



State of Connecticut
Department of Higher Education

Facts

The Gender Gap at Connecticut Colleges and Universities

The disparity in the college enrollment and graduation of women and men is persistent and troubling but not unique to Connecticut. Across the country, women college students outnumber men by almost 2.6 million and they earn 1.4 times more degrees. A snapshot of gender across colleges in Connecticut reveals the following findings.

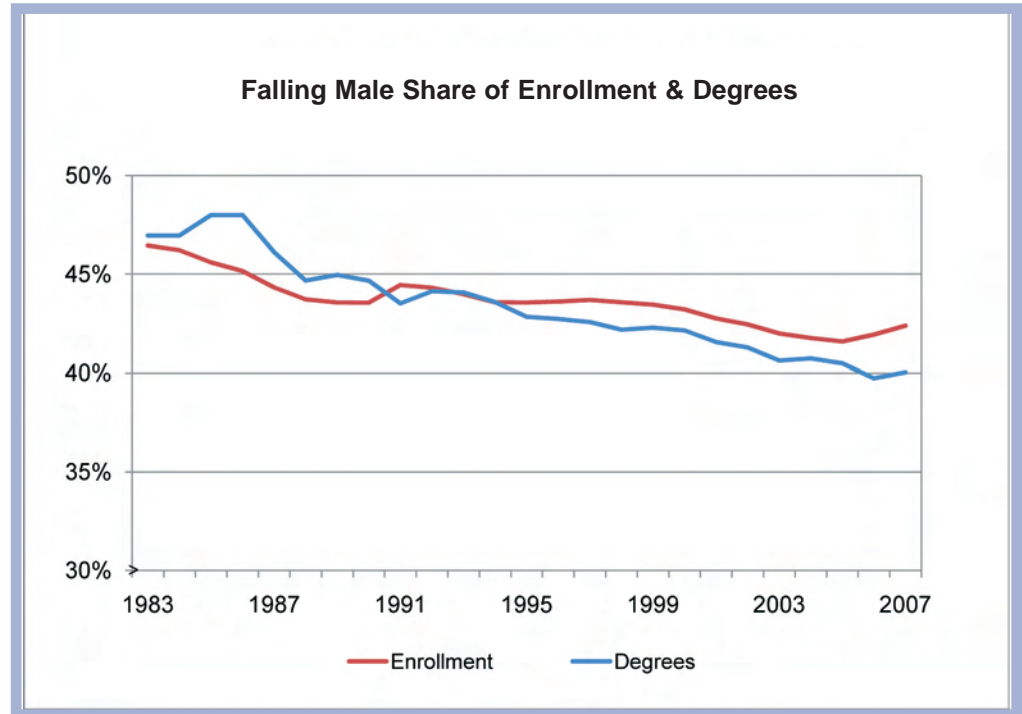
The gap is long-standing.

1. Men first became a minority of college students in the late 1970s.

- Men's share of Connecticut's college enrollment dropped from 46% in 1983 to 42% in 2002 and since then has remained virtually unchanged. Their drop-off in degrees has been even more pronounced, down from 47% to 40% in 2007.

2. The gap cannot be explained by demographics.

- The decline in male participation does not reflect gender imbalances in the segment of the population that supplies most of our college students; the gender ratio for those aged 15-34 is about 50-50.
- Similarly, the decline cannot be attributed to gender differences in race or income. Despite the fact that men under age 15 represent slightly more than half (51%) of the minority population and those living in poverty, women are the majority of every racial/ethnic group of college students except for non-resident aliens.



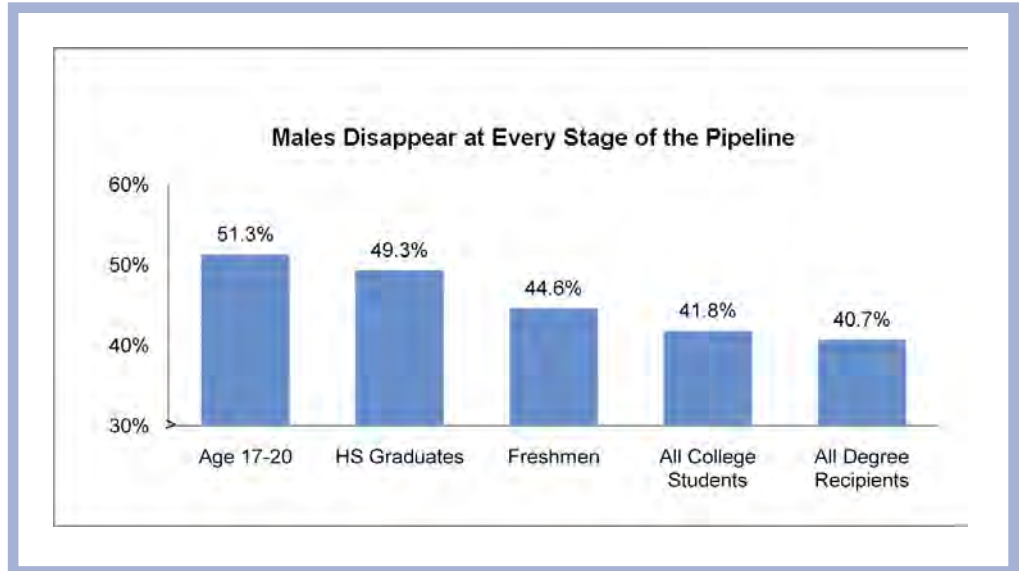
3. Men disappear at every point along the educational pipeline.

- Even when they do enroll in college, men are much less likely than women to graduate. Men start out at just over 51% of those aged 17-20, drop to under 45% of first-time freshmen and end up at less than 41% of college degree recipients.
- The probability of men going to college at all has been falling at the same time as it has been rising for women. Almost 9% of the adult female population attends college compared to less than 7% in 1976.
- Among young adults, the gender gap in college attendance rates (CT college students under age 25 as a percent of persons aged 16-24 in CT population) has widened from about two percentage points to more than seven over the last 20 years. Rates now stand at about 24% for young men compared to 31% for women.
- Even among older men (aged 25-59), there has been a recent and pronounced drop in participation, while the rate among adult women has remained flat.

- Connecticut is experiencing a marked shift in female goal orientation, with women steadily increasing their share of degrees in fields once reserved for men such as the physical sciences, and engineering and technology.

4. Little is known about what men are doing instead of going to college.

- Available data do not explain what is happening to these seemingly “missing” men. Changes in participation in other sectors likely to “enroll” people under age 25 such as active-duty military, trade schools and state/federal prisons are not enough to explain the gaps. Even more puzzling are the declining workforce participation rates of young males. Nationally, the 15 percentage point lead young males held over young females in workforce participation in the late 1970s (73% vs. 58%) has narrowed to less than five points in recent years (64% vs 59%).



5. The gap is not likely to disappear soon.

- Looking to the future, there are few indications that the collegiate gender gap will soon vanish. In fact, there are several gender difference theories evolving that may drive a widening divide: women are reaching parity with and/or outpacing men in many areas of academic preparation; women are increasing work expectations and marrying later; and men tend to exhibit higher incidences of behavioral problems affecting the ability to succeed in school.
- As Connecticut’s economic survival depends on the participation of a full, highly educated workforce, a clearer understanding is needed of what underlies this potential “lost gender” and what steps can be taken to reverse these trends.