

Increasing Economic Diversity at Ivy League Schools Shouldn't Be That Hard

Introduction

If you're one of the very few lower-income students who are fortunate enough to get into an Ivy League institution, your life trajectory is about to change. Perhaps even exponentially. Presidents, government leaders, Supreme Court Justices, and Fortune 500 company CEOs all disproportionately come from this small group of esteemed institutions.

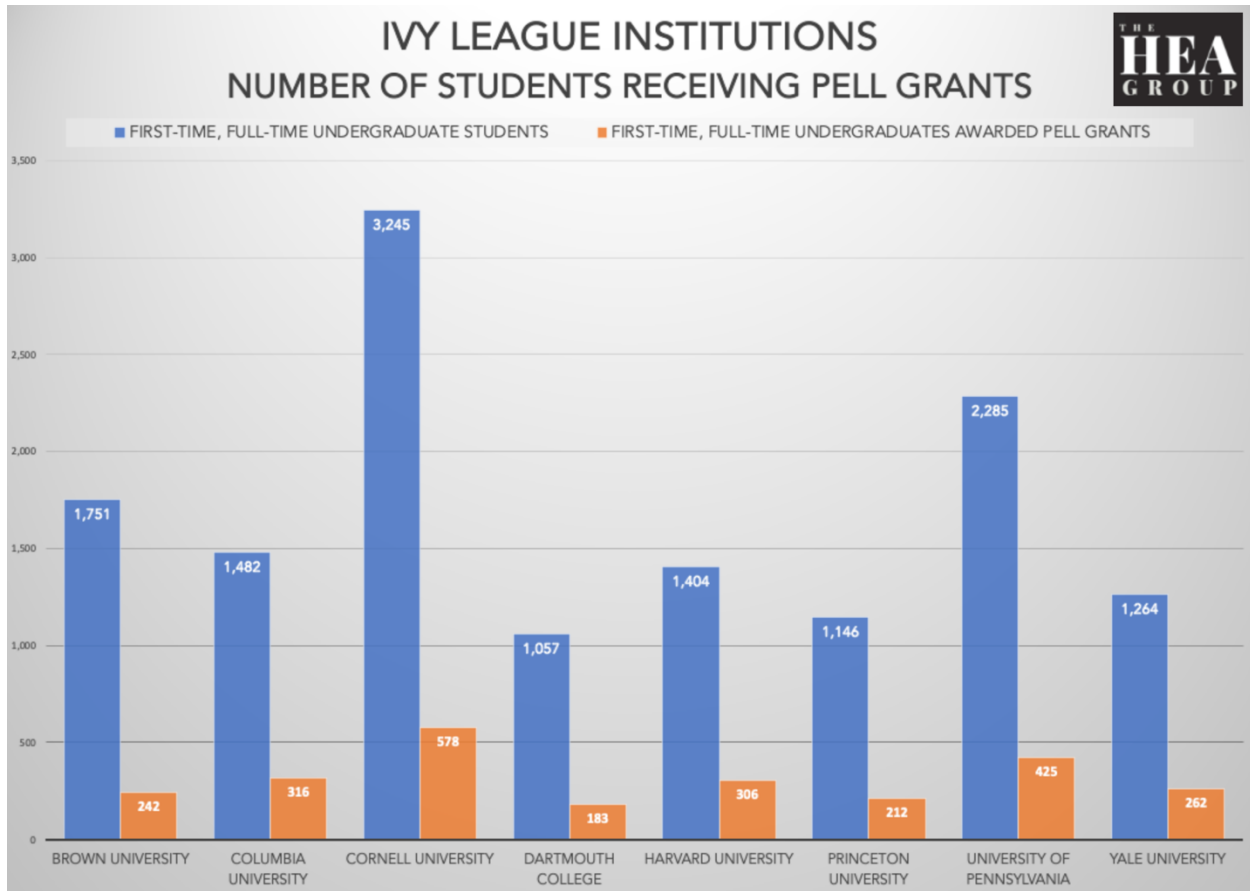
Unfortunately, your chances are limited. Overall, these institutions routinely admit less than 5% of students. And, if you're less well off, the likelihood decreases even further. Those from the bottom 20% of family income are [77 times less likely](#) than their wealthy peers to receive an admittance letter from an Ivy or Ivy-like school. Even if you submit the [same SAT scores](#), you're still less than half as likely to get in.

In response to the recent Supreme Court ruling limiting an institution's ability to consider race and ethnicity within its college admissions process, some are looking for other ways to ensure an equally representative student body. And with wealth playing such an important factor as to whether one is admitted to an Ivy League institution – or not admitted – one additional measure that schools can focus on is the economic diversity of its incoming class.

In this analysis, we explore efforts that Ivy League institutions can take to increase opportunities for students, especially those from lower- and moderate-income backgrounds. Specifically, we examine what a modest 5% increase of these students would look like at these schools. Even such small growth could pay big dividends for the low- and moderate-income students who get to attend.

Current Enrollment at Ivy League Institutions

There are only eight Ivy League institutions across the U.S., and only a very small proportion of students attend them. For example, the 2021 incoming class at all eight consisted of only 13,634 undergraduate students; only 2,524 (18.5%) of these students were Pell Grant recipients (meaning they are from low- and moderate-income backgrounds). Compare this to the [15.4 million students](#) and [6.2 million Pell Grant recipients](#) (~40%) who enrolled at every other institution across the rest of the country.

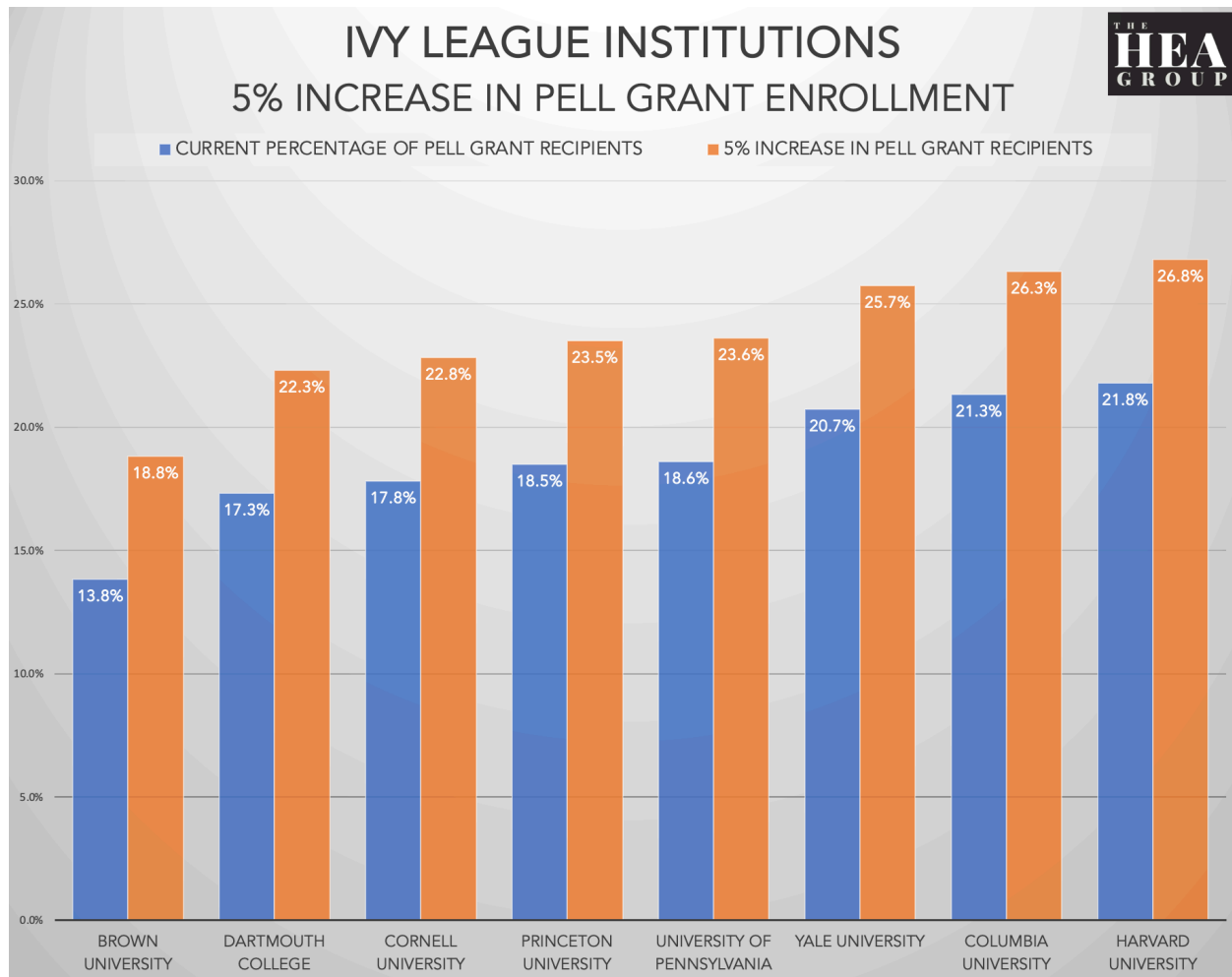


*Data come from the U.S. Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data system. They reflect first-time, full-time undergraduate degree/certificate-seeking students in 2021.

Out of the Ivies, Cornell had the largest incoming class of 3,245 students. Yet, only 578 of those students – or 17.8% – were Pell Grant recipients, indicating they were from low- or moderate-income backgrounds. Harvard had the highest proportion of Pell Grant recipients enrolled – 21.8% – but that only equates to 306 low- and moderate-income students who enrolled.

Increasing Pell Grant Enrollment by 5%

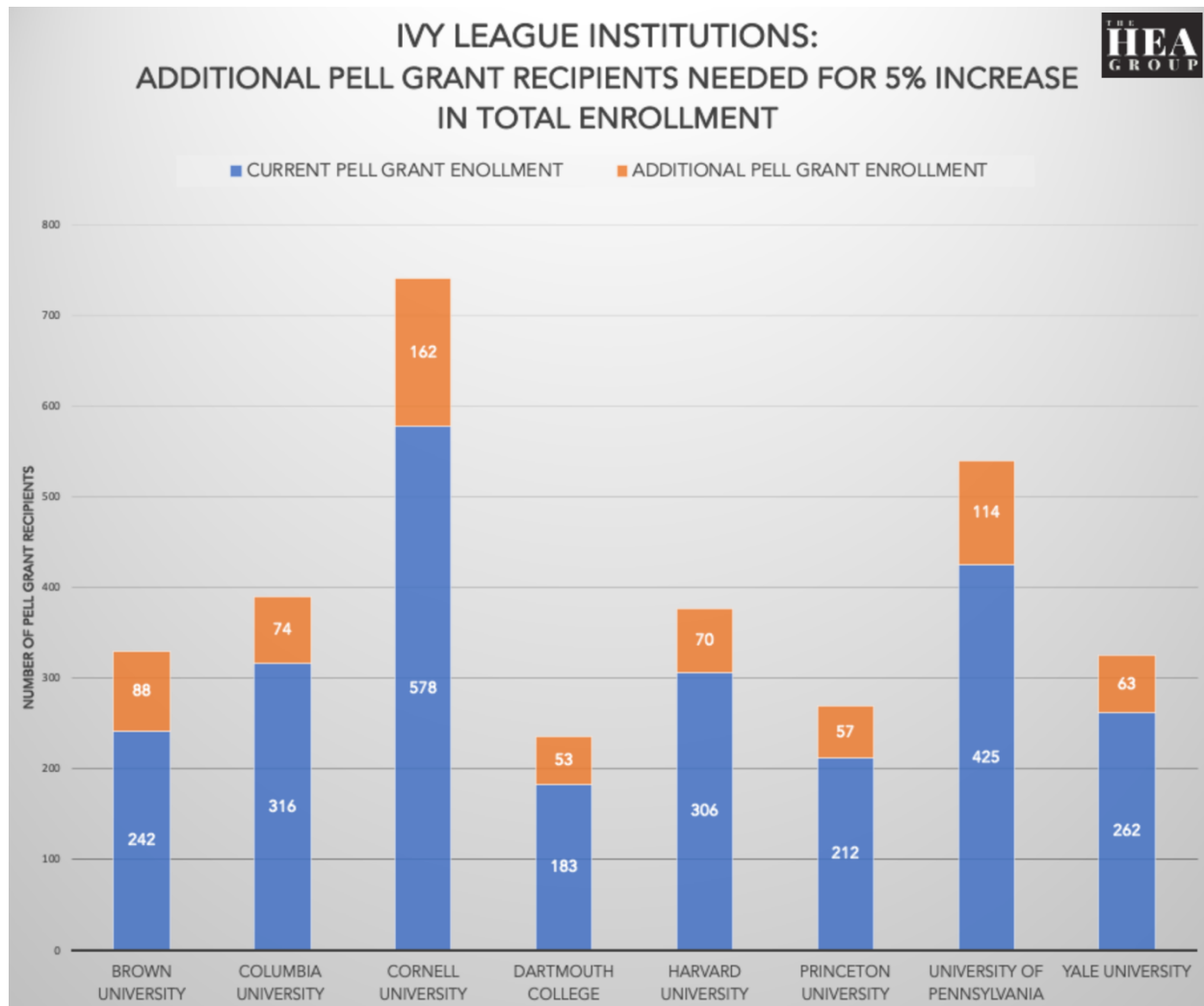
Being that Ivy League schools enroll such a small proportion of Pell Grant recipients to begin with, enrolling a higher proportion is actually a small lift. Overall, low- and moderate-income students average only 18.5% of total enrollment at these institutions —far less than the ~40% average at other schools. This means that a modest 5% increase would still equate to less than a fourth of their overall enrollment.



At Brown, the institution with the lowest proportion of Pell Grant recipients, a 5% increase would mean that enrollment of these students would jump from 13.8% to 18.8%. At Harvard, the Ivy League institution with the highest proportion of Pell Grant recipients, a 5% increase would allow 26.8% of their student body to consist of low- and moderate-income students. A modest increase, such as 5%, would still mean that a considerably smaller proportion of Pell Grant recipients attend these institutions in comparison to other institutions across the U.S.

Number of Students Needed to Increase Pell Enrollment by 5%

Combined, Ivy League institutions only need to enroll *682 additional lower- and moderate-income* students in order to result in a 5% across the board increase. At some of these institutions, this equates to approximately 50 more Pell Grant students every year. At others, it means a modest increase of around 150.



For example, Dartmouth, which enrolled 183 Pell Grant recipients, would only need to increase its Pell enrollment by 53 additional students, bringing the total up to 236. This would increase the percentage of low- and moderate-income students from 17.3% to 22.3% of the 1,057 total student body. Similarly, Princeton and Yale would only need to enroll 57 and 63 additional low- and moderate-income students, respectively, to increase the proportion of Pell Grant recipients by 5% at each of their institutions.

Conclusion

While the breadth of economic mobility is [noticeably larger](#) at other institutions, there are actions the Ivies can take to play their part, while still maintaining their elite status. One of them is making a modest commitment to increase the low- and moderate-income students each of them enrolls. Even 682 students would show progress, as those from underserved backgrounds would benefit from the resources and social connections made at these institutions. If the Ivy Leagues believe in the American



Dream, it's about time they share their prosperity with other deserving students. After all, lifting this generation up and leaving them better off than the previous benefits us all.