

**FIRST-TIME FRESHMAN GRADUATION RATES  
FALL 1980 - FALL 1995 ENTERING CLASSES**

**BIENNIAL REPORT**

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## **Executive Summary**

- Of first-time freshmen entering Cornell in Fall 1995, 90.8 percent earned a baccalaureate degree from one of the seven undergraduate colleges within six years of matriculation. For the past dozen years the graduation rate has been essentially 90 percent or above, and this year's rate represents an increase of eight percentage points over the freshman class that entered in Fall 1980. (See page 3.)
- The proportion of students who graduate early -- graduating prior to the spring semester of their fourth year at Cornell (see Figure 3, page 4) -- increased slightly for those who entered in Fall 1994 (6.1 percent) and remained relatively stable in Fall 1995 (5.8 percent).
- Six-year graduation rates vary by the college in which students matriculate, though graduation rates have been increasing for those entering each of Cornell's seven undergraduate colleges. (See pages 4-5.) In general, graduation rates are higher for students who enter one of Cornell's contract colleges.
- Not all students who enter Cornell as first-time freshmen graduate from the college in which they matriculate. Students are most likely to transfer out of the Colleges of Architecture, Art, and Planning; Engineering; and Human Ecology. The Colleges of Arts and Sciences and Agriculture and Life Sciences gain the most internal transfers. (See pages 5-6.)
- For those students who entered Cornell as first-time freshmen in Fall 1980, there was a gap of approximately 20 percentage points between African-American, and Hispanic and Native American students whose six year graduation rate was approximately 68 percent and the approximately 87 percent graduation rate among Asian and white students. By the entering class of Fall 1987, this gap had been reduced to about 10 percentage points. The gaps have continued to narrow, particularly for African-American students entering in Fall 1995 who have a six-year graduation rate within 9 percentage points of Asian and white students. (See pages 6-7.)
- First-time freshmen who are recruited athletes graduate at rates essentially equivalent to the undergraduate population as a whole. The recruited athletes entering in Fall 1995 had a 91.1 percent graduation rate. (See page 8.)
- Of the two most recent attrition cohorts, about a third of the Fall 1994 matriculants and less than 30 percent of the Fall 1995 matriculants were required to leave or withdraw from Cornell. A little more than half of the Fall 1994 and close to two-thirds of the Fall 1995 attrition cohorts left Cornell voluntarily before completing a degree. Additionally, approximately 13 percent of those classified in the attrition group of Fall 1994 and 8 percent of Fall 1995 either earned a Cornell degree after the six-year study window or are still currently enrolled as undergraduates at Cornell. (See pages 9-12.)
- Comparing the effects of financial aid status on graduation rates, there appears to be a slightly greater likelihood of students who received Cornell grant aid not to complete a degree than those who only received loans, work-study, or no aid. (See page 12.)

## **Methodology**

### **Population**

The population for this study is first-time freshman matriculants (with no prior transfer credits or course work) who were initially enrolled at Cornell in the Fall terms of 1980 through 1995. Entering classes are identified by the date when they first entered the university. Transfer students -- those who come to Cornell from another college or university -- are excluded from this study.

### **Principal Concept and Study Design**

The retention concept underlying this report is based on a six-year period from the point a student first matriculated at one of Cornell's seven undergraduate colleges to the time of graduation. The methods employed in this research design are similar to those employed in retention research in many national studies.

The research behind this report was conducted so that students who graduate within four, five, or six years can be distinguished. Students who did not graduate from any of Cornell's seven undergraduate colleges within six years of entering are classified in the attrition group, although we know that a number are either currently enrolled or subsequently earn a Cornell undergraduate degree.

A year is delineated in terms of the academic calendar and comprises the Fall and Spring semesters and the Summer term. Students appearing in the four-year rate are those receiving degrees earlier than whichever Fall semester would signify the start of their fifth year. The single exception is in the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning where students enrolled in five-year programs have their time-to-degree window extended by a year. For example, students in five-year degree programs who graduate before the beginning of their sixth year are included among the four-year degree recipients. This was done in the interest of comparability since these students have made the same progress toward their degrees as those candidates for degrees normally requiring only four years of study.

In addition, graduation rate information drawn from *US News & World Report's* annual *America's Best Colleges Guide* is included to help put Cornell's graduation rates into a larger context.

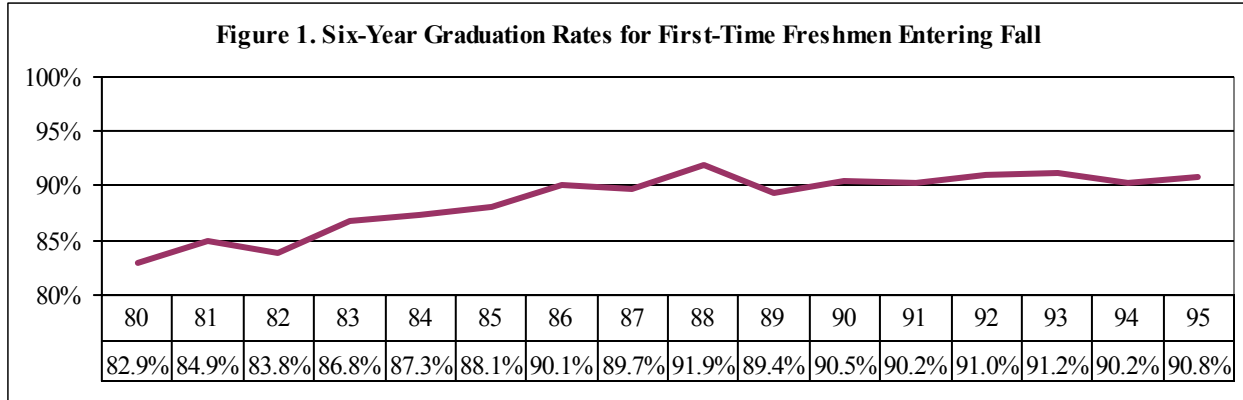
### **Audience**

While aggregate graduation rates are compiled and reported annually, this more detailed analysis is crafted every other year as a report to the Trustee Committee on Academic Affairs and Campus Life. It is shared with the university Deans, Associate Deans, and Executive Staff. It is also available to the public in an electronic form after the report is presented to the Trustees.

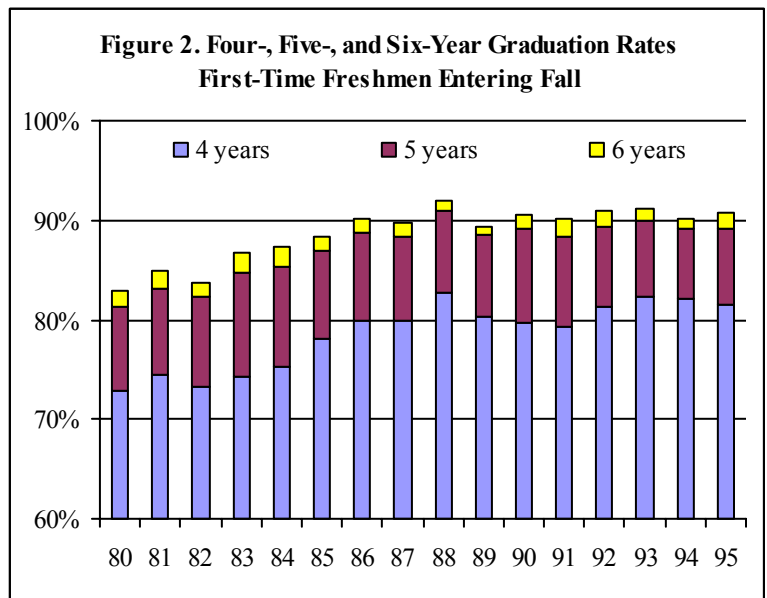
**Analysis**

**Overall Graduation Rates**

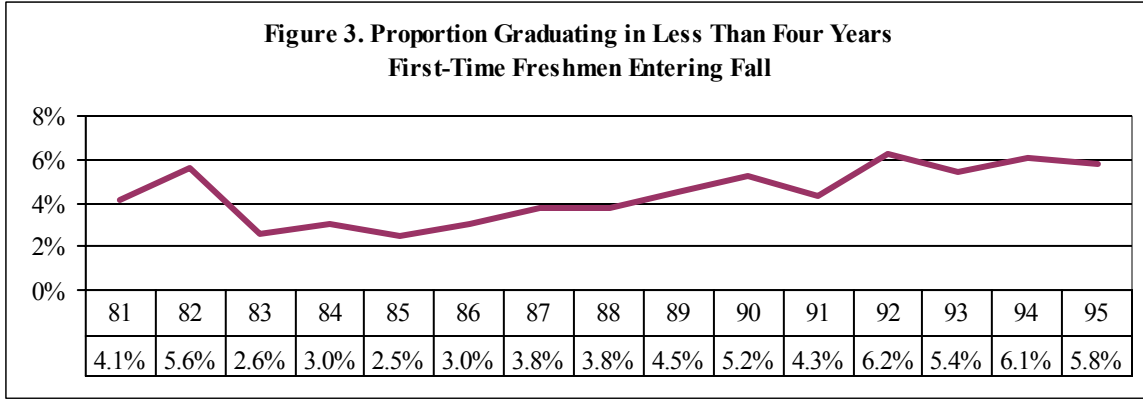
For a decade, the overall six-year graduation rate of entering first-time freshmen has been essentially 90 percent. Of the 3,059 first-time freshmen that entered Cornell in Fall 1995, 90.8 percent earned a baccalaureate degree from one of the seven undergraduate colleges on the Ithaca campus within six years of matriculation. This is an increase of eight percentage points over the 82.9 percent of the 2,785 member freshman class that entered in Fall 1980 (see Figure 1).



As Figure 2 indicates, the majority of this increase in graduation rates can be accounted for by the increase in the number of students who are earning degrees in four years. For the Fall 1980 entering class, 72.8 percent earned a Cornell degree in four years, while the Fall 1995 entering class saw 81.5 percent of their number earning a degree in four years. The proportion of first-time freshmen earning a degree in five years decreased slightly between the Fall 1980 (8.5 percent) and Fall 1995 (7.6 percent) entering classes. The proportion of those utilizing a sixth year to complete their degree requirements has remained essentially unchanged -- 1.6 percent for the Fall 1980 entering class and 1.7 percent for those entering in Fall 1995.

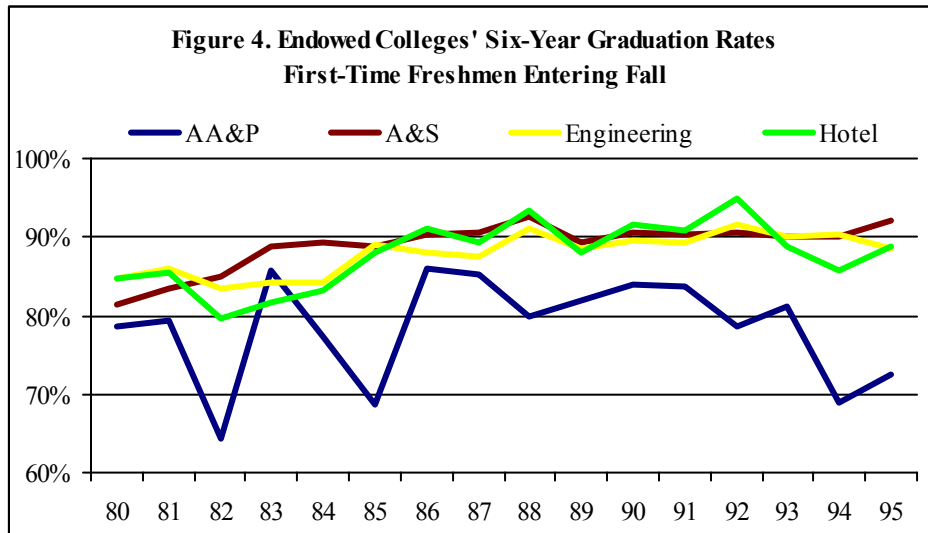


The proportion of students who graduate early -- prior to the spring semester of what would be their fourth year at Cornell -- was greater than 4 percent starting with the Fall 1989 through Fall 1995 entering classes (see Figure 3). This is a return to the patterns for the Fall 1981 and Fall 1982 entering classes, after which there were six years of early graduation rates below 4.0 percent.



### Graduation Rates by College

Six-year graduation rates vary by the college in which students matriculate, though the rates have increased for those entering all but one of Cornell's seven undergraduate colleges over the



sixteen-year period. As depicted in Figure 4, the trend in graduation rates among three of the four endowed colleges is positive for Fall 1995. For students entering the College of Arts and Sciences in Fall 1980, 81.3 percent earned a degree from Cornell within six years. For the Fall 1995 entering class,

that proportion had increased to 92.0 percent. Similarly, the College of Engineering and the School of Hotel Administration saw an increase from 84.6 percent and 84.8 percent to 88.6 percent and 88.8 percent respectively.

Six-year graduation rates in the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning are lower and more volatile than in the other endowed colleges. The college's graduation rate peaked among students entering in Fall 1983 (85.7 percent) and Fall 1986 (86.0 percent). From the class entering in Fall 1986 to the class entering in Fall 1993, the graduation rate remained between 80 percent and 86 percent. However, the class entering in Fall 1994 showed the lowest graduation rate of 69.0 percent. This increased for the class entering in Fall 1995 (3 percentage

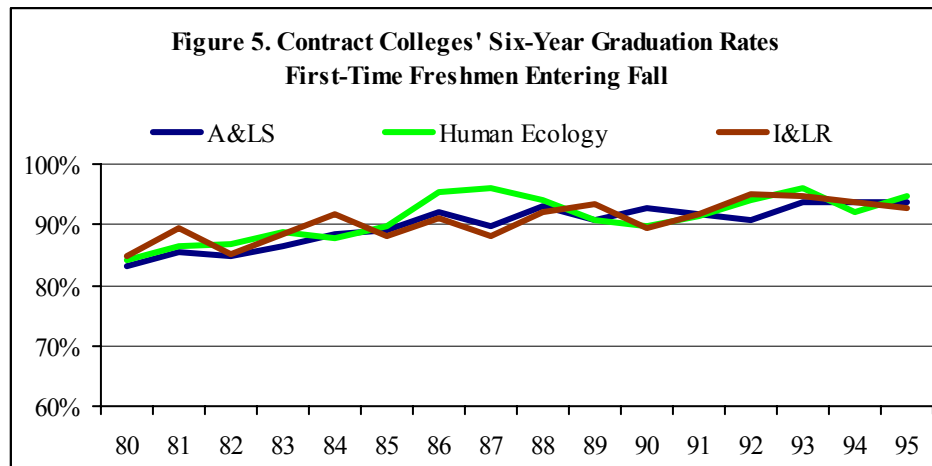
points). One reason for the volatility (besides the relatively smaller number of first-time freshmen entering the college each year) may be attributed to the college's policy of allowing students to be "in limbo" in the Bachelor of Architecture (BArch) and Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) programs for five years from the time of the last course is completed. This means the degree is held pending completion of generally non-course requirements (e.g. undergraduate thesis). After five years, if there is outstanding thesis or course work, the student must re-apply to the respective program to satisfy degree requirements for the year and term of the re-admit. For the first-time freshmen entering in Fall 1995, 14 students are "in limbo" with their BArch degree requirements, and 3 students are "in limbo" with their BFA degree requirements.

Six-year graduation rates for students who initially enrolled in all of Cornell's contract colleges saw noticeable increases between freshman classes entering in Fall 1980 and Fall 1995 (see Figure 5). Among students entering the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, six-year graduation rates

increased from 83.2 percent in Fall 1980 to 93.6 percent in Fall 1995.

Students who matriculated in the School of Industrial and Labor Relations in Fall 1980 graduated at a rate of 84.7 percent while the proportion of those who entered in

Fall 1995 graduated at 92.9 percent. Students who enrolled in the College of Human Ecology in Fall 1995 boasted the highest graduation rate among the seven undergraduate colleges at 94.6 percent, an increase from 84.0 percent for the class entering in Fall 1980.

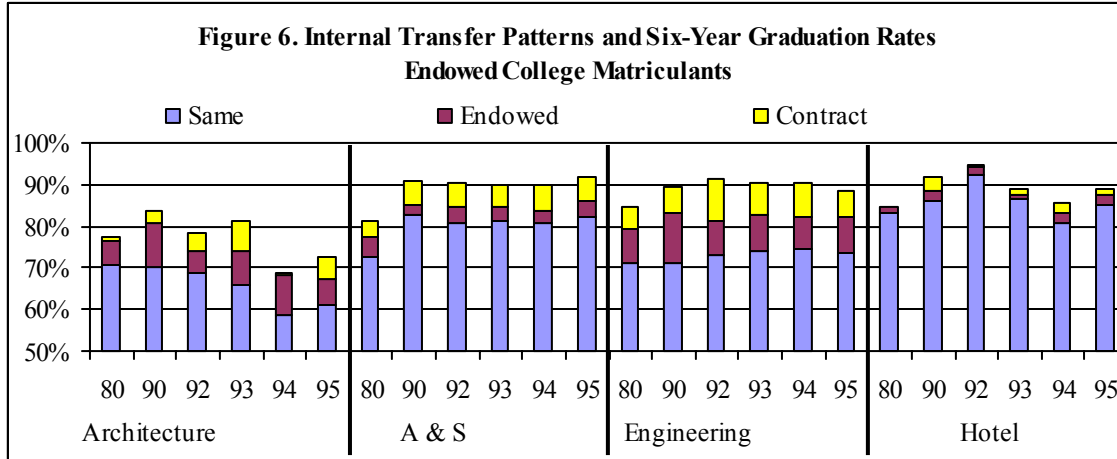


Not all students who enter Cornell as first-time freshmen graduate from the same college in which they matriculate. The patterns of internal transfers have remained relatively stable over the period of investigation. For instance, among the endowed colleges (see Figure 6), there is a considerable amount of internal transfers among students who initially enter the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning or the College of Engineering. In contrast, there is slight movement for students entering the College of Arts and Sciences and even less among students who matriculate in the School of Hotel Administration.

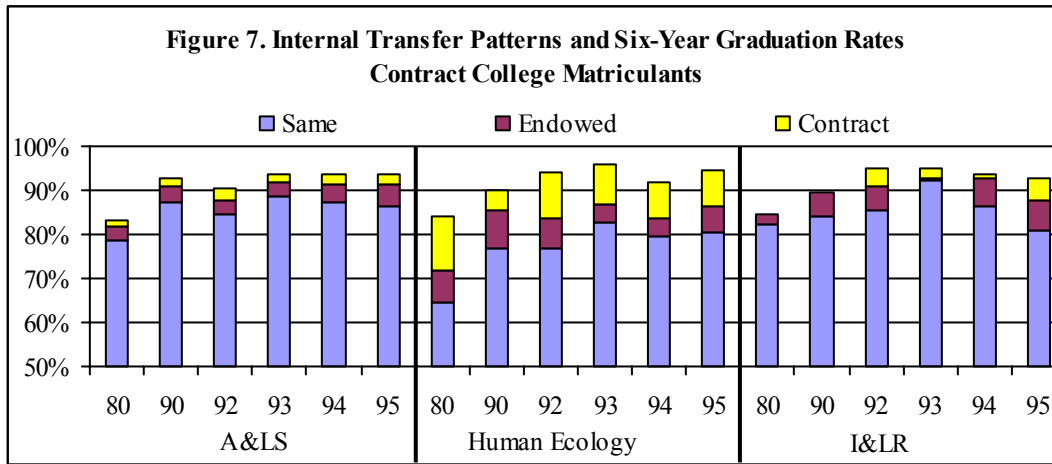
Of the first-time freshmen entering the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning in Fall 1995, 61 percent earned their degree from the college, while 6 percent earned a degree from another endowed college; an additional 5 percent earned a contract college degree. For students who matriculated in the College of Engineering in Fall 1995, 15 percent earned their degree from another college. Fifty-seven percent of these received a degree from an endowed college (primarily Arts and Sciences) and 43 percent from a contract college (primarily Agriculture and Life Sciences). The proportion of students initially enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences



and the School of Hotel Administration in Fall 1995 who completed their degree elsewhere were 9.9 percent and 3.5 percent respectively.



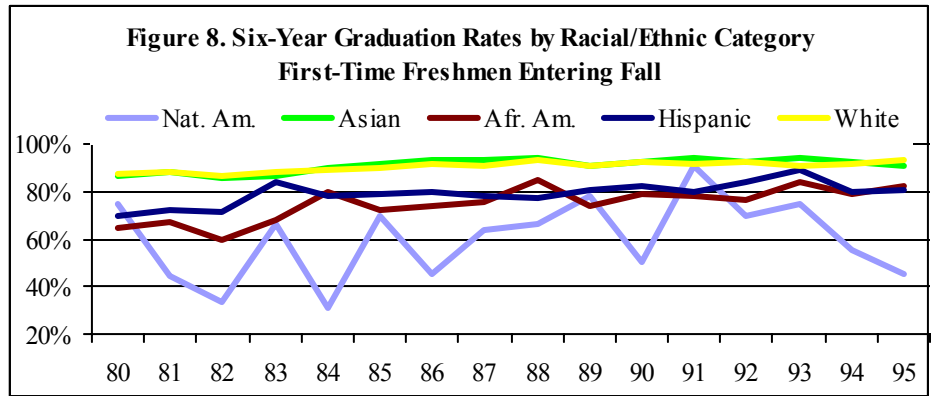
Among the contract colleges the patterns of internal transfer have remained fairly consistent over this sixteen-year period (see Figure 7). For first-time freshmen entering in Fall 1995, a considerable number of students transfer out of the College of Human Ecology (14 percent), less transfer out of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations (12 percent) and a more modest amount transfer out of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (7 percent).



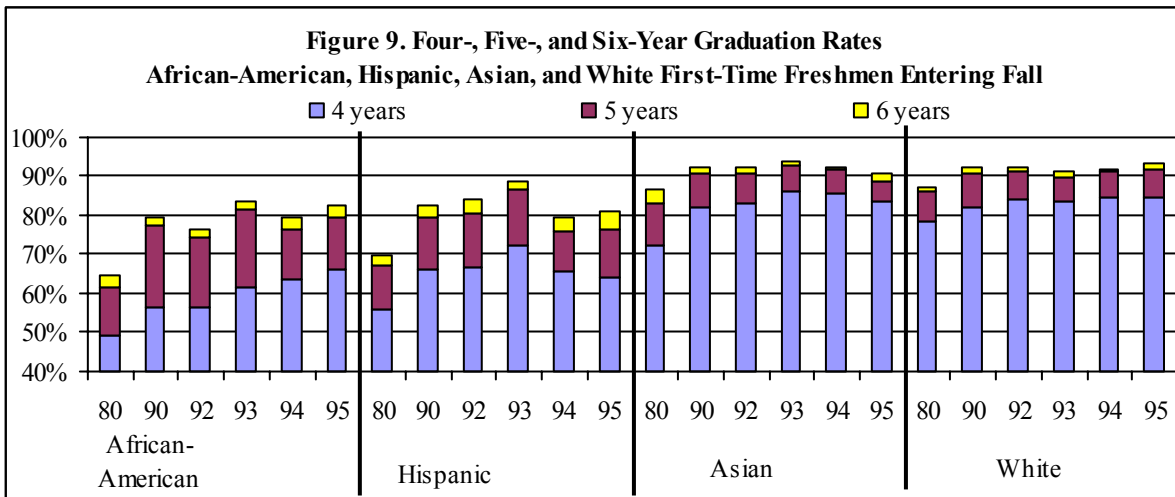
**Graduation Rates by Racial/Ethnic Group**

Graduation rates among racial/ethnic groups at Cornell over this sixteen-year time frame show generally positive trends (see Figure 8). For those students who entered Cornell as first-time freshmen in Fall 1980, there was a gap of approximately 20 percentage points between the combined African-American, Hispanic, and Native American six year graduation rate of approximately 68 percent and the composite 87 percent graduation rate for Asian and white students. By the entering class of Fall 1989, this gap had been reduced to about 10 percentage points, and all five groups had seen gains in their individual six-year graduation rates. However, from Fall 1993 to Fall 1995, declines were experienced in all minority groups: Hispanics declined 8 percentage points, African-Americans declined 2 percentage points, and Asians declined 3 percentage points.

Among the racial/ethnic groups, six-year graduation rates for African-Americans experienced the highest increase, from 64.6 percent for those entering in Fall 1980 to 82.4 percent in Fall 1995 (18 percentage points). Other increases from Fall 1980 to Fall 1995 were Hispanics at 11 percentage points, Asians at 4 percentage points, and whites at 6 percentage points.



The volatility in six-year graduation rates among Native American students can be attributed primarily to the very small numbers in each entering class. This has ranged from a low of 3 in the Fall 1983 entering class to a high of 22 in Fall 1995. With the exception of the Fall 1990 entering class (50.0 percent), the trend in the six-year graduation rate has become more consistently positive from 45.5 percent in Fall 1986, to a high of 90.9 percent in Fall 1991 and finally 75.0 percent in Fall 1993. However for Fall 1994 and Fall 1995, this trend has declined from 55.6 percent in Fall 1994 to 45.5 percent for Fall 1995.



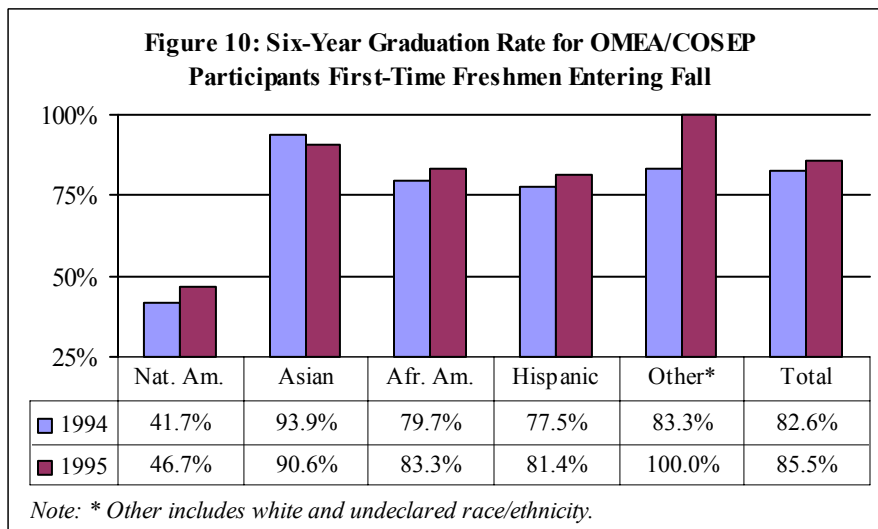
While African-American and Hispanic students are more likely to utilize a fifth or sixth year to complete their degrees than Asian or white students (see Figure 9), the increase in the overall proportion of students graduating within six years is again more attributable to the increase in students completing their degree requirements in four years.

Six-year graduation rates for non-resident aliens were very similar to the rates for the Asian and white groups. However, a higher proportion of non-resident aliens than all other groups graduated in less than four years. In each of the entering cohorts, between 7 and 9 percent of the non-resident aliens graduated early.

**OMEA/COSEP Graduation Rates by Racial/Ethnic Group**

In 1965, the Committee on Special Education Projects (COSEP) was established by Cornell University with the primary goals of: 1) increasing the enrollment of African-American students at Cornell; and 2) providing support services to facilitate both their adjustment to Cornell and their graduation. Later, COSEP was expanded to include Latino/Hispanic American, Native American and Asian American students. In 1976, COSEP was subsumed into the Office of Minority Education Affairs (OMEA). The OMEA offers and coordinates a comprehensive network of academic and administrative support services for students.

Of the 3,059 first-time freshmen entering in Fall 1995, 19 percent or 588 students were participants in OMEA/COSEP programs. The six-year graduation rate for this sub-set of

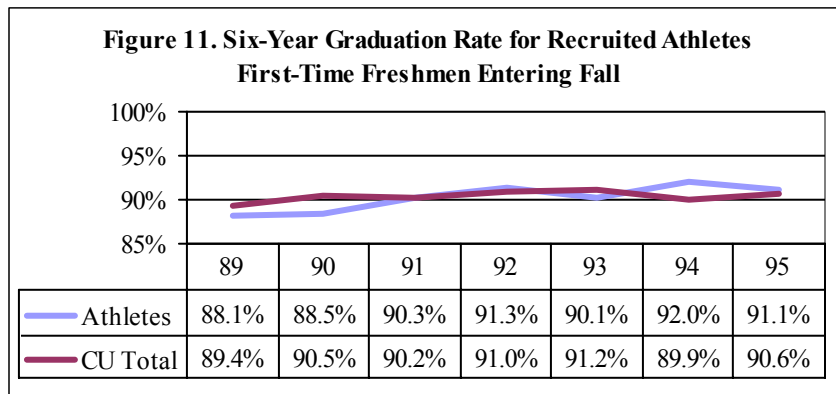


students was 85.5 percent. As Figure 10 displays, the six-year graduation rates for first-time freshmen entering in Fall 1995 who participated in the OMEA/COSEP programs are equivalent to the overall population graduation rates (see Figure 8) within the African-American and Hispanic racial/ethnic categories. For the Fall 1995 cohort, 92.6

percent of African-Americans and 71.4 percent of Hispanics participated in one or more OMEA/COSEP programs.

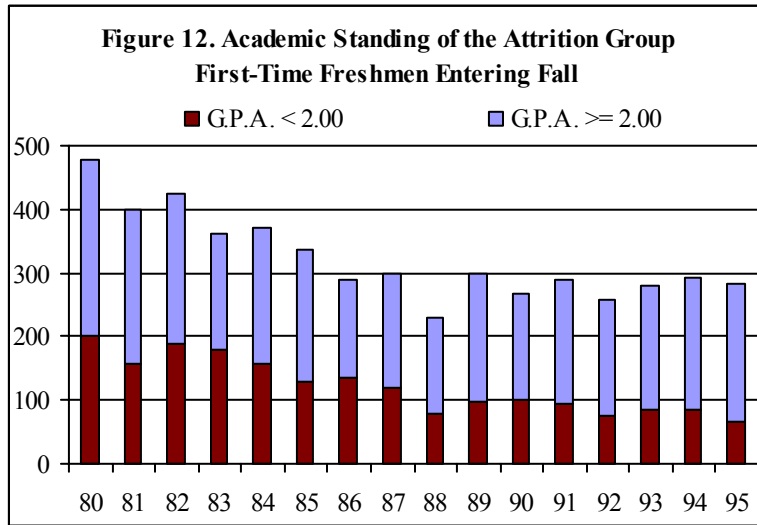
**Recruited Athletes Graduation Rates**

Overall, first-time freshmen who are recruited athletes graduate within six-years of matriculation at about the same rate as other first-time freshmen. Graduation rates for recruited athletes have fluctuated from 2 percentage points below the overall average in Fall 1990 to 2 percentage points above in Fall 1994. For first-time freshmen recruited athletes entering in Fall 1995, the graduation rate is one-half a percentage point higher than the University's graduation rate.



**Attrition Group**

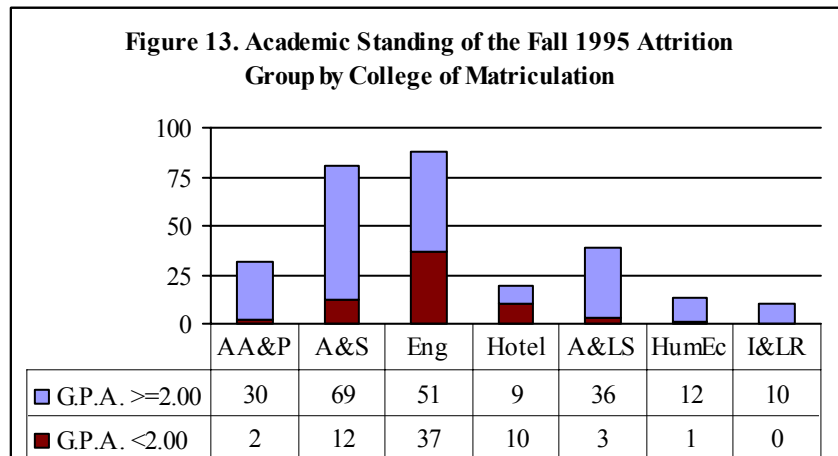
The proportion of students who initially entered Cornell as first-time freshmen and did not complete a degree within six years of matriculation has decreased from 17 percent for those who



entered in Fall 1980 to 9 percent for the Fall 1995 entering class (see Figure 1). Within this diminishing number of students who make up each entering class's attrition group, the proportion in good academic standing at the completion of their last semester of enrollment has increased (see Figure 12). Among the 2,785 students who entered Cornell as first-time freshmen in Fall 1980, a total of 477 did not earn a degree within six years of matriculation; 57.7 percent of those students (275) were in good academic

standing. For Fall 1995, the number of students in the attrition group dropped to 282 out of an entering class of 3,059, increasing the proportion in good academic standing to 77.0 percent of those students (217).

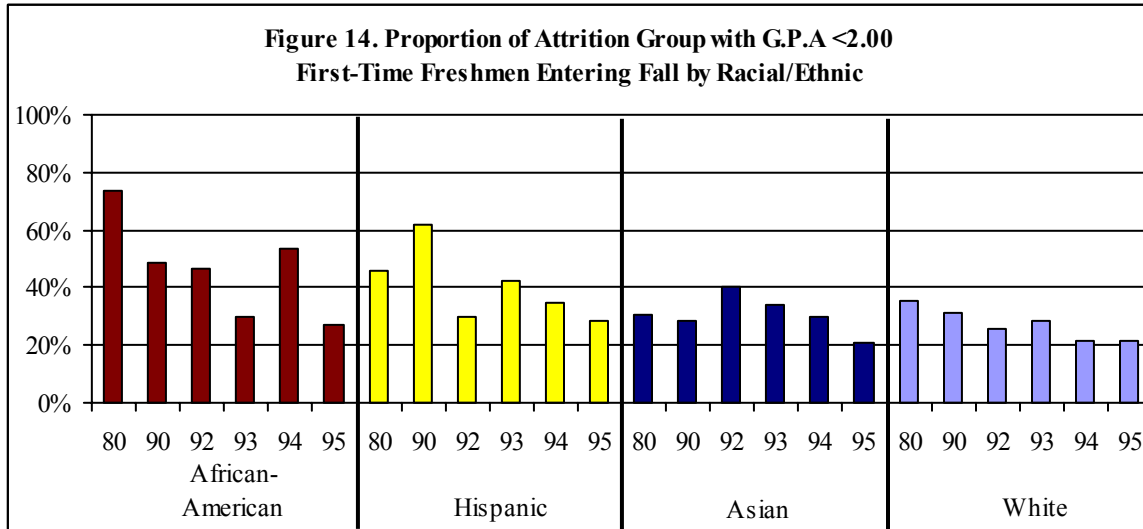
As Figure 13 indicates, the proportion of the Fall 1995 entering class that did not earn a Cornell degree within six years shows variability that is primarily a product of the size of the entering class in each college. Nevertheless, over 90 percent of the attrition group in Architecture, Art, and Planning; Agriculture and Life Sciences; and Human Ecology were in good academic standing as of the last semester enrolled.



Additionally, 85 percent in Arts and Sciences, and 58 percent of those in Engineering were also in good academic standing as of the last semester enrolled. The School of Hotel Administration had the lowest proportion of the attrition group in good academic standing at 47 percent.

Figure 14 displays the difference in the proportion of the attrition group with a cumulative G.P.A. of less than 2.00 by racial/ethnic status over the sixteen-year period of study. For the first-time freshmen entering in Fall 1995, slightly less than a quarter of the Asian and white

attrition group have a final G.P.A. of less than 2.00. For Hispanic students, the proportion of the attrition group with a G.P.A. of less than 2.00 has ranged from a high of 62.1 percent for the Fall 1990 entering class to its current low of 28.2 percent for the Fall 1995 entering class. The proportion of African-American students in the attrition group with a G.P.A. of less than 2.00 has fallen from a high of 73.4 percent for the Fall 1980 entering class to its current low of 26.9 percent for Fall 1995 entering class.



Additional information about the status of individuals who were part of the attrition groups for the entering classes of Fall 1994 and Fall 1995 is provided below. Table 1 shows that only a third (104 of 293) of the Fall 1994 attrition group were required to leave or withdraw from Cornell. Slightly more than half of all the individuals in this attrition cohort took a non-required leave or withdrawal (161 of 293). It is noteworthy that a total of 9.6 percent of the attrition group either earned a Cornell degree after the six-year study window (18 individuals) or are still currently enrolled as undergraduates at Cornell (10 individuals).

**Table 1. Categories of Attrition Group, First-Time Freshmen Entering Fall 1994**

Reason	AA&P	A&S	Eng	Hotel	A&LS	HumEc	I&LR	Total
Graduated After 6-Year Window	2	5	5	1	5			18
Currently Registered	3	3	1		3			10
Leave								
Medical		4	2		2	2	2	12
Required	2	28	6	4	6	1	4	51
Voluntary	15	36	5	7	10	1	1	75
Withdrawal								
Required	2	7	29	4	3	8		53
Voluntary	9	14	11	1	7	7		49
Other/Unknown	3		7	4	7	1	3	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>293</b>

Table 2 indicates that 29.4 percent (83 of 282) of the Fall 1995 attrition group was required to leave or withdraw from Cornell. Close to two-thirds of the individuals in this attrition cohort took a non-required leave or withdrawal (183 of 282). A total of 5.7 percent of the attrition group either earned a Cornell degree after the six-year study window (3 individuals) or are still registered as undergraduates (13 individuals).

**Table 2. Categories of Attrition Group, First-Time Freshmen Entering Fall 1995**

Reason	AA&P	A&S	Eng	Hotel	A&LS	HumEc	I&LR	Total
Graduated After 6-Year Window			2		1			3
Currently Registered		5	5	2	1			13
Leave								
Medical	2	9	6		1			18
Required	4	18	8	4		2		36
Voluntary	17	33	14	4	3		2	73
Withdrawal								
Required	2	6	35	4				47
Voluntary	6	8	11	1	4	1	1	32
Other/Unknown	1	2	7	4	29	10	7	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>282</b>

Table 3 displays that the percentage of students who did not earn a degree within six years of matriculating varies slightly in the lower and upper SAT quartiles. This indicates that freshmen entering Cornell in Fall 1992 and Fall 1993 with comparatively high SAT scores were as likely not to earn a degree in six years as those with relatively low SAT scores. However, this trend changed with the first-time freshmen entering in Fall 1994 and Fall 1995. Students entering in Fall 1994 or 1995 with a relatively low SAT score were less likely to graduate.

**Table 3. Percentage of Matriculants by SAT Quartiles Who Did Not Graduate Within Six-Years**

SAT Quartiles of Cornell Students	Fall 1992		Fall 1993		Fall 1994		Fall 1995	
	Verbal	Math	Verbal	Math	Verbal	Math	Verbal	Math
0% - 24%	8.8%	9.4%	9.8%	9.3%	13.3%	12.9%	13.1%	12.8%
25% - 49%	10.2%	7.6%	8.4%	9.4%	8.6%	8.8%	8.5%	7.8%
50% - 74%	7.9%	9.0%	8.4%	8.4%	7.3%	7.5%	6.4%	8.7%
75% - 100%	8.3%	9.4%	8.6%	7.9%	10.3%	8.8%	9.2%	8.1%

In looking at whether the geographic origin of students enrolling at Cornell is associated with their likelihood of graduating, Table 4 indicates that there is a slightly greater chance of not graduating for US citizens/permanent residents who come to Cornell from greater distances.

**Table 4. Percentage of Matriculants by Geographic Admit Region Who Did Not Graduate Within Six-Years**

Admit Region	Fall 1992	Fall 1993	Fall 1994	Fall 1995
New York	7.9%	7.1%	7.7%	7.0%
New England / Middle Atlantic	7.8%	8.9%	9.5%	8.2%
Other U.S.A.	12.2%	11.3%	15.0%	13.8%
Foreign	7.3%	8.3%	8.4%	9.1%

Students matriculating from New York, New England, the Middle Atlantic states, and from outside the United States were somewhat more likely to earn a degree within six years than those students from the remaining states and US possessions. While the association between geographic origin and graduation status is statistically significant, the degree of association is small enough not to cause concern given the overriding institutional commitment to enrolling a geographically diverse class.

Cornell operates on a “need-blind” admissions policy, which ensures that all admissions decisions are made without regard to the financial circumstances of applicants. With this in mind, Cornell is committed to providing students with the financial support necessary to complete their undergraduate program.

Financial aid programs provide funds to improve access opportunities for needy students and to lower the absolute cost for some via grants. Table 5 displays the percentage of students who did not earn a degree within six years of matriculating by the type of financial aid package received.

It appears that students receiving Cornell administered grants are at a higher risk of not graduating within six-years. However, first-time freshmen entering in Fall 1994 and Fall 1995 receiving loan packages without grants are more likely to graduate within the six-year window. Students entering in Fall 1995 who were on work-study or received no financial aid showed a similar attrition rate as those receiving loans without grant aid. However, this group of students is also more likely to include underrepresented minority students, which may account for most of this difference.

**Table 5. Percentage of Matriculants by Financial Aid Package Who Did Not Graduate Within Six-Years**

<b>Financial Aid Type</b>	<b>Fall 1994</b>	<b>Fall 1995</b>
CU administered grants	10.7%	11.6%
Loans without grants	5.5%	7.5%
Work-study / No aid	11.0%	7.8%
<i>Note: CU administered grants recipients might also receive loans.</i>		

**Inter-Institutional Comparisons**

Consistently reliable graduation rate information covering the time period under consideration in this study for the full set of institutions that constitute Cornell’s common application and admission overlap group is not easily accessible. One proxy for such data is found in the annual *America’s Best Colleges* guide published each fall by *U. S. News & World Report*. For the past seven years, they have collected and displayed a graduation rate figure for each institution included in their rankings.

**Table 6. Six-Year Graduation Rates for Cornell and its Overlap Group**

*Source: USN&WR’s Annual America’s Best Colleges Guide<sup>1</sup>*

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Δ
Binghamton	75%	77%	79%	83%	79%	82%	82%	7%
Northwestern	88%	89%	89%	90%	91%	90%	92%	4%
<b>Cornell</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>2%</b>
Penn	89%	90%	90%	87%	88%	90%	91%	2%
Princeton	95%	95%	95%	95%	94%	95%	97%	2%
MIT	90%	91%	91%	89%	89%	92%	91%	1%
Stanford	92%	93%	93%	93%	94%	92%	93%	1%
Brown	94%	94%	94%	93%	91%	93%	94%	0%
Duke	93%	94%	95%	95%	93%	92%	93%	0%
Harvard	97%	97%	97%	97%	97%	97%	97%	0%
Virginia	91%	92%	92%	93%	91%	92%	91%	0%
Yale	95%	95%	96%	95%	93%	94%	95%	0%
Michigan	83%	84%	85%	85%	84%	83%	82%	-1%
Columbia	90%	95%	88%	88%	87%	90%	88%	-2%
Dartmouth	95%	95%	95%	94%	93%	94%	92%	-3%
Johns Hopkins	88%	87%	87%	87%	88%	89%	85%	-3%

Table 5 displays reported graduation rates for Cornell and the fifteen institutions that make up its common application and admission overlap group. Note in particular that seven institutions -- Cornell, Binghamton, Northwestern, Penn, Princeton, MIT, and Stanford -- have realized net gains from the beginning to the end of this period. Five institutions have had no net change, and four institutions – including two Ivy League schools -- have experienced a decline from the beginning to the end of this period.

<sup>1</sup>The rates displayed are four-year averages of six-year graduation rates. For example, the 2000 rates are the averages of six-year graduation rates for freshmen entering in Fall 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1992. The last column of the table displays the arithmetic difference between the rate published in 2000 and the rate published in 1994.