



UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT TRENDS

Fall 1999

Prepared for

Cornell University's Board of Trustees
for their meeting on
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Michael Matier
mwm5@cornell.edu

and

Cathy Alvord
cja2@cornell.edu

Institutional Research and Planning
440 Day Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853-2801
607-255-7540

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Undergraduate Enrollment Objectives

There continue to be three overarching objectives that drive policy development and decision making as it relates to managing undergraduate enrollment on the Ithaca campus:

1. That we continue to enhance the selectivity of our undergraduate student population;
2. That we continue to enhance the diversity of the undergraduate student population while maintaining access to a Cornell education; and
3. That we curtail additional growth in the on-campus undergraduate student population in order to stabilize overall enrollments.

For the last several years, the institution has had an operational maximum total on-campus undergraduate enrollment target of 13,000 students. As indicated below we have not been able to stay under that maximum target.

Having more than 13,000 undergraduates enrolled at any one time taxes the physical and human resources of the institution, and significant fluctuations from year to year create tensions on our teaching and infrastructure resources. Hence discussions are planned for this coming fall to determine what will be necessary to target and achieve entering first-time freshmen enrollments of 3,000 and total on-campus undergraduate enrollments of between 12,800 and 13,000. Doing so will better position the university to address both the academic and non-academic needs associated with providing the quality of undergraduate experience we desire to deliver. Equally important, doing so will make it possible to fulfill commitments in the Residential Initiative – to provide housing for all freshmen as well as to guarantee housing for all sophomores and entering transfers who so desire.

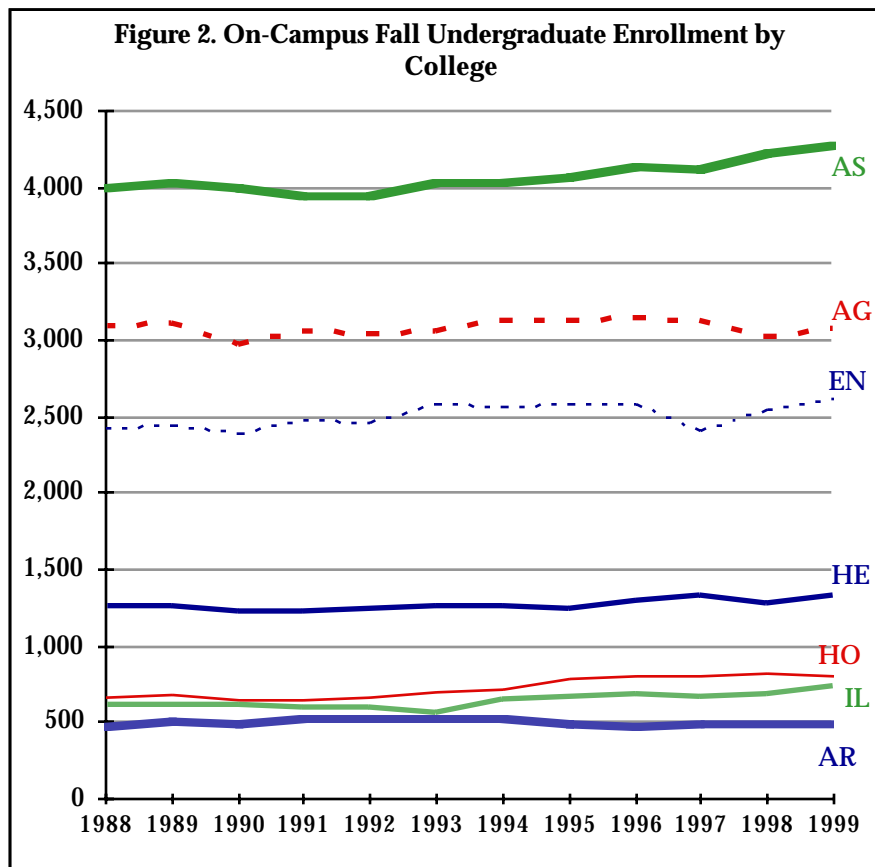
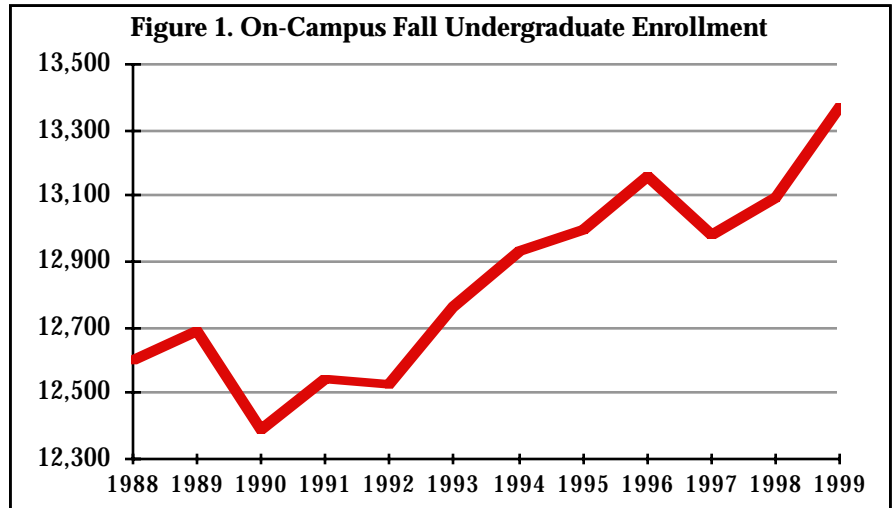
In addition to managing the total number of undergraduates on campus, it is imperative that Cornell maintain a commitment to access while continuing to enhance the diversity of the undergraduate student population. The gender, racial/ethnic, and socio-economic diversity of the student body must receive careful attention. In addition, the geographic diversity of the study body is equally important as it also enriches the educational environment. We have to pay close attention to market supply as well as an understanding with New York State that between sixty and seventy percent of undergraduates in the Statutory Colleges be New York residents.

In conjunction with the first two undergraduate enrollment objectives, continuing to enhance the selectivity of our undergraduate student population is also essential. This is linked to individual college recruitment plans, research on our prospect pool for targeted recruitment efforts in order to strategically increase the size and quality

of our applicant pool, linking admissions efforts more pointedly with the commitment programs, improving the yield on offers of admission, and increasing the proportion of the fall entering class that is admitted under the Early Decision Program.

Current Situation and Changes over Time

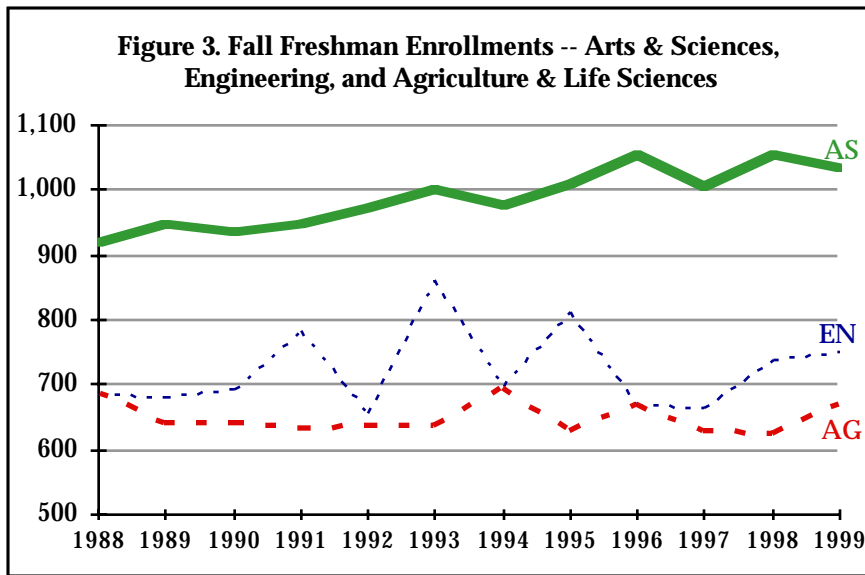
Figure 1 indicates that on-campus undergraduate enrollment has increased by 6.1 percent, or 771 students (12,603 in Fall 1988 to 13,374 in Fall 1999) during the past eleven years. Slightly more than a third of this increase (276 students) occurred between Fall 1998 and Fall 1999.



Fully two-thirds of the increase from Fall 1988 to Fall 1999 occurred in the Endowed General Purpose Colleges. Figure 2 displays that Arts & Sciences (AS) has 287 more students in Fall 1999 than in Fall 1988, Engineering (EN) 208 additional students, and Architecture, Art, & Planning (AR) has 3 more students currently than in Fall 1988. The Statutory Colleges accounted for only 4 percent of the increase from Fall 1988 to Fall 1999.

Industrial and Labor Relations (IL) increased their enrollments by 110 students over this time period, Human Ecology (HE) increased by 85 students, and Agriculture & Life Sciences (AG) experienced a marginal decrease of 16 students in their fall enrollments. The remaining enrollment changes occurred in the Hotel School (HO), with an increase of 141 students (of which 100 was planned) and the Internal Transfer Division (not pictured) where enrollments declined from 95 in Fall 1988 to 48 in Fall 1999.

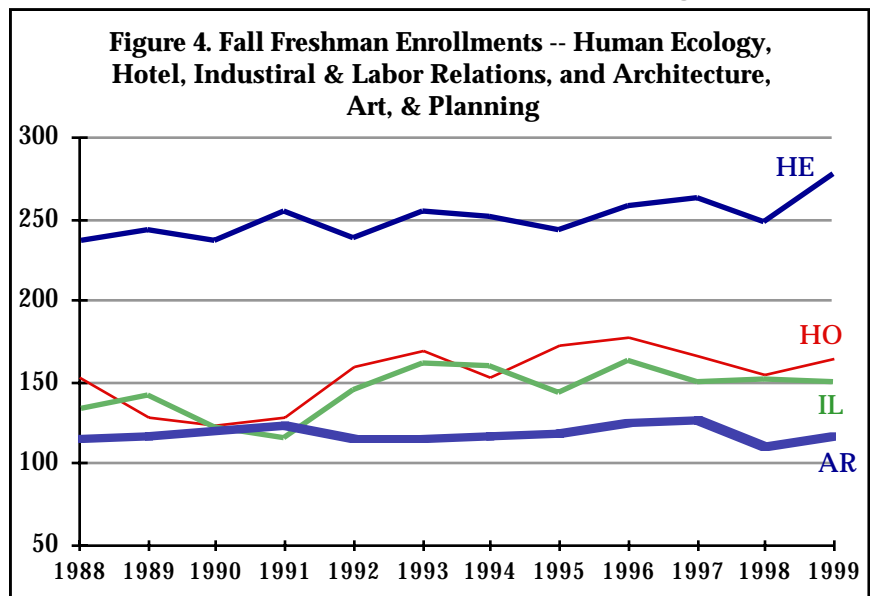
Figure 3 displays freshman enrollments from 1988 to 1999 in the three largest colleges – Arts & Sciences, Engineering, and Agriculture and Life Sciences. The size of the incoming freshman class in Arts & Sciences increased fairly steadily from 918 in Fall 1988 to 1,035 in Fall 1999, a 13 percent increase. The College of Engineering has also experienced an overall increase in the size of their freshman class of nearly 10 percent over this same time frame (from 683 to 749), but there has been much more volatility in their



number, including a high of 860 new freshmen in Fall 1993. Freshman enrollments in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences have, on the other hand, declined by a total of 2.6 percent, or 18 freshmen, between Fall 1988 (687) and Fall 1999 (669). However, note that in Fall 1988, Fall 1994, and Fall 1995, their incoming freshman were at least equal to those in the current year.

Figure 4 displays fall freshman enrollments from Fall 1988 to Fall 1998 in the other four undergraduate colleges. The College of Human Ecology has experienced a 17.4 percent increase in freshman enrollments, from 236 in Fall 1988 to 277 in Fall 1999.

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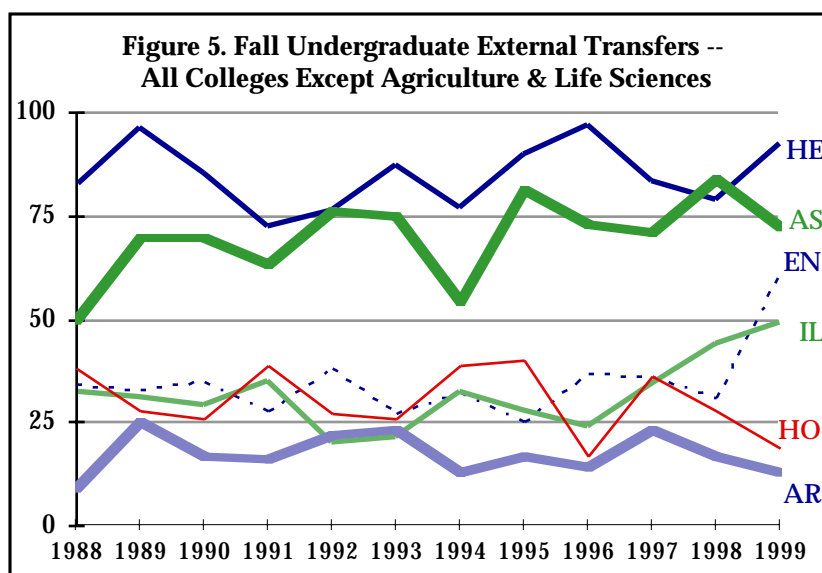


Freshman enrollments have been stable in the College of Architecture, Art, & Planning (116 in Fall 1988; 117 in Fall 1999). Although there has been only a modest increase in the number of freshmen in the School of Hotel Administration between Fall 1988 (153) and Fall 1999 (165), they have been as high as 173 in Fall 1995 and as low as 124 in Fall 1990. Similarly, freshman enrollments in the School of Industrial & Labor Relations have fluctuated from a low of 116 in Fall 1991 to a high of 162 in Fall 1996.

The majority of external transfers to Cornell arrive as sophomores or juniors. Their arrival on campus helps to maintain upperclass enrollment levels. Their entrance into the university's enrollment stream helps to compensate for the natural attrition of first-time freshmen; the small number of students who complete their bachelors degree requirements in less than four years; and the increasing number of juniors and seniors participating in off-campus programs (study abroad, Cornell in Washington, the Engineering and Hotel co-op programs, Human Ecology's urban semester in New York City, etc.).

Over the past decade between 39 and 43 percent of all incoming external transfers have annually enrolled in the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences. In Fall 1988, this amounted to 186 out of 431 external transfers (43 percent) and in Fall 1999, 195 out of 501 (39 percent).

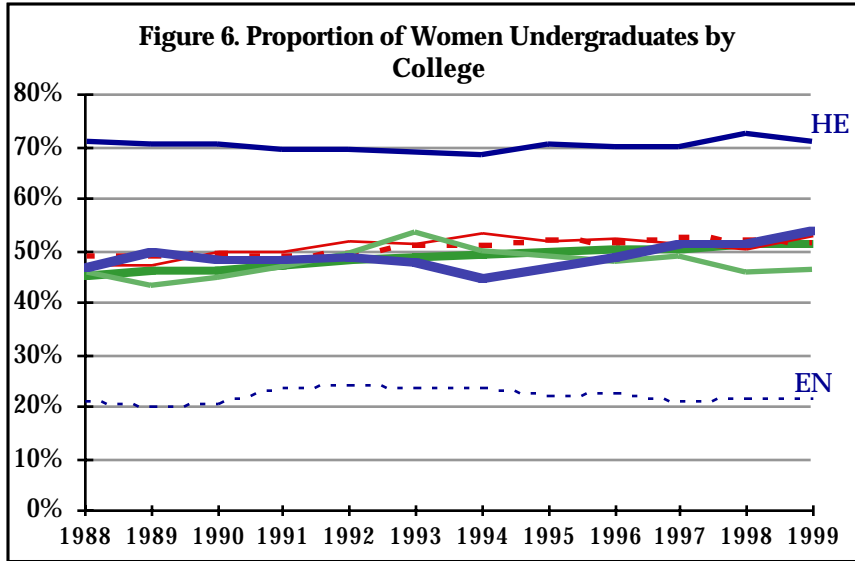
The various affiliation agreements between the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and a number of SUNY campuses are one reason why such large proportions of transfers into the university enroll in this college. For the other colleges (see Figure 5) it is evident that the number of external transfers fluctuates more year by year. Regardless, the



number of transfers into Arts & Sciences has been trending upward as part of the total on-campus enrollment planning process and they have seen an increase from 50 in Fall 1988 to 72 in Fall 1999 (44 percent). Engineering experienced nearly a doubling of their external transfers in the past year, from 31 in Fall 1998 to 61 in Fall 1999.

The proportion of women among the total undergraduate population increased from 44.2 percent in Fall 1988 to 47.4 percent in Fall 1999. As Figure 6 makes clear, however, two of the colleges have distinctly different patterns that have remained

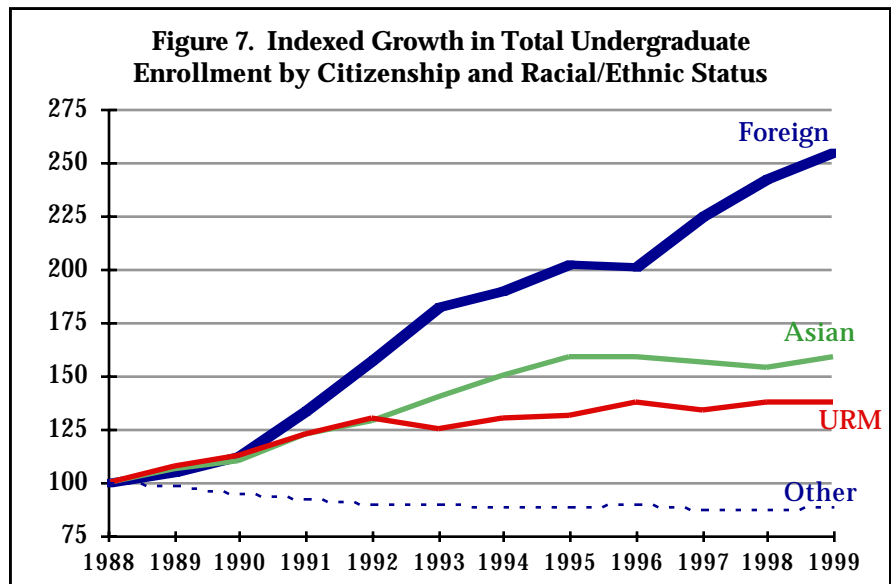
Undergraduate Enrollment Trends -- Fall 1999



virtually unchanged over this time period. The proportion of women among undergraduates in the College of Human Ecology has remained between 68 and 72 percent from Fall 1988 to Fall 1999. Conversely, women have accounted for only 20 to 24 percent of the students in the College of Engineering.

The proportion of minorities among the undergraduate population¹ has grown from 20 percent in Fall 1988 to 30 percent in Fall 1999. Figure 7 shows the proportion of underrepresented minorities (URM: Native Americans, Hispanics, and African

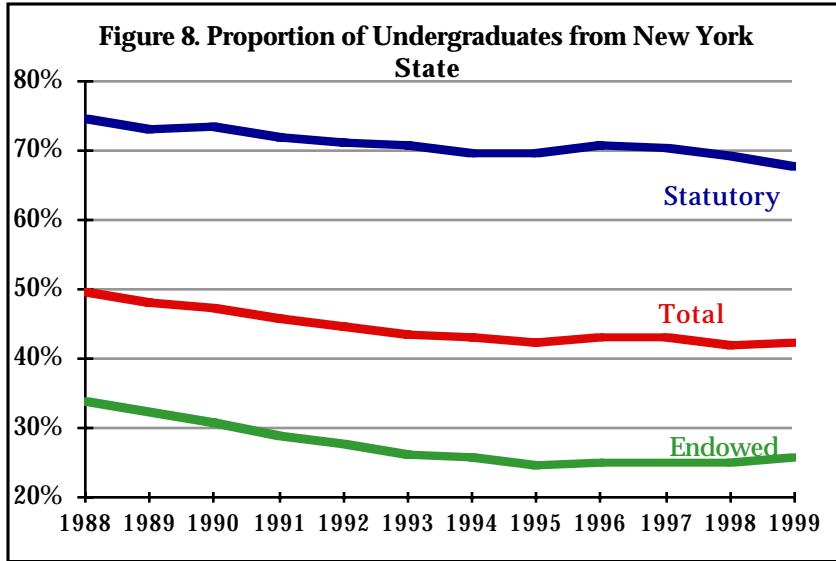
Americans) has grown by 38 percent from Fall 1988 to Fall 1999 (from 1,085 students to 1,494). The largest growth has been among Hispanics (from 507 to 811 students), followed by African Americans (535 to 609) and Native Americans (43 to 74). The number of Asian American students grew from 1,415 in Fall 1988 to 2,245 in



Fall 1999, an increase of 59 percent. For all other U.S. citizens (whites and those who elected not to designate racial/ethnic information), enrollments declined from 10,053 in Fall 1988 to 8,934 in Fall 1999, a decrease of 11 percent. Over this period, enrollment of foreign students increased 155 percent from 390 to 996.

As part of planned recruitment efforts the undergraduate student population has become more geographically diverse in both the Endowed and Statutory colleges. Although the proportion of undergraduates from New York State has been

¹Limited to U.S. citizens only; racial/ethnic data is not gathered and reported on foreign students.



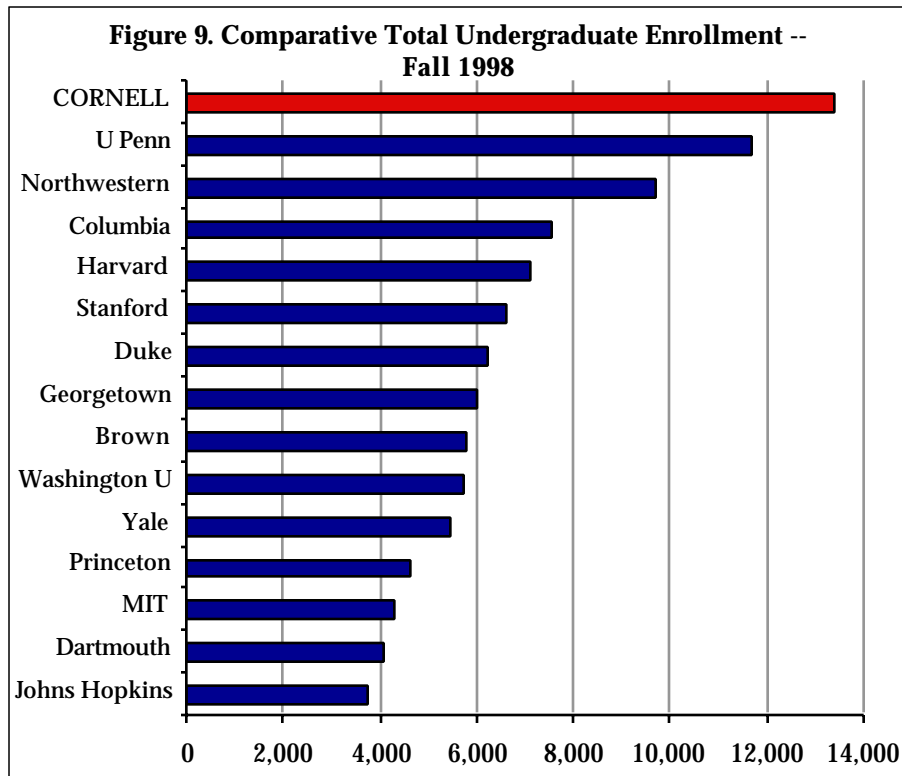
declining (see Figure 8), they still account for the largest share of students in both the Endowed and Statutory colleges. In the Endowed colleges, the proportion of students from the Middle Atlantic and Midwestern states have been stable, those coming from New England have declined, and student enrollments from the South, West, Southwest, and out of

the country have increased. The Statutory colleges have seen modest increases from all regions outside New York State with the exception of New England.

Competitor Comparisons

This section focuses on comparisons between Cornell and many of the “admissions overlap group” institutions for which we have a ready source of comparative data through our participation in the Consortium on Financing Higher Education (COFHE).²

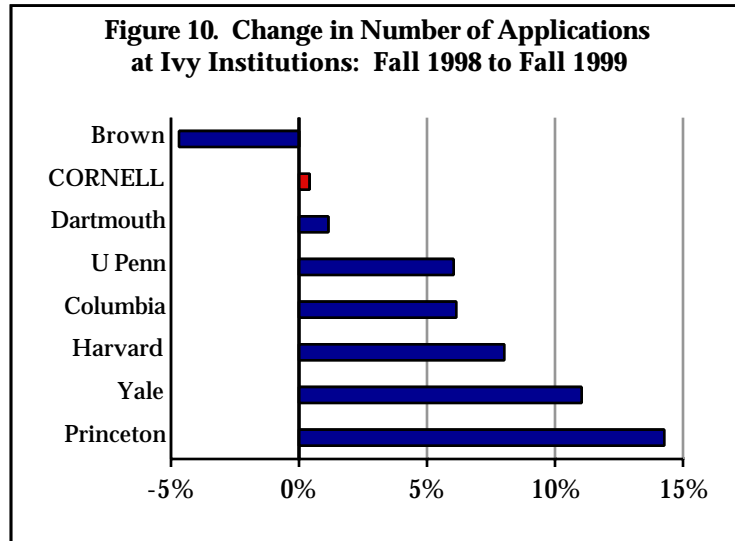
As Figure 9 makes clear, Cornell enrolls a larger number of undergraduates than any of our comparators. With the



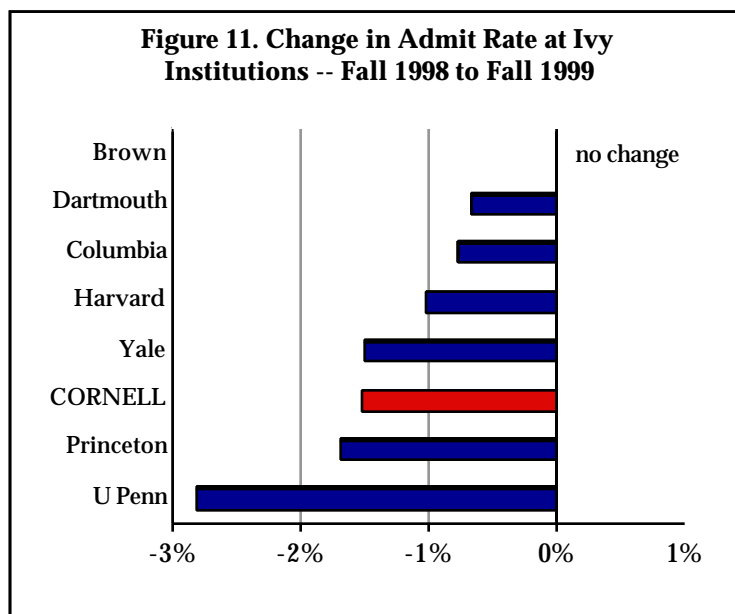
²Fall 1998 comparative data is the most recent information available from COFHE. The 1999 data from COFHE will not be available until much later in the semester. We were, however, able to gain early release of information from our Ivy League colleagues about their Fall 1999 entering freshman class.

exception of Penn, Cornell has at least twice as many undergraduates as any other Ivy League school. As a general rule, freshmen account for approximately a quarter of the undergraduate population. Hence, while Cornell looks to admit roughly 3,000 first-time freshmen each fall, our closest Ivy comparator, Penn has an entering class closer to 2,400, while Dartmouth, Princeton, and Columbia are admitting closer to 1,000 new freshmen each year.

As Figure 10 displays, all of the Ivy League institutions, with the exception of Brown saw an increase in the number of applications for admission between Fall 1998 and Fall 1999. Cornell's increase from 19,860 to 19,949 (0.4 percent) significantly trailed the 11 percent increase experienced at Yale (11,947 to 13,270) and the 14 percent increase at Princeton (13,006 to 14,875). However, it should be noted that the relatively small



increase for Cornell is also related to the change last year to a one-part admissions application. In point of fact, completed applications – for Fall 1998 those who completed both Part A and Part B of the application for Admission to Cornell and for Fall 1999 those who completed the one-part application -- increased by 12 percent.

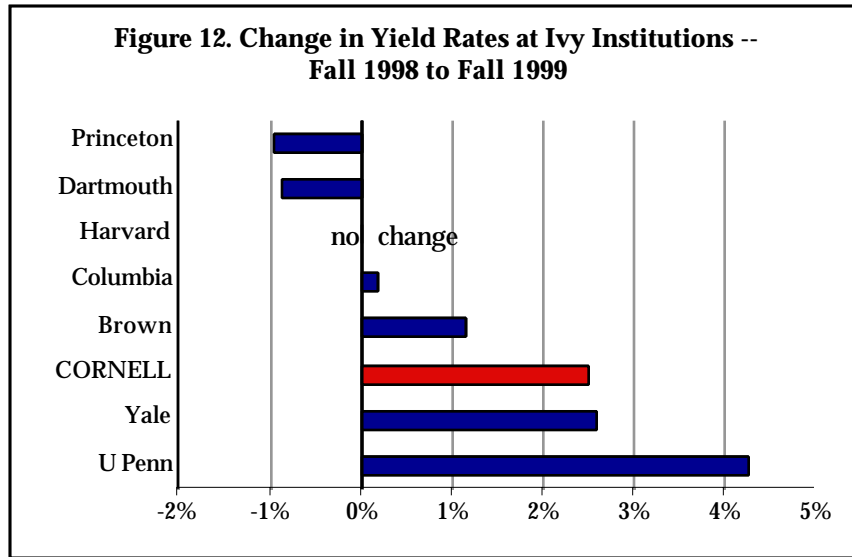


As indicated in Figure 11, Cornell's admit rate – the proportion of students offered admission divided by the total number of applicants – declined from 34.4 percent in Fall 1998 to 32.9 percent for Fall 1999. Brown was the only Ivy comparator that did not experience a one-year decrease in admit rate. The changes depicted in Figure 11 are directly and inversely related to the changes in the number of applications displayed in Figure 10 (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.

Cornell's 32.9 percent admit rate for Fall 1999 is the highest in the Ivy League, which otherwise ranges from a low of 11.4 percent at both Princeton and Harvard to a high of 26.4 percent at Penn. Among the seven undergraduate colleges at Cornell, Arts and Sciences had the lowest admit rate (27.1 percent) and Engineering the highest (42.0 percent). Collectively, the Statutory colleges had an admit rate of 36.9 percent, and the endowed admit rate was 31.7 percent.

Figure 12 displays the one-year change in comparative yield rates – the proportion of students who accept an offer of admission divided by the total number of applicants

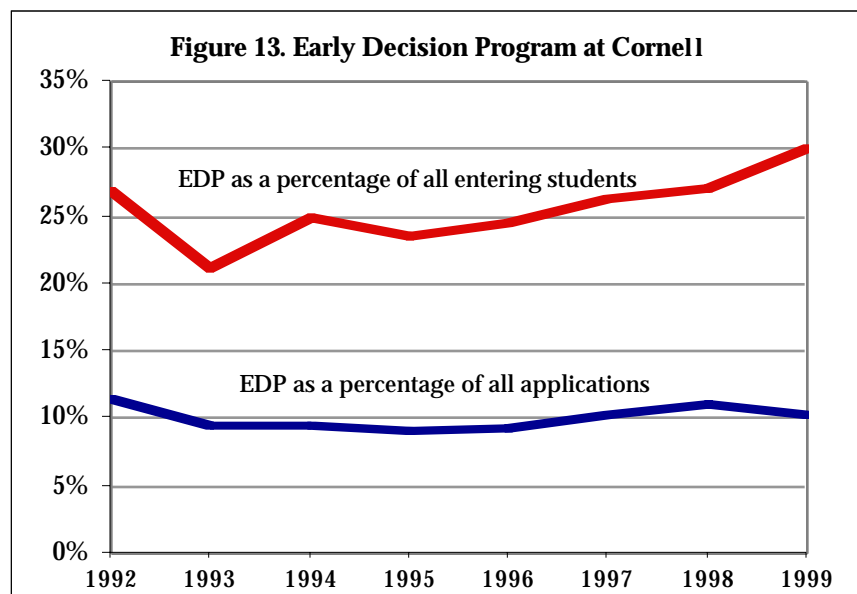


who were admitted – for all Ivy League institutions. Between Fall 1998 and Fall 1999, Cornell's yield rate has increased from 46.7 percent to 49.2 percent. A significant component of the increased yields depicted can be attributed to the increased number of students admitted by way of early decision or early action programs.

Among the other Ivy League institutions, yield rates for Fall 1999 ranged from a low of 49.7 percent at Dartmouth to a high of 79.1 percent at Harvard.

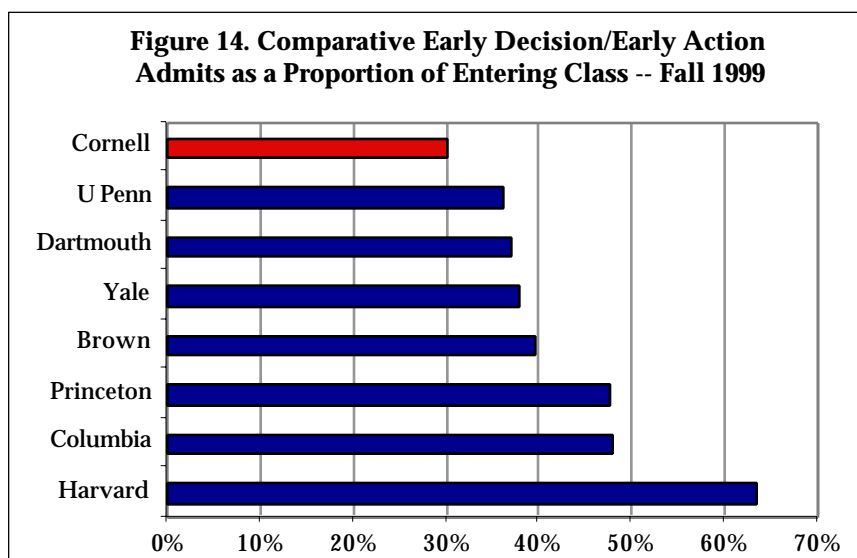
For the past eight years Cornell's Early Decision Program (EDP) applications have accounted for between 9 and 12 percent of all applications (see Figure 13). For the Fall 1999 entering class 2,046 of 19,949 applicants applied via EDP.

Nevertheless, the proportion of the entering class admitted through EDP has been steadily increasing. For Fall 1999, fully 30 percent of all entering first-time freshmen (949 of 3,162) were admitted through EDP. Comparatively speaking, however, Cornell significantly trails many of its Ivy League



comparators in utilizing an early decision or early action program to fill its freshman class (see Figure 14).

For Fall 1999, the seven undergraduate colleges were cumulatively given a first-time freshman enrollment target of 3,012. As indicated earlier, total first-time freshman enrollment at Cornell for Fall 1999 is 3,162, or 5 percent (150 students) over target. Among its Ivy comparators, Cornell is not alone in experiencing over-enrollment of the



freshman class. While Columbia, Dartmouth, Harvard, and Yale each enrolled within 7 students of their stated Fall 1999 first-time freshman targets, Brown was over target by 55 students (4 percent) and Penn 157 (7 percent).

On the Horizon

In last year's report, we cited three issues on the horizon that could potentially impact undergraduate enrollment on the Ithaca campus in the near- or longer-term future: national demographic trends, distance learning, and early graduation.

National demographic trends clearly indicate that there will be an increasing number of high school graduates for at least the next decade. Further, there will be an overall increase in the proportion of traditional-age, college-bound freshmen from what are now considered underrepresented minority groups. It is anticipated that such states as California and Texas – increasingly important recruiting grounds for Cornell – are likely to see whites become a minority of their school age population early in the next century.

The expansion of distance learning and other non-traditional learning venues is often considered a “threat” to enrollment in post-secondary institutions, leading some to suggest that thirty years hence we won't recognize higher education as it is known today. While it is clear that electronically available for-credit instructional opportunities will continue to increase, we believe that it is highly unlikely that the primarily residential undergraduate degree programs offered by Cornell and other highly selective universities and private colleges will be superseded by the growing number of “virtual institutions.” It is possible that on-line instructional opportunities may impact the number of semesters students spend in residence on

the Ithaca campus. It is also quite possible that distance learning technologies will significantly enrich Cornell's current curricular offerings. Nevertheless, we continue to anticipate that the greatest impact of distance learning at Cornell will be the new revenue streams flowing to the institution as a result of Cornell's faculty being net exporters of knowledge through programs for alumni, life-long learners, executive education, and the general populace.

To date, we have not seen a significant increase in the proportion of students graduating in less than four years from Cornell. Over the last ten years only between two and six percent of all first-time freshmen have completed their degrees in less than eight semesters. Nevertheless, we fully recognize the need to continually monitor this statistic in light of an increasing number of students taking advantage of advanced placement coursework while in high school, as well as an increasing number of undergraduates utilizing their summers to earn credit at other institutions that they then transfer to Cornell.

Conclusions

The 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 undergraduate students. In particular, it is imperative that we find ways of making what is distinctive about Cornell overtly apparent to our target populations. In essence, we need to become ever more savvy about the manner in which we market the institution both to prospective students and the public at large.

Of more immediate concern, however, is the need to squarely face the consequences of continuing to over-enroll the freshman class and to craft a set of strategies to bring our enrollments into an equilibrium that is programmatically sound and fiducially responsible. As was suggested earlier, the Provost has scheduled a series of conversations to take place this fall with the relevant decision makers and policy implementers on campus. As well, he has charged the Undergraduate Enrollment Planning Team (UEPT) to put forward multi-year enrollment targets that will lead to an entering fall first-time freshman cohort of 3,000 and total on-campus undergraduate enrollment of between 12,800 and 13,000. The Provost has also asked the UEPT to consider the mechanisms for creating and the time periods in which to institute appropriate tuition stabilization reserves. Among other things, these reserves could be used to help the transition to a lower total on-campus undergraduate enrollment and/or to provide the backstop funds if future enrollment targets are not met in any one year – in total or within a particular undergraduate college. In addition to reserves, other financial management considerations will need to be considered in moving toward stabilizing our enrollments.

Undergraduate enrollments at Cornell remain strong. The institution is in the enviable position of having a sufficiently large applicant pool to make it possible to admit and matriculate a highly diverse and extremely well qualified undergraduate

student body. However, these are statements that are equally true of Cornell's comparators.

Cornell is in a highly competitive market in its search for undergraduates. The institution's ability to sustain and improve its relative position within that market is constrained by its comparatively larger size. By the same token, the breadth of academic offerings available on the Ithaca campus is a significant competitive advantage.