

## Edition 4 | January 2025

Welcome to the Thrive Scholars Research Roundup, shared quarterly with you! We are continually keeping up to date on research in the field and thought you'd like to see what we are reading and how it relates to our work.

### **The Value of College for Meaningful Careers and Economic Mobility**

There are still ongoing debates about the importance of a college degree. For instance, the Pew Research Center recently [showed](#) that the public has mixed views, with only a quarter saying higher education is important for a well-paying job today. Many surveyed see a degree as less important than 20 years ago, and nearly half say college is only worth the cost if no loans are required. Yet new [research](#) from the Pell Institute and Lumina Foundation shows that students from underrepresented backgrounds, specifically Black, Latino, and Indigenous TRIO students, believe that higher education is critical for their own upward mobility—both in terms of the economic and non-economic benefits. This underscores what we know at Thrive: for students like ours, college attainment with meaningful career prospects is necessary for themselves and their families and communities.

### **Ongoing Changes in College Admissions Trends**

This Georgetown Center for Education and Workforce [report](#) examines how racial and socioeconomic inequities in college access and enrollment have evolved over the past decade, even with race-conscious affirmative action policies in place. While overall college access has improved, significant disparities remain, particularly at the most selective universities. Black, Latino, and Native American students make up 37% of the college-age population, but only 21% of enrollment at selective schools. Meanwhile, white and Asian students are overrepresented, accounting for 73% of selective enrollment. Additionally, Pell Grant recipients make up less than 25% of enrollment at selective colleges, compared to over 50% at open-access institutions. Our Thrive Scholars contrast this trend, 82% of whom are Black, Latino, or Native American and about 66% who qualify for Pell Grants, with 48% going to Top 20 colleges across the country.

This Inside Higher Ed [article](#) provides a nuanced look at how college enrollment demographics have shifted in the first year since the Supreme Court banned affirmative action, pulling together all the information from one-off articles about outcomes at [MIT](#), [Amherst and Tufts](#), and [many others](#). The data from these 25 universities shows a mixed picture—some schools saw double-digit drops in underrepresented minority enrollment, while others remained relatively stable. Key challenges to understanding the impact of the ban include a) the increase in students who declined to report their race to their school, b) the inclusion (or not) of international students in each school's data, and c) the starting points of different schools. This highlights the complexity and uncertainty surrounding the impacts of the affirmative action ban, at least in the short term. As a leader in this area, we are closely monitoring these trends, continuing to provide top-notch service to our Scholars so we can maintain hard-won progress on diversity and advocate for equity-focused policies at our partner universities.

In addition, this [report](#) from Acuity Insights outlines several key trends—including the use of test-optional policies and AI-powered application reviews—impacting college admissions in the wake of the 2023 Supreme Court ruling against affirmative action. The data reveals ongoing disparities in representation, especially for underrepresented students at selective institutions, and reaffirms the critical need for our work with scholars as the college admissions landscape changes.

Another response to the Supreme Court's 2023 ruling is that many highly selective colleges have dramatically expanded their financial aid programs as a race-neutral approach to boosting diversity. Inside Higher Ed [reports](#) that schools like Dartmouth, Vanderbilt, UVA, and UNC have all raised income thresholds for free tuition, room, and board, with the explicit goal of increasing socioeconomic diversity on their campuses. But simply increasing financial aid may not be enough, as colleges must also focus on active recruitment in underrepresented communities to truly move the needle on diversity. Overall, there is a renewed emphasis on socioeconomic diversity as colleges adapt to the evolving legal and policy landscape around affirmative action—something we are paying attention to at Thrive Scholars as we support our Scholars to apply to top, best-fit colleges.

### Wealth Gaps Impact College Access and Success Gaps

This recent IHEP (Institute for Higher Education Practice) [report](#) details how wealth disparities by race impact college access and success. While income gaps are significant, racial wealth gaps are even larger, stemming from historical discrimination. Wealth influences college savings, attendance, borrowing, and completion. While we do not currently assess the wealth of our Scholars, we do know that our Scholars are less likely to have generational wealth given the disproportionate distribution of wealth by race and class in the US.

### Interrupting Disparities in Black Student Outcomes

This new [report](#) from the American Council on Education paints a mixed picture of educational progress for Black Americans over the past two decades. While the share of Black adults without a high school diploma has dropped significantly, and more are earning bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees, sizable gaps remain compared to white and Asian Americans. Notably, Black students are half as likely as Asian students to earn STEM degrees, and this gap widens at the doctoral level. At Thrive, two of our career pathways are STEM-focused and we are proud to say that 53% of our most recent Black college graduates were STEM majors—and 76% of those interested in STEM at the start of college succeeded in graduating with a STEM degree.

### Seniors are Feeling the Challenge of Entering the Workforce

This [article](#) from Higher Ed Dive finds that the majority of the College Class of 2025 surveyed by Handshake feel their education has boosted their ability to land well-paying and meaningful jobs and greatly contributed to their personal growth. However, they are also worried about the job market, with over half feeling pessimistic about the intense competition that may negatively impact their career launch. This emphasizes the importance of the industry-specific career coaching that we provide to our Scholars, which has increased our Scholars' meaningful first-destination career placements each year since its inception. The article also notes that student loan debt is a major source of stress, especially for Black and first-generation students, aligning with what we know about [debt burden for underrepresented students](#), and underscoring why it is so important for our Scholars' long-term well-being that over half to graduate without any debt (and those with debt have an average of <\$6500 total).

### The Importance of Quality Education-to-Career Coaching

Strada Education Foundation recently shared [research](#) emphasizing why quality education-to-career coaching is important. Strada defined quality coaching as guidance, timely information, and support and found that only one in five college graduates had all the elements of quality coaching before they graduated. However, those who received quality coaching were more likely to get a first job requiring a degree and report that their education positively impacted their well-being and helped them achieve their goals. This is why we provide 1:1 coaching support to all Scholars—from their junior year in high school into the start of their careers—and we know they appreciate it, with 90% of our Scholars reporting that their coaches are valuable to their success.

