



Cornell University

**UNDERGRADUATE
ENROLLMENT TRENDS**

Fall 2005

*Catherine J Alvord
cja2@cornell.edu
Institutional Research and Planning
440 Day Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853-2801*

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Context

As part of a continuing emphasis on enhancing the selectivity of our undergraduate student population and curtailing growth in order to stabilize overall enrollment, Cornell has been following an aggressive strategic first-year freshman enrollment plan since Fall 2001.

The purpose of the plan was to:

- Manage toward longer-term, university-wide, undergraduate enrollment targets of 3,000 fall first-time freshmen.
- Protect individual colleges from under-enrollment as they adjust admissions strategies to yield their targeted number of incoming fall first-time freshmen.
- Advise and assist colleges from enrolling more than their targeted number of students.

Given previous history of over-enrolling the freshman class and the need for disciplined enrollment targets to accommodate the new North Campus Residential Initiative, the above plan was initially presented in Fall 2000 to each of the undergraduate colleges. Full implementation began in Fall 2001. After implementation, the plan was reviewed and revisions were initiated starting with the Fall 2003 term. These included increasing the undergraduate enrollment target by 50 students to 3,050 fall first-time freshmen and eliminating all January first-time freshmen.

A key element of the first-year freshmen enrollment plan was the construction of a conservative admit and yield model¹ and the aggressive use of the waitlist². Students admitted from the waitlist are just as strong as students admitted through regular and early decision based on standard, quantifiable measures. Contrary to conventional wisdom, there has been no dramatic drop-off in academic quality when colleges admit from the waitlist. For an institution like Cornell, this is significant because we have such a large and strong applicant pool.

¹The admit model is used to estimate the number of students each college should admit to yield the targeted number of matriculating students. The yield model examines relevant characteristics of admitted students and statistically determines the likelihood of enrollment for a given admitted student.

²Because the admit and yield models are predictive tools that approximate enrollment prior to admitted students' acceptance or rejection of Cornell's offer of admission, it is customary to utilize an admission waitlist to guard against over-enrollment. High quality students who are not selected for admission in the regular decision process are carefully vetted to be placed on an individual college's waitlist. It is this pool of potential students that allows us to address conceivable shortfalls in target enrollments

Challenges That Lay Ahead

The major challenge is continuing to implement a cohesive enrollment management strategy, utilizing more refined admit and yield models. For Fall 2005, implementation of the guidelines was a tremendous success as evidenced by the size and quality of the first-year freshman class. The seven undergraduate colleges continued to refine their independent admissions processes to achieve a university first-time freshmen enrollment target of 3,050 students. They were successful with 3,076 first-time freshmen enrolling for Fall 2005 as of the sixth week of classes.

Cornell continues to be challenged by enrollment of students of color. The percentage of African-American, Hispanic and Native American students has remained relatively constant, but the absolute number of students of color has fluctuated over the past decade. We have yet to make significant progress with the enrollment of underrepresented minority students overall and with African-American students in particular.

It is imperative that we enhance the diversity of the undergraduate student population while maintaining access to a Cornell education. The gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic diversity of the student body must continue to receive careful attention. The geographic diversity of the student body is equally important, as it enriches the educational environment.

Undergraduate Enrollment Objectives

For the last several years, Cornell has had an operational maximum total on-campus undergraduate enrollment target of 13,000 students. At present, we continue to exceed that target. Having more than 13,000 undergraduates enrolled at any one time taxes the physical and human resources of the institution. In addition, significant year-to-year fluctuations create difficulties for both our teaching and infrastructure resources.

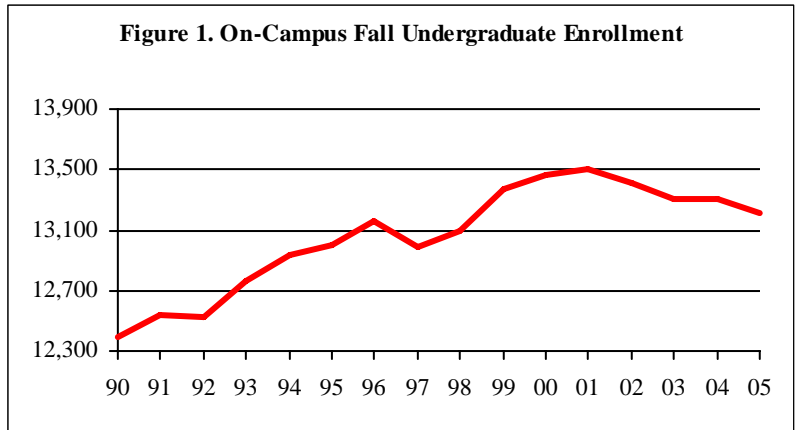
The current enrollment planning process focuses intensely on a first-time freshman enrollment target of 3,050 students. It is especially important to be disciplined about first-year enrollment targets given that all freshmen are housed within the North Campus Residential Initiative.

Undergraduate enrollment consists of different types of students: first-time freshmen, first-time transfers to Cornell, rejoining students, and continuing students. While only a portion of undergraduate over-enrollment can be attributed to first-time freshmen arriving in the fall, it has been the major contributing factor and the one over which the institution has the greatest control. Obtaining more control with regard to the enrollment of first-time freshmen, will assist in guiding our enrollment approach toward first-time transfers.

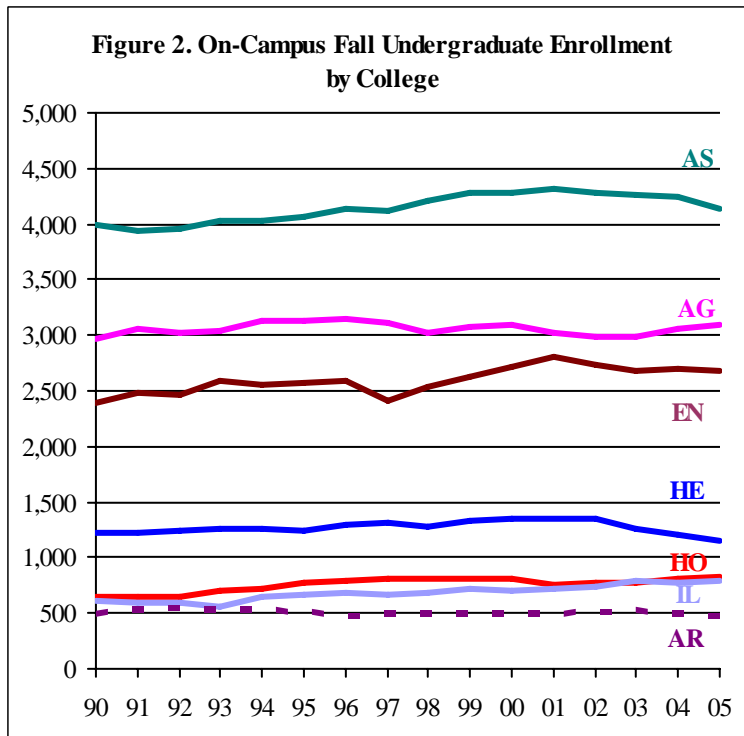
The admit rate from Fall 2004 to Fall 2005 decreased from 29 percent to 27 percent; the yield also decreased from 50 percent to 47 percent over the one-year period. As of the sixth week of classes in Fall 2005, Cornell enrolled 3,076 first-time freshmen, just 26 students over the 3,050 first-time freshmen target.

Current Situation and Changes over Time

Figure 1 indicates that on-campus undergraduate enrollment increased by 6 percent, or 819 students, between Fall 1990 and Fall 2005 (12,389 in Fall 1990 to 13,208 in Fall 2005). Slightly more than a third of this increase (393 students) occurred from Fall 1998 and Fall 1999. Figure 1 also demonstrates the success we have been experiencing in decreasing the operational maximum total on-campus undergraduate enrollment toward the 13,000 students target articulated in Fall 2001.



The Endowed General Purpose Colleges accounted for 48 percent of the increase from Fall 1990 to Fall 2005. Figure 2 displays Arts & Sciences (AS) with 146 more students in Fall 2005 than in Fall 1990; Engineering (EN) with 285 additional students; and Architecture, Art, & Planning (AR) with 10 fewer students currently enrolled than in Fall 1990.



The Contract Colleges accounted for 22 percent total on-campus undergraduate enrollment increase from Fall 1990 to Fall 2005. Industrial & Labor Relations (IL) increased their enrollments by 181 students, Human Ecology (HE) decreased by 68 students, and Agriculture & Life Sciences (AG) increased by 129 students between Fall 1990 and Fall 2005. The remaining enrollment changes occurred in Hotel Administration (HO), with an increase of 180 students, and the Internal Transfer Division (not pictured

though included in the Endowed General Purpose percentage) whose enrollments have declined steadily from 71 students in Fall 1990 to 47 students in Fall 2005.

Figures 3 and 4 displays the results of the implemented first-year freshman enrollment plan as compared to prior first-time freshmen enrollments starting in Fall 1990. As planned, the first-time freshman enrollment decreased from 3,162 in Fall 1999 to 3,054 in Fall 2000. Following the initial Fall 2000 test, Cornell implemented more aggressive measures to assist each of the colleges in staying within 1 percent of their designated targets. With the exception of Agriculture & Life Sciences and Hotel Administration where they were over-enrolled, the remainder of the undergraduate colleges were successful in managing within their respective bounds for Fall 2005 first-time freshmen targets.

Figure 3 displays fall first-time freshman enrollments from Fall 1990 to Fall 2005 in the three largest colleges.

The size of the incoming freshman class in Arts & Sciences increased 8 percent from 934 students in Fall 1990 to 1,011 in Fall 2005. Engineering experienced volatility in their freshman enrollment during the early years under investigation. For Fall 2005, Engineering enrolled 705 freshmen. Freshman enrollments in Agriculture & Life Sciences increased by 3 percent, from 639 students in Fall 1990 to 657 students in Fall 2005.

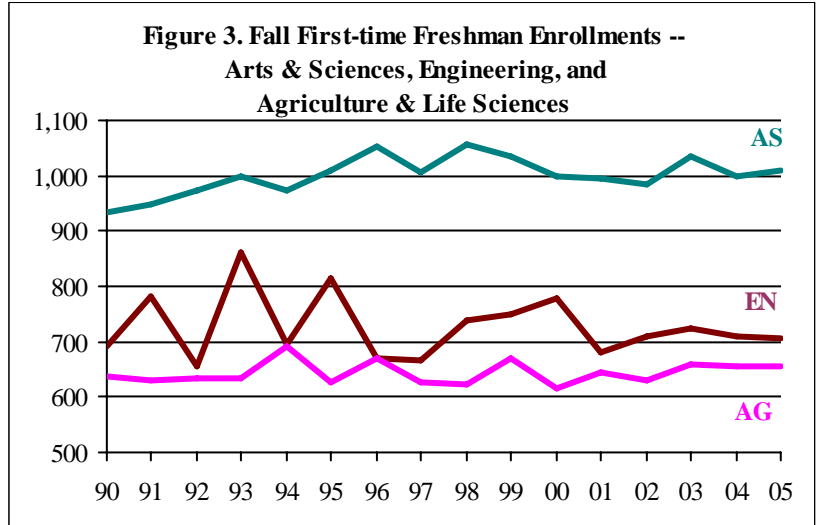
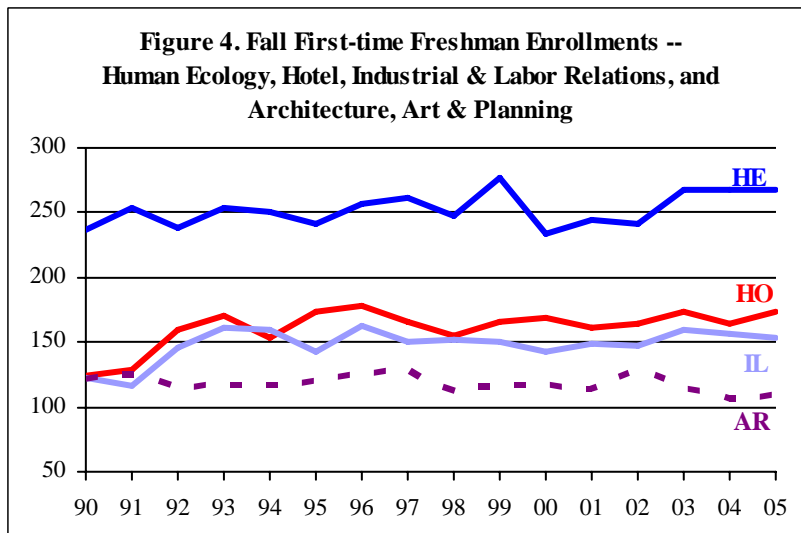


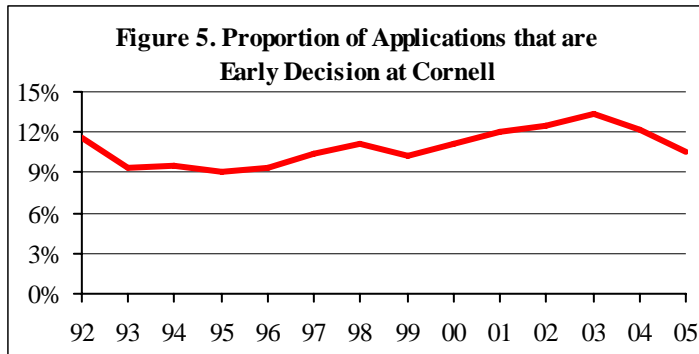
Figure 4 displays fall first-time freshman enrollments from Fall 1990 to Fall 2005 in the other four undergraduate colleges.



Human Ecology experienced a 13 percent increase in freshman enrollments from Fall 1990 (237 students) to Fall 2005 (267 students). Hotel Administration increased their first-time freshmen by a total of 40 percent between Fall 1990 (124 students) and Fall 2005 (174 students). From Fall 1990 to Fall 2005, enrollments in Industrial & Labor Relations increased 25 percent (122 to 153 students respectively).

Architecture, Art & Planning experienced a 10 percent decrease in freshman enrollments from Fall 1990 (121 students) to Fall 2005 (109 students) primarily as a result of reducing the number of freshman architecture students with the commencement of the M.Arch I program.

From Fall 1992 through Fall 2005, Cornell's Early Decision Program (EDP) applications have accounted for between 9 and 13 percent of all applications (see Figure 5). For the Fall 2005 entering class, 2,570 of 24,452 applicants applied via EDP. Nevertheless, the proportion of the entering class enrolled through EDP steadily increased from Fall 1993 to Fall 2003. For Fall 2005, 34 percent of all first-time freshmen entering (1,047 of 3,076 students) were enrolled through EDP.

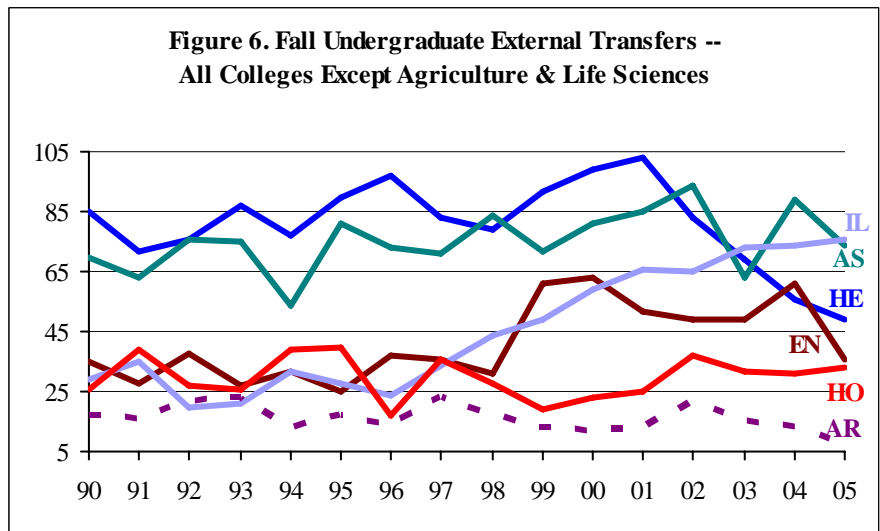


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External transfers offer another option for maintaining a stable enrollment. The majority of external transfers to Cornell arrive as sophomores or juniors. It is important to note that Cornell has always had a tradition of enrolling transfer students, particularly in the Contract Colleges; however, Arts & Sciences also enrolls a significant number of new external transfers each fall. Cornell's tradition in this regard sets us apart from our Ivy peers, some of whom enroll a more modest number of external transfer students or none at all. These students add a rich dimension to the classroom experience and their contributions to undergraduate life at Cornell are deep and varied.

From Fall 1990 to Fall 2005, between 35 and 44 percent of all incoming external transfers have annually enrolled in Agriculture & Life Sciences. In Fall 1990, this amounted to 172 out of 434 external transfers

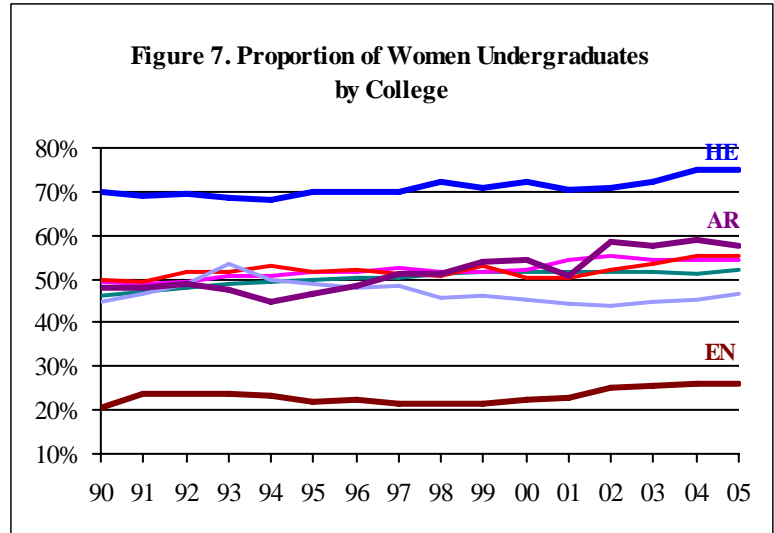
(40 percent) and in Fall 2005, 206 out of 482 external transfers (43 percent). For the other colleges (see Figure 6) the number of external transfers fluctuates from year to year. The number of external transfers into Arts & Sciences has ranged between 54 in Fall 1994 and 94 in Fall 2002 with 74 for Fall 2005.



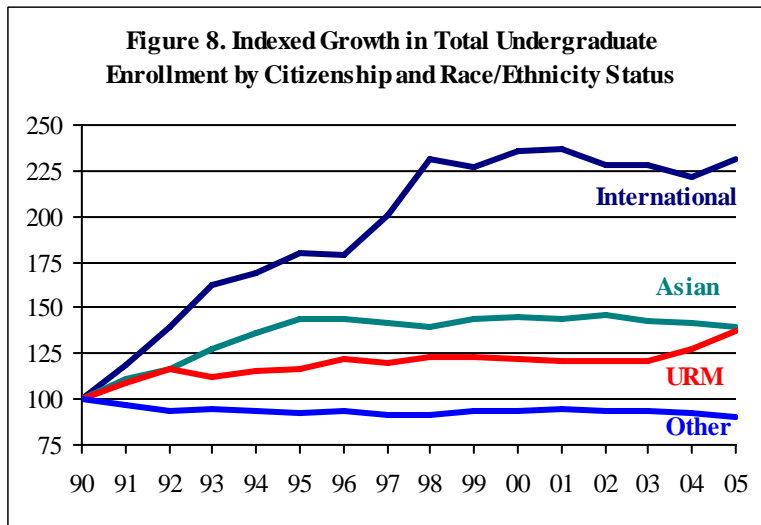
Industrial & Labor Relations has just about tripled their external transfers from 29 in Fall 1990 to 76 in Fall 2005. Hotel Administration had a 27 percent increase and Engineering a 3 percent increase in external transfers between Fall 1990 and Fall 2005. Human Ecology experienced a decrease from 85 external transfers in Fall 1990 to 49 in Fall 2005.

Cornell has been making progress on other related areas of undergraduate enrollment. Figures 7 through 10 displays the diversity of the undergraduate student population with regard to gender, race/ethnicity, and geographic distribution.

The proportion of women among the total undergraduate population increased from 44 percent in Fall 1990 to 49 percent in Fall 2005. As Figure 7 demonstrates, two of the colleges have distinctly different patterns from the other colleges. The proportion of women among undergraduates in Human Ecology has fluctuated between 68 and 75 percent from Fall 1990 to Fall 2005. In Engineering, undergraduate women have increased from 20 to 26 percent. The most significant increase in the proportion of women in any single college occurred in Architecture, Art & Planning with a 10 percent increase from Fall 1990 to Fall 2005.



The proportion of minorities among the undergraduate population³ has grown from 22 percent in Fall 1990 to 31 percent in Fall 2005. Among all minority groups, the largest increase during this period has been among Asian



American students growing from 1,559 in Fall 1990 to 2,168 in Fall 2005, (39 percent). The proportion of underrepresented minorities (URM)⁴ has grown by 38 percent from Fall 1990 to Fall 2005 (1,218 to 1,679 students respectively). The largest increase among URM students during this period has been among Hispanic Americans who grew with 150 additional students (584 in Fall 1990 to 734 in Fall 2005), followed by African American

students (594 in Fall 1990 to 656 in Fall 2005) and Native American students (40 in Fall 1990 to 64 in Fall 2004). For all other U.S. citizens (Caucasians and those who elected not to designate

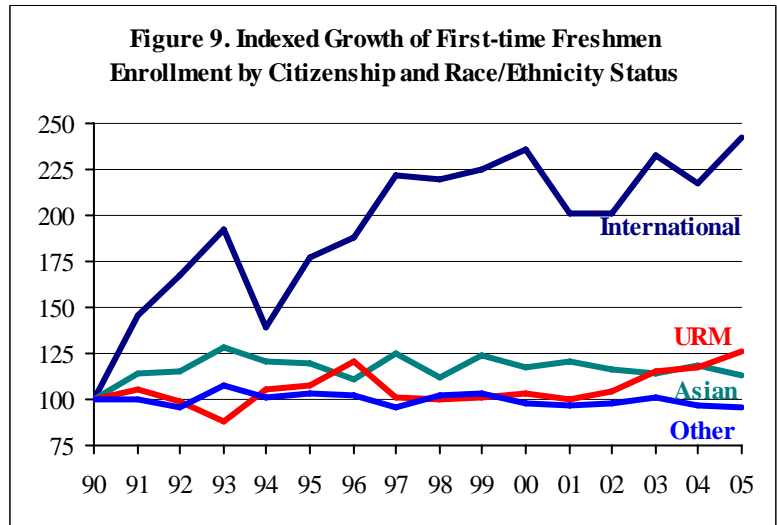
³Limited to U.S. citizens and Permanent Residents only; race/ethnicity data is not gathered and reported on international students.

⁴URM: Native Americans, Hawaiian-Pacific Islanders, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and multi-racial indicating at least one underrepresented category.

race/ethnicity information), enrollments declined 11 percent from 9,586 in Fall 1990 to 8,654 in Fall 2005. Over this same time period, the enrollment of international students increased from 438 to 1,014 students.

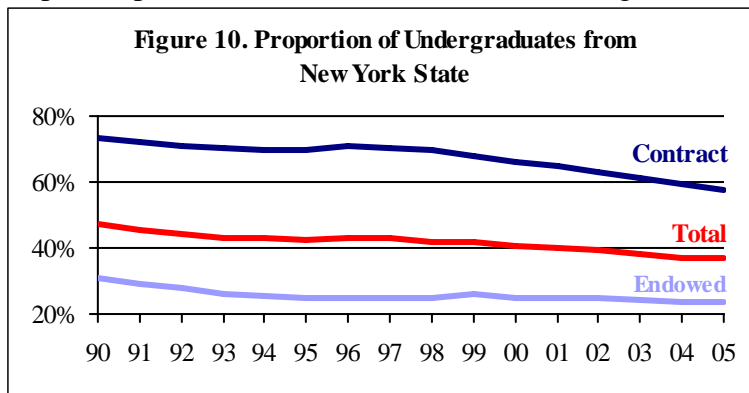
Starting in Fall 2002, the Office of Undergraduate Admissions began to utilize a new race/ethnicity category to enhance the ability to track underrepresented minorities (URM) more consistently with federal guidelines. These are students who indicated on their admissions application they were multi-racial with at least one URM category. Prior to Fall 2002 students who indicated a multi-racial category were defaulted to “other or not reported.” For total undergraduate enrollment, this new category has increased from 24 students in Fall 2002, to 225 students in Fall 2005.

For first-time freshmen, Figure 9 shows the proportion of underrepresented minorities (URM) has grown 26 percent from Fall 1990 to Fall 2005 (346 to 436 students respectively). With the exception of the new multi-racial URM category and Native Americans, between Fall 1990 and Fall 2005 the traditional categories of URM increased slightly. African Americans increased 7 percent (12 students) followed by Hispanic Americans at 6 percent (11 students). In the other categories, from Fall 1990 to Fall 2005, Asian Americans increased 13 percent (57 students) and international students increased from 99 students in Fall 1990 to 240 students in Fall 2005.



Caucasians and those not reporting race/ethnicity declined by 4 percent (1,985 to 1,903 students from Fall 1990 to Fall 2005, respectively).

As part of planned recruitment efforts, the undergraduate student population has become more geographically diverse in both the Endowed and Contract colleges.



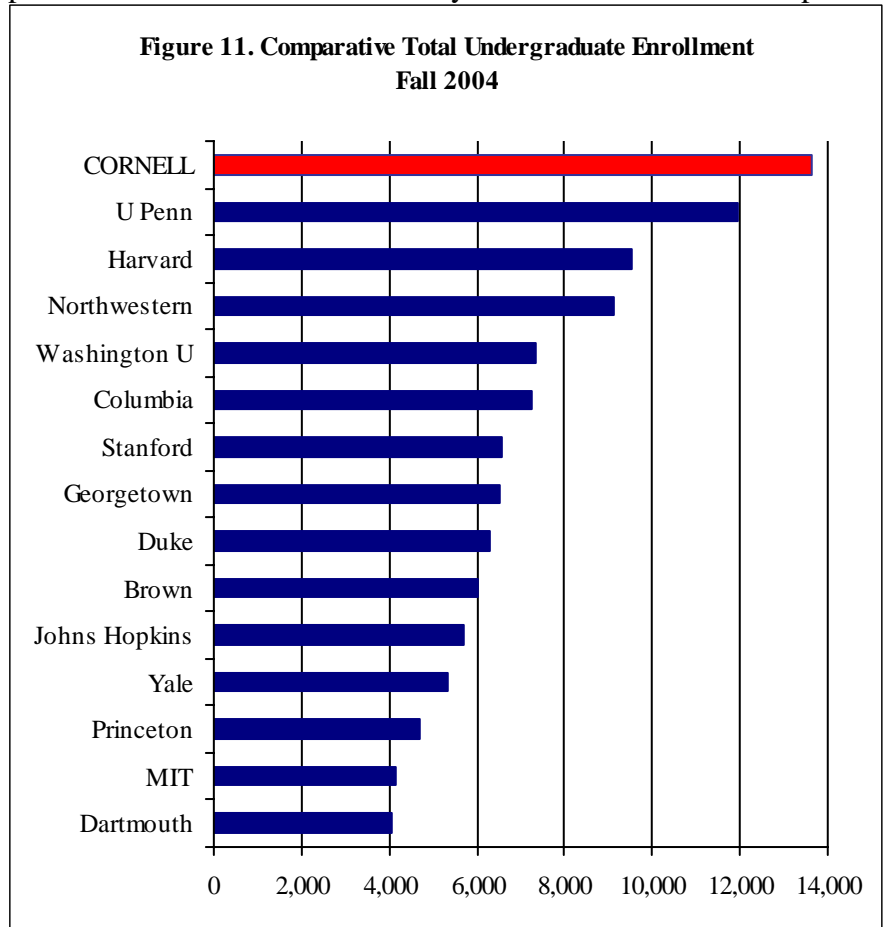
Although the proportion of undergraduates from New York State has been declining (see Figure 10), they still account for the largest share of students in both the Endowed and Contract colleges. From Fall 1990 to Fall 2005, in the Endowed colleges, proportions from the Mid-Atlantic, South and Southwestern states have been stable with only a 1 percent increase; those coming from New England and Midwestern regions declined 1 percent; and enrollments from the West and out of

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the country have increased between 4 and 3 percent, respectively. During the same time period, enrollment in the Contract Colleges from the Southwestern region increased slightly by 1 percent. Enrollments from the New England, Midwest, South and out of country regions increased 2 percent while proportions from the Mid-Atlantic and the West increased 4 percent.

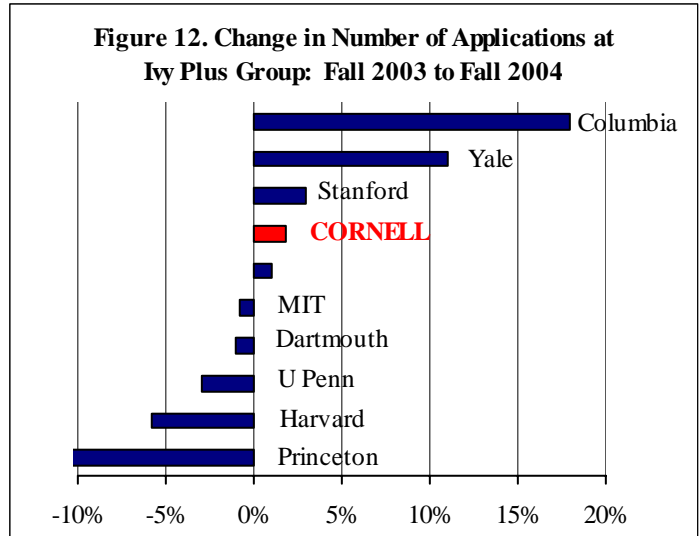
Competitor Comparisons

This section focuses on comparisons between Cornell and many of the “admissions overlap group” institutions for which we have a source of comparative data.⁵ As Figure 11 makes clear, Cornell enrolls a larger number of undergraduates than any of our comparators. Typically, freshmen account for approximately a quarter of the undergraduate population. Hence, while Cornell admits roughly 3,050 first-time freshmen, our closest Ivy comparator, the University of Pennsylvania, has an entering class of approximately 2,400, while Dartmouth and MIT are admitting closer to 1,000 new freshmen each year.

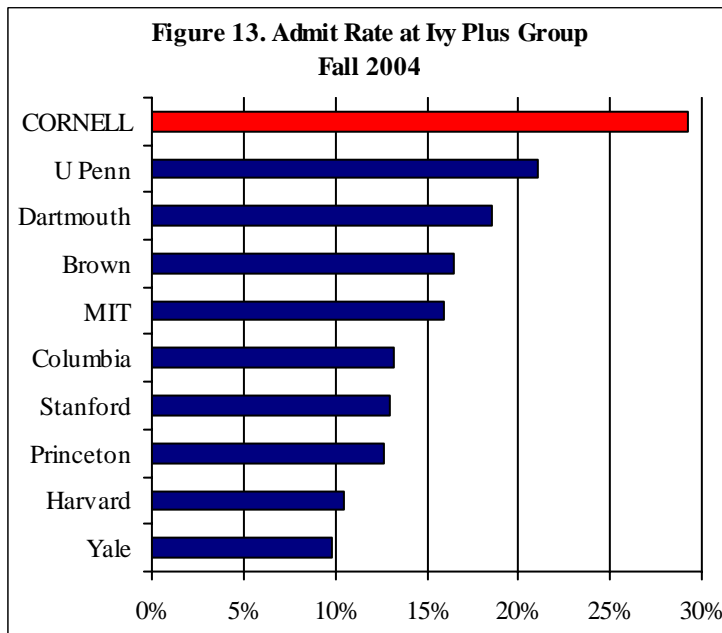


⁵Fall 2004 comparative data is the most recent information available. The 2005 data will not be available until late in the spring 2006 semester.

As Figure 12 displays, half of the Ivy Plus Group (the eight Ivy League institutions plus MIT and Stanford) saw an increase in the number of applications for admission between Fall 2003 and Fall 2004. Cornell experienced a 2 percent increase from 20,360 to 20,738 applications over this one year period.

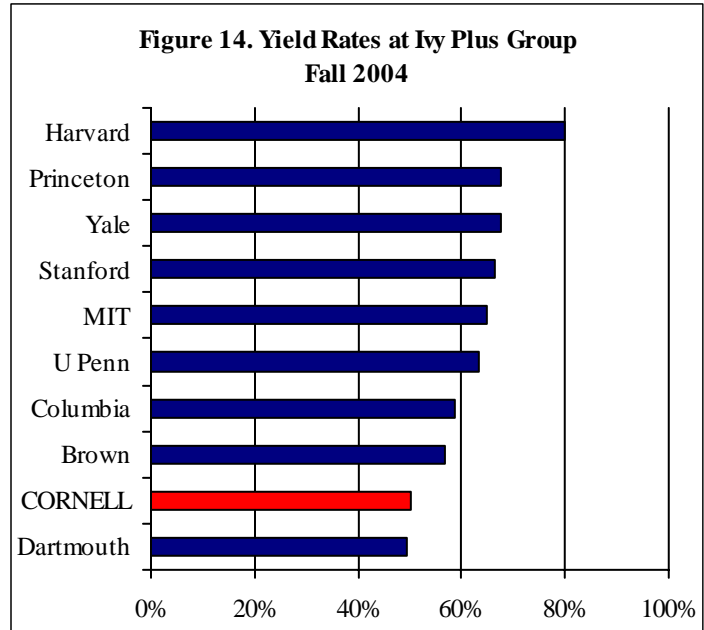


Cornell's admit rate – the proportion of students offered admission divided by the total number of applicants – decreased 2 percent from 31 percent in Fall 2003 to 29 percent for Fall 2004. Of our Ivy Plus Group comparators, from Fall 2003 to Fall 2004 Yale and MIT experienced a 1 percent decrease. Princeton experienced a 3 percent increase while Columbia had a 2 percent increase. Brown, Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania experienced a 1 percent increase with Dartmouth and Stanford remaining constant. The changes depicted are often directly and inversely related to the changes in the number of applications displayed in Figure 12 above (an increase in applications typically leads to a decrease in admit rates). As well, the general declines in admit rates are also related to increases in the number of students being admitted via early decision programs and figures prominently.

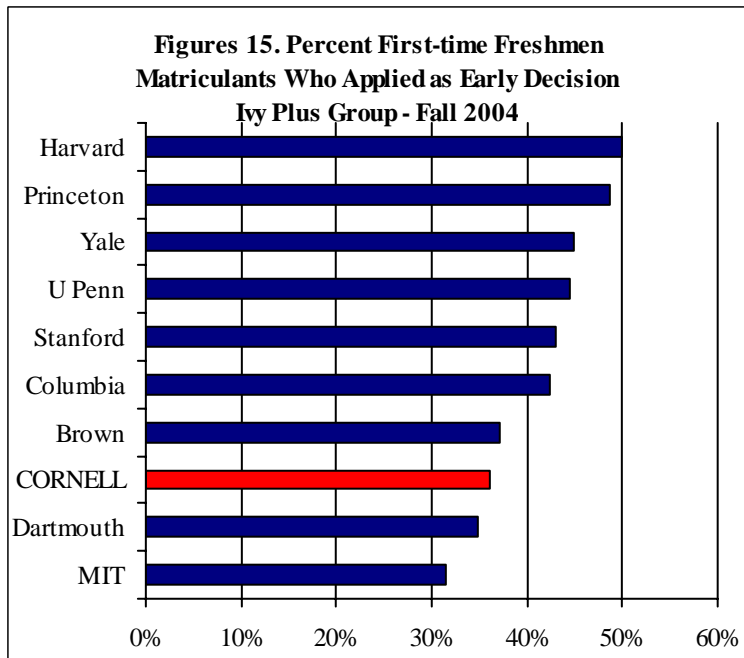


Cornell's 29 percent admit rate for Fall 2004 is the highest in the Ivy Plus Group, which otherwise ranges from a low of 10 percent at Harvard and Yale to a high of 21 percent at the University of Pennsylvania (see Figure 13). Among Cornell's seven undergraduate colleges, Architecture, Art & Planning had the lowest admit rate (22 percent) with Engineering having the highest (38 percent). Collectively, the Contract Colleges had an admit rate of 31 percent, and the Endowed colleges' admit rate was 29 percent for the incoming class.

Figure 14 displays the Fall 2004 comparative yield rates – the proportion of students who accept an offer of admission divided by the total number of applicants who were admitted – for the Ivy Plus Group. Between Fall 2003 and Fall 2004, Cornell’s yield rate increased less than 1 percent. Among these comparators, yield rates for Fall 2004 ranged from 50 percent at Dartmouth and to 80 percent at Harvard.



As described earlier in this report (see page 6, Figure 5), the proportion of first-time freshmen admitted via the Early Decision Program (EDP) has been increasing at Cornell. Comparatively speaking, however, for Fall 2004 Cornell significantly trails many of its Ivy Plus Group comparators in utilizing an early decision/early action program to fill its first-time freshman class (see Figure 15). For Fall 2004, the most extensive use of early decision/early action programs was at Harvard who enrolled 50 percent of their first-time freshmen in this fashion. At the other end of the spectrum MIT enrolled 31 percent of their first-time freshmen through early decision/early action.



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On the Horizon

Maintaining a stable total undergraduate enrollment is imperative as Cornell continues to enhance the undergraduate experience. The North Campus Residential Initiative's role in the university's total undergraduate experience necessitates a greater need to be more disciplined about all aspects of enrollment targets. Managing toward the 3,050 fall, first-time freshmen target has been possible because of the implementation of the undergraduate enrollment management guidelines.

External transfer applications for fall semester admissions have decreased 23 percent during the period from 1990 to 2005. During this same period, the number of external transfer acceptances increased 16 percent, with yield increasing 10 percent, in part through more judicious use of guaranteed transfer programs in several of the colleges. As a result, external transfer enrollment has grown over the past several years. With the North Campus Residential Initiative in place, the need for specific external transfer admission and enrollment targets is critical in order to maintain optimal overall enrollments. A long-range enrollment plan for external transfers that will develop specific admission and enrollment targets by college is under development.

As part of its continuing goal to provide the nation's best undergraduate experience at a research university, Cornell is renewing and revitalizing its traditional long-standing commitment to undergraduates. At its heart is one of the most ambitious program innovations ever undertaken by the university: building five House systems for post-first-year students on West Campus. Currently in operations are the Alice H. Cook House and the Carl Becker House. The Bethe House is under construction, and the remaining two houses are scheduled to be completed by 2010.

Conclusions

Undergraduate enrollments at Cornell remain strong. The institution is in the enviable position of having a large and talented applicant pool making it possible to admit and matriculate a diverse and extremely well qualified student body.

The on-going challenge facing Cornell is to craft and implement strategies that will allow the institution to become an ever-stronger player in the increasingly complex head-to-head competition for high-ability undergraduate students. In particular, it is imperative that we continue to highlight what is distinctive about Cornell to our target populations. In essence, we need to become ever more accomplished in marketing the institution, both to prospective students and the public at large.

Most recently, our main emphasis was on the over enrollment of first-time freshmen. For Fall 2003 through Fall 2005, the seven undergraduate colleges were given a cumulative first-time freshman enrollment target of 3,050. During these first years of the university enrollment management plan, total first-time freshman enrollment at Cornell continues to be refined based on the needs of the university as a whole as well as for each individual college.