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College-educated flock to Central Oregon, metropolitan Portland

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The number of college-educated Oregonians grew steadily during the past two decades — especially in Central Oregon — but there were significant regional disparities across the state, census data show.

The proportion of Oregon residents age 25 and older with at least a bachelor's degree grew from 20.6 percent in 1990 to 25.1 percent in 2000. The figure climbed to 28.3 percent during the 2005-2009 period, according to newly released American Community Survey (ACS) estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau. The margin of error for the five-year period was plus or minus 0.3 percent.

Average educational attainment in the Portland metropolitan area, which includes Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties, was consistently higher than the state average during the past two decades. What's more, the proportion of college-educated people in the three counties increased more precipitously than any other part of Oregon.

In Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties combined, 25.2 percent of residents had at least a bachelor's degree in 1990. The figure was 31.3 percent in 2000 and 36 percent (/- 0.3 percent) during the 2005-2009 period. Here's how the counties changed over time:

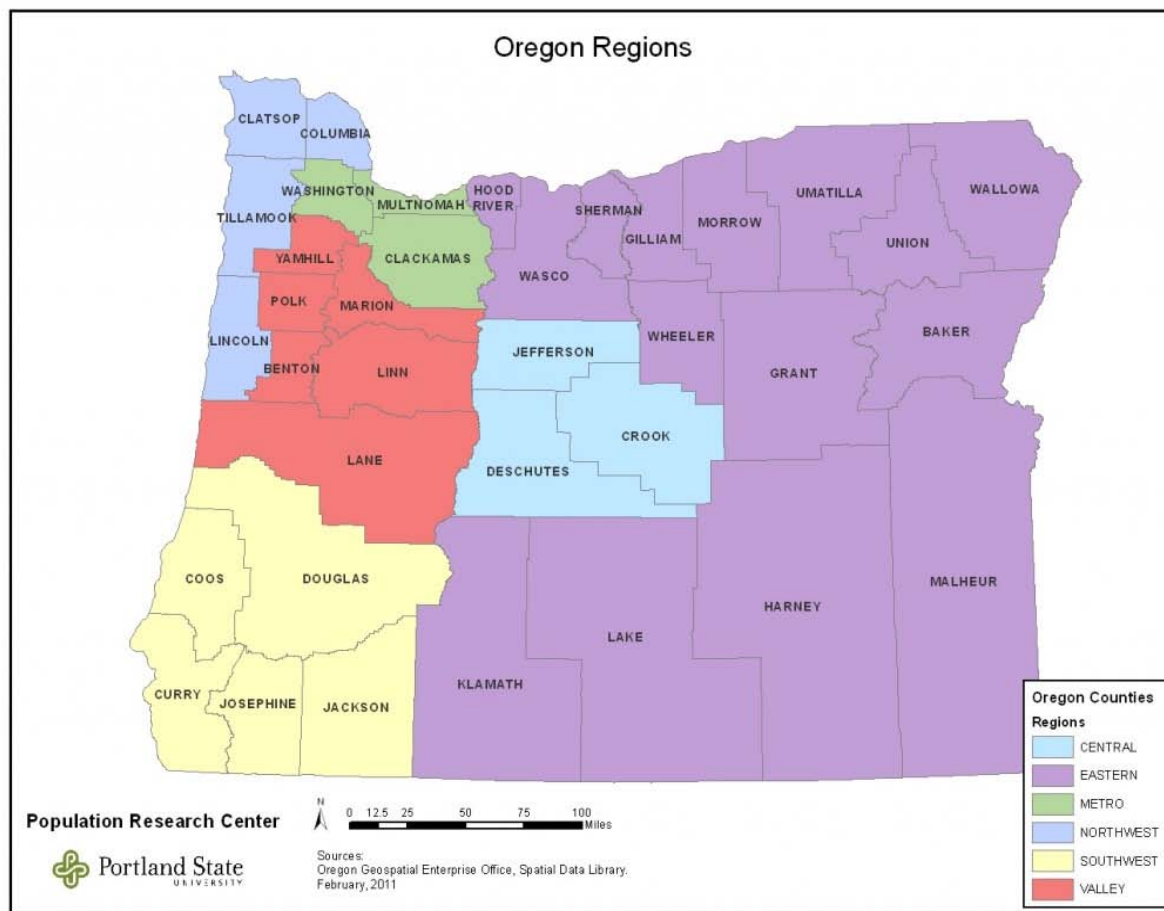
- College educational attainment in Washington and Clackamas counties increased by more than 4 percent, with a margin of error of plus or minus 0.3 percent, following Census 2000.
- Multnomah County experienced one of the state's largest increases in educational attainment during the period, at 6.2 percent (/-0.6 percent). Portland was a major factor: 25 percent of the city's residents age 25 or older had at least a bachelor's degree in 1990; the figure climbed to 43 percent during the 2005-2009 period.

In addition to general increases in educational attainment for residents already residing in the Portland metropolitan area, relatively young college-educated individuals moving to the metroplex contributed to the growth.

So, how did other parts of the state stack up?

Central Oregon, including Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties, was second to only the Portland metropolitan region in terms of educational attainment. Along with the Portland metropolitan area, Central Oregon had one of the state's largest increases in educational attainment during the past 20 years (Figure 1, below).

In 1990, 16.9 percent of residents in Central Oregon had at least a bachelor's degree. In 2000 and during the 2005-2009 period, the figure increased to 22.1 percent and 26 percent (/- 0.9 percent), respectively. From 2000 to the 2005-2009 period, the region's largest increases in educational attainment were in Deschutes and Crook counties, at 3.9 percent (/- 1.1 percent) and 3.2 percent (/- 2.2 percent), respectively. Population in Deschutes and Crook grew at 48 percent and 42 percent, respectively, during the period — the fastest relative population growth in the state. Ample recreational opportunities, real estate and rural amenities helped lure well-educated migrants.



The Upper Willamette Valley, including Benton, Lane, Linn, Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties, followed Central Oregon. In 1990, 20.6 percent of residents in Upper Willamette Valley counties had at least a bachelor's degree. The proportion increased to 23.7 percent in 2000 and 24.8 percent (/- 0.4 percent) in 2005-2009.

In 1990 and 2000, these counties exceeded or kept pace with Oregon's average educational attainment levels. During the 2005-2009 period, however, buoyed by considerable increases in educational attainment in the Portland metro area and Central Oregon, levels dipped below the state average.

While the Willamette Valley region is the home of several major educational institutions, including the University of Oregon (Lane County), Oregon State University (Benton County) and Willamette University (Marion County), many college-educated individuals seeking employment after completing their degree leave the region, the data show.

Increases in educational attainment after 2000 were greatest in Yamhill and Linn counties, at 2.4 percent (/- 1.2 percent) and 2.2 percent (/- 1 percent), respectively. Benton County, with 47.7 percent (/- 1.8 percent) of residents possessing at least a bachelor's degree, had the highest educational attainment of any county in Oregon.

Benton stood in stark contrast with the Northwest, Southwest, and Eastern counties, which had the lowest levels of educational attainment in Oregon. On average, 14 percent of residents in these counties possessed a bachelor's degree or higher in 1990; the percentage increased to 17 percent in 2000 and 19.5 percent in 2005-2009. Here's how the regions compared:

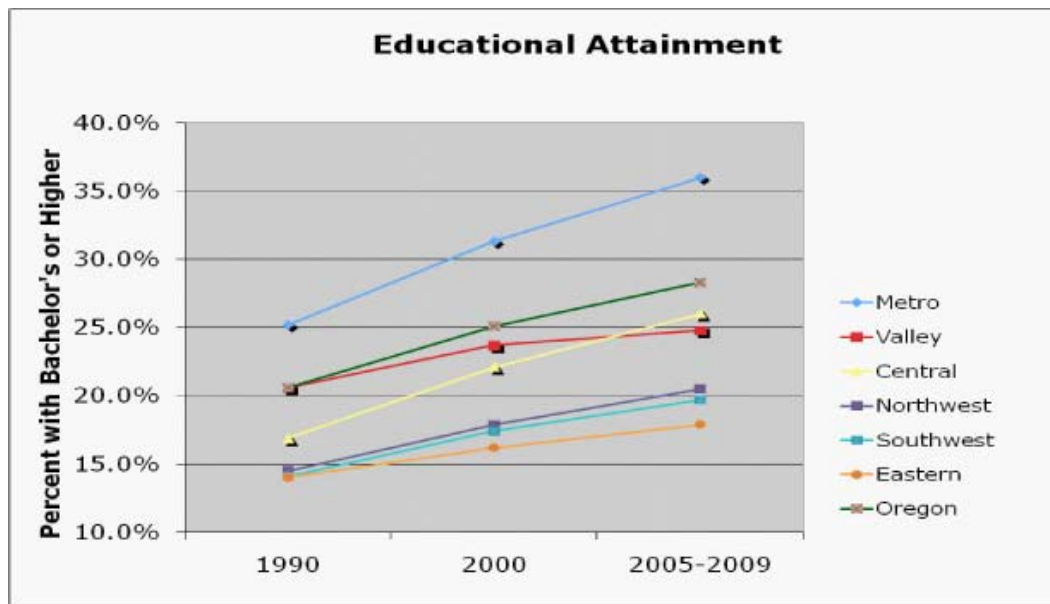
Northwest Oregon, including Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln and Tillamook counties, experienced a modest increase in educational attainment, from 14.5 percent in 1990 to 20.5 percent (/- 0.8 percent) in 2005-2009. The largest increases were in Clatsop and Columbia counties, both averaging a 3 percent (/- 1.5 percent) increase in educational attainment.

Southwest Oregon, which includes Douglas, Jackson, Josephine, Coos and Curry counties, had a modest increase in educational attainment allowing the region to keep pace with Northwest Oregon, albeit at slightly lower levels. Largely boosted by Coos, Jackson and Josephine counties, 14.1 percent of Southwest Oregon residents had at least a bachelor's degree in 1990, 17.4 percent in 2000, and 19.7 percent (/- 0.5 percent) in 2005-2009.

Sparsely populated Eastern Oregon was last among regions in terms of educational attainment. Fourteen percent of the region's residents had at least a bachelor's degree in 1990; the figure climbed to 17.9 percent (/- 0.6 percent) during the 2005-2009 period.

While counties east of the Cascades — excluding Central Oregon — had the lowest levels of educational attainment in Oregon in the latest ACS period, educational attainment rose significantly in some Columbia River counties. Since 2000, educational attainment increased 4.1 percent (/- 2.7 percent) and 5.5 percent (/-2 percent) in Hood River and Wasco counties, respectively. In addition to increased commuting from Hood River County to the Portland metropolitan area, recreation, tourism, retirement migration, and technical jobs contributed to increases in this area.

Figure 1: Educational Attainment By Region



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2005-2009.

Interactive Map: Use zoom and pan to customize view, click on counties to highlight numbers in table. Click in table to highlight map entity.