

THE COLOR of MONEY

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A financial and career gap between whites and minorities could get even wider unless minority college-graduation and job-training rates

improve.

The gap is evident from government figures about El Paso County. Per capita income for whites was \$28,290 in 2005, and the average for minority groups was \$19,240, according to the U. S. Census Bureau.

As demand rises for highly educated workers, the disparities could worsen. Minority groups are at risk of being left behind, economists for the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City said in a study issued last month.

The study covered minorities in Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Wyoming, the northern half of New Mexico and the western third of Missouri.

“To close the sizable earnings gaps that most minority groups in the region have, they will need to achieve further levels of education,” said the report, written by Chad Wilkerson and Megan Williams.

The report recommends that governments enact policies encouraging minorities to pursue jobs that require only moderate training after high school such as a vocational certificate or associate’s degree.

Some of those jobs include dental hygienists, legal assistants, emergency medical technicians and appraisers. Demand for those jobs is expected to increase sharply during the next several years, and getting proper training would position minorities for a big jump in income, the study said.

That approach might help minorities, but it isn’t without risk, said John Brock, an economics professor at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. People with jobs that require lower education levels could be more vulnerable to economic changes that send work overseas or make their skills obsolete. People with higher education levels — at least a bachelor’s degree — are often better able to adapt, Brock said.

“The long run is to somehow improve the education of all kids in this country to where all, particularly minorities, have the opportunity to aspire to these higher levels of education,” he said.

As it is, minorities in El Paso County are dramatically behind in educational attainment. Nineteen percent of minorities haven’t completed high school, compared with 5 percent of whites. Thirty-eight percent of whites in the county have completed a bachelor’s degree or

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higher, compared with 19 percent of minorities.

Like other parts of the nation, minorities in El Paso County have a sizable presence in the area's colleges and universities. But the representation of minorities slips a bit in numbers of people graduating.


At Pikes Peak Community College, minorities made up 26 percent of the enrollment in fall 2005 and 24 percent of the graduates for the year. For UCCS, minorities were 19 percent of enrollment in fall 2005 and 16 percent of the graduates for the year.

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