Race and Stratification in College Enrollment over Time

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Abstract

We measure college enrollment-selectivity gaps by race/ethnicity using a novel method that is simultaneously sensitive to both the level (2- versus 4-year) and selectivity of the college in which students enroll. We find that overall Hispanic-White and Black-White enrollment-selectivity gaps closed in the U.S. between 1986 and 2014. However, this contraction was driven almost entirely by students at the margin between no college and college enrolling in non-degree granting programs. This overall closing of gaps appears to be related to the closing of high school graduation gaps. Among students who enrolled in degree granting schools, Black students have enrolled at increasingly less selective institutions than white students, while Hispanic-White gaps remained relatively unchanged over the nearly 30 years of our study. These gaps are concerning because of their implications for long-term economic inequality.

Keywords: college enrollment gaps, college selectivity, race gaps
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Americans have long recognized that education is one of the great drivers of social mobility; a Bachelor’s degree provides one of the best chances for an economically secure life (Torche, 2011). And the more selective the college a student attends, the higher the potential economic returns, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Dale & Krueger, 2011; Hoekstra, 2009). Yet we do not have a clear view of access at these different levels of the higher education system. Although it has been easy to track race-based gaps in overall college enrollment or at particular types of colleges (e.g. two- versus four-year colleges), we lack a summary measure of racial disparities in college enrollment that takes into account differences in both whether and where students enroll.

In other words, the level and selectivity of a student’s postsecondary destination is an important predictor of later-life outcomes, but this nuance has not been fully accounted for in discussions of college enrollment trends. Rather than tracking indicators of inequality by focusing on questions like “did a greater percentage of white students than black students enroll in college?” or even “did a greater percentage of white students than Black students enroll in a selective college?” scholars and policymakers need to attend to the full spectrum of postsecondary education destinations.

We regularly observe, for example, that access to selective colleges does not appear equal between groups—minority and low-income students attend selective colleges at disproportionately low rates (Alon & Tienda. 2007; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Engberg, 2012; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012). However, these findings do not help us understand the overall distribution of minority and low-income students in American higher education. If, concurrent to downward trends at the most selective colleges, minority
enrollment is increasing at colleges that are moderately selective, then it may be that overall gaps in college destinations are closing, indicating that progress is being made in college access for underrepresented groups, if not at the most selective levels. Measuring these enrollment-selectivity gaps is difficult because the American higher education system has a complex hierarchical structure, and access may increase at colleges of some levels and decrease at others. As a result, it has been difficult to say succinctly whether disparities in access have been increasing or decreasing over time.

We work to make such an assessment in this article. Specifically, we address four research questions: (1) How big are the gaps in the selectivity of college attended by white and traditionally underrepresented racial minority students? (2) Within which levels of college selectivity are these gaps largest? And (3) How have these gaps changed over time? The ability to track changes in overall college enrollment-selectivity gaps alongside other broad demographic and education trends—like changes race-based income or high school graduation gaps—can help identify important correlates of the gaps. Thus, we also ask: (4) How are trends in college enrollment-selectivity gaps related to trends in race-based gaps in high school graduation, achievement, income, and parental education?

In answering we these questions, we make three contributions to the understanding of racial stratification in postsecondary schooling over time. First, our measurement of enrollment-selectivity gaps succinctly quantifies the extent of racial stratification across all levels of postsecondary education. This technique is helpful because it is difficult to simultaneously track changes in enrollment gaps across multiple levels of postsecondary type and selectivity. Second, in contrast to earlier work that typically examines enrollment gaps using national samples of high school students collected decades apart, we use data that captures nearly the complete
populations of students enrolled in postsecondary education annually. Finally, we are among the first to look at macro-level trends in gaps other than college enrollment to identify potential explanations for enrollment-selectivity gaps. In this endeavor, we update and expand the work started by Kane (1994, 2004).

The Importance of College Choice

As college enrollment rates have grown, where—as opposed to if—a student attends college has become increasingly important (Hoxby, 2004). U.S. higher education is distinctly hierarchical, with many low-status, broad-access institutions at the bottom and relatively few high-status, exclusive-access universities at the top (Labaree, 2017). Students who attend more selective colleges enjoy larger tuition subsidies, generous college resources, and more faculty attention (Hoxby, 2009; Hoxby & Avery, 2012). A growing body of research indicates that selective college attendance leads to higher average earnings (Long, 2008; Black & Smith, 2004; Hoekstra, 2009), and the largest benefits may accrue to minority and other disadvantaged students (Dale & Krueger, 2011).

But it is not only among the most prestigious schools that selectivity matters. Enrollment at less competitive schools, even those that are marginally selective, affects several important outcomes. College selectivity is related to probability of completion overall, and for academically marginal and racial minority students (Cohodes & Goodman, 2014; Goodman, Hurwitz, & Smith, 2017; Kurlaender, Carrell, & Jackson, 2016; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Melguizo, 2006; Smith & Stange, 2015;) and the probability of completing has implications for labor market outcomes and for ability manage student loan debt (e.g. Dynarski, 2015). Selectivity, across the full distribution of schools, is also related to initial earnings and earnings growth (MacLeod, Riehl, Saavedra, & Urquiola, 2015; Scott-Clayton, 2016), and even provides
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a premium to already lucrative majors like business and the sciences (Eide, Hilmer, & Showalter, 2016). However, racial minority students are less likely to choose high paying majors (Carnevale, Strohl, & Melton, 2013), which—although we do not track majors in this article—suggests that the economic implications of enrollment selectivity gaps are likely only exacerbated by differences in major choice.

Thus, one step toward improving racial economic equality is to promote greater parity in selectivity of college enrollment between race groups. Comparable levels of college enrollment between race and ethnicity groups makes it more likely these groups will see comparable economic outcomes. For this reason, it is important to track college enrollment-selectivity gaps.

Improving on Prior Higher Education Student Stratification Research

Despite recent absolute increases in the percentage of Black and Hispanic students enrolling in college (Perna, 2000), a greater share of white students than Black and Hispanic students attend college (see for example, Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Kane, 1994, 2004; Perna, 2000). In addition to these general enrollment gaps, Black and Hispanic students are also much less likely than white students to be enrolled in four-year schools in general (Bozick & Lauff, 2007; Dalton, Ingels, & Fritch, 2016) and more selective colleges in particular (Author, 2012; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Hearn 1991). Longitudinal studies of admission to “very competitive” four-year colleges have shown increasing underrepresentation of minority students (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Engberg, 2012; Karen, 2002; Posselt, et al., 2012). We aim to add to this literature by measuring gaps in a way that it is sensitive to all college types and levels simultaneously.

Most of these earlier studies have typically drawn conclusions about the racial composition of colleges using samples of students from the National Longitudinal Survey of 1972, High School and Beyond 1980, National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, and
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Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002. This data choice is problematic for two main reasons. First, these data sources are collected from cohorts that are each almost a decade apart, limiting their precision in tracking trends over time. Second, they are sampled to be representative of high school students, but not college students nor college students at any particular level of selectivity. Thus, college enrollment analyses are sometimes supported by sparse observations for specific racial groups at particular levels of higher education. In contrast, we primarily use data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which not only gives us a nearly complete census of annual postsecondary enrollment. Although it has limitations that we note below, IPEDS gives us a much more complete picture of postsecondary stratification and its evolution over time, freeing us from the pitfalls of having to extrapolate from potentially small subsamples or potentially anomalous cohorts of students.¹

We analyze this data with a variation of the V-statistic methodology developed by Ho and Reardon (2012). This method was first used to measure gaps on achievement tests in which only ordered, categorical score thresholds (e.g. fail, low pass, pass, high pass), rather than continuous scores, were available. Such data makes it difficult to present easily digestible statistics that can be tracked over time (such as, “white children score ten points higher than Black children, on average”). Ho and Reardon use the V-statistic methodology to recover such test gaps by measuring the distribution of test scores implied by the percentage of students of each race group that score above certain proficiency thresholds.

The V-statistic has also been used to describe income gaps (Reardon, Townsend, & Fox, 2017) and differences in student test engagement (Soland, forthcoming). Here we use the method to quantify enrollment-selectivity gaps using fixed, ordinal levels of selectivity rather than test thresholds. In effect, the V-statistic approach quantifies the difference in the selectivity of college
enrolled in by students from different race/ethnicity groups (akin to the average difference in tests scores between groups), improving upon prior approaches that examine group differences in the percentage of students who enrolled in any one level of college (akin to difference in the percentage of students deemed proficient by a given test).

This technique is helpful because it is difficult to simultaneously track changes in enrollment differences across multiple levels of postsecondary level and selectivity. As a basic example of this challenge, consider a scenario in which 20 percent of college-age Black enrolled in community colleges, 15 percent in non-selective four-year colleges, and 3 percent in the most selective colleges in 1990, but five years later these percentages were 22, 11, and 5, respectively. In this example, what should we conclude about the relative representation of Black students relative to a hypothetically unchanged white enrollment patterns? The answer is difficult because Black students in this example gain ground in some areas, but lose it in others. The question becomes more complicated in the present study because we examine nine different levels of postsecondary enrollment per race/ethnicity over 29 years. The technique we use simplifies the enrollment-selectivity gap measurement to a single number per year. To demonstrate the utility of such data simplification, consider the figures in Appendix A, which illustrate the difficulty of presenting the constituent data of our analysis an easily interpretable way.

Although our primary interest is in describing overall enrollment-selectivity gaps, we also look at how trends in enrollment-selectivity gaps change conditional on enrollment at certain levels of college. Different trends in enrollment-selectivity gaps between different conditional analyses help determine the postsecondary levels at which the change in gaps have been most dramatic.

**Concurrent Trends**
To the extent that we find trends in college enrollment-selectivity gaps over time, it is important to understand why they change. We lay the foundation for future work in this area by considering concurrent trends that may be related to observed changes in college enrollment-selectivity gaps. Although there are many possible explanations for trends in enrollment-selectivity gaps, we focus on academic and familial factors.

**Academic factors.** Both academic achievement and high school graduation likely play a role in determining whether and where students enroll in college. Race-based academic achievement gaps have been slowly closing over time (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Reardon, Robinson-Cimpian, & Weathers, 2015). If relative increases in academic performance by minority students are reflected in students’ postsecondary enrollment choices, the narrowing of achievement gaps would predict the closing of enrollment-selectivity gaps.

Although achievement plays a large role in selective colleges, most postsecondary institutions have relatively minimal admissions criteria or accept the majority of students who apply (Klasik, Proctor, & Baker, 2015). For students considering these options, high school graduation is the major academic milestone they must reach. Although race-based high school graduation gaps have narrowed over the past few decades (Murnane, 2015), as of 1999, the closing of these gaps, as well as the shrinking of gaps in academic achievement, does not appear to be related to gaps in college enrollment (Kane, 2004).

**Family factors.** A student’s family plays many roles in the admissions process, but for our exploratory purposes we focus on two: a family’s income and whether a student’s parents went to college. These two factors have been found to be related to undermatching (Dillon & Smith, 2016; Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013), a phenomenon that itself may be related to enrollment-selectivity gaps in which a student enrolls in a college that is less selective than one...
might expect given the student’s academic background (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008).

In the U.S., postsecondary tuition/fees are positively correlated with admissions selectivity. Because Hispanic and Black families, on average, earn less than white families (Fryer, 2011; Patten, 2016), some of the disparities in college destinations by race could therefore be the result of differences in (perceived or actual) ability to pay, or other admissions benefits that are associated with coming from a higher-income background (Reardon, Kasman, Klasik, & Baker, 2016). There is some evidence that income gaps are slowly narrowing, especially for women (Kochhar & Fry, 2014; Patten, 2016), which may predict increasing parity in college enrollment selectivity between groups.

We also focus on whether gaps in whether parents of college-age children attended college themselves. Having a parent who went to college is a common indicator of social capital—sources of information and support—and, in general, students with access to more sources of social capital are more likely to enroll in college (Ellwood & Kane, 2000; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997; Perna 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005). There are notable differences by race in terms of access to social capital (McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005), so changes in access to social capital may also explain trends in enrollment-selectivity gaps. Kane (1994) documented trends in Black-White gaps in whether parents graduated from high school, noting that the closing of these gaps was associated with the closing of college enrollment gaps into the late 1980s, but to our knowledge, race gaps in parental postsecondary educational attainment have not previously been documented. Because parental education strongly predicts the likelihood of college enrollment, we hypothesize that any closing of parental educational attainment gaps would lead to closing college enrollment-
selectivity gaps.

**Other factors.** We chose to look at academic and familial factors because they are supported by theory and they lend themselves to our primary goal of measuring and comparing nationwide enrollment-selectivity gaps over time. Despite this focus, we acknowledge that these factors are not an exhaustive account of the forces that shape students’ enrollment choices. Indeed, any policy or characteristic that would lead students to make differential enrollment choices in ways that vary by race have the potential to affect enrollment selectivity gaps. State-level policy is a particularly rich area for such policies: From setting tuition to banning affirmative action, states engage in many activities that likely affect enrollment choices differentially by race. It may also be that relative changes in net tuition between higher and lower selectivity institutions or cohort sizes may also have a role to play, although it is unclear whether these changes would lead to different enrollment choices by race, or if for example, the effect of tuition changes would instead be reflected by the income gaps we measure. The variation in enrollment-selectivity gaps that result from this extended list of explanations—either in terms of local, in-state gaps and broader, national gaps—is not a topic we can do justice to in the space that we have and is a limitation of our work. However, we believe that our work is a useful starting point for thinking about state-specific issues and hope our approach has value for future research in this area.

**Data**

The V-statistic approach requires data on percentages of each race/ethnicity group enrolled at each of the nine categories of level/selectivity of postsecondary destination that we consider. IPEDS, our primary data source, gives the count of students by race at nearly every postsecondary institution. Non-four-year colleges are classified by their level of offering (non-
degree or two-year), while we classify four-year colleges by their admissions competitiveness, as defined by the Barron’s Profile of American Colleges. To convert the count of students enrolled at each level to percentages, we use U.S. Census estimates of population size by race and age to calculate the total size of each race/ethnicity group that is of college-going age (which also allows us to calculate the percent of each cohort that is not enrolled in any post-secondary destination). We describe these data in detail below.

**IPEDS**

IPEDS is collected annually by NCES from every college, university, technical, and vocational institution that participates in federal student financial aid programs. These data give enrollment rates by race from 1986 to 2014. Although IPEDS confers many important advantages that allow us to fill gaps in prior work, it also presents notable challenges. These include determining which students to include in our enrollment counts, unstable race categories, and a changing population of schools. We outline these concerns, and our approach to addressing them in brief below and in detail in Appendix B. In short, each of the data complications does not appear to affect the magnitude or trend of our estimated gaps in any appreciable way.

**Count of students in each postsecondary destination.** Our main analyses focus on full- and part-time, first-time postsecondary students using IPEDS fall enrollment counts, which count first-time, degree- or certificate-seeking students enrolled in the fall term. IPEDS did not include the “degree- or certificate-seeking” qualifier in their 2000 survey, so we drop this year from our analysis. By capturing only first-time students we avoid double counting students over time: if students were to transfer or stop-out of college and then re-enter, their enrollment would count in the population proportions of two cohorts of students.\(^3\) By focusing on full- and part-time students we avoid undercounting students in community colleges and less-selective four-year
colleges, where part-time enrollment is more common. The trade-off to using all, rather than only full-time, students is the potential to double count students who are enrolled at multiple institutions in their first term of attendance. We believe the prevalence of double enrollment is relatively small and find little change in our results when we repeat the analysis using only full-time students.

Institutions report the number of first-time students to IPEDS only in the fall. Because of this schedule, students who enroll for the first time in the spring semester are not counted in our primary data. If race groups first enroll in fall or spring at different rates, this could affect our estimated gaps. We address this concern by re-estimating our gaps using 12-month enrollment counts (which include all students, not just first-time enrollees) and find only minor changes in the magnitude, but not trend, of our gaps.

**Race groups.** The race categories available in IPEDS are not constant across years. Between 2008 and 2010 IPEDS disaggregated Asian and Pacific Islanders and added a reporting category for students who self-identified as being a member of two-or-more race groups. During the transition period, institutions used either the original seven- or revised nine-category system, so we report gaps based on total Black, Hispanic, and white students reported in either system and indicate the lack of categorical clarity by a change of formatting in our figures. In Appendix B we bound the possible implications of the race-category changes by re-estimating gaps after re-categorizing multi-racial students to different race groups.

**Population of colleges.** Not all colleges are present in every year of IPEDS data. This irregularity is due to two main factors. First, some schools did not exist for all years—there were many new entrants to the postsecondary sector in this time and some schools closed. We are not concerned with this issue because the opening and closing of schools, or even the expansion and
contraction of enrollment at individual institutions, represent changes in the supply of enrollment opportunities and may be an important element of changes in enrollment-selectivity gaps. Indeed, we know that there was expansion in the supply of seats in most sectors of higher education, but greater expansion at two-year colleges and “competitive” four-year colleges over this time (Hurwitz & Kumar, 2015; Kelly, 2016). However, we cannot say whether these changes happened in response to student demand or whether students altered their enrollment choices to fill these newly-created seats. More importantly, it is not clear that these capacity changes should differentially impact the enrollment choices of students by race or ethnicity.

A second concern about the irregular appearance of some institutions in the IPEDS data is that reporting to IPEDS was not mandatory for all institutions that are eligible to receive federal Title IV funds (the major source of federal student aid) until 1993 (Fuller, 2011). We indicate the potential incompleteness of this population with special formatting in our figures and find in Appendix B that the use of data from only institutions present in all years of data makes our gap estimates slightly larger.

Additionally, students who attend non-Title IV institutions are undercounted by IPEDS as data reporting for these schools is voluntary (Cellini & Goldin, 2012). Non-Title IV institutions are predominantly non-degree granting schools, and many are for-profit. Undercounting students in these schools could bias our estimates of overall enrollment-selectivity gaps, as these non-counted students would be attributed to the “no college” category. However, as this sector enrolls a relatively small proportion of students, this bias should not dramatically affect our results. This undercounting is less of a problem at more selective colleges, so this bias will be reduced when we condition our analyses on different levels of enrollment-selectivity. While we cannot examine this issue directly using the IPEDS data, we investigate potential implications two ways. First, in
we measure enrollment-selectivity gaps with and without for-profit schools. The differences between these two measures can give us a sense of the direction of the bias induced by under-measurement of non-Title IV enrollment. Second, we compare gaps computed using the longitudinal NCES longitudinal data sets popular in earlier research. These data include the postsecondary destinations of all students in the sample, do undercounting enrollment at non-Title IV is minimized.

**Census Population Estimates**

To examine the proportion of each cohort that does not enroll in a post-secondary destination, we combined the IPEDS data with annual Census population estimates to determine the size of the entire cohort of potential college students of each race/ethnicity group, regardless of their postsecondary enrollment status. We use the estimated population size of 18-year-olds—the age of the traditional first-year college student. Because of the increasingly varied age of students at their first college entry, the decision to use 18-year-olds as the cohort denominator could affect measures of enrollment-selectivity gaps. In Appendix B, we demonstrate that neither the size nor trend of our gaps qualitatively change when we instead use an average of the size of the cohort of 18- to 24-year olds as our denominator.

**Barron’s Admissions Competitiveness Data**

The selectivity ratings of colleges and universities come from *Barron’s Profiles of American Colleges*. Barron’s classifies four-year colleges and universities on a scale from 1-6, where 1 is the most selective and 6 is the least selective. These ratings are based on the high school GPAs, high school class ranks, and SAT/ACT scores of enrolled students, as well as on the proportion of applicants the schools admit. Although Barron’s ratings have changed over time, the discussion of our results uses the 2008 rankings so that the group of colleges in each
selectivity category is constant. We create separate categories for two-year colleges and non-degree granting postsecondary institutions, which Barron’s does not rate. In Appendix B we demonstrate that our gap estimates do not qualitatively change when we drop rather than impute the selectivity of the 360 four-year institutions that do not have Barron’s ratings.

Other Data Sources

We draw on data from numerous other sources to compare the trends we observe in college enrollment-selectivity to gap trends in high school graduation, achievement, income, and parental education.

High School Graduation. To examine gaps in high school graduation rates by race, we primarily use data collected by Murnane (2015). He uses data from Census 1990, 2000, American Community Survey 2010 and General Education Development (GED) Testing Service. These data, in combination, address concerns in calculations of graduation rates (such as differences in coverage, categorization of recent immigrants and treatment of students who earn a GED) that are present in a number of data sources. These data include graduation rates by race for students who were 18 in 1986–2006.

We add data from the American Community Survey to track gaps in graduation rates for the 2007-2014 cohorts (Ruggles, Genadek, Goeken, Grove, & Sobek, 2016). In doing this, we replicated the procedure described by Murnane (2015), adjusting for GED recipients and recent immigrants.

Achievement Gaps. Data on achievement gaps by race come from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The NAEP Long-Term Trend tests are administered roughly every four years in mathematics and reading to a national-representative sample of 9- 13- and 17-year old students. We use data from 13-year olds (adjusted by 5 years to
match age of college enrollment) because the composition of the older cohort might be biased by differential high school drop-out rates by race.

**Income.** Data on income gaps by race come from the Current Population Survey (CPS) as aggregated in the Integrated Public Use Data Series (Flood, King, Ruggles & Warren, 2016). Because the CPS surveys individuals living in households, we look at the income of the parents of 14-17 year olds (before students have moved out to enroll in college) from 1984 to 2012 and apply those gap estimates to cohorts two years later, when those children could be enrolled in college. We use the seven income categories reported in the CPS (<$15,000, $15,000-24,999, $25,000-34,999, $35,000-49,999, $50,000-74,999, $75,000-99,999, and >$100,000).

**Parental Education.** Data on the parental education of college-age students also come from the CPS (Flood, et al., 2016). As with income, we look at the education levels of the parents of 14-17 year olds and apply those gap estimates to cohorts two years later, when those children could be enrolled in college.

**Method**

**The V-statistic**

We quantify the disparities in enrollment by race across different levels of college selectivity by using the V-statistic method (Ho & Reardon, 2012). The V-statistic method is described in depth by Ho and Reardon (2012), but the general idea of the measure is as follows. Using our data we observe the proportion of students that are a given race and enrolled in different levels of postsecondary education. Specifically, we categorize them according to whether they are not enrolled in college, enrolled in a non-degree granting college, enrolled in a two-year college, or enrolled in any of the six Barron’s selectivity levels of four-year colleges.
With this information, we create a probability-probability (PP) plot by graphing the relative cumulative distribution functions of, for example, Black and white students enrolled at a given level of education or lower. The area under the curve of a PP plot gives the probability that a randomly chosen Black student is enrolled in a post-secondary destination at a higher level of selectivity than a randomly chosen white student. These PP plots are analogous to the well-established method for graphically displaying income inequality, the Lorenz curve.

An example of the PP plot for Black and white student college enrollment in 2010 is given in Figure 1. Each point of the plot represents the percentage of students from each of the two race groups that are enrolled in a given level of postsecondary education or lower. Note that if Black and white students were equally represented at all levels of postsecondary education, the PP plot would trace a 45-degree line and the area under the curve would be 0.5. That is, there would be a 50 percent chance that a randomly chosen Black student would be enrolled in a lower level of selectivity as a randomly selected white student.

As detailed in Ho and Reardon (2012), if we define this area under the PP plot as \( P_{a > b} \), then the following nonlinear, monotonic transformation of \( P_{a > b} \) gives \( V \) for the difference in college enrollment-selectivity between students from group a and group b:

\[
V = \sqrt{2} \Phi^{-1}(P_{a > b})
\]

\( V \) is thus a single measure of college enrollment-selectivity gaps between students from different race groups that accounts for differences in representation across ordinal categories of college level and selectivity. In fact, only this ordinal property is important for determining \( V \); it does not rely on any interval-scale properties of underlying college selectivity.

**Conditional Gaps.** Additionally, we limit our analysis to students who attend college above a given level of selectivity. Specifically, we examine enrollment-selectivity gaps
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conditional on enrollment in: (1) any postsecondary education (between 41 and 53 percent of all 18-year-olds in the years of study), (2) a degree-granting institution (between 41 and 50 percent), (3) a four-year college (between 28 and 33 percent), and (4) a very competitive (Barron’s 3) college (between 12 and 14 percent). These analyses allow us to determine at which levels of college selectivity racial enrollment-selectivity gaps are the largest. For example, small Black-White gaps for the entire population coupled with large Black-White gaps conditional on enrollment in a four-year college would indicate that Black and white students are attending college at similar rates but that they are attending very different four-year schools.6

**Interpretation.** The V-statistic can be interpreted as the standardized difference between the means of two groups (Cohen’s d) if the selectivity of colleges were transformed into a metric in which both groups enrollment-selectivity pattern were normally distributed (Ho & Reardon, 2012; Reardon, Kalogrides, & Shores, 2016). In the original test-score-gap context, this leads to the interpretation of the V-statistic in rough standard deviations of the distribution of test scores. The interpretation is less intuitive in our context as it requires thinking about standard deviations of enrollment-selectivity across two- and four-year college enrollment, including the choice not to enroll in college at all. As a result, for our main description of gaps, we present $p_{a>b}$ rather than $V$. As described above, $p_{a>b}$ presents the gaps as the probability a student in race/ethnicity group $a$ is enrolled at a higher level of postsecondary destination than a student from group $b$.7 Because it is directly comparable to other gap measures, we use $V$ rather than $p_{a>b}$ in analysis of concurrent trends.

**Concurrent trends**

We use three methods to compute racial gaps in concurrent trends (high school graduation, family income, parental education, and academic achievement). Each of these
methods produces a gap measure that is directly comparable to the gaps we compute for enrollment selectivity.

For data that are reported by category (e.g. income), we use $V$-statistics. For binary measures, we computed a standardized difference in means. We accomplish this either by direct calculation (for graduation rates) or by estimating a probit regression of the outcome variable controlling only for indicators of race, omitting the indicator for white students (for parental education). The coefficients on each race/ethnicity indicator give the gap in parental education. Finally, for continuous data (NAEP scores), we computed a standardized difference in group means. Because changes in enrollment at different levels of selectivity may be associated with the closing of gaps at different points of the achievement distribution, particularly at selective colleges, we calculate achievement gaps at the 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles.

We calculate bivariate correlations between each of these concurrent gaps and our enrollment-selectivity gaps (both the overall gap and each of the enrollment-selectivity gaps conditional on given levels of enrollment). These correlations provide simple evidence of how changes in college enrollment-selectivity gaps might be related to changes in gaps in pre-college measures. Because of the small number of time points we observe each gap, we use $\alpha = 0.1$ to assess statistical significance of these correlations.

While these simple correlations provide a sense of which gaps tend to trend together, they could be misleading; they do not account for the correlation between various concurrent trends (for example, income gaps are likely related to test score gaps and enrollment-selectivity gaps) and they do not account for potentially spurious correlations because of underlying time trends (Granger & Newbold, 1974). To address these concerns, we also examine these relationships using more robust methods that allow us to make explicit assumptions about which time series
trends are related to each other. Specifically, we use structural vector autoregressions (SVAR) (Sims, 1980) to predict enrollment-selectivity gaps using all other concurrent trends, lagged versions of these trends, and the lagged dependent variable. Our data greatly limit our ability to make robust conclusions from these analyses (namely, we only have measured test gaps for 11 of the 28 years, reducing our already limited power), so we briefly discuss where the results from these models alight with our bivariate correlations and present the full set of results in Appendix C. Whether interpreting our correlations or the SVAR analyses, the results should be taken as descriptive rather than causal.

Results

Enrollment-Selectivity Gaps

Figure 2 gives the change in college enrollment-selectivity gaps from 1986-2014 for both Black and Hispanic students relative to white students. This figure accounts for all possible postsecondary destinations, including not enrolling in any further education. With some variation, both Black and Hispanic students have seen their overall college enrollment-selectivity gaps shrink relative to white students (recall that gaps closer to a probability of 0.50 indicate greater parity between race groups). The Black-White gap has shrunk from where $p_{b>w}$ was roughly 0.34 to roughly 0.47, while the Hispanic-White gap has shrunk from where $p_{h>w}$ was 0.28 to where $p_{h>w}$ was 0.42, indicating that postsecondary destinations for these groups have been increasingly similar over this period. White students on average still attend more selective institutions, particularly relative to Hispanic students.

The story of an overall decrease in college enrollment-selectivity gaps for Black and Hispanic students shifts when we condition our analysis on a certain baseline level of enrollment. This change is seen in Figures 3 and 4, which gives the Black-White and Hispanic-White college
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enrollment-selectivity gaps over time using (a) students enrolled in any postsecondary destination, (b) students enrolled in a degree granting college, (c) students enrolled just in four-year colleges and (d) students enrolled in very selective colleges.

First, in Figure 3 (Black-White gaps), enrollment-selectivity gaps conditional on attending a degree granting school and conditional on attending any post-secondary institution have grown over time. This contrast from the decrease in gaps seen in Figure 2 appears to be a consequence of the only population of students in Figure 2 not included in Figure 3: students not enrolled in college. In other words, it appears that nearly all the relative gains in Black postsecondary enrollment have occurred at the margin of attendance.

We see a similar marginal enrollment story when we condition on enrollment in a degree-granting institution. As recently as 1990, the enrollment-selectivity gap between Black and white students in this condition was essentially zero ($p_{b\succ w} = 0.50$). Since then, however, this gap has grown to where $p_{b\succ w}$ is nearly 0.39. The fact that the trend among students in degree granting schools shows a smaller gap than among students attending any postsecondary institution (including certificate programs) is a sign that Black students are increasingly more likely than white students to enroll in non-degree granting programs and that Black and white students are likely enroll in two-year colleges at similar rates to each other. Indeed, in 1990, 55 percent of first time students in non-degree granting schools were White, and 16 percent were Black. By 2010, 38 percent of students in non-degree granting schools were white and 23 percent were Black.\footnote{8}

Black-White enrollment-selectivity gaps conditional on four-year college attendance are the largest of the gaps we examine. This gap has hovered with $p_{b\succ w}$ around 0.36 for the past 30 years. Enrollment-selectivity gaps have been similarly stable at the most selective colleges
(Barron’s rating 1-3), but very small with $p_{bw}$ close to 0.50. However, it should be emphasized that this final gap is calculated using the relatively few Black students that enroll in these schools at all.

Figure 4 gives the analogous trends for the Hispanic-White gaps. These trends tell a different story. Like Black students, Hispanic students saw a relative minimum in their enrollment-selectivity gaps relative to white students in the early 1990s, but over the nearly 30 years covered by the figure, their enrollment-selectivity gap with white students has remained broadly unchanged, no matter which subset of students we examine. Unlike with the Black-White gaps, the largest gaps are among the populations that include non-degree enrollment and enrollment at two-year colleges. This consistently large gap is an indication that while Hispanic students are attending college at rates that are increasingly similar to white students, they are attending less selective schools, including non-degree granting programs and two-year schools, at much higher rates.

Enrollment-selectivity gaps between Hispanic and white students are smallest among four-year college enrollees. These gaps are much smaller than Black-White gaps among four-year enrollees. This indicates that Hispanic students that enroll in four-year colleges are distributed more like white students across levels of selectivity than Black students are.

Conditional on attendance at the most selective colleges (Barron’s 1-3), Hispanic students enroll at more selective colleges than white students, though this gap has shrunk over the past 30 years. This is in contrast to Black students enrolled in the most selective colleges, who attend schools that are of similar selectivity to white students. However, it should again be emphasized that this gap is calculated using the relatively few Hispanic students that enroll in these schools at all.
College Enrollment-Selectivity Gaps and Concurrent Trends

To identify macro-level trends in gaps of pre-college measures that covary with enrollment-selectivity gap trends, we compare the enrollment-selectivity gap trends to concurrent trends in gaps in high school graduation, achievement, family income, and parental education using correlational analyses. The graphical presentations of these overall gaps in selectivity of enrollment, gaps in selectivity of enrollment conditional on four-year enrollment, and concurrent gaps are found in line graphs in Figures 5 and 6 for Black-White and Hispanic-White gaps, respectively, and the bivariate correlations are found in Table 1.

One common pattern among these results is that estimated relationships (using both bivariate correlations and the more sophisticated SVAR models), is that they tend to flip signs between overall gaps and conditional gaps. This is expected, given that overall gaps in enrollment-selectivity are decreasing, but that nearly every gap that conditions on a minimum level of enrollment is increasing.

In our bivariate correlation analysis, Black-White graduation gaps are significantly correlated with overall enrollment-selectivity gaps ($r = 0.450$) and enrollment-selectivity gaps conditional on enrollment in selective four-year colleges ($r = -0.389$). These correlations appear mostly driven by the shrinking graduation gaps in the late 1990s and between 2005 and 2010 (Figure 5). The SVAR analysis provides some support for the relationship between graduation gaps and enrollment-selectivity gaps. As shown in Appendix Table C1, we find a significant negative relationship between graduation gaps and enrollment-selectivity gaps conditional on enrollment in a four-year college. The estimate of this relationship is even larger for enrollment-selectivity gaps conditional on selective college enrollment, however this relationship does not reach conventional levels of significance.
The correlational analysis also indicates a negative relationship between gaps in whether students’ parents went to college and enrollment-selectivity gaps conditional on enrollment at a selective college. The SVAR confirms this relationship between these two variables with respect to enrollment-selectivity gaps conditional on enrollment at a four-year college, however it suggests a positive relationship between parental education gaps and enrollment-selectivity gaps conditional on enrollment at a selective college, indicating there may be a complicated relationship between gap trends that is not captured in our correlational analysis.

Trends in Hispanic-White enrollment-selectivity gaps and concurrent gaps are shown in Figure 6 with the bivariate correlations between gaps in Table 1. Here we see two sets of statistically notable correlations: a negative correlation between high school graduation gaps and enrollment-selectivity gaps, regardless of how we condition the data, and a negative correlation between gaps in parental college enrollment and overall enrollment-selectivity gaps. The graduation gap correlations are backed up in the SVAR results when we condition on four-year college enrollment and enrollment in a selective college. As with the Black-White gaps, the SVAR results also indicate a relationship between parental college gaps and enrollment-selectivity gaps, but the direction changes—larger Hispanic-White gaps in terms of the proportion of students whose parents have a college education are associated with larger enrollment-selectivity gaps both overall and conditional on enrollment in a selective college.

Estimates from the SVAR models also suggest a positive relationship between income gaps and both overall enrollment gaps and gaps at selective college admissions. Although not apparent in the correlation analysis, this relationship goes in expected direction in that larger income gaps are associated with larger enrollment gaps.

**Conclusion**
A growing body of evidence supports the fact that a student’s likelihood of graduation as well as her long term economic outcomes are determined not just by whether she enrolls in college, but where she enrolls. Because of this connection between the level and selectivity of postsecondary enrollment and issues of economic equity, we present a comprehensive way of measuring college enrollment-selectivity gaps that is sensitive to these important distinctions in postsecondary destinations. This approach improves on earlier methods of measuring enrollment gaps that could only look at one type of enrollment at a time.

In short, we find that overall Black- and Hispanic-White gaps in college enrollment-selectivity shrunk considerably between 1986 and 2014, but white students still attend, on average, more selective post-secondary destinations than their Black and Hispanic peers. On their face, these narrowing gaps are encouraging, particularly since it appears that shrinking enrollment-selectivity gaps are related to shrinking high school graduation gaps; efforts to improve high school graduation rates may have longer-term benefits in terms of opening access to postsecondary education.

However, this rosy view of closing enrollment-selectivity gaps is tempered by our finding that the closing of gaps for both Black and Hispanic students appears to be driven entirely by more of these students making the choice to enroll in non-degree granting postsecondary programs rather than not enroll in college at all. Indeed, once we remove these marginal postsecondary enrollees from our analysis, over the past three decades enrollment-selectivity gaps have been consistently growing for Black students, and growing more gradually for Hispanic students. Thus, although closing graduation gaps may be associated with greater access to postsecondary education for Black and Hispanic students, these gains only appear to be reflected in marginal enrollment choices and Black and Hispanic students are still falling behind
their white peers in the rate at which they are able to access higher levels of higher education.

Of the traditionally underrepresented students who successfully enroll at the most selective colleges, Black students do so at selectivity levels similar to, and Hispanic students greater than, their white peers. However, this finding obscures the fact that not many Black and Hispanic students enroll at these levels at all (Posselt, et al., 2012; Author, 2012). Indeed, in 2014 six, seven, and 18 percent of Black, Hispanic, and white students were enrolled in these colleges, respectively.

Often, successful graduation from high school is all that is needed to access the majority of postsecondary options in the U.S.—those institutions that are essentially open access. Thus, it seems intuitive that the closing black-white graduation gaps is associated with closing of overall enrollment-selectivity gaps. However, the rest of our findings about the relationship between graduation gaps and enrollment-selectivity gaps do not provide such easy explanations. Indeed, the relationship between Black-White graduation gaps and enrollment-selectivity gaps conditional on various levels of college attendance suggest that the closing of graduation gaps has been accompanied by an increasing advantage of white students over black students in terms of their postsecondary destinations. The same story is true for Hispanic-White students. Thus, we may be demonstrating evidence of effectively maintained inequality (Lucas, 2001)—as the competition for seats at open-access institutions has become more even, white students appear to be marshaling other resources to preserve their enrollment-selectivity advantage.

This explanation may also result from another trend that we do not explicitly address in this article: the early 1990s represented a low point in the size of the college-age population, but by 2010 the college-age population reached a relative peak. This population growth means that, over the course of most of our analysis, competition for seats in college was increasing.
Although the supply of enrollment options increased as well, most of this expansion happened at the two- rather than the four-year sector (Kelly, 2016). Our enrollment-selectivity gaps are consistent with a story in which there has been an absolute increase in access to postsecondary education for all groups but little relative change in access to different levels of selectivity—privileged groups stay one-step ahead.

We also want to highlight that Black and Hispanic do not appear to be following the same path in terms to enrollment-selectivity gaps, either in terms of the relative magnitude of their gaps with white students or in the rate at which the gaps are changing. Neither do the potential explanatory gaps appear to be related to enrollment-selectivity gaps in the same way for these two race groups. For example, while there is alignment in terms of the general findings about the relationship between graduation gaps and enrollment-selectivity gaps, the Black and Hispanic stories diverge with respect to the relationship between gaps in whether students have parents who attended college and enrollment-selectivity gaps. Here, our evidence points to a minimal, and perhaps negative relationship between these two gaps for Black students, while it leans positive for Hispanic students, particularly at more selective colleges when we add the additional controls of the SVAR models. Thus, college attendance for Black parents does not appear to convey the same field-leveling benefits in terms of their children’s higher education as it does for Hispanic parents. This perspective on the differing intergenerational returns to higher education adds more evidence to research that has describes the value of parental educational attainment for Latino families (Ovink & Kalogrides, 2015), and its weakness for Black families relative to White families (Long, Kelly, & Gamoran, 2010).
Whatever the mechanisms that work to close gaps, the new way of measuring enrollment-selectivity gaps in this article will be an important tool in tracking progress toward increased equity in postsecondary destinations.
Notes

1 For example, the NELS data is anomalous because it followed a cohort of students that was among the smallest of any since the mid-60s (NCES, 2014). Given the relative rarity of universities deciding to shrink their enrollment, this small cohort faced less competition for existing seats at selective colleges, making it more likely that students with lower academic credentials could gain admission to these selective schools. As a result, we may see increases in representation of racial and ethnic minorities in this cohort at more selective schools separate from any underlying change in access to educational opportunity or changes in university policies.

2 There is, of course, an important distinction between an institution’s listed tuition and fees, and the average amount students actually pay to attend. Conditional on family income and after financial aid has been accounted for, many of the most selective four-year schools actually have lower net tuition than other selective four-year schools (Hoxby, 2009). However, many students are not aware that sticker price can differ significantly from net price or have difficulty finding net price information (Hoxby & Turner, 2015), so the positive correlation between selectivity and price generally holds.

3 To the extent the college from which one graduates is more important than the school(s) at which one took classes (an argument that signaling is more important than human capital development), and the extent to which students from different racial groups exhibit significantly different patterns of transfer, using first school of enrollment could produce biased results. If anything, we are likely understating potential graduation gaps, as, conditional on attendance, white students are more likely to transfer from 2-year schools to 4-year schools than Black and
Hispanic students (NCES, 2011 Community College Student Outcomes (2012-253), Table S1-B).

4 Barron’s also assigns a ranking of 7, which indicates “specialty” schools—such as divinity schools or the military academies. Because these schools use different admissions criteria and draw specialized applicant pool, we exclude these schools from our analysis.

5 In the analyses we present in this paper, we use the 2008 Barron’s rankings for all years. In reality, in the years of our analyses, the Barron’s selectivity increases for a small subset of institutions in our data, but the relative selectivity of schools is largely stable. We conducted sensitivity analyses using time varying (2004, 1992, and 1982, as opposed to constant 2008) measures of selectivity and find no appreciable changes in results (these results are available upon request). We thus present only findings using 2008 Barron’s rankings, consistent with the decisions of past researchers (e.g. Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011).

6 Although it is possible to calculate confidence intervals for $V$-statistics, we chose not to present them for two reasons: (1) our data is not a sample, it captures the full population of interest, so the interpretation of confidence intervals is not clear and (2) our large number of observations generates confidence intervals that are quite small (and not visible when graphed). Indeed, if we were to consider our population as a sample, these minute standard errors mean that even the very small changes that we report are “statistically significant.” Though not presented, confidence intervals are available from the authors upon request.

7 Although non-linear, the one-to-one correspondence between $p_{a>b}$ and $V$ minimally distorts our findings over the rage of values in our results. Figures presented with $V$-statistics are available from the authors upon request.
Examples of non-degree granting schools are Central Mass School of Massage & Therapy, Rob Roy Academy, and Giumenta School of Real Estate.
References


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National Center for Education Statistics (2014). Table 201.20: Enrollment in grades 9 through 12 in public and private schools compared with population 14 to 17 years of age: Selected years, 1889-90 through fall 2014.


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Table 1

Correlations between Postsecondary Enrollment-selectivity Gaps and Other Concurrent Gaps, by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditional Enrollment-selectivity Gap:</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Four-Year</th>
<th>Selective College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concurrent Gap:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black-White</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduation</td>
<td>0.450*</td>
<td>-0.196</td>
<td>-0.389*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-75 Reading</td>
<td>0.377</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>-0.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-75 Math</td>
<td>-0.137</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>-0.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-50 Reading</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>-0.193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-50 Math</td>
<td>-0.382</td>
<td>0.318</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Income</td>
<td>0.244</td>
<td>-0.126</td>
<td>-0.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation College</td>
<td>0.202</td>
<td>-0.209</td>
<td>-0.337*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hispanic-White</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduation</td>
<td>0.729*</td>
<td>-0.874*</td>
<td>-0.847*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-75 Reading</td>
<td>0.209</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>-0.294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-75 Math</td>
<td>-0.077</td>
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<td>0.210</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.167</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Income</td>
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<td>-0.132</td>
<td>0.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation College</td>
<td>-0.359*</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>0.275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. * p < 0.1
Figure 1. Probability-Probability plot of Black-White postsecondary enrollment, 2010.

Notes. The y-coordinate of each point indicates the percent of White students who are enrolled at that post-secondary destination or lower. The x-coordinate of each point indicates the percent of Black students who are enrolled at that post-secondary destination or lower. The dashed line indicates the 45-degree line.
Figure 2. Black- and Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps.

Notes. The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Black/Hispanic student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Black, Hispanic, and white students regardless of reporting method.
**Figure 3.** Black-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps, conditional on minimum level of enrollment, 1986-2014.

**Notes.** The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Black student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Black and white students regardless of reporting method.
Figure 4. Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps, conditional on minimum level of enrollment, 1986-2014.

Notes. The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Hispanic student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Hispanic and white students regardless of reporting method.
Figure 5. Black-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gap compared to other gaps, 1986-2014.

Notes: The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Black student has a superior outcome (higher test score, higher family income, more selective post-secondary destination) than a randomly chosen white student. Data on college selectivity gaps comes from IPEDS. Data to calculate the high school graduation gap prior to 2006 come from Murnane (2015). Graduation gap data from 2007 to 2014 come from the ACS. Math and reading achievement gap data come from NAEP-LTT data from the US Department of Education. Income and parental education gap data come from the CPS as aggregated in the IPUMS and reflects the parents of 14-17 year olds. We use three methods to compute gaps: V-gap methodology for data that are reported by category (college selectivity, income); standardized difference in means for binary measures (percent of students of a given race who graduate from high school, percent of students of a given race who have a parent who attended college) and a standardized difference computed by dividing the difference in means by the pooled standard deviation for continuous data (NAEP test scores).
Figure 6. Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gap compared to other gaps, 1986-2014.

Notes: The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Hispanic student has a superior outcome (higher test score, higher family income, more selective post-secondary destination) than a randomly chosen white student. Data on college selectivity gaps comes from IPEDS. Data to calculate the high school graduation gap prior to 2006 come from Murnane (2015). Graduation gap data from 2007 to 2014 come from the ACS. Math and reading achievement gap data come from NAEP-LTT data from the US DOE. Income and parental education gap data come from the CPS as aggregated in the IPUMS and reflects the parents of 14-17 year olds. We use three methods to compute gaps: V-gap methodology for data that are reported by category (college selectivity, income); standardized difference in means for binary measures (percent of students of a given race who graduate from high school, percent of students of a given race who have a parent who attended college) and a standardized difference computed by dividing the difference in means by the pooled standard deviation for continuous data (NAEP test scores).
Appendix A

Other Representations of College Selectivity Gaps

The benefit of using the $V$-statistic method to illustrate changes in enrollment-selectivity gaps is that it effectively collapses a large amount of information into a single number. In this appendix we present three other ways of displaying the same information without using the $V$-statistic in order to illustrate how difficult the task is. Each of these representations improves upon the last, but each still has significant limitations.

In Figures A1 and A2 we present stacked bars that show the percentage of Black and Hispanic students, respectively, enrolled in each of the 9 different postsecondary destinations we consider in this paper compared to the rate of enrollment in these destinations for white students. This is the simplest way of looking at these data, and these figures illustrate the challenges in examining trends. For example, while we can see that enrollment in 2-year schools has grown for all three race groups, it’s difficult to tell for which group 2-year enrollment has grown the most, and how this compares to growth in other sectors. And importantly, in these figures it is hard to assess how overall changes in enrollment have evolved.

In Figures A3 – A5, we present the percent of students who are enrolled in at least each level of selectivity for each race. By examining the area between each pair of lines, we can track growth in particular sectors. For example, but looking at the area between the Non-Degree Granting and 2-year School lines, we can see the growth in the Non-Degree Granting sector for all races. This representation is helpful in that it clearly shows if growth trends in enrollment for a given race in a given sector. However, there are two main limitations to this representation. First, like the previous representation, it is difficult to assess trends in overall enrollment. Second, these graphs do not allow us to compare across races in one figure.
Finally, in Figures A6 and A7 we reduce the data slightly and give lines that track the *difference* in percentage of white students relative to Black and Hispanic students enrolled in each postsecondary destination. Here we can see some of the trends we note in the paper—namely the closing margin of not attending college at all. However, it is still difficult to weight the overall trends in enrollment, particularly without additional information about the relative number of students enrolled at each level. What you lose in this approach is a sense of the proportion of students at each level. We may see trends at different levels of selectivity running in opposite directions, but without knowing the proportion of total enrollments at each level (and for each year), it is difficult to make claims about overall changes in gaps. For example, while the closing of the gap in non-enrollment is striking in both figures, it is difficult to know how important this is without knowing what percent of students fall into this category. This representation again does not allow us to ascertain how changes in enrollment gaps in one particular sector affect enrollment gaps overall.
Figure A1. Postsecondary destinations of Black (left bar) and white (right bar) students, 1986-2014.

Notes. Data come from Integrated Postsecondary Data System and the US Census. The selectivity of four-year schools is rated use Barron’s Profile of American Colleges. For each year the left bar gives the percentage of Black students at each type of postsecondary destination while the right bar gives the same information for white students.
Figure A2. Postsecondary destinations of Hispanic (left bar) and white (right bar) students, 1986-2014.

Notes. Data come from Integrated Postsecondary Data System and the US Census. The selectivity of four-year schools is rated use Barron’s Profile of American Colleges. For each year the left bar gives the percentage of Hispanic students at each type of postsecondary destination while the right bar gives the same information for white students.
Figure A3. Percent of Hispanic students enrolled in each post-secondary destination or higher.

Notes. Data come from Integrated Postsecondary Data System and the US Census. The selectivity of four-year schools is rated use Barron’s Profile of American Colleges. Each line indicates the percent of Hispanic students enrolled in a post-secondary destination that is at least that selective. For example, the height of the “Competitive” line indicates what percent of Hispanic students are enrolled in four-year colleges that are ranked as Competitive, Very Competitive, Highly Competitive, or Most Competitive each year.
Figure A4. Percent of Black students enrolled in each post-secondary destination or higher.

Notes. Data come from Integrated Postsecondary Data System and the US Census. The selectivity of four-year schools is rated use Barron’s Profile of American Colleges. Each line indicates the percent of Black students enrolled in a post-secondary destination that is at least that selective. For example, the height of the “Competitive” line indicates what percent of Black students are enrolled in four-year colleges that are ranked as Competitive, Very Competitive, Highly Competitive, or Most Competitive each year.
Figure A5. Percent of White students enrolled in each post-secondary destination or higher.

Notes. Data come from Integrated Postsecondary Data System and the US Census. The selectivity of four-year schools is rated use *Barron’s Profile of American Colleges*. Each line indicates the percent of white students enrolled in a post-secondary destination that is at least that selective. For example, the height of the “Competitive” line indicates what percent of white students are enrolled in four-year colleges that are ranked as Competitive, Very Competitive, Highly Competitive, or Most Competitive each year.
Figure A3. Difference in rates of enrollment between white and Black students, by level and selectivity of postsecondary destination from 1986-2014.

Notes. Data come from Integrated Postsecondary Data System and the US Census. The selectivity of four-year schools is rated use Barron’s Profile of American Colleges. The level of each line indicates the percent of Black students enrolled in a given post-secondary destination minus the percent of White students enrolled at the same level; negative values indicate a greater proportion of white students enroll in the given level than black students.
Figure A4. Difference in rates of enrollment between white and Hispanic students, by level and selectivity of postsecondary destination from 1986-2014.

Notes. Data come from Integrated Postsecondary Data System and the US Census. The selectivity of four-year schools is rated use Barron’s Profile of American Colleges. The level of each line indicates the percent of Hispanic students enrolled in a given post-secondary destination minus the percent of White students enrolled at the same level; negative values indicate a greater proportion of white students enroll in the given level than Hispanic students.
Appendix B

Sensitivity Analyses

The following work demonstrates the robustness of our results to various data decisions and limitations.

**Full-Time Versus Part-Time Students**

In our main analyses, we use the IPEDs counts of all first-time degree-/certificate-seeking students enrolled at each post-secondary institution. Here we re-estimate selectivity gaps using only full-time first-time degree-/certificate-seeking students, which should reduce the potential to double count students who are enrolled at multiple institutions in their first term of attendance. Since relatively few students enroll in more than one college—somewhat less than 2 percent of all students enrolled in any postsecondary institution are enrolled in more than one institution (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015), these results are not substantively different from the results presented in Figure B1.

**Fall Versus 12-Month Enrollment**

Institutions report the number of first-time students to IPEDS only in the fall. Because of this schedule, students who enroll for the first time in the spring semester are not counted in our primary data. If race groups first enroll in fall vs. spring at different rates, this could affect our estimated gaps. There is no available data source to satisfactorily address this concern, as IPEDS’ 12-month enrollment counts include all enrolled students—freshman to seniors, first-time and otherwise. Thus, these 12-month data conflate college enrollment with college persistence—differential persistence by race may exaggerate or attenuate differential enrollment-selectivity gaps by race. For the sake of robustness, but given this caveat, we compare gaps computed using first-time fall enrollment with gaps computed using the 12-month data. In Figure
B2 we compare Black- and Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps using both fall and 12-month enrollment data conditional on attending at least a moderately selective four-year school (Barron’s 1-5), as this balances concerns about conflating persistence and access with including as many students as possible. In these comparisons, the choice of enrollment type does not alter the trend of the gaps, and only modestly changes the magnitude of the gaps.

**Changes in Race Categorization**

Between 2008 and 2010, IPEDS changed the race categories that schools were asked to use when reporting enrollments. Prior to 2008, schools could categorize students using seven race categories (Non-Resident Alien; Race and Ethnicity unknown; Black non-Hispanic; American Indian/Alaskan Native; Asian/Pacific Islander; Hispanic; or White, non-Hispanic). In the 2008-09 and 2009-10 collection years, schools could report using the previous seven categories or the new nine IPEDS reporting categories (Nonresident Alien; Race and Ethnicity Unknown; Hispanics of any race; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; White; or two or more races). In 2010 and after, all schools had to use the nine new categories.

The main difference of consequence to our analysis is the introduction of the multi-race category. In the main analyses, we report gaps only using students identified as from one of the major race/ethnicity groups (that is, we do not include students who report that they are two-or-more races). In this Appendix, we report three methods for including these students. The first recodes each multi-race student as white. This method will exaggerate race gaps in favor of the higher performing group (make Black-White and Hispanic-White gaps larger and more negative). The second method is to recode each multi-race student as Hispanic or Black. This should attenuate estimated gaps (bias them in favor of the underrepresented group). Finally, we
recode multi-race students according to the race proportions present in our data. This represents our “best guess.”

The results, presented in Figures B3 (Black-White gaps) and B4 (Hispanic-White gaps) show that our results are sensitive to these different treatments of multi-race students. However, recoding all students who select multi-race as one specific race (particularly the races that represent a small proportion of the population, such as Black) is likely an unreasonable upper bound. Recoding these students according to population proportions does not meaningfully affect the results we present in the main analyses. However, these results do highlight the need to create uniform data reporting structures that more accurately reflect changing demographics and nuanced racial categories.

**Population of Institutions**

In our main analyses, we use enrollment counts from all colleges, regardless of whether the institution was present in all years of our data. Although we think this is the most appropriate analysis, as it accurately reflects the changing supply of college seats available, we examine the sensitivity of our results to focusing only on the schools that existed in all years in this test. The results, presented in Figure B5, are not qualitatively different overall, but there are a few notable differences. Namely, we note that the White-Hispanic gap is smaller when we include all schools than when we rely only on schools that were present in every year since 1986. This trend is also apparent, though less stark, for the Black-White gap. These trends suggest that Hispanic and Black students were more likely than white students to attend schools that opened in the past 30 years; these new entrants disproportionately served traditionally underrepresented groups.
As noted in the main text, IPEDS reporting was not mandatory for all schools prior before 1994. As a result, we note that our estimates are suggestive, but not definitive, prior to 1994.

**Cohort Age**

Because of the increasingly varied age of students at their first college entry, the decision to use 18-year-olds as the cohort denominator is consequential and could bias measures of enrollment-selectivity gaps. We are particularly concerned by the co-occurrence of uneven growth of racial/ethnic groups relative to each other and a differential likelihood of these same groups to delay first college enrollment relative to other groups. For example, imagine that across all racial groups 75 percent of all high school graduates eventually enroll in college. If the population of Asians in the United States is growing significantly more quickly than other racial groups and Asians tend to delay college enrollment by 10 years, it will look like Asians enroll at much lower rates than other groups (75 percent of all 28-year-olds will be less than the 75 percent of 18-year-olds). We investigate the potential upper bound of this bias by using an average of 18-24 year-olds as the measure of the size of each cohort. The results of this analysis are presented in Figure B6 and do not qualitatively change the size or trend of Black-White and Hispanic-White selectivity gaps.

**Missing Barron’s Ratings**

Approximately 360 degree-granting four-year institutions are missing a *Barron’s* selectivity rating. In these cases, we attempted to estimate the rating based on publicly available data (e.g. percent of applicants admitted, average SAT scores, etc.) and *Barron’s* criteria for determining college selectivity. To check the sensitivity of our results to this imputation, we repeat our analyses by dropping these schools from the analysis. Our results, as presented in
Comparison to NCES Longitudinal Data

While the NCES longitudinal data sets are not ideal for our analyses for the reasons we outline in the paper, they are not subject to some of the concerns we have with the IPEDS data and are helpful for checking the robustness of our results. In this section we present the gaps for the national samples in three datasets (NELS, ELS and HSLS). These longitudinal data sets are representative of the population of students in late middle school or early high school (eighth grade for NELS, tenth grade for ELS, and ninth grade for HSLS), so the types of students who would drop out before the base year collection are not represented. Because of this, we calculate and present the results for gaps conditional on any postsecondary enrollment. Additionally, because these data sets include a relatively small sample, they often contain small numbers of URM students at particular levels of enrollment and sample weights cannot account for whether these particular observations are outliers.

We find the results from the NCES longitudinal largely in line with our IPEDS estimates. The trends are qualitatively similar (widening Black-White gaps and widening-then-leveling Hispanic-White gaps), though the Hispanic-White gaps estimated using the NCES data are larger than those using IPEDS.

Exclusion of For-Profit Schools

The for-profit sector is an increasingly important player in higher education in the United States and examining race gaps in selectivity of enrollment with and without for-profit schools can help us understand the role these institutions might play in the sorting of students into colleges by race. Black and Hispanic students are more likely to enroll in for-profit schools than their white peers (Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2013). This trend, combined with the fact that most
for-profit schools tend to be less selective and the number of seats in for-profit institutions has grown rapidly during the years we study (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007), may help explain the closing enrollment-selectivity gaps we observe. Thus, to explore the extent to which the trends we describe can be explained in part or in full by the for-profit sector, we recalculated our gaps excluding enrollments from for-profit institutions. Figure B9 shows that both the Black-White and Hispanic-White gaps are bigger when we do not include for-profit schools. This is especially true for the Black-White gap. Thus, for-profit schools are important actors in the overall closing of gaps, but are not entirely responsible for this closing.

However, for-profit schools are more expensive than similar alternatives (Cellini, 2012), they tend to have lower graduation rates than similar non-profit schools (Lynch, Engle & Cruz, 2010) and research has found that the economic returns to attending a for-profit college are insignificant or lower than other similar sectors (Darolia, Koedel, Martorell, Wilson & Perez-Arce, 2015; Cellini & Chaudhary, 2014; Lang & Weinstein, 2013). Thus, the fact that for-profit schools seem to drive a nontrivial amount of the shrinking race gap in college selectivity is not an entirely positive finding.
Figure B1. Black- and Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps calculated using all enrollment versus just full-time enrollment, 1986-2014.

Notes. The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Black/Hispanic student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. The solid lines indicate gaps estimated using all enrolled students. The dashed lines indicate gaps estimated using only students who are enrolled full time. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Black, Hispanic, and white students regardless of reporting method.
Figure B2. Black- and Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps calculated using all fall enrollment versus 12-month enrollment conditional on attending at least a Barron’s 5 institution, 1986-2014.

Notes. The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Black/Hispanic student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. The solid lines indicate gaps estimated using first-time fall enrollments reported to IPEDS. The dashed lines indicate gaps estimated using 12-month enrollments (all students, not just freshmen) reported to IPEDS. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Black, Hispanic, and white students regardless of reporting method.
Figure B3. Black-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps accounting for the inclusion of multiracial students, 1986-2014.

Notes. The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Black student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. The two dashed lines indicate gaps estimated by re-coding students who self-identify as Multiracial as either Black or White. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Black, Hispanic, and white students regardless of reporting method.
Figure B4. Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps accounting for the inclusion of multiracial students, 1986-2014.

Notes. The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Hispanic student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. The two dashed lines indicate gaps estimated by re-coding students who self-identify as Multiracial as either Hispanic or White. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Black, Hispanic, and white students regardless of reporting method.
Figure B5. Black- and Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps calculated using all institutions versus only institutions present in every year of data, 1986-2014.

Notes. The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Black/Hispanic student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. The dashed lines indicate gaps estimated by including only schools that were present in every year of analysis. The solid lines indicate gaps that were estimated using all available schools. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Black, Hispanic, and white students regardless of reporting method.
Figure B6. Black- and Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps calculated using a base cohort of 18 year-olds compared to average size of the 18-24 year old population, 1986-2014

Notes. The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Black/Hispanic student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. The dashed lines indicate gaps estimated by using the average size of cohorts of 18- to 24-year-olds. The solid lines indicate gaps that were estimated using the size of the 18-year-old cohort. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Black, Hispanic, and white students regardless of reporting method.
Figure B7. Black- and Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps calculated with imputed *Barron’s* ratings versus dropping institutions with missing *Barron’s* ratings, 1986-2014.

Notes. The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Black/Hispanic student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. The dashed lines indicate gaps estimated by dropping schools that do not have a Barrons rating. The solid lines indicate gaps that were estimated by imputing missing Barrons ratings. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Black, Hispanic, and white students regardless of reporting method.
Figure B8. Black- and Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps calculated with using IPEDS and Census data compared to gaps estimated using data from NCES longitudinal data sets.

Notes. The level of each line and dot indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Black/Hispanic student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. The solid lines indicate gaps that were estimated using IPEDS and census data. The dots indicate gaps that were estimated using NCES longitudinal data sets. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Black, Hispanic, and white students regardless of reporting method.
Figure B9. Black- and Hispanic-White postsecondary enrollment-selectivity gaps calculated with including for-profit schools versus dropping for-profit schools, 1986-2014.

Notes. The level of each line indicates the probability that a randomly chosen Black/Hispanic student is enrolled in a more selective post-secondary destination than a randomly chosen white student. The solid lines indicate gaps that were estimated dropping for-profit schools. The dashed lines indicate gaps that were estimated using data from all schools. IPEDS enrollment reporting was not mandatory at all schools prior to 1993. Prior to 2008 all institutions reported race in seven categories. After 2010, all institutions used a nine-category system. Between 2008 and 2010 institutions could report enrollment by race under either system and we use the total Black, Hispanic, and white students regardless of reporting method.
Appendix C

Structural Vector Autoregression Results

We estimated structural vector autoregressions (SVAR) of the relationship between enrollment-selectivity gaps and gaps in students’ achievement and socio-economic status in a way that is more sensitive to complex interrelationships between the gaps than the bivariate correlations we present in the main body of this article. SVAR models are a variant of vector autoregressions (VAR). VAR models compute a set of regressions for each dependent and independent variable in the model using every other variable in the system as well as each variable’s lagged values as well as a control. This approach both accounts for underlying time trends and helps calculate standard errors to account for potential autocorrelation (Stock & Watson, 2001). Structural VAR extend these models by allowing one to make explicit assumptions about which time series trends influence each other. For example, while family income gaps and high school graduation gaps might affect gaps in the selectivity of enrollment, we don’t expect that high school graduation gaps will affect contemporaneous family income gaps. Structural VAR models allow us to explicitly set some relationships to zero while estimating other relationships.

Although this approach provides the potential for a more defensible account of the relationship between enrollment-selectivity gaps and other gaps, our data greatly limit our ability to make robust inferences (and given the lack of exogenous variation, certainly not causal inferences) from these analyses. Namely, test gaps were only measured for 11 of the 28 years we study, and only have math and reading scores for eight of those years. In order to estimate these models, we thus make significant assumptions. Specifically, we use only one test score gap (math), and impute the math gap using the reading gap in years that NAEP was administered in reading but not math. As NAEP was administered irregularly, we also imputed missing test
scores using the nearest available year (both forward and backward imputation). Thus, the test scores we use to estimate these models are noisy measures of true test score gaps and estimated coefficients should be interpreted with caution.

Because we are using data from multiple sources, we also had to make decisions about the timing of gaps. We use measures of gaps from within a cohort. For example, we use the 2003 8th grade test score and family income gaps (for parents of 14-17 year olds) from 2007 gaps to predict 2008 college enrollment-selectivity gaps.

We set the following parameters when estimating the models. We allowed enrollment selectivity gaps to be a function of each of the contemporaneous trends (graduation gaps, test score gaps, parental income gaps, and parental college enrollment gaps), but did not allow that the contemporaneous trends to be a function of enrollment-selectivity gaps. We allow graduation gaps to be a function of income gaps, parental college attendance gaps, and test score gaps; test score gaps to be a function of parental college and income gaps; and income gaps to be a function parental college attendance gaps. All other terms are set to zero. We include three years of lags (of the dependent variable and all independent variables) in each model, which is the most we could include give the data that we have.

The results of our SVAR analyses of the relationship between enrollment-selectivity gaps and potential explanatory gaps are presented in Table C1. One common trend among all of these findings is that estimated relationships tend to flip signs between overall gaps and conditional gaps. This makes sense, given that overall gaps in enrollment-selectivity are decreasing (trending toward zero), but that nearly every gap that conditions on a minimum level of enrollment goes in the opposite direction.
There are some common relationships across the two race categories we examine. High school graduation gaps are negatively related to enrollment-selectivity gaps conditional on either four-year enrollment or on enrollment in a selective college). Test score gaps are negatively related to overall enrollment-selectivity gaps for both race gaps that we examine.

The most important difference that we see is that there is a positive relationship between the two measures of family SES gaps (income gaps and parental education gaps) and overall enrollment-selectivity gaps for Hispanic-White gaps but not Black-White gaps.

While the SVAR models are a considerable improvement over the bivariate correlations we present in the main text of the paper, we hesitate to draw any strong conclusions from these models given the limitations we described above, although it is reassuring that the SVAR results echo some of our bivariate conclusions.
Table C1. SVAR of the Relationship between Enrollment-selectivity Gaps and Potential Explanatory Gaps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black-White Gaps</th>
<th>Hispanic-White Gaps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gaps Conditional on Enrollment at:</td>
<td>Gaps Conditional on Enrollment at:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall Gap</td>
<td>4-year College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduation Gap</td>
<td>-0.115 (0.081)</td>
<td>-0.214** (0.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50th Percentile Test Gap</td>
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<td>0.045* (0.019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75th Percentile Test Gap</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income Gap</td>
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<td>0.072 (0.055)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Education Gap</td>
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<td>-0.078† (0.036)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Standard errors in parentheses. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.1