

Wisconsin's Education Pipeline: Changing Gender Profiles

Investment in education is, with good reason, a focal point of economic development policy. On average, college graduates earn 80% more than high school graduates. Higher education is also critical to innovation which is fundamental to economic growth and development. There is also an entrepreneurial "sweet spot" at the bachelor's degree level. Places with a large share of their population holding a college degree, not more or less, have the highest rates of entrepreneurship in the form of business ownership. Thus, by growing the share of the Wisconsin workforce that is college-educated one would expect competitive wages, higher levels of innovation and entrepreneurship, and ensuing job creation.

In Wisconsin college-education attainment is not evenly distributed by gender. Historically, men dominated colleges and universities as reflected in the college education attainment of men and women age 65 and over (Figure 1). In the youngest cohort, however, a far larger share of women than men hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Throughout the state educated women outnumber college-educated men in nearly every county (Figure 2). One could reasonably conclude that women now represent the vast majority of more highly education people in Wisconsin.

Given the connection between bachelor's degree attainment and entrepreneurship, it is troubling that the large shares of college-educated women do not seem to correspond to high rates of entrepreneurship.

Figure 1: Share of Population with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher by Cohort, 2014 Wisconsin

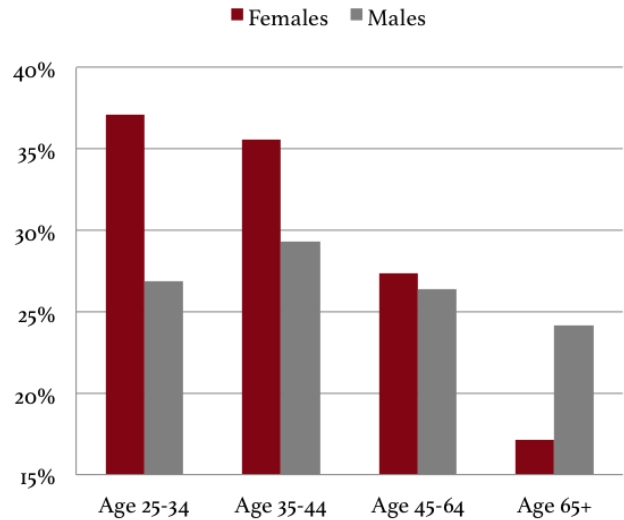


Figure 2: Ratio of College-educated Females to Males, 2014

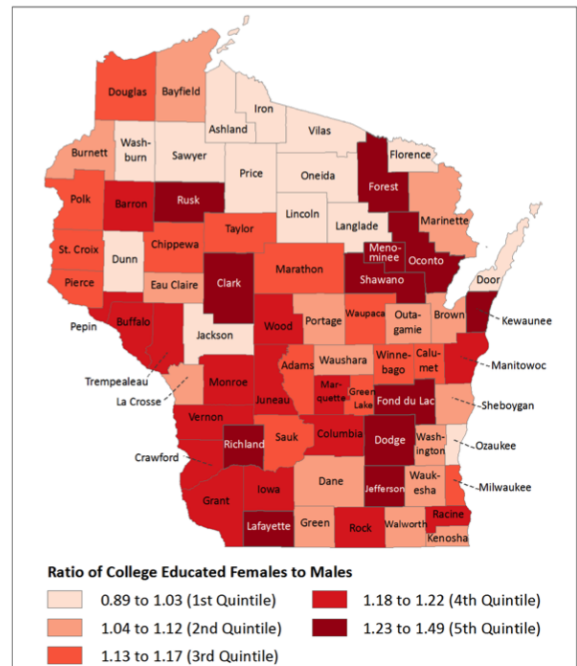
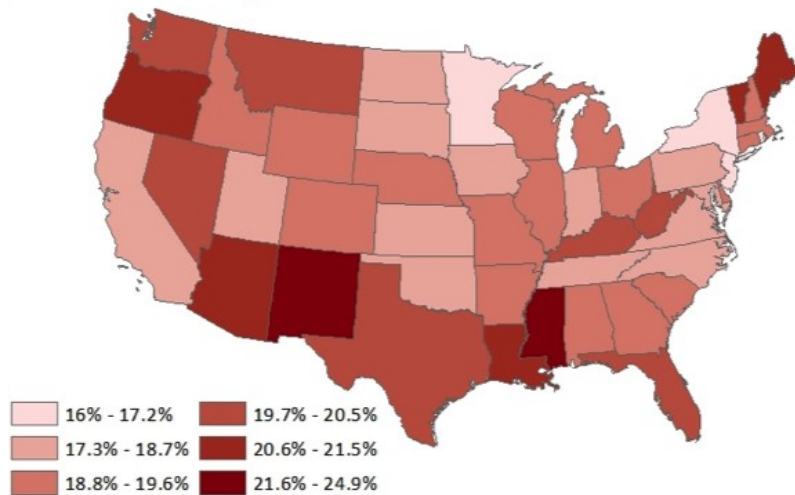


Figure 3: Share of Women-Owned or Managed Establishments, 2011

Source: Authors' calculations using the National Establishment Time Series.



This is particularly true in Wisconsin where the share of women owned businesses is quite low compared to the rest of the country (Figure 3). While part of the gender gap in entrepreneurship may be due to the fact that the surge of college-educated women is still relatively young and thus have not yet pursued their entrepreneurial ambitions, it raises questions about women entrepreneurs in Wisconsin. Specifically, are there constraints driving the persistent entrepreneurship gap.

One such consideration may be the fields of study women choose in college. Women are still a minority in STEM fields (Figure 4) which may better lend themselves to business ownership than some degrees in the humanities. Alternatively, child care availability may be a constraint to the extent that women with entrepreneurial pursuits are charged with rearing children, especially young children that require full-time primary care.

Clearly women are becoming a more important component of the educated workforce in Wisconsin and greater consideration of that trend must be in the forefront in economic growth and development policy.

Figure 4: Degree Fields of Population Age 25-64 by Gender Wisconsin, 2014

