

USU UWLP Releases New Report on Educational Attainment of Utah Women

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The Utah State University [Utah Women & Leadership Project](#) (UWLP) released a new research and policy brief, [Educational Attainment of Utah Women: A 2026 Update](#), providing an in#depth analysis of how Utah women's education levels have changed over time and how they compare to national trends. The report draws on the most recent American Community Survey (ACS) data and highlights persistent gender gaps, regional differences, and statewide challenges in degree completion.

Susan R. Madsen, founding director of UWLP and coauthor of the report, said educational attainment is widely recognized as a driver of opportunity, health, and economic mobility.

"Through our research, we learned that higher levels of educational attainment are consistently linked to improved health and fitness, greater marital satisfaction, enhanced child welfare, stronger mental health, and higher levels of civic engagement," she said. "Yet these benefits are not evenly distributed—and Utah's patterns reveal both progress and areas of concern."

Utah's Educational Landscape Shows Mixed Progress

The report analyzes current ACS data and historical trends to assess how Utah women and men are faring across key educational milestones. Utah continues to outperform national averages in high school completion, with only 7.3% of adults lacking a diploma compared to

10.3% nationally. Women in Utah have earned high school degrees at slightly higher rates than men for two decades.

However, Utah remains among the states with the highest percentage of adults who start college but do not finish. In 2024, 22.2% of Utah adults aged 25 and older had completed some college but no degree. The report highlights that Utah still ranks among the worst states for its high percentage of men and women who start college and do not finish, underscoring the need for targeted retention strategies.

At the bachelor's level, Utah women and men earn degrees at similar rates, and Utah outperforms national averages. But gender gaps persist in graduate education. Utah men earn graduate and professional degrees at higher rates than women across all age groups, with the largest gaps appearing among older adults.

Regional Differences Across Utah Counties

The report includes detailed county#level data showing substantial variation in educational attainment across the state. Rural counties face specific challenges in high school completion, while some rural areas—such as Summit and Wasatch counties—lead the state in bachelor's and graduate degree attainment. Gender gaps also vary widely by county, with some rural regions showing significant disparities in graduate degree completion.

Policy Implications for Utah

The report outlines several policy priorities to strengthen educational outcomes statewide:

- Expand access to high#quality secondary and postsecondary education, especially in rural regions.
- Invest in evidence#based strategies to improve college retention and completion.
- Address gender gaps in graduate education through targeted recruitment, support, and financial pathways.
- Strengthen partnerships among higher education institutions, policymakers, and community organizations to align educational goals with workforce needs.

"As Utah continues to navigate rapid economic change, workforce demands, and persistent gender disparities, these findings highlight both progress and urgency," said Madsen. "Utah needs to continue to aggressively focus efforts on increasing enrollment and completion rates

for both women and men at all degree and certification levels.”

Yvette Young, research manager, Utah Women & Leadership Project, is lead author of the report.

The [Utah Women & Leadership Project](#) strengthens the impact of Utah girls and women through research, resources, and statewide engagement. Its premier initiative – [A Bolder Way Forward](#) – creates opportunities for Utahns to learn, collaborate, and drive meaningful change across 18 areas of focus. For more information, visit the [UWLP website](#). The UWLP is affiliated with [USU Extension](#).

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