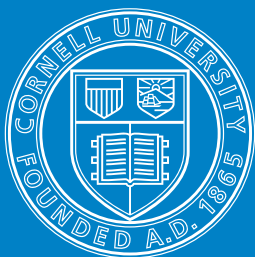


# Undergraduate Enrollment Trends

Fall, 2006

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# **UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT TRENDS**

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## **UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT TRENDS**

### **Fall 2006**

#### **Context**

In Fall 2001, Cornell developed a strategic first-year freshman enrollment plan. This original plan was part of a continuing emphasis on enhancing the selectivity of our undergraduate student population and curtailing growth in order to stabilize overall enrollment.

The purpose of the original 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 adjusted admissions strategies to yield their targeted number of incoming fall first-time freshmen.
- Advise and assist colleges to avoid 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 then new North Campus Residential Initiative, the above plan was initially presented to each of the undergraduate colleges in Fall 2000. After full implementation in Fall 2001, 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 freshman enrollment plan was the construction of conservative admit and yield models<sup>1</sup> and the strategic use of the waitlist<sup>2</sup>. 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 primarily due to our large and strong applicant pool.

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<sup>1</sup>The admit model is used to estimate the initial number of students each college should admit during the regular decision process 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.

<sup>2</sup>Because 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 students who are offered a place on the waitlist that allows us to address conceivable shortfalls in freshman target enrollments.

## **Current Challenges**

Since the freshman enrollment plan was implemented in 2001, Cornell has achieved its freshman enrollment target in four of the six years. In the other two years, the university exceeded its freshman enrollment target. The major challenge, however, is to continue to maintain a cohesive enrollment management strategy by utilizing more refined admit and yield models. While the 31% increase in admissions applications since 2001 has made the enrollment planning process more complex, Cornell will continue to enhance the methods by which we manage the overall freshman enrollment.

Cornell continues to be challenged by enrollment of underrepresented minority students. Since 2001, the percentage of African-American, Hispanic and Native American students has remained relatively stable, but noticeable growth occurred in Fall 2006 with the enrollment of African-American students. In Fall 2006, Cornell enrolled 192 African-American students, the largest number in over two decades. We will continue to monitor the enrollment of underrepresented minority students, and implement strategies that will improve undergraduate student racial and ethnic diversity at Cornell.

It is imperative that we continue to 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 several years, Cornell has had an operational maximum total on-campus undergraduate enrollment target of 13,000 students. While the undergraduate freshman enrollment has declined from 13,802 in Fall 2001 to 13,562 in Fall 2006, the freshman enrollment still exceeds the desired enrollment of 13,000... 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.

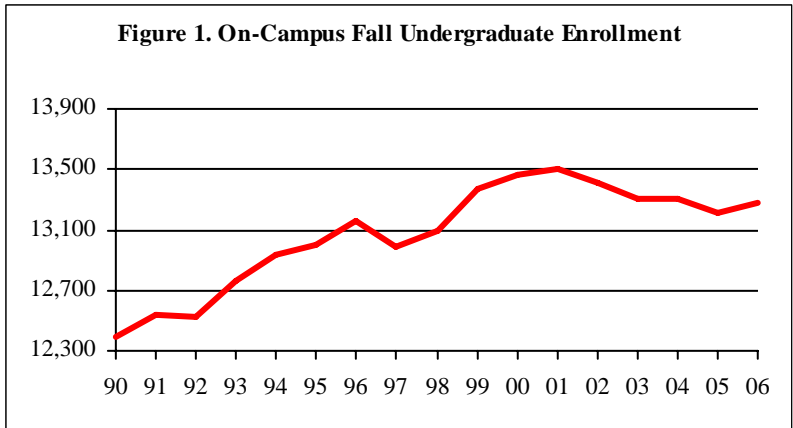
The current enrollment planning process focuses intensely on a first-time freshman enrollment target of 3,050 students. It is especially important to be disciplined about first-year enrollment targets given that all freshmen are housed within the North Campus Residential Initiative.

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. Obtaining more control with regard to the enrollment of first-time freshmen will assist in guiding our enrollment approach toward first-time transfers.

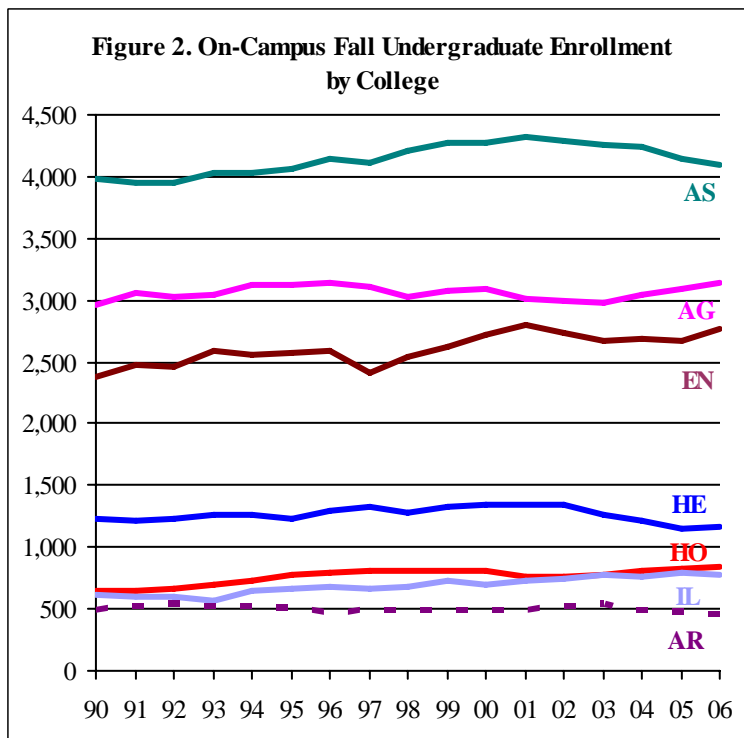
The admit rate from Fall 2005 to Fall 2006 decreased from 27 percent to 25 percent; the yield stayed constant at 47 percent over the one-year period. As of the sixth week of classes in Fall 2006, Cornell enrolled 3,188 first-time freshmen, 138 students over the 3,050 first-time freshmen target.

**Current Situation and Changes over Time**

Figure 1 indicates that on-campus undergraduate enrollment increased by 7 percent, or 885 students, between Fall 1990 and Fall 2006 (12,389 in Fall 1990 to 13,274 in Fall 2006). More than a third of this increase (393 students) occurred from Fall 1998 and Fall 1999, before the freshman enrollment management process was implemented. Figure 1 also demonstrates the success experienced in decreasing the operational maximum total on-campus undergraduate enrollment toward the 13,000 students target articulated in Fall 2001 despite the slight increase in Fall 2006.



The Endowed General Purpose Colleges accounted for 47 percent of the increase from Fall 1990 to Fall 2006. Figure 2 displays Arts & Sciences (AS) with 102 more students in Fall 2006 than in Fall 1990; Engineering (EN) with 389 additional students; and Architecture, Art, & Planning (AR) with 38 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 2006. Industrial & Labor Relations (IL) increased their enrollments by 165 students, Human Ecology (HE) decreased by 52 students, and Agriculture & Life Sciences (AG) increased by 163 students between Fall 1990 and Fall 2006. The remaining enrollment changes occurred in Hotel Administration (HO), with an increase of 195 students, and the Internal Transfer Division's (not pictured though included in the Endowed General Purpose percentage) enrollments, which have declined steadily from 71 students in Fall 1990 to 32 students in Fall 2006.

Figures 3 and 4 display the first-year freshman enrollment plan started in Fall 2000 as compared to prior first-time freshman 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. However, in Fall 2006, Hotel Administration and Industrial & Labor Relations were the only colleges not going beyond their respective bounds for first-time freshman targets, as shown in the figures below.

Figure 3 displays fall first-time freshman enrollments from Fall 1990 to Fall 2006 in the three largest colleges. The size of the incoming freshman class in Arts & Sciences increased 13 percent from 934 students in Fall 1990 to 1,055 in Fall 2006. Engineering experienced volatility in their freshman enrollment during the early years under review. For Fall 2006, Engineering enrolled 767 freshmen. Freshman enrollments in Agriculture & Life Sciences increased by 4 percent, from 639 students in Fall 1990 to 662 students in Fall 2006.

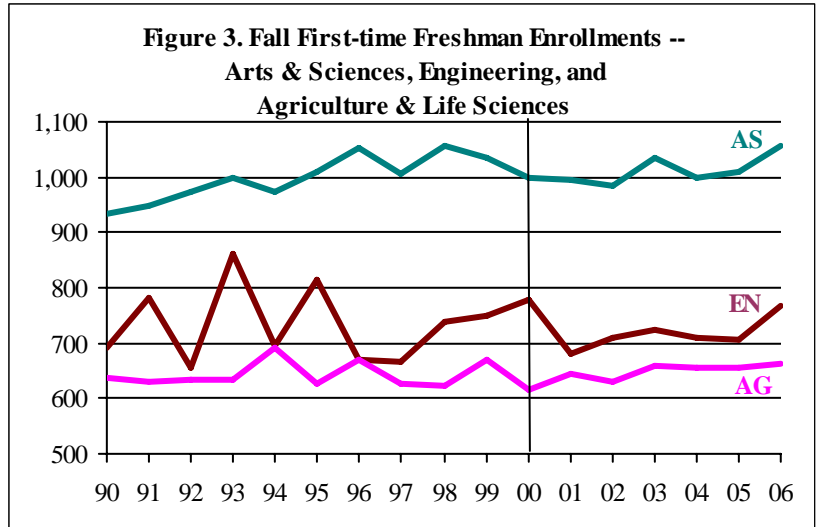
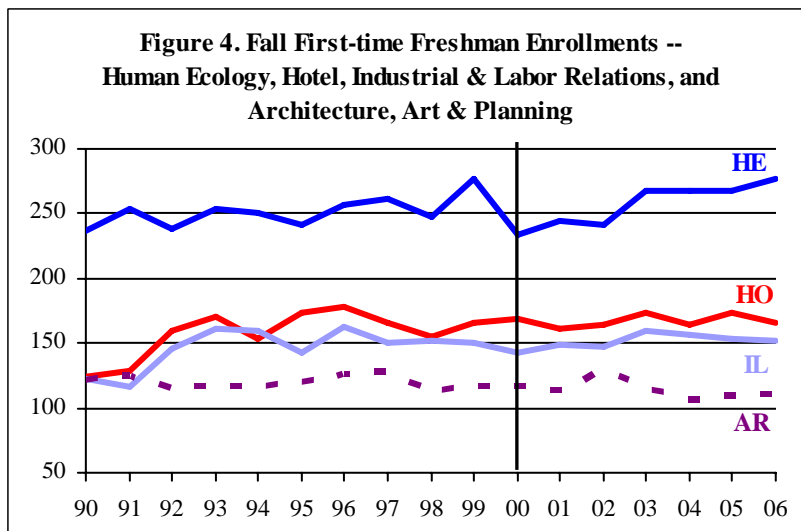


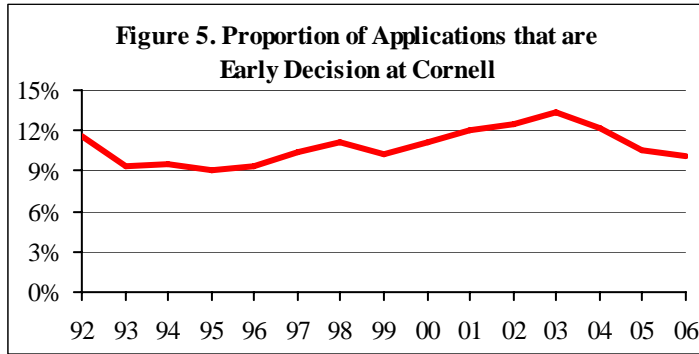
Figure 4 displays fall first-time freshman enrollments from Fall 1990 to Fall 2006 in the other four undergraduate colleges. Human Ecology experienced a 17 percent increase in freshman enrollments from Fall 1990 (237 students) to Fall 2006 (277 students). Hotel Administration increased their first-time freshmen by a total of 33 percent between Fall 1990 (124 students) and Fall 2006 (165 students). From Fall 1990 to Fall 2006, enrollments in Industrial & Labor Relations increased 25 percent (122 to 152 students respectively). During this time, it should be noted, the fall freshman enrollment target for ILR, Hotel, and Human Ecology all increased to offset the elimination of the January freshman program. Architecture, Art & Planning experienced a 9 percent decrease in freshman enrollments from Fall 1990 (121 students) to Fall 2006 (110 students) primarily as a result of



Architecture, Art & Planning experienced a 9 percent decrease in freshman enrollments from Fall 1990 (121 students) to Fall 2006 (110 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 2006, Cornell's Early Decision Program (EDP) applications have

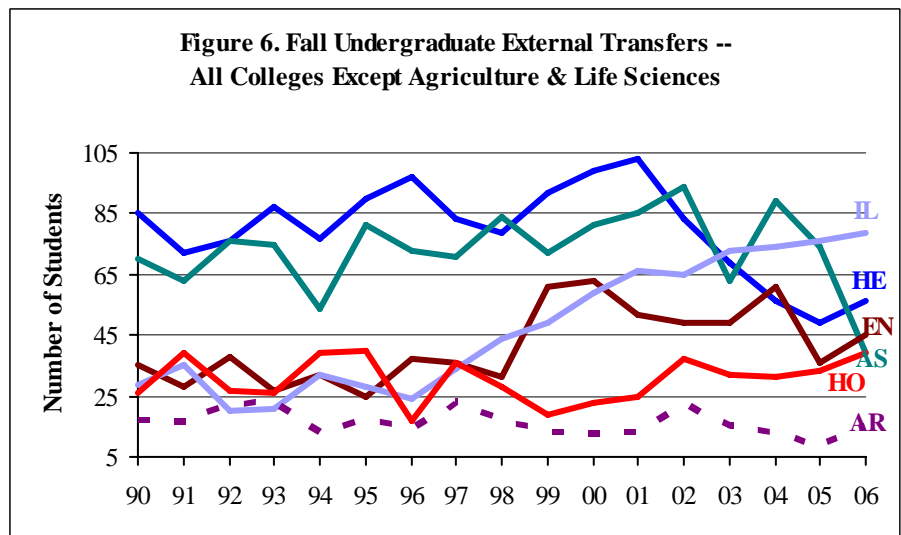


accounted for between 9 and 13 percent of all applications (see Figure 5). For the Fall 2006 entering class, 2,848 of 28,098 applicants or 10%, applied via EDP. The proportion of the entering class enrolled through EDP increased from Fall 1995 to Fall 2003, and then declined in Fall 2006 to 34 percent; in Fall 2006, of 3,188 first-time freshmen entering, 1,083 were admitted through EDP.

External transfers offer another option for maintaining a stable enrollment. Although the enrollment management process for external transfer students is not as regulated as it is for freshman students, there is still careful monitoring of external transfer enrollments. 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 has also enrolled a significant number of new external transfers. 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 2006, 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 2006, 209 out of 482 external transfers (43 percent).

For the other colleges (see Figure 6) the number of external transfers fluctuates from year to year. Industrial & Labor Relations just about tripled their external transfers from 29 in Fall 1990 to 79 in Fall 2006. Hotel Administration increased 13 students and Engineering 10 students in external transfers between Fall 1990 and Fall 2006.

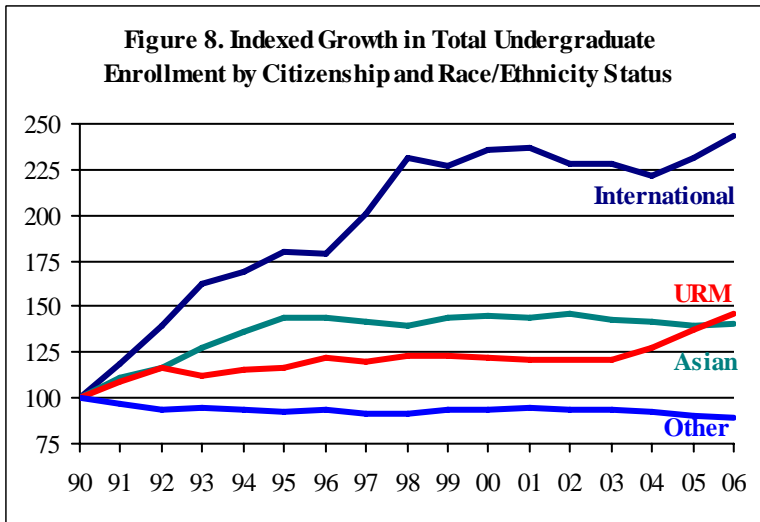
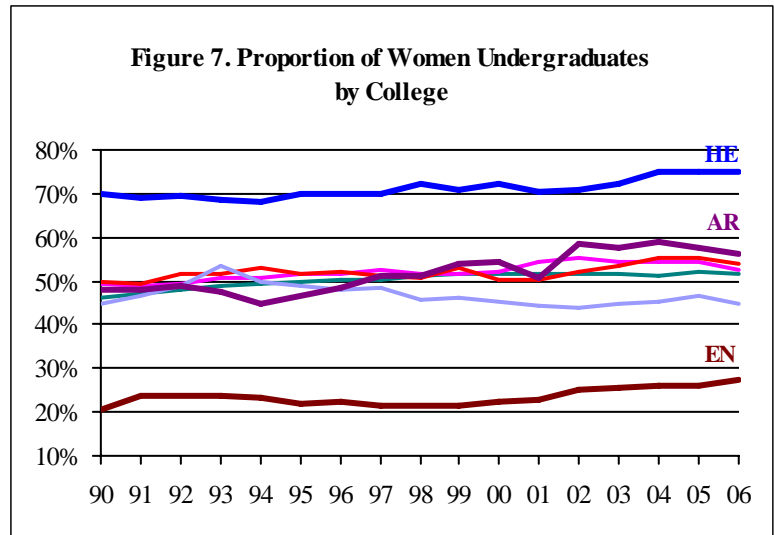


*Undergraduate Enrollment Trends -- Fall 2006*

The number of external transfers into Arts & Sciences has ranged between the current low of 39 for Fall 2006 and a high of 94 in Fall 2002. Other decreases in external transfer enrollment from Fall 1990 to Fall 2006 occurred in Human Ecology (-29 students) and Architecture, Art & Planning (-2 students).

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 2002 where it remains at the percentage. 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 2006. In Engineering, undergraduate women have increased from 20 to 28 percent with two of those percentage points occurring between Fall 2005 and Fall 2006. The most significant increase in the proportion of women in any single college occurred in Architecture, Art & Planning with an 8 percent increase from Fall 1990 to Fall 2006.



The proportion of minorities among the undergraduate population<sup>3</sup> has grown from 22 percent in Fall 1990 to 32 percent in Fall 2006. Among individual minority groups, the largest increase during this period has been among Asian American students, growing from 1,559 in Fall 1990 to 2,184 in Fall 2004. The proportion of underrepresented minorities (URM)<sup>4</sup> grew by 46 percent from

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

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

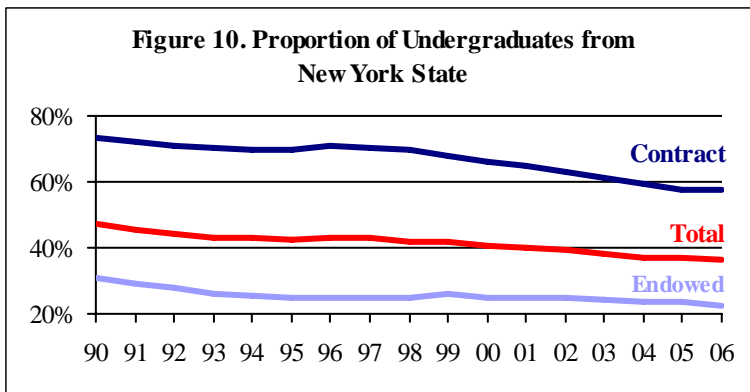
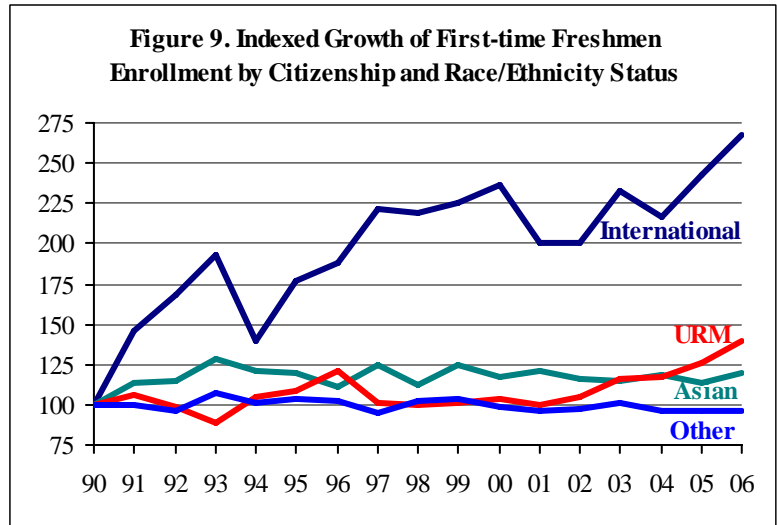


*Undergraduate Enrollment Trends -- Fall 2006*

Fall 1990 to Fall 2006 (1,218 to 1,775 students respectively). The largest increase among URM students during this period was among Hispanic Americans with an increase of 161 additional students (584 in Fall 1990 to 745 in Fall 2006), followed by African American students with an increase of 62 students between Fall 1990 and Fall 2006, and Native American students (40 in Fall 1990 to 64 in Fall 2006). For all other U.S. citizens (Caucasians and those who elected not to designate race/ethnicity information), enrollments declined 11 percent from 9,586 in Fall 1990 to 8,538 in Fall 2006. Over this same time-period, the enrollment of international students increased significantly from 438 to 1,065 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 with at least one URM category were defaulted to “other or not reported.” For total undergraduate enrollment, this new category has increased from 24 students in Fall 2002, to 284 students in Fall 2006.

For first-time freshmen, Figure 9 shows the proportion of underrepresented minorities (URM) has grown 40 percent from Fall 1990 to Fall 2006 (346 to 485 students respectively). With the exception of the new multi-racial URM category and Native Americans, between Fall 1990 and Fall 2006 the traditional categories of URM increased. African Americans increased 19 percent (31 students) followed by Hispanic Americans at 4 percent (7 students). In the other categories, from Fall 1990 to Fall 2006, Asian Americans increased 19 percent (85 students) and international students increased from 99 students in Fall 1990 to 265 students in Fall 2006. Caucasians and those not reporting race/ethnicity declined by 4 percent (1,985 to 1,913 students from Fall 1990 to Fall 2006, respectively).



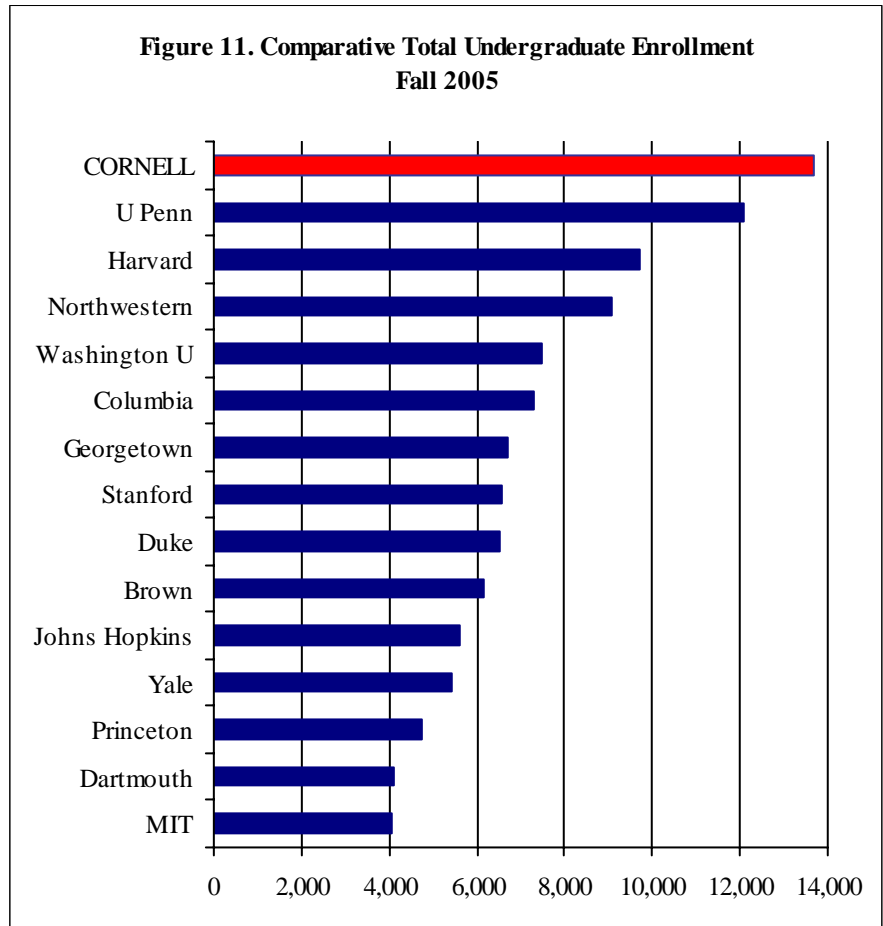
As part of planned recruitment efforts, the undergraduate student population has become more geographically diverse in both the Endowed and Contract colleges. Although the proportion of undergraduates from New York State has been declining (see Figure 10), they still account for the

largest share of students in both the Endowed and Contract colleges. From Fall 1990 to Fall 2006, 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 from 1 to 2 percent respectively; and enrollments from the West and out of the country have increased between 4 and 5 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**

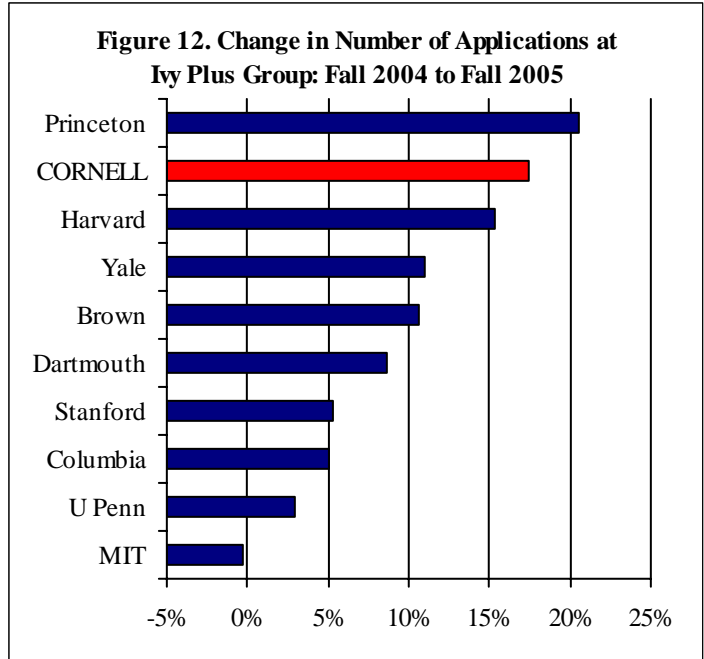
This section focuses on comparisons between Cornell and many of the “admissions overlap group” institutions for which we have a source of comparative data.<sup>5</sup> As Figure 11 makes clear,

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 or 22 percent of total undergraduate enrollment, our closest Ivy comparator, the University of Pennsylvania, has an entering class of approximately 2,400 or 21 percent of their total undergraduate enrollment. Dartmouth and MIT are admitting closer to 1,000 new freshmen each year and that accounts for a quarter of their undergraduate enrollment total.

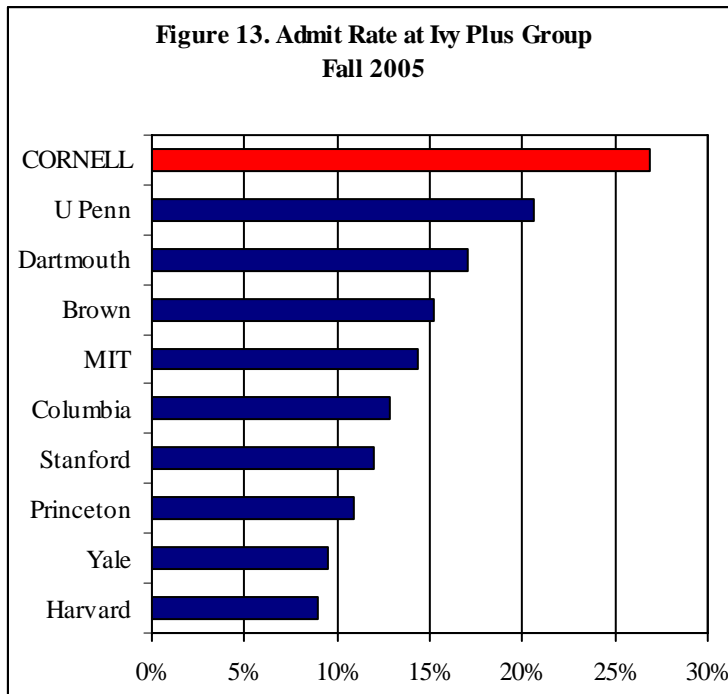


<sup>5</sup>Fall 2005 comparative data is the most recent information available. The 2006 data will not be available until late in the spring 2007 semester.

As Figure 12 displays, eight 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 2004 and Fall 2005. MIT stayed relatively stable while Yale experienced a 1 percent decline in applications. Cornell experienced a 17 percent increase from 20,822 to 24,452 applications over this one-year period. This increase corresponds with Cornell's accepting the Common Application.

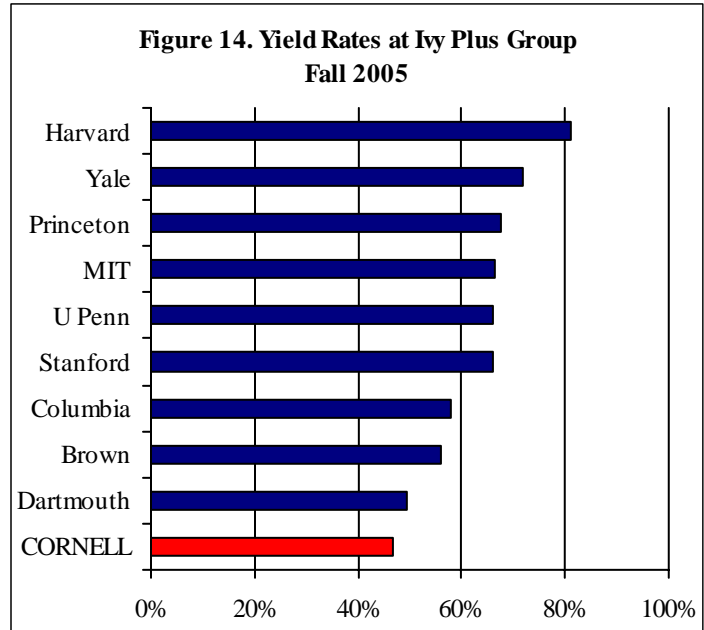


Cornell's admit rate – the proportion of students offered admission divided by the total number of applicants – decreased 2 percent from 29 percent in Fall 2004 to 27 percent for Fall 2005. Of our Ivy Plus Group comparators, all experienced a decrease in admit rate from Fall 2004 to Fall 2005. Harvard, Princeton, MIT, and Dartmouth decreased by 2 percent. Stanford and the University of Pennsylvania decreased 1 percent while Columbia and Yale experienced marginal decreases. The changes depicted are often directly and inversely related to the changes in the number of applications displayed in Figure 12 (an increase in applications typically leads to a decrease in admit rates).



Cornell's 27 percent admit rate for Fall 2005 is the highest in the Ivy Plus Group, which otherwise ranges from a low of 9 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 (21 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 26 percent for the incoming Class of 2010.

Figure 14 displays the Fall 2005 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 2004 and Fall 2005, Cornell’s yield rate decreased by 3 percent while Yale’s yield rate increased by 4 percent within this one-year period. Among these comparators, yield rates for Fall 2005 ranged from 47 percent at Cornell to 81 percent at Harvard.



### 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 freshman target becomes the goal due to the implementation of the undergraduate enrollment management guidelines.

External transfer applications for fall semester admission has decreased 6 percent during the period from 1990 to 2006. During this same period, the number of external transfer acceptances increased 11 percent, with yield increasing 8 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 fall freshman enrollment plan in place, the need for specific external transfer enrollment targets is critical in order to maintain optimal overall enrollments. A long-range enrollment plan for external transfers that will enhance recruitment efforts and establish enrollment targets by college is being developed. A central part of this plan is the Pathway to Success program, a transfer admissions program funded, in part, from a grant that Cornell received from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. Cornell was the only Ivy League school and one of only eight institutions in the nation to receive this grant. The Pathway to Success program was initiated in June 2006 and involves a partnership with Monroe Community College and Morrisville State College to increase the transfer of students from these schools to Cornell University..

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.

## **Conclusion**

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.

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.