



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Office of Strategy, Planning,
and Analysis

The State of Washington: *Demographic Trends*

Environmental Scan Series 2025

Identifying strategic environmental insights to advance WSU

January 24, 2025

Environmental Scan Series

The State of Washington: Demographic Trends

Washington State University strives to educate Washington’s population and provide integral research, work that fuels the state’s labor market and uplifts its people. To that end, it is essential that we examine the people and economy of the state to understand their needs and challenges.

In this report, we explore some of the current and projected demographic changes facing Washington state. By understanding the financial needs, labor market demands, and population growth trajectories within the state, we gain insight into the challenges that Washington and its people face. This knowledge helps us make informed decisions as we position Washington State University to better serve our students and the state in the years to come.

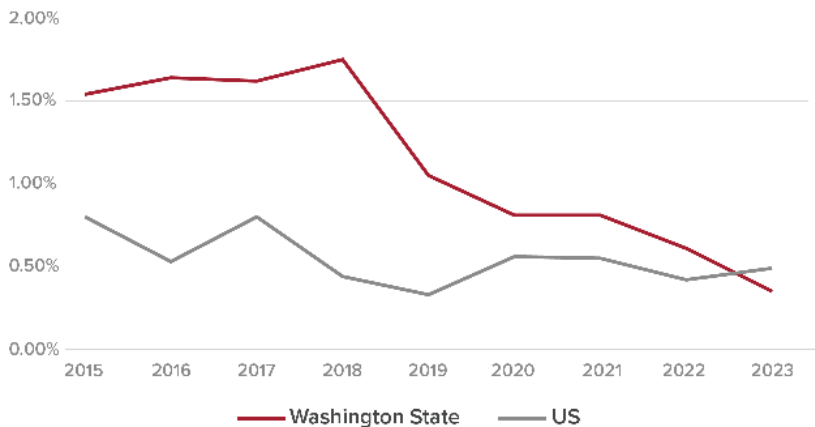


Population

Growth & Age Division

Washington’s population has been consistently increasing for decades, with the largest growth of 1.75% happening in 2018. According to the US Census, Washington has historically had greater population growth than that of the US as a whole, with an average annual population growth rate of 1.13% for the last decade in Washington versus the US’ 0.55%. The population growth in both Washington and the US has been slowing for the last half-decade, with Washington’s population growth in 2023 being at a low of 0.35% versus the US’ 0.49% - representing the first time Washington’s annual population growth in 2023 dipped below that of the US in the last decade.

Washington State & US Population Percent Growth Change, 2015-2023



Source: US Census

Quick Summary

Population Changes:

Washington’s total population is still growing, but that growth has slowed since 2018. The population has also been getting older on average, while the population of individuals up to 29 years of age has been declining since 2014.

Diversifying Demographics:

Washington has become increasingly diverse over the last decade, adding over half a million BIPOC to its population, while its multiracial population has over doubled since 2010. Additionally, Washington ranked as having the 9th highest international immigration rate among states in 2023.

Declining High School Graduates:

Washington is projected to graduate just over 72 thousand high school students in 2025, but this count is expected to decline moving forward with a net loss of just over 9% of high school graduates by 2032.

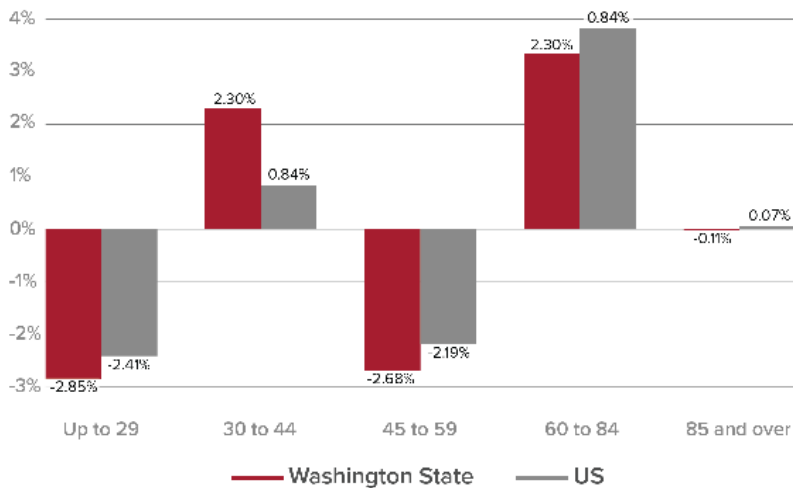
Wage Pressures:

The median annual income in Washington was \$59,147 in 2023, 15.7% higher than the US median. The estimated living wage for Washington was \$53,248 for 2023, just above the median annual income of \$52,013 for individuals with some college or an Associate’s degree.

While Washington’s population has been growing, it has also been aging. According to the US Census, Washington State’s median age has increased from 37.5 in 2014 to 38.6 in 2023. Looking at some specific age groups for Washington, the population aged from 0 to 29 has on average been declining since 2014, while the population aged from 30 to 44 and those aged 60 to 85 have been increasing.

The US has followed similar population growth trends as Washington, but has generally been less extreme in comparison. The two areas where the US’ population has been growing faster than Washington’s has been the 60 to 84 and the 85 and over populations. Overall, Washington’s population has been aging more slowly than the US on average, with the US median age increasing from 37.7 in 2014 to 39.2 in 2023. However, Washington’s young population has been declining faster than the US as well, which may represent a problem for the state’s workforce in the near future.

US & Washington State Net Population Change by Age Category, 2014-2023



Source: US Census

Population Diversity & Migration

Washington state is progressively becoming a more racially diverse state, as defined by the US Census. The Washington state population of all people of color groups increased between 2010 and 2020, for a total increase of over half a million individuals. During this same time, the white population of Washington decreased by just over 65 thousand individuals. Further, between 2010 and 2020 the state has become more multiracial, with 10.9% of the population being two or more races in 2020 versus 4.7% in 2010. In comparison to the US, Washington has a slightly higher population with two or more races (10.2% for the US) and all of the state’s race populations except for Some Other Race are growing faster than the average for the US.

Questions to Consider

As we review these demographic trends for Washington state, we should think about their effect on WSU and our ability to affect them in turn. Some initial questions to ask are:

How will the ongoing population changes— especially paired with a decline in high school graduates— affect WSU’s enrollments and initiatives in the future?

How can WSU best support and serve the state’s increasingly diverse population?

How can WSU help elevate its student’s financial success, and how can it better serve those from low-income families?

Compared to the US average, Washington had a relatively high immigration rate in 2023, helping counteract its small net negative interstate migration during the year. According to the US Census, 0.9% of Washington's population in 2023 lived in a different country in the prior year. US states on average had an international immigration rate of 0.6% for 2023. Looking at migration between states, we see that Washington net lost 0.03% of its population between those moving into and out of Washington in 2023. This trend may explain some of Washington's growing diversity.



Education

High School Graduates

According to the NCES, Washington's high school graduates are expected to decline in coming years. Since 2013, the yearly total of high school graduates in Washington has been growing on average by 0.58% annually, as compared to the US' average annual growth of 0.62% in that same period. Notably, Washington had two distinct dips in graduates in both 2019 (-3.32%) and 2023 (-3.25%), neither of which were felt as significantly by the US (0.82% and -0.31% respectively).

In 2025, Washington is expected to graduate just over 72 thousand students, the peak before NCES' projected decline starts in 2026. On average, Washington's high school graduates are estimated to decline 1.4% annually from 2026 through the end of the projection in 2032, whereas the US' will decline 1.2% annually over the same period. Altogether, NCES projects Washington will graduate nearly 6,600 (9%) fewer public higher school students in 2032 than it will in 2025.

Questions to Consider

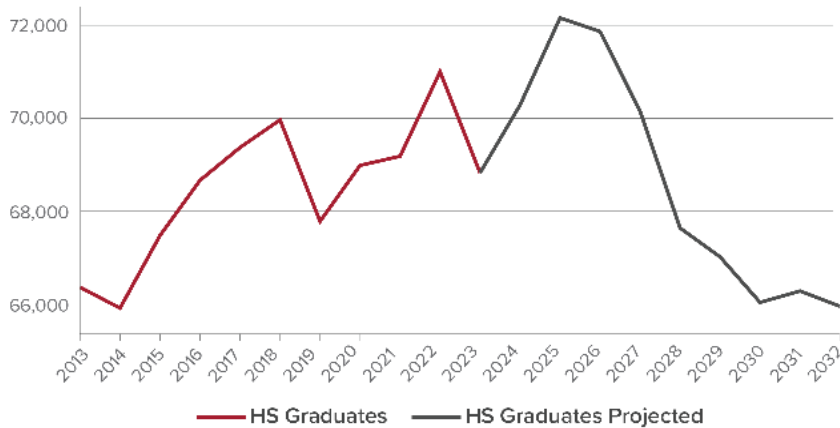
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Annual High School Graduates in Washington, projected to 2032



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Postsecondary Education

The US Census reports that 4.3% of Washington’s population was enrolled in an undergraduate degree program in 2023, with another 1.2% enrolled in a graduate degree program. This is below the US, with 4.9% of the US population in 2023 being enrolled in an undergraduate degree program and another 1.4% enrolled in a graduate degree program. Since 2010, we have seen annual enrollments tending to decline for undergraduate programs in both Washington state and the US (net loss of 16.1% and 17.3% by 2023, respectively), while enrollment in graduate programs has increased in the same period for both Washington (net 25.1% gain) and the US (net 12.1% gain).

According to a 2023 report from the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, 25% of all jobs in Washington will require a Bachelor’s degree and 14% will require a Graduate degree by 2031. By comparison, this will rank Washington as 15th and 14th among the states for share of jobs requiring a Bachelor’s or Graduate education respectively. According to the US Census, 37% of Washington residents 25 and older had a Bachelor’s degree or higher in 2023, potentially below the 2031 labor force needs projected by Georgetown. Given the declining enrollment in undergraduate programs in Washington, this may indicate a growing gap between Washington’s labor market’s demand for Bachelor’s degrees and our in-state supply.

Earnings

Earnings & Education

According to the US Census, the median income for individuals in Washington in 2023 was just over \$59 thousand and for married-couple families was just under \$130 thousand. In comparison to the US, median incomes in Washington are 25.6% higher for individuals and 21.7% higher for married-couple families. According to Dr. Amy K. Glasmeier, Professor

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of Economic Geography and Regional Planning at MIT, the living wage in Washington is \$25.60 an hour, or just over \$53 thousand annually, for an individual with no children. However, it should be noted that Dr. Glasmeier has commented that “... the living wage is perhaps better defined as a minimum wage covering necessary costs for persons living in the United States.”

Looking at median earnings by education level, we see that the median income for individuals in Washington with some college or an Associate’s degree was \$52,013 annually, or just over \$25 an hour, whereas those with a Bachelor’s degree earned \$78,485 annually (nearly \$38 an hour) and those with a Graduate or professional degree earned \$102,656 annually (just over \$49 an hour). This means that, on average, individuals without a Bachelor’s degree or higher in Washington do not make a living wage.

What’s Next

Coming Up

This report is the first in a series of environmental scans designed to enhance our understanding of critical forces shaping WSU and the broader Washington state landscape. Upcoming reports will explore trends in student enrollment and the evolving labor market within the state, offering valuable insights to guide decision-making and strategic planning.

For more information

Access more insights and find future reports in this series at strategy.wsu.edu/system-strategy/trends/. This resource hub provides a comprehensive view of environmental scanning efforts and tools to support informed decision-making.

About OSPA

This report was compiled by the Office of Strategy, Planning, and Analysis (OSPA), which plays a pivotal role at WSU by leveraging institutional data and analytics to drive informed planning and transparent decision-making across the WSU system. OSPA ensures alignment and consistency in strategic initiatives, working collaboratively with campuses, colleges, and units to achieve WSU’s vision and priorities. Through actionable insights, OSPA stewards progress toward institutional excellence.

Learn more about OSPA at strategy.wsu.edu or contact us at strategy@wsu.edu.

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