



## Economic Diversity Is Ticking Up at Elite Colleges. Why?

**Julie J. Park**, University of Maryland-College Park

Economic diversity at selective institutions is ticking up slightly, and that's a good thing. In December, [analysis](#) from the Associated Press found that, of 17 highly selective colleges, almost all saw increases in their share of Pell Grant-eligible students between 2023 and 2025. At Swarthmore College, the share rose from 17 percent to 26 percent. At Tufts University, it went from 11 percent to 16 percent.

This news isn't as good as it seems on first glance: Most of the gains were due to changes to the Pell Grant [eligibility](#) formula in 2024, which made it easier for students to qualify. Matt Barnum of *Chalkbeat* [pointed out](#) that the uptick in low-income student enrollment was far outpaced by growth of students from high-income neighborhoods. That said, there appears to be a modest rise in low-income student enrollment, even when using estimates that approximate the old Pell criteria. What's driving it?