

## GRE® RESEARCH REPORT

Pathways to Graduate School: 5.

# A Data Overview of U.S. Prospective Graduate Students by Black Students and Gender



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# ETS Research Report Series

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# **Pathways to Graduate School: 5. A Data Overview of U.S. Prospective Graduate Students by Black Students and Gender**

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## **Abstract**

One understudied segment of the domestic talent pool is the Black or African American individuals who are U.S. citizens and aspire to earn a graduate degree. Gender differences within this talent pool are specifically understudied. The 101,039 individuals who are U.S. citizens, who provided gender and race/ethnicity information, and who had scores on all three GRE® measures are the subjects for this descriptive study, one of a series of five such reports. GRE data from July 1, 2016, to June 30, 2021, supplemented with U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Census data, are analyzed. These individuals, referred to as prospective graduate students (PGS), are examined through six core questions: (a) Who were the PGS? (b) Where did they reside? (c) What were their education and work experiences? (d) What were their undergraduate experiences? (e) What were their plans for graduate study? and (f) What were their emerging graduate school choice sets? Key findings include the following: (a) 34% were 22 years of age or younger; (b) 37% were currently enrolled in college; (c) 75% attended an institution in their home state, with women doing so slightly more than men; (d) 46% were first-generation college students; (e) nearly 60% were Pell Grant–eligible; (f) as undergraduates, women favored life sciences, while men leaned toward physical sciences and engineering; (g) women were slightly more interested in master’s degrees; and (h) 76% included at least one in-state institution in their graduate school choice sets. The report concludes with recommendations for future research and practical applications, particularly in the graduate school application process.

*Keywords:* Black, African American, graduate school applications, test measures, GRE®, prospective graduate students, demographics, work experience, undergraduate experience, graduate enrollment, graduate program

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### Series Preface

This research report is one of five in the Pathways to Graduate School: A Data Series on U.S. Prospective Graduate Students series, which examines prospective graduate students (PGS) who are U.S. citizens at a time in their educational trajectory that is not commonly explored—when they are considering applying to graduate school. This series is intended to supplement the ETS (2022) report “A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the *GRE*<sup>®</sup> General Test July 2016–June 2021,” which presents analyses for all GRE test takers.

The series is intended for individuals and organizations involved in graduate education, such as graduate education institutions, graduate school admissions offices, organizations focused on diversity and inclusion, policymakers and government agencies, and education researchers and analysts who may apply descriptions of domestic subpopulations of the overall GRE test taker population to inform their understanding of and support for various groups within the PGS population. Each report examines the same six questions:

1. Who were the PGS?
2. Where did the PGS reside?
3. What were their education and work experiences?
4. What were their undergraduate experiences?
5. What were PGSs plans for graduate study?
6. What were their emerging graduate school choice sets?

The five profiles of U.S. citizens are (a) women PGS, (b) PGS by Hispanic subgroup and gender, (c) PGS by parental education and gender, (d) PGS by Pell Grant eligibility and gender, and (e) PGS by Black students and gender.

A total of 1.2 million PGS who took the GRE General Test from 2016 to 2021 and responded to questions on the GRE registration form and the Background Information Questionnaire provided data for the series. The GRE data were supplemented with data from the U.S. Department of Education to enrich the descriptions of postsecondary institutions and the U.S. Census Bureau to enhance the profile of where individuals reside. The data are descriptive rather than inferential, so observed differences should not be considered definitive or conclusive.

### List of Series Abbreviations

| Abbreviation              | Full text                                                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AANAPISI                  | Asian American Native American Pacific Islander–serving institution |
| AAU                       | American Association of Universities                                |
| ACE                       | American Council on Education                                       |
| ADHD                      | attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder                            |
| American Indian           | American Indian or Alaskan Native                                   |
| ANNH                      | Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian–serving institution               |
| Asian                     | Asian or Asian American                                             |
| B&B                       | Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study                         |
| BA/BS                     | bachelor of arts/bachelor of science                                |
| <i>Barron's</i>           | <i>Barron's Profile of American Colleges</i>                        |
| BIQ                       | Background Information Questionnaire                                |
| Black                     | Black or African American                                           |
| Carnegie                  | Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education         |
| CBSA                      | core-based statistical area                                         |
| doctorate                 | doctoral degree, e.g., PhD, EdD                                     |
| GPA                       | grade point average                                                 |
| Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander                           |
| HSI                       | Hispanic-serving institution                                        |
| IPEDS                     | Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System                      |
| master's                  | master's degree, e.g., MA, MS, MEd                                  |
| Mexican                   | Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicano                               |
| MSI                       | minority-serving institution                                        |
| NASNTI                    | Native American–serving nontribal institution                       |
| NCES                      | National Center for Education Statistics                            |
| no parent bach            | no parent earned a bachelor's degree                                |
| NSF                       | National Science Foundation                                         |
| one parent bach           | at least one parent earned a bachelor's degree                      |
| one parent bach+          | at least one parent earned a graduate degree                        |
| other                     | other race/ethnicity                                                |
| other Hispanic            | other Hispanic, Latino, or Latin American                           |
| PBI                       | predominantly Black institution                                     |
| PGS                       | prospective graduate students                                       |
| STEM                      | science, technology, engineering, and math                          |
| TCU                       | tribal college or university                                        |
| White                     | White (non-Hispanic)                                                |

## Introduction

Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today. (Malcolm X, 1964)

One of the clearest indicators of individuals preparing for the future is the pursuit of continued education. In education systems worldwide, earning a postbaccalaureate credential is often seen as the pinnacle of the academic journey. The benefits of this pursuit are well known: developing intellectual passion, setting oneself apart in the workforce, ratcheting up one's career mobility, and enhancing one's earning potential. Additionally, in some sectors, another reason may be that having a graduate degree is becoming a requirement for entry-level jobs in the government or private sector and for academe (Dishman, 2016).

In the United States, the National Science Board (2020), in its report *Vision 2030*, emphasized the need for the country to cultivate “the fullness of the nation’s domestic talent.” It argues that this will foster individual opportunity and benefit the U.S. economy. However, when we consider a definition of *full*—“containing as much or as many as is possible or normal” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)—we must ask: Does this fullness truly encompass all groups within the nation’s domestic talent pool?

This study aims to construct a detailed descriptive portrait of Black or African American individuals who are U.S. citizens and aspire to earn a graduate degree and to illuminate gender differences. Why focus on this segment of the talent pool? One reason is that these individuals need greater representation in graduate education. In 2021, 2,431 individuals identified as Black or African American U.S. citizens or permanent residents earned a research doctorate in the United States (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2021, Tables 1–8). These individuals represented 5% of all 2021 doctorate recipients ( $n = 52,250$ ), 80% of all Black or African American 2021 doctorate recipients ( $n = 3,040$ ), and 8% of all U.S. citizens or permanent resident 2021 doctorate recipients ( $n = 31,674$ ).

Another reason to focus on Black or African American individuals is the widely discussed narrative of Black women outpacing Black men in educational achievements. While Black women are leading in many respects—notably in the higher education attainment rate—there are essential nuances worth exploring. In 2021, among Black women and men over the age of 25 years, (a) Black men made up 45% of the Black adult population, while Black women represented 55% ( $n = 12,760,000$  and  $15,400,000$ , respectively); (b) 16% of Black men and 18%

of Black women had attained a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education ( $n = 2,056,000$  and  $2,798,000$ , respectively); (c) 7% of Black men and 10% of Black women had attained a master's degree ( $n = 841,000$  and  $1,591,000$ ); and (d) 1% of Black men and Black women had attained a doctoral degree ( $n = 151,000$  and  $221,000$ , respectively; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021, Table 1). While these statistics highlight important differences in educational outcomes, there is much more to understand beyond just the numbers. This study seeks to explore those distinctions in greater depth.

This research looks at an earlier point in the journey to earn a graduate degree, when individuals are thinking about graduate school, to examine what the U.S. citizen Black or African American populace looks like overall and by gender. Research has yet to explore the unique characteristics and goals of this population of PGS. The intention is to increase awareness and promote an understanding of the characteristics, aspirations, and graduate degree intentions of individuals considering graduate school.

In preparing for this study, a content analysis of the questions on the GRE® test registration form and the Background Information Questionnaire (BIQ) was conducted. Following this, consideration was given to how ETS's data from these questions could be presented to offer potential insights for individuals and organizations involved in graduate education, such as graduate education institutions, graduate school admissions offices, organizations focused on diversity and inclusion, policymakers and government agencies, and education researchers and analysts. It was concluded that presenting the data in response to a series of questions would be the most effective way to provide a snapshot of the period from July 2016 to June 2021. In presenting this research, it is important to emphasize, and encourage readers to remember, Emdin's (2012) wisdom that "yes, there is difference but difference is not deficient" (p. 1).

Six grand questions guided this work:

1. Who were the PGS? This section examines key demographic characteristics, such as age, if they communicate better in English than any other language, and whether they have a documented disability.
2. Where did the PGS reside? This analysis explores their geographic distribution, including their residence by U.S. Census region and the most populous states, core-based statistical areas (CBSAs), and congressional districts.

3. What were their education and work experiences? Their enrollment statuses and work experiences are presented here.
4. What were their undergraduate experiences? This section delves into the characteristics of their baccalaureate institutions, their experiences related to family educational attainment, Federal Pell Grant eligibility, and their academic achievements, such as their undergraduate fields of study and grade point averages (GPA), both overall and within their major.
5. What were PGSs plans for graduate study? The focus here is on their aspirations for graduate education, including their intended field of study, mode of study (part-time/full-time), attendance plans, and preferred geographic region for pursuing graduate school.
6. What were their emerging graduate school choice sets? This section discusses the set of graduate schools under consideration, including factors such as geographic location and the potential to pursue graduate studies at their baccalaureate institution or a flagship university within their state. Furthermore, the characteristics of these institutions (e.g., public/private) are analyzed, along with the intensity of particular institutional characteristics within the choice sets.

This report takes a descriptive approach, comparing women PGS from different racial and ethnic groups in relation to the six key research questions to illuminate their distinct characteristics, experiences, and pathways toward graduate education.

### **Methodology**

To answer the six research questions about PGS, data from the ETS GRE Program were analyzed. The GRE data are unique in their focus on the period before application to graduate programs. Other well-known national data sets focus on enrollment and degree completion, such as the National Center for Education Statistics' Baccalaureate and Beyond Study; the National Student Clearinghouse education data; and the National Science Foundation's Survey of Earned Doctorates, which examines doctoral degree completion. The Council of Graduate Schools' report *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2011 to 2021* (Zhou, 2022) focused on the more than 2

million applications U.S. graduate schools received in fall 2021. It is not possible, however, to convert applications into numbers of individual applicants.

When individuals register for the GRE, in addition to providing their gender and state of residence, they complete the self-report BIQ, with questions on demographic background, undergraduate institution and experiences, and preferences for graduate study. Each year, the GRE Program publishes a snapshot report that presents analyses for all GRE test takers. The Pathways to Graduate School: A Data Series on U.S. Prospective Graduate Students reports are intended to supplement the ETS (2022) report on the snapshot of individuals who took the GRE General Test from July 2016 to June 2021.

The 1,093,466 individuals who (a) took the GRE General Test between June 30, 2016, and July 1, 2021, and consented to have their data used in research; (b) had valid scores for all three test sections (analytical writing, verbal reasoning, and quantitative reasoning); (c) self-identified as U.S. citizens; (d) had gender data; and (e) reported information about their race/ethnicity are the subjects for this study. Individuals who took the GRE multiple times were counted once, and the BIQ data from the most recent registration were included. As women are the focus of this study, the analyses were run on the 698,298 women who had complete baseline data.

The most common reason for taking the GRE, cited by 99%, was to gain admission to graduate school, with the next most common reason being a requirement for fellowship or scholarship applications (8%). It is appropriate to refer to these women as PGS, as the majority (87%) selected only one of the seven provided response options to the question of why they were taking the GRE.

### **Variable Response Rates**

The data in the following six sections pertain to U.S. individuals who provided both gender and Federal Pell Grant data, along with their responses to each item. Owing to differing response rates for each item, the groups of respondents may vary. Descriptive statistics were computed for each item based on all available responses, and missing values were excluded from the analysis.

The GRE registration form and the 21-item BIQ have required- and optional-response questions. The four BIQ questionnaire items that require an answer ask registrants about their country of citizenship, about their educational status at the time of the GRE exam, whether they

communicate better (or as well) in English than in any other language, and about their intended field of graduate study.

Generally, item response rates for almost all the optional-response items used in the study were above 75% (see Table A1). The exception is the undergraduate institution name, with a 62% item response. Accordingly, this response rate moderates the findings on characteristics of the undergraduate institutions attended. Additionally, this low item response rate impacts the derived variables that present information on whether individuals were considering applying to their undergraduate institutions for graduate school.

## **Other Variable Notes**

### ***Federal Pell Grant Eligibility***

Individuals responded to the question “If you are a United States citizen, were you eligible for a Pell Grant as an undergraduate?” The response options were “Yes,” “No,” and “I don’t know.” This is the only question on the BIQ to offer an “I don’t know” option. Two rationales are provided for including an “I don’t know” option. The first is to allow people to indicate what Sudman and Bradburn (1973) referred to as memory error, which is forgetting an episode entirely. The second reason is that the U.S. financial aid system has been burdened by decades of students and families experiencing a lack of clear and transparent information about how they pay for college. For example, Burd et al. (2018), writing for New America in “Decoding the Cost of College: The Case for Transparent Financial Aid Award Letters,” reported in their analyses of 515 award letters from unique institutions that many institutions fail to differentiate types of aid—70% of award letters grouped all aid together. So, it is possible that an individual who received financial aid may not have been provided with the level of detail to know if they had a Federal Pell Grant.

### ***Field of Study***

One exception to not including missing data in the analyses was for the undergraduate and intended graduate fields of study. The undergraduate field of study was not a required response item, whereas the intended field of graduate study was. To present comparable analyses to those given in ETS (2022) and to compare continuing in the same field of study in graduate school, the missing data for the undergraduate field of study were included in the reported categories as “undecided or no major provided.” The “undecided or no major provided” response

is more common for intended graduate majors than for undergraduate fields. Although no formal analysis was conducted, one possible explanation is that students are encouraged to take the GRE while still undergraduates and in “study mode,” allowing them to bank their scores for future use as they await greater clarity with regard to their graduate school plans.

### ***Graduate Institution Choices***

Individuals have two options for indicating which universities or graduate programs they want their scores sent to when they register or after they take the exam. Some individuals may not have sent their scores to institutions when the data were captured. It is reasonable to deduce that individuals sent their scores only to graduate programs in which they hoped to have an option to enroll.

### ***Parental Education***

Parents’ educational attainment is classified at three levels. No parent with a bachelor’s includes individuals who reported that their parents had achieved the following levels of education: less than high school diploma, high school diploma or equivalency, some postsecondary education, or an associate’s degree (a first-generation college student and first-generation graduate student). One parent with a bachelor’s includes individuals who reported that at least one parent earned a bachelor’s degree in any field (a continuing-generation college student and a first-generation graduate student). One parent with a bachelor’s+ includes individuals who reported that at least one parent earned a graduate or professional degree in any field (a continuing-generation college student and a continuing-generation graduate student).

### ***State of Permanent Residence***

Individuals provided two sources of information about where they were living. The first source, a required response on the registration form, was their address—for example, the specific location where they could receive correspondence. The second source was their state of permanent residence, an optional response on the BIQ. The response rate for the permanent residence question was lower than the response rate for the address question. The match rate of responses for the 640,629 individuals who responded to both questions was 99%, so these analyses assume that state address is comparable to state of permanent residence.

## Supplementing the GRE Data

At the individual level, the residential information provided at registration was augmented by matching zip codes with data from the U.S. Census. This included CBSAs and congressional districts. Examining CBSAs rather than a single city, such as Cambridge, MA, captures a larger geographic area, such as Boston–Cambridge–Newton, MA/NH. The U.S. Census Bureau (2023) defined a CBSA as

the county or counties (or equivalent entities) associated with at least one core (urbanized area or urban cluster) of at least 10,000 population, plus adjacent counties having a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured through commuting ties.

At the institutional level, the GRE data were supplemented with data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to understand better the types of institutions PGS attended as undergraduates and the kinds of institutions they aspire to attend for their graduate education. Institutional characteristics, such as whether the institution was under public or private control, its Carnegie classification, and the size of the student body served, were included. In addition to IPEDS, other enhancements to the institutional data included adding single-sex colleges, regional comprehensive universities, or flagship state university status. At the undergraduate level, information from *Barron's Profile of American Colleges* indexes to undergraduate institutions according to their degree of admissions selectivity was incorporated. For undergraduate and graduate institutions, membership in the American Association of Universities (AAU) and minority-serving institution status data from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education were added to the data set.

## Analyses

Because the study uses a convenience sample, its results are not necessarily generalizable to all U.S. women who aspire to attend graduate or first professional school. At the same time, the sheer size of the data pool for this study enables us to provide insights into the aspirations and characteristics of many, and even most, women PGS from 2016 to 2021.

The intention of the Pathways to Graduate School: A Data Series on U.S. Prospective Graduate Students reports aligns with the qualities of quantitative descriptive analyses presented by Loeb et al. (2017), who stated,

Quantitative descriptive analysis characterizes the world or a phenomenon by identifying patterns in data to answer questions about who, what, where, when, and to what extent. Descriptive analysis is data simplification. Good description presents what we know about capacities, needs, methods, practices, policies, populations, and settings in a manner that is relevant to a specific research or policy question. (p. 1)

This exploratory study aims to identify and describe the experiences of U.S. women overall and across the nine racial groups of women. Descriptive analyses—frequencies and cross-tabulations—of self-reported data are presented. These descriptive analyses answer the six research questions about who, where, and to what extent. Please note that the group differences presented have not been statistically tested and should be interpreted cautiously. Although the group statistics presented from the PGS sample offer valuable insights, readers need to consider how these trends may reflect their own institutions' unique context and data, fostering a deeper understanding of the patterns within their specific institutions or programs.

The body of the report presents selected data in graph and table format, and the appendix provides six data tables (Tables A1–A6) aligned to the six research questions.

### **Limitations**

All data have limitations, and the data analyzed for this study of U.S. citizens who are PGS are no exception. Following are key limitations to keep in mind when thinking about the results of this study: (a) the representativeness of the individuals whose data are presented in this report, (b) the possible difference between the emerging choice set and the final choice set, (c) the high yet variable item response rates, (d) variables that may not reflect the most current standards or classifications, and (e) the graduate school pathway factors that are beyond the scope of the data available for this study.

The primary limitation of this study is that respondents are limited to U.S. citizens who took the GRE between 2016 and 2021. It is understood that this group does not encompass the entirety of PGS. Individuals who did not or will not submit GRE scores for graduate school admission are excluded, and it is not known what portion of the national pool this represents. Nevertheless, while the required elements of a graduate school application may vary depending

on degree level or institutional type, the GRE has been a key component of many graduate school admissions applications for the past 75 years.

Another limitation of this study is the possible difference between PGS' emerging and final choice sets. There could be additions and deletions. Additions could include new graduate programs that require GRE scores and those that do not. At a later time, PGS may elect not to apply to some graduate programs where they sent their GRE scores. These changes to the choice set composition could potentially alter the choice set proportions reported in the study. Additionally, it is acknowledged that individuals' plans and interests may change even if they initially apply to graduate schools.

The methodology section discussed issues regarding item response rates for the GRE registration form and the 21-item BIQ. In particular, converting the question about the current or most recent undergraduate institution from open response to forced choice could potentially change the findings on the undergraduate institutional experience.

In two instances, the variable definitions used in this study may not reflect the most current standards or classifications, as they were based on the conventions and data available at the time of analysis. The variables follow.

- **Gender.** Gender is a required response on the GRE registration form. The options at the time were binary: female and male.<sup>1</sup> Henceforth individuals who identify as female will be referred to as women.
- **Racial/Ethnic Group.** The BIQ asked respondents, "If you are a United States citizen, how do you describe yourself? (Select one)," offering nine response options: (a) American Indian or Alaskan Native (American Indian); (b) Asian or Asian American (Asian); (c) Black or African American (Black); (d) Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicano (Mexican); (e) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders (Hawaiian/Pacific Islander); (f) Puerto Rican; (g) other Hispanic, Latino, or Latin American (other Hispanic); (h) White (non-Hispanic) (White); or (i) other.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the "other" option did not allow respondents to provide additional details. Additionally, the survey's single-select design allowed individuals to select only one option, potentially limiting their ability to represent their racial or ethnic identity fully. Individuals who identify with multiple races or ethnicities are able to choose one or "other." These

response options may not permit individuals to represent their identity as they want, and the data may not reflect the nation's current diversity or citizenship status.

This study is a secondary data analysis using an internal ETS data source—the GRE Program data. We leveraged the rich data set to answer our questions. Yet the GRE data, while providing great insights into PGS' experiences, accomplishments, and plans, did not contain some of the information we would have liked to have had to enrich and contextualize the findings and add greater insight into this part of the educational journey. These include additional personal data (e.g., marital status, parenthood, and income), significant influences or supporters (e.g., undergraduate faculty, family, or friends), additional educational or work accomplishments (e.g., publications), educational debt (undergraduate and/or graduate), alternative sources of funding (e.g., employer educational assistance programs), and career aspirations.

## **Results**

### **Research Question 1: Who Were the Black Prospective Graduate Students?**

Individuals and organizations working in the graduate school application space may consider prospective applicants in two ways. Active participants are individuals already engaged in the admissions process, preparing or submitting their applications. Graduate schools gather demographic information for this group to understand trends in who is applying and to ensure that they meet diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. Institutions can use the data to tailor support to different populations and inform strategies to retain students from diverse backgrounds throughout the application process. Prospective applicants who have not yet entered the application process but are potential candidates are targets for outreach. Graduate programs and organizations rely on demographic data to identify populations that may be underrepresented in their applicant pool, allowing them to develop outreach efforts that resonate with specific communities.

For this study, age, ability to communicate in English, and disability status are all statuses that can shape Black PGS' undergraduate experiences and could factor into their considerations for their graduate school experiences (see Table A2).

### ***General Profile***

When 5 years of data are combined, the total number of Black individuals is 101,039, with 69,432 women and 31,607 men.<sup>3</sup> Women are the majority of the Black PGS, representing 69% of the pool (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Profile of Black Prospective Graduate Students by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**

| Prospective Graduate Student | 2016–2017 | 2017–2018 | 2018–2019 | 2019–2020 | 2020–2021 | Total   |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Black                        | 22,891    | 24,210    | 22,349    | 18,266    | 13,323    | 101,039 |
| Women                        | 15,530    | 16,654    | 15,413    | 12,640    | 9,195     | 69,432  |
| Men                          | 7,361     | 7,556     | 6,936     | 5,626     | 4,128     | 31,607  |

*Note.* These individuals had scores on all three GRE General Test measures over the period of July 1, 2016, to June 30, 2021, and responded to the questions about gender, citizenship, and race/ethnicity on the GRE registration form and the Background Information Questionnaire. Black = Black or African American.

### ***Age Group***

Black PGS are young (see Table A2). As a group, 34% are 22 years of age or younger, with a moderate, 6-point difference between women (36%) and men (30%). Collectively, 26% are 23–25 years of age, 18% are 26–30, 13% are 31–40, and 8% (women) and 8% (men) are 41 years of age or older, with minimal gender differences.

### ***Communicates Better in English***

Black women (92%) and men (91%) were comparable in reporting that they communicate better or as well in English as in any other language (see Table A2). When asked about their native languages,<sup>4</sup> French, Yoruba, Igbo, Amharic, Arabic, Twi, Somali, Swahili, Akan, and Tigrinya were some of the native languages PGS reported.

### ***Documented Disability***

The Americans With Disabilities Act defines a person with a disability as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (Civil Rights Division, n.d.). These include both visible disabilities—those disabilities that have a visible indicator, such as use of a screen reader—and invisible disabilities, or those disabilities that do not have a visible indicator, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Individuals could indicate one of the following: none, blind/visually impaired, deaf/hard of hearing, physical disability, learning disability, multiple disabilities, or other. For the other

disability category, the BIQ did not have the option to provide more information, for example, if they had a neurodevelopmental or cognitive disability or condition (e.g., autism, ADHD, or brain injury) or an emotional or mental health concern or condition (e.g., depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder).

Women (4%) and men (5%) were comparable in self-reporting of a documented visible or invisible disability (see Table A2). For those individuals who reported having a documented disability, the most often reported were learning disability (31%), other disability (28%), and blind/visually impaired (20%). Men and women had slight differences of less than 5 percentage points in self-reporting a particular disability, with one exception: 36% of men compared to 29% of women reported having a learning disability, a 7 percentage point difference.

### **Research Question 2: Where Did Black Prospective Graduate Students Reside?**

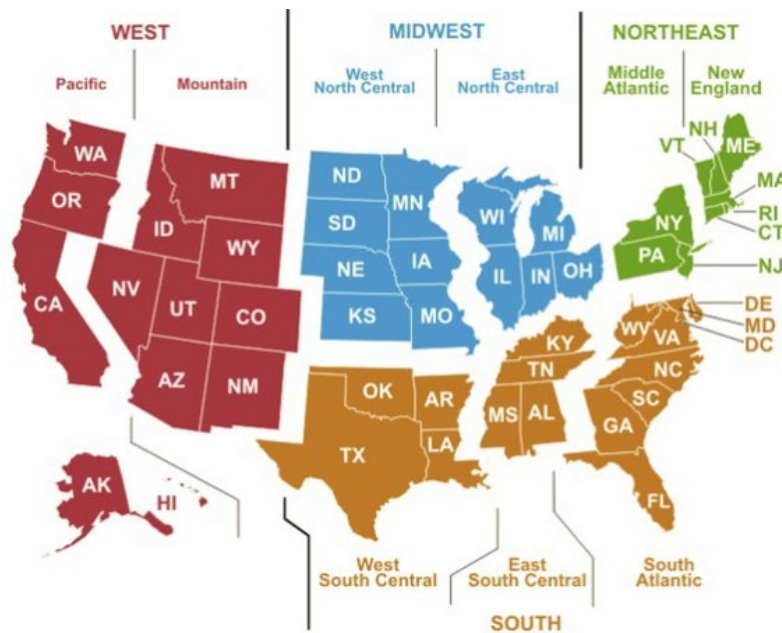
If we look at an aerial view of the 3.1 million square miles composing the contiguous United States, where might we find PGS? The simple answer is, everywhere. And yet, the U.S. population is not evenly distributed across the country. Where are there significant representations of individuals seeking advanced education? Examining geographic data can inform both admissions and advocacy work.

Gevelber (2014) wrote, “Think geographic, not just demographic. . . . Location data provides a reliable window into the mindsets, intentions, and concerns of an audience—sometimes even more so than demographic data.” Graduate schools interested in shaping their applicant pools may benefit from a better understanding of where PGS reside. Equipped with this intelligence, graduate schools may refine their strategies to target future graduate students, perhaps in their undergraduate years or even through workforce connections. Insights gained from geographic data may also help with market segmentation when recruiting.

Among the many ways to champion change in graduate education is to advocate for resources and policies that can ease students’ journeys. The U.S. president is the only elected official with every prospective graduate student in their constituency. It is imperative that elected officials at all levels—local, county, state, and federal—know who is in their districts and what they need. U.S. Census data can help determine the federal funding state governments and local communities receive; the need for new higher education institutions and programs; and representation in state legislatures and the U.S. House of Representatives, where critical graduate education issues can be voted on.

The data presented in this section include home state, CBSAs, the four U.S. Census regions and nine divisions (see Figure 1),<sup>5</sup> and congressional districts. With the exception of the census data, these data presented are limited to the 10 areas with the highest representations of PGS.

**Figure 1. U.S. Census Regions and Divisions**



Data are from the U.S. Census Bureau.

### ***Home States***

In 2022, California, Texas, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, Georgia, North Carolina, and Michigan were the most populous states in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). A different picture surfaces when states with significant Black populations are the focal point. The major states of residence for the U.S. Black population in 2022 were Texas (9%), Florida (8%), Georgia (8%), New York (7%), California (6%), and North Carolina (6%; Moslimani et al., 2024). These states overlap with where Black PGS live.

The top 10 states where 66% of Black PGS resided are Georgia, New York, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, California, Maryland, Virginia, Louisiana, and Illinois (see Table 2). While the order may differ, these are the top 10 states where men (64%) and women (67%) reside.

**Table 2. The 10 States With the Highest Representation of Black Prospective Graduate Students by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**

| Highest representation (highest to lowest) | Men            | Women          | All Black PGS  |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1                                          | Texas          | Georgia        | Georgia        |
| 2                                          | New York       | New York       | New York       |
| 3                                          | Georgia        | Texas          | Texas          |
| 4                                          | Florida        | Florida        | Florida        |
| 5                                          | California     | North Carolina | North Carolina |
| 6                                          | North Carolina | California     | California     |
| 7                                          | Maryland       | Maryland       | Maryland       |
| 8                                          | Virginia       | Louisiana      | Virginia       |
| 9                                          | Illinois       | Virginia       | Louisiana      |
| 10                                         | Louisiana      | Illinois       | Illinois       |
| Percentage                                 | 64             | 67             | 66             |
| Top 10 <i>n</i>                            | 20,053         | 46,309         | 66,362         |
| 50 states + DC                             | 31,399         | 69,074         | 100,473        |

*Note.* These analyses are restricted to the 50 states and Washington, DC. The shading signifies the frequency with which a state is common to all three groups. Dark blue denotes that the state is common to all Black prospective graduate students and men and women. PGS = prospective graduate students.

### ***Core-Based Statistical Areas***

The 10 largest CBSAs in the United States in 2022 were (a) New York–Newark–Jersey City, NY/NJ/PA; (b) Los Angeles–Long Beach–Anaheim, CA; (c) Chicago–Naperville–Elgin, IL/IN/WI; (d) Dallas–Fort Worth–Arlington, TX; (e) Houston–Pasadena–The Woodlands, TX; (f) Washington–Arlington–Alexandria, DC/VA/MD/WV; (g) Philadelphia–Camden–Wilmington, PA/NJ/DE/MD; (h) Atlanta–Sandy Springs–Alpharetta, GA; (i) Miami–Fort Lauderdale–Pompano Beach, FL; and (j) Phoenix–Mesa–Chandler, AZ.

Although it is beyond the scope of this study, it is informative to understand a more nuanced view of where different segments of the Black population live in the United States. Nine of the 10 metropolitan areas with the largest Black populations in 2022 overlap with the 10 largest CBSAs for the country: New York–Newark–Jersey City, NY/NJ/PA (7% of the total Black population); Atlanta–Sandy Springs–Roswell, GA (5%); Chicago–Naperville–Elgin, IL/IN/WI (3%); Washington–Arlington–Alexandria, DC/VA/MD/WV (3%); Dallas–Fort Worth–Arlington, TX (3%); Philadelphia–Camden–Wilmington, PA/NJ/DE/MD (3%); Houston–The Woodlands–Sugar Land, TX (3%); Miami–Fort Lauderdale–West Palm Beach, FL (3%); Detroit–Warren–Dearborn, MI (2%); and Los Angeles–Long Beach–Anaheim, CA (2%; Moslimani et al., 2024). Black immigrant populations tend to settle in specific U.S. cities, such

as New York City, Miami, Washington, DC, Atlanta, Boston, Houston, and Dallas (Tamir, 2022). For example, 35% of Black Jamaican immigrants reside in the New York City metropolitan area, while 35% of Black Haitian immigrants are concentrated in the Miami area. Additionally, nearly 20% of Black Ethiopian immigrants live in the Washington, DC, area.

Forty-two percent of all Black PGS reside in 10 CBSAs (see Table 3). The CBSAs where Black PGS live overlap with nine of the 10 most populous CBSAs nationally. While not in the same order, men (41%) and women (43%) reside in these same CBSAs.

**Table 3. The 10 Core-Based Statistical Areas With the Highest Representation of Black Prospective Graduate Students by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**

| Highest representation (highest to lowest) | Men      | Women    | All Black PGS |
|--------------------------------------------|----------|----------|---------------|
| 1                                          | NYC Area | NYC Area | NYC Area      |
| 2                                          | ATL Area | ATL Area | ATL Area      |
| 3                                          | DC Area  | DC Area  | DC Area       |
| 4                                          | HOU Area | HOU Area | HOU Area      |
| 5                                          | DAL Area | DAL Area | DAL Area      |
| 6                                          | LA Area  | MIA Area | CHI Area      |
| 7                                          | CHI Area | CHI Area | MIA Area      |
| 8                                          | MIA Area | LA Area  | LA Area       |
| 9                                          | PHI Area | PHI Area | PHI Area      |
| 10                                         | BAL Area | BAL Area | BAL Area      |
| Percentage                                 | 41       | 43       | 42            |
| Top 10 <i>n</i>                            | 12,961   | 29,449   | 42,410        |
| 50 states +DC                              | 31,399   | 69,074   | 100,473       |

*Note.* These analyses are restricted to the 50 states and Washington, DC. The shading signifies the frequency with which a core-based statistical area is common across the three groups. Dark blue denotes that the core-based statistical area is common to all Black prospective graduate students and men and women. ATL Area = Atlanta–Sandy Springs–Roswell, GA. BAL Area = Baltimore–Columbia–Towson, MD. DAL Area = Dallas–Fort Worth–Arlington, TX. DC Area = Washington–Arlington–Alexandria, DC/VA/MD/WV. HOU Area = Houston–Pasadena–The Woodlands, TX. LA Area = Los Angeles–Long Beach–Anaheim, CA. MIA Area = Miami–Fort Lauderdale–West Palm Beach, FL. NYC Area = New York–Newark–Jersey City, NY/NJ. PGS = prospective graduate student. PHI Area = Philadelphia–Camden–Wilmington, PA/NJ/DE/MD.

### ***U.S. Census Regions and Divisions***

The South is the most populous region in the United States, with 38.9% of the nation’s population, followed by the West (23.6%), the Midwest (20.6%), and the Northeast (17%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). This demographic landscape is crucial for understanding PGS distribution.

The U.S. Black population is clustered regionally in the South (56%), Northeast (17%), Midwest (17%), and West (10%; Moslimani et al., 2024). Black PGS mirror this residential pattern, with 61% residing in the South, 18% in the Northeast, 12% in the Midwest, and 10% in the West (see Table A3). There were slight variations among men and women in the census regions where they resided. For example, 58% of men and 63% of women lived in the South.

The next level is composed of the nine U.S. Census divisions. The highest concentration of Black PGS is in the South Atlantic (37%), followed by the Mid-Atlantic and West South Central (15% each), East South Central and East North Central (9% each), Pacific (8%), West North Central and New England (3% each), and Mountain (2%) divisions. As census divisions are derivative of census regions, earlier minimal gender differences were observed.

### ***U.S. Congressional Districts***

For Black PGS overall, the top 10 congressional districts to focus on would span six states: Georgia (Districts 05, 13, and 04), New York (Districts 08 and 05), Mississippi (District 02), Florida (District 02), Louisiana (District 02), and Maryland (Districts 04 and 05; see Table 4). This represents 13% of all Black PGS.

**Table 4. The 10 U.S. Congressional Districts With the Highest Representation of Black Prospective Graduate Students by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**

| Highest representation (highest to lowest) | Men         | Women       | All Black PGS |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1                                          | GA Dist. 05 | NY Dist. 08 | GA Dist. 05   |
| 2                                          | NY Dist. 08 | GA Dist. 05 | NY Dist. 08   |
| 3                                          | GA Dist. 04 | GA Dist. 13 | GA Dist. 13   |
| 4                                          | FL Dist. 02 | GA Dist. 04 | GA Dist. 04   |
| 5                                          | DC Dist. 00 | MS Dist. 02 | MS Dist. 02   |
| 6                                          | MS Dist. 02 | FL Dist. 02 | FL Dist. 02   |
| 7                                          | GA Dist. 13 | LA Dist. 02 | LA Dist. 02   |
| 8                                          | MD Dist. 05 | MD Dist. 04 | MD Dist. 04   |
| 9                                          | NY Dist. 13 | NC Dist. 06 | NY Dist. 05   |
| 10                                         | MD Dist. 04 | NY Dist. 05 | MD Dist. 05   |
| Percentage                                 | 11          | 13          | 13            |
| Top 10 <i>n</i>                            | 3,558       | 9,154       | 1,2564        |
| 50 states + DC                             | 31,399      | 69,074      | 100,473       |

*Note.* These analyses are restricted to the 50 states and Washington, DC. The shading signifies the frequency with which a congressional district is common across the three groups. Dark blue denotes that the congressional district is common to all Black prospective graduate students and men and women. Pink represents a congressional district that is common to two groups. Orange indicates a congressional district that is unique to one group. PGS = prospective graduate students.

When the top 10 congressional districts for all Black PGS are presented separately by gender, two changes are observed. First, they represent 11% of men and 13% of women, respectively, and the number of congressional districts with high representations of Black PGS increases from 10 to 13, including the District of Columbia (District 00) and New York (District Districts 13 and 06).

### **Research Question 3: What Were Their Education and Work Experiences?**

Graduate programs are interested in knowing what prospective students are engaged in at the time of application. Black PGS bring a diverse range of educational and work backgrounds. This section elucidates two areas that graduate programs typically consider: the applicants' current educational status and work experience. Both experiences play a critical role in shaping PGS' readiness for graduate education (see Table A4).

#### ***Current Educational Level***

As a group, Black PGS reported their educational status as being either currently enrolled (37%), unenrolled (57%), or other status (6%). More than one-quarter of Black PGS were currently enrolled in college (28%), with another 9% enrolled in graduate school. Forty percent of Black PGS were unenrolled college graduates; another 17% reported being unenrolled master's program graduates. Men and women reported comparable educational levels.

#### ***Full-Time Work Experience***

Individuals decide whether to enroll in graduate school directly after undergraduate studies or to take a break. Those who take time off between undergraduate studies and graduate school may gain work experience and prepare for graduate school. Forty-four percent of Black PGS had less than 1 year of full-time work experience, with another 24% reporting 1–2 years, 11% reporting 3–4 years, 8% reporting 5–7 years, and 12% reporting 8 or more years. Men and women had slight differences in their work experiences—less than 2 percentage points.

### **Research Question 4: What Were Their Undergraduate Experiences?**

Diverse undergraduate experiences shape the academic journeys of PGS. Understanding these pathways begins by examining the institutions they attended, providing essential context for their postsecondary education. This section also explores two key dimensions of their undergraduate experiences: their status as first-generation college students and their eligibility

for Pell Grants, offering insight into the socioeconomic and familial factors influencing their academic decisions. Additionally, the majors they pursued and their academic performance, such as grades, are analyzed to paint a fuller picture of their readiness for advanced study. Together, these factors provide a comprehensive view of the diverse academic profiles of Black PGS, offering valuable information for graduate admissions committees and organizations interested in fostering equitable access to graduate education (see Table A5).

### ***What Are the Profiles of Their Baccalaureate Institutions?***

There are approximately 2,600 4-year, degree-granting, postsecondary institutions in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021, Table 317.10). Like the women profiled in this report, higher education institutions have multiple identities—academic, athletic, and research. Several baccalaureate institution profiles are of interest. Women PGS self-reported their undergraduate institutions when they registered for the GRE. The first profile examines if women attended an undergraduate institution in their state of residence and particular types of institutions in their state of residence. The next set are two conventional institutional characteristics: control and size. The third set considers whether women attended a minority-serving institution (MSI) or a single-sex college. The final set focuses on the range of institutional diversity using the Carnegie classification, *Barron's* selectivity measures, and membership in the AAU.

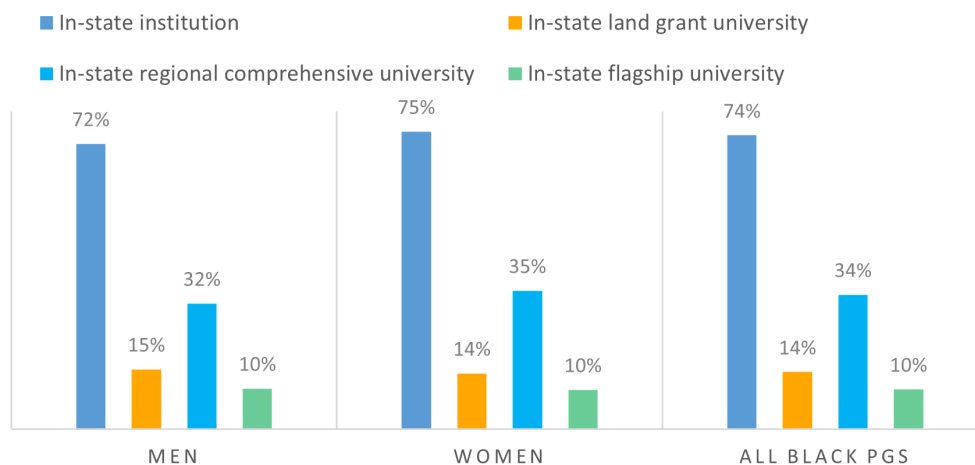
#### ***Baccalaureate Institutions in Their Home States***

An individual may elect to earn a bachelor's degree at a higher education institution in the state where they reside for several reasons, such as privileges tied to admissions (e.g., Texas Top 10% Plan), being eligible for in-state tuition, proximity to home, and academic offerings. Within a state, there is variation among public higher education institutions, from the state flagship (usually the most prominent public university in the state, with a high research profile and the most doctoral programs) to regional comprehensive universities usually founded as teacher's colleges, night schools, veteran's education centers, or technical colleges (Orphan, 2018) to state land grant universities created by the Morrill Act of 1862 with an "original mission . . . to teach agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanic arts as well as classical studies so members of the working classes could obtain a liberal, practical education" (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, n.d., "What Is a Land-Grant University," para. 2). In some

states, colleges and universities hold multiple designations, such as in New Jersey, where Rutgers–New Brunswick is the state’s land grant and its public flagship university, and Montclair State University is one of the public regional comprehensive universities. By contrast, in North Carolina, North Carolina State University, Raleigh is the land grant college, North Carolina Central University is the public regional comprehensive university, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC Chapel Hill) is the public flagship.

Four different profiles of the baccalaureate experience, categorized by state of residence, are presented: attending an in-state institution within their state of residence, a state land grant university within their state of residence, a regional comprehensive university within their state of residence, or a flagship university within their state of residence (see Figure 2 and Table A5). State land grant universities, regional comprehensive universities, and flagship universities are subsets of the broader category of in-state institutions.

**Figure 2. Black Prospective Graduate Students’ Attendance at an Undergraduate Institution in Their State of Residence and by Institutional Type and Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**



Apart from the University of Idaho, the University of North Dakota, and the University of South Dakota, there is no overlap between the state flagship university and the regional comprehensive universities in a state.

Three-quarters of Black PGS were attending/attended an undergraduate institution (public or private) in their states of residence. Women did so at a slightly higher rate (75% vs. 72%). Black PGS enrollment at the state land grant institutions in their states of residence was

14%. Black PGS enrollment at a regional comprehensive university in their states of residence was 34%, with women slightly favoring a regional comprehensive university more than men (35% vs. 32%). Ten percent of Black PGS were attending/attended the flagship university in their states of residence.

### *Institution Control and Student Body Size*

Institution control is a classification for whether an institution operates as part of a state government (public) or independently of the state government (private). Private institutions can be either nonprofit or for-profit. In fall 2021, 77% of undergraduate students nationally enrolled at public institutions, 18% at nonprofit private institutions, and 5% at for-profit institutions (NCES, 2022, Table 306.50). Control is associated with the student body size. Eighty-four percent of the institutions that compose the 120 largest degree-granting colleges and universities are public universities, followed by private nonprofit (9%) and private for-profit (7%; NCES, 2021, Table 312.10).

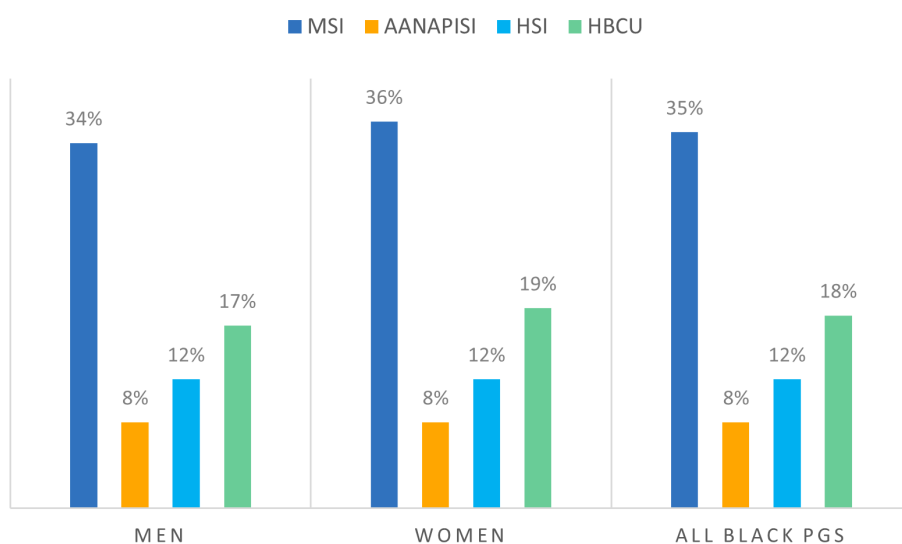
The majority of Black PGS (72%) attend/attended a public college or university as undergraduates (see Table A5). Fewer than 1% of Black PGS attend/attended a private for-profit undergraduate institution. Forty-four percent of Black PGS attended institutions with student populations of 20,000 or more.

### *Minority-Serving Institutions*

Today, millions of students of color, many of whom may be from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and the first in their families to attend college, enroll at an MSI (American Council on Education [ACE], n.d.-b). Students of all races/ethnicities attend MSIs. The 771 MSIs compose a category of educational establishments based on historical origin or enrollment criteria (typically the percentage of enrolled minorities at a particular school; Conrad & Gasman, 2017). Institutions may have more than one MSI designation. For this research, the umbrella term MSI subsumes Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions (AANAPISIs), Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions (AANHs), Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Native American-serving nontribal institutions (NASNTIs), predominantly Black institutions, and tribal colleges and universities.

Thirty-five percent of Black PGS attended an MSI for their undergraduate degree, with slight differences by gender (see Figure 3 and Table A5). HBCUs were the most highly attended of the different types of MSI, with 18% of Black PGS having attended, followed by HSIs (12%) and AANAPISIs (8%).

**Figure 3. Black Prospective Graduate Students' Attendance at Minority-Serving Institutions Overall, Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**



*Minority-serving institution* is the overarching term for the various types of institutions. Some institutions have multiple affiliations. Hispanic-serving institutions, Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions, and historically Black colleges and universities are three types of minority-serving institution. AANAPISI = Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-serving institution. HBCU = historically Black college or university. HSI = Hispanic-serving institution. MSI = minority-serving institution.

### *Single-Sex Colleges*

Today there are 36 single-sex women's colleges and 62 single-sex men's colleges as listed by the National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator.<sup>6</sup> Morehouse College is the only all-male HBCU (fall 2021 enrollment 2,554), and Bennett College (fall 2021 enrollment 207) and Spelman College (fall 2021 enrollment 2,417) are the two HBCU women's colleges. While 2% of all Black PGS attend/attended single-sex colleges, 2% of Black women were

attending a women's college, and 1% of Black men were attending a men's college (see Table A5).

### *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education highlights important similarities and differences among institutions focusing on mission and function. This classification shows the range of institutional diversity in the U.S. higher education system. The basic classification is doctoral universities, master's colleges and universities, baccalaureate colleges, baccalaureate/associate colleges, associate colleges, special focus institutions, and tribal colleges (ACE, n.d.-a).

Black women and men were alike in the types of Carnegie institutions they attended: 68% doctoral universities, 24% master's colleges and universities, and 8% baccalaureate colleges (see Table A5).

### *Barron's Profile of American Colleges*

*Barron's Profile of American Colleges* indexes colleges according to their degree of undergraduate admissions selectivity (Barron's College Division Staff [BCDS], 2015). It considers the median entrance examination scores for the first-year class, class rank, GPA required for admission, and the percentage of accepted applicants (BCDS, 2015). The approximately 200 institutions ranked most competitive and highly competitive typically enroll students ranked in the top 35% of their high school class with a B or higher high school GPA. For example, *Barron's*-ranked institutions in Connecticut would be Charter Oak College (other), the University of Hartford (competitive), Fairfield University (very competitive), Trinity College (highly competitive), and Yale University (most competitive).

Thirty-nine percent of Black PGS attended institutions ranked by *Barron's* as competitive, with 25% attending very competitive, 11% highly competitive, and 11% most competitive (see Table A5) schools. There was minimal variation by gender.

### *Association of American Universities Member University*

The 63 U.S. member universities of the AAU are “on the leading edge of innovation, scholarship, and solutions that contribute to scientific progress, economic development, security and well-being” (American Association of Universities [AAU], n.d.-b, para. 1).<sup>7</sup> In 2020, AAU

institutions awarded 48% of all research doctoral degrees and 20% of all undergraduate degrees in STEM and social sciences (AAU, n.d.-a). The AAU universities conduct critical research and receive 63% of the funding from federal agencies to perform research in the national interest (AAU, n.d.-a).

Collectively, 17% of Black PGS attended AAU institutions as undergraduates, with only minor gender differences observed: 18% of men and 16% of women (see Table A5).

### ***How Did Black Prospective Graduate Students Experience Their Undergraduate Education?***

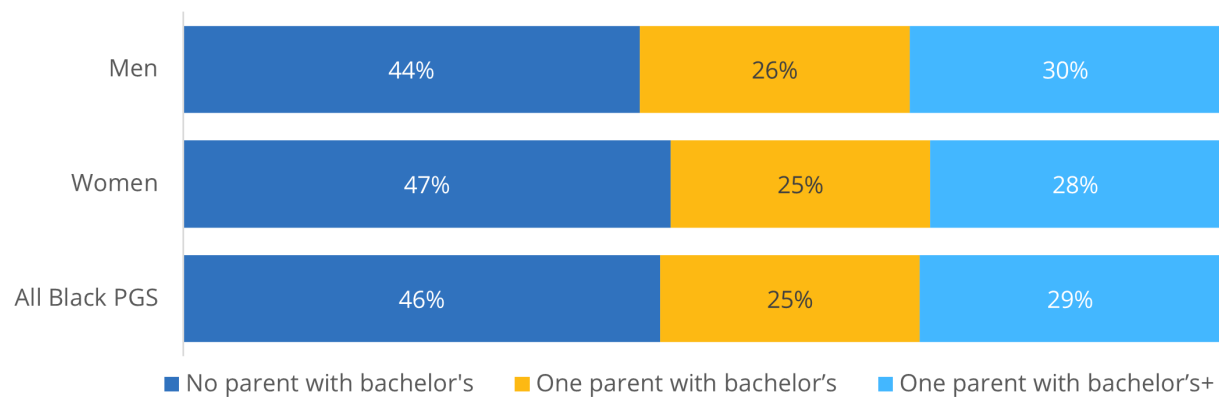
In addition to their gender and race/ethnicity, other dimensions of PGS' lived experiences may influence how they navigate their undergraduate and graduate school experiences. Parental education and Federal Pell Grant eligibility may be two factors.

#### ***Parent Educational Attainment***

Parent/guardian (parent) educational attainment is correlated with children's educational attainment. For example, data from the Survey of Earned Doctorates reveal that among U.S. citizens who received a doctorate in 2021, 51% had at least one parent who earned a master's degree, professional doctorate, or research doctoral degree; 23% had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree; and 26% had at least one parent whose highest level of education was some college or less (NCES, 2021, Table 5-5). For Black or African American U.S. citizens, the pattern was different: 35% had at least one parent who earned a master's degree, professional doctorate, or research doctoral degree; 19% had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree; and 46% had at least one parent whose highest level of education was some college or less (NCES, 2021, Table 5-5). For a more comprehensive analysis of parental education, see the third Pathways to Graduate School series report (Millett, 2025b).

For all Black PGS, their parents' educational attainment was comparable to the profile of Black U.S. citizen doctoral degree recipients—46% reported no parent with a bachelor's degree, 25% reported one parent with a bachelor's degree, and 29% reported one parent with a bachelor's+ (see Figure 4 and Table A5). Gender differences were negligible.

**Figure 4. Black Prospective Graduate Students' Family Educational Attainment by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**



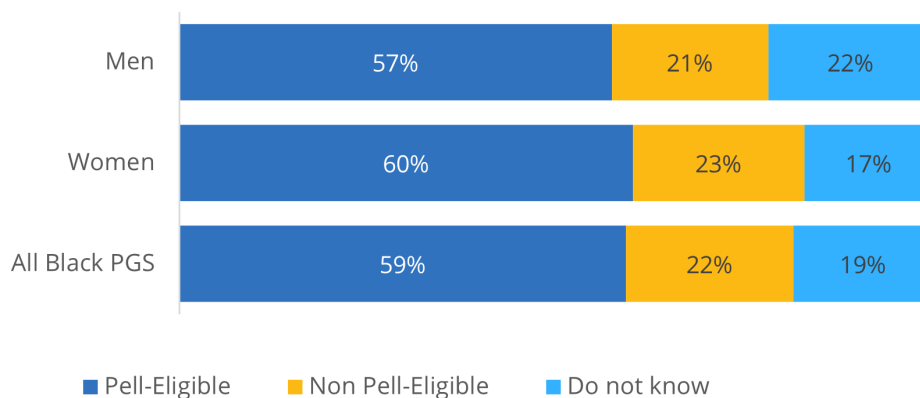
PGS = prospective graduate student.

#### *Federal Pell Grant Eligibility*

PGS were not asked to provide information about their income, parents' income, or other financial assets. Instead, they were asked whether they participated in the Federal Pell Grant program as undergraduates, a proxy measure for economically disadvantaged status. The fourth report in the Pathways to Graduate School series (Millett, 2025c) provides a detailed discussion of Pell-eligible and non-Pell-eligible experiences.

Nearly 60% of Black PGS reported being eligible for a Pell Grant as undergraduates, with 22% reporting that they were not eligible and 19% reporting that they did not know whether they were eligible (see Figure 5 and Table A5). The gender differences were slight.

**Figure 5. Black Prospective Graduate Students' Pell Grant Eligibility by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–2021**



PGS = prospective graduate student.

#### *Pell Grant–Eligible and First-Generation College Students*

Being a first-generation college student (no parent with a bachelor's degree) can be associated with being from an economically disadvantaged background. Here Black PGS who were Pell-eligible and first-generation college students are presented. As a group, 34% were Pell-eligible and first-generation college students, with minimal variation among men (32%) and women (35%; see Table A5).

#### *What Were Black Prospective Graduate Students' Academic Accomplishments?*

Black PGS reported on two of their undergraduate academic accomplishments: what they studied and the grades they achieved.

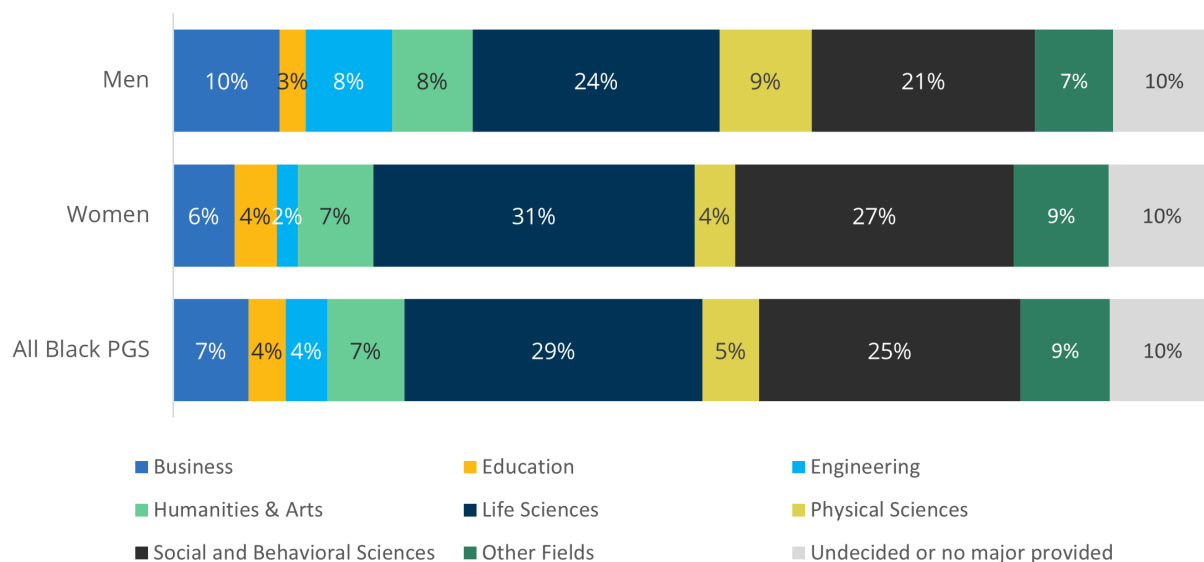
#### *Undergraduate Major Field*

Nationally, 36% of bachelor's degrees are conferred in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, followed by business (19%), other fields (17%), social sciences (13%), humanities (11%), and education (4%; NCES, 2021, Table 322.30).

As a group, Black PGS' top four undergraduate major choices were STEM fields (38%), social and behavioral sciences (25%), other fields (9%), and business and humanities (7%; see Figure 6 and Table A5). When examining STEM fields more closely, important gender differences emerge that warrant further monitoring. Women tend to pursue life sciences at notably higher rates than do men (31% vs. 24%), while men are more likely to enter fields like

physical sciences (4% vs. 9%) and engineering (2% vs. 8%). These disparities highlight the need to continue tracking gender representation across different STEM disciplines, as they may influence career opportunities, workforce diversity, and the overall gender balance in STEM-related fields.

**Figure 6. Black Prospective Graduate Students by Undergraduate Major Field and Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**



Other fields include, among others, architecture and environmental design, communications and journalism, family and consumer services, law, library and archival studies, public administration, religion and theology, and social work. Those who indicated undecided, indicated any department not listed, or did not respond to the question or who provided an invalid answer are included in the undecided or no major provided category. PGS = prospective graduate student.

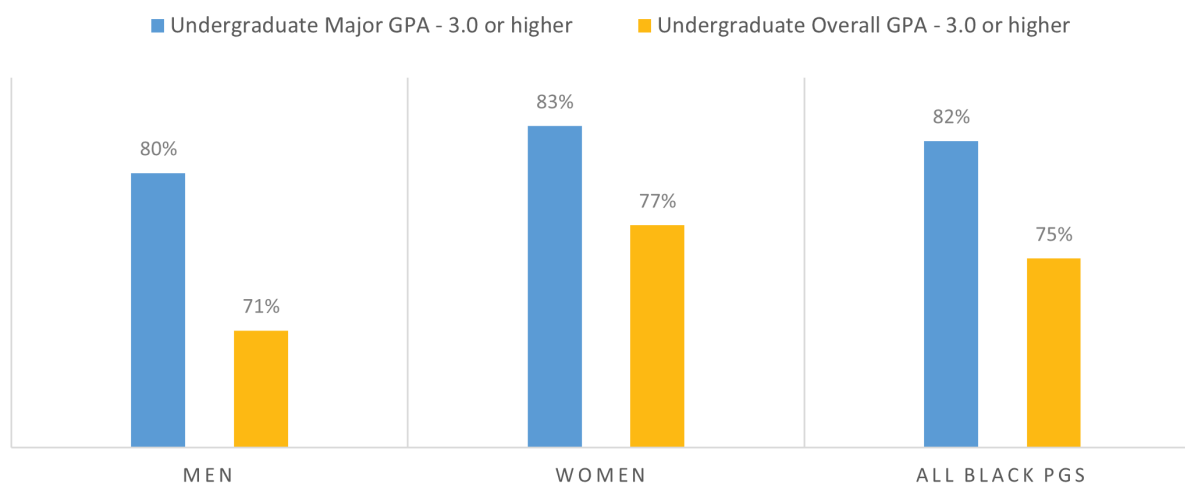
### *Undergraduate Grade Point Average*

Unlike for undergraduate admissions, department faculty typically make graduate school admissions decisions (Kent & McCarthy, 2016). Although there is no universal minimum GPA admissions committees require, PGS may consult popular forums (e.g., Quora, Academic Stack Exchange, or Forbes Advisor) that suggest (a) at least a 3.0 GPA, with some variation for more competitive programs, and (b) that graduate school admissions committees tend to prioritize undergraduate major GPA above overall GPA, with possible exceptions if an applicant is applying to a different field than their undergraduate major.

To provide context for the data in this study, the U.S. Department of Education, through the Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B) Longitudinal Study, presented GPAs for individuals who earned their bachelor's degrees during the 2007–2008 academic year by selected characteristics (Woo et al., 2012). In this B&B report, race/ethnicity is stated as Black, and 55.3% of Black bachelor's degree recipients reported a cumulative undergraduate GPA of 3.0 or higher.

PGS reported their GPAs for their undergraduate majors and their overall GPAs (see Figure 7 and Table A5). Regarding undergraduate major GPA, 82% of Black PGS reported a GPA of 3.0 or higher, with minimal differences between men and women. For overall undergraduate GPA, 75% of respondents reported a GPA of 3.0 or higher, with a moderate gender gap of 6 percentage points (71% for men vs. 77% for women).

**Figure 7. Black Prospective Graduate Students by Undergraduate Major Grade Point Average of 3.0 or Higher and Overall Grade Point Average of 3.0 or Higher and Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**



GPA = grade point average.

### **Research Question 5: What Were Black Prospective Graduate Students' Plans for Graduate Study?**

Understanding PGS' aspirations and goals can help individuals and organizations interested in graduate education better align their offerings with student expectations. This information can also be helpful when advising students to consider where they might go. PGS were asked several broad questions about their plans, covering key aspects such as their intended

degrees, fields of study, and preferred learning modalities, including online and in-person formats. Additionally, they provided insights into their anticipated enrollment status—full-time or part-time—and geographic preferences for where they planned to pursue their graduate education. These insights comprehensively depict Black PGS’ graduate education objectives (see Table A6).

### ***Graduate Degree Objective***

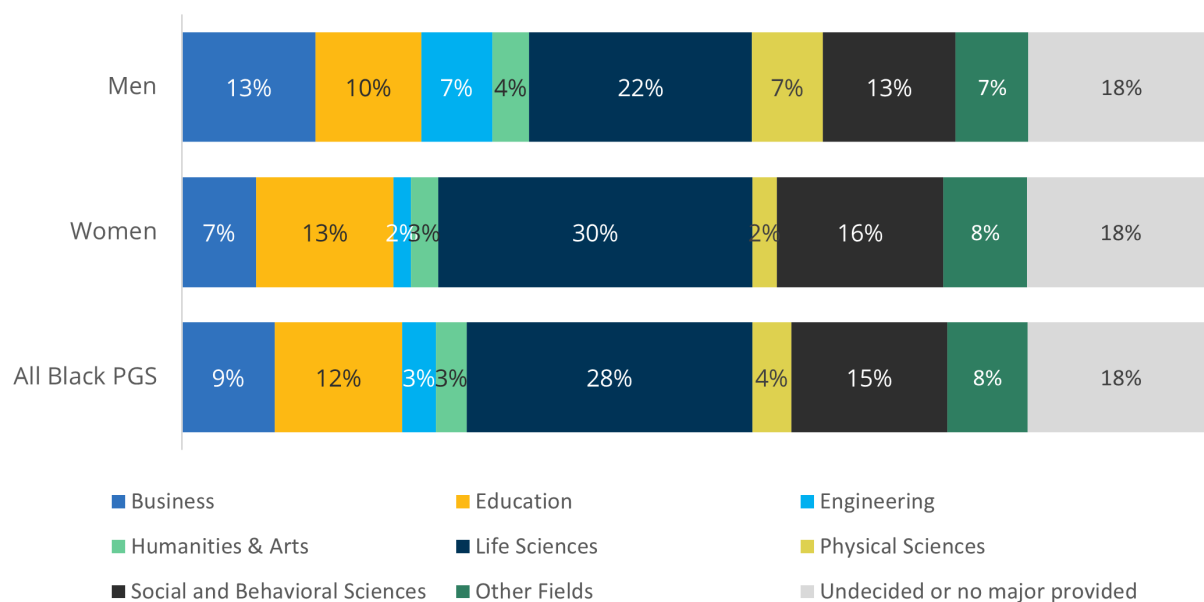
In the academic year 2020–2021, four out of five graduate degrees conferred were for master’s degrees (NCES, 2022, Table 319.10). The doctoral degrees conferred included individuals who earned a PhD, an EdD, an MD, a DDS, a law degree, or another comparable degree at the doctoral level.

More than half (53%) of Black PGS were interested in pursuing a master’s degree, 38% a doctorate, 6% a master’s in business administration (MBA), 1% a juris doctor, and 2% other (see Table A6). There were slight differences among men and women—4 percentage points—in their interest in pursuing a master’s degree (50% of men and 55% of women) and in pursuing an MBA (9% of men and 5% of women).

### ***Intended Graduate Major Field***

The intended fields of graduate study are explored, highlighting potential shifts from undergraduate- to graduate-level study. For Black men and women, the top four intended graduate fields were STEM (35%), social and behavioral sciences (15%), education (12%), and business (9%; see Figure 8 and Table A6). Notable changes from their undergraduate fields included (a) a decline in interest in the social and behavioral sciences (from 25% at the undergraduate level to 15% at the graduate level), (b) an increase in interest in education (rising from 4% to 12%), (c) a slight increase in business (from 7% to 9%), and (d) a slight decrease in STEM fields (from 38% to 35%). It is valuable to note that admissions test requirements at either the graduate school or department level may drive some of the observed outcomes.

**Figure 8. Black Prospective Graduate Students' Intended Graduate Major Field by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**



Other fields include, among others, architecture and environmental design, communications and journalism, family and consumer services, law, library and archival studies, public administration, religion and theology, and social work. Those who indicated undecided, indicated any department not listed, or did not respond to the question or who provided an invalid answer are included in the undecided or no major provided category. PGS = prospective graduate student.

There is a moderate, 6 percentage point difference in interest in business between men (13%) and women (7%). The STEM field patterns observed at the undergraduate level held. Women indicated a moderately higher preference for the life sciences (30% vs. 22%), while men showed a slightly greater interest in physical sciences and engineering (7% vs. 2%).

More than half of Black PGS planned to continue their graduate studies in the same field as their undergraduate major, with no gender differences (see Table A6).

### ***Program Format***

In the academic year 2019–2020, 64% of all postbaccalaureate students reported taking a class taught entirely online. For those who reported taking an online class, 46% reported that their entire degree program was online (NCES, 2022, Table 311.32).

Within this broader context, Black women and men generally preferred to pursue their degrees on campus (see Table A6). There were minor differences between men and women in their preference for being on campus (63% and 57%, respectively) and for a combination of on-campus and online (23% and 28%, respectively).

### ***Enrollment Preference***

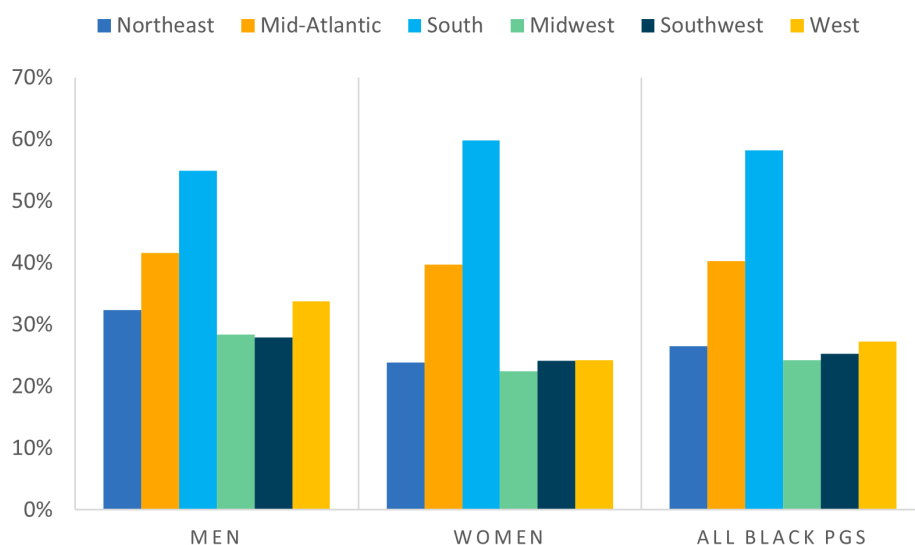
In fall 2021, 57% of postbaccalaureate students nationally had full-time status (NCES, 2023b, Table 303.45). Nationally, 60% of men and 55% of women attended full-time. In light of these figures, women and men had similar preferences for full-time enrollment (see Table A6). Eighty-two percent planned to go full-time, 10% indicated a preference for part-time, and 8% were undecided.

### ***Preferred Geographic Region for Graduate Study***

All individuals were asked a general question about the geographic regions in the United States<sup>8</sup> and outside of the United States where they preferred to attend graduate school. Regarding their U.S. and global options, 56% of Black PGS indicated one region and 15% two regions (see Table A6).

When considering only their six U.S. regional options, 58% of Black PGS indicated one region, 16% indicated two regions, 11% indicated three regions, 15% indicated four or more, and fewer than 1% indicated no region. The South was the most popular region, as 58% of Black PGS selected it as a preferred region (see Figure 9 and Table A6). The Mid-Atlantic region (DC, DE, MD, NJ, NY, PA) was the second most popular choice at 40%. Black PGS had comparable levels of interest in the other four regions of the United States—27% indicated the West, 27% stated the Northeast, 25% indicated the Southwest, and 24% indicated the Midwest. There were notable variations—greater than 5 percentage points—between men and women in their geographic preferences. Men signaled more interest in the West (34% vs. 24%), Northeast (32% vs. 24%), and Midwest (28% vs 22%).

**Figure 9. Preferred Regions to Attend Graduate School Within the United States by Black Prospective Graduate Students and by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**



Respondents were able to indicate multiple regions.

Eleven percent of Black PGS selected among eight regions outside of the United States: Canada, Africa, Asia, Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands, Eastern Europe and Russia, Latin America (Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean), the Middle East, and Western Europe. The popularity of different regions of the world ranged from 6% of Black PGS selecting Western Europe or Canada to 1% selecting the Middle East. For all areas of the world, men and women were fairly comparable in their preference for possibly studying outside of the United States for graduate school.

### **Research Question 6: What Were Their Emerging Graduate Program Choice Sets?**

This section focused on the early construction of PGS' graduate program choice sets (see Table A7). In constructing their choice sets—the collections of graduate institutions to which they may apply—individuals weigh varied factors, for instance, the number of programs to apply to. According to one commonly used discussion forum, graduate school applicants may refer to the rule of thumb when applying to a degree program, which is to consider applying to four to six programs (GradCafe Editor, 2024). Another set of factors is related to the characteristics of the prospective programs. The Council of Graduate Schools (2021) suggested that individuals

consider program fit, financial investment, student support services, location, and professional development and career support.

Although insights into how PGS settled on specific graduate programs and their exhaustive or final collections of institutions in their choice sets are unavailable for this study, information regarding the graduate schools and departments they were considering is accessible. Two caveats may have shaped the parameters of the choice set presented. First, on test day, individuals can designate up to four graduate institutions and departments and fellowship sponsors to receive scores as part of the test fee. Individuals who elect to send their GRE General Test scores to additional institutions or to send their scores after test day can do so by ordering additional score reports for a fee (ETS, n.d.). Second, PGS may apply to graduate programs that do not require GRE scores, and thus these programs would not be reflected in the observed emerging choice set.

Graduate programs and schools are typically divisions in a college or university that award graduate degrees. For example, the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, which has master's and doctoral programs, is part of the University of Texas at Austin. The data presented in this section describe the college or university (e.g., the University of Texas at Austin) rather than specific graduate programs. An institution is counted only once per individual, even if the individual sent scores to multiple graduate programs at a single university (e.g., the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs and the Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin).

### ***Choice Set Size***

Altogether, 80% of Black PGS sent their scores to graduate institutions and, therefore, have a choice set (see Table A7). It is not surprising that not all Black PGS individuals send score reports, as GRE scores are good for 5 calendar years after individuals take the test. Even though the BIQ does not ask questions about the costs of applying to graduate programs or the ease or hardship of paying those costs, women most likely cover the cost of applications, which in a field like psychology can range from \$0 to \$125 per application plus the cost of official transcripts (Weiss & Tamura, 2023). According to the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (2018), the average cost of a transcript ranges from \$5.00 to \$9.99. If or how these costs may have factored into choice set construction (e.g., number or type of programs) has yet to be discovered.

The 81,076 PGS with graduate school choice sets had approximately 245,892 choices with a median of two graduate institutions per person (see Table A7). As a group, 82% of Black PGS’ choice sets had four or fewer institutions, 16% had a choice set with 5–10 institutions, and 2% had a choice set with 11 or more institutions. There were no gender differences.

In addition to presenting whether women included a graduate school with a certain institutional characteristic (yes/no), the intensity of this characteristic in the graduate school choice set is presented (see Table A7). An example may best illustrate the difference (see Table 5). Consider two women, each of whom has four graduate programs in her choice set. If the women’s preference for a graduate program at a private institution is considered, the fact that each chose at least one private graduate school would be reported. This would mask that for Prospective Graduate Student 1, three out of four (75%) graduate programs were at private institutions, whereas for Prospective Graduate Student 2, two were graduate programs at private institutions (50%).

**Table 5. Hypothetical Example of Graduate School Choices**

| Individual                                                 | Graduate school choice |         |         |         |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                                            | 1                      | 2       | 3       | 4       |
| Prospective Graduate Student 1: Public/private institution | Public                 | Private | Private | Private |
| Prospective Graduate Student 2: Public/private institution | Public                 | Public  | Private | Private |

***Where in the United States Would They Like to Go to Graduate School?***

PGS’ graduate school choice sets provide us with a second opportunity to learn about their geographic preferences. Here PGS’ choice is restricted to U.S. institutions to learn if they include a constellation of graduate schools across the country for their choice sets or if they narrow their geographic considerations. There may be a precedent for geographic narrowing based on selecting an undergraduate institution. In their transition from high school to college, the majority (56.2%) of public, 4-year college students attend an institution under an hour’s drive away from home (fewer than 50 miles), and nearly 70% attend within 2 hours of their homes (fewer than 100 miles; Wozniak, 2018). Two patterns have been observed when individuals graduate from college (EAB, 2018). Graduates of state universities tend to remain close to their alma maters—often staying within state lines. The typical graduate lives within 330 miles of the university, and 40% stay within 50 miles. The second pattern is for graduates of elite universities to move to major economic hubs—usually near their alma maters.

Let us consider a woman who lived in California and who applied to four graduate programs—one each in California, Washington, Arizona, and Florida (see Figure 10). As she resides in California, this choice would be in-state as well as within the U.S. Census Pacific Division and Region where she resides. A graduate institution in Washington would be considered out-of-state and in the same U.S. Census division and region. The institution in Arizona would be considered out-of-state, in the same U.S. Census division, and out of the region. The Florida-based institution would be out-of-state and out of U.S. Census division and region.

**Figure 10. U.S. Map With Hypothetical Graduate School Choices**



In this figure, California is the prospective graduate students' state of residence.

### *Pursuing Graduate Study at In-State or Out-of-State Colleges or Universities*

Seventy-six percent of Black PGS included at least one institution in the state where they lived in their choice sets (see California from the example in Figure 10; see also Figure 11 and Table A7). Women did so slightly more than men (77% vs. 74%). For those PGS who included an in-state institution, those institutions represented 76% of their choice sets.

Fifty-six percent of women and men included at least one out-of-state institution in their choice sets (see Washington, Arizona, or Florida from the example in Figure 10). Men had a

slightly higher rate of including an out-of-state institution (58% vs. 55%). If an out-of-state institutions was included in the choice sets, it represented 76% of their sets.

### *Pursuing Graduate Study in Their U.S. Census Division or Region*

Eighty-six percent of Black PGS were considering at least one graduate institution in their census division (see Washington from the example in Figure 10; see also Table A7). Slightly more women than men indicated an interest in institutions in their census division (87% vs. 84%). For those who did include at least one, these institutions represented 81% of their choice sets.

Twenty-one percent of Black PGS included a graduate program that was outside their census division but within their census region (see Arizona from the example in Figure 10). Men and women were similar in their interests. For those who included one, these institutions represented 43% of the institutions in their choice sets.

As a group, 36% of Black PGS included a graduate program outside their census region (see Florida from the example in Figure 10). Men tended to do so more than women (39% vs. 34%). For those who included them, a graduate institution outside their census region represented 60% of choice sets.

### ***What Are the Profiles of the Institutions in Their Graduate School Choice Sets?***

Now that their geographic preferences for where to pursue graduate studies are known, the next consideration is the types of institutions included in PGS' choice sets.

### *Intend to Pursue Graduate Study at Their Undergraduate Institution*

There are pros and cons to earning a graduate degree at the same institution where one received one's undergraduate degree (Bonacolta, 2021; Lovick, 2020). Some of the pros to continuing at the same place include already being a member of the academic community, possible tuition discounts, and, in some cases, finishing or continuing one's undergraduate research. In addition, PGS would not incur relocation costs and could retain existing networks outside of the university community. Some cons are that one may be restricting one's network, limiting one's exposure to how academic departments are run in other places, and potentially limiting one's international experience. While the reason for excluding them from their

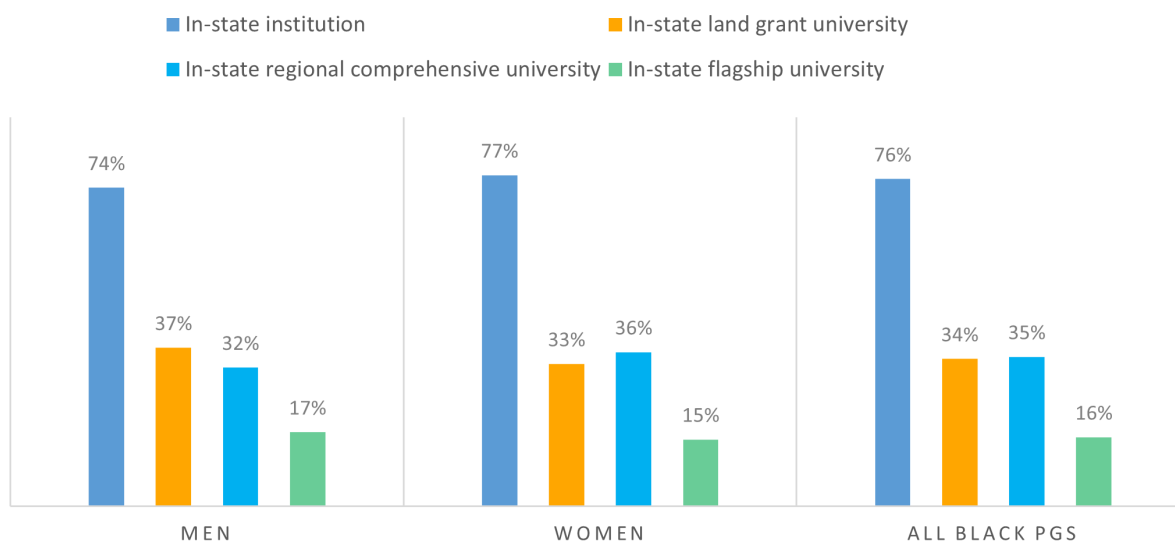
undergraduate institutions is unknown, one factor may be that it offers limited or no graduate programs (e.g., a Carnegie classification baccalaureate college).

Forty-seven percent of Black PGS were considering applying to their undergraduate alma maters (see Table A7). Women were slightly more likely to report so (48% vs. 45%). If their alma mater was included in their choice set, it represented 47% of their choices.

### *Land Grant Institutions, Regional Comprehensive Universities, and Flagship Universities in Their State of Residence*

Thirty-four percent of Black PGS included the land grant institutions of their states of residence in their choice sets (e.g., North Carolina State University, Raleigh; see Figure 11 and Table A7). The difference between men and women in including land grants in their states of residence in their choice sets was slight (37% vs. 33%). If included in the choice sets, land grant institutions represented 48% of the choices.

**Figure 11. Black Prospective Graduate Students' Inclusion of Possible Graduate School Choices by Institutional Type in Their State of Residence and by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**



Apart from the University of Idaho, the University of North Dakota, and the University of South Dakota, there is no overlap between the state flagship university and the regional comprehensive universities in a state. PGS = prospective graduate student.

Among all Black PGS, 35% included a regional comprehensive university in their state of residence in their choice sets (e.g., North Carolina Central University). Women slightly more often indicated interest in these institutions than men (36% vs 32%). Regional comprehensive institutions ranged from representing 20% of men's to 23% of women's choice sets if included in the choice sets.

Sixteen percent of Black PGS included the flagship state university in their state of residence in their choice sets (e.g., UNC Chapel Hill). Men did so at a slightly higher rate (17% vs. 15%). For those PGS who included the state flagship, it represented 43% of their choice sets.

### ***Institution Control and Student Body Size***

In fall 2021, 50% of postgraduate students nationally enrolled at public institutions, 43% at nonprofit private institutions, and 7% at for-profit institutions (NCES, 2022, Table 306.5). Black men and women were comparable in their preference for including both public and private graduate programs in their choice set. Eighty-one percent of Black PGS may apply to at least one public graduate institution. If they included a public graduate institution, they represented 77% of their choice sets. Among Black PGS, 56% may apply to at least one private nonprofit graduate institution. If a private nonprofit graduate institution was included in their choice sets, it represented 64% of choices (see Table A7). Private for-profit graduate institutions were included in 4% of PGS' choice sets; if included, they represented 30% of their choices.

Seventy-one percent of Black PGS included a graduate program at an institution with at least 20,000 students in their choice sets, with men doing so slightly more often. If a large-sized institutions was included in the choice sets, it represented 70% of the choices.

### ***Minority-Serving Institutions***

Among the 771 MSIs, 454 (59%) are 4-year institutions, and not all of them necessarily offer graduate degrees. In looking at the presence of MSIs in the graduate school choice set, 47% of Black PGS indicated that they may apply to an MSI for graduate school (see Table A7). Women expressed slightly more interest than men (48% vs. 45%). If an MSI was included in the choice sets, it represented 57% of the choice sets.

When considering the various types of MSI, three were particularly interesting to Black PGS, with minimal gender differences. Twenty-four percent of Black PGS may apply to an HSI,

20% to an AANAPISI, and 17% to an HBCU. If an HSI was included in a choice set, it represented 50% of the choices; for HBCUs, it was 54%, and for AANAPISIs, 44%.

### ***Single-Sex Colleges***

Single-sex colleges are primarily bachelor's degree institutions that award master's degrees and postbaccalaureate certificates, and a few award doctoral degrees. Two percent of the possible graduate schools for men and women were women's colleges, and if they were included, they represented 30% of the choice sets (see Table A7).

### ***Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education***

Institutions classified as Carnegie doctoral-granting institutions were prevalent in Black PGS' choice sets (87%; see Table A7). For those who did include a Carnegie doctoral institution, they represented 87% of institutions in their choice sets. Twenty-nine percent of Black PGS included a Carnegie master's-classified institution; if included, they represented 55% of their choice sets. Fifteen percent of Black PGS included at least one graduate institution with a Carnegie classification of special focus 4-year (e.g., Relay Graduate School of Education, Pardee RAND Graduate School). For those including one, it represented 45% of their choice sets.

### ***Association of American Universities Member University***

More than 40% of Black PGS' graduate school choice sets included at least one AAU member institution (see Table A7). Men included one at a notably higher rate than women (46% vs. 40%). For those PGS who did include an AAU institution, the institutions ranged from representing 64% of men's to 59% of women's institutions in their choice sets.

### **Selected Highlights**

The data represent 101,039 Black individuals aspiring to graduate education, collected over a 5-year period. The majority are women ( $n = 69,432$ ) compared to men ( $n = 31,607$ ).

Among Black PGS, 34% were 22 years old or younger, and 37% were currently enrolled in college. Seventy-five percent attended an institution in their home states, with women slightly more likely to do so than men. Forty-six percent were first-generation college students, and nearly 60% were Pell Grant-eligible. As undergraduates, Black women tended to favor life sciences, while Black men leaned more toward physical sciences and engineering. Black women

also showed a slightly greater interest in pursuing master's degrees. Additionally, 76% of Black PGS included at least one in-state institution in their graduate school choice sets.

Following are selected data highlights from the findings.

### **Q1. Who Were the Prospective Graduate Students?**

- **Age.** Thirty-four percent were 22 or younger, with a moderate gender difference (36% of women; 30% of men).
- **Disability.** Women and men were comparable (4% and 5%, respectively) in self-reporting that they have a documented visible or invisible disability. The most common were learning disabilities (31%), other disabilities (28%), and blind/visually impaired (20%).

### **Q2. Where Did Prospective Graduate Students Reside?**

- **Regional Distribution.** Sixty-one percent resided in the South, followed by the Northeast (18%), Midwest (12%), and West (10%).
- **Top 10 States.** Georgia, New York, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, California, Maryland, Virginia, Louisiana, and Illinois accounted for 66% of Black PGS.

### **Q3. What Were Their Education and Work Experiences?**

- **Enrollment.** Thirty-seven percent were currently enrolled, while 57% were not.
- **Work Experience.** Forty-four percent had less than 1 year of full-time work experience, and 24% had 1–2 years.

### **Q4. What Were Their Undergraduate Experiences?**

- **In-State Attendance.** Seventy-five percent attended an institution in their home states, with women doing so slightly more than men (75% vs. 72%).
- **MSI Attendance.** Thirty-five percent attended an MSI, primarily HBCUs (18%), HSIs (12%), and AANAPISIs (8%).
- **First-Generation Status.** Forty-six percent had no parent with a bachelor's degree, 25% had one parent with a bachelor's degree, and 29% had one parent with a bachelor's degree+.

- **Pell Grant Eligibility.** Nearly 60% were Pell Grant–eligible, while 22% were not and 19% were unsure.
- **Top Undergraduate Majors.** STEM (38%), social/behavioral sciences (26%), other fields (9%), and business/humanities (7%) were the most popular. Gender differences emerged in STEM fields—women favored life sciences (31% vs. 24%), while men leaned toward physical sciences (9% vs. 4%) and engineering (8% vs. 2%).
- **GPA.** Eighty-two percent reported a major GPA of B or higher, and 75% reported an overall GPA of B or higher, with moderate gender differences.

#### Q5. What Were Prospective Graduate Students' Plans for Graduate Study?

- **Degree Goals.** Black women and men showed similar interest in pursuing a doctorate (38%), while women were slightly more interested in master's degrees (55% vs. 50%) and men in MBAs (9% vs. 5%).
- **Graduate Fields of Interest.** The top fields were STEM (35%), social/behavioral sciences (15%), education (12%), and business (9%). The STEM field patterns observed at the undergraduate level held. Women preferred life sciences (30% vs. 22%), while men showed more interest in physical sciences and engineering (7% vs. 2% for each field).
- **Continuity in Field.** More than 50% planned to continue in their undergraduate fields, with no gender differences.
- **Geographic Preferences.** Black PGS preferred to stay in the United States, particularly in the South (58%) and Mid-Atlantic (40%), with gender differences in geographic preferences.

#### Q6. What Were Their Emerging Graduate School Choice Sets?

- **In-State Preference.** Seventy-six percent included at least one in-state institution, with women slightly more likely than men to do so (77% vs. 74%). These institutions made up 76% of their choice sets.
- **Undergraduate Alma Mater.** Forty-seven percent considered applying to their alma maters, with women more likely than men to do so (48% vs. 45%). If included, alma maters made up 47% of their choice sets.

- **Flagship State University.** Sixteen percent included a flagship state university, with men doing so slightly more than women (17% vs. 15%). These institutions made up 43% of their choice sets.
- **AAU Institutions.** More than 40% included at least one AAU institution, with men doing so at a moderately higher rate than women (46% vs. 40%). AAU institutions represented 64% of men's and 59% of women's choice sets.

### **Application of Research**

The detailed profiles of PGS provide a foundation for enhancing how different segments of the prospective graduate student population are understood and supported. This research offers valuable insights that may help various audiences, including graduate schools, admissions offices, faculty, policymakers, and organizations advocating for diversity and inclusion in graduate education, reassess their own data and practices. Following are several key ways in which these stakeholders may apply the findings to inform how they evaluate and utilize their own data.

### **Graduate Schools**

In the United States, 1,836 institutions award master's degrees, and 1,066 award doctoral degrees (NCES, 2022). Universities and colleges offering graduate programs may use the findings from this research to reassess their data regarding PGS. Institutions could explore the following:

- How does an institution's current student pool compared to the demographic and academic profiles outlined in this research?
- What insights can an institution gain about their challenges in attracting certain groups of students, particularly underrepresented populations?

Institutions may use these data as they analyze their recruitment strategies, potentially identifying areas for improvement in outreach to local, regional, or national student populations. By comparing the PGS data with their own admissions and enrollment data, schools may discover trends they had yet to consider, helping them refine their efforts to build a more diverse and inclusive graduate student body.

## Graduate School Admissions Offices

Admissions offices play a vital role in analyzing trends in their applicant pools. The findings from the PGS profiles may inform how they assess their data, offering new ways to

- evaluate the geographic and academic backgrounds of their applicants
- understand whether they are reaching the prospective students who align with their institution's strategic priorities

This research may help admissions teams examine their recruitment data through a new lens, focusing on regions or demographics that may be underrepresented in their applicant pools. By examining their data in the context of the broader national trends revealed in the PGS research, they may more effectively target outreach efforts and refine their recruitment strategies in collaboration with faculty.

## Graduate Programs and Faculty

Faculty are deeply involved in the graduate admissions process, particularly at the departmental level. The insights from this research may help faculty analyze their program data in several ways:

- **Selection of Applicants.** Faculty may use the findings to review how their applicant pool compares to national trends in academic preparation, research interests, and demographic diversity. This comparison may lead to a better understanding of gaps or opportunities in their admissions process.
- **Admissions Criteria.** The research may prompt faculty to reassess their admissions criteria, exploring whether they are attracting students who align with the department's research priorities and long-term goals.
- **Recruitment and Outreach.** Faculty may look at where their current applicants come from and assess whether there are untapped feeder institutions or geographic regions. The data may inform how faculty evaluate their recruitment efforts and suggest new partnerships with other institutions or organizations.

By examining their own admissions data in light of these broader trends, faculty may better understand how to attract academically prepared students who are aligned with the department's research goals.

## **Policymakers and Government Agencies**

Policymakers responsible for shaping higher education policies may use this research to guide how they analyze existing data on graduate education access and financial aid programs. The profiles of PGS may provide a broader context for understanding issues related to

- equity in access to graduate education, particularly among underrepresented groups
- the effectiveness of existing financial aid programs in ensuring that support reaches the students who are most in need of financial support

By comparing the national trends to their data on program effectiveness, policymakers may make informed decisions about where to allocate resources and which policy adjustments may be necessary to improve access and equity in graduate education.

## **Organizations Focused on Diversity and Inclusion**

Advocacy groups promoting equity in higher education may use these findings to reexamine their data and refine their focus. The PGS data may inform how they evaluate the effectiveness of their diversity efforts and how well they are reaching key populations, such as

- first-generation students, Black and Hispanic students, or women in STEM
- students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds or rural areas

By analyzing their data through the lens of the PGS findings, these organizations may assess whether they are effectively directing resources and support. They may also identify new opportunities for outreach or scholarship programs aimed at underserved populations.

## **Undergraduate Institutions**

The findings from this research may help undergraduate institutions as they analyze their data related to student outcomes and graduate school preparation. Institutions may

- evaluate their students' academic preparation and career aspirations in light of broader trends among PGS
- compare where their graduates are applying for graduate school with national trends and assess whether their students are aiming for the right types of institutions

These data may inform how undergraduate institutions improve their advising and graduate school preparation services, ensuring that their students are well prepared for the subsequent stage of education. They may also identify potential gaps in support for students considering graduate education and develop programs to address these needs.

### **Future Research**

Building on the current findings, several promising areas for future research could deepen our understanding of PGS and the dynamics of graduate education access, diversity, and success. This future research would help fill key gaps and extend the utility of the data.

#### **Education Researchers and Analysts**

Individuals focused on higher education issues, such as equity, access, and diversity, could explore new dimensions of the PGS experience. Future research could aim to

- better understand how diverse student populations, including students from underrepresented socioeconomic backgrounds, international students, and students with disabilities, navigate graduate education opportunities
- explore how factors beyond race—such as age, geographic background, and interdisciplinary experience—impact access and success in graduate education

#### **Connect GRE Data to Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems**

The variability in the maturity of statewide longitudinal data systems across the United States offers a rich area for research. Identifying states with well-developed systems that connect high school and undergraduate academic data could enable deeper insights into students' educational trajectories. Specifically, this approach could reveal

- how high school academic experiences, such as specific coursework or extracurricular activities, influence students' decisions to pursue graduate education
- which factors in a student's undergraduate experience (e.g., GPA, field of study, institutional type) are most predictive of applying to graduate school

#### **Connect GRE Data to National Student Clearinghouse Data**

Linking GRE data with the National Student Clearinghouse could provide a more complete picture of students' paths through higher education. This approach would allow researchers to

- measure how many PGS ultimately enroll in graduate programs, where they choose to attend, and whether they persist to graduation

- analyze trends in graduate program completion rates across different demographic groups or fields of study, helping to identify areas where interventions could improve retention and success

### **Conduct a Non–U.S. Citizen Study**

The current study excluded individuals who self-reported not being U.S. citizens, limiting the analysis to domestic populations. Future research could

- investigate the experiences of non-U.S. citizens navigating the graduate school application process, who may face distinct challenges related to visa requirements, financial aid, or access to specific academic programs
- conduct comparative studies between U.S. citizens and noncitizens, which could reveal important insights into how international students’ experiences differ from those of domestic students and how policies could better address their needs

### **Expand the Graduate School Choice Set Information**

The current study was limited to graduate schools where PGS sent their GRE scores, excluding GRE-optional or GRE-not-required programs from analysis. This omission creates a potential gap in understanding the full range of options PGS consider. Future research could

- include data from GRE-optional and GRE-not-required programs to analyze whether including these institutions changes the size and diversity of the choice sets
- examine how the growing trend of graduate programs removing GRE requirements impacts student decisions and overall program competitiveness

### **Conduct Qualitative Research**

The present study focuses primarily on quantitative data, which provides a broad view of the “what” in the graduate school application process. Adding a qualitative component could provide critical insights into the “why” behind these choices:

- Why are so many PGS choosing in-state graduate programs? What financial, social, and academic factors drive these decisions?
- How do personal motivations, career goals, or perceptions of institutional prestige influence which graduate schools students apply to and ultimately attend?

By pursuing these new lines of inquiry, future research can build on the current study's findings and significantly advance the understanding of how students navigate the graduate school application process and succeed in their academic and professional pursuits.

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## Appendix

**Table A1. Counts and Percentages for Valid and Missing Data for Black Prospective Graduate Students by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**

| Table | Variable description                                                                         | Valid responses |       | Missing responses |      |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------------------|------|
|       |                                                                                              | No.             | %     | No.               | %    |
| 2     | State where GRE test takers resided                                                          | 100,748         | 99.7  | 291               | 0.3  |
| 3     | CBSA where GRE test takers resided                                                           | 98,616          | 97.6  | 2,423             | 2.4  |
| 4     | Congressional district where GRE test takers resided                                         | 100,401         | 99.4  | 638               | 0.6  |
| A2    | Age at time of taking the GRE                                                                | 100,954         | 99.9  | 85                | 0.1  |
| A2    | Communicates best in English                                                                 | 100,927         | 99.9  | 112               | 0.1  |
| A2    | Documented disability (self-reported)                                                        | 73,987          | 73.2  | 27,052            | 26.8 |
| A3    | U.S. Census region and division where GRE test takers resided                                | 100,537         | 99.5  | 502               | 0.5  |
| A4    | Current educational level                                                                    | 101,039         | 100.0 | 0                 | 0.0  |
| A4    | Full-time work experience                                                                    | 84,282          | 83.4  | 16,757            | 16.6 |
| A5    | Individual provided undergraduate institution                                                | 59,387          | 58.8  | 41,652            | 41.2 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution has IPEDS information                                              | 59,301          | 58.7  | 41,738            | 41.3 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution was in their state of residence                                    | 59,105          | 58.5  | 41,934            | 41.5 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution is a state land grant institution in their state of residence      | 59,301          | 58.7  | 41,738            | 41.3 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution is a regional comprehensive university in their state of residence | 59,085          | 58.5  | 41,954            | 41.5 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution is the flagship university in their state of residence             | 59,085          | 58.5  | 41,954            | 41.5 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution—control—public/private/for-profit                                  | 59,301          | 58.7  | 41,738            | 41.3 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution has more than 20,000 students                                      | 59,301          | 58.7  | 41,738            | 41.3 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution is an MSI                                                          | 59,301          | 58.7  | 41,738            | 41.3 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution is a single-sex institution                                        | 59,301          | 58.7  | 41,738            | 41.3 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution's <i>Barron's Profile of American Colleges</i> classification      | 58,056          | 57.5  | 42,983            | 42.5 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution's Carnegie classification                                          | 59,158          | 58.5  | 41,881            | 41.5 |
| A5    | Undergraduate institution is a member of the AAU                                             | 59,301          | 58.7  | 41,738            | 41.3 |
| A5    | Parent educational attainment                                                                | 92,596          | 91.6  | 8,443             | 8.4  |
| A5    | Eligible for a Federal Pell Grant as an undergraduate                                        | 90,740          | 89.8  | 10,299            | 10.2 |
| A5    | Federal Pell Grant–eligible and first-generation college student                             | 87,486          | 86.6  | 13,553            | 13.4 |
| A5    | Undergraduate major field                                                                    | 92,120          | 91.2  | 8,919             | 8.8  |
| A5    | Undergraduate major GPA                                                                      | 86,075          | 85.2  | 14,964            | 14.8 |
| A5    | Overall undergraduate GPA                                                                    | 86,067          | 85.2  | 14,972            | 14.8 |
| A6    | Graduate degree objective                                                                    | 93,748          | 92.8  | 7,291             | 7.2  |
| A6    | Intended graduate major field                                                                | 101,039         | 100.0 | 0                 | 0.0  |
| A6    | Undergraduate major is the same as intended graduate major field                             | 101,039         | 100.0 | 0                 | 0.0  |
| A6    | Program format preference for graduate study                                                 | 92,319          | 91.4  | 8,720             | 8.6  |
| A6    | Enrollment preference for graduate study                                                     | 94,197          | 93.2  | 6,842             | 6.8  |
| A6    | Preferred geographic region for graduate study                                               | 90,453          | 89.5  | 10,586            | 10.5 |
| A7    | Sent at least one GRE score report to a graduate institution with an IPEDS ID                | 81,076          | 80.2  | 19,963            | 19.8 |

|    |                                                                                            |        |      |        |      |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|------|--------|------|
| A7 | Number of GRE score reports sent                                                           | 81,076 | 80.2 | 19,963 | 19.8 |
| A7 | GSC: may apply to at least one in-state institution                                        | 80,750 | 79.9 | 20,289 | 20.1 |
| A7 | GSC: may apply to at least one out-of-state institution                                    | 80,750 | 79.9 | 20,289 | 20.1 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to at least one institution in U.S. Census division                        | 80,750 | 79.9 | 20,289 | 20.1 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to at least one institution outside U.S. Census division but within region | 80,750 | 79.9 | 20,289 | 20.1 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to at least one institution outside U.S. Census region                     | 80,750 | 79.9 | 20,289 | 20.1 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to their undergraduate institution                                         | 50,162 | 49.6 | 50,877 | 50.4 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to regional flagship institution in state of residence                     | 80,750 | 79.9 | 20,289 | 20.1 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to at least one regional comprehensive institution in state of residence   | 80,750 | 79.9 | 20,289 | 20.1 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to the land grant institution in their state of residence                  | 81,076 | 80.2 | 19,963 | 19.8 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to at least one public/private/private-for-profit graduate institution     | 81,076 | 80.2 | 19,963 | 19.8 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to at least one graduate institution with at least 20,000 students         | 81,062 | 80.2 | 19,977 | 19.8 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to at least one graduate program at an MSI                                 | 81,076 | 80.2 | 19,963 | 19.8 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to at least one graduate program at a single-gender institution            | 81,706 | 80.9 | 19,333 | 19.1 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to at least one graduate institution with Carnegie classification          | 80,954 | 80.1 | 20,085 | 19.9 |
| A7 | GSC : may apply to at least one AAU member graduate institution                            | 81,076 | 80.2 | 19,963 | 19.8 |

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*Note.*  $N = 101,039$ . AAU = Association of American Universities. CBSA = Core-based statistical area. GPA = grade point average. GSC = graduate school choice. IPEDS = Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. MSI = minority-serving institution.

**Table A2. Demographic Profile of Black Prospective Graduate Students by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**

| Variable                                             | Men      |    | Women    |    | All Black PGS |    |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------|----|----------|----|---------------|----|
|                                                      | <i>n</i> | %  | <i>n</i> | %  | <i>n</i>      | %  |
| Age group                                            |          |    |          |    |               |    |
| <22                                                  | 9,571    | 30 | 24,931   | 36 | 34,502        | 34 |
| 23–25                                                | 8,280    | 26 | 18,351   | 26 | 26,631        | 26 |
| 26–30                                                | 6,362    | 20 | 11,882   | 17 | 18,244        | 18 |
| 31–40                                                | 4,710    | 15 | 8,745    | 13 | 13,455        | 13 |
| ≥41                                                  | 2,656    | 8  | 5,466    | 8  | 8,122         | 8  |
| Communicates better in English                       | 28,841   | 91 | 63,542   | 92 | 92,383        | 92 |
| 10 most common native languages (other than English) |          |    |          |    |               |    |
| 1                                                    | FRE      | 21 | FRE      | 19 | FRE           | 20 |
| 2                                                    | UND      | 11 | UND      | 16 | UND           | 14 |
| 3                                                    | YOR      | 11 | YOR      | 9  | YOR           | 10 |
| 4                                                    | IBO      | 9  | IBO      | 8  | IBO           | 8  |
| 5                                                    | AMH      | 7  | AMH      | 8  | AMH           | 8  |
| 6                                                    | ARA      | 6  | ARA      | 6  | ARA           | 6  |
| 7                                                    | TWI      | 5  | TWI      | 6  | TWI           | 5  |
| 8                                                    | SOM      | 3  | SOM      | 5  | SOM           | 4  |
| 9                                                    | SWA      | 5  | SWA      | 3  | SWA           | 4  |
| 10                                                   | AKA      | 4  | TIR      | 3  | AKA           | 3  |
| Documented disability                                | 1,179    | 5  | 2,222    | 4  | 3,401         | 5  |
| If documented disability, type of disability         |          |    |          |    |               |    |
| Blind/visually impaired                              | 200      | 17 | 467      | 21 | 667           | 20 |
| Deaf/hard of hearing                                 | 69       | 6  | 158      | 7  | 227           | 7  |
| Learning disability                                  | 421      | 36 | 641      | 29 | 1,062         | 31 |
| Multiple disabilities                                | 50       | 4  | 103      | 5  | 153           | 4  |
| Other                                                | 320      | 27 | 631      | 28 | 951           | 28 |
| Physical disability                                  | 119      | 10 | 222      | 10 | 341           | 10 |

*Note.* AKA = Akan. AMH = Amharic. ARA = Arabic. FRE = French. IBO = Igbo. PGS = prospective graduate students. SOM = Somali. SWA = Swahili. TIR = Tigrinya. TWI = Twi. UND = language not listed. YOR = Yoruba.

**Table A3. U.S. Census Geographic Profile of Black Prospective Graduate Students by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**

| Variable             | Men      |    | Women    |    | All Black PGS |    |
|----------------------|----------|----|----------|----|---------------|----|
|                      | <i>n</i> | %  | <i>n</i> | %  | <i>n</i>      | %  |
| U.S. Census region   |          |    |          |    |               |    |
| West                 | 3,612    | 11 | 6,041    | 9  | 9,653         | 10 |
| Midwest              | 3,901    | 12 | 7,690    | 11 | 11,591        | 12 |
| Northeast            | 5,564    | 18 | 12,062   | 17 | 17,626        | 18 |
| South                | 18,339   | 58 | 43,327   | 63 | 61,666        | 61 |
| U.S. Census division |          |    |          |    |               |    |
| Pacific              | 2,750    | 9  | 4,833    | 7  | 7,583         | 8  |
| Mountain             | 862      | 3  | 1,208    | 2  | 2,070         | 2  |
| West North Central   | 928      | 3  | 1,596    | 2  | 2,524         | 3  |
| East North Central   | 2,973    | 9  | 6,094    | 9  | 9,067         | 9  |
| Middle Atlantic      | 4,607    | 15 | 10,243   | 15 | 14,850        | 15 |
| New England          | 957      | 3  | 1,819    | 3  | 2,776         | 3  |
| West South Central   | 4,603    | 15 | 10,276   | 15 | 14,879        | 15 |
| East South Central   | 2,732    | 9  | 6,796    | 10 | 9,528         | 9  |
| South Atlantic       | 11,004   | 35 | 26,255   | 38 | 37,259        | 37 |

*Note.* PGS = prospective graduate students.

**Table A4. Education and Work Experiences of Black Prospective Graduate Students by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**

| Variable                             | Men      |    | Women    |          | All Black PGS |          |
|--------------------------------------|----------|----|----------|----------|---------------|----------|
|                                      | <i>n</i> | %  | <i>n</i> | <i>n</i> | %             | <i>n</i> |
| Current educational level            |          |    |          |          |               |          |
| Currently enrolled in college        | 8,883    | 28 | 19,827   | 29       | 28,710        | 28       |
| Unenrolled college graduate (BA/BS)  | 12,828   | 41 | 27,477   | 40       | 40,305        | 40       |
| Unenrolled master's program graduate | 4,905    | 16 | 11,785   | 17       | 16,690        | 17       |
| Enrolled in graduate school          | 3,065    | 10 | 6,000    | 9        | 9,065         | 9        |
| Other                                | 1,926    | 6  | 4,343    | 6        | 6,269         | 6        |
| Full-time work experience (years)    |          |    |          |          |               |          |
| <1                                   | 11,833   | 44 | 24,951   | 43       | 36,784        | 44       |
| 1–2                                  | 6,107    | 23 | 14,508   | 25       | 20,615        | 24       |
| 3–4                                  | 3,148    | 12 | 6,493    | 11       | 9,641         | 11       |
| 5–7                                  | 2,402    | 9  | 4,567    | 8        | 6,969         | 8        |
| ≥8                                   | 3,246    | 12 | 7,027    | 12       | 10,273        | 12       |

*Note.* BA = bachelor of arts. BS = bachelor of science. PGS = prospective graduate students.

**Table A5. Undergraduate Experiences Black Prospective Graduate Students Will Bring to Graduate School by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**

| Variable                                                                                 | Men      |     | Women    |          | All Black PGS |          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----|----------|----------|---------------|----------|
|                                                                                          | <i>n</i> | %   | <i>n</i> | <i>n</i> | %             | <i>n</i> |
| Individual provided undergraduate institution                                            | 18,702   | 59  | 40,685   | 59       | 59,387        | 59       |
| Undergraduate institution has IPEDS information                                          | 18,666   | 59  | 40,635   | 59       | 59,301        | 59       |
| Undergraduate institution in their state of residence                                    | 13,383   | 72  | 30,361   | 75       | 43,744        | 74       |
| Undergraduate institution: state land grant institution in their state of residence      | 2,583    | 15  | 5,260    | 14       | 7,843         | 14       |
| Undergraduate institution: regional comprehensive university in their state of residence | 5,889    | 32  | 14,123   | 35       | 20,012        | 34       |
| Undergraduate institution: flagship university in their state of residence               | 1,905    | 10  | 4,008    | 10       | 5,913         | 10       |
| Undergraduate institution: control: public                                               | 13,422   | 72  | 29,395   | 72       | 42,817        | 72       |
| Undergraduate institution: control: private nonprofit                                    | 5,201    | 28  | 11,176   | 28       | 16,377        | 28       |
| Undergraduate institution: control: private for-profit                                   | 43       | 0.2 | 64       | 0.2      | 107           | 0.2      |
| Undergraduate institution: >20,000 students                                              | 8,308    | 45  | 17,875   | 44       | 26,183        | 44       |
| Undergraduate institution: MSI                                                           | 6,343    | 34  | 14,653   | 36       | 20,996        | 35       |
| AANAPISI                                                                                 | 1,540    | 8   | 3,224    | 8        | 4,764         | 8        |
| ANNH                                                                                     | 25       | 0.1 | 22       | 0.1      | 47            | 0.1      |
| HSI                                                                                      | 2,264    | 12  | 4,886    | 12       | 7,150         | 12       |
| HBCU                                                                                     | 3,121    | 17  | 7,659    | 19       | 10,780        | 18       |
| NASNTI                                                                                   | 26       | 0.1 | 74       | 0.2      | 100           | 0.2      |
| PBI                                                                                      | 464      | 2.5 | 1,260    | 3.1      | 1,724         | 2.9      |
| TCU                                                                                      | 0        | 0.0 | 0        | 0.0      | 0             | 0.0      |
| Undergraduate institution: single sex                                                    | 283      | 1.5 | 896      | 2.2      | 1,179         | 2.0      |
| Men's college                                                                            | 257      | 1.4 | 14       | 0.0      | 271           | 0.5      |
| Women's college                                                                          | 26       | 0.1 | 882      | 2.2      | 908           | 1.5      |
| Undergraduate institution: Carnegie classification                                       |          |     |          |          |               |          |
| Doctoral universities                                                                    | 12,691   | 68  | 27,763   | 68       | 40,454        | 68       |
| Master's colleges and universities                                                       | 4,322    | 23  | 9,728    | 24       | 14,050        | 24       |
| Baccalaureate colleges                                                                   | 1,607    | 9   | 3,047    | 8        | 4,654         | 8        |
| Undergraduate institution: <i>Barron's</i>                                               |          |     |          |          |               |          |
| Most competitive                                                                         | 2,262    | 12  | 4,329    | 11       | 6,591         | 11       |
| Highly competitive                                                                       | 2,129    | 12  | 4,273    | 11       | 6,402         | 11       |
| Very competitive                                                                         | 4,560    | 25  | 9,981    | 25       | 14,541        | 25       |
| Competitive                                                                              | 6,901    | 38  | 15,483   | 39       | 22,384        | 39       |
| Other                                                                                    | 2,442    | 13  | 5,696    | 14       | 8,138         | 14       |
| Undergraduate institution: AAU                                                           | 3,345    | 18  | 6,530    | 16       | 9,875         | 17       |
| Parental educational attainment                                                          |          |     |          |          |               |          |
| No parent bach                                                                           | 12,864   | 44  | 29,691   | 47       | 42,555        | 46       |
| One parent bach                                                                          | 7,492    | 26  | 16,028   | 25       | 23,520        | 25       |
| One parent bach+                                                                         | 8,793    | 30  | 17,728   | 28       | 26,521        | 29       |
| Federal Pell Grant–eligible                                                              |          |     |          |          |               |          |

|                                                                  |        |    |        |    |        |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----|--------|----|--------|----|
| Yes                                                              | 16,212 | 57 | 37,566 | 60 | 53,778 | 59 |
| No                                                               | 5,878  | 21 | 14,252 | 23 | 20,130 | 22 |
| Do not know                                                      | 6,180  | 22 | 10,652 | 17 | 16,832 | 19 |
| Federal Pell Grant—eligible and first-generation college student | 8,746  | 32 | 20,893 | 35 | 29,639 | 34 |
| Undergraduate major field—detailed                               |        |    |        |    |        |    |
| Business                                                         | 3,222  | 10 | 4,062  | 6  | 7,284  | 7  |
| Education                                                        | 793    | 3  | 2,816  | 4  | 3,609  | 4  |
| Engineering                                                      | 2,610  | 8  | 1,402  | 2  | 4,012  | 4  |
| Humanities and arts                                              | 2,453  | 8  | 5,016  | 7  | 7,469  | 7  |
| Life sciences                                                    | 7,479  | 24 | 21,422 | 31 | 28,901 | 29 |
| Physical sciences                                                | 2,800  | 9  | 2,685  | 4  | 5,485  | 5  |
| Social and behavioral sciences                                   | 6,769  | 21 | 18,574 | 27 | 25,343 | 25 |
| Other field                                                      | 2,362  | 7  | 6,316  | 9  | 8,678  | 9  |
| Undecided or no major provided                                   | 3,119  | 10 | 7,139  | 10 | 10,258 | 10 |
| Undergraduate major field—STEM fields aggregated                 |        |    |        |    |        |    |
| Business                                                         | 3,222  | 10 | 4,062  | 6  | 7,284  | 7  |
| Education                                                        | 793    | 3  | 2,816  | 4  | 3,609  | 4  |
| STEM fields                                                      | 12,889 | 41 | 25,509 | 37 | 38,398 | 38 |
| Humanities and arts                                              | 2,453  | 8  | 5,016  | 7  | 7,469  | 7  |
| Social and behavioral sciences                                   | 6,769  | 21 | 18,574 | 27 | 25,343 | 25 |
| Other field                                                      | 2,362  | 7  | 6,316  | 9  | 8,678  | 9  |
| Undecided or no major provided                                   | 3,119  | 10 | 7,139  | 10 | 10,258 | 10 |
| Undergraduate major field—STEM yes/no                            | 12,889 | 41 | 25,509 | 37 | 38,398 | 38 |
| Undergraduate major GPA                                          |        |    |        |    |        |    |
| 3.7–4.0                                                          | 8,925  | 33 | 23,182 | 39 | 32,107 | 37 |
| 2.7–3.6                                                          | 15,980 | 59 | 31,513 | 54 | 47,493 | 55 |
| 0.0–2.6                                                          | 2,323  | 9  | 4,152  | 7  | 6,475  | 8  |
| ≥3.0                                                             | 21,873 | 80 | 48,915 | 83 | 70,788 | 82 |
| Undergraduate overall GPA                                        |        |    |        |    |        |    |
| 3.7–4.0                                                          | 6,145  | 23 | 17,180 | 29 | 23,325 | 27 |
| 2.7–3.6                                                          | 17,133 | 63 | 35,032 | 60 | 52,165 | 61 |
| 0.0–2.6                                                          | 3,960  | 15 | 6,617  | 11 | 10,577 | 12 |
| ≥3.0                                                             | 19,331 | 71 | 45,431 | 77 | 64,762 | 75 |

*Note.* AANAPISI = Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-serving institution. AAU = Association of American Universities. ANNH = Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-serving institution. GPA = grade point average. HBCU = historically Black college or university. HSI = Hispanic-serving institution. IPEDS = Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. MSI = minority-serving institution. NASNTI = Native American-serving nontribal institution. PBI = predominantly Black institution. PGS = prospective graduate students. STEM = science, technology, engineering, and math. TCU = tribal college or university.

**Table A6. Plans for Graduate School of Black Prospective Graduate Students by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**

| Variable                                                         | Men      |    | Women    |    | All Black PGS |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----|----------|----|---------------|----|
|                                                                  | <i>n</i> | %  | <i>n</i> | %  | <i>n</i>      | %  |
| Graduate degree objective                                        |          |    |          |    |               |    |
| Doctorate                                                        | 11,268   | 38 | 24,624   | 38 | 35,892        | 38 |
| Master's                                                         | 14,742   | 50 | 35,191   | 55 | 49,933        | 53 |
| MBA                                                              | 2,629    | 9  | 3,128    | 5  | 5,757         | 6  |
| JD                                                               | 268      | 1  | 477      | 1  | 745           | 1  |
| Other                                                            | 459      | 2  | 962      | 1  | 1,421         | 2  |
| Intended graduate major field—detailed                           |          |    |          |    |               |    |
| Business                                                         | 4,077    | 13 | 4,974    | 7  | 9,051         | 9  |
| Education                                                        | 3,237    | 10 | 9,236    | 13 | 12,473        | 12 |
| Engineering                                                      | 2,180    | 7  | 1,155    | 2  | 3,335         | 3  |
| Humanities and arts                                              | 1,130    | 4  | 1,843    | 3  | 2,973         | 3  |
| Life sciences                                                    | 6,823    | 22 | 21,136   | 30 | 27,959        | 28 |
| Physical sciences                                                | 2,163    | 7  | 1,662    | 2  | 3,825         | 4  |
| Social and behavioral sciences                                   | 4,065    | 13 | 11,169   | 16 | 15,234        | 15 |
| Other field                                                      | 2,232    | 7  | 5,639    | 8  | 7,871         | 8  |
| Undecided or no major provided                                   | 5,700    | 18 | 12,618   | 18 | 18,318        | 18 |
| Intended graduate major field—STEM fields aggregated             |          |    |          |    |               |    |
| Business                                                         | 4,077    | 13 | 4,974    | 7  | 9,051         | 9  |
| Education                                                        | 3,237    | 10 | 9,236    | 13 | 12,473        | 12 |
| STEM fields                                                      | 11,166   | 35 | 23,953   | 34 | 35,119        | 35 |
| Humanities and arts                                              | 1,130    | 4  | 1,843    | 3  | 2,973         | 3  |
| Social and behavioral sciences                                   | 4,065    | 13 | 11,169   | 16 | 15,234        | 15 |
| Other field                                                      | 2,232    | 7  | 5,639    | 8  | 7,871         | 8  |
| Undecided or no major provided                                   | 5,700    | 18 | 12,618   | 18 | 18,318        | 18 |
| Intended graduate major field—STEM yes/no                        | 11,166   | 35 | 23,953   | 34 | 35,119        | 35 |
| Undergraduate major is the same as intended graduate major field | 16,226   | 51 | 35,109   | 51 | 51,335        | 51 |
| Program format                                                   |          |    |          |    |               |    |
| On-campus                                                        | 18,228   | 63 | 36,415   | 57 | 54,643        | 59 |
| Online                                                           | 2,023    | 7  | 5,216    | 8  | 7,239         | 8  |
| A combination of both                                            | 6,703    | 23 | 17,580   | 28 | 24,283        | 26 |
| Undecided                                                        | 2,024    | 7  | 4,130    | 7  | 6,154         | 7  |
| Enrollment preference                                            |          |    |          |    |               |    |
| Full-time                                                        | 24,022   | 82 | 53,337   | 82 | 77,359        | 82 |
| Part-time                                                        | 3,051    | 10 | 6,381    | 10 | 9,432         | 10 |
| Undecided                                                        | 2,379    | 8  | 5,027    | 8  | 7,406         | 8  |
| Preferred region for graduate study (may select more than one)   |          |    |          |    |               |    |
| U.S. regions                                                     |          |    |          |    |               |    |

|                                |        |     |        |     |        |     |
|--------------------------------|--------|-----|--------|-----|--------|-----|
| Northeast                      | 9,208  | 32  | 14,775 | 24  | 23,983 | 27  |
| Mid-Atlantic                   | 11,848 | 42  | 24,633 | 40  | 36,481 | 40  |
| South                          | 15,651 | 55  | 37,058 | 60  | 52,709 | 58  |
| Midwest                        | 8,076  | 28  | 13,901 | 22  | 21,977 | 24  |
| Southwest                      | 7,963  | 28  | 14,954 | 24  | 22,917 | 25  |
| West                           | 9,630  | 34  | 15,049 | 24  | 24,679 | 27  |
| Non-U.S. regions               |        |     |        |     |        |     |
| Canada                         | 1,968  | 7   | 3,124  | 5   | 5,092  | 6   |
| Africa                         | 796    | 3   | 1,274  | 2   | 2,070  | 2   |
| Asia                           | 794    | 3   | 926    | 1   | 1,720  | 2   |
| Australia/New Zealand          | 994    | 3   | 1,481  | 2   | 2,475  | 3   |
| Latin America                  | 744    | 3   | 1,418  | 2   | 2,162  | 2   |
| Middle East                    | 448    | 2   | 517    | 1   | 965    | 1   |
| Western Europe                 | 2,064  | 7   | 3,290  | 5   | 5,354  | 6   |
| Eastern Europe and Russia      | 625    | 2   | 866    | 1   | 1,491  | 2   |
| Count ALL regions              |        |     |        |     |        |     |
| 1                              | 15,185 | 53  | 35,757 | 58  | 50,942 | 56  |
| 2                              | 3,853  | 14  | 9,795  | 16  | 13,648 | 15  |
| 3                              | 3,051  | 11  | 6,288  | 10  | 9,339  | 10  |
| 4                              | 1,758  | 6   | 3,127  | 5   | 4,885  | 5   |
| 5                              | 975    | 3   | 1,753  | 3   | 2,728  | 3   |
| ≥6                             | 3,657  | 13  | 5,254  | 8   | 8,911  | 10  |
| Number of U.S. regions         |        |     |        |     |        |     |
| 0                              | 66     | 0.2 | 133    | 0.2 | 199    | 0.2 |
| 1                              | 15,550 | 55  | 36,514 | 59  | 52,064 | 58  |
| 2                              | 4,039  | 14  | 10,184 | 16  | 14,223 | 16  |
| 3                              | 3,306  | 12  | 6,669  | 11  | 9,975  | 11  |
| 4                              | 1,734  | 6   | 2,986  | 5   | 4,720  | 5   |
| 5                              | 810    | 3   | 1,391  | 2   | 2,201  | 2   |
| 6                              | 2,974  | 10  | 4,097  | 7   | 7,071  | 8   |
| All regions outside U.S.       |        |     |        |     |        |     |
| Yes                            | 3,538  | 12  | 6,022  | 10  | 9,560  | 11  |
| Number of regions outside U.S. |        |     |        |     |        |     |
| 0                              | 24,941 | 88  | 55,952 | 90  | 80,893 | 89  |
| 1                              | 1,730  | 6   | 3,215  | 5   | 4,945  | 5   |
| 2                              | 747    | 3   | 1,242  | 2   | 1,989  | 2   |
| 3                              | 379    | 1   | 668    | 1   | 1,047  | 1   |
| 4                              | 211    | 1   | 302    | 0   | 513    | 1   |
| 5                              | 117    | 0   | 178    | 0   | 295    | 0   |
| ≥6                             | 354    | 1   | 417    | 1   | 771    | 1   |

*Note.* PGS = prospective graduate students.

**Table A7. Characteristics of the Institutions in the Graduate School Choice Sets of Black Prospective Graduate Students by Gender (U.S. Citizens), July 2016–June 2021**

| Variable                                                                                                                  | Men    | Women   | All Black PGS |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------|---------------|
| Percentage PGS who sent at least one GRE score report to a graduate institution with an IPEDS ID                          | 79     | 81      | 80            |
| Number of PGS who sent at least one GRE Score Report to a graduate institution with an IPEDS ID                           | 24,827 | 56,249  | 81,076        |
| Total number of GRE score reports                                                                                         | 76,495 | 169,397 | 245,892       |
| Median number of graduate institutions                                                                                    | 3.08   | 3.01    | 3.03          |
| Mean number of graduate institutions                                                                                      | 2.00   | 2.00    | 2.00          |
| Minimum number of graduate institutions                                                                                   | 1      | 1       | 1             |
| Maximum number of graduate institutions                                                                                   | 34     | 49      | 49            |
| Percentage with $\leq 4$ prospective graduate institution choices                                                         | 82     | 82      | 82            |
| Percentage with 5–10 prospective graduate institution choices                                                             | 16     | 16      | 16            |
| Percentage with $\geq 11$ prospective graduate institution choices                                                        | 2      | 2       | 2             |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one in-state institution (Y/N)                                                   | 74     | 77      | 76            |
| Percentage in-state institutions in choice set                                                                            | 75     | 76      | 76            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one out-of-state institution (Y/N)                                               | 58     | 55      | 56            |
| Percentage out-of-state institutions in choice set                                                                        | 77     | 76      | 76            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one institution in U.S. Census division (Y/N)                                    | 84     | 87      | 86            |
| Percentage institutions in U.S. Census division in choice set                                                             | 79     | 82      | 81            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one institution outside their U.S. Census division but within their region (Y/N) | 21     | 20      | 21            |
| Percentage institutions outside U.S. Census division but within region in choice set                                      | 43     | 43      | 43            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one institution outside of their U.S. Census region (Y/N)                        | 39     | 34      | 36            |
| Percentage institutions outside U.S. Census region in choice set                                                          | 62     | 59      | 60            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to their undergraduate institution (Y/N)                                                     | 45     | 48      | 47            |
| Percentage undergraduate institutions in choice set                                                                       | 62     | 62      | 62            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to regional flagship institution in state of residence (Y/N)                                 | 17     | 15      | 16            |
| Percentage regional flagship institutions in state of residence in choice set                                             | 43     | 43      | 43            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one regional comprehensive institution in state of residence (Y/N)               | 32     | 36      | 35            |
| Percentage regional comprehensive institutions in state of residence in choice set                                        | 20     | 23      | 22            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to the land grant institution in their state of residence (Y/N)                              | 37     | 33      | 34            |
| Percentage land grant institutions in their state of residence in choice set                                              | 48     | 47      | 48            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one public graduate institution (Y/N)                                            | 81     | 81      | 81            |
| Percentage public graduate institutions in choice set                                                                     | 78     | 77      | 77            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one private nonprofit graduate institution (Y/N)                                 | 56     | 57      | 56            |
| Percentage private nonprofit graduate institutions in choice set                                                          | 64     | 64      | 64            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one private for-profit graduate institution (Y/N)                                | 3      | 4       | 4             |
| Percentage private for-profit graduate institutions in choice set                                                         | 28     | 30      | 30            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one graduate institution with at least 20,000 students (Y/N)                     | 73     | 70      | 71            |
| Percentage graduate institutions with at least 20,000 students in choice set                                              | 72     | 69      | 70            |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one MSI graduate institution (Y/N)                                               | 45     | 48      | 47            |

|                                                                                                                           |     |     |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Percentage MSI graduate institutions in choice set                                                                        | 56  | 57  | 57  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one AANAPISI graduate institution (Y/N)                                          | 20  | 20  | 20  |
| Percentage AANAPISI graduate institutions in choice set                                                                   | 43  | 45  | 44  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one ANNH graduate institution (Y/N)                                              | 0   | 0   | 0   |
| Percentage ANNH graduate institutions in choice set                                                                       | 37  | 35  | 36  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one HSI graduate institution (Y/N)                                               | 24  | 24  | 24  |
| Percentage HSI graduate institutions in choice set                                                                        | 50  | 51  | 50  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one NASNTI graduate institution (Y/N)                                            | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| Percentage NASNTI graduate institutions in choice set                                                                     | 50  | 49  | 49  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one PBI graduate institution (Y/N)                                               | 6   | 8   | 7   |
| Percentage PBI graduate institutions in choice set                                                                        | 42  | 42  | 42  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one HBCU graduate institution (Y/N)                                              | 15  | 18  | 17  |
| Percentage HBCU graduate institutions in choice set                                                                       | 55  | 54  | 54  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one TCU graduate institution (Y/N)                                               | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Percentage TCU graduate institutions in choice set                                                                        |     |     |     |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one single-sex college (Y/N)                                                     | 2   | 3   | 2   |
| Percentage single-sex colleges in choice set                                                                              | 25  | 31  | 30  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one men's college (Y/N)                                                          | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Percentage men's colleges in choice set                                                                                   | 25  | 25  | 25  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one women's college (Y/N)                                                        | 2   | 3   | 2   |
| Percentage women's colleges in choice set                                                                                 | 25  | 31  | 30  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one graduate institution with Carnegie doctoral classification (Y/N)             | 88  | 87  | 87  |
| Percentage graduate institutions with Carnegie doctoral classification in choice set                                      | 89  | 87  | 87  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one graduate institution with Carnegie master's classification (Y/N)             | 27  | 30  | 29  |
| Percentage graduate institutions with Carnegie master's classification in choice set                                      | 56  | 55  | 55  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one graduate institution with Carnegie classification special focus 4 year (Y/N) | 13  | 16  | 15  |
| Percentage graduate institutions with Carnegie classification special focus 4 year in choice set                          | 44  | 45  | 45  |
| Percentage PGS who may apply to at least one AAU member graduate institution (Y/N)                                        | 46  | 40  | 42  |
| Percentage AAU member graduate institutions in choice set                                                                 | 64  | 59  | 61  |

*Note.* AANAPISI = Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-serving institution. ANNH = Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-serving institution. AAU = American Association of Universities. BA = bachelor of arts. HBCU = historically Black college or university. HSI = Hispanic-serving institution. IPEDS = Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. MSI = minority-serving institution. N/A = not applicable. NASNTI = Native American-serving nontribal institution. PBI = predominantly Black institution. PGS = prospective graduate students. TCU = tribal college or university. Y/N = yes/no.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In 2022, the gender question was revised. *A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the GRE General Test July 2018–June 2023* (ETS, 2024) presents gender data using the revised gender question.

<sup>2</sup> These race/ethnicity categories match those provided in *A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the GRE General Test July 2016–June 2021* (ETS, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> For a more comprehensive analysis of the experiences of women PGS, refer to the first Pathways to Graduate School series report (Millett, 2025a).

<sup>4</sup> On the BIQ, individuals were asked “What is your native language?” It is acknowledged that within the field of applied linguistics, using the term *first language* rather than *native language* would address concerns surrounding the “native speaker bias.”

<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau does not include Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories in any census region or division.

<sup>6</sup> College Navigator is the data source. Note that many of the men’s colleges are religious institutions. See <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

<sup>7</sup> This list is from July 2022. As of July 2023, 69 AAU member universities are in the United States.

<sup>8</sup> Note that these regions do not align precisely with the U.S. Census divisions and regions presented in other report sections. These regions are from the BIQ. The Northeast region includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The Mid-Atlantic region includes Washington, DC, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. The South region includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The Midwest region includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The Southwest region includes Arizona, Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The West region includes Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawai‘i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

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