

Colleges contending with shift in demographics

By Eric Hoover, Chronicle of Higher Education

Demographic projections have inspired doomsayers and daydreamers alike. The sky-is-falling contingent says the declining number of white, affluent high-school graduates will sink many tuition-dependent colleges. Meanwhile, optimistic observers predict that population shifts will compel institutions to transform themselves by embracing underrepresented students like never before.

As any admissions officer could tell you, the number of high school graduates in several Midwestern and Northeastern states will drop sharply over the next decade, according to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

Nationally, the number of black and white students will decline, and the number of Hispanic and Asian-American graduates will increase significantly. The nation's already seeing a sharp rise in first-generation and low-income graduates—the very students whom selective four-year institutions have long struggled to serve.

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