

Key Facts About Postsecondary Education 2026

Shannon W. Gilkey, EdD, Commissioner

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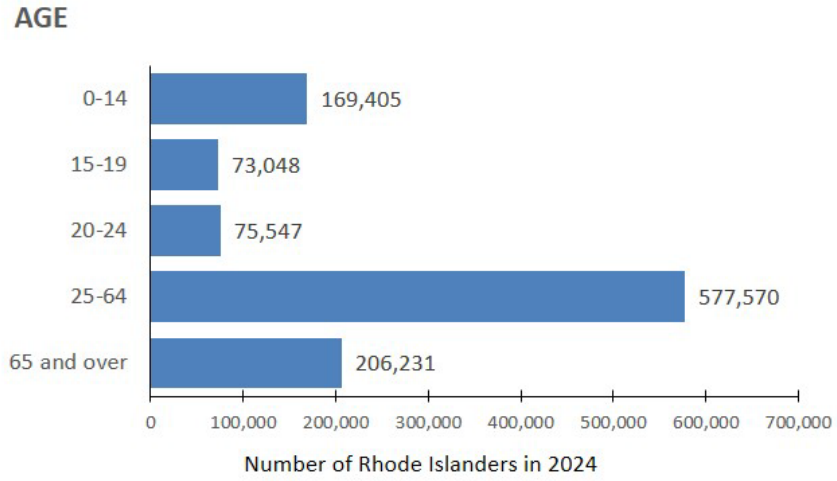
About the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner

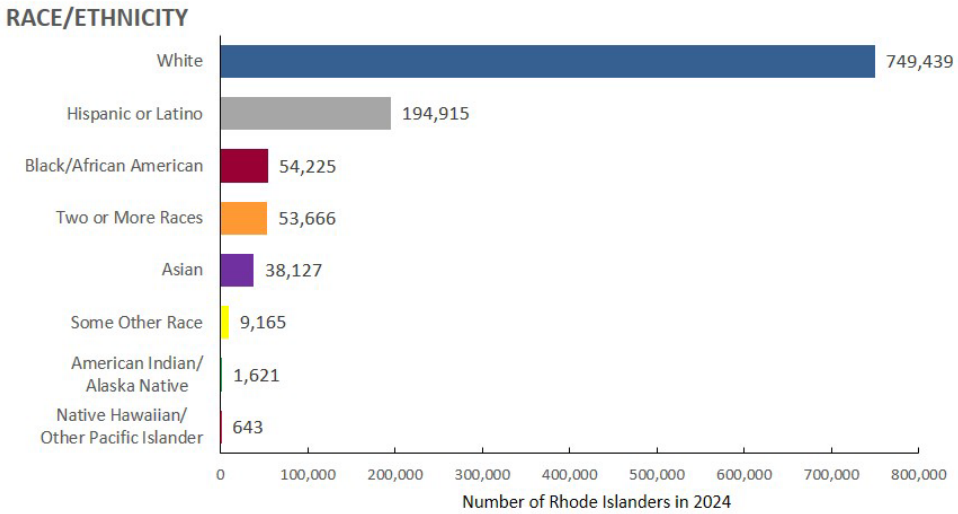
The mission of the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (OPC) is to ensure, promote, and expand postsecondary attainment among all Rhode Islanders by providing an effective system of postsecondary education and workforce training that is high quality, equitable, accessible, affordable, and aligned to PK–12 education and the economy. Rhode Island's system of postsecondary education should foster the economic, civic, social, and cultural growth of all Rhode Islanders, their communities, and the state. To fulfill its mission, OPC:

- Develops strategic plans to meet broad goals for the state's higher education system that are aligned with the goals of the Board of Education and Council on Elementary and Secondary Education;
- Formulates policy to implement goals and objectives established by the Board of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education;
- Performs data analysis and reporting to provide transparency about all aspects of postsecondary education in Rhode Island;
- Provides leadership on financial planning, budgeting compliance, and other issues related to fiscal policy for public higher education.
- Makes recommendations to the Council on Postsecondary Education regarding system policy and programmatic operations; and
- Administers the policies, rules, and regulations of the Council on Postsecondary Education.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION in Rhode Island

Rhode Island has a diverse population, with citizens from a wide variety of backgrounds. To ensure that all students have the preparation, access, and resources they need to reach their postsecondary goals, we need to understand who they are and the challenges they may face.

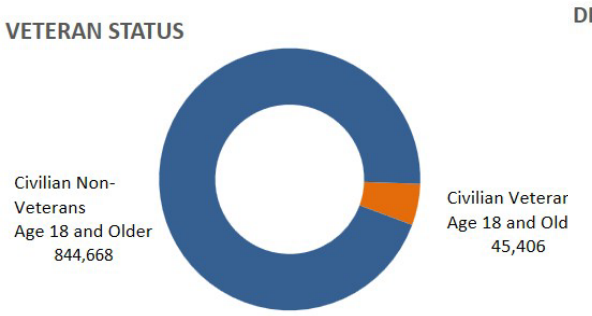


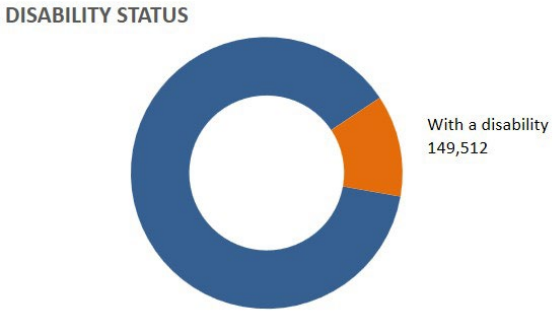


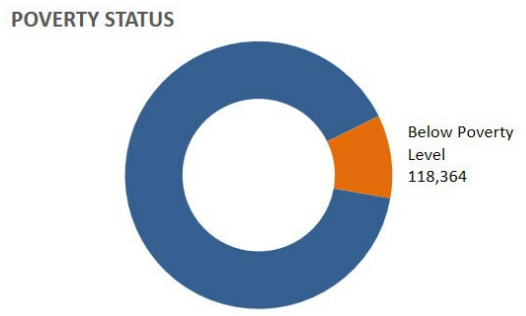
- The total population in Rhode Island increased by 4.2%, from 1,057,231 in 2019 to 1,101,801 in 2024. The male population grew by 5.2%, outpacing the female population, which increased by 3.3%.
- Rhode Island is experiencing a demographic shift toward an older population. Between 2019 and 2024, the population aged 25 to 64 increased by 3.3%, while the population aged 65 and older grew by 15.9%, more than five times the rate of growth among working-age adults.
- Among all residents, 68.0% are White, 17.7% are Hispanic or Latino, and 4.9% are Black/African American. The median age is 40.6.

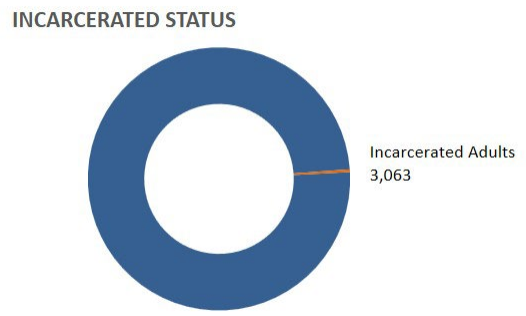
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION in Rhode Island

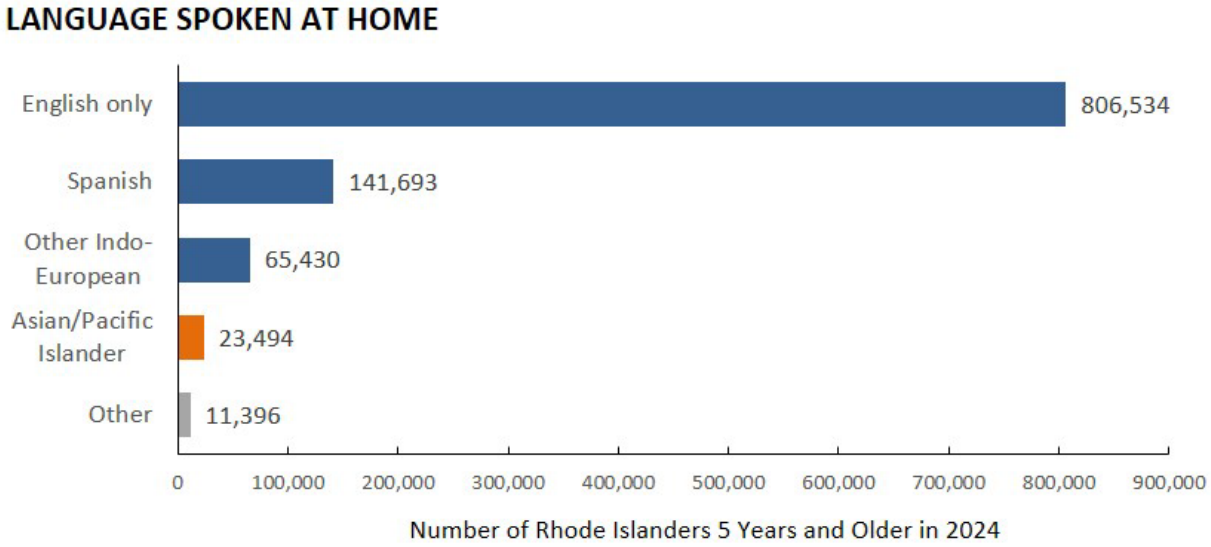








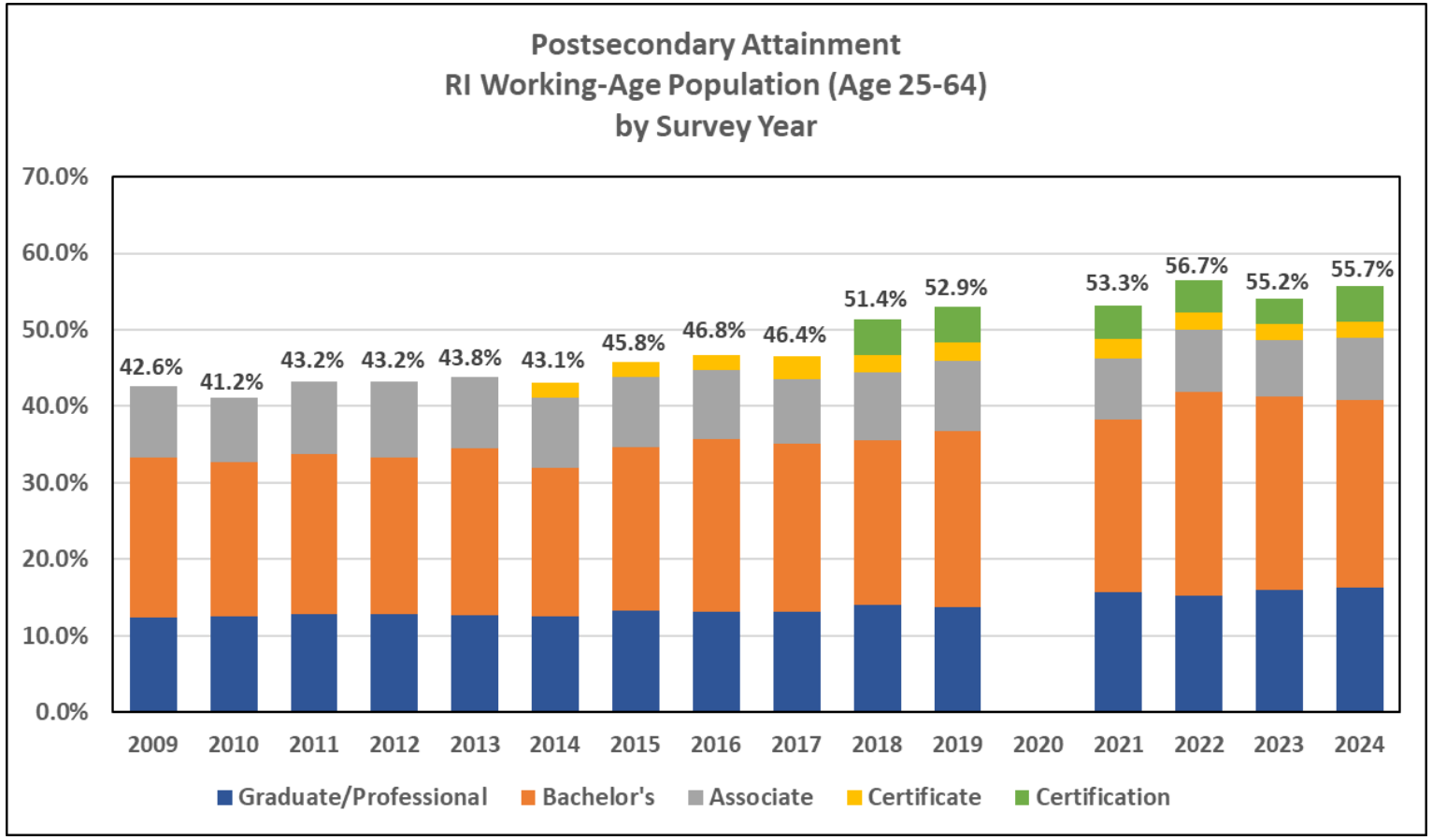
- While all Rhode Islanders need access to educational and workforce opportunities, that access often depends on the availability of supportive services. Removing barriers such as lack of childcare, housing instability, and food insecurity is essential to helping students become educated, engaged, and employed.
- Of the 317,042 urban core residents for whom poverty status is known, 19.0% live below the poverty level. This proportion is significantly higher than the statewide rate of 11.2 percent.
- Among incarcerated individuals, 37.6% have a high school diploma or equivalent while 25.5% have completed some college or earned an associate's degree. An additional 31.0% have less than a high school diploma.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT in Rhode Island

Rhode Island's attainment goal is for 70% of working-age residents to have a postsecondary degree or credential by 2030. This goal cannot be accomplished by any single agency or institution. Instead, Rhode Island must establish collective ownership and work together to provide resources and supports to Rhode Islanders as they pursue postsecondary education. Currently, the rate is 55.7%, with 49.0% having an associate degree or above and 6.7% with a certificate or credential.

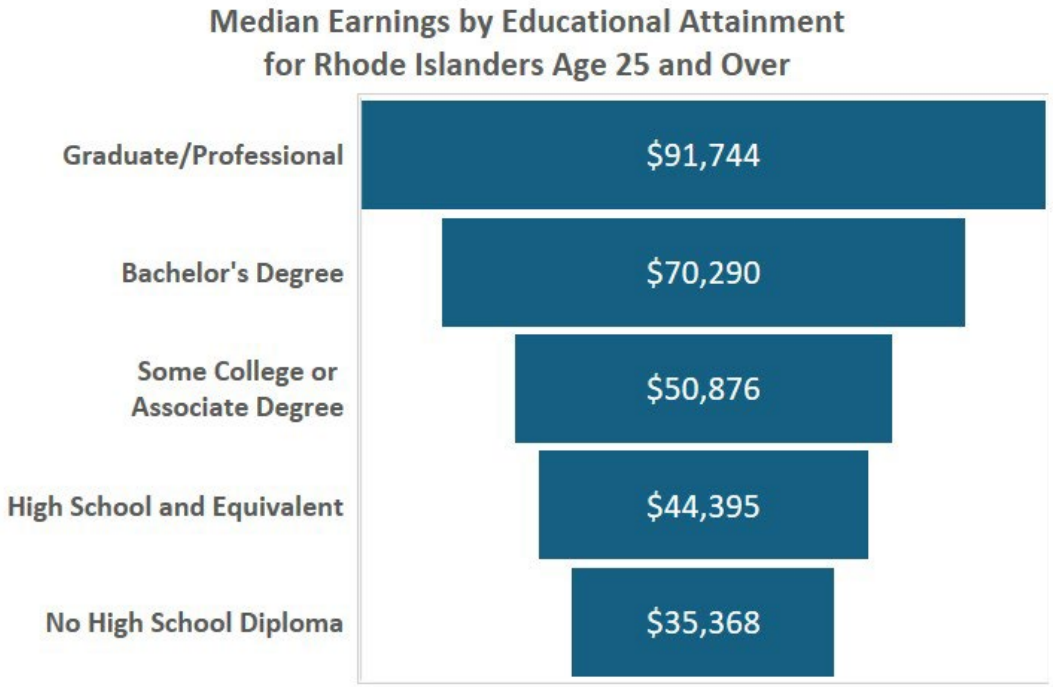


There is a lag between the collection of American Community Survey data and its public release. Currently, 2024 is the most recent year for which data are available.

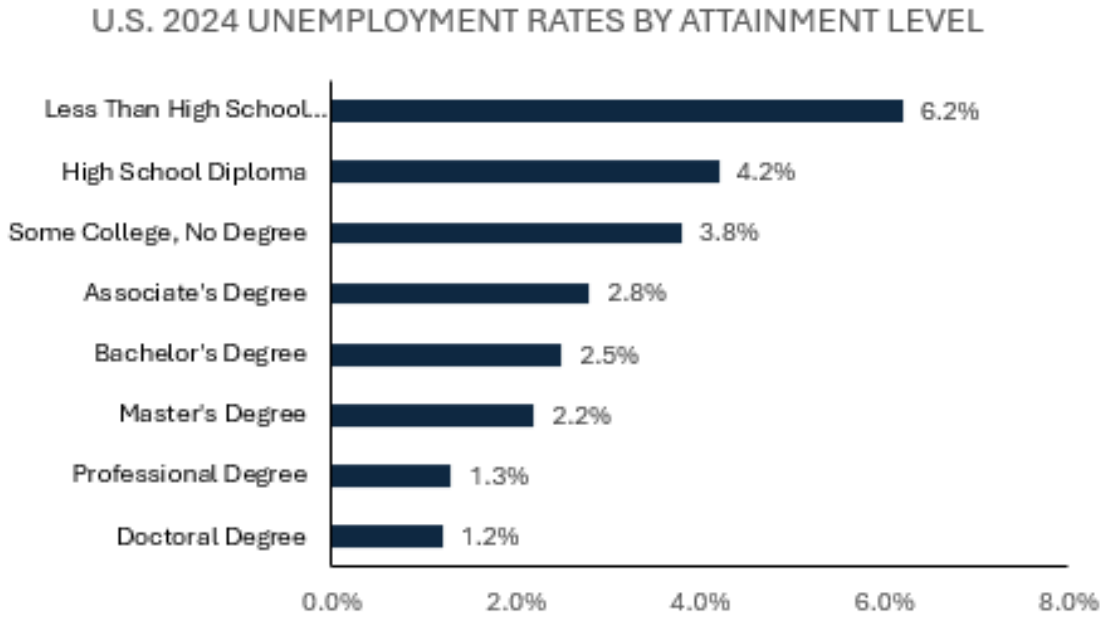
Certificates were added in 2014 and certifications in 2018. Data not collected in 2020 due to Covid.

Source: Lumina Foundation. (2026, February 5). *A Stronger Nation.* Indianapolis, IN

EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS in Rhode Island



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over.

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

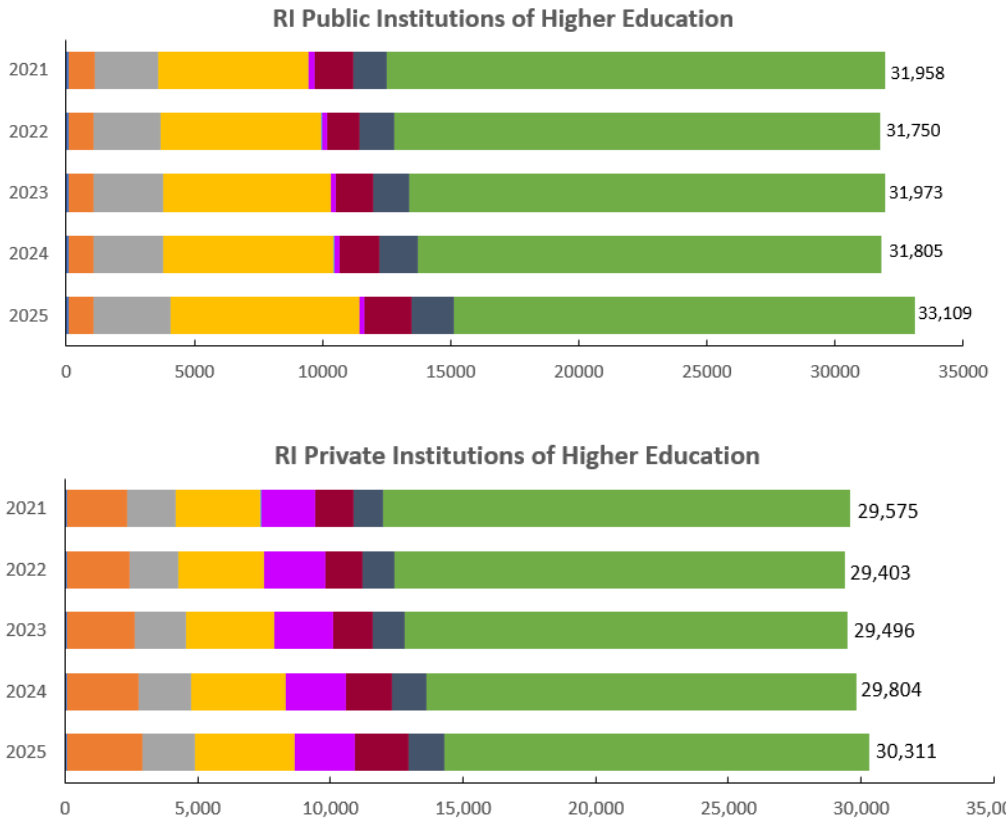
It is estimated that by 2031, 72% of jobs in the U.S. and 67% of jobs in RI will require some postsecondary education. (Source: Carnevale, A. P., et al. (2023). *After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031.* Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.)

Individuals who have earned a postsecondary degree are more likely to experience lower unemployment rates and higher median earnings.

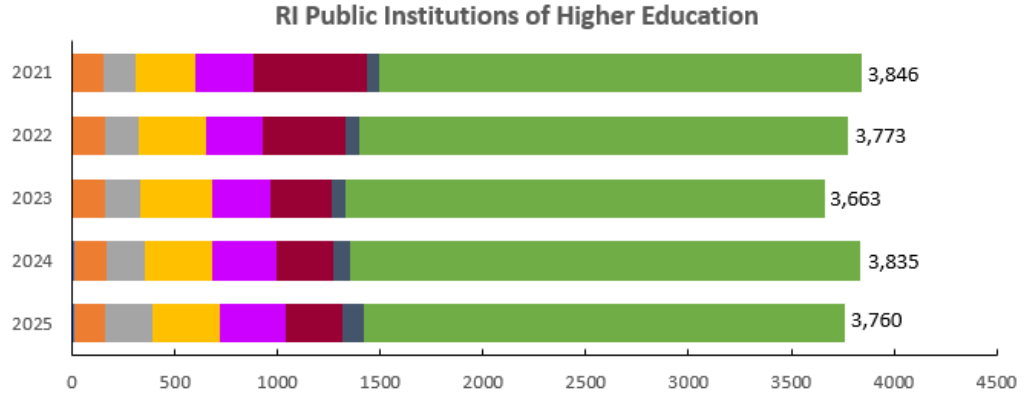
ENROLLMENT AND COMPLETION in Rhode Island Colleges and Universities

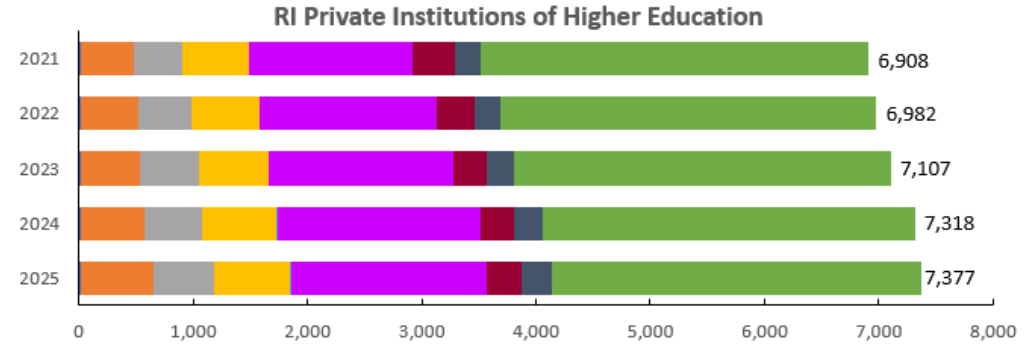
The Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner strives to implement solutions that will remove barriers to access, participation, and completion of a postsecondary degree or credential. From administering programs such as Rhode Island Reconnect to the management of a portfolio of state-funded scholarships, we are committed to meeting postsecondary attainment goals and helping all Rhode Islanders prosper.

Fall Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity



Fall Graduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity



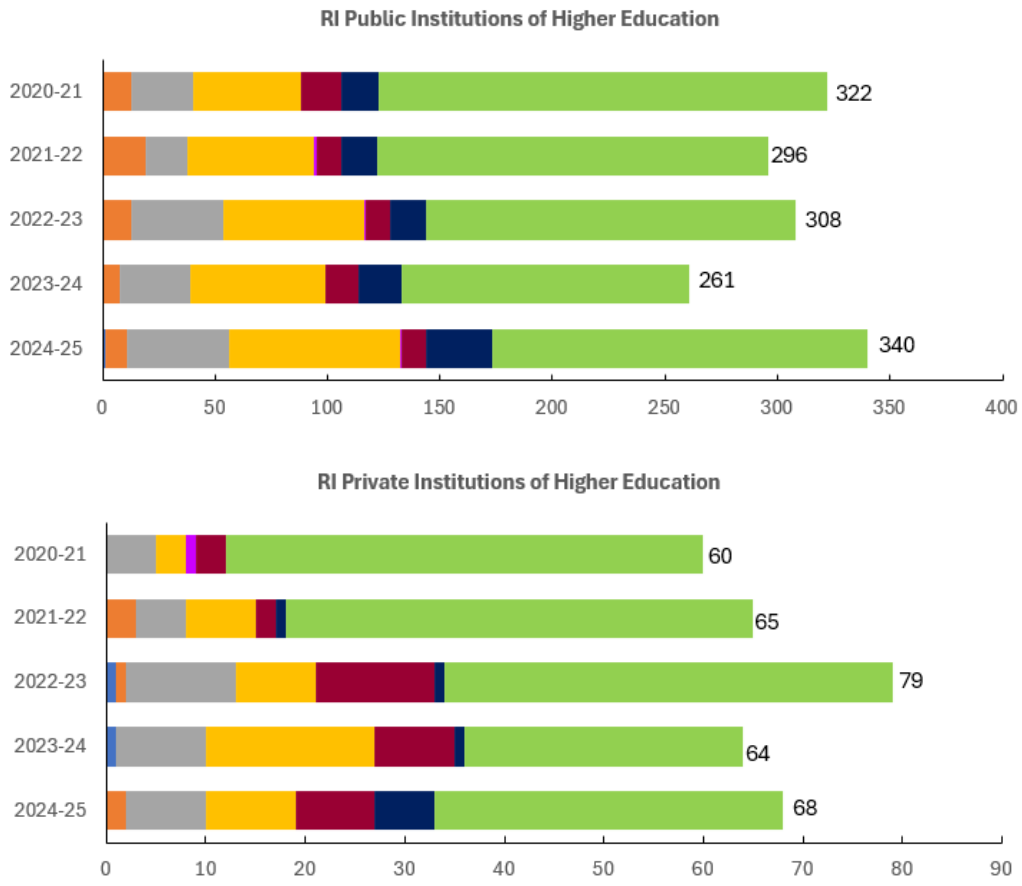




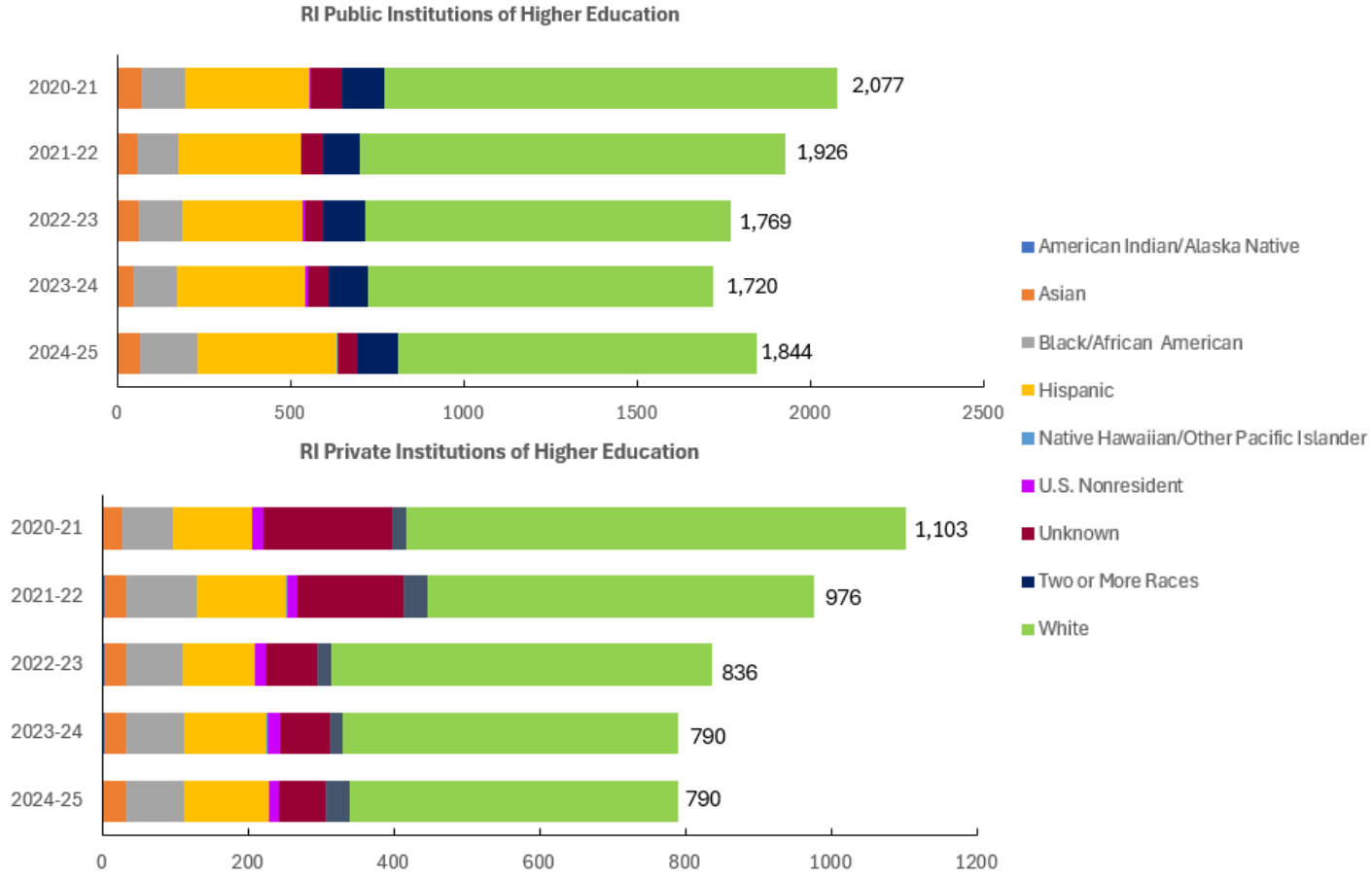
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall Enrollment survey.

ENROLLMENT AND COMPLETION in Rhode Island Colleges and Universities

Number of Certificates Awarded Below the Baccalaureate by Race/Ethnicity



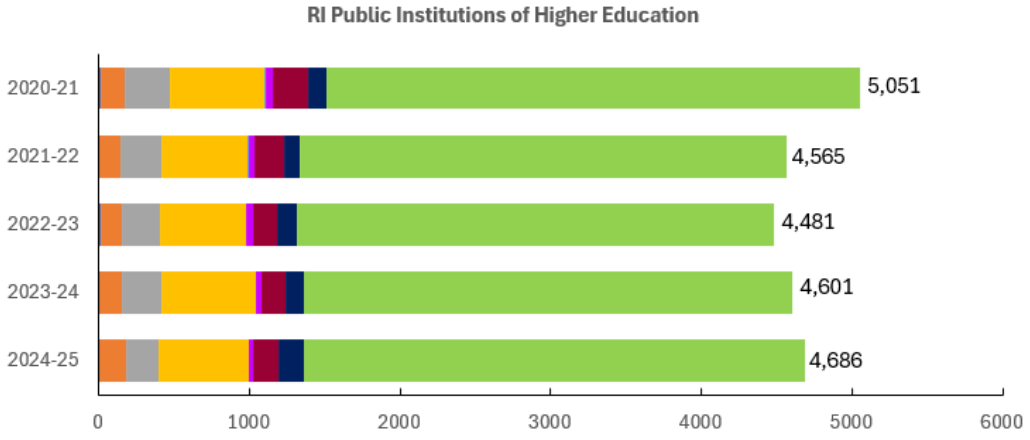
Number of Associate Degrees Awarded by Race/Ethnicity

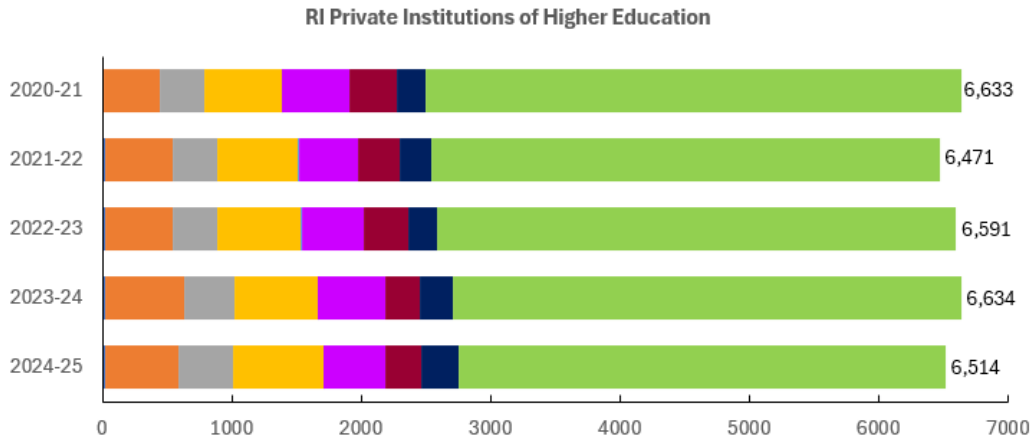


Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Completions survey.

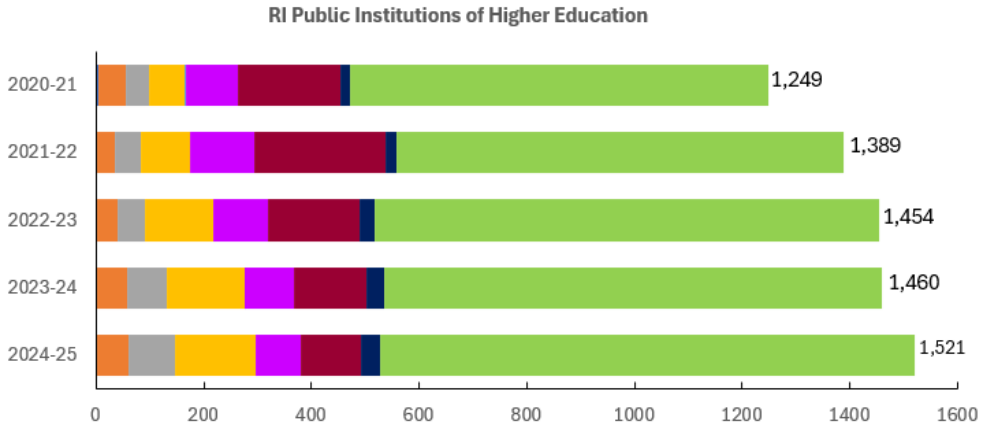
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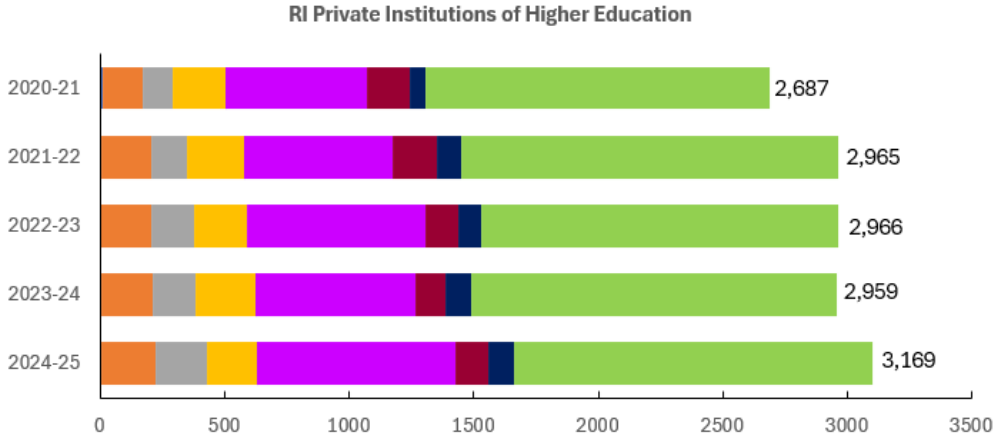
Number of Bachelor Degrees Awarded by Race/Ethnicity

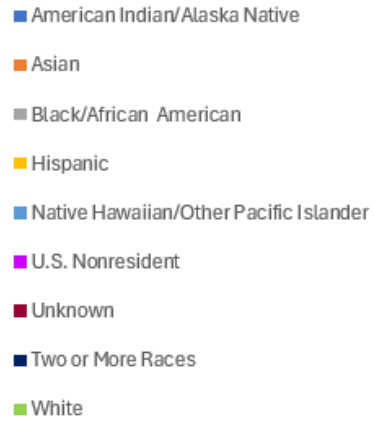




Number of Graduate Degrees Awarded by Race/Ethnicity







Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Completions survey.

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