

**Top 10 Percent Report:
Changes in Newly Enrolled Undergraduate
Student Populations in Texas Public
Universities**

Fall 2009-2023

March 2025

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Agency Purpose

Our purpose is to strengthen Texas through higher education. By making higher education accessible to a wide range of people, we can ensure Texas remains one of the world's most innovative, valuable educational systems. By bringing together data, policymakers, and institutions, we can inform sensible policies that make a difference and make education beyond high school available to every person in our state. When we do that, we will improve lives, communities, and our shared economy.

Agency Vision

The THECB will be recognized as an international leader in developing and implementing innovative higher education policy to accomplish our mission.

Agency Philosophy

The THECB will promote access to and success in quality higher education across the state with the conviction that access and success without quality is mediocrity and that quality without access and success is unacceptable.

The THECB's core values are:

Accountability: We hold ourselves responsible for our actions and welcome every opportunity to educate stakeholders about our policies, decisions, and aspirations.

Efficiency: We accomplish our work using resources in the most effective manner.

Collaboration: We develop partnerships that result in student success and a highly qualified, globally competent workforce.

Excellence: We strive for excellence in all our endeavors.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, or disability in employment or the provision of services.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	i
Background.....	i
Current Report.....	i
Trends in Racial/Ethnic Diversity.....	1
The University of Texas at Austin.....	1
Texas A&M University	3
Other Texas Public Universities	6
Trends in Enrollment of Special Populations.....	10
Economically Disadvantaged Students	10
Students from Small High Schools or Low-Sending High Schools.....	12
Regional Enrollment Patterns	14
Appendix A: Higher Education Regions.....	16

Figures

Figure 1. The University of Texas at Austin: First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status.....	1
Figure 2. The University of Texas at Austin: 2009-2023 Change in First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status.....	2
Figure 3. The University of Texas at Austin: Comparison of First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment with Texas Population Ages 18-22.....	3
Figure 4. Texas A&M University: First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status.....	4
Figure 5. Texas A&M University: 2009-2023 Change in First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status	5
Figure 6. Texas A&M University: Comparison of First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment with Texas Population Ages 18-22.....	6
Figure 7. Other Texas Public Universities: First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status	7
Figure 8. Other Texas Public Universities: 2009-2023 Change in First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status.....	8
Figure 9. Other Texas Public Universities: Comparison of First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment with Texas Population Ages 18-22	9
Figure 10. Top 10 Percent Enrollment of Economically Disadvantaged Students from Texas Public High Schools	11

Figure 11. Economically Disadvantaged Percentages of Top 10 Percent Students and of Texas Public High School Graduates 12

Figure 12. Top 10 Percent Enrollment from Small and Low-Sending High Schools 13

Figure 13. The University of Texas at Austin: First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Region 14

Figure 14. Texas A&M University: First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Region..... 15

Appendices

Appendix A: Higher Education Regions..... 16

Introduction

Background

The original “Top 10 Percent Law” (also called the “Top 10 Percent Rule”) was passed by the 75th Texas Legislature in 1997 to address the issue of diversity in Texas public universities. It was hoped that the automatic offer of admission made to the top 10% of students in the spring of their junior year would attract many high school students to Texas public universities, thus increasing the income, ethnic/racial, and geographic diversity of institutions, particularly at the two flagship institutions of The University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin) and Texas A&M University.

The law stated that:

“Each general academic teaching institution shall admit an applicant for admission to the institution as an undergraduate student if the applicant graduated in one of the two school years preceding the academic year for which the applicant is applying for admission from a public or private high school in this state accredited by a generally recognized accrediting organization with a grade point average in the top 10 percent of the student’s high school graduating class.”¹

A 2009 statutory change allowed UT-Austin to set a more stringent standard than top 10% to limit the number of students offered automatic admission under the rule to “75 percent of the university’s enrollment capacity designated for first-time resident undergraduate students in an academic year.”² With the 2009 change in the law, the Legislature mandated that THECB produce an annual report on students admitted under the Top 10 Percent Rule and assess the impact of the statutory change on THECB agency goals.

Current Report

The Top 10 Percent report aims to provide information about the ongoing impact of the Top 10 Percent Rule on enrollment. In accordance with Texas Education Code 51.803, this report explores the profile of enrolled Top 10 Percent students by race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic region, and who are from small or low-sending high schools.

The current report explores changes in enrollment over time and compares Top 10 Percent enrollees to relevant population benchmarks. First, this report examines changes in first-time undergraduate student enrollment between 2009 and 2023 at UT-Austin, Texas A&M University, and other public Texas universities for students admitted under the Top 10 Percent Rule (Top 10 Percent students). We report data at three points in time: 2009, the year the statute mandating the report was passed; 2019, the year immediately before the coronavirus pandemic; and 2023, the most recent year of data available. Second, this report examines the extent to which the two flagship universities and the other public universities

¹ Texas Education Code, Section 51.803

² Texas Education Code, Section 51.803(a-1). Based on this rule, admissions officials at UT-Austin initially set the standard at the top 7% and changed it to top 6% for the 2019 entering freshman class. Due to limitations in THECB data collection, all students in the top 10% at UT-Austin are included in this analysis; however, students below the UT-Austin threshold were not automatically admitted. UT-Austin publishes an annual report with additional detail on this issue: <https://provost.utexas.edu/enrollment-management/admissions-research/admission-reports>.

enroll Top 10 Percent students who are representative of relevant population benchmarks. For example, the racial/ethnic diversity of Top 10 Percent students is compared to the state's 18- to 22-year-old population, income diversity of enrolled Top 10 Percent students is compared to all high school graduates, and geographic diversity of enrolled Top 10 Percent students is compared to all enrolled students. These population comparisons help evaluate the characteristics of Top 10 Percent student enrollment, based on what we might expect.

A [dataset](#) with information for all years from 2009 to 2023 is available on the THECB's Texas Higher Education Data website.

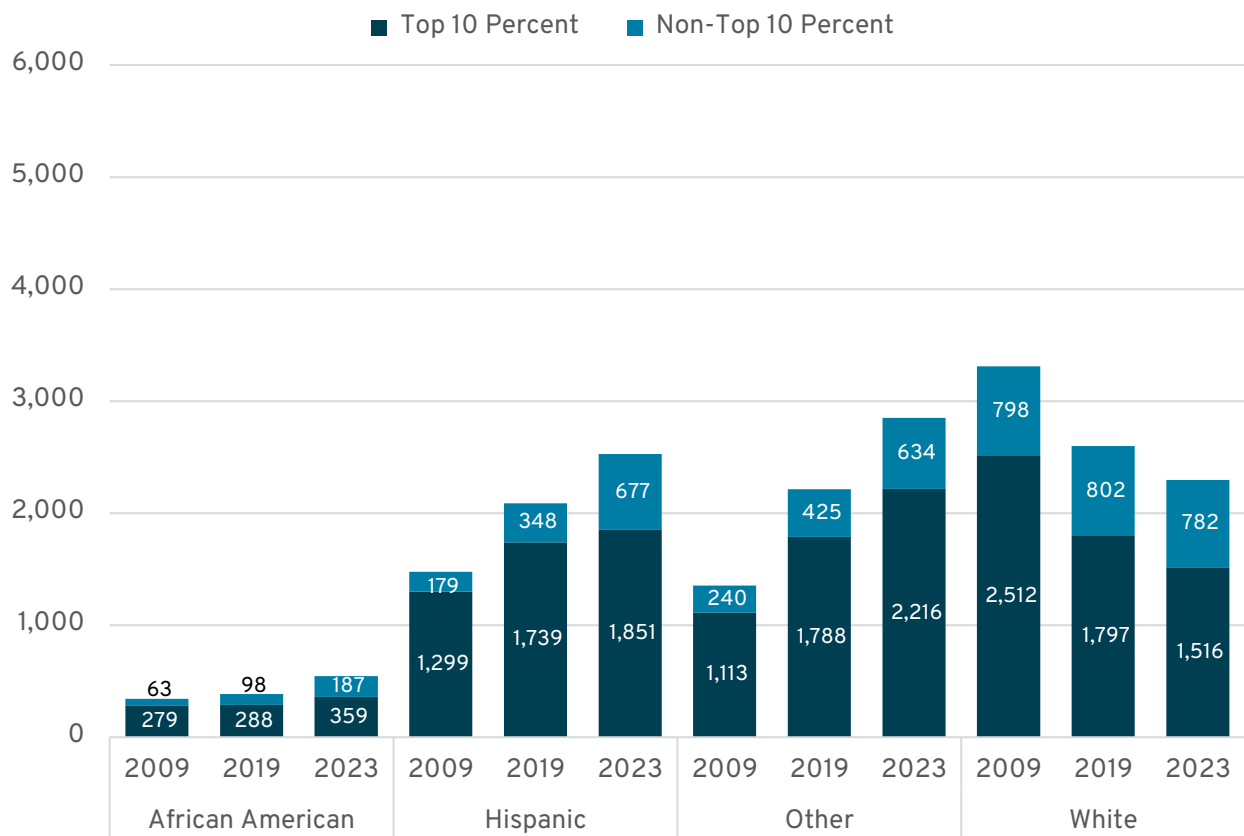
Trends in Racial/Ethnic Diversity

This section explores the racial and ethnic diversity of Top 10 Percent students. In particular, this includes the following topics: a) how Top 10 Percent student enrollment has changed over time, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, and b) how Top 10 Percent enrollments proportionally align with the race and ethnicity of the Texas young adult population.

The University of Texas at Austin

Enrollments by Top 10 Percent and Non-Top 10 Percent students increased for African American, Hispanic, and Other race/ethnicity students across the entire 2009-2023 period at UT-Austin (Figure 1). For White students, Non-Top 10 Percent and Top 10 Percent enrollments and overall enrollments declined, a trend that has continued since the pandemic.

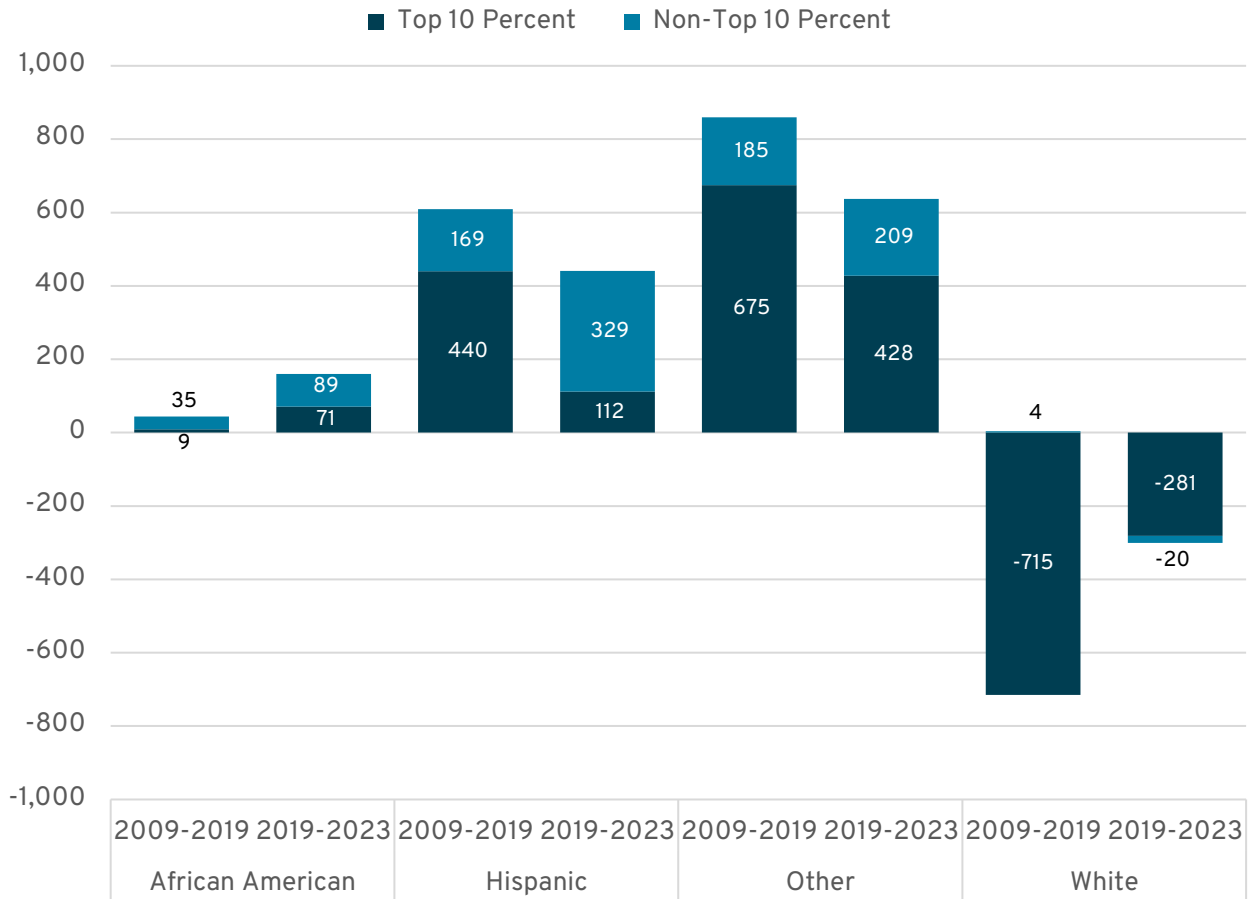
Figure 1. The University of Texas at Austin: First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status



Looking at changes across time periods, the increase in enrollments of Other race/ethnicity students and the decline in White enrollments at UT-Austin were mostly accounted for by the change in Top 10 Percent enrollments (Figure 2). The relatively small increase in African American enrollments was mostly accounted for by Non-Top 10 Percent enrollments. Notably, a time-specific trend emerged for Hispanic student enrollments: the increase in enrollments

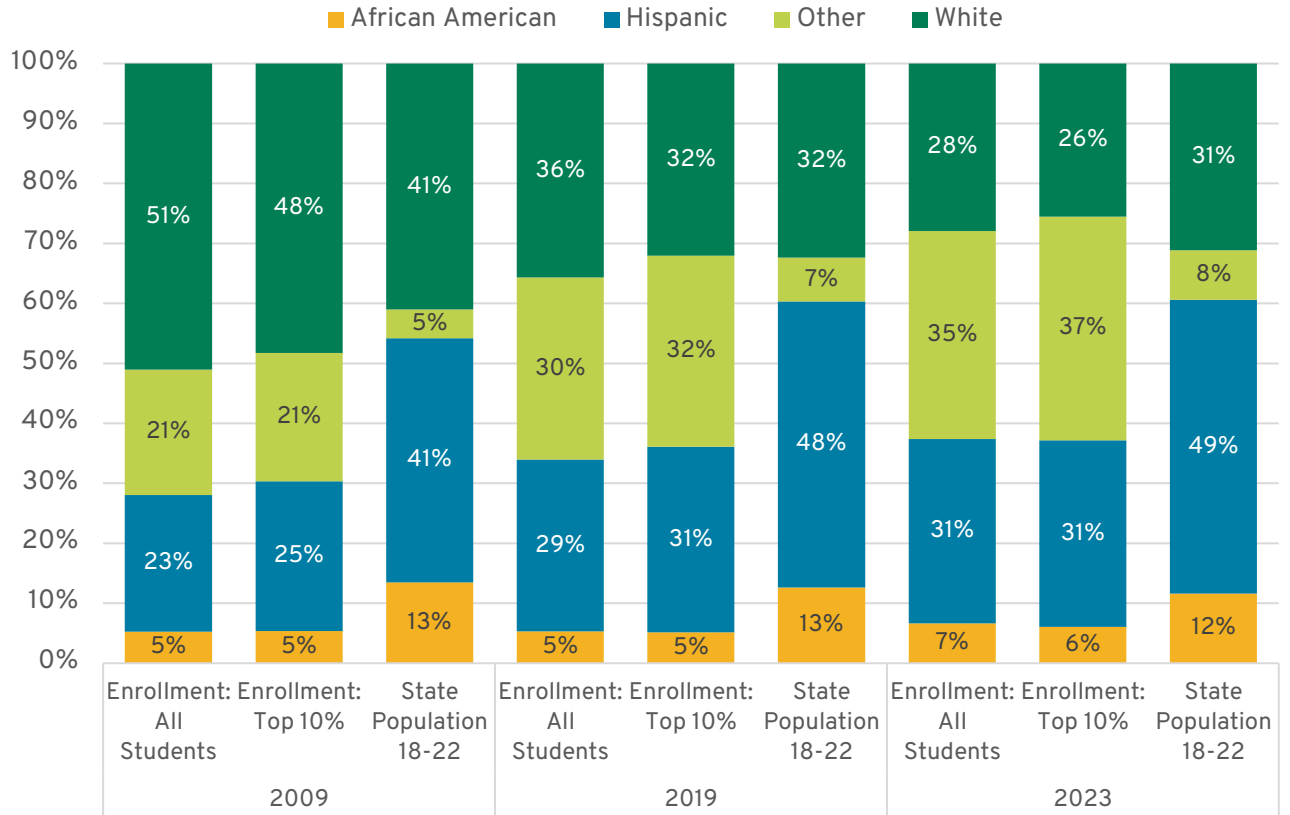
between 2009 - 2019 was driven by an increase in Top 10 Percent enrollments, whereas the increase between 2019 - 2023 was accounted for by Non-Top 10 Percent enrollments. Dividing the 2009-2019 change by 10 and the 2019-2023 change by 5 to compare average annual rates of change in the two time periods, the average rate of change was greater since the pandemic than over the previous 10 years for African American, Hispanic, and Other race/ethnicity enrollments.

Figure 2. The University of Texas at Austin: 2009-2023 Change in First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status



Comparing the university’s racial/ethnic diversity with that of 18- to 22-year-olds in the state ([Figure 3](#)), overall and Top 10 Percent enrollment shares of Hispanic students increased between 2009 and 2023 but continued to fall short of the percentage in the statewide 18- to 22-year-old population. African American enrollment shares changed little and remained short of the statewide population percentage. Meanwhile the Other race/ethnicity students, many of whom are Asian or multiracial, made up a large and growing share of the university’s enrollment, greatly exceeding that group’s share in the state population.

Figure 3. The University of Texas at Austin: Comparison of First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment with Texas Population Ages 18-22



Texas A&M University

At Texas A&M University, enrollments by Top 10 Percent students decreased for African American, Hispanic, and White students between 2019 and 2023 after increasing during the previous 10 years (Figure 4). Non-Top 10 Percent enrollments among all student groups increased between 2019 and 2023 (Figures 4 and 5). For Hispanic and White students in 2019-2023, increases in Non-Top 10 Percent enrollments exceeded the decrease in Top 10 Percent enrollment, so overall enrollment increased (Figure 5). Enrollment by Other race/ethnicity students from both Top 10 Percent and Non-Top 10 Percent students increased in both time periods.

Figure 4. Texas A&M University: First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status

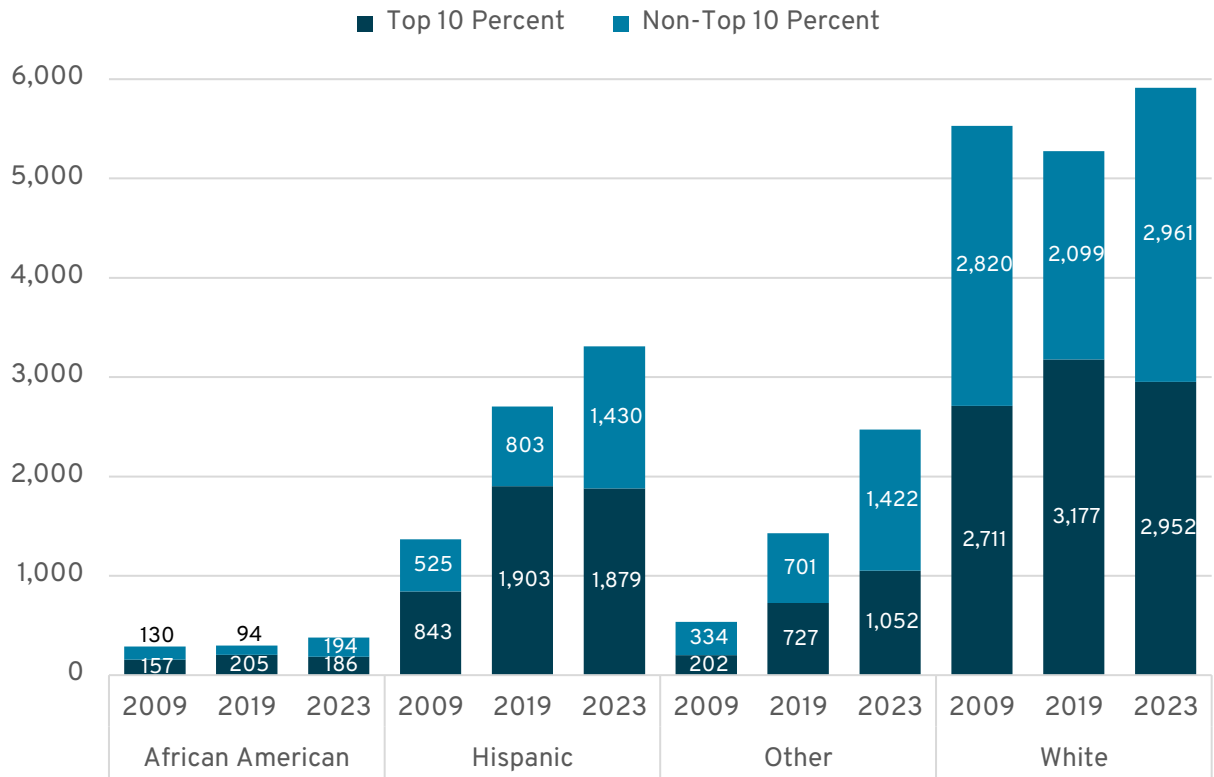
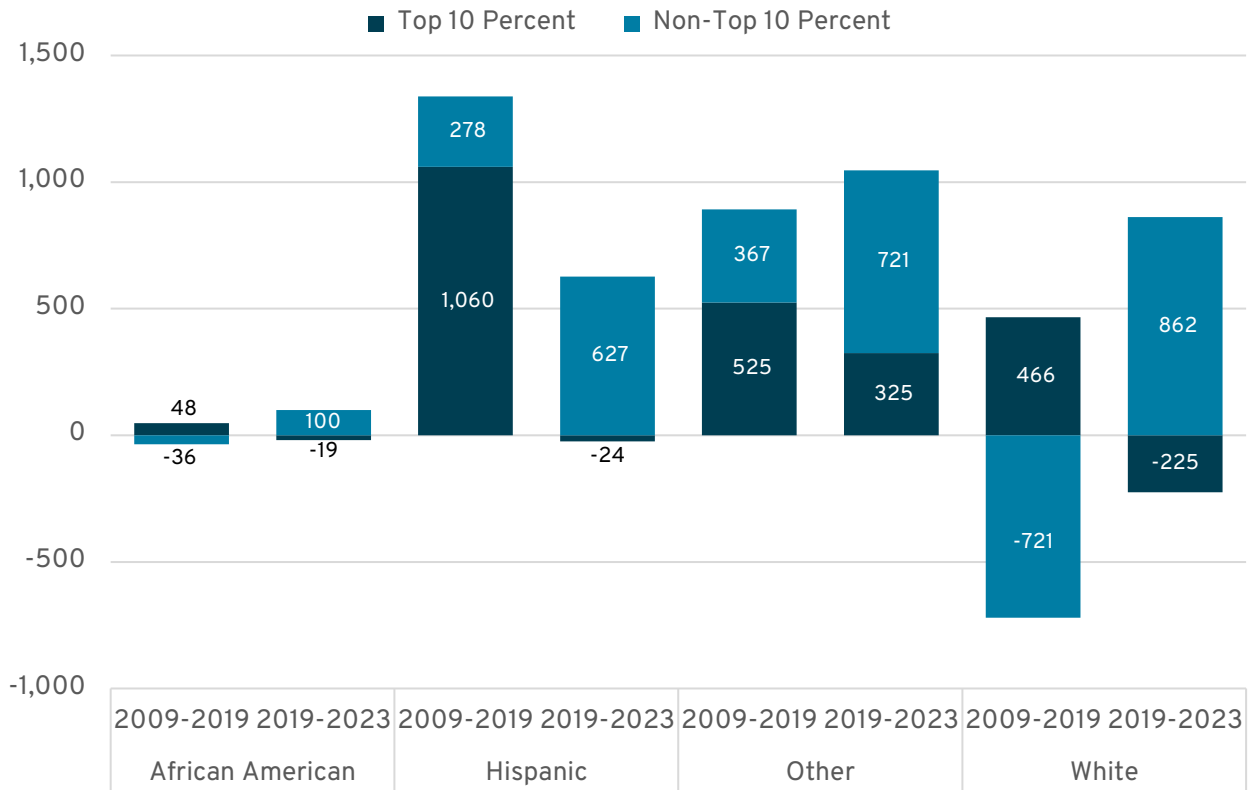
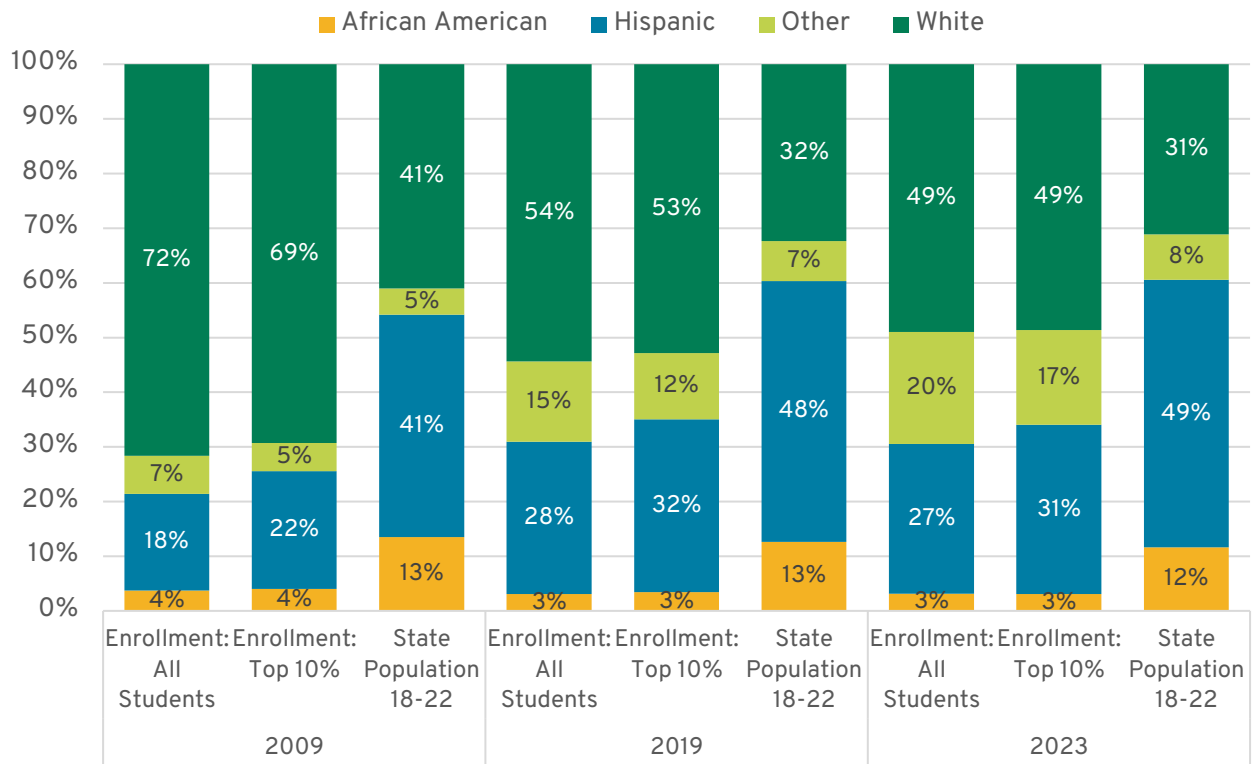


Figure 5. Texas A&M University: 2009-2023 Change in First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status



Comparing Texas A&M University’s racial/ethnic diversity with that of the population of 18- to 22-year-olds in the state, White students made up almost half of new student enrollments and Top 10 Percent enrollments in 2023, exceeding their share of the Texas young adult population ([Figure 6](#)). The number of African American and Hispanic student enrollments continued to be below their share in the 18- to 22-year-old state population, while students in the Other race/ethnicity group have increased their share of total and Top 10 Percent enrollment to exceed their share of the state’s 18- to 22-year-old population.

Figure 6. Texas A&M University: Comparison of First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment with Texas Population Ages 18-22



Other Texas Public Universities

Enrollments by Top 10 Percent White and Other race/ethnicity students at the other Texas public universities increased between 2009 and 2019 but declined from 2019 to 2023 (Figures 7 and 8), while African American and Hispanic Top 10 Percent students had a small increase in 2019-2023. Non-Top 10 Percent enrollment increased for all groups from 2019 to 2023. Notably, Hispanic students had the largest increase in both Top 10 Percent and Non-Top 10 Percent students. Non-Top 10 Percent students accounted for most of the enrollment of entering students at non-flagship institutions and most of the changes in enrollment for African American, Hispanic, and Other race/ethnicity students.

Figure 7. Other Texas Public Universities: First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status

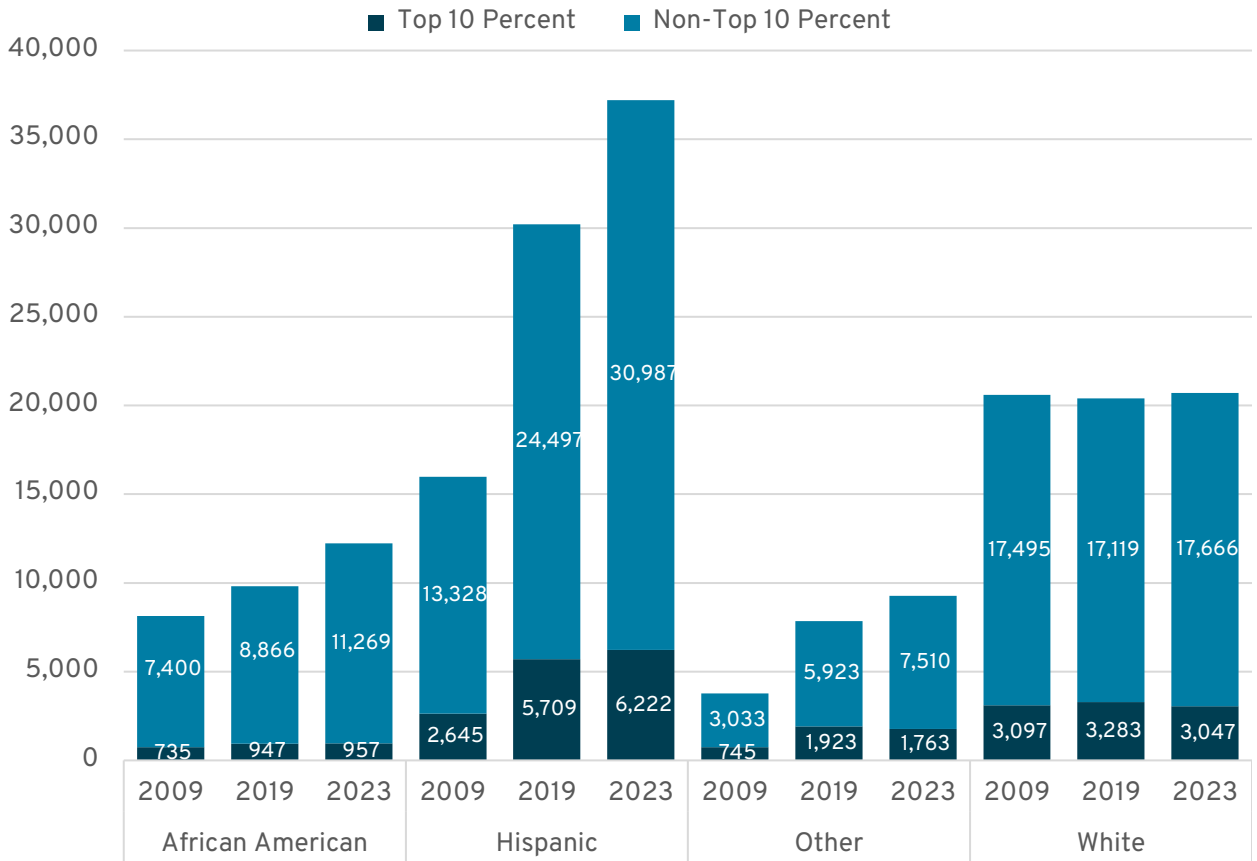
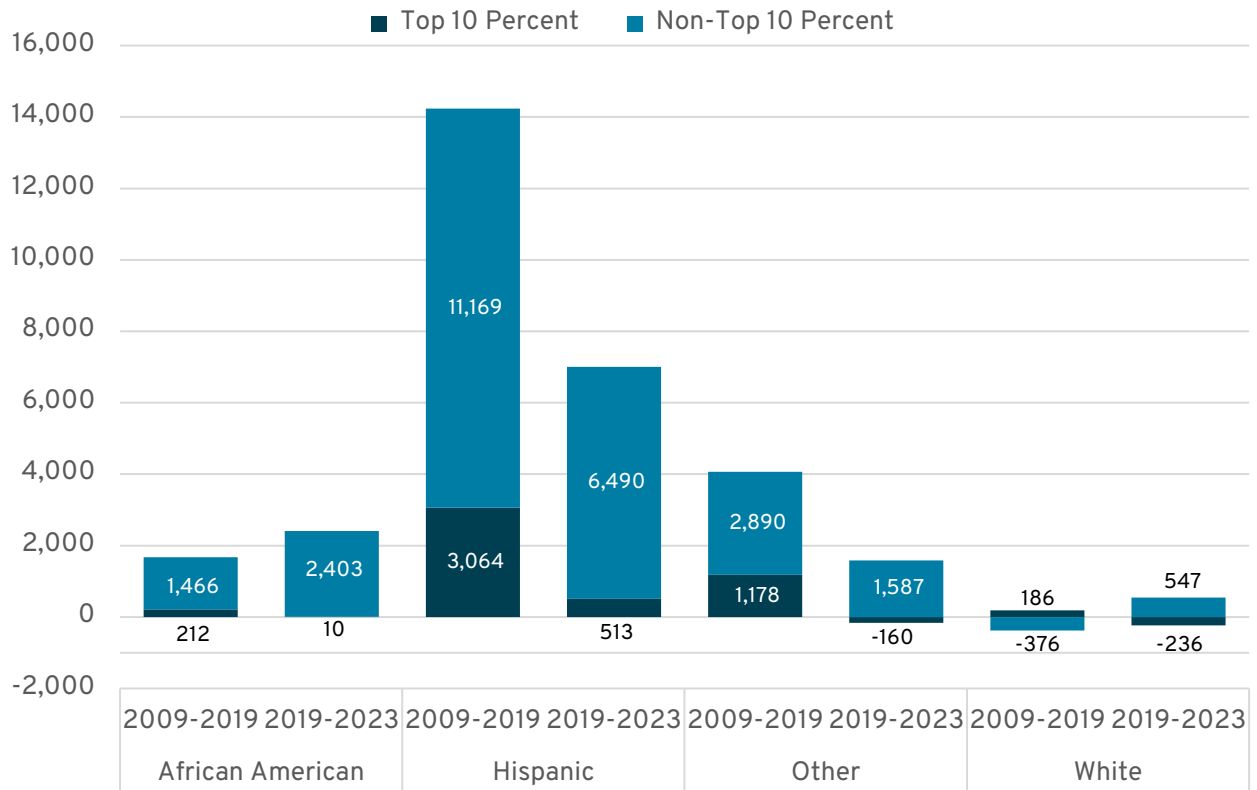
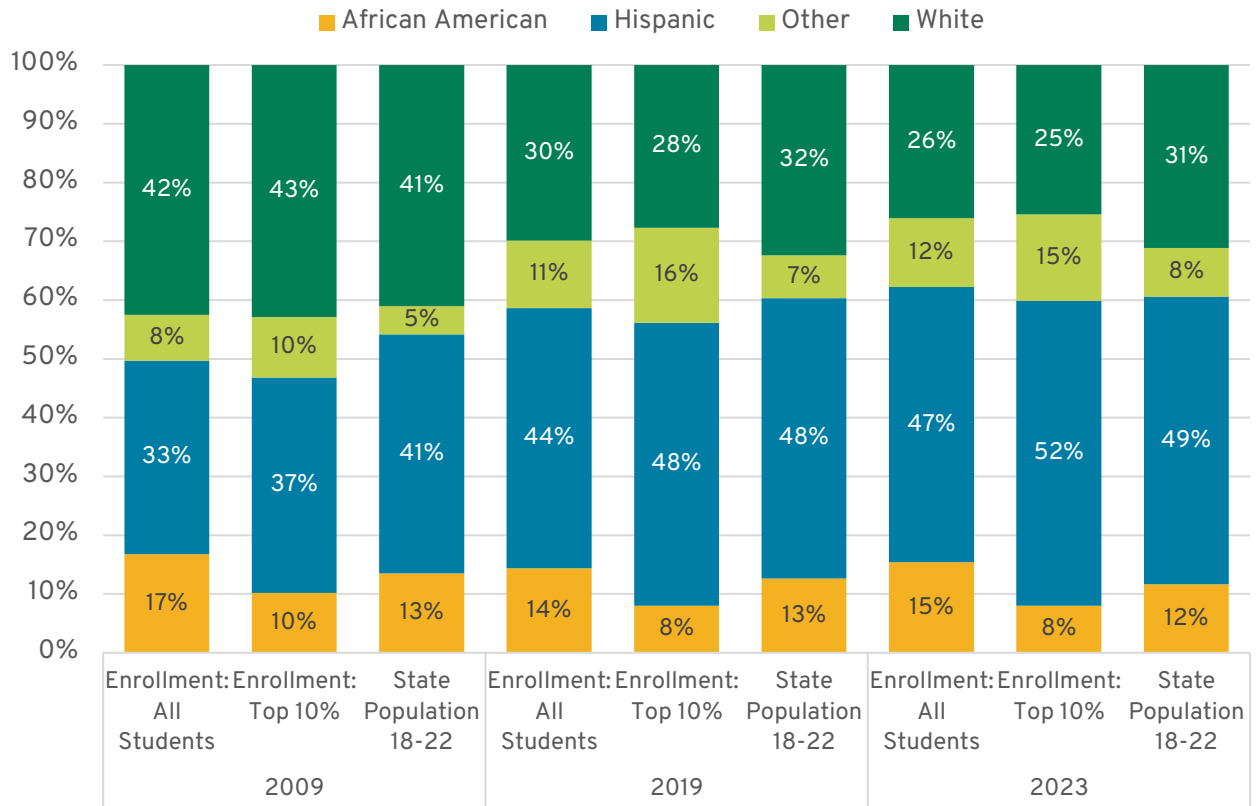


Figure 8. Other Texas Public Universities: 2009-2023 Change in First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Top 10 Percent Status



Overall enrollment of racial/ethnic groups in the non-flagship universities in 2021 came fairly close to representing the population of 18- to 22-year-olds in the state (Figure 9). African American students were overrepresented in the Non-Top 10 Percent group and underrepresented in the Top 10 Percent group. White students were underrepresented and Other race/ethnicity students were overrepresented in both groups.

Figure 9. Other Texas Public Universities: Comparison of First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment with Texas Population Ages 18-22



Trends in Enrollment of Special Populations

This section explores the diversity of Top 10 Percent students who are in a special population, defined as (1) low-income students – those identified as economically disadvantaged in the Texas Education Agency’s graduation data;³ (2) students from small high schools with fewer than 50 graduates; and (3) students from low-sending high schools—those with at least 50 graduates and in the bottom 20% based on the percentage of their graduates who enrolled in a four-year Texas institution in one of the two academic years following the student’s high school graduation year.

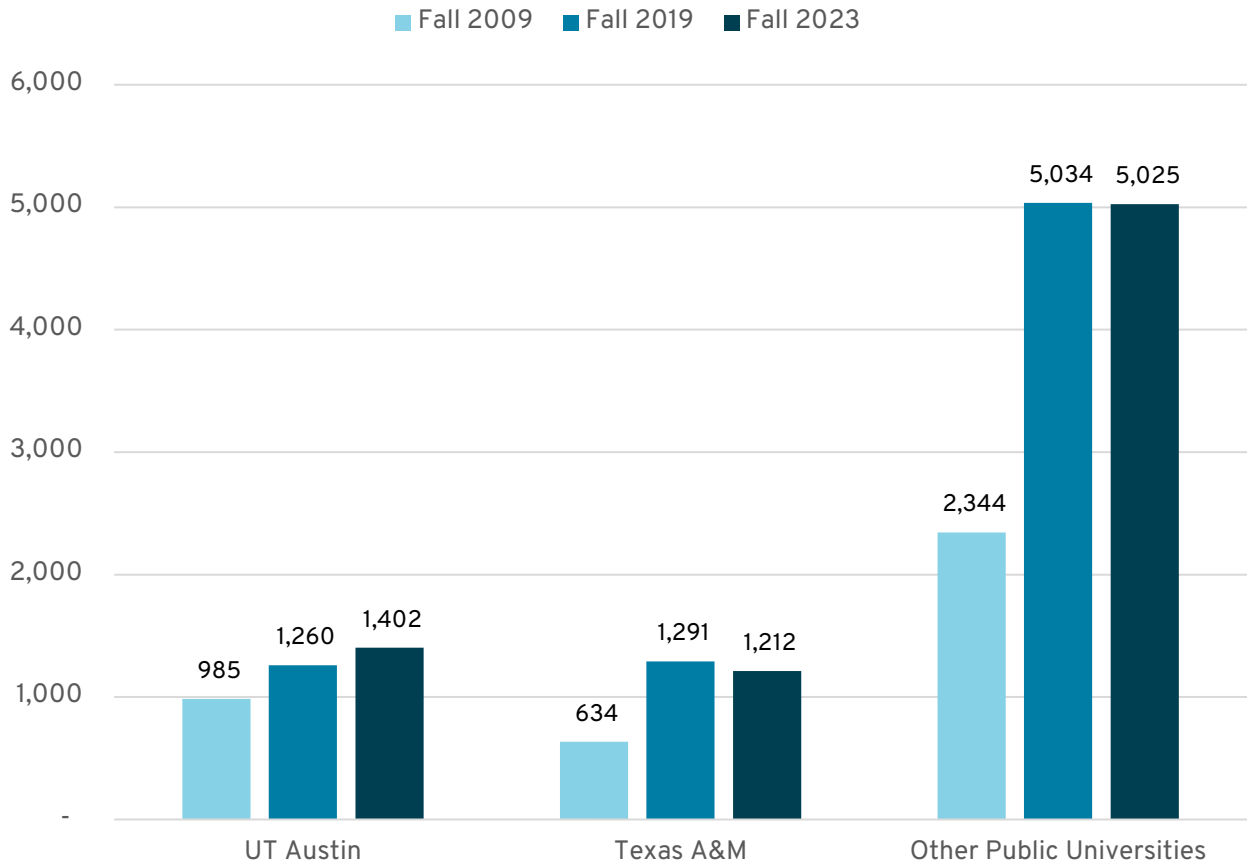
The following section examines two topics: a) change in college enrollment of Top 10 Percent students who are economically disadvantaged or from small/low-sending high schools over time, and b) whether college enrollment of economically disadvantaged Top 10 Percent students proportionally aligns with economically disadvantaged Top 10 Percent high school graduates.

Economically Disadvantaged Students

The number of economically disadvantaged students who enrolled under the Top 10 Percent criterion increased at UT-Austin in both 2009-2019 and 2019-2023. At Texas A&M University, enrollment of economically disadvantaged students increased in 2009-2019 but decreased between 2019 and 2023. At other public universities, the number of economically disadvantaged Top 10 Percent students remained consistent in 2019 and 2023 ([Figure 10](#)).

³ In most cases, these were students identified as having been eligible for the Free and Reduced-Price Student Lunch program.

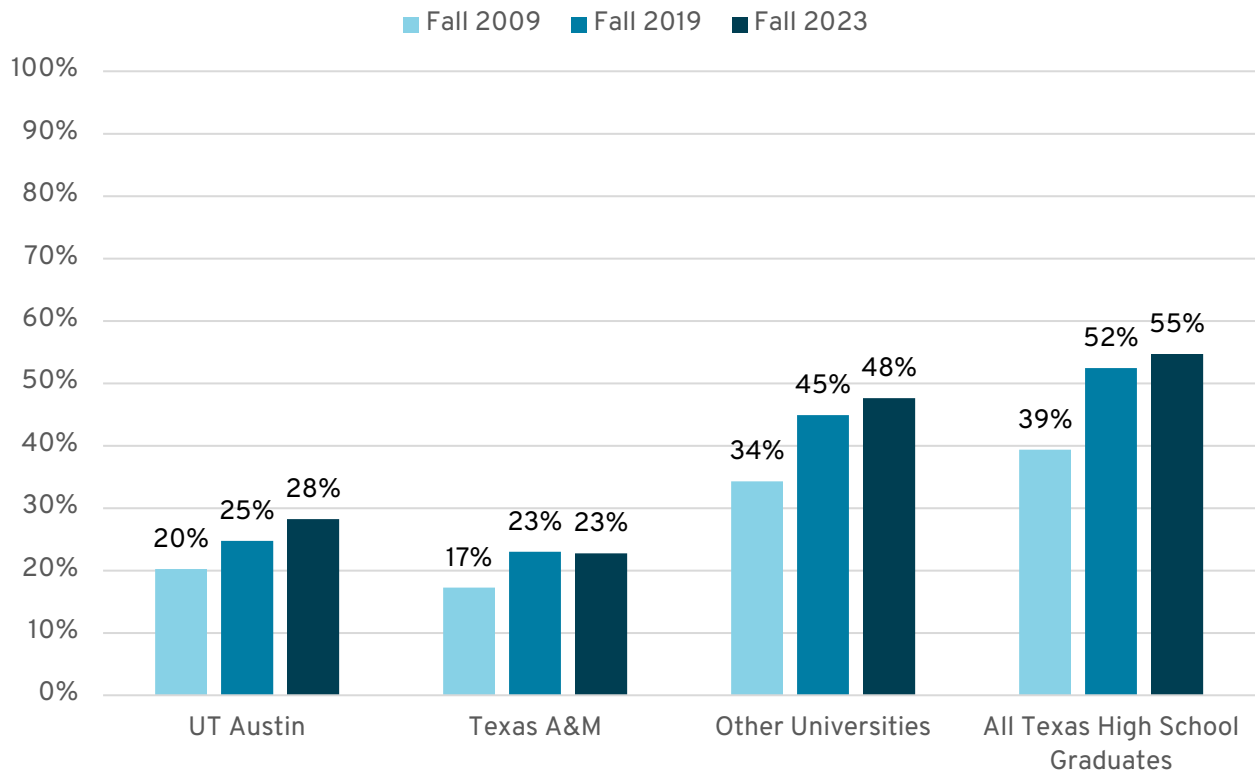
Figure 10. Top 10 Percent Enrollment of Economically Disadvantaged Students from Texas Public High Schools



Economically disadvantaged students made up a lower percentage of Top 10 Percent enrollees than of the overall Texas public high school graduating population (Figure 11). This gap was lowest at the other public universities and greatest at Texas A&M University.⁴ For Texas A&M University, the gap between the Texas high school graduates and Texas A&M enrollees increased from 22 to 29 percentage points between 2009 and 2019 and from 29 to 32 percentage points from 2019 to 2023. At UT-Austin, the gap increased from 19 to 27 percentage points in 2009-2019 and held steady at a 27-percentage point gap in 2019-2023.

⁴ A similar comparison could not be made with the state’s overall population of 18-to-22-year-olds because the Census American Community Survey does not have a comparable measure of economic disadvantage.

Figure 11. Economically Disadvantaged Percentages of Top 10 Percent Students and of Texas Public High School Graduates

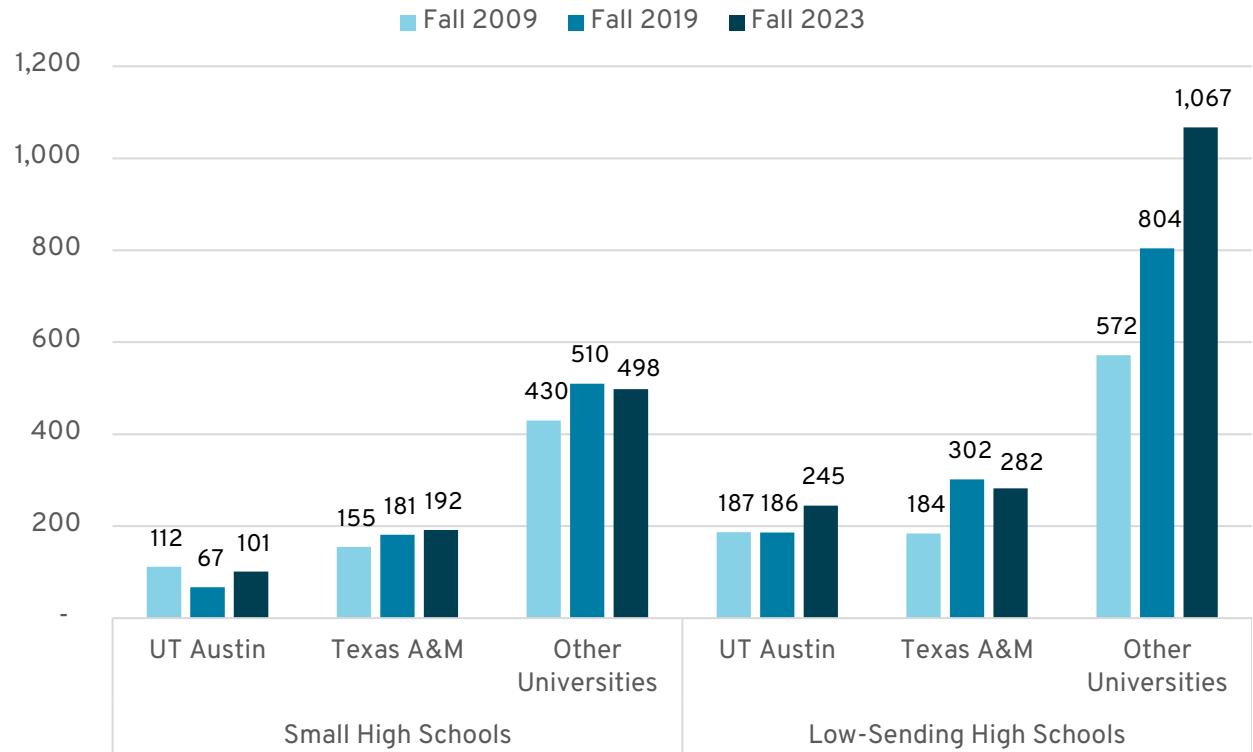


Students from Small High Schools or Low-Sending High Schools

Small high schools are defined as those with fewer than 50 graduates in a given year. Low-sending high schools are defined as those with 50 or more graduates and that were in the bottom 20% based on the percentage of their graduates who enroll in a four-year institution within two years of high school graduation.

The number of Top 10 Percent students from small high schools or low-sending high schools was relatively small, as illustrated in [Figure 12](#). At other public universities, the number of Top 10 Percent enrollees from small high schools increased between 2009 and 2019 but fell between 2019 and 2023, while at UT-Austin, the number of small high school enrollees declined from 2009 to 2019 but increased from 2019 to 2023. At Texas A&M University, the number of Top 10 Percent enrollees from small high schools has steadily increased. From 2009 to 2019, the number of Top 10 Percent enrollees from low-sending high schools increased at Texas A&M and other public universities while remaining roughly constant at UT-Austin; from 2019 to 2023, the number from low-sending high schools increased at UT-Austin and other public universities but declined at Texas A&M.

Figure 12. Top 10 Percent Enrollment from Small and Low-Sending High Schools



Regional Enrollment Patterns

This section explores the regional diversity of Top 10 Percent students. In particular, this includes the following topics: a) how the proportion of enrolled Top 10 Percent students from diverse higher education regions compares with the regional proportions of all (Top 10 and non-Top 10) enrolled students, and b) how the regional representativeness of Top 10 Percent students has changed over time.

First-time undergraduate student enrollment in the state’s public universities is also tracked by the higher education region where the students originate. A map of the state’s higher education regions is contained in [Appendix A](#). Four of these 10 regions contain the bulk of the state’s population: South Texas (containing San Antonio and the Rio Grande Valley), Central Texas (containing Austin), Gulf Coast (containing the Houston metropolitan area), and Metroplex (containing the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area).

In 2023, regional proportions were similar between Top 10 Percent and all enrollees at UT-Austin ([Figure 13](#)). At Texas A&M University, the six less populated Other regions were slightly better represented in the Top 10 Percent group, while the Central Texas group was better represented in the overall student population ([Figure 14](#)).

Figure 13. The University of Texas at Austin: First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Region

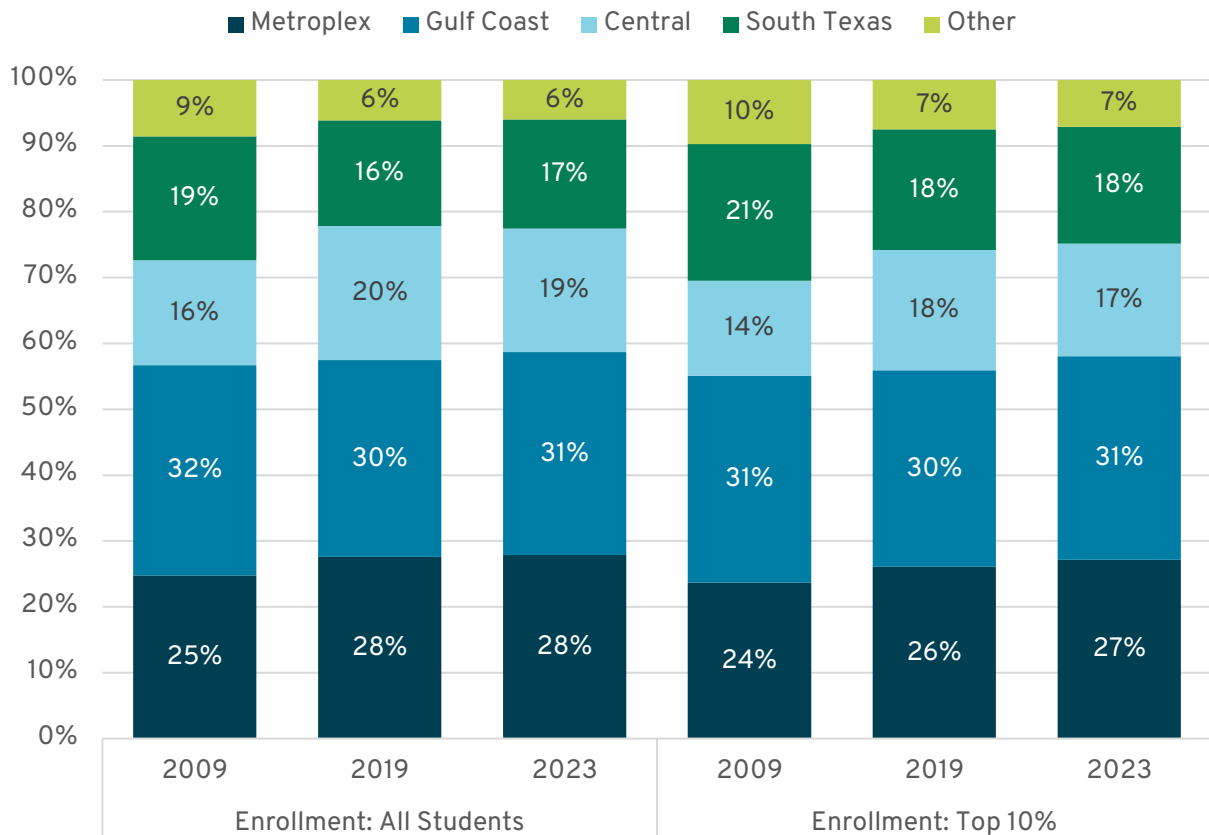
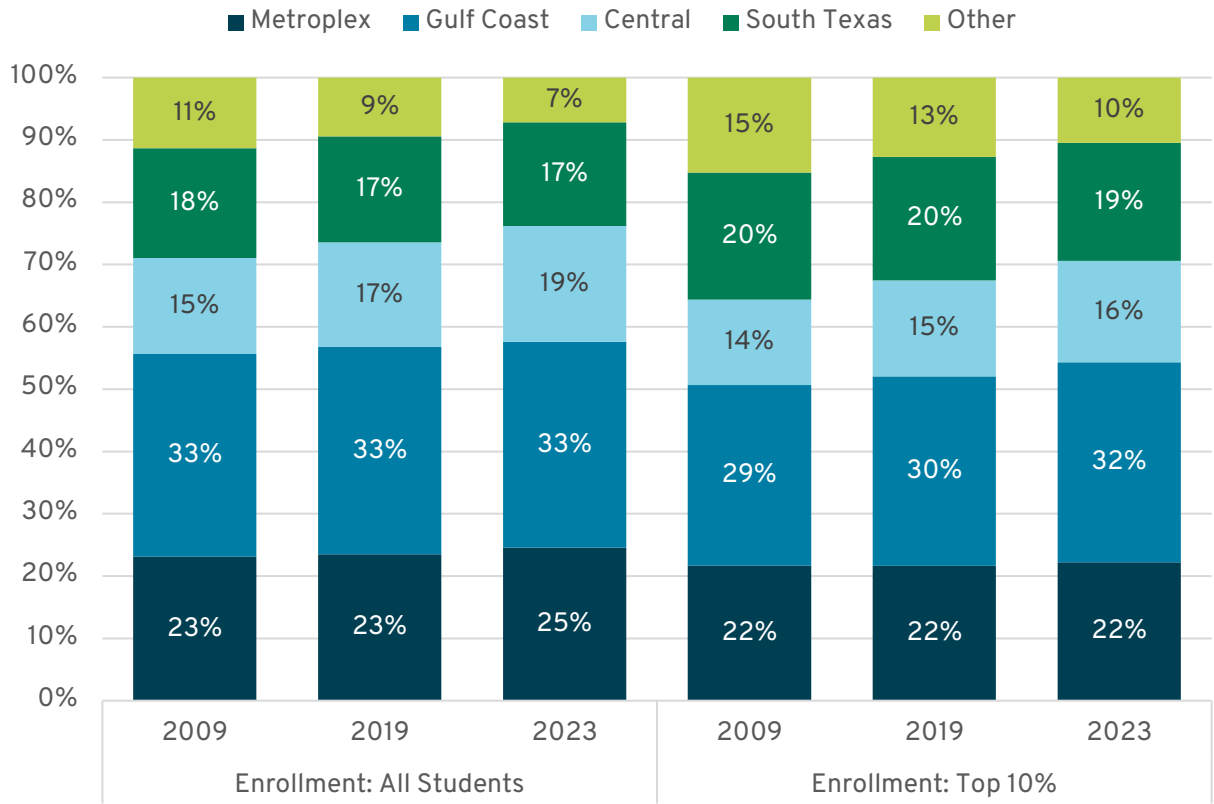
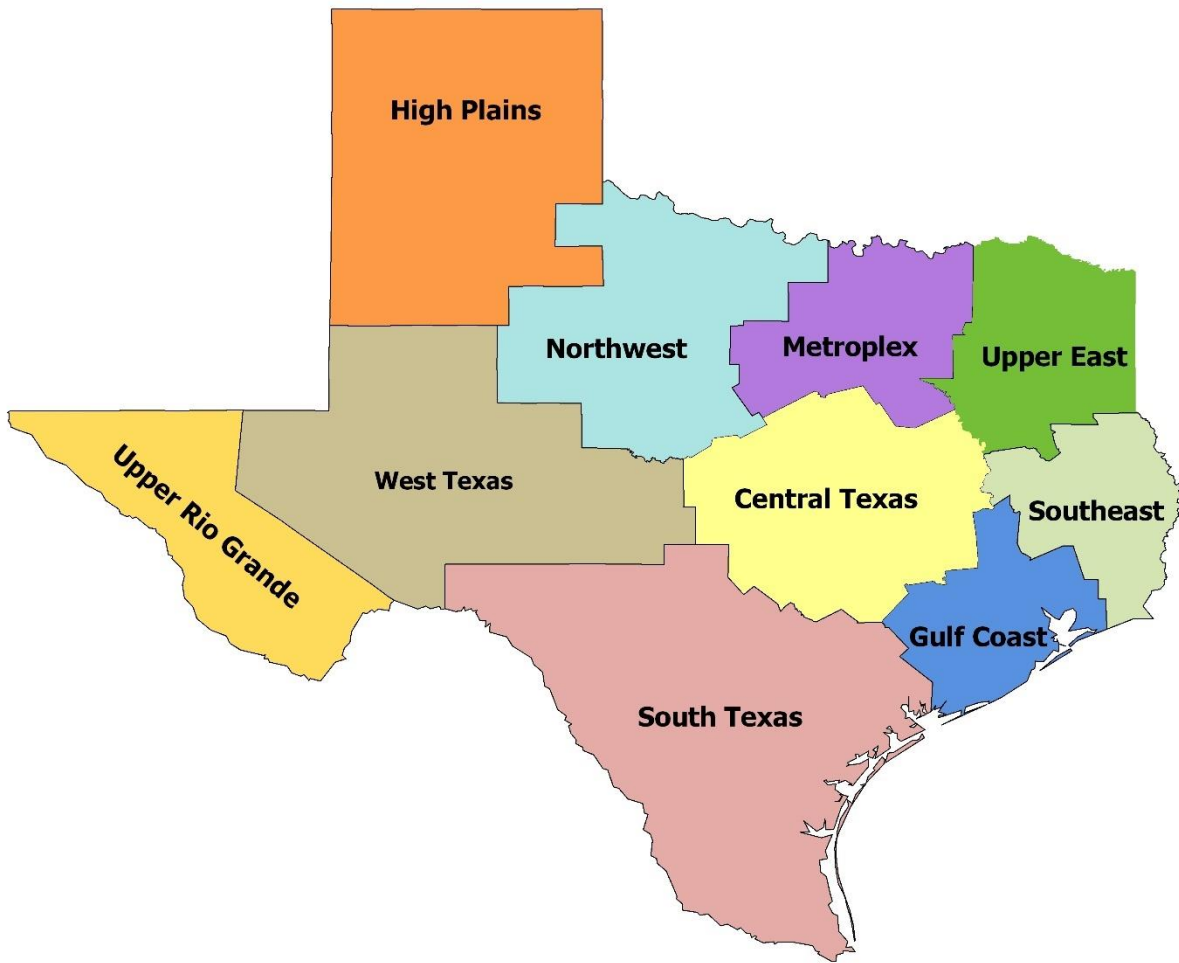


Figure 14. Texas A&M University: First-Time Undergraduate Enrollment by Region



Appendix A: Higher Education Regions



**Texas Higher
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This report and the supporting data are available on the [Texas Higher Education Data](#) website.

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