



# UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT TRENDS

## Fall 2000

Prepared for

Cornell University's Board of Trustees  
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### Undergraduate Enrollment Objectives

The management of undergraduate enrollments on the Ithaca campus is governed by three overarching objectives:

1. To continue to enhance the selectivity of our undergraduate student population;
2. To continue to enhance the diversity of the undergraduate student population while maintaining access to a Cornell education; and
3. To curtail 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 continue to overshoot that target. Having more than 13,000 undergraduates enrolled at any one time taxes the physical and human resources of the institution. As well, significant year-to-year fluctuations create tensions on our teaching and infrastructure resources.

During the Fall of 1999, the Provost, all the undergraduate deans, and the admissions community were engaged in discussions to determine what would 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. It was agreed that adhering to these targets 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.

While not all of our over enrollment can be attributed to first-time freshmen arriving in the fall, it is the major contributing factor and the one over which the institution has the greatest control. As a result of last fall's conversations, the university admitted approximately 400 fewer freshmen applicants than in the Fall of 1999, which was about 700 fewer admits than for the Fall of 1998. This did lead to a decrease in first-time freshmen enrollments. We were still over target largely because our yield increased by a bit more than two percentage points for the second year in a row (this year slightly better than 51% with an admit rate of just under 31%, down from 33% the previous year). As is reported in more detail below, overall enrollments were also above targets.

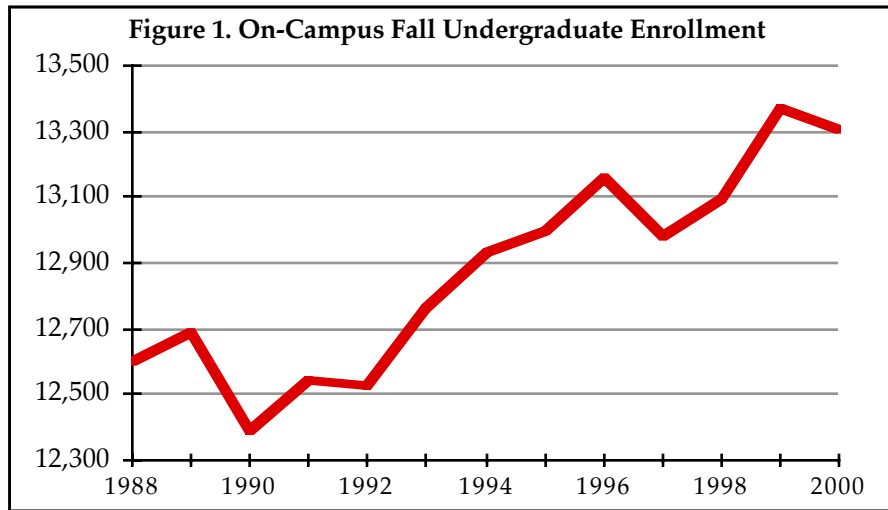
In addition to managing the total number of undergraduates on campus, it is imperative that Cornell maintains a commitment to access while continuing to

enhance the diversity of the undergraduate student population. The gender, racial/ethnic, and socio-economic diversity of the student body must continue to receive careful attention. As well, the geographic diversity of the study body is equally important as it also enriches the educational environment.

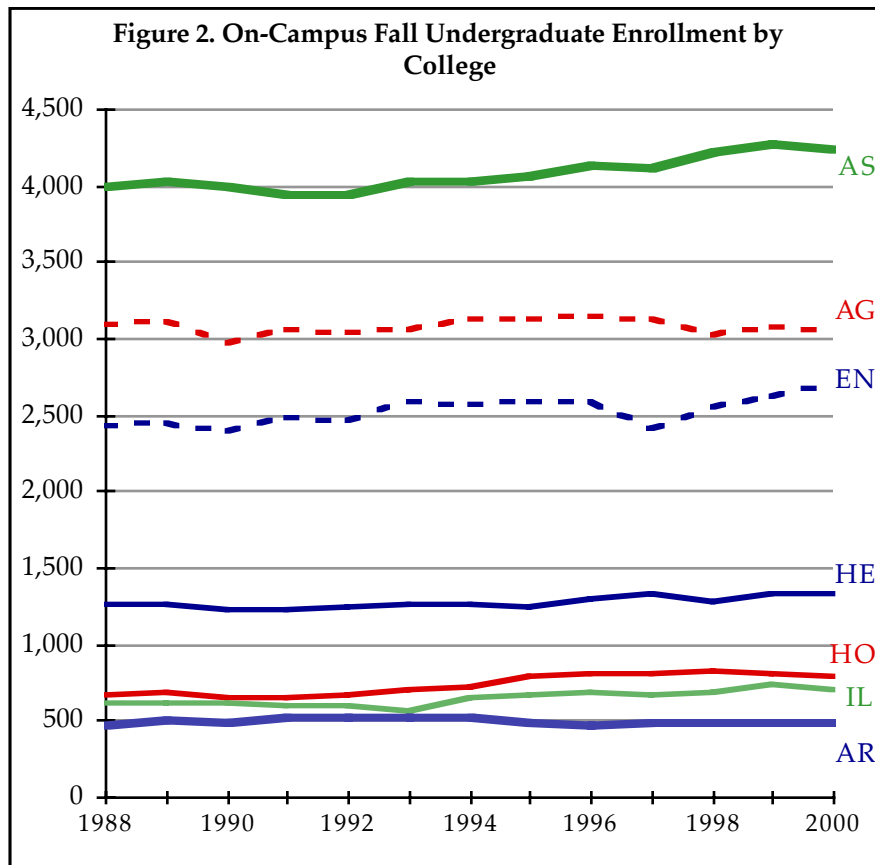
In conjunction with the first two undergraduate enrollment objectives, continuing to enhance the selectivity of our undergraduate student population is also essential. This is linked to individual college recruitment plans, research on our prospect pool for targeted recruitment efforts in order to strategically increase the size and quality of our applicant pool, linking admissions efforts more pointedly with the commitment programs, and improving the yield on offers of admission.

**Current Situation and Changes over Time**

Figure 1 indicates that on-campus undergraduate enrollment has increased by 5.6 percent, or 700 students (12,603 in Fall 1988 to 13,303 in Fall 2000) during the past twelve years. Slightly more than a third of this increase (276 students) occurred between Fall 1998 and Fall 1999.



Almost three-quarters of the increase from Fall 1988 to Fall 2000 occurred in the Endowed General Purpose Colleges. Figure 2 displays that Arts & Sciences (AS) has

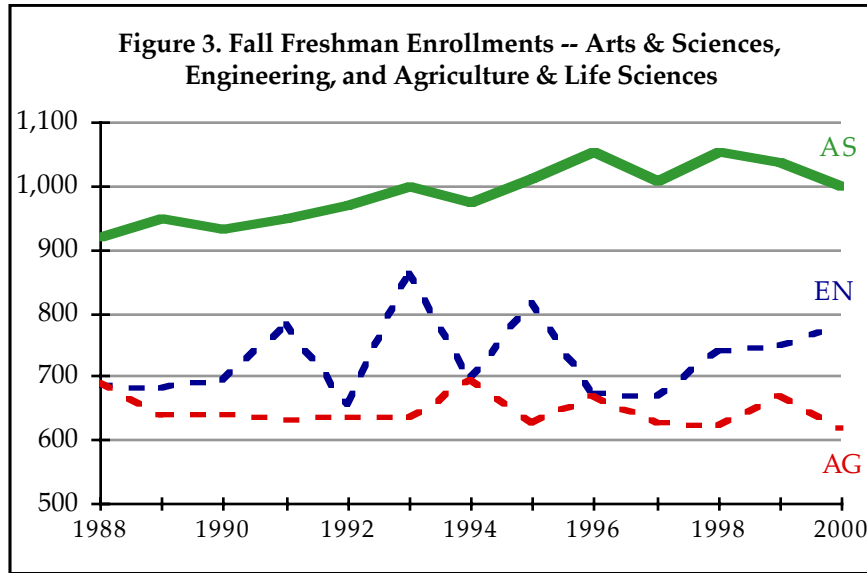


238 more students in Fall 2000 than in Fall 1988, Engineering (EN) 281 additional students, and Architecture, Art, & Planning (AR) has 8 more students currently than in Fall 1988. The Statutory Colleges accounted for only 13 percent of the increase from Fall 1988 to Fall 2000. Industrial and Labor Relations (IL) increased their enrollments by 73 students over this time period, Human Ecology (HE) increased by 84 students, and Agriculture & Life

Sciences (AG) experienced a decrease of 41 students in their fall enrollments. The remaining enrollment changes occurred in the Hotel School (HO), with an increase

of 114 students (of which 100 was planned) and the Internal Transfer Division (not pictured) where enrollments declined from 95 in Fall 1988 to 38 in Fall 2000.

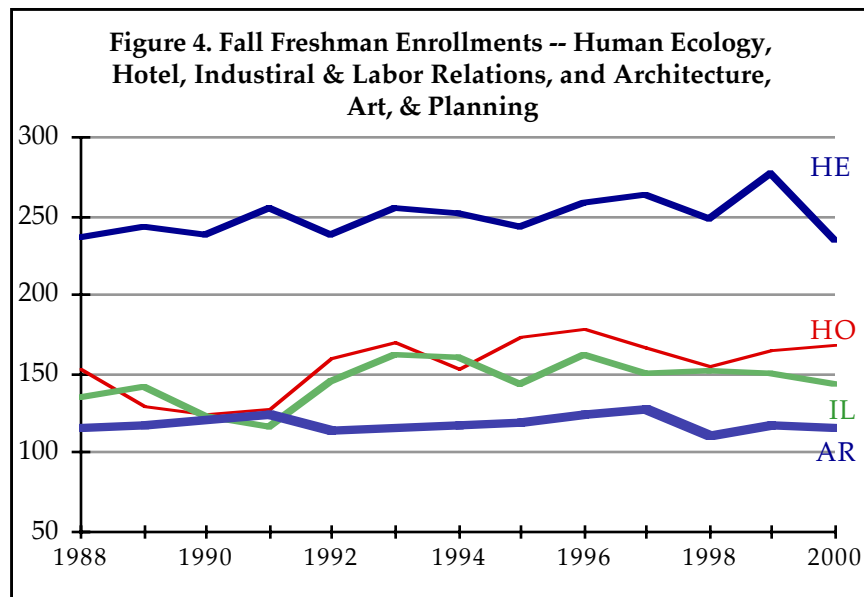
Figure 3 displays freshman enrollments from 1988 to 2000 in the three largest colleges – Arts & Sciences, Engineering, and Agriculture and Life Sciences. The size of the incoming freshman class in Arts & Sciences increased fairly steadily from 918 in Fall 1988 to 999 in Fall 2000, a 9 percent increase. However, from Fall 1999 to Fall 2000 there was a decrease of 3 percent, or 36 freshmen.



in Fall 1988 to 999 in Fall 2000, a 9 percent increase. However, from Fall 1999 to Fall 2000 there was a decrease of 3 percent, or 36 freshmen. The College of Engineering has also experienced an overall increase in the size of their freshman class of nearly 14 percent during this same time frame (from 683 to 777), 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 10 percent, or 71 freshmen, between Fall 1988 (687) and Fall 2000 (616).

Figure 4 displays fall freshman enrollments from Fall 1988 to Fall 2000 in the other four undergraduate colleges. The College of Human Ecology has experienced a marginal decrease in freshman enrollments, from 236 in Fall 1988 to 234 in Fall 2000.



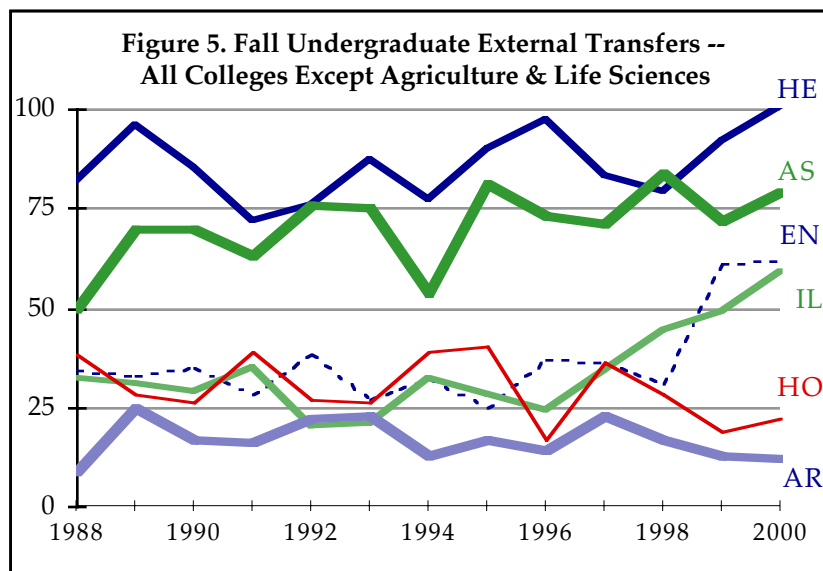
Freshman enrollments have been stable in the College of Architecture, Art, & Planning (116 in Fall 1988 and Fall 2000). Although there has been only a modest increase in the number of freshmen in the School of Hotel Administration between Fall 1988 (153) and

Fall 2000 (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 134 in Fall 1988 to a low of 116 in Fall 1991 to a high of 162 in Fall 1996 and are currently at 143.

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.).

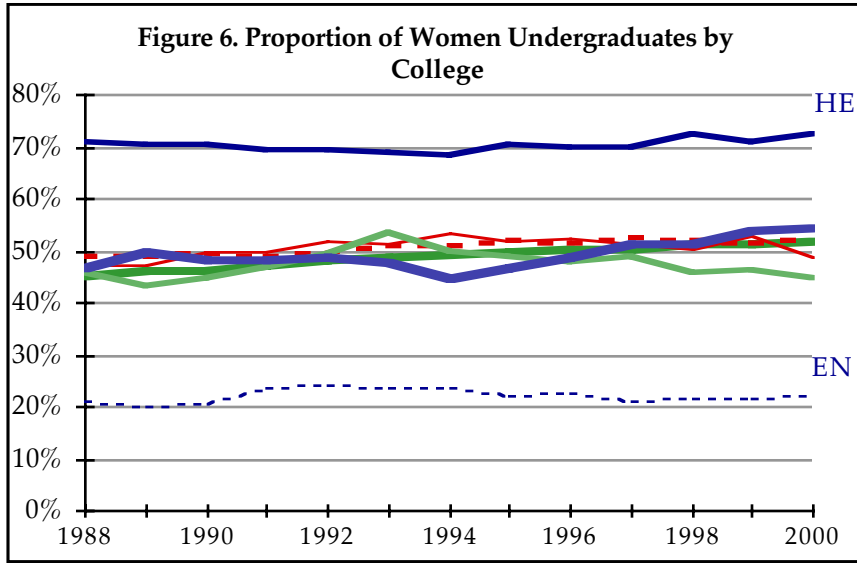
Over the past twelve years, between 37 and 43 percent of all incoming external transfers have annually enrolled in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. In Fall 1988, this amounted to 186 out of 431 external transfers (43 percent) and in Fall 2000, 197 out of 532

(37 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 from year to 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 79 in Fall 2000 (58 percent). Engineering experienced a doubling of their external transfers from 31 in Fall 1988 to 62 in Fall 2000.

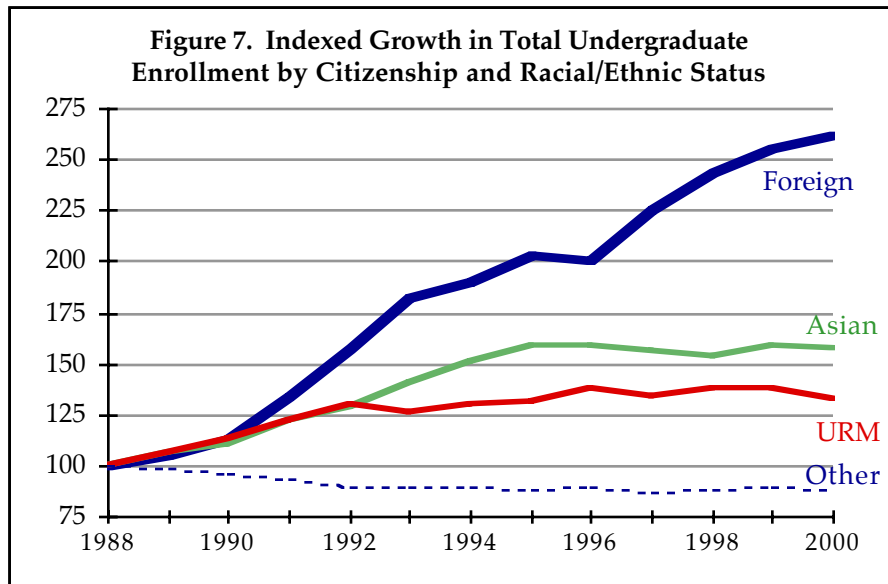
The proportion of women among the total undergraduate population increased from 44.2 percent in Fall 1988 to 47.4 percent in Fall 2000. As Figure 6 makes clear, however, two of the colleges have distinctly different patterns that have remained



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 2000. 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 population<sup>1</sup> has grown from 20 percent in Fall 1988 to 30 percent in Fall 2000. Figure 7 shows the proportion of underrepresented minorities (URM: Native Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans) has grown by 33 percent from Fall 1988 to Fall 2000 (from 1,085 students to 1,442).

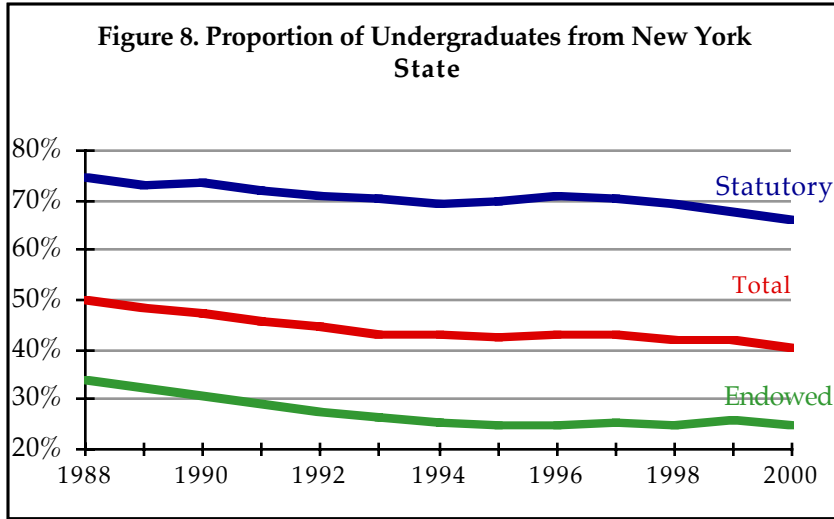
The largest growth has been among Hispanics (from 507 to 765 students), followed by African Americans (535 to 606) and Native Americans (43 to 71). The number of Asian American students grew from 1,415 in Fall 1988 to 2,235 in Fall 2000, an increase of 58 percent. For all other U.S.



citizens (whites and those who elected not to designate racial/ethnic information), enrollments declined from 10,053 in Fall 1988 to 8,891 in Fall 2000, a decrease of 11 percent. Over this period, enrollment of foreign students increased 162 percent from 390 to 1,022.

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

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

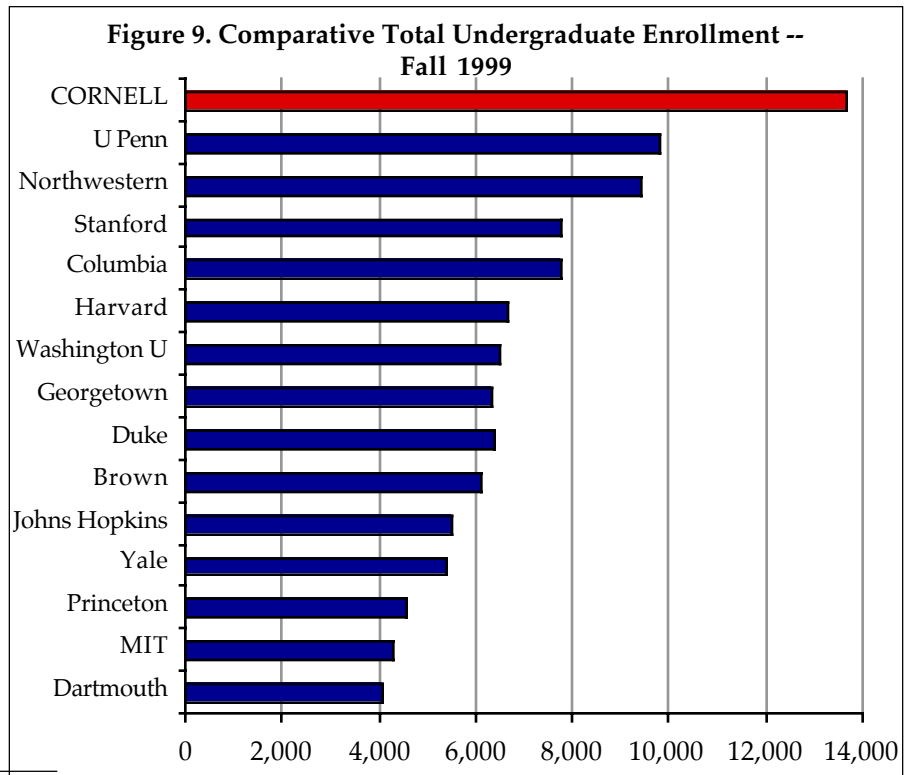


Although the proportion of undergraduates from New York State has been declining (see Figure 8), they still account for the largest share of students in both the Endowed and Statutory colleges. In the Endowed colleges, proportions from the Midwestern states have been stable, those coming from New England have declined, enrollments from the Middle

Atlantic, South, and Southwest have increased marginally, and students from the West and out of the country have increased between 3 and 6 percent respectively. The Statutory colleges have seen modest increases from all regions outside New York State with the exception of New England where there has been a slight decline.

### 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).<sup>2</sup> As Figure 9 makes clear, Cornell enrolls a larger number of

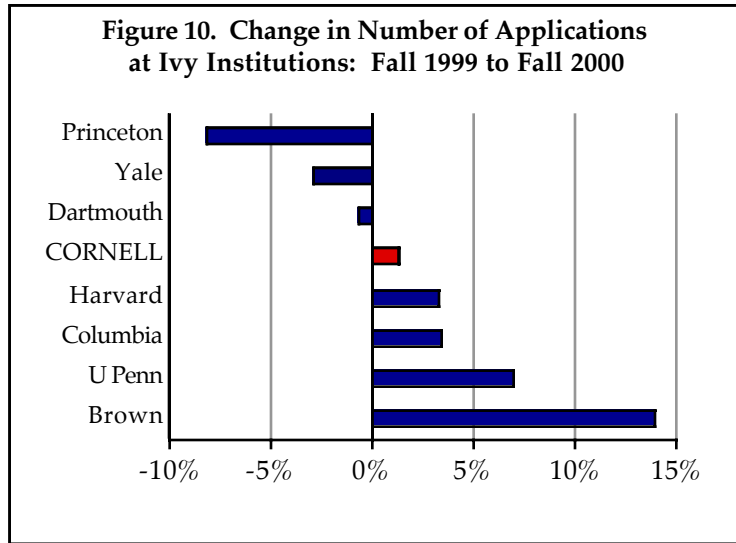


<sup>2</sup>Fall 1999 comparative data is the most recent information available from COFHE. The 2000 data from COFHE will not be available until much later in the semester. We were, however, able to gain early release of information from our Ivy League colleagues about their Fall 2000 entering freshman class.

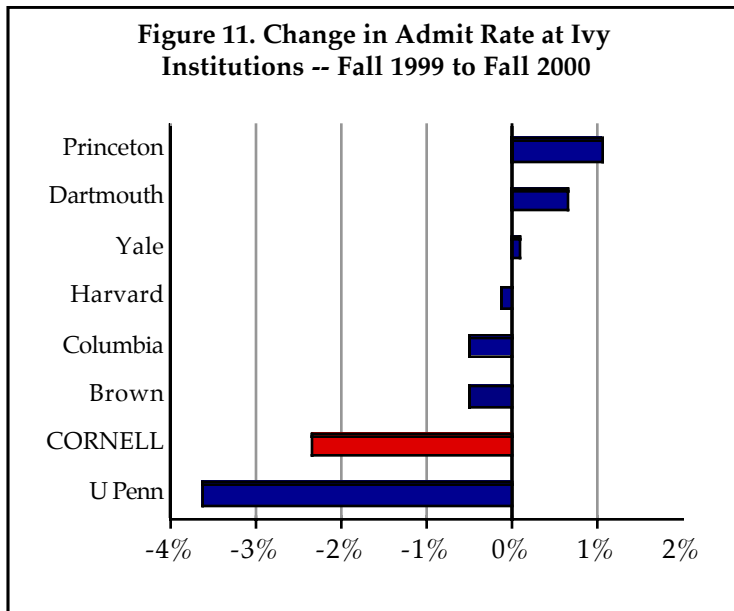


undergraduates than any of our comparators. With the exception of Penn, Cornell has at least twice as many undergraduates as any other Ivy League school. As a general rule, freshmen account for approximately a quarter of the undergraduate population. Hence, while Cornell looks to admit roughly 3,000 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, five of the Ivy League institutions saw an increase in the number of applications for admission between Fall 1999 and Fall 2000. Cornell's increase from 19,949 to 20,199 (1.3 percent) significantly trailed the 14 percent increase experienced at Brown (14,756 to 16,806) and the 7 percent increase at Penn (17,596 to 18,823). However, it should be noted that Cornell has experienced this relatively small increase since Fall 1997 while Brown saw a decrease of 7 percent from Fall 1997 to Fall 1998.

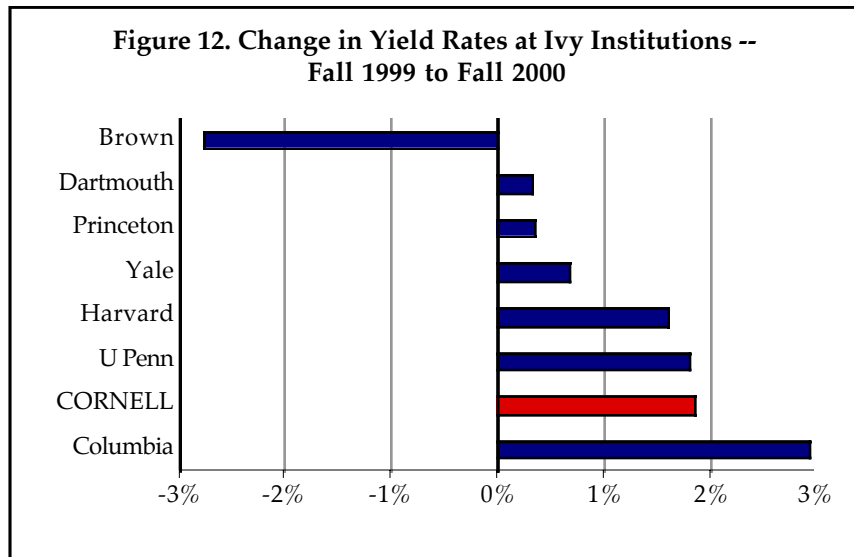


As indicated in Figure 11, Cornell's admit rate – the proportion of students offered admission divided by the total number of applicants – declined from 33 percent in Fall 1999 to 31 percent for Fall 2000. Of our Ivy comparators, only Princeton and Dartmouth experienced a 1 percent increase in admit 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 31 percent



admit rate for Fall 2000 is the highest in the Ivy League, which otherwise ranges from a low of 11 percent at Harvard to a high of 23 percent at Penn. Among the seven undergraduate colleges at Cornell, Arts and Sciences had the lowest admit rate (25 percent) and Engineering the highest (39 percent). Collectively, the Statutory colleges had an admit rate of 33 percent, and the endowed admit rate was 30 percent.

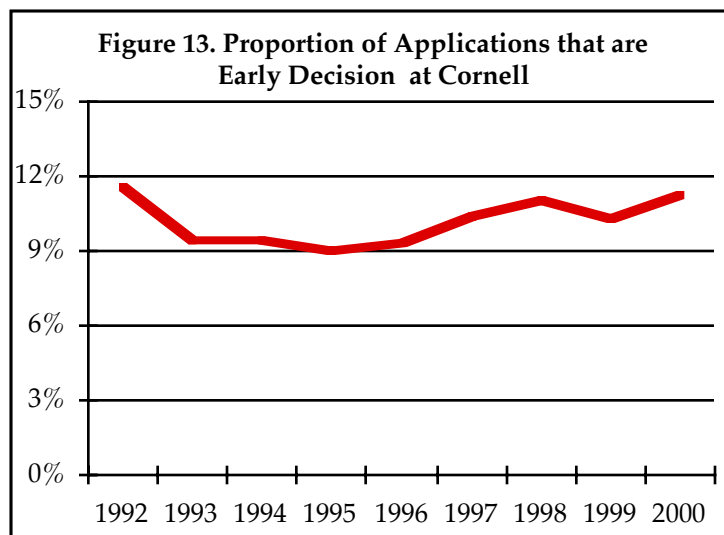
Figure 12 displays the one-year change in comparative yield rates – the proportion of students who accept an offer of admission divided by the total number of applicants



who were admitted – for all Ivy League institutions. Between Fall 1999 and Fall 2000, Cornell’s yield rate has increased from 49 percent to 51 percent. A significant component of the increased yields depicted can be attributed to the increased number of students admitted via early decision or early action programs.

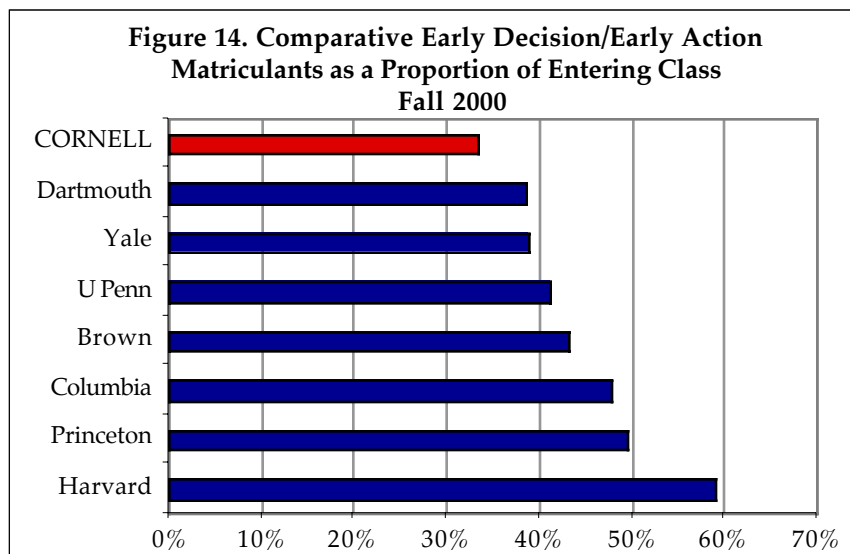
Among the other Ivy League institutions, yield rates for Fall 2000 ranged from a low of 50 percent at Dartmouth to a high of 79 percent at Harvard.

For the past nine 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 2000 entering class 2,264 of 20,199 applicants applied via EDP.



Nevertheless, the proportion of the entering class admitted through EDP has been steadily increasing. For Fall 2000, a full third of all first-time freshmen declaring intent to enroll (1,017 of 3,152) were admitted through EDP. Comparatively speaking, however, Cornell significantly trails many of its Ivy League comparators in utilizing an early decision/early action program to fill its freshman class (see Figure 14).

For Fall 2000, the seven undergraduate colleges were given a cumulative first-time freshman enrollment target of 3,000. As indicated earlier, total first-time freshman enrollment at Cornell for Fall 2000 is 3,054, or 2 percent (54 students) over target.



### 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 future or over the longer term: 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, executives, 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 two to 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 and 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 high ability undergraduate students. In particular, it is imperative that we continue to 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 marketing the institution both to prospective students and the public at large.

Of more immediate concern, however, is the need to continue to squarely face the consequences of continuing to over-enroll the freshman class. Additional effort will be necessary to further refine strategies to bring our enrollments into an equilibrium that is programmatically sound and fiduciary responsible. As a follow-up to the conversations held last fall, the Provost and Associate Provost for Admissions and Enrollment Management will be holding another series of conversations this fall with the relevant decision-makers and policy implementers on campus. This time, the conversations will center on the review of a set of enrollment management guidelines drafted by the Undergraduate Enrollment Planning Team (UEPT). These guidelines have been crafted to suggest a set of incentives and consequences relative to meeting - or not meeting both - first-time freshmen and overall undergraduate enrollment targets. The guidelines include the provision of an enrollment stabilization reserve to ease 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, either in total or within a particular undergraduate college.

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 student body.