



POPULATION BRIEF

Trends in the Western U.S.

Education

A Regional Overview

By Don E. Albrecht

Overview

Rural development is the process by which the lives of individuals and families living in rural areas are improved. Effective rural development necessarily involves several components that include 1) good jobs that provide individuals and families the opportunity to earn and maintain a livable income; 2) a chance to complete an education and have lifelong opportunities to learn and improve one's circumstances; 3) and the opportunity to live a reasonably long and healthy life. Communities that effectively meet these conditions are likely to retain existing residents and attract new residents and thus experience population growth.

Additionally, effective rural development means that opportunities to obtain high-quality employment, complete an education, and live a long and healthy life must be available to all residents of the community, rather than only to certain segments of the population.

The first step in advancing an effective rural development program is to carefully assess baseline conditions. In response, the Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) is providing a set of population briefs that provide some of this baseline information. Each population brief will assess one of the components of rural development listed above. This brief will explore education, and each brief will explore overall conditions, and then examine the extent to which opportunities are available to all segments of the population by making comparisons on race/ethnicity, gender, family structure or geography. The geographic component will provide comparisons between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas and will

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compare the west with the remainder of the United States. Further, population briefs for each of the 13 states comprising the western region are developed that provide more detailed information on rural development issues. Data for these population briefs are obtained from the United States Census.

Education Trends in the West

While college educated workers have always earned higher incomes than their less-educated counterparts, this educational income gap has increased substantially in recent years. Recent Census data indicate that households where the primary wage-earner has a college degree or more have total household incomes that are more than twice as high as households where the primary wage-earner has only a high school degree or less.

The primary reasons for the growing educational income gap are changes in the employment and economic structure of this country. These changes are having an especially significant impact on rural areas. Historically, the primary source of employment in rural areas was agriculture and the natural resource industries of mining, forestry and fisheries. Later, as our nation industrialized, manufacturing became the largest employer of rural Americans. A unique feature of agriculture, the natural resource industries and manufacturing (the goods-producing industries) is that

they provide many stable middle-income jobs, and many of these jobs are held by individuals who have a high school degree or less.

In recent years, however, millions of jobs in the goods producing sector have been lost as they have either been replaced by technology or outsourced to foreign countries by multi-national corporations to take advantage of cheaper labor. Nationwide, the loss of jobs in the goods-producing sector has been offset by a growing number of jobs in the service sector. Service sector employment, compared to the goods-producing sector, tends to be much more economically diverse. There are many high-quality service jobs in fields such as health care, education, information, and finance. These jobs, however, generally require advanced education or training. In contrast, there has also been a significant increase in the number of low-pay service jobs in retail trade and personal, household, tourism, and entertainment services. Individuals holding these low-pay service jobs tend to earn substantially less than equally educated persons working in the goods-producing sector. Consequently, economic restructuring has resulted in steadily higher wages for college educated persons as the demand for skilled labor has increased, and lower wages for persons with less than a college education as middle-income jobs in the goods-producing sector have been replaced by low-pay service jobs. The consequence

is increased inequality and a growing educational income gap.

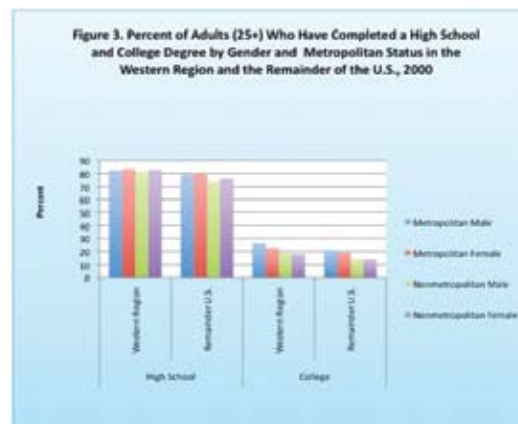
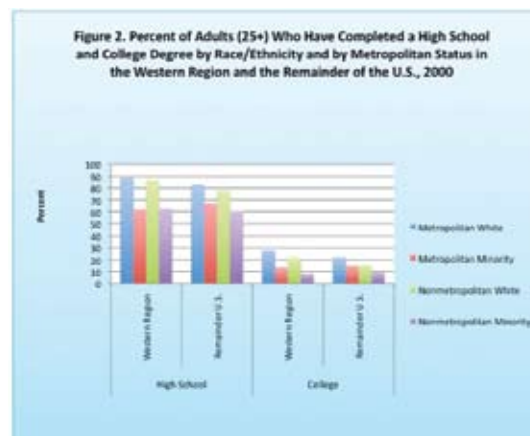
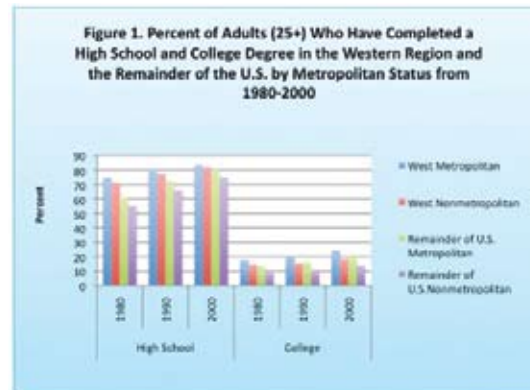
Impacts for Rural Areas

Economic restructuring and the growing educational income gap are especially problematic for rural areas for two major reasons. First, rural areas have traditionally been more dependent on the declining goods-producing sector, and second, education levels tend to be lower in rural areas, making rural residents, on average, less qualified to fill positions in expanding skill-based service fields. Thus, as jobs in the goods-producing sector are lost, displaced rural workers lack the education to obtain the high-quality service jobs and are thus often relegated to the low-pay service sector.

A review of the data comparing the proportions of adults who have completed at least a high school or college degree in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas in the western region and in the remainder of the United States from 1980 to 2000 (see Figure 1) reveal three primary results. First, the proportion of persons who have attained high school and college degrees has steadily increased over time. For example, in the Nonmetropolitan West, the proportion of adults with a high school degree has increased from 71 percent in 1980 to 82 percent in 2000, while the percent with a college degree has grown from 14.4 percent in 1980 to 18.5 percent in 2000. Second, education attainment levels are measurably higher in metropolitan areas than in nonmetropolitan areas. Third, educational levels are significantly higher in the west than in the remainder of the United States. Figures 4 and 5 show data on the distribution of individuals who have completed high school and college. Counties with high proportions of high school graduates are most extensive in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah. Metropolitan counties are over-represented among counties with high proportions of college graduates.

Education Across Population Segments

Another vital issue is the extent to which educational benefits are shared by all segments of the population. When comparing levels of educational



attainment by race/ethnicity and gender for metropolitan and nonmetropolitan residents of the West and the remainder of the United States (see Figures 2 and 3) it is apparent educational levels are much lower for minorities than for whites in both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas (see Figure 2). In the nonmetropolitan West, for example, 86.6 percent of white residents have a high school degree and 21.7 percent have a college degree, compared to only 62.5 percent of minority residents who have a high school degree and 8.1 percent

who have a college degree. Similar data relative to gender is presented in Figure 3. There is little difference in the proportion of persons who have completed high school between males and females as high school completion becomes closer to universal. For all comparisons, a slightly higher proportion of females than males have completed high school. At the college level, a higher percentage of males are college graduates than females. When looking at college education levels, the differences between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan residents are also more apparent.

In every state within the Western Region, the proportion of metropolitan residents exceeds the proportion of nonmetropolitan residents who are college graduates (Table 1). In every state but California, the proportion of metropolitan residents is greater than the proportion of nonmetropolitan residents who are high school graduates. Overall, high school graduation rates are the highest in Wyoming (87.2 percent), and college graduation rates are the highest in Colorado (25.7 percent).

Conclusion

The relative value of an advanced education is increasing as our nation's economic structure changes. Certain segments of the population have significantly lower levels of educational attainment than others. Specifically, nonmetropolitan residents have less education than metropolitan residents, and minority educational attainment is much lower than white educational attainment. Improving educational opportunities and achievements for rural citizens will play a significant role in community development efforts of the future. In fact, a community's efforts to attract high-quality employment may be thwarted if the potential workforce lacks the necessary levels of education. ●

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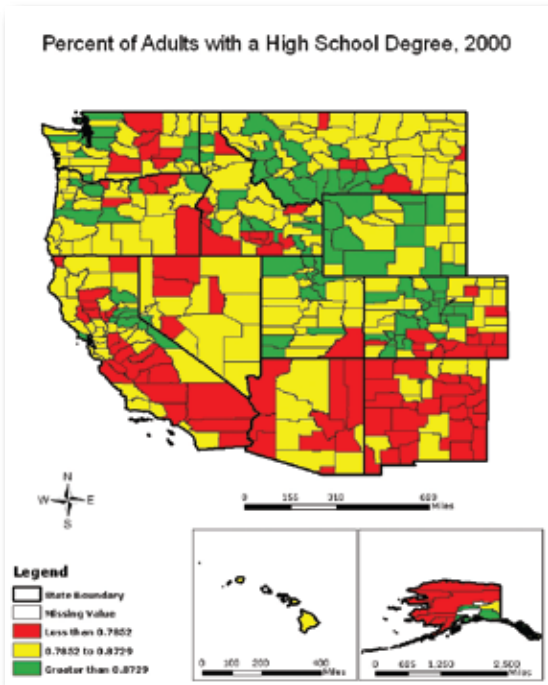


Figure 4

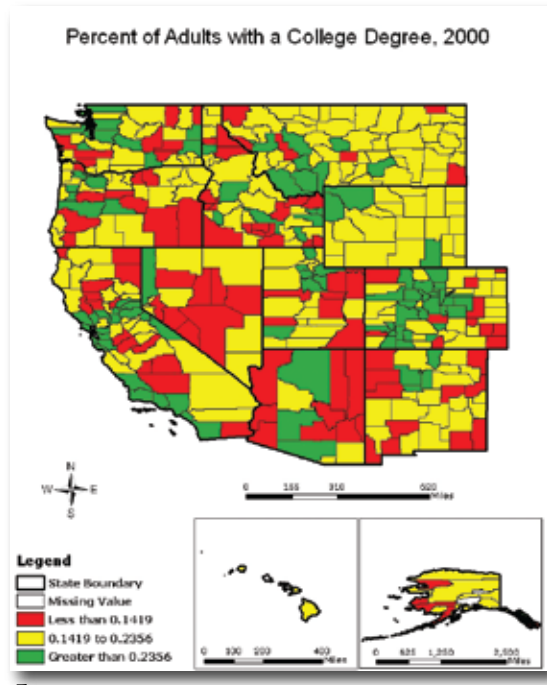


Figure 5

Table : Percentage of Adults (25+) Who have completed at least a High School and College Degree by State and Metropolitan Status, 1980-2000

State	Metropolitan			Nonmetropolitan			Total		
	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000
Alaska									
High School	85.5	89.3	90.1	70.5	78.1	82.0	72.5	79.6	82.9
College	21.1	23.4	24.7	16.3	17.2	17.8	16.9	18.0	18.6
Arizona									
High School	69.1	74.7	78.6	60.3	66.0	72.6	64.7	70.4	75.4
College	15.3	16.9	19.6	10.9	11.0	13.0	13.1	13.9	16.1
California									
High School	71.4	75.8	77.3	74.8	77.3	81.2	72.6	76.4	78.7
College	17.7	21.0	24.1	14.8	14.8	17.2	16.7	18.8	21.6
Colorado									
High School	80.7	86.4	89.2	71.7	78.2	83.2	74.0	80.3	84.7
College	22.7	26.8	32.6	17.7	18.9	23.4	18.8	20.9	25.7
Hawaii									
High School	75.6	81.2	84.8	57.2	69.8	72.7	60.9	72.1	75.1
College	21.7	24.6	27.9	12.4	14.3	18.5	14.3	16.3	20.4
Idaho									
High School	71.7	77.5	83.0	71.8	77.6	81.7	71.8	77.5	82.0
College	13.5	15.0	18.3	14.1	14.3	17.0	13.9	14.5	17.4
Montana									
High School	75.6	82.5	88.7	70.4	76.8	83.7	70.8	77.2	84.0
College	18.6	21.7	26.0	14.0	15.5	18.8	14.3	15.9	19.3
Nevada									
High School	78.6	81.8	83.1	69.1	76.0	80.6	71.3	77.4	81.2
College	15.9	17.1	19.4	11.2	11.8	13.1	12.3	13.1	14.6
New Mexico									
High School	67.5	75.3	79.3	61.7	68.6	75.0	63.0	70.1	75.9
College	16.5	19.1	22.5	13.2	15.1	17.7	13.9	16.0	18.7
Oregon									
High School	76.8	82.6	86.4	71.1	76.5	81.4	72.8	78.3	83.0
College	19.6	22.2	26.7	12.3	13.9	15.9	14.5	16.4	19.2
Utah									
High School	80.5	85.6	88.7	74.6	79.5	84.5	76.6	81.6	86.0
College	18.9	21.1	25.7	13.5	14.3	17.3	15.3	16.7	20.2
Washington									
High School	75.0	80.2	83.8	72.9	78.0	83.2	73.8	79.0	83.4
College	15.6	18.0	22.1	14.7	16.4	19.7	15.1	17.1	20.8
Wyoming									
High School	81.3	84.7	88.7	75.8	81.6	87.0	76.3	81.9	87.2
College	18.7	20.5	21.7	15.5	17.2	20.5	15.8	17.5	20.6

About the Briefs

Published by the Western Rural Development Center

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The Population Briefs provide information on the population trends in the western U.S. They are intended to provide both basic information and, when combined with the data tables on the WRDC website, more detailed information for further analysis and application.

The series of Population Briefs will include population trends in the western U.S. related to minorities, natural amenities, education, employment/labor, health, fuel usage, and more. Each topic will include a regional overview and then one brief focused on each of the 13 states in the WRDC's region. The briefs will also include data, where available, related to the population trends in the four western U.S. Territories.

The Population Briefs are available in PDF format on the WRDC website (<http://wrdc.usu.edu>) under 'Publications' and in paper format through the WRDC offices via email to wrdc@usu.edu.

Data

Data for this series is obtained from the U.S. Census of Population for 1980, 1990, 2000, and, where available, 2006. Data is reported for all persons for whom race/ethnicity was reported.



The Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) is one of four regional centers funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Services (CSREES) to strengthen the capacity of local citizens to guide the future of their rural communities. Each of the four Centers link the research and extension capacity of regional land-grant universities with local decision-makers to address a wide range of rural development issues.

The WRDC also receives substantial support from several Utah State University units including Cooperative Extension, the Agricultural Experiment Station and the College of Natural Resources.

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There is a Population Brief for each of the 13 states in the Western Region, and when available, one brief on each of the four U.S. Territories in the region.

To access the state briefs visit 'Rural Resources' on the WRDC website at <http://wrdc.usu.edu>.

State Briefs are available for:

Alaska
Arizona
California
Colorado
Hawaii
Idaho
Montana
Nevada
New Mexico
Oregon
Utah
Washington
Wyoming