring up fights in higher ed circles.

Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA): The organization whose lawsuit against Harvard and UNC-Chapel Hill led to the Supreme Court decision in 2023 that ended the practice of race-conscious admissions.

Students for Fair Admissions (*SFFA*): When this name is italicized in the report, it refers to the Supreme Court's majority opinion, not to the group.

Tribal College: A federal designation for colleges chartered by Tribal governments.

URM: Underrepresented minority, or as this report tends to use in the text, underrepresented students of color. This group includes students who are African American/Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic, or Native Hawaiian/ other Pacific Islander.

Yield: A term indicating admits who have enrolled, often rendered as a percentage.

Introduction

In 2023, the Supreme Court ruled in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* (*SFFA*) that admissions offices can no longer consider the racial or ethnic identity of an applicant in admissions decisions. This decision came at the end of a long history of failed legal challenges to the consideration of race in admissions, including a federal trial and a Superior Court appeal, both lost by Students for Fair Admissions (note: to distinguish between the Supreme Court ruling and the plaintiffs in that case, I use italics for the former). In an opinion that only discussed college and higher education admissions decisions but may extend to other practices of admissions and financial aid offices, the Supreme Court ended race-conscious admissions as a mechanism for pursuing what Chief Justice John Roberts called the "commendable" goal of increasing campus diversity by increasing the enrollment of historically underrepresented students of color. (In this report, I use this shorthand to refer to students who identify as Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Native Alaskan, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.)

How Race-Conscious Admissions Worked

Race-conscious admissions provided an advantage to qualified underrepresented students of color who applied to these institutions in much the same manner that being a recruited athlete, legacy applicant, or student at an expensive private high school does. At colleges and universities with single-digit acceptance rates, a relatively small proportion of applicants are highly qualified for admission. Nevertheless—and this is the key aspect—this smaller pool of qualified applicants is much larger than the number of seats in the freshman class an admissions office has to offer. Admissions offices need to cut this pool down even further. It's at this point that one small thing—what admissions offices refer to as a "tip"—can make a very large difference in an applicant's likelihood of being accepted, whether it's having parents who attended the college, being a published poet, coming from a low-income household or a sparsely populated region, playing a sport or a musical instrument at a very high level, or being a member of a racial group that was historically underrepresented on a campus.

However, a "tip" only has an impact when a student has already satisfied many other institutional requirements (e.g., grades, test scores, extracurriculars), which is why the repeated use of the phrase "race-based admissions" in the majority opinion in *SFFA* is so frustratingly inaccurate. College admissions were no more "race-based" at Harvard than they are "legacy-based" or "athletics-based." While it might be the case that certain highly recruited athletes are admitted to NCAA Division I schools solely on the basis of their abilities (although even they have to meet basic academic requirements), the reality is that no one is admitted to highly selective institutions on the basis of a single factor. Even legacies and the relatives of major donors, who are much more likely to be admitted to Harvard than their peers, tend to have fairly strong academic qualifications. Race-conscious admissions were not race-based admissions.

Further, the debate over race-conscious admissions was not whether underrepresented students of color enjoyed a certain advantage in the admissions process but whether they should possess such an advantage. Edward Blum, the president of Students for Fair Admissions and a lifelong filer of lawsuits, believes that the consideration of race was unfair

and constituted racial discrimination. In contrast, those who advocate for race-conscious admissions, like me, believe that the fact of historical and still-present racial discrimination in housing, education, law enforcement, employment, and other areas justified providing this advantage to qualified applicants. A student of color who has achieved the increasingly absurd level of accomplishment expected of teenagers by elite colleges and universities might be given further credit for doing so in the face of bias and discrimination. Furthermore, the advantages provided by legacy preferences (which Blum also opposes but has not sued anyone over), athletic recruiting, and attending expensive private schools goes largely to White, wealthy applicants; race-conscious admissions worked as a counterbalance to these admissions "tips" and helped create a more racially diverse class.

After two federal courts decided in favor of Harvard and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC, also sued in the case), the Supreme Court sided with SFFA. Admissions offices responded by redacting applicants' responses to questions regarding ethnic and racial identity from the materials provided to admissions readers. Questions regarding racial identity are legal and remain on almost all college applications, including the Common Application, which is used by approximately 1,000 institutions. A few colleges have also eliminated scholarships affiliated with racial identity and recruitment programs targeted at underrepresented students of color, although the Supreme Court's majority opinion mentioned nothing regarding either aspect.

At the time of the decision, some civil rights activists and higher education experts predicted that it would be a "tremendous blow to institutions of higher education dedicated to ensuring equal access to education" and "undermine opportunity, diversity, and fairness in our education system for generations." Research on statewide bans on race-conscious admissions at public universities have found significant declines in Black and Hispanic enrollment at flagship universities as well as a chilling effect on applications from students of color to the most selective institutions in the state (although that remains a point of contention among scholars). Researchers also found a cascade effect in which "underrepresented minority (URM) freshman applicants…cascade into lower-quality public and private universities." In describing admissions cascades, I prefer the term "less-selective" rather than "lower-quality," as the latter description is loaded with presumptions that contribute little to the conversation and confuse outcomes with quality.

What Happened Post-SFFA: Initial Findings

It did not take very long to realize that the dire predictions about the impact of *SFFA* were not entirely wrong, but they were not exactly right either. I began tracking enrollment announcements in early September 2024, after news stories on huge declines in African American and Hispanic enrollment at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Amherst College threatened to shape the narrative around the SFFA decision, apparently confirming SFFA's case that ending the consideration of race would dramatically reduce the enrollment of underrepresented students of color. Merely expanding the lens to other highly selective institutions revealed that these institutions were outliers, not representative.

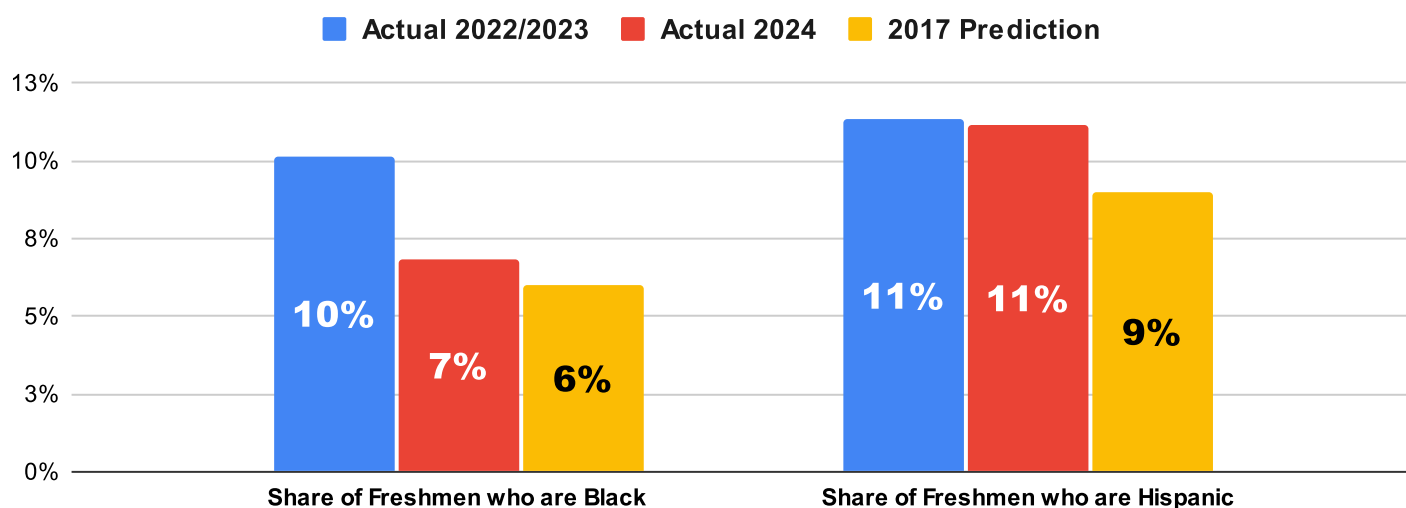I found the following in this preliminary analysis:

1. The variety in institutional data reporting practices needlessly complicated the analysis of the impact of the *SFFA* decision on college enrollment.

2. The number of universities that experienced demographic shifts in 2024 was unusual, but the size of those demographic shifts at many institutions were not out of line with previous years' shifts.

3. The proportion of Black students declined significantly at most highly selective institutions. The shares for other demographics mostly remained flat or decreased and had little impact on White or Asian American enrollment.

4. Edward Blum and Chief Justice Roberts were wrong—there is no such thing as race-based admissions, and there never has been.

5. There was a significant increase in the number of students who did not identify their race/ethnicity on their college applications.

A subsequent *New York Times* analysis made similar findings, also suggesting that while the *SFFA* ruling certainly had a negative effect on campus diversity at highly selective institutions, it was not as bad as many expected. For example, an internal Harvard study from 2017 had predicted that eliminating race-conscious admissions would cause Black enrollment in their freshman class to fall from 14% to 6% and Hispanic enrollment to drop from 14% to 9%. The prediction was not accurate, in no small part because Black and Hispanic enrollment at Harvard fell below 2017 levels before the Supreme Court decision.

Harvard's own dire predictions, put forth in the context of a trial—where the worst-case scenario can often best serve a defendant's purpose—may have come back to haunt them and their peers, as SFFA and its champions looked at initial enrollment reports and cried foul at any institution that

How well did Harvard predict the impact of the end of race conscious admissions?

Sources: SFFA trial documents, IPEDS

Legend: Actual 2022/2023, Actual 2024, 2017 Prediction

Share of Freshmen who are Black: 10%, 7%, 6%
Share of Freshmen who are Hispanic: 11%, 11%, 9%

View interactive chart

did not see the scale of enrollment declines at MIT and Amherst. SFFA sent letters to Yale University, Princeton University, and Duke University, questioning their compliance with the Supreme Court decision, and the Trump Administration has repeatedly accused Ivy League colleges of violating civil rights law.

The problem is that all these accusers had, like everyone else, preliminary data of varying quality and were missing vital information about the applicant pool and the admitted pool, which made it impossible to know how much they affected enrollment outcomes and irresponsible to level accusations against an institution.

The main message I attempted to communicate with the publication of the 2024 enrollment tracker and the 2025 enrollment tracker was *caution*—caution about making conclusions about enrollment outcomes, or making any inferences regarding how an institution's practices were affected by *SFFA*, based on data that

- at best show us *what* happened with enrollment, not *why* it happened;
- originated from college websites, not from the Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which is the resource for enrollment data used by researchers;
- used different standards and calculations, where certain institutions utilized the IPEDS method in which every student belongs to only one demographic category, while other institutions counted a multiracial student in more than one category; or some institutions calculated demographic shares out of the entire class, as IPEDS does, while others calculated them out of domestic students only;
- represented only a single year, and a year in which lingering effects of COVID and severe malfunctions with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) may have affected application and enrollment patterns;
- included an unprecedented increase in the number of students who chose not to identify by race or ethnicity, thus making it difficult to measure the full impact on the diversity of the freshman class; and
- covered only a small number of highly selective institutions, which were far from representative of institutions of higher education.

One of the essential problems with the data available on pre- and post-*SFFA* enrollment is that it only reveals the end of the process. What we call college admissions has at least four stages: recruitment, applications, admissions, and enrollment. The first three stages can have a profound impact on the final one, which is why colleges and universities invest so much in admissions offices. Simply examining an institution's enrollment numbers—without having a sense of who applied, who was admitted, and who enrolled after being admitted (aka, yield) and what those numbers look like at competitor institutions—is far from sufficient to know what happened at any one institution. The Urban Institute has begun collecting that valuable data at some institutions, but it will be years before new IPEDS data collection will provide a more complete picture of how applicant pools and yield shaped enrollment pre- and post-*SFFA*.

IPEDS Data for Fall 2024

In January 2026, the Department of Education released fall 2024 enroll-ment data that resolves many but not all of the issues with the preliminary data I tracked in the fall of 2024 and 2025. This data, which this report analyzes, encompasses thousands of colleges from all sectors (public, not-for-profit, for-profit, bachelor's, associate's, certificates) and utilizes the same reporting standard for all of them. It covers just one year, does not include data on applicants or admitted applicants (hereafter, admits), and is obscured by an increase in the number of students who do not report race or ethnicity. Caution remains necessary, particularly when it comes to attributing cause or intention—let alone lawbreaking—to any institution.

All the same, the new IPEDS data provide the most complete picture of the immediate impact of the *SFFA* decision and reaffirm a few of my preliminary findings, chiefly that *SFFA* had the largest impact on Black enrollment at the most selective colleges and universities and less clear impacts on other demographic groups. But that is far from the whole story. What these new, better, and comprehensive data reveal even more than the preliminary data did is that college admissions is a complex ecosystem, in which what happens at one institution shapes and is shaped by what hap-pens at many others; this happens for the simple reason that most students apply to multiple colleges and it is the students who decide where to enroll.

On account of these complex networks, predicting enrollment outcomes at an institution or even a group of institutions is unwise. Claiming to know what the "correct" demographic shares should be at a college—as SFFA ostensibly did in its letters to Duke, Princeton, and Yale—is foolish. For example, few people who follow college admissions will be surprised to see that the enrollment of underrepresented students of color went down among Ivy Plus colleges, but how many people expected these enrollment numbers to go up among state flagship universities? When Edward Blum brought his case against Harvard and UNC, did he ever think that Black enrollment would grow by almost 50% at the University of Mississippi or almost 20% at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor? Or that the share of Hispanic students in the freshman class at Trinity College in Connecticut would grow by 75% or the share of underrep-resented students of color would increase by 37% at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville? College admissions is a complicated game, and it is certainly not a single-player one.

Methodology

I accessed IPEDS fall first-time enrollment data by race/ethnicity for every public, not-for-profit, and for-profit institution of higher education identified as a two- or four-year program in IPEDS in 2022, 2023, and 2024. I included gender in the [enrollment dashboard](#) Class Action built to accompany this report. I included two-year colleges, which would be very unlikely to be affected by the Supreme Court decision, in order to track whether enrollments might shift to the two-year sector. I chose these years to compare enrollment outcomes pre- and post-*SFFA*, as the 2024 cohort was the one that was first affected by the court's decision. I averaged data for 2022 and 2023 to create a more stable cohort that is less likely to be subject to atypical single year fluctuations.

Then, I combined this file with the College Scorecard's classifications by predominant degree. I find those classifications to be more accurate at the institutional level, since IPEDS will default to the highest degree an institution offers for its classification. Consequently, many institutions that mainly award associate's degrees or certificates, particularly community colleges, get misleadingly characterized as four-year colleges in IPEDS. I retained reclassified institutions in the complete dataset, which is why it includes institutions that predominantly award certificates.

The next step in cleaning the data was to eliminate very small institutions that enrolled fewer than 25 freshmen. Small changes at institutions with very low enrollment can create large and misleading effects, such as increasing Hispanic enrollment by 300% by adding merely 3 students. For the same reason, I do not break out American Indian/Native Alaskan or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander populations in most of the charts included in this report. I hope to publish a separate report on these populations in the coming months. This step eliminated 406 institutions. I also eliminated 61 institutions that enrolled no underrepresented students of color in any of the years under consideration. Unfortunately, I excluded Clark Atlanta University from the data after I discovered that its responses to IPEDS questions regarding students who identified with two or more races and who did not report their race were likely reversed. I will return its data to the analysis when I can confirm I have accurate numbers.

On that note, it is important to mention that this analysis depends on the accuracy of institutional reporting to IPEDS. Inevitably, unintentional errors are made in survey responses. If a reader spots any errors in this report or the enrollment dashboard, I ask that they let me know (and grant some grace to all involved).

My cohort comprises 3,198 institutions of higher education and over 3.5 million first-time enrollments over 3 years. I examined only first-time enrollments because they were most likely to be affected by the end of race-conscious admissions, although the impact of *SFFA* on transfer enrollments would be an interesting if challenging subject for future research.

I used IPEDS to identify 2021 Carnegie classifications, graduation rates, and admit rates for all institutions. Institutions without admit rates were classified as "open enrollment." IPEDS also provided information on three federal designations of institutions: HBCUs, tribal colleges, and

land-grant institutions. If an HBCU or tribal college was also identified as a land-grant institution, I used the former designations in the dataset. Common Data Set (CDS) survey responses provided information on whether a four-year college's admissions process considered legacy status (i.e., being related to an alumnus) or, pre-*SFFA*, race. Federal Student Aid (FSA) provided data on median income earnings four years after college for 2014–15 and 2015–16 undergraduate completers who received Title IV aid and were working. The amounts were adjusted by FSA to 2025 dollars. Finally, I used Wikipedia and other online sources to identify 52 state flagship universities and the Ivy Plus cohort (i.e., the Ivy League, Stanford University, University of Chicago, Duke University, and MIT).

What, Not Why

The analysis in this first-look report is mainly descriptive, which is to say that it aims to reveal *what* happened with first-year college enrollments after the *SFFA* decision, not *why* it happened. Identifying the causes of demographic shifts across sectors, within institutional groupings, or simply at single institutions is very difficult without any disaggregated data on applicants or admits. Without this data, we cannot determine how much enrollment was affected by the demographics of the applicant and admit pools or by yield rates. Greater clarity on this issue is expected in late 2026, when, for the first time, IPEDS will release disaggregated demographic data on applicants and admits. This change came at the end of a long coalition effort to provide greater transparency in admissions. More controversially, the Trump Administration has rushed out a massive new IPEDS data survey component, the Admissions and Consumer Transparency Supplement (ACTS), that will collect six years of admissions data at a very granular level with a heavy emphasis on race and sex. It is far from clear that any data coming from ACTS will be trustworthy, given the host of problems with the data collection, or even that it will come out next year, given the staffing concerns at the National Center of Education Statistics.

However, even with this new IPEDS data, there will still be much left unanswered regarding individual institutions and the admissions ecosystem. We will not know, for example, who applied where or the decisions and financial aid offers they received, which means that we are missing key information about enrollments as well. It is safe to assume that there is significant overlap among applicants who apply to peer and rival colleges. Who gets into or rejected by one college can shape the freshman class at another one. To use an unlikely hypothetical, if one year Vanderbilt University decided to enroll no students from New York state, the enrollments of New Yorkers at Washington University and Emory University would very likely go up. These ecosystem effects have likely played a significant role in shaping post-*SFFA* enrollment outcomes. Tracking them at any scale beyond individual interviews is not possible.

Moreover, numbers tell us almost nothing about the impact that institutional policies—such as legacy preferences, caps on out-of-state enrollment at state universities, athletic recruiting, merit aid, affordability, test score requirements, recruiting practices, and much more—have on enrollment.

All these limitations should be a caution against making too much of descriptive analysis, of moving from a *what* to a *why*. They are an important reminder that no one should make any claims regarding the legality of an institution's admissions practices based on an enrollment number alone. In America, such claims should only be made once a fair and thorough investigation has been conducted.

Measuring Demographic Changes

Even in descriptive analysis, choices must be made. One of the important questions this report had to weigh was how best to measure and show the impact of the Supreme Court decision.

First, there is the question of whether to measure by headcount, which reflects the numbers of students affected by enrollment shifts, or diversity, which reflects the percentage of a class represented by each demographic. Although headcount and diversity are frequently aligned, they need not be. It is possible, for example, for the number of White students at a college to increase while their share of the class goes down, and vice versa. Both measures are important, which is why neither of them is the "right" one.

I have opted to focus on the percentage changes in headcount shares in this first look at post-*SFFA* outcomes because it is an easier measure for most people to understand and reflects direct impacts on all students. However, I also include measures of changes in enrollment shares as a means to reflect on the importance of diversity, which is not merely a question of numbers but of representation. Representation can have important impacts on fairness and a sense of inclusion. If a college enrolls 20 more Native Hawaiians in the freshman class but expands other demographic groups by three times as much, a class can end up not just being less diverse but feeling less diverse and providing fewer of the [many benefits associated with belonging to a diverse community](#).

There is also the question of whether to show percentage point changes in diversity or percentage changes. In the former, change is shown as the difference in percentage points, while in the latter that difference is divided by the starting percentage. For example, in the freshman class at Oberlin College, African American representation grew by 1.9 percentage points in 2024 from 2022 and 2023, which may sound rather modest until you realize that that change represents a 53% increase in the share of freshmen who are Black. As with enrollment counts, calculations of percentage change can provide a better sense of the scale of the change.

Caution is advised with all calculations, and it is always smart to check percentages against real numbers, particularly for smaller institutions. For example, at Cal Tech, Black enrollment increased by 9%, which sounds good until you realize it represents merely one more student at a very small institution that enrolled only 11 African American students on average in 2022 and 2023. The [enrollment dashboard](#) provides headcount and diversity data, including a view by race and gender, for all institutions in the cohort.

Findings

1. The Big Picture

After *SFFA*, the aggregate enrollment of underrepresented students of color, particularly of African American students, declined at highly selective institutions and at Ivy Plus institutions in particular, but they increased in almost all other institutional groups. The number of Asian American freshmen enrolled at Ivy Plus institutions grew by 7%, as did White enrollment at HBCUs, but otherwise their enrollment numbers remained fairly flat across a range of institutional groups, as shown in the chart below. (Note: these groups do overlap.)

Changes in Freshman Enrollment after the SFFA Decision, by Institutional Groups

The n after each group name represents the number of institutions of higher education it includes. Institutions with freshmen classes smaller than 25 were left out of this report's analysis.

	Total	Underrepresented Minority	Asian American	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	White	Two or More Races
Total Group (n=3198)	5.4%	9.4%	2.7%	9.2%	9.8%	0.4%	9.1%
Open Enrollment (n=1640)	9.9%	12.5%	9.7%	14.2%	12.1%	4.6%	15.9%
Admit Rate 25-100% (n=1466)	2.4%	7.0%	−0.8%	6.1%	7.7%	−1.9%	5.5%
Admit Rate 25% and Below (n=93)	0.5%	−7.0%	3.9%	−16.3%	−1.8%	−0.7%	−0.3%
Private Four-Years (n=954)	0.6%	5.8%	−1.0%	5.0%	6.7%	−3.5%	1.6%
Public Four-Years (n=591)	2.8%	5.9%	0.5%	4.2%	7.1%	−1.0%	6.9%
HBCU (n=92)	1.6%	−1.4%	−82.8%	−3.5%	25.7%	7.2%	2.3%
Land Grants (n=59)	3.4%	5.6%	3.3%	4.2%	6.0%	0.7%	8.1%
State Flagships (n=52)	3.2%	8.0%	1.2%	8.4%	7.7%	0.6%	8.1%
Ivy Plus (n=12)	−0.1%	−18.9%	7.0%	−25.5%	−14.8%	0.7%	−7.5%
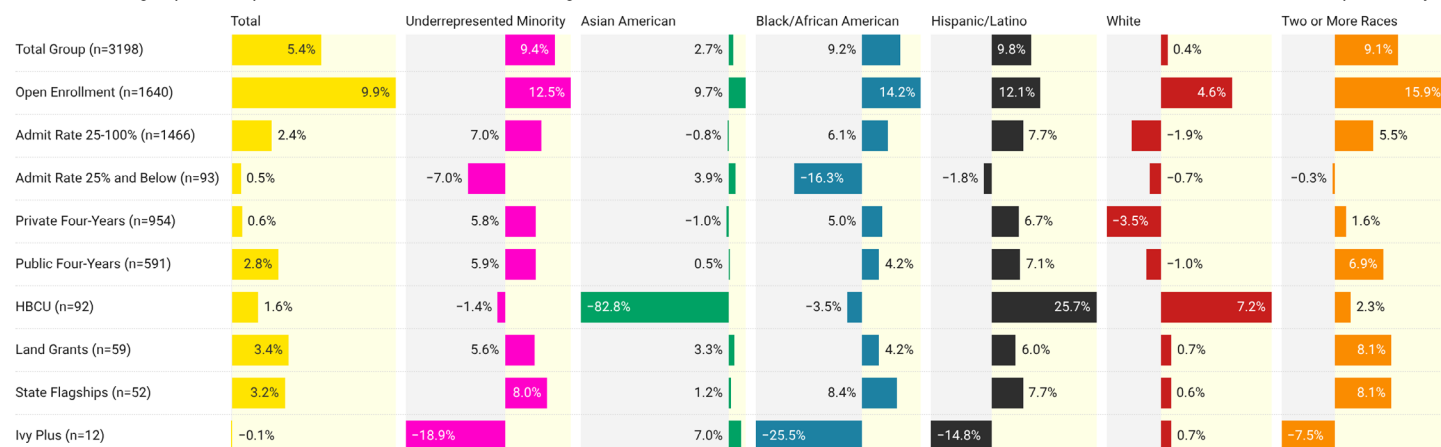
Chart: James S. Murphy, Class Action • Source: IPEDS • Created with Datawrapper

The stability of Asian American and White enrollment is even more clearly revealed if the percentage point changes in demographic shares are examined rather than the changes in enrollment.

Changes in Shares of Total Enrollment after the SFFA Decision, by Institutional Groups

The n after each group name represents the number of institutions of higher education it includes. Institutions with freshmen classes smaller than 25 were left out of this report's analysis. These percentages represent the changes by percentage points in class share, compared to the average share in 2022 and 2023.
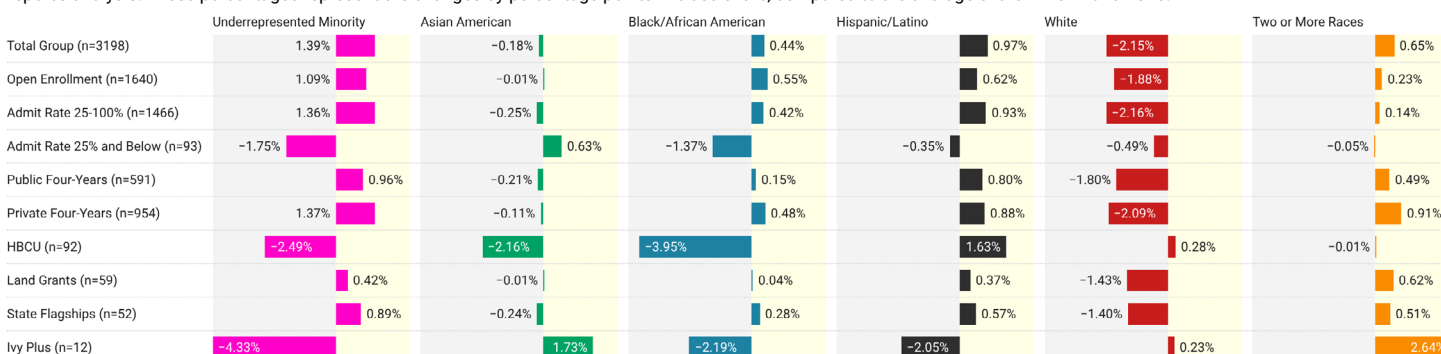
	Underrepresented Minority	Asian American	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	White	Two or More Races
Total Group (n=3198)	1.39%	−0.18%	0.44%	0.97%	−2.15%	0.65%
Open Enrollment (n=1640)	1.09%	−0.01%	0.55%	0.62%	−1.88%	0.23%
Admit Rate 25-100% (n=1466)	1.36%	−0.25%	0.42%	0.93%	−2.16%	0.14%
Admit Rate 25% and Below (n=93)	−1.75%	0.63%	−1.37%	−0.35%	−0.49%	−0.05%
Public Four-Years (n=591)	0.96%	−0.21%	0.15%	0.80%	−1.80%	0.49%
Private Four-Years (n=954)	1.37%	−0.11%	0.48%	0.88%	−2.09%	0.91%
HBCU (n=92)	−2.49%	−2.16%	−3.95%	1.63%	0.28%	−0.01%
Land Grants (n=59)	0.42%	−0.01%	0.04%	0.37%	−1.43%	0.62%
State Flagships (n=52)	0.89%	−0.24%	0.28%	0.57%	−1.40%	0.51%
Ivy Plus (n=12)	−4.33%	1.73%	−2.19%	−2.05%	0.23%	2.64%

Chart: James S. Murphy, Class Action • Source: IPEDS • Created with Datawrapper

Examining percent changes in class shares reveals how significantly *SFFA* affected Black and Hispanic enrollment at highly selective institutions. The share of Black students at Ivy Plus institutions dropped by just over 2 percentage points, but that decline represented a loss of 25% from an already low share of Black students in the freshman class.

Percent changes in shares of freshman enrollment after the SFFA decision, by Institutional Groups

The n after each group name represents the number of institutions of higher education it includes. Institutions with freshmen classes smaller than 25 were left out of this report's analysis. These percentages represent the size of the changes in class share, relative to the average share in 2022 and 2023, not the raw percentage point changes.
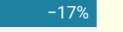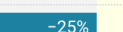
	Underrepresented Minority	Asian American	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	White	Two or More Races
Total Group (n=3198)	4%	−3%	4%	4%	−5%	20%
Open Enrollment (n=1640)	2%	0%	4%	2%	−5%	5%
Admit Rate 25-100% (n=1466)	4%	−3%	4%	5%	−4%	3%
Admit Rate 25% and Below (n=93)	−8%	3%	−17%	−2%	−1%	−1%
Public Four-Years (n=591)	3%	−2%	1%	4%	−4%	23%
Private Four-Years (n=954)	5%	−1%	4%	6%	−4%	22%
HBCU (n=92)	−3%	−83%	−5%	24%	6%	0%
Land Grants (n=59)	2%	0%	1%	3%	−3%	34%
State Flagships (n=52)	5%	−2%	5%	4%	−2%	24%
Ivy Plus (n=12)	−19%	7%	−25%	−15%	1%	83%

Chart: James S. Murphy, Class Action • Source: IPEDS • Created with Datawrapper   View interactive chart

In a newly released paper, College Board researchers also found that "enrollment shifts into less selective colleges [were] slightly larger among Black students than among Hispanic students," after *SFFA*, even when Black and Hispanic students had the exact same SAT scores. "Among Hispanic students with a 1400 SAT score," they write, "entry rates to Ivy Plus colleges and other selective colleges fell 1.5 and 2.3 percentage points respectively; for Black students with the same scores, rates of entry into those two segments fell 5.1 and 5.0 percentage points."

The explanation for this decline is not, as some might think, that race was the only reason that students of color got into highly selective institutions. It's that the elimination of any advantage in such a competitive situation means that they are just another talented applicant in a pool full of them and where almost everyone gets rejected. According to College Board researchers, "Without race-conscious affirmative action, URM students' placements across the college selectivity hierarchy became more similar to those of non-URM students with comparable academic preparation."

Determining why *SFFA* had a more negative impact on African American applicants than on other demographic groups will be an important subject for future research. The lack of disaggregated student-level data on applicants and admits at any institution makes it difficult to ascertain the extent to which these pools shape enrollment. Research has suggested that Black applicants received a larger benefit from race-conscious admissions at highly selective institutions than other demographic groups, but there is no explanation for why this is so.

One plausible explanation for some of this advantage at highly selective colleges and universities—and the post-*SFFA* disadvantage—is the number of competitive applicants from each demographic group in the application pool. The smaller number of Black students with SAT scores over 1400 (~5K in 2024) versus Asian American (~54K), Hispanic (~10K), or White (~50K) students with equivalent scores could have meant a larger proportion of these Black applicants got a bigger boost than their peers at colleges that put great stock in high test scores.

2. Highly Selective Institutions

It is no surprise that the negative impact of *SFFA* on the enrollment of underrepresented students of color was largely at highly selective institutions, given the role that tips play in such a hypercompetitive pool of qualified applicants. Even at these institutions, where more applicants are rejected than accepted, enrollment outcomes are far from uniform. As depicted in the chart below, the post-*SFFA* enrollment declines were largely concentrated in the 100 most, or even the 50 most, selective institutions. In fact, Black and Hispanic enrollment grew among the second hundred most selective colleges and universities.

Post-SFFA Enrollment Outcomes for Underrepresented Students of Color at the Most Selective Colleges and Universities

Selectivity is based on the acceptance rate published in IPEDS for 2024. The ranking here ascends by admit rate, i.e., number one has the lowest admit rate in the group and number 200 has the highest.

	Change in Headcount: Underrepresented Minority	Percent Change in Headcount: Underrepresented Minority	Change in Headcount: Black/African American	Percent Change in Headcount: Black/African American	Change in Headcount Hispanic/Latino	Percent Change in Headcount: Hispanic/Latino
1st to 50th	−2,727	−15%	−1,444	−27%	−1,223	−10%
51st to 100th	344	2%	−471	−7%	803	6%
101st to 150th	880	5%	90	2%	764	6%
151st to 200th	2,496	10%	618	6%	1,902	13%

Chart: James S. Murphy, Class Action • Source: IPEDS • Created with Datawrapper

View interactive chart

A similar pattern holds if we look at diversity by quartile among the 200 most selective institutions. White and Asian American enrollment shares increased only in the top quarter and remained flat or even decreased after the Supreme Court decision.

The changing demographics of the 200 most selective colleges and universities

Data based on 2024 admit rates reported to IPEDS by public and not-for-profit four-year institutions with at least 25 first-year students.

	White	Asian American	Hispanic/Latino	Black/African American	Two or More Races	Unknown	American Indian or Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	International
1st to 50th									
2018/19	37%	21%	14%	6%	6%	3%	0%		13%
2022/23	31%	23%	16%	7%	7%	3%	0%		13%
2024	32%	24%	14%	5%	7%	5%	0%		13%
51st to 100th									
2018/19	50%	14%	14%	8%	5%	2%	0%		7%
2022/23	45%	16%	17%	8%	5%	2%	0%		6%
2024	44%	16%	17%	7%	5%	3%	0%		6%
101st to 150th									
2018/19	47%	14%	15%	7%	5%	2%	0%		8%
2022/23	45%	15%	17%	7%	6%	3%	0%		6%
2024	44%	15%	18%	7%	6%	3%	0%		6%
151st to 200th									
2018/19	48%	11%	14%	12%	4%	3%	0%		8%
2022/23	45%	13%	16%	12%	5%	2%	0%		7%
2024	43%	12%	18%	13%	5%	2%	0%		7%

View interactive chart

Even among the 50 most selective colleges and universities, there was significant variation in outcomes in the first year after the Supreme Court decision; this is evident from the following chart.

Percent change in enrollment headcounts after SFFA at the 50 most selective colleges and universities in the nation

This chart shows the percent change in freshman enrollment from the average in 2022 and 2023 to 2024 for four large demographic groups. Only institutions with 25 or more first-year students were included in the analysis. The table is sorted in from the lowest to the highest acceptance rate in 2024 among this group.
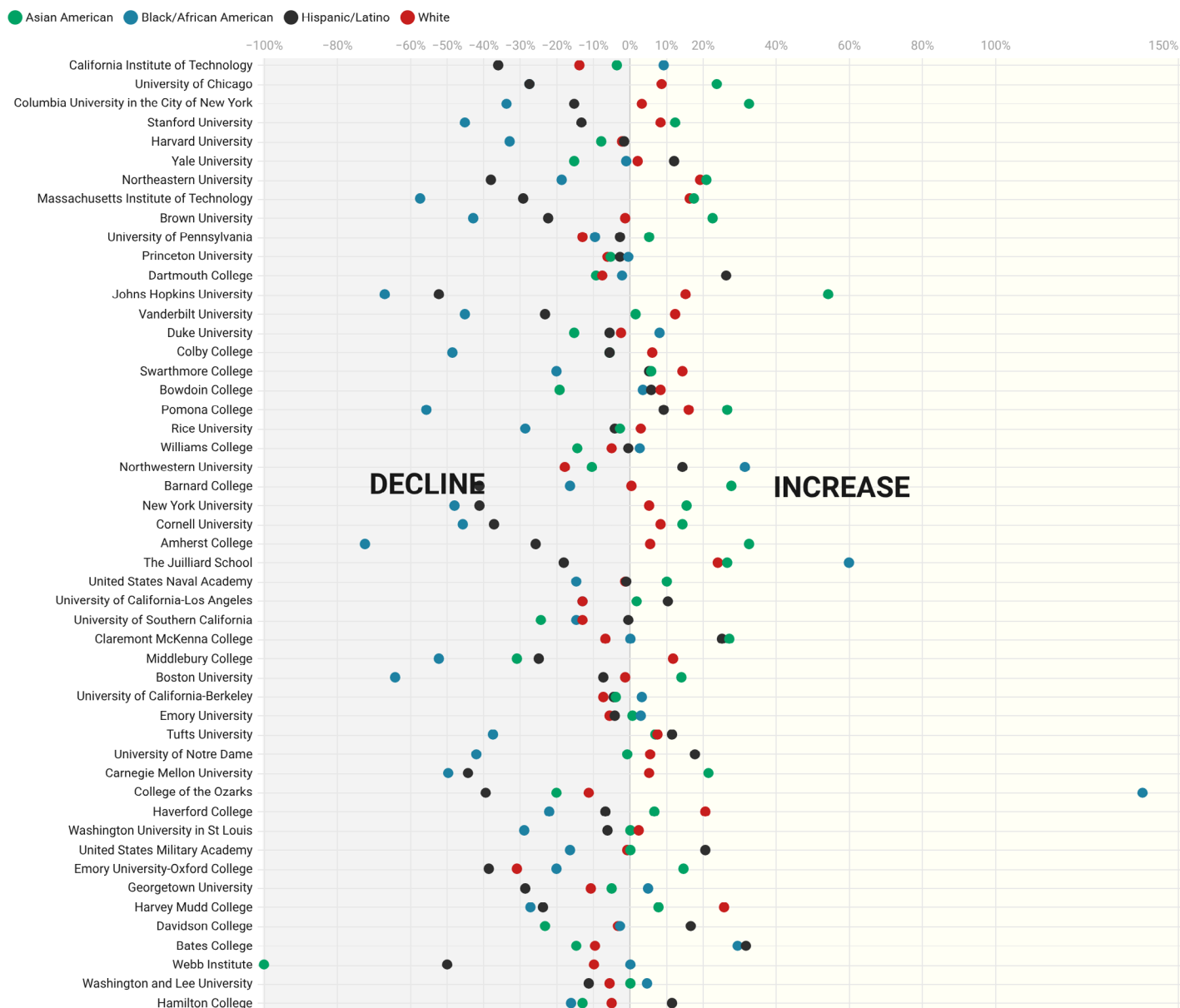
Chart: James S. Murphy • Source: IPEDS • Created with Datawrapper

View interactive chart

Even a glance at the chart reveals that a majority of the blue dots representing African American enrollment lie on the left side of the figure. This finding echoes what I found in enrollment trackers in the fall of 2024 and 2025, but the IPEDS data more clearly reveal that declines in Hispanic enrollment were as common at the most selective institutions. Further, Black and Hispanic enrollment was flat or increased at almost a third of these institutions, as seen below. Patterns were much less clear, if not entirely absent, for Asian American and White enrollment; approximately half of the most selective institutions saw those demographics shrink or stay flat. This finding runs contrary to the expectations set by the SFFA trial, where it was argued that Black and Hispanic enrollment came at a cost to Asian American and White applicants, a line of argument that the [Trump Administration has only amplified](#).

Enrollment outcomes at the 50 most selective colleges and universities, by institution

I treated enrollment shifts between -1% and 1% as flat. Source: IPEDS

Decreased **Flat** **Increased**

	Decreased	Flat	Increased
Black/African American	34	4	12
Hispanic/Latino	34	2	14
White	24	2	24
Asian American	20	5	25

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

View interactive chart
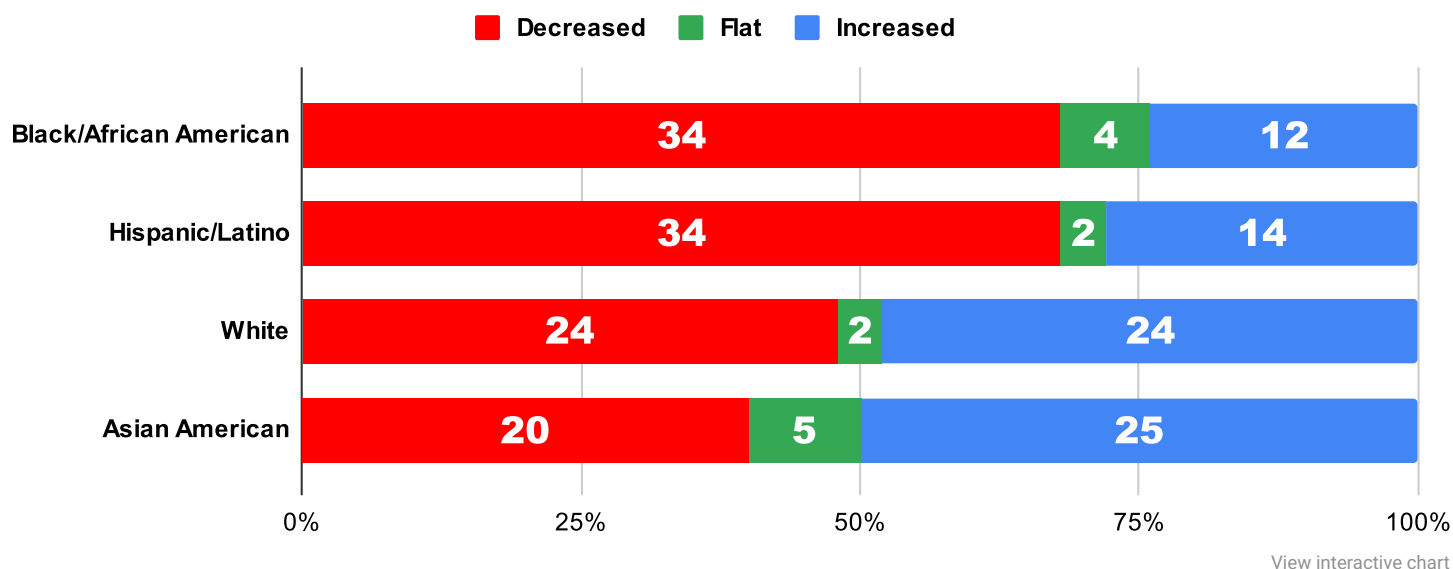
One reason that enrollment outcomes might have substantially varied even among more selective institutions is the use of legacy preferences, which provide an admissions advantage to the relatives of alumni (typically, the most selective institutions put a thumb on the scale only for the children of alumni). Data on who benefits from legacy preferences is severely limited, but some research has found that the advantage goes mainly to [wealthy White applicants](#); thus, legacy preferences can be expected to further cut into the enrollment of students of color, effectively magnifying the impact of the *SFFA* decision.

The evidence, albeit from just one year, is not so clear cut. At colleges and universities that admit less than half their applicants, providing a legacy preference was associated with a decline in the enrollment of underrepresented students of color while not providing one was associated with an increase. However, the declines in Black and White enrollment were essentially the same, while Asian American enrollment dropped at institutions without legacy admissions and increased at those with. The starkest difference was in Hispanic enrollment shares, which experienced the largest increase of any demographic, but only at non-legacy schools. Hispanic enrollment shares declined at schools that continued to cling to legacy preferences. This disparity might reflect a decreased likelihood, relative to other groups, that Hispanic applicants are legacies, but the data are not available to confirm this hypothesis. No institutions publish demographic data on legacy admits, and, although the Trump administration claims to be interested in restoring meritocracy to college admissions, the ACTS survey includes no questions on legacy admissions.

Post-SFFA Percentage Point Changes in Enrollment Shares by Legacy Preference Policy at Four-Year Institutions with Acceptance Rates below 50%

The underrepresented minority category includes students who identify as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native, or American Indian/Alaska Native.

Legend:
- No Legacy Preference (n=125)
- Provides Legacy Preference (n=92)

Underrepresented Minority
- No Legacy Preference: 0.19%
- Provides Legacy Preference: −0.87%

Asian American
- No Legacy Preference: −0.26%
- Provides Legacy Preference: 0.18%

Black/African American
- No Legacy Preference: −0.54%
- Provides Legacy Preference: −0.55%

Hispanic/Latino
- No Legacy Preference: 0.75%
- Provides Legacy Preference: −0.31%

White
- No Legacy Preference: −0.94%
- Provides Legacy Preference: −0.77%

Chart: James S. Murphy, Class Action • Source: IPEDS, 2024 compared to the average of 2022 and 2023 • Created with Datawrapper   View interactive chart

3. Beyond the Highly Selectives, or the Other 94% of Four-Year Institutions

When looking beyond the highly selectives, which after all enroll only 8% of students in four-year colleges, the picture changes significantly. The number and share of underrepresented students of color grew almost everywhere else: public and not-for-profit four-years, less selective institutions, land-grant colleges, and state flagships.

Changes in Freshman Enrollment after the SFFA Decision, by Institutional Groups

The n after each group name represents the number of institutions of higher education it includes. Institutions with freshmen classes smaller than 25 were left out of this report's analysis.

	Total	Underrepresented Minority	Asian American	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	White	Two or More Races
Total Group (n=3198)	5.4%	9.4%	2.7%	9.2%	9.8%	0.4%	9.1%
Open Enrollment (n=1640)	9.9%	12.5%	9.7%	14.2%	12.1%	4.6%	15.9%
Admit Rate 25-100% (n=1466)	2.4%	7.0%	-0.8%	6.1%	7.7%	-1.9%	5.5%
Admit Rate 25% and Below (n=93)	0.5%	-7.0%	3.9%	-16.3%	-1.8%	-0.7%	-0.3%
Private Four-Years (n=954)	0.6%	5.8%	-1.0%	5.0%	6.7%	-3.5%	1.6%
Public Four-Years (n=591)	2.8%	5.9%	0.5%	4.2%	7.1%	-1.0%	6.9%
HBCU (n=92)	1.6%	-1.4%	-82.8%	-3.5%	25.7%	7.2%	2.3%
Land Grants (n=59)	3.4%	5.6%	3.3%	4.2%	6.0%	0.7%	8.1%
State Flagships (n=52)	3.2%	8.0%	1.2%	8.4%	7.7%	0.6%	8.1%
Ivy Plus (n=12)	-0.1%	-18.9%	7.0%	-25.5%	-14.8%	0.7%	-7.5%

Chart: James S. Murphy, Class Action • Source: IPEDS • Created with Datawrapper

View interactive chart

Enrollment of underrepresented students of color increased at 83% of the state flagship universities, which likely benefitted from higher rejection rates for Black and Hispanic students at highly selective private universities and out-of-state public universities.

Some of the flagship universities where diversity increased post-SFFA

This chart shows notable headcount changes and percent changes in the enrollment of underrepresented students of color at some state flagships. The percent change in total freshman enrollment is displayed as a point of comparison to show that increases in URM enrollment were proportionally larger.

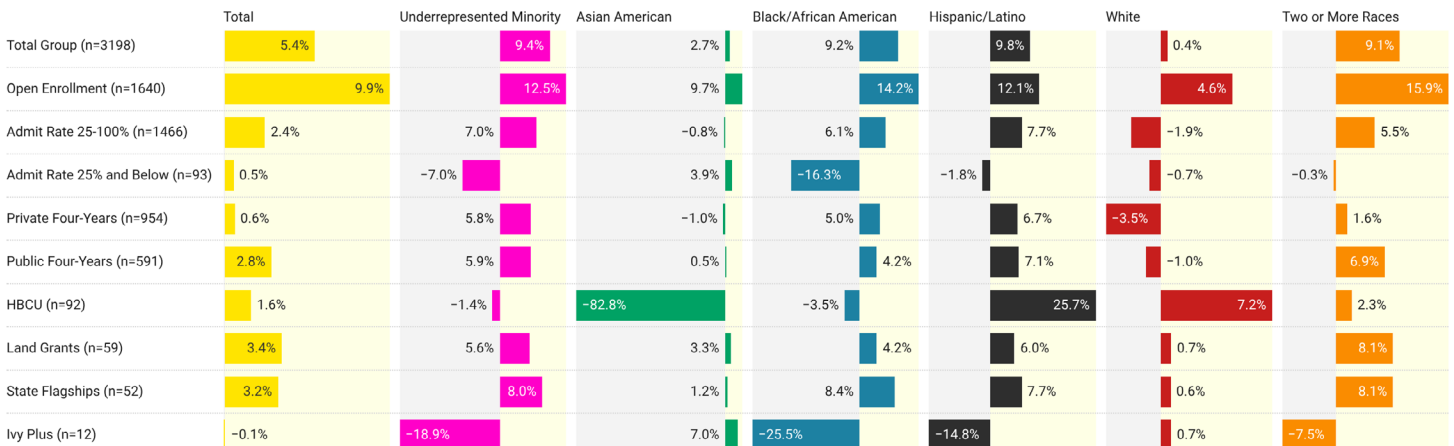|	Percent Change All Freshman Enrollment	URM	Percent Change URM	Black/African American	Percent Change Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	Percent Change Hispanic/Latino
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College	6%	628	25%	490	30%	139	17%
University of South Carolina-Columbia	5%	308	30%	102	16%	205	51%
University of Florida	12%	307	17%	-68	-17%	369	26%
University of Mississippi	23%	288	44%	168	50%	127	44%
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	11%	273	17%	-4	-1%	276	24%
University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus	13%	265	24%	41	16%	185	27%
The University of Tennessee-Knoxville	1%	226	37%	94	46%	138	35%
University of Washington-Seattle Campus	0%	224	23%	63	24%	153	23%
Indiana University-Bloomington	0%	191	16%	64	16%	116	14%
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	0%	177	13%	74	19%	102	10%
The University of Alabama	-2%	162	10%	134	15%	15	2%
University of Arkansas	-2%	150	15%	22	12%	124	17%
University of Missouri-Columbia	18%	103	19%	43	20%	56	18%
University of Georgia	-1%	101	13%	53	16%	41	9%

Chart: James S. Murphy, Class Action • Source: IPEDS • Created with Datawrapper

View interactive chart

The enrollment of underrepresented students of color increased as well at many private colleges and universities with national reputations.

Some prominent private institutions where diversity increased post-SFFA

This chart shows notable headcount changes and percent changes in the enrollment of underrepresented students of color at some private colleges and universities. The percent change in total freshman enrollment is displayed as a point of comparison to show that increases in URM enrollment were proportionally larger.
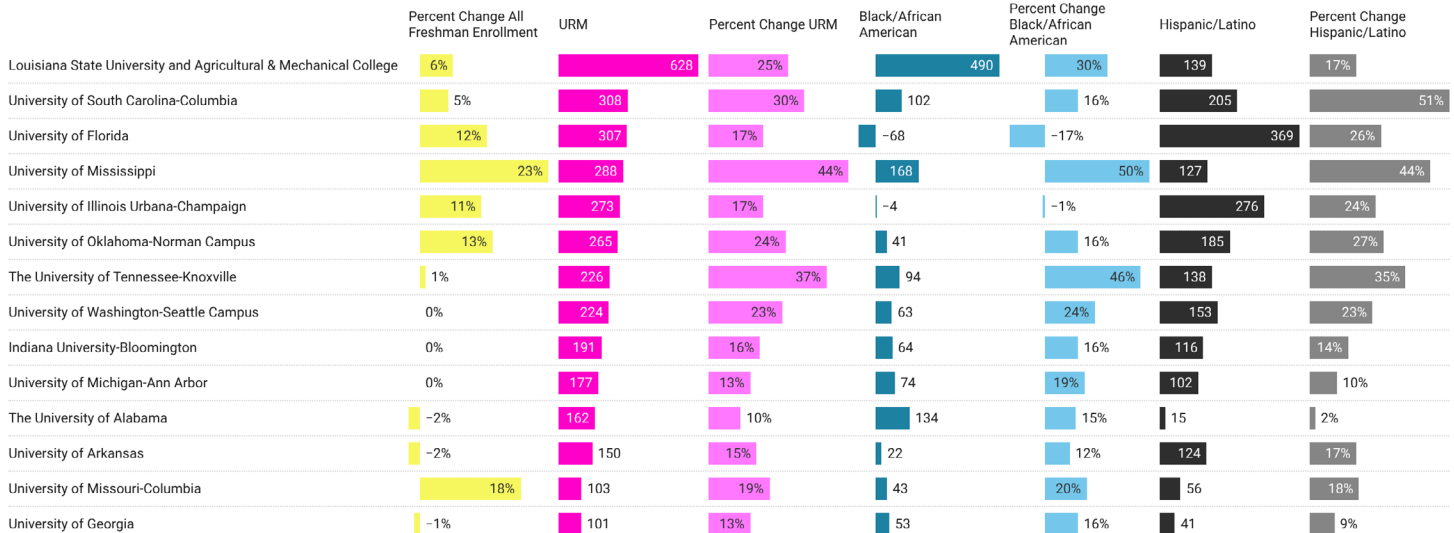
	Percent Change All Freshman Enrollment	URM	Percent Change URM	Black/African American	Percent Change Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	Percent Change Hispanic/Latino
High Point University	3%	72	30%	41	38%	30	24%
Rochester Institute of Technology	−3%	144	28%	64	34%	74	23%
Boston College	7%	102	23%	−6	−4%	110	38%
Elon University	−5%	46	22%	27	34%	20	16%
Syracuse University	−1%	161	22%	47	17%	103	23%
Wesleyan University	8%	26	22%	4	9%	22	30%
Fordham University	−1%	145	22%	26	18%	123	23%
Northwestern University	2%	107	21%	55	31%	48	14%
American University	−8%	80	20%	32	24%	44	17%
Southern Methodist University	6%	53	15%	−5	−6%	60	23%
University of Miami	5%	95	15%	−102	−50%	198	45%
Skidmore College	−12%	16	15%	−4	−12%	21	29%
Dartmouth College	2%	26	14%	−2	−2%	27	26%
Texas Christian University	−2%	65	12%	−4	−4%	70	16%
Yale University	−3%	29	7%	−2	−1%	31	12%

Chart: James S. Murphy, Class Action • Source: IPEDS • Created with Datawrapper

View interactive chart

Perhaps the most surprising outcome was a decline in the total enrollment and Black enrollment at HBCUs, where a few pundits expected to see growth as a result of *SFFA*. It is unclear why this decline occurred, but enrollment outcomes at HBCUs will be the subject of a future report from Class Action.

An outcome that was entirely predictable was the decline in the enrollment of underrepresented students of color at institutions that had considered race in their admissions process before the Supreme Court decision.

Post-SFFA enrollment outcomes at more selective four-year Institutions, based on whether they considered race in admissions pre-SFFA

This chart shows the change in headcount by demographic groups at four-year public and not for profit institutions with acceptance rates below 50% in 2024, according to IPEDS. Institutions' pre-SFFA policy on considering race in admissions decisions comes from Common Data Set responses in 2022.

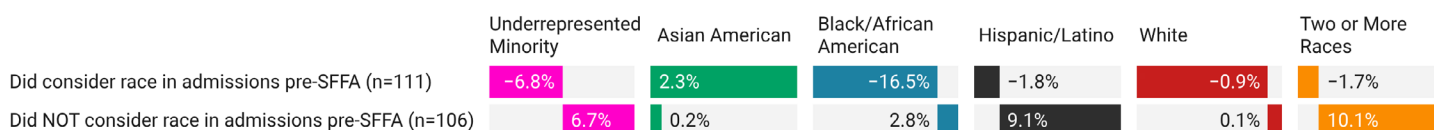|	Underrepresented Minority	Asian American	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	White	Two or More Races
Did consider race in admissions pre-SFFA (n=111)	−6.8%	2.3%	−16.5%	−1.8%	−0.9%	−1.7%
Did NOT consider race in admissions pre-SFFA (n=106)	6.7%	0.2%	2.8%	9.1%	0.1%	10.1%

Chart: James S. Murphy, Class Action • Source: IPEDS, CDS • Created with Datawrapper

View interactive chart

In 2023, nine states had already banned race-conscious admissions at public universities and colleges: Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Washington. After *SFFA*, Black and Hispanic enrollment increased at these institutions, likely as a result of the Supreme Court decision's impact on a significant number of highly qualified students of color who would have been more likely in the past to enroll at a private or out-of-state public colleges and universities. Students for Fair Admissions effectively, if unintentionally, enabled these institutions to increase their diversity.

Post-SFFA enrollment outcomes at public four-year institutions in states that had already banned the consideration of race in admissions

This chart shows the change in headcount by demographic groups at four-year public institutions in 2024 Public four-year Institutions in the ten states that had already banned the consideration of race in admissions before the Supreme Court decision in *SFFA*.
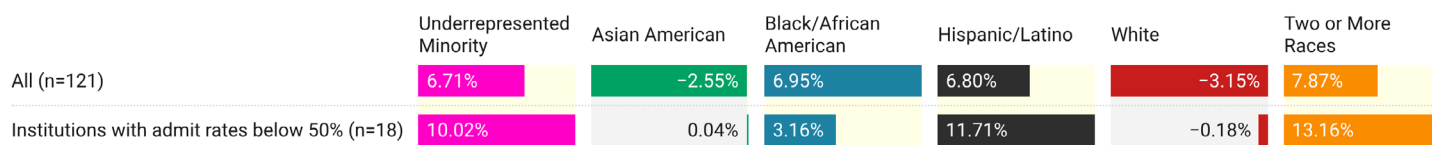
	Underrepresented Minority	Asian American	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	White	Two or More Races
All (n=121)	6.71%	−2.55%	6.95%	6.80%	−3.15%	7.87%
Institutions with admit rates below 50% (n=18)	10.02%	0.04%	3.16%	11.71%	−0.18%	13.16%

Chart: James S. Murphy, Class Action • Source: IPEDS • Created with Datawrapper   View interactive chart

Cascades, or How *SFFA* Helped Promote DEI

Although increased diversity at most higher education institutions might appear to be a counterintuitive, even shocking, result of the *SFFA* decision, this outcome will come as no surprise to certain higher education experts who have modeled the impact of a ban on race-conscious admissions or examined the effects of state bans in Texas and California.

They found that the elimination of race-conscious admissions creates a cascade effect in which the most highly qualified students of color who would have previously benefitted from a tip based on race now enroll at less selective institutions. Consequently, students of color who would have enrolled in these less selective institutions in the past become less likely to be admitted and, therefore, cascade down to less selective institutions and so on.

The key point, not so well understood even by some researchers, is that the highly qualified students of color who lost an advantage in the admissions process due to *SFFA* were not going to opt out of higher education altogether as a result of being rejected by the most selective institutions. They would end up, instead, enrolling at schools that would have been their safety schools pre-*SFFA*. The College Board's analysis of enrollment patterns supports this hypothesis. They found that after the Supreme Court decision, public universities in states that had previously banned race-conscious admissions "experienced an influx of high-SAT URM students, … likely because such students were admitted to fewer highly selective colleges after SFFA." Even SFFA's own expert witness predicted

that a ban on race-conscious admissions would "work to undo the conse-quences of an affirmative ban at the next tier of schools. With the removal of affirmative action, the drop in URM admits at top schools would increase the supply of URMs for schools in the next tier down." In other words, Harvard's loss was Boston College's gain, and flagships that had become less diverse under statewide bans on race-conscious admission would become more diverse under a nationwide one.

This cascade effect explains why most of the loss of diversity occurred at the most selective colleges and universities and why state flagships and public institutions in states that had banned race-conscious admissions experienced growth in the enrollment and proportion of underrepre-sented students of color. Once again, college admissions is an ecosystem in which no institution is isolated and enrollment numbers reflect the end of a complex process that occurs within an even more complex network. Looking at enrollment figures to determine a college's practices and pol-icies makes as much sense as looking at a Super Bowl score to determine how a team won the NFL championship.

The Downside of Cascades

While the immediate cascade effect created by a ban on race-conscious admissions may have ultimately increased the diversity of student bodies at a broader spectrum of institutions of higher education, its impact is not wholly positive for underrepresented students of color or for students at highly selective institutions. The latter fail to reap the benefits of diversity while the former may be more likely to enroll in an institution with weaker outcomes than they would have before the Supreme Court decision.

My initial analysis of the enrollment patterns suggests that the cascade created by *SFFA* has indeed reduced the number of students of color at institutions with the highest graduation rates and the largest median incomes after graduation. After the Supreme Court decision, the proportion of Black freshmen and Hispanic freshmen at institutions with graduation rates of over 80% dropped by 1.6 and 1 percentage points, respectively. Those are not extremely large decreases but are meaningful, particularly for the students who are enrolled at institutions with weaker outcomes.

Enrollment by graduation rate bands, pre- and post-SFFA
Chart based on IPEDS data for fall enrollment (average of 2022 and 2023, 2024) and 6-year graduation rates (2024) at four-year colleges.

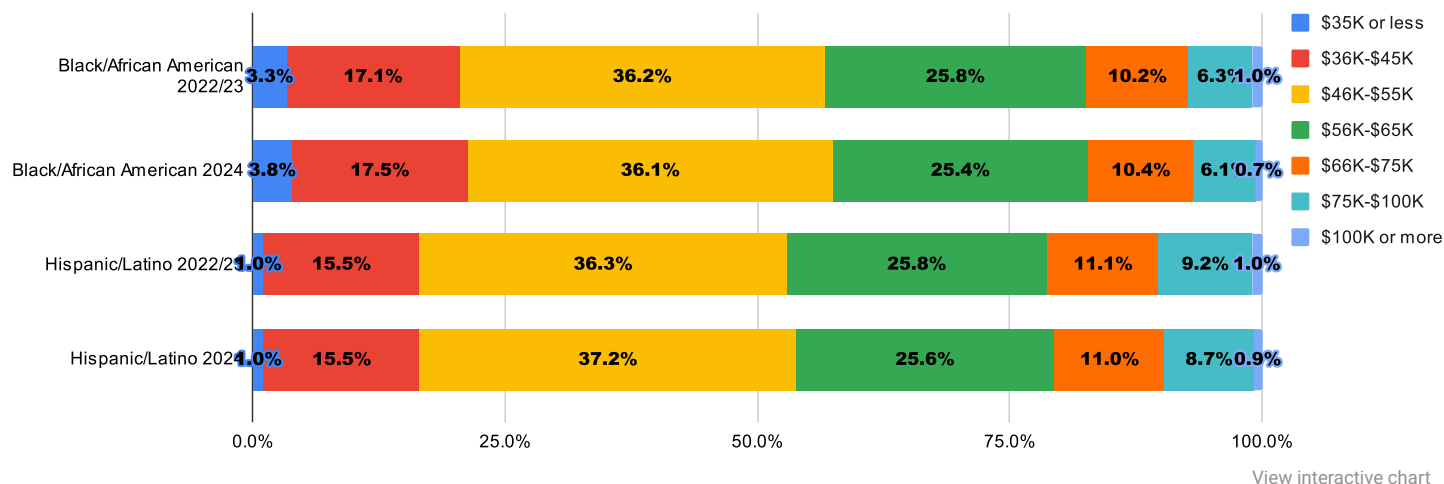

	0-25%	26-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
Black/African American 2022/23 (n=178,969)	8.3%	35.1%	22.9%	18.1%	8.4%	7.1%	3.6%
Black/African American 2024 (n=186,599)	8.4%	34.7%	22.3%	19.1%	9.0%	6.5%	2.8%
Hispanic/Latino 2022/23 (n=289,432)	2.8%	19.8%	26.3%	23.8%	13.3%	14.0%	5.3%
Hispanic/Latino 2024 (n=308,762)	2.9%	19.4%	26.1%	24.4%	13.8%	13.4%	4.9%

View interactive chart
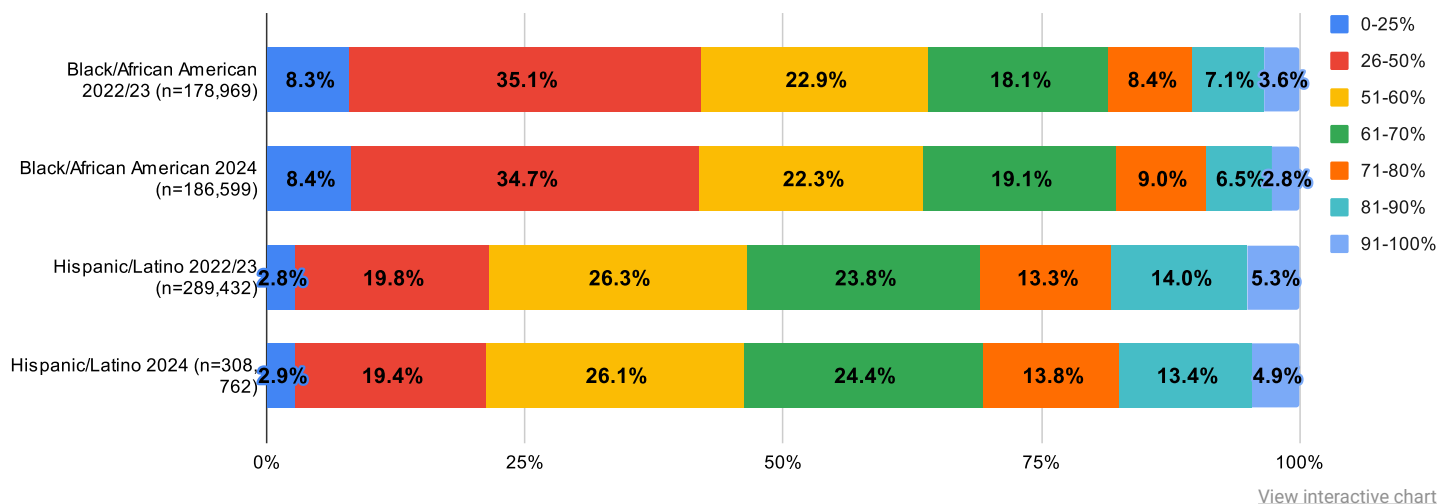
The effect of SFAA on income is similar, albeit smaller, with declining enrollment of Black and Hispanic students at the colleges and universities with the largest median incomes earned by students four years after graduation.

Enrollment by bands of income earned 4 years after graduation, pre- and post-SFFA
Chart based on IPEDS data for fall enrollment (average of 2022 and 2023, 2024) combined with Federal Student Aid median earnings data for 2014-15 & 2015-16 graduates.

	$35K or less	$36K-$45K	$46K-$55K	$56K-$65K	$66K-$75K	$75K-$100K	$100K or more
Black/African American 2022/23	3.3%	17.1%	36.2%	25.8%	10.2%	6.3%	1.0%
Black/African American 2024	3.8%	17.5%	36.1%	25.4%	10.4%	6.1%	0.7%
Hispanic/Latino 2022/23	1.0%	15.5%	36.3%	25.8%	11.1%	9.2%	1.0%
Hispanic/Latino 2024	1.0%	15.5%	37.2%	25.6%	11.0%	8.7%	0.9%

View interactive chart

Comparing the average median earnings of Black and Hispanic students, pre- and post-*SFFA*, a similar decline in outcomes can be observed, although it is not clear that the decline is sufficiently large to raise serious concern. The persistent racial and ethnic income disparities certainly should raise concern.

Weighted average of median earnings four years after graduation, by demographic

These weighted averages were calculated by multiplying the median income at an institution earned four years after graduation by the headcount of freshmen that year. The top 10% was created by sorting the list of institutions by earnings in descending order and calculating the weighted average of the first tenth of the total population of a group. These calculations are averages that do not take into account variations in income by program or by race; they cannot tell us how much any individual graduate will earn upon graduation.
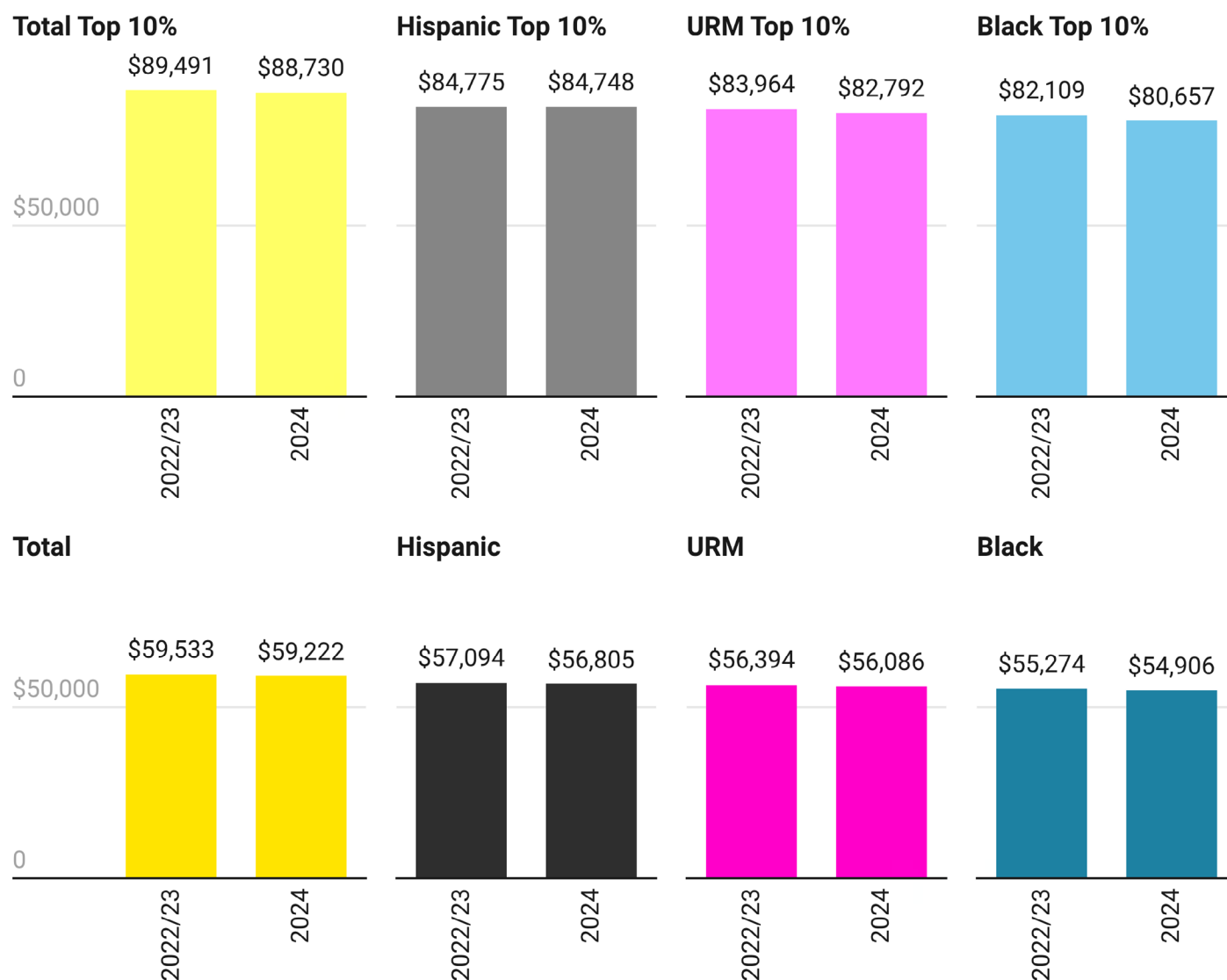
Total Top 10%

$89,491	$88,730
2022/23	2024

$50,000

0

Hispanic Top 10%

$84,775	$84,748
2022/23	2024

URM Top 10%

$83,964	$82,792
2022/23	2024

Black Top 10%

$82,109	$80,657
2022/23	2024

Total

$59,533	$59,222
2022/23	2024

$50,000

0

Hispanic

$57,094	$56,805
2022/23	2024

URM

$56,394	$56,086
2022/23	2024

Black

$55,274	$54,906
2022/23	2024

Chart: James S. Murphy, Class Action • Source: IPEDS, FSA • Created with Datawrapper

View interactive chart

It does not appear that the cascade effect pushed underrepresented students of color who would have enrolled in bachelor's degree programs into associate's degree or certificate programs. Although the proportion of Black and Hispanic students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs declined slightly in 2024, the number did not. This smaller proportion might be the result of increased enrollment in community colleges, whose enrollment began to rebound after years of steep decline during COVID. It is concerning that Black first time enrollments in the for-profit sector increased by approximately 15,000 students in 2024.

Enrollment by Sector, pre- and post-SFFA

Source: IPEDS

View interactive chart
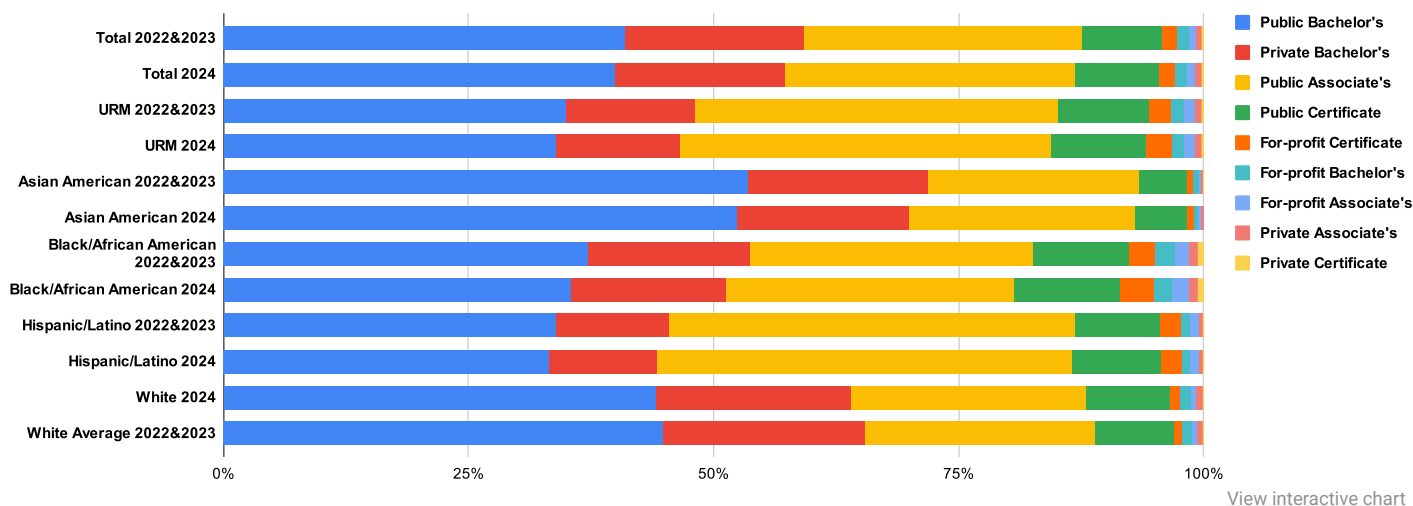
Conclusions and Future Research

This first look at reliable and uniform federal data encompassing three years of first-time higher education enrollment at over 3,000 institutions provides several important findings regarding the impact of the end of race-conscious admissions as a result of the *SFFA* decision.

1. Post-*SFFA* enrollment outcomes are a reminder that college admissions operate in an ecosystem where what happens at one institution shapes and is shaped by what happens at many others. This fact is an important one to remember and explain to laypeople and policymakers in the coming years, assuming that bad actors will continue to push simplistic narratives about college admissions based on limited data points.

2. The *SFFA* decision did not simply affect elite institutions that practiced race-conscious admissions. In the first year after the Supreme Court decision in *SFFA*, the enrollment of underrepresented students of color declined at most highly selective institutions and at Ivy Plus schools in particular; however, it also increased at many other institutions, including most state flagship universities. *SFFA* was both bad and good for diversity.

3. The enrollment effects of *SFFA* may be surprising, but they were not unanticipated. The end of race-conscious admissions created, at least in its first year, a cascade effect in which highly qualified students of color who would have been much more likely to be admitted to highly selective institutions pre-*SFFA* ended up enrolling in less selective institutions, to the benefit of the latter institutions.

4. The cascade effect created by *SFFA* may have negative consequences for underrepresented students of color who enrolled in institutions with lower graduation rates and median incomes after graduation; however, the impact is mitigated by the small percentage of Black and Hispanic students enrolled at colleges and universities with the strongest outcomes.

There are many ripe areas of investigation that have not been considered in this first look at post-*SFFA* enrollment outcomes and that Class Action will examine in the coming year.

First and foremost is the intersection of race and gender in enrollment before and after the Supreme Court decision. The [enrollment dashboard](#) created by Class Action breaks down enrollment by race and gender, but a forthcoming report will examine the differential impact that *SFFA* may have had on men and women of color.

Another topic of great importance that this initial report has not tackled is the significant increase in the number of students who opt out of identifying themselves by race or ethnicity in their applications. These "race-unknown" enrollments may obscure the impact of *SFFA* on diversity, if, for example, a large number of students at Ivy League schools who are White chose not to report their race to the institution where they matriculated. In the next few months, Class Action will release a report examining the phenomenon of "unreported" race.

Class Action will also be releasing supplemental reports on post-*SFFA* enrollment at state flagships as well as HBCUs and Minority-Serving Institutions; it will also provide reports on enrollment outcomes for American Indians, Native Alaskans and Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders.

If one theme unites our present and forthcoming research on post-*SFFA* enrollment, it is a simple one that I hope the federal government is also mindful of: College admissions is a complicated ecosystem that does incredibly important work that affects the future of our nation and its citizens. It is no place for simple interpretations from simple thinkers.

Class Action is a grassroots, student-driven organization reimagining "elite" higher education.

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