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# More Hispanics earning community college degrees

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Bakersfield College takes the lead as higher education report says more Hispanics are attaining associate degrees from community colleges.

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From 2001 to 2006 there was a 125 percent increase in Hispanics graduating from Bakersfield College, from 237 grads in 2001 to 534 in 2006, according to school spokeswoman Amber Chiang.

A broader study from the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium, which covers 24 colleges in a 10-county area, said the number grew by 2.1 percent in the region.

"That's huge that white and Hispanic students have evened out in terms of enrollment," said Executive Director Cheri Cruz.

"Enrollment is up across the board and that's good, too."

The enormous disparity between the Bakersfield College and Consortium numbers can be attributed to Bakersfield's growing Hispanic population compared to the Central Valley region studied, Chiang said.

According to census figures, from 2000 to 2006, the population of Hispanic 18- to 29-year-olds in Kern County grew by 46 percent, from 55,544 to 81,117.

Additionally, Bakersfield College officials noted the college has made efforts to become more accessible to students.

“The college has diversified its schedule,” Chiang said. “People need financial aid and they need to work. We have classes in the evening.”

Chiang also pointed to financial aide increases and a bad state economy as reasons more people are going back to school to finish their education.