

# WHAT'S NEW WITH KIDS?

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## The Gender Gap in Higher Education

Over the past three decades in the United States, women have been outpacing men in attaining college degrees.<sup>1</sup> To see if a gender gap in degrees conferred exists in Nevada, this *Newsletter* looks at data from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV).

UNLV is the only graduate and research institution in Southern Nevada. It is a young and fast-growing institution. Enrollment in the fall of 1957, when the first classes were held on campus,<sup>2</sup> was 498.<sup>3</sup> Preliminary student headcount in the fall of 2015 is 28,600—16,048 females and 12,552 males.<sup>4</sup> Over 100 undergraduate programs and about 120 graduate and professional programs are offered at UNLV.<sup>5</sup>

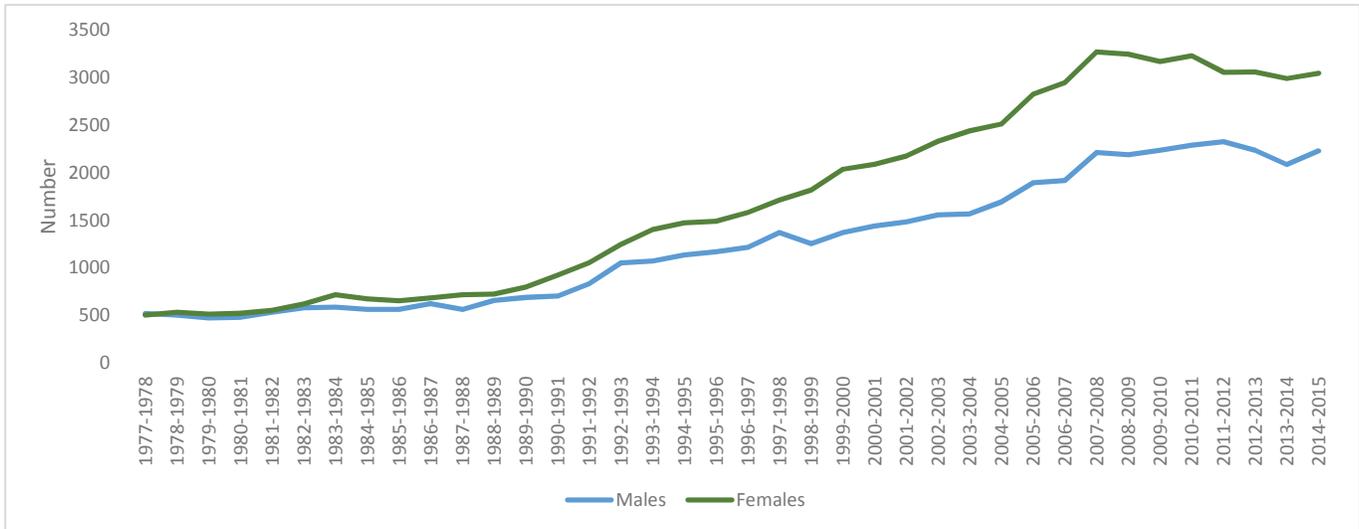
Figure 1 on page two shows the number of degrees conferred from UNLV from 1977 to 2015. The degree could have been a certificate, a bachelor's degree, a professional development degree (P.D.D.), a master's degree, an associate degree, an education specialist degree, or a doctorate degree.

In academic year 1977-1978, 1,026 degrees were conferred—50.8 percent to males and 49.2 percent to females. A year later, females were more likely to have earned a degree than were males, 51.3 percent and 48.7 percent, respectively. They would continue to do so through 2014-2015.

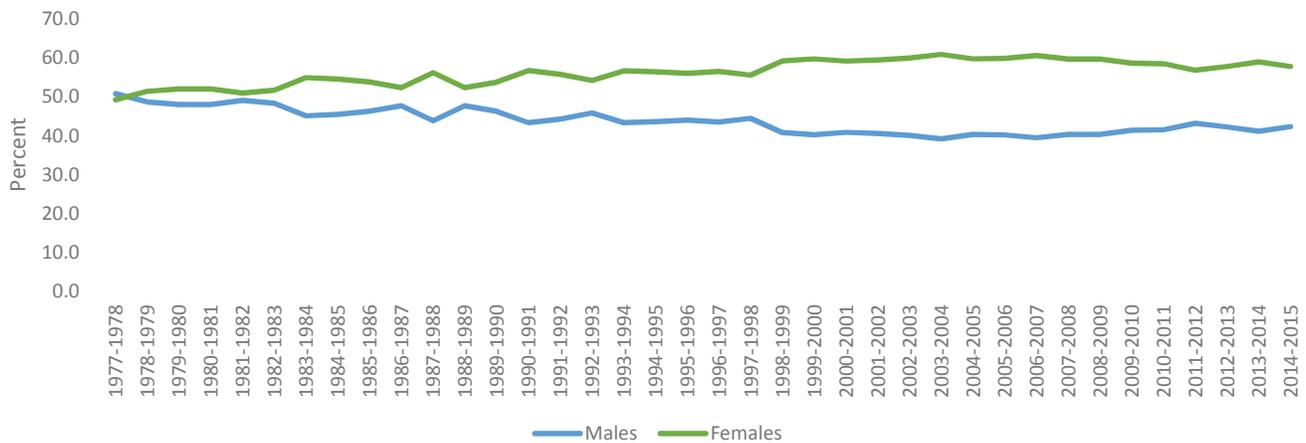
During the 19-year period, 1977-2015, the gender gap in degrees conferred was the largest in academic year 2003-2004, when 60.9 percent of the students who had attained a degree were female, and only 39.1 percent were male. See Figure 2.

The total number of degrees conferred increased for both genders over the 19 years. The number of degrees conferred to males increased from 521 in 1977-1978 to 2,231 in 2014-2015. For females, the number increased from 505 to 3,046.

**Figure 1. Number of Degrees Conferred at UNLV by Gender and Academic Year: 1977-2015**



**Figure 2. Percent of Degrees Conferred at UNLV by Gender and Academic Year: 1977-2015**



Sources: 1977-1997 data: *Selected Institutional Characteristics (Fact Book)*, UNLV Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning; 1998-2014 data: UNLV Office of Decision Support website, <https://ir.unlv.edu/IAP/Reports/Content/.DegreesAndCertsConferredByCollege.aspx>; 2014-2015 data: UNLV Office of Decision Support.

The dramatic increase in the number of degrees by women over the last three decades may be a result of many factors. Some of the factors cited in the literature include:

- Change in social norms that made women acquiring a college degree more socially appropriate.<sup>6</sup>
- Increase in divorce rates and in the number of women providing financial support for children made economic independence and investment in their own human capital important.<sup>7</sup>
- Change in laws that reduced the age of majority in many states and increased the rights of minors (the mature minor doctrine) allowed single women to legally obtain the contraceptive pill. The pill gave women the opportunity to delay child birth to invest in a professional career.<sup>8</sup>
- Increased realization by women of the economic benefits of a college degree resulting in women better preparing themselves for college by taking college preparation courses in high school.<sup>9</sup>

## References

<sup>1</sup>Zinshteyn, Mikhail, "Who's Going to (and Graduating from) College, in 7 Charts," *The Atlantic*, September 27, 2013, online at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/09/whos-going-to-and-graduating-from-college-in-7-charts/280069/>, as of 9/11/15.

<sup>2</sup>Celebrating Fifty Years, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2007, available at: <https://www.unlv.edu/ourhistory/timeline>, as of 9/22/15.

<sup>3</sup>Office of Decision Support, Historical Headcount, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, <https://ir.unlv.edu/IAP/Files/Historical%20Headcount%20Enrollment.aspx>, as of 10/13/15.

<sup>4</sup>Office of Decision Support, About UNLV, Facts and Stats, from UNLV Analytics Enrollment Census - Official Fall 2015 Preliminary (October 5, 2015), University of Nevada, Las Vegas, <https://www.unlv.edu/about/glance/facts>, as of 10/13/15.

<sup>5</sup>Office of Decision Support, Degree Programs and Certificates Offered, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2014, available at: <https://ir.unlv.edu/IAP/Reports/Content/DegreeProgramsandCertificatesOffered.aspx>, as of 9/30/15.

<sup>6</sup>Charles, Kerwin Kofi and Ming-Ching Luoh, August 2003, "Gender Differences in Completed Schooling," *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 85(3):559-577, available at: <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/003465303322369722>, as of 9/29/15.

<sup>7</sup>Goldin, Claudia, Lawrence F. Katz, and Illyana Kuziemko, fall 2006, "The Homecoming of American College Women: The Reversal of the College Gender Gap," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20(4):136-156, available at: <http://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.20.4.133>, as of 9/23/15.

<sup>8</sup>Goldin, Claudia and Lawrence F. Katz, 2002. "The Power of the Pill: Oral Contraceptives and Women's Career and Marriage Decisions," *Journal of Political Economy*, 110(4):730-770, available at: [http://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/2624453/Goldin\\_PowerPill.pdf?sequence=4](http://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/2624453/Goldin_PowerPill.pdf?sequence=4), as of 9/27/15.

<sup>9</sup>Goldin, Claudia, May 2006, "The Quiet Revolution that Transformed Women's Employment, Education, and Family," *American Economic Review*, 96(2):1-22, available at: <http://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/000282806777212350>, as of 9/29/15.

## Note

Thanks to Mya Starling, director of Institutional Research, Office of Decision Support, UNLV, for 2015 degrees conferred numbers and access to the hard copies of the UNLV *Fact Book*.

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*The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas or the Nevada System of Higher Education.*

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