

Gender and the Demographic Cliff



Tim Dedeaux, Ph.D.
Pearl River Community College
tdedeaux@prcc.edu

Overview and Agenda

1. What is the Demographic Cliff?
2. How is this affecting Mississippi specifically?
3. How does this fit in with previous enrollment declines?
4. How does gender fit into this?
5. Discussion, Questions, and Wrap-Up
6. Notes and Resources

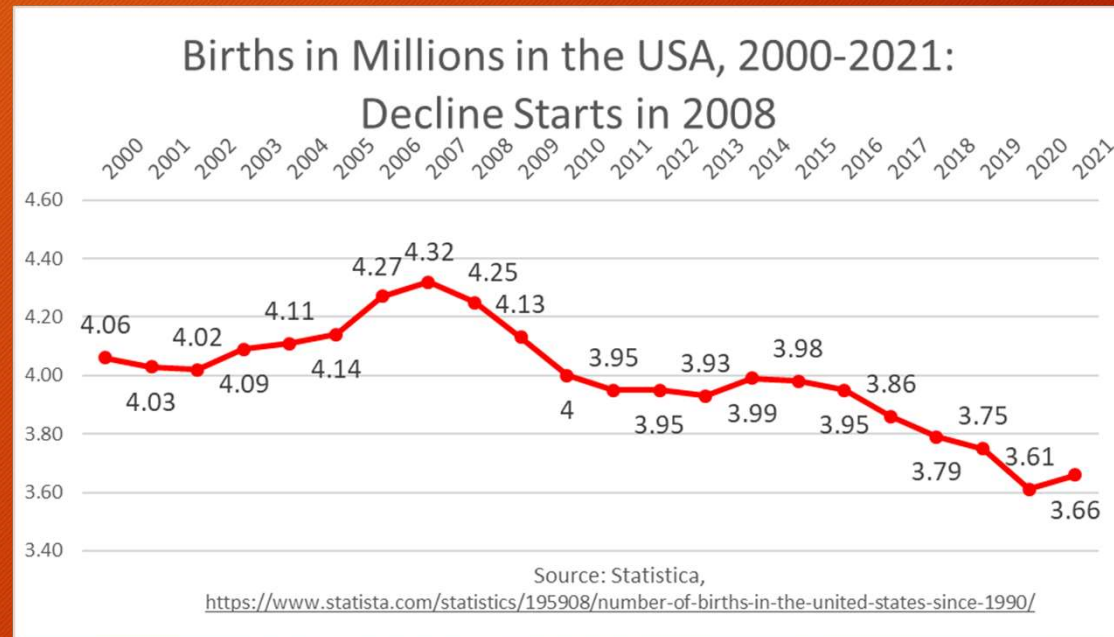
What is the Demographic Cliff?

- The number of college freshman age students is about to drop off substantially.
- Mississippi isn't immune to this nationwide trend.
- Gen Z was a large generation, but Gen Alpha is much smaller
- Economic conditions are largely responsible

Why is this happening?

The birth rate went down during the housing crisis, starting in 2008, but more importantly, it *never went back up*.

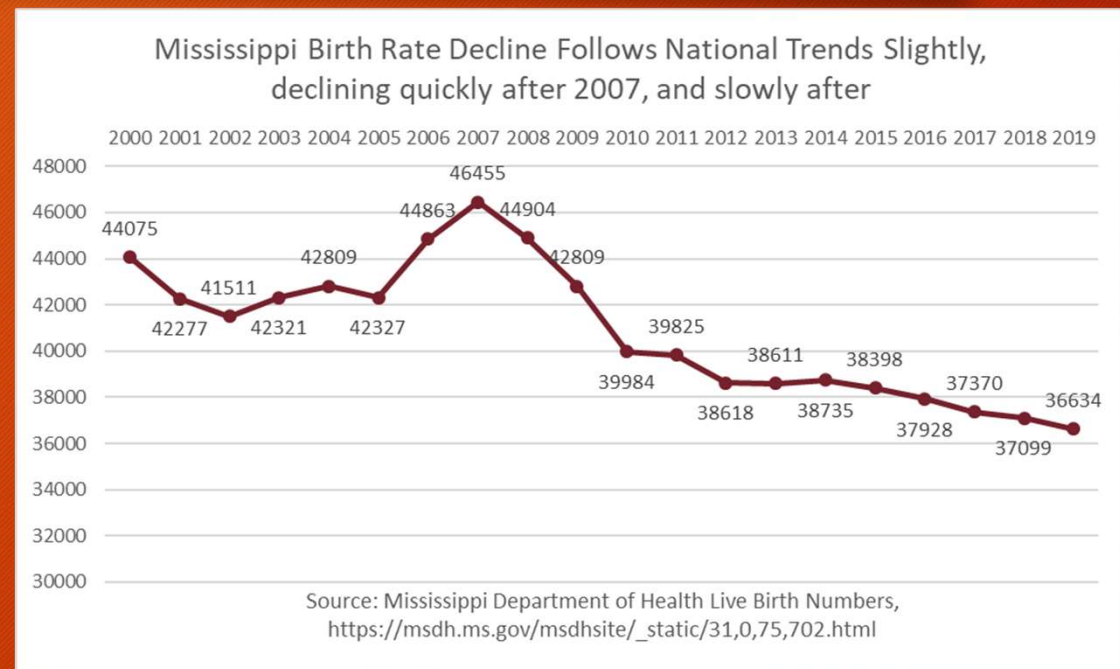
While there are still ups and downs and fluctuations, the new normal is over 10% lower than before.



What about Mississippi?

Mississippi is a rural state with more traditional values ... but that doesn't mean anything in the face of major economic change. The same pattern happened here.

In fact, our drop was even greater, about 15%.



What About Mississippi?

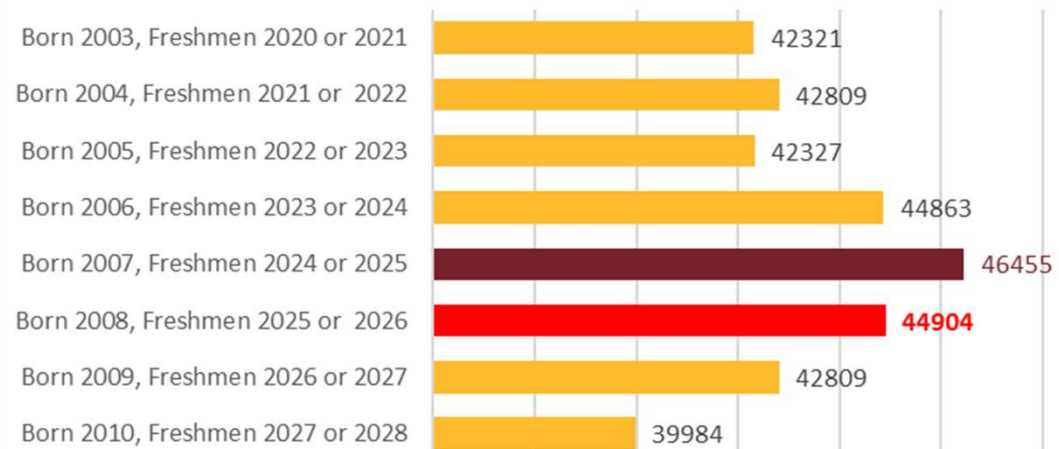
- The number isn't going back up
- Even if the next year's number of birth surges forward, we're still looking at 13 years of lower numbers.
- There just aren't going to be as many Generation Alpha kids as there are Generation Z kids, in Mississippi and the U.S. as a whole.
- We're going to have to find a way to move forward with fewer freshman-age students.

When Will this Hit Us?

We'll *at most* see one more year of population increases (students born in 2007 and entering in Fall 2025)

After that, it's all downhill.

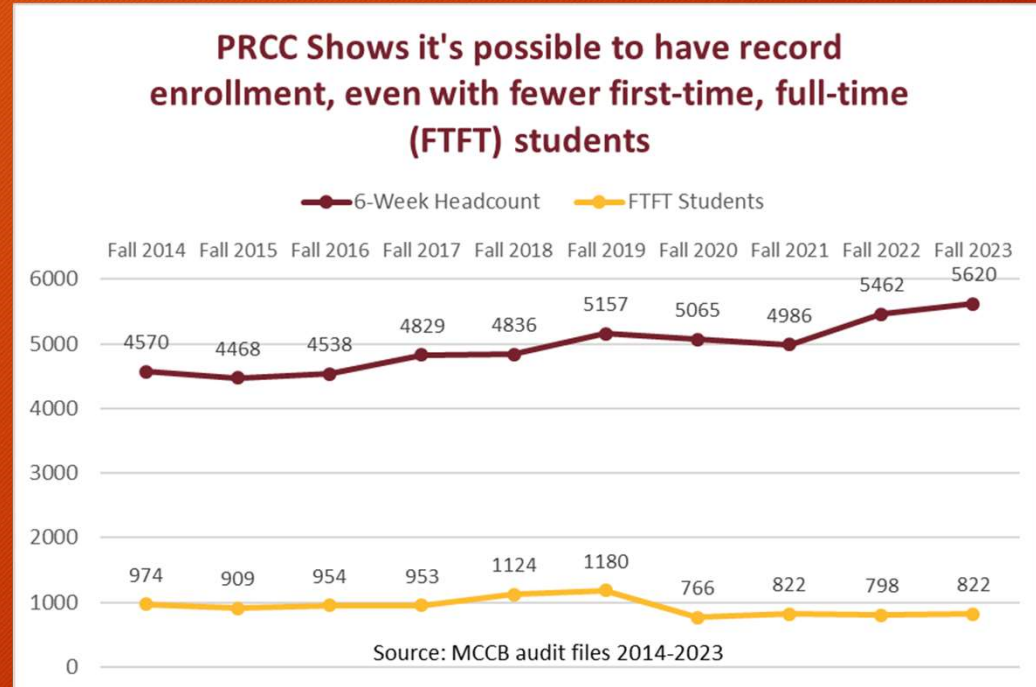
Predicted Freshman Age Population Drop-Off Will Reach Us By Fall 2026



We Don't Have to Fall Off the Cliff

It is possible to increase enrollment, even to record levels, even with fewer first-time, full-time (FTFT) students.

This is audited data. Internal data shows Fall 2024 continuing this trend.



Past and Ongoing Enrollment Declines

- Since 2010, College Enrollment has declined in Mississippi and Nationwide, dropping by 14.6% nationwide (NCES, 303.70).
- The Mississippi Community College System is down 24.8%, from 80,765 to 60,717 students, from Spring 2010 to 2025, (MCCCB Preliminary Enrollment Master, Spring 2025).

Why? Money.

- Tuition is up, but Grants are Down, and that means Debt.
- Often crushing debt that delays marriage, home ownership, and having children.
- After the Housing Crash of 2009, spending that kind of money just to fight for entry level jobs just didn't make sense for some students.

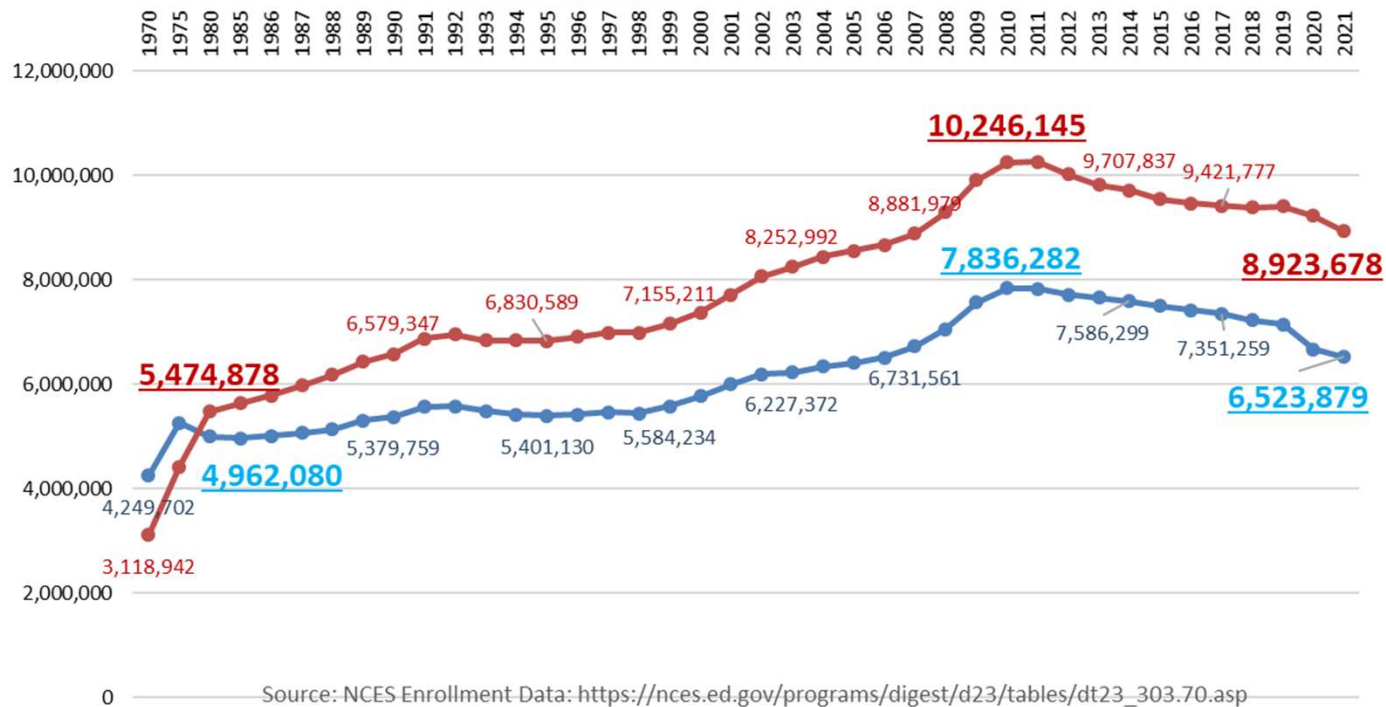
How Will This Affect Your Reporting?

- You'll be getting lower numbers
- It will be slow enough that it probably won't set off a massive string of "Fatal Errors" in IPEDS
- You're going to have to get used to being the bearer of bad news
- It helps if you can find some good news
- But someone has to say it.

Gender and the Demographic Cliff

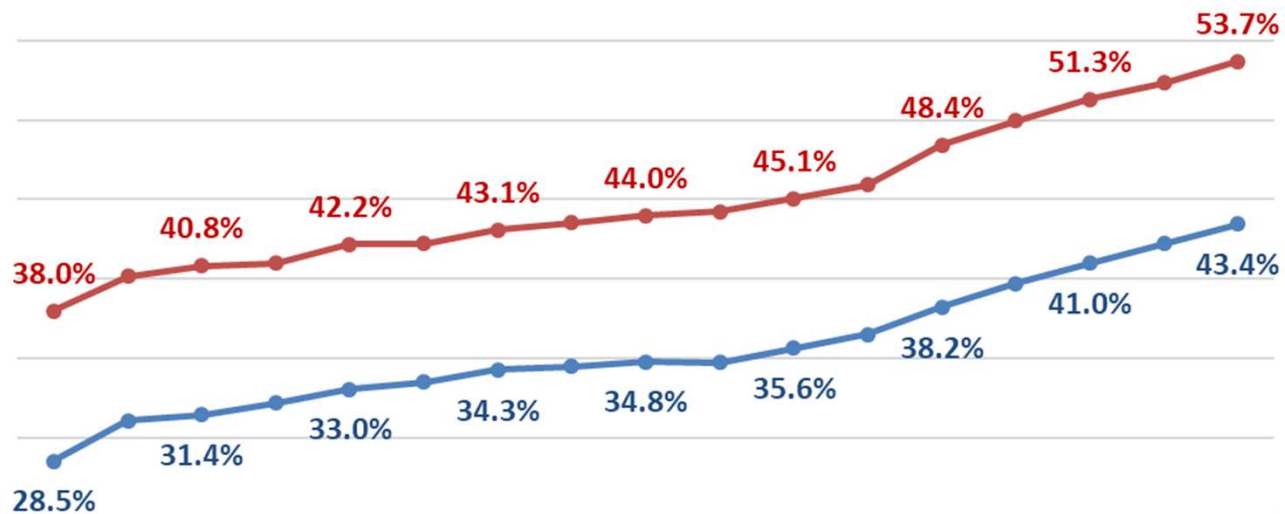
- Prior to 1980, more men attended & graduated college. Since then, women have outpaced men substantially.
- According to NCES data, women earned 62.8% of associate's, 58.5% of bachelor's, 62.6% of master's, and 57.0% of doctorate degrees as of 2021-22 (2023).
- According to the National Student Clearinghouse, undergraduate men are 7.2% less likely to graduate than women (2023).

Women Passed **Men** in College Enrollment in 1980. All Enrollment Has Decreased Since 2010, but **Men's (-16.7%)** Decreased More than **Women's (-12.9%)**. As of 2021, **Men are 42.2%** of Students



Women Have Consistently Higher Four-Year Graduation Rates than Men, Though Both Have Increased Since 1996

1996 entry 2000 entry 2002 entry 2003 entry 2004 entry 2005 entry 2006 entry 2007 entry 2008 entry 2009 entry 2010 entry 2011 entry 2012 entry 2013 entry 2014 entry 2015 entry 2016 entry



Source: NCES Table 326.10

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_326.10.asp

Gender Disparities and Programs

- There are a number of programs to encourage women to participate in traditionally male-dominated fields.
- But college itself is becoming a female-dominated field. Outreach actions to bring men back to college could help blunt the effect of the shrinking age cohort, *so long as they do not alienate women*.
- This is especially true at many HBCUs, where men make up one-third of the students (The Feed, 2023).

Why?

- Men are graduating high school at a lower rate than women (Reeves, Buckner, & Smith, 2021).
- Research says that girls do better than boys starting early in K12, and suggests this is due in part to non-cognitive skills possibly related to maturation rates (Weeks, 2013).
- To some degree, outreach efforts to increase women's participation in college have been highly successful, and because men's participation in college was taken as a given for so long, no such messages were sent to men (Marcus, 2024).

Why Should We Care?

- Our colleges and universities serve our communities and society. This is especially true of community colleges.
- Men are about half our community, and their situation strongly affects the other half.
- Bringing men back without alienating women could blunt the impact of the demographic cliff substantially

How do we recruit more men without alienating women?

- Looking for ideas to increase enrollment and completion?
Ask male graduates.
- Each college has its own culture & character.
- For example, the University of Montana sends emails to men highlighting outdoor recreational activities like hunting, rafting, and hiking, and majors like forestry.
- Colleges can highlight intramural sports, extracurricular clubs, and majors that may appeal to men.

Approaches to Try

- Research suggests that entrepreneurship programs appeal to high school boys and college men. The University of Vermont has had success with this (Marcus, 2024).
- Research shows that displays of school spirit positively affect young men's reaction to a college. UVM encourages its faculty, staff, and students to wear school colors on Fridays, the days it hosts most of its high school campus tours. (Marcus, 2024).

Approaches to Try

- As we recruit more women into formerly male-dominated majors like Engineering or Computing, perhaps we should try to recruit more men into formerly female-dominated majors like nursing and education (Marcus, 2024)
- **A stronger expectation of men attending college.** I've seen families where the daughters went to college and the sons didn't. Same parents, same families. There are different cultural gender expectations, and we have to act to correct them as colleges if we want things to change.

My Personal Experiences and Reflections

- Many young men here don't like school. They are *done* by the time high school is over.
- Recruiting men later is harder because culturally it's often considered shameful for a man to let his wife support him while he goes back to school, while the reverse is not true.
- Many young men may be recruitable into a 1 or 1.5 year certificate program with no academic components, when they'd simply refuse to do anything requiring algebra or writing essays.

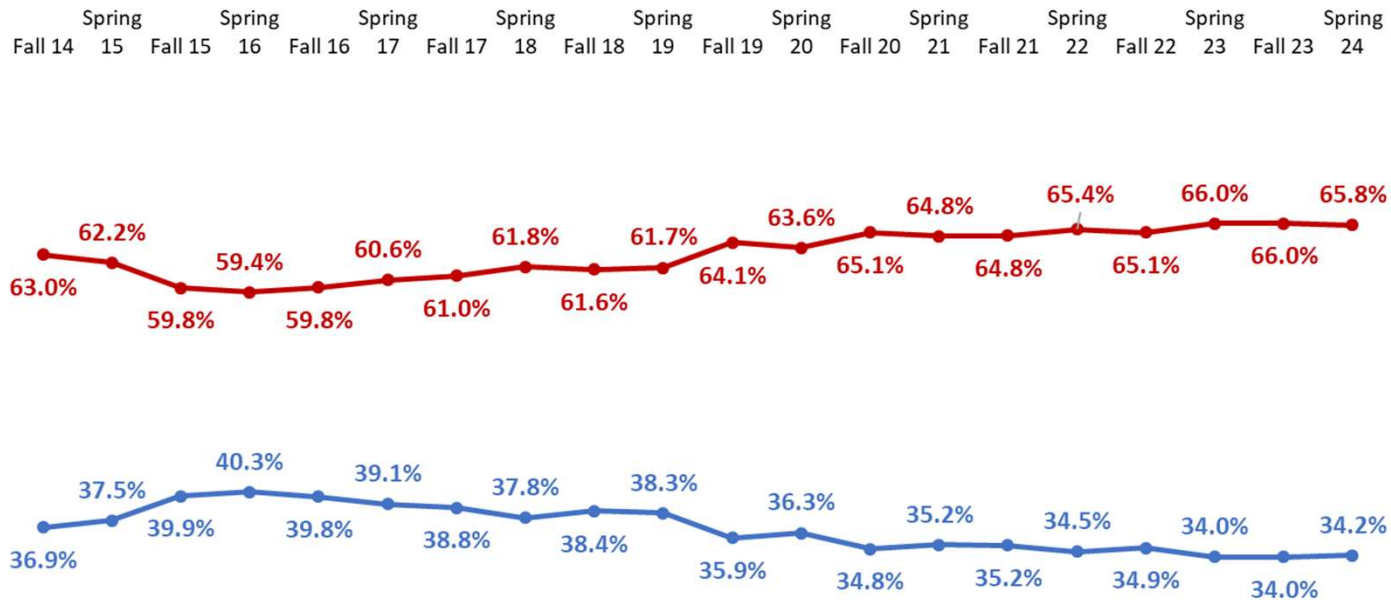
Increasing Men's Retention

- Men are often less likely to join extracurriculars or clubs, and less likely to seek help.
- The lack of connection is well-known among U.S. men.
- Young men are often less experienced at self-advocacy and asking for help
- Young men often have fewer friends and social support
- Mentorships and other methods to build connections can help (Marcus, 2024).

This is a National and a Local Problem

- Even though PRCC has shown great growth in overall numbers over the last decade, men have still decreased as a share of the overall student body (Source: MCCB audit files).
- In Fall 2014, we had 1,686 men. In Fall 2023, we had 1,913, an increase of 227, or 13.5%.
- In the same period, we went from 2,878 women to 3,707, an increase of 829, or 28.8%.

Women Are Consistently **Over 60%** of the PRCC Student Body, Fall 2014-Spring 2024, as **Men's** Percentage Trends Downward.



Source: MCCB Audit Files, Fall 2014-Spring 2024

PRCC's Actions - QEP

- Our last QEP focused on first-year student orientation, advising, assigning faculty advisors, and courses to connect students with college resources.
- Our new QEP is focusing on student wellness, including mental, emotional, and social, and bringing the faculty in to further improve connection and help overcome difficulties that can lead to stopping out.
- This seems to help overall retention and enrollment, but hasn't specifically addressed the gender gap.

Discussion and Questions

- Any Questions?
- Now I have a question:
- What are your colleges doing about this?
 - The Demographic Cliff?
 - And the Gender Gap?

Notes and Resources: Demographic Cliff

Carey, Kevin (2022) The Incredible Shrinking Future of College. *Vox Magazine*.

<https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/23428166/college-enrollment-population-education-crash>

Mississippi State Department of Health (2023). Mississippi birth numbers, 2000-2019.

https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/31,0,75,702.html

Statista (2023). Number of Births in the United States from 1990 to 2021 (in millions).

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/195908/number-of-births-in-the-united-states-since-1990/>

Schroeder, Ray (2021) A Second Demographic Cliff Adds to Urgency for Change. *Inside Higher Ed*.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/blogs/online-trending-now/second-demographic-cliff-adds-urgency-change>

Notes and Resources: Gender and Enrollment

The Feed (2023). At many HBCUs, men represent just one third of undergraduates. Georgetown University. <https://feed.georgetown.edu/access-affordability/at-many-hbcus-men-represent-just-one-third-of-undergraduates/>

The Feed (2024). Seeking more male students, colleges tailor outreach, programming. Georgetown University. <https://feed.georgetown.edu/access-affordability/seeking-more-male-students-colleges-tailor-outreach-programming/>

Marcus, Jon (2024). Universities and colleges search for ways to reverse the decline in the ranks of male students. *The Hechinger Report*. <https://hechingerreport.org/universities-and-colleges-search-for-ways-to-reverse-the-decline-in-the-ranks-of-male-students/>

National Student Clearinghouse (2023). Completing College National and State Reports. https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Completions_Report_2023.pdf

National Student Clearinghouse (2022). Completing College National and State Reports : <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/PersistenceRetention2022.pdf>

Notes and Resources: Gender and Enrollment

NCES: National Center for Education Statistics (2023). Table 318.10 Degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by level of degree and sex of student.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_318.10.asp

NCES: National Center for Education Statistics: Table 303.70 Undergraduate Enrollment.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_303.70.asp

NCES: National Center for Education Statistics: Table 326.10 Undergraduate Graduation.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_326.10.asp

Reeves, Richard V., Buckner, Eliana, and Smith, Ember (2021). The Unreported Gender Gap in High School Graduation Rates. *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-unreported-gender-gap-in-high-school-graduation-rates/>

Reeves, R. V. and Smith, E. (2021). The Male College Crisis Is Not Just in Enrollment, But Completion. *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-male-college-crisis-is-not-just-in-enrollment-but-completion/>

Additional Resources on Gender

Ford, Celia (2024). Men are struggling. Here's how your philanthropy can help. *Vox*.
<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/388155/giving-tuesday-2024-men-issues-charities>

Fry, Richard (2023). Fewer young men are in college, especially at 4-year schools. *Pew Research Center*.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/12/18/fewer-young-men-are-in-college-especially-at-4-year-schools/>

Nietzel, M. T. (2024). Women Continue to Outpace Men in College Enrollment and Graduation. *Forbes*.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelt Nietzel/2024/08/07/women-continue-to-outpace-men-in-college-enrollment-and-graduation/>

Reeves, Richard and Seckler, Will (2024). Degrees of Difference: Male College Enrollment and Completion. *American Institute for Boys and Men*. <https://aibm.org/research/male-college-enrollment-and-completion/>

Statista (2023). Percentage of the U.S. population who have completed four years of college or more from 1940 to 2022, by gender. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/184272/educational-attainment-of-college-diploma-or-higher-by-gender/>

Thompson, L. (2024). Where are the Men? A Look at the Higher Ed Gender Gap. *SRQ*.
https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2024-03-23/23882_Where-are-the-Men-A-Look-at-the-Higher-Ed-Gender-Gap