



The College Degree Gap

One million more degrees annually, 2009-2025

Over the past forty years, the percentage of the United States population with a two or four year college degree – 39% – has remained stagnant while other industrialized countries have experienced significant growth. Although currently ranked first among industrialized countries in the proportion of college-educated adults between the ages of 55 and 64, the U.S. only ranks tenth in the percentage of young adults holding a college degree and ranks near the bottom in the percentage of entering students that complete a degree program. The U.S. now stands as one of two industrialized countries where older adults are more educated than younger adults.

According to an analysis by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), the U.S. will need to produce 63.1 million degrees to match leading nations Canada, Japan, and South Korea in the percentage of adults with a college degree (estimated at 55%) by 2025. With no changes, the U.S. will produce approximately 40.6 million new college degrees by 2025 – 22.5 million fewer degrees than needed to reach the target 55% attainment rate. In recent years the U.S. has added a significant number of degree holders through immigration from other countries. If these rates are sustained, 7.0 million degrees of the needed 22.5 million will be added through immigration between 2005 and 2025, leaving a **15.5 million shortfall**.

The U.S. can achieve the goal of 55% postsecondary educational attainment in our workforce by: 1) normal population growth, 2) improving the rates of high school graduation, college participation, and college graduation and 3) helping adults with some college or just a high school diploma obtain a postsecondary credential. Projected population growth will provide **1.3 million degrees**. By achieving the following goals the U.S. can produce an additional **14.5 million** degrees over the next sixteen years.

4.3 million degrees Increasing the attainment rate of traditional-aged students by 2.5 percentage points every four years (a total of **10 percentage points**) in three categories: high school graduation rate (68% to 78%), college-going rate of recent high school graduates (55% to 65%), and postsecondary graduation rates: two-year (from 30% to 40%) and four-year (from 60% to 70%).

4.2 million degrees Enabling half of the 8.4 million young U.S. adults (aged 25-34) with some college to complete a degree.

2.6 million degrees Enabling a third of the 8.8 million slightly older U.S. adults (aged 35-44) with some college to complete a degree.

3.4 million degrees Enabling fifteen percent of the 22.7 million adults (aged 25-44) who have completed high school, but not attended college to complete a degree.

Under this scenario (one of many possibilities) about 70% of the 14.5 million degrees beyond population growth would come by improving the education of adults already in the workforce without a postsecondary credential. The following table shows the number of degrees each of these achievements would generate in individual states.

College Degree Gap
One Million More Degrees Annually, 2009-2025
State Level Analysis

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State	Estimated additional degrees from traditional-aged students ¹	Estimated additional degrees from adult learners				Estimated all additional degrees		
		Additional degrees from pop. aged 25-44, just high school graduate or equivalent ²	Additional degrees from pop. age 25-34, with some college but no degree ³	Additional degrees from pop. aged 35-44, with some college but no degree ⁴	Total additional degrees from adult learners	Number from all students	Percent from traditional-aged students	Percent from adult learners
Alabama	57,456	57,286	67,588	38,587	163,461	220,917	26%	74%
Alaska	7,257	7,973	11,654	8,274	27,901	35,157	21%	79%
Arizona	66,250	63,407	97,543	59,094	220,043	286,293	23%	77%
Arkansas	37,331	39,250	41,853	25,669	106,771	144,102	26%	74%
California	506,146	344,275	520,859	326,360	1,191,494	1,697,640	30%	70%
Colorado	73,693	46,591	74,564	43,357	164,512	238,205	31%	69%
Connecticut	56,032	37,953	36,483	28,348	102,784	158,816	35%	65%
Delaware	11,223	11,071	10,545	7,109	28,724	39,947	28%	72%
Florida	225,916	203,138	221,836	152,497	577,470	803,386	28%	72%
Georgia	120,438	119,070	141,329	83,722	344,120	464,558	26%	74%
Hawaii	13,572	15,518	18,231	11,660	45,408	58,980	23%	77%
Idaho	19,845	15,209	26,378	15,602	57,188	77,033	26%	74%
Illinois	179,665	135,204	184,087	120,089	439,380	619,046	29%	71%
Indiana	98,589	85,289	93,343	54,867	233,498	332,088	30%	70%
Iowa	58,590	33,429	41,713	26,841	101,982	160,573	36%	64%
Kansas	48,297	29,237	42,882	25,918	98,037	146,333	33%	67%
Kentucky	55,946	58,913	64,087	35,698	158,699	214,645	26%	74%
Louisiana	53,142	62,559	69,599	38,890	171,048	224,191	24%	76%
Maine	20,272	18,417	16,312	11,735	46,464	66,737	30%	70%
Maryland	81,892	57,776	74,988	51,424	184,188	266,080	31%	69%
Massachusetts	108,409	68,771	71,542	46,945	187,257	295,666	37%	63%
Michigan	150,347	115,526	159,085	106,189	380,800	531,147	28%	72%
Minnesota	99,166	48,675	77,728	54,318	180,721	279,887	35%	65%
Mississippi	36,616	37,323	40,483	26,073	103,879	140,495	26%	74%
Missouri	89,383	72,022	86,413	54,569	213,004	302,387	30%	70%
Montana	15,318	10,780	14,290	9,142	34,212	49,530	31%	69%
Nebraska	32,476	16,384	26,329	17,082	59,795	92,271	35%	65%
Nevada	23,634	33,301	39,431	27,352	100,083	123,717	19%	81%
New Hampshire	23,595	15,210	13,609	12,344	41,163	64,758	36%	64%
New Jersey	122,806	95,417	92,233	69,151	256,801	379,607	32%	68%
New Mexico	24,177	21,381	27,887	17,967	67,235	91,412	26%	74%

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New York	297,417	210,087	211,583	139,120	560,790	858,207	35%	65%
North Carolina	119,399	104,243	131,414	77,307	312,963	432,362	28%	72%
North Dakota	13,088	6,330	9,832	5,839	22,000	35,088	37%	63%
Ohio	174,753	151,467	156,383	101,495	409,344	584,097	30%	70%
Oklahoma	49,989	43,495	57,941	31,378	132,814	182,803	27%	73%
Oregon	42,818	38,254	64,051	38,216	140,521	183,339	23%	77%
Pennsylvania	222,769	164,298	126,767	87,086	378,150	600,919	37%	63%
Rhode Island	15,661	12,296	13,677	8,169	34,142	49,803	31%	69%
South Carolina	59,032	54,907	64,009	34,855	153,771	212,803	28%	72%
South Dakota	15,916	8,454	10,498	6,011	24,963	40,879	39%	61%
Tennessee	66,843	87,870	88,181	52,795	228,845	295,688	23%	77%
Texas	324,101	256,169	368,194	207,455	831,818	1,155,919	28%	72%
Utah	40,261	26,674	57,597	23,071	107,342	147,603	27%	73%
Vermont	10,473	8,181	6,286	4,354	18,821	29,294	36%	64%
Virginia	116,353	83,051	96,741	67,274	247,067	363,420	32%	68%
Washington	81,675	64,724	98,539	67,201	230,464	312,139	26%	74%
West Virginia	24,467	28,959	23,384	13,828	66,171	90,638	27%	73%
Wisconsin	98,596	65,937	76,956	53,175	196,068	294,664	33%	67%
Wyoming	10,648	6,036	9,318	5,090	20,443	31,090	34%	66%
United States	4,344,040	3,397,785	4,176,245	2,630,590	10,204,620	14,548,660	30%	70%

Notes:

1. Additional degrees calculated based on adjusted 9th grade cohort number (source: Mortenson, T. Chance for College by Age 19 by State 1986 to 2004, Postsecondary Education Opportunity, Oskaloosa, Iowa, July 2006. (Note: Technical corrections were made to three states: Indiana, Kentucky and Utah in the 2004 data)) with 10 percentage point increase over current high school graduation rate and college-going rate (source: Mortenson, T.), and 10 percentage point increase in college graduation rate (source: NCES, IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey, posted by NCHEMS, www.higheredinfo.org). Rate increase phased in at a 2.5 percentage point increase every four years.
2. Assumed 15 percent degree attainment of current population aged 25-44 with only high school graduation or equivalent (source: U.S Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey; Tables B15001 and C15001, posted by NCHEMS at www.higheredinfo.org).
3. Assumed 50 percent degree attainment of current population aged 25-34 with some college, no degree (source: U.S Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey; Tables B15001 and C15001, posted by NCHEMS at www.higheredinfo.org).
4. Assumed 30 percent degree attainment of current population aged 35-44 with some college, no degree (source: U.S Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey; Tables B15001 and C15001, posted by NCHEMS at www.higheredinfo.org).