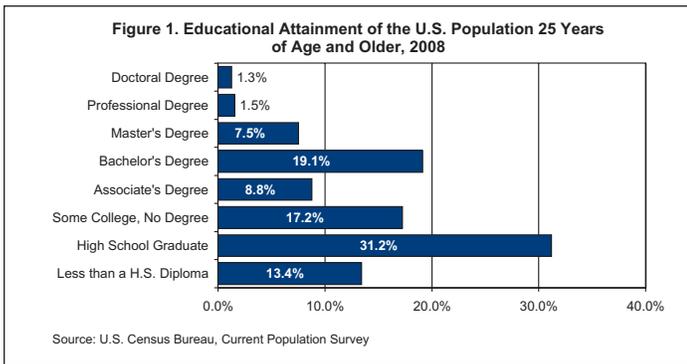


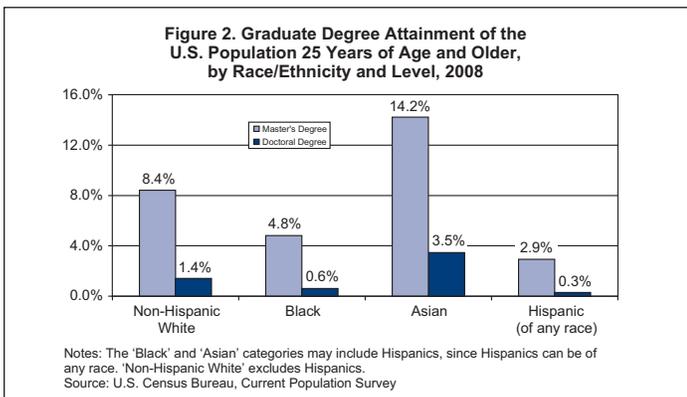
# Data Sources: Graduate Degree Attainment of the U.S. Population

More than 660,000 graduate degrees are now awarded each year (Snyder et al., 2009), but individuals with master's degrees and doctorates account for a very small share of the U.S. population. In 2008, just 8.8% of the U.S. population 25 years of age and older reported that a graduate degree was their highest degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). These findings on educational attainment come from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly sample survey of the U.S. population.

As shown in Figure 1, just 1.3% of the U.S. population 25 years of age and older had a doctorate as their highest degree in 2008, and only 7.5% had a master's degree. In contrast, nearly one-third (31.2%) held a high school diploma and one out of five (19.1%) a bachelor's degree as their highest degree.



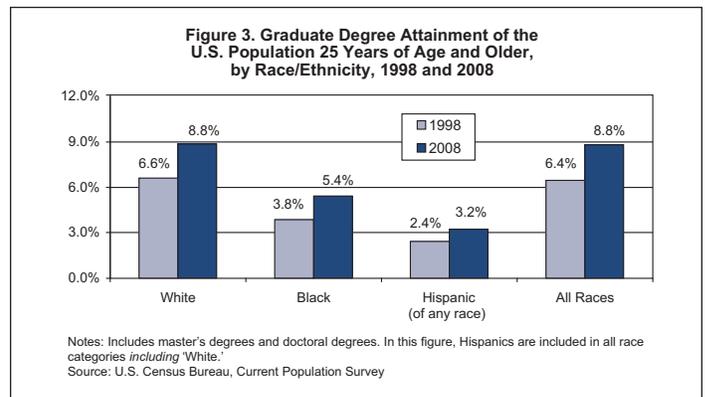
Women are slightly more likely than men to have a master's degree as their highest degree (7.7% vs. 7.3%), but men are about twice as likely as women to have a doctorate (1.7% vs. 0.8%). Educational attainment rates also vary considerably by race/ethnicity (see Figure 2). Asians and non-Hispanic whites are far more likely to have graduate degrees than their Black and Hispanic peers. In 2008, 3.5% of Asians and 1.4% of non-Hispanic whites had doctorates, compared with 0.6% of Blacks and 0.3% of Hispanics. Similarly, 14.2% of Asians and 8.4% of non-Hispanic whites had a master's degree as their highest degree, compared with 4.8% of Blacks and 2.9% of Hispanics. Due to sampling issues relating to small numbers, the CPS does not separately report data on the educational attainment of Native Americans.



Educational attainment rates have increased considerably over the last decade. In 1998, 16.4% of the U.S. population 25

years of age and older had a bachelor's degree as their highest degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 1998), compared with 19.1% in 2008. Similarly, 6.4% of the population had a master's degree or a doctorate as their highest degree in 1998, a figure that increased to 8.8% in 2008 (see Figure 3). The increase in graduate degree attainment over the past ten years has been driven in large part by greater increases in educational attainment by women than men. For men, 7.3% had a graduate degree in 1998, compared with 9.1% in 2008. For women, 5.7% had a graduate degree in 1998, compared with 8.6% in 2008.

Increases in educational attainment occurred for all racial/ethnic groups as well. Although the U.S. Census Bureau changed the way it collected data by race/ethnicity between 1998 and 2008, some comparisons can be made. The percentage of Hispanics with a graduate degree increased from 2.4% to 3.2% over the decade, and graduate degree attainment for Blacks increased from 3.8% to 5.4%. For whites, graduate degree attainment increased from 6.6% to 8.8% between 1998 and 2008. Note that the percentages for whites in Figure 3 include individuals of Hispanic ethnicity (since Hispanics can be of any race), but the percentages in Figure 2 are only for non-Hispanic whites. Since Hispanics have lower levels of educational attainment on average, the overall graduate degree attainment rate for whites in Figure 3 appears lower than in Figure 2. Due to small sample sizes, educational attainment rates were not reported separately for Asians and Native Americans in 1998.



## Implications

The 2008 CPS data includes both encouraging and troubling statistics. On the positive side, the rising level of bachelor's degree attainment in the past decade is promising for the future of graduate education. With more students academically prepared to enter graduate school, graduate enrollment is likely to continue to increase. Recent projections from the National Center for Education Statistics support this, predicting that graduate enrollment will increase 18% between 2006 and 2017 (Hussar and Bailey, 2008).

Currently, women far outnumber men in graduate education. In Fall 2007, 59% of all graduate students were women, and just 41% were men (Bell, 2008). Given women's representation in graduate education, and the considerable

increase over the past decade in the number of women with a graduate degree as their highest degree, it appears likely that the graduate degree attainment rate for women in the U.S. population will soon surpass that of men. While the increase in educational attainment is positive for women, the smaller numbers of men in graduate education, in combination with a rapidly growing population, raises the possibility that graduate degree attainment rates for men could actually decline in the future should these trends continue.

Finally, while it is encouraging that educational attainment has risen for Blacks and Hispanics over the past ten years, the percentages of these populations with graduate degrees still remain far below the percentages for Asians and non-Hispanic whites. Particularly troubling is the low percentage of Hispanics with graduate degrees. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that the Hispanic population in the United States will nearly triple between 2008 and 2050, and that nearly one in three U.S. residents in 2050 will be Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). In order for the United States to continue to prosper, remain competitive, and be a world leader, it is imperative that educational attainment increase for Hispanics.

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