Report on the Diversity of Political Science Majors

Paul S. Herrnson

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This report analyzes trends among undergradates who major in political science (POLS) compared to students who major in any College of Liberal Arts and Sciences department (CLAS), and all University of Connecticut undergraduate students (UCONN). Most of the analysis includes data fom 2002 to 2022 (fewer years are included when data are unavailable). The report documents the growth and representation of female majors; majors who identify as a member of a traditionally underrepresented racial or ethnic group; majors identifed as international students; and first-generation majors. The analysis is based on data provided by UCONN's Institutional Research Team.

Overall, the findings demonstate the growth and inceased representation of female, underrepresented ethnic and racial groups, international, and first-generation POLS majors. This growth either parallels or exceeds that for CLAS and UCONN. However, POLS lags behind CLAS and UCONN in enrollments of international students.

The first set of figures documents the trend in the number of POLS majors relative to CLAS and UConn undergraduate students. Figure 1 demonstrates that POLS majors constitute about 6% of CLAS students and 3% of all UCONN students. Figure 2 provides a more focused presenation of the data, and demonstrates the number of POLS majors grew to 721 in 2005 and then began to decline before stabilizing at about 570. Enrollments in all CLAS majors were relatively stable, and then experiencer a preciptous dip in 2021. UCONN experienced overall growth in enrollment during this period. It appears CLAS enrollments were the most heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

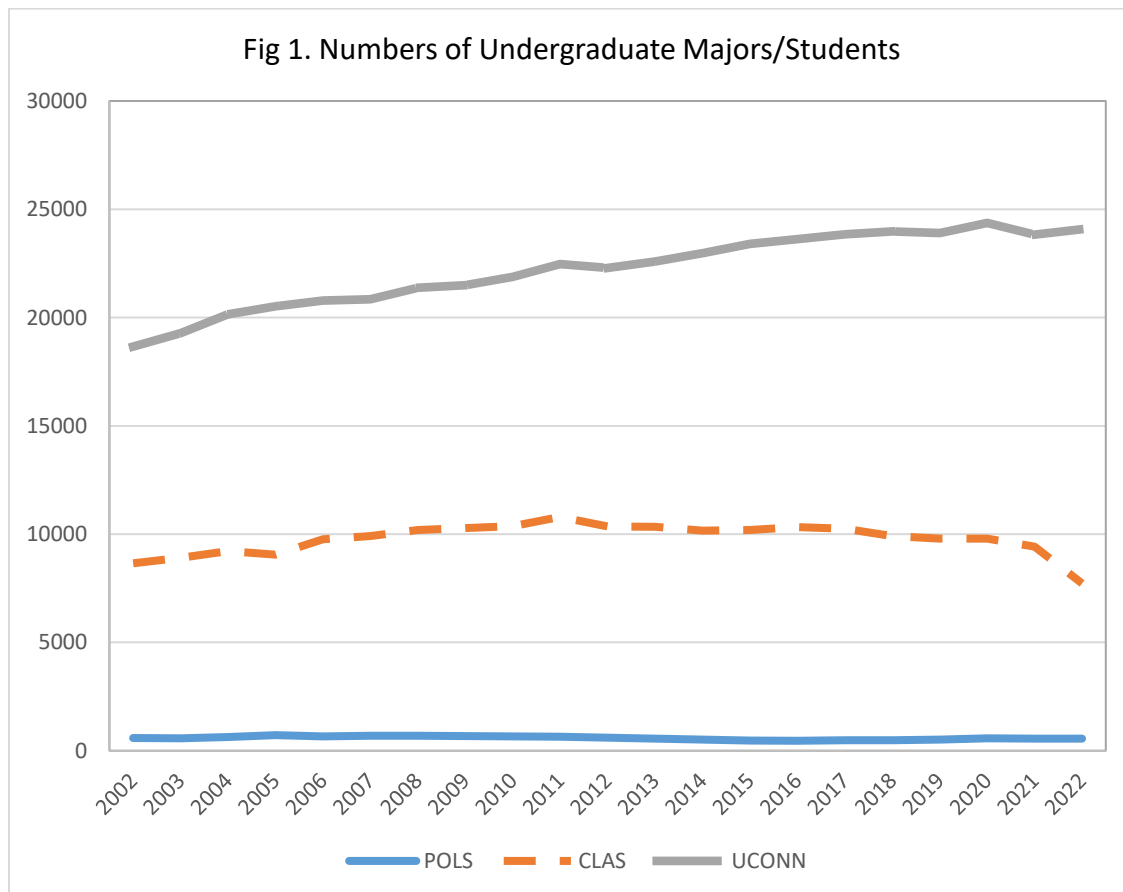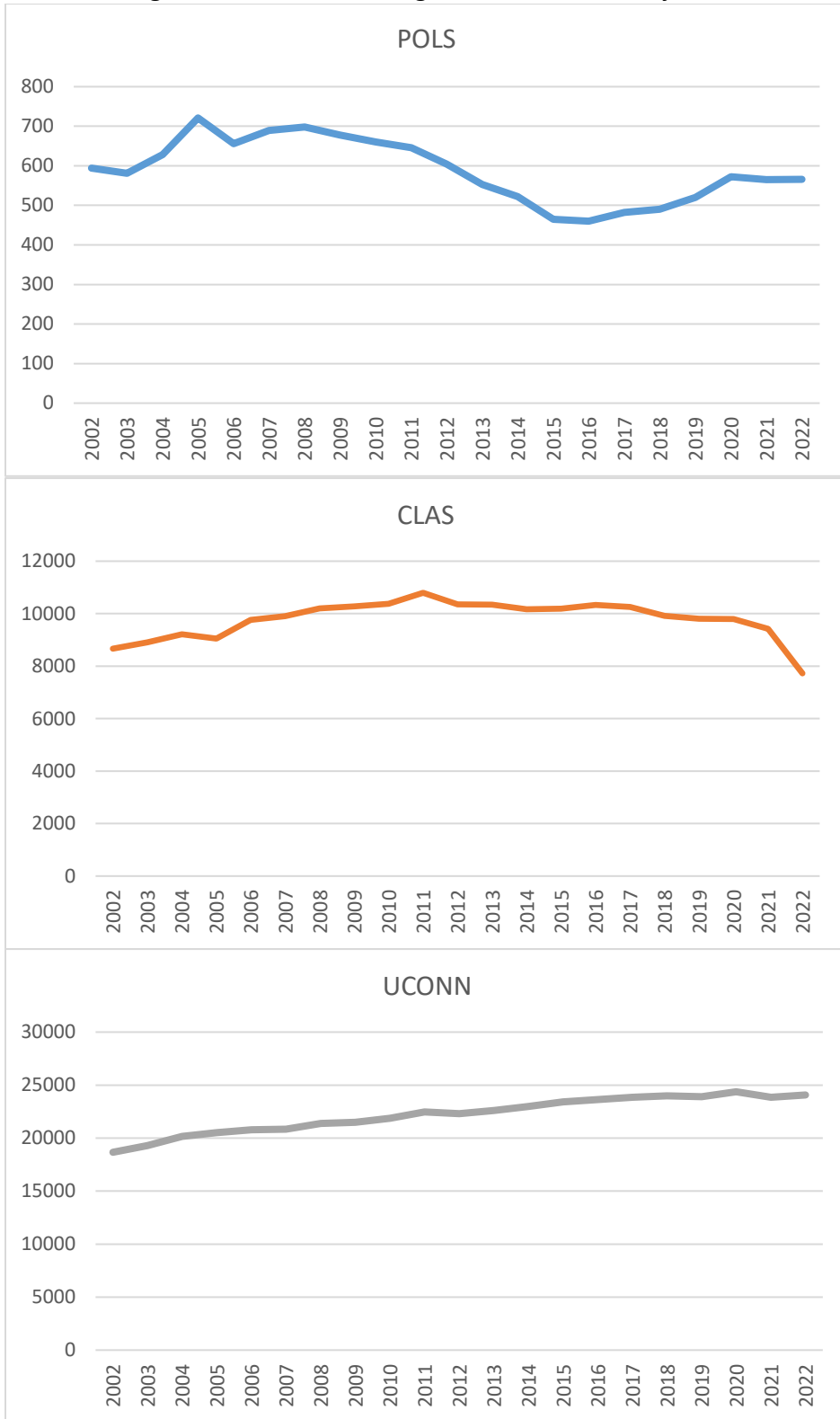Fig 1. Numbers of Undergraduate Majors/Students

Fig 2. Numbers of Undergraduate Student Majors

Figures 3 through 11 provide an overview of trends in the demographic composition of POLS and other majors. Figure 3 shows that between 2002 and 2022, the number of female majors typically ranged from the low 200s to the low 300s, peaking at 325 in 2020.
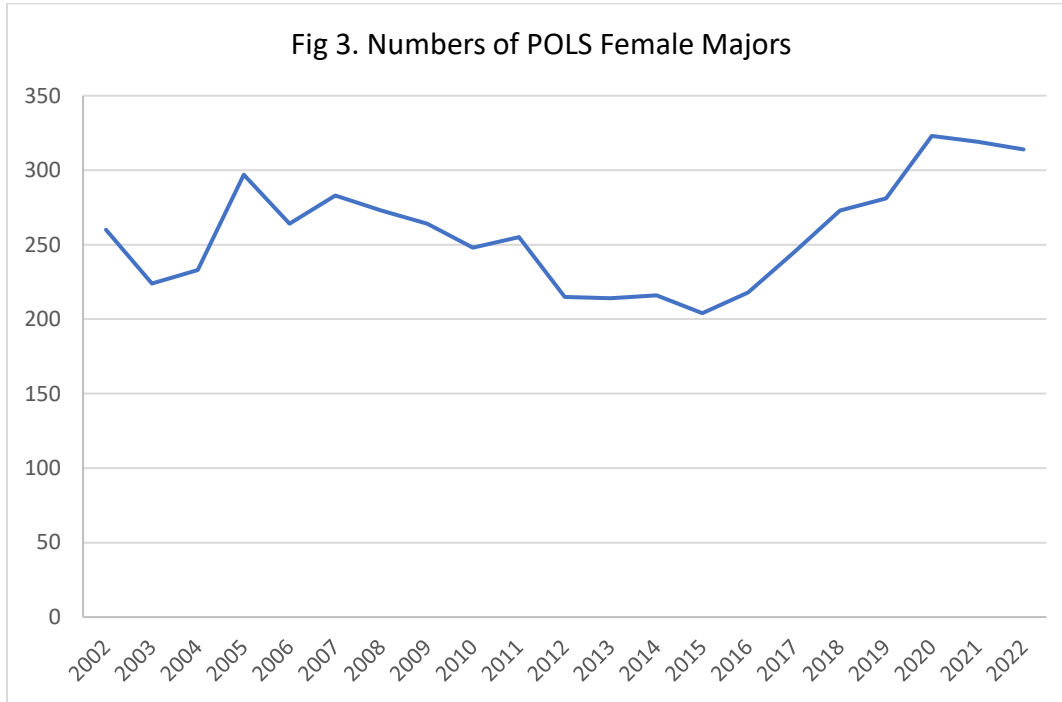

Fig 3. Numbers of POLS Female Majors

Figure 4 compares the percentage of POLS majors who are female to the percentages of CLAS majors and UCONN students who are female. Women's representation among POLS majors grew substantially since 2012, peaking at approximately at 56% in 2021. Women's representation among CLAS majors grew more modestly, and female enrollment in UCONN remained relatively flat.

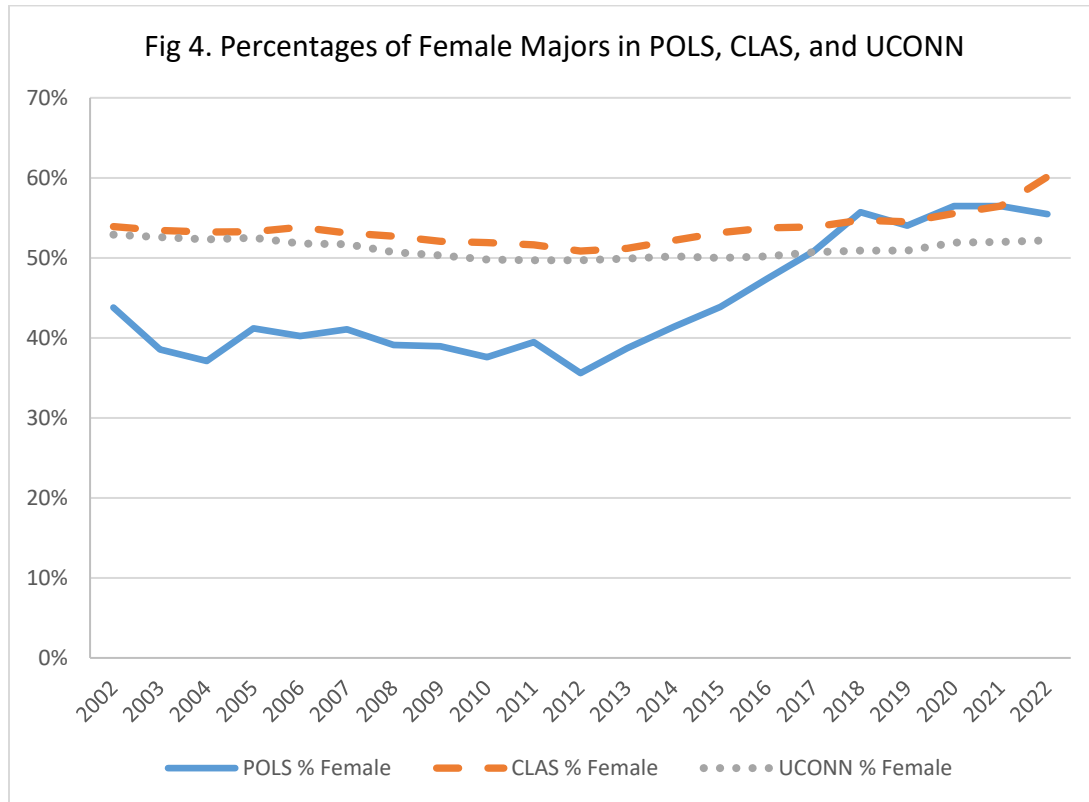Fig 4. Percentages of Female Majors in POLS, CLAS, and UCONN

Figure 5 demonstrates the total number of POLS majors who identify themselves as Hispanic/Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or belonging to two or more groups increased fairly steadily to 2018 and then climbed until it reached 246 in 2022. Figure 6 shows POLS, CLAS, and UCONN each experienced an approximately 25 percentage-point increase in the number of majors who identify with an underrepresented racial or ethnic group.

Fig 5. Numbers of POLS Majors who Self-Identify as from an Underrepresented Racial or Ethnic Group

Fig 6. Percentages of Majors in POLS, CLAS, and UCONN who Self-Identify as from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group
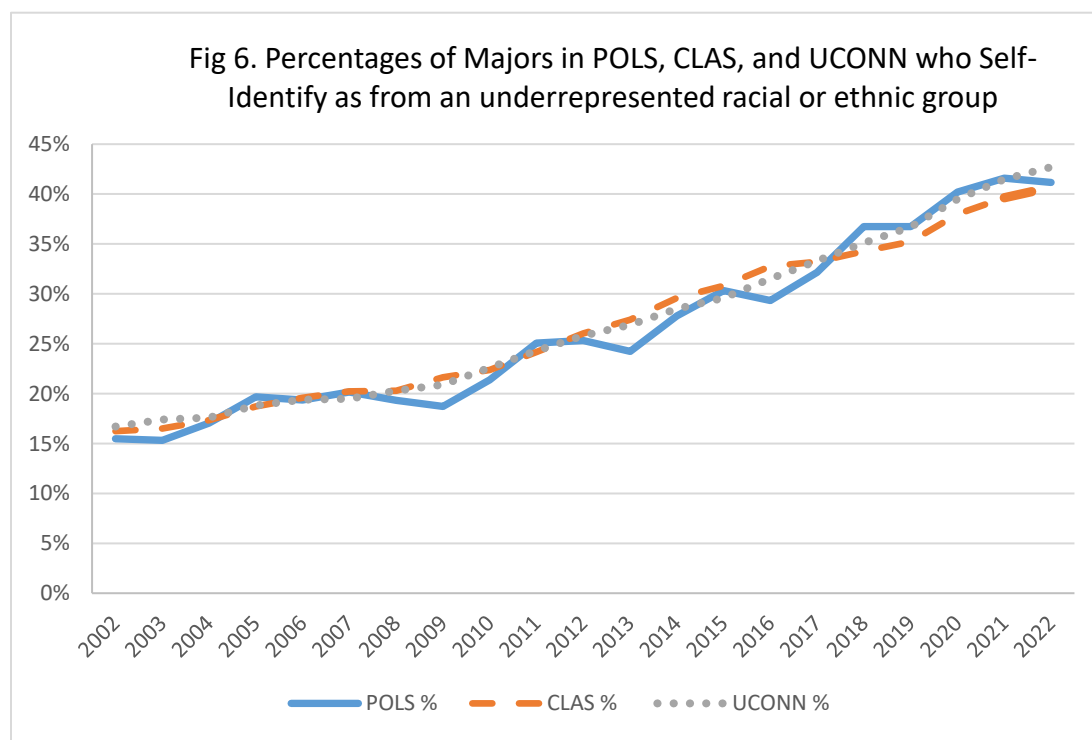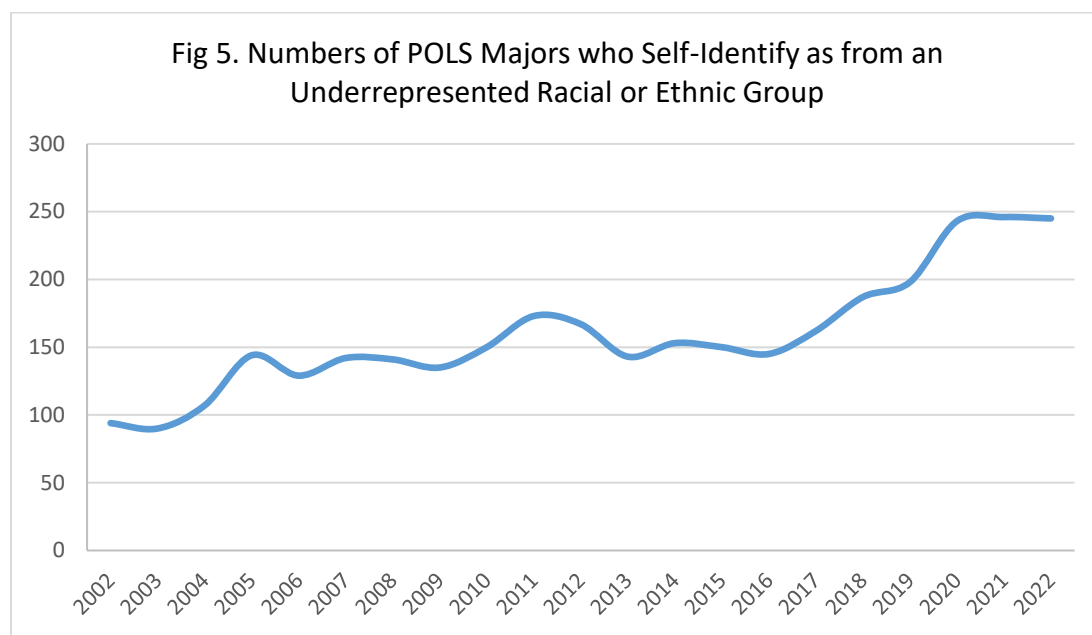
Figure 7 provides further insights into trends among POLS majors who identify as students from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group. It demonstrates the greatest growth was among those who listed as Hispanic/Latino, and much of this growth occurred after 2016. Between 2002 and 2005 the number of Black/African American students more than doubled, and it has averaged about 48 since then. There have been modest increases in the numbers of POLS majors who identify as Asian or as belonging to two or more races. The number of America Indians and Alaska Natives has never exceeded 5 and has been consistently small.
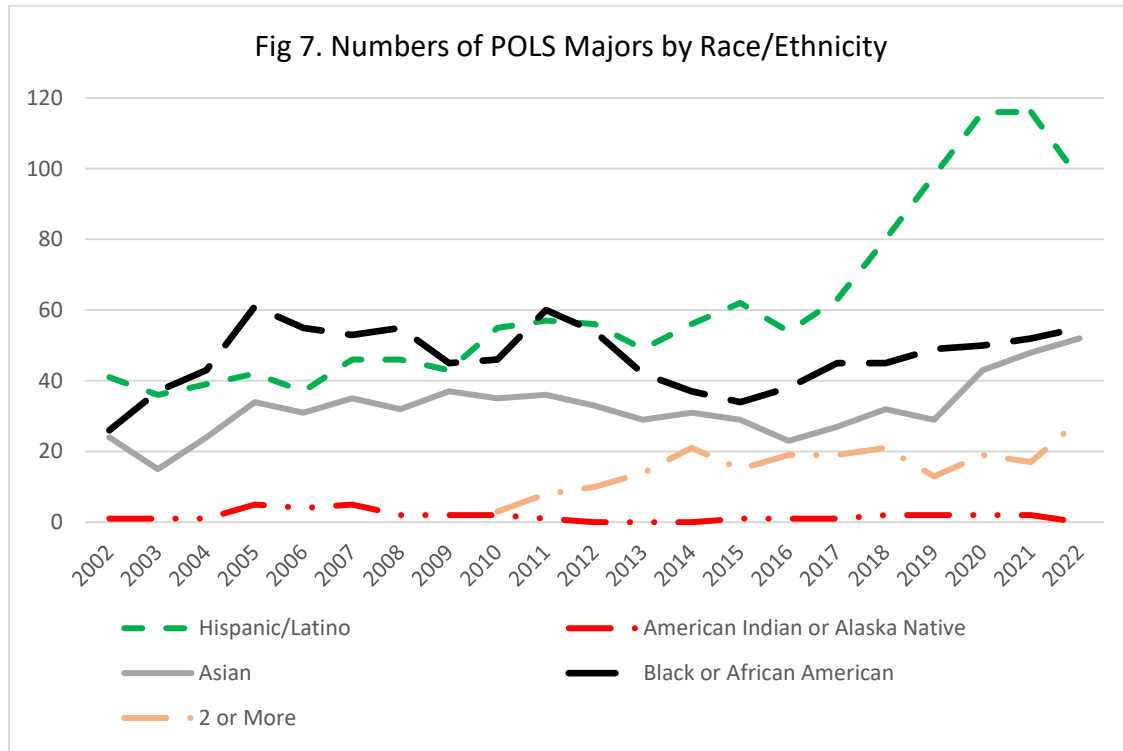

Fig 7. Numbers of POLS Majors by Race/Ethnicity

Figure 8 presents the percentages of POLS majors by race and ethnicity. It shows the racial and ethnic composition of POLS majors changed significantly between 2002 and 2022. The representation of Hispanics/Latinos increased the most. There were smaller increases in the representation of Blacks, Asians, and students identifying with two or more races. The percentage of whites dropped by 26 percentage points.

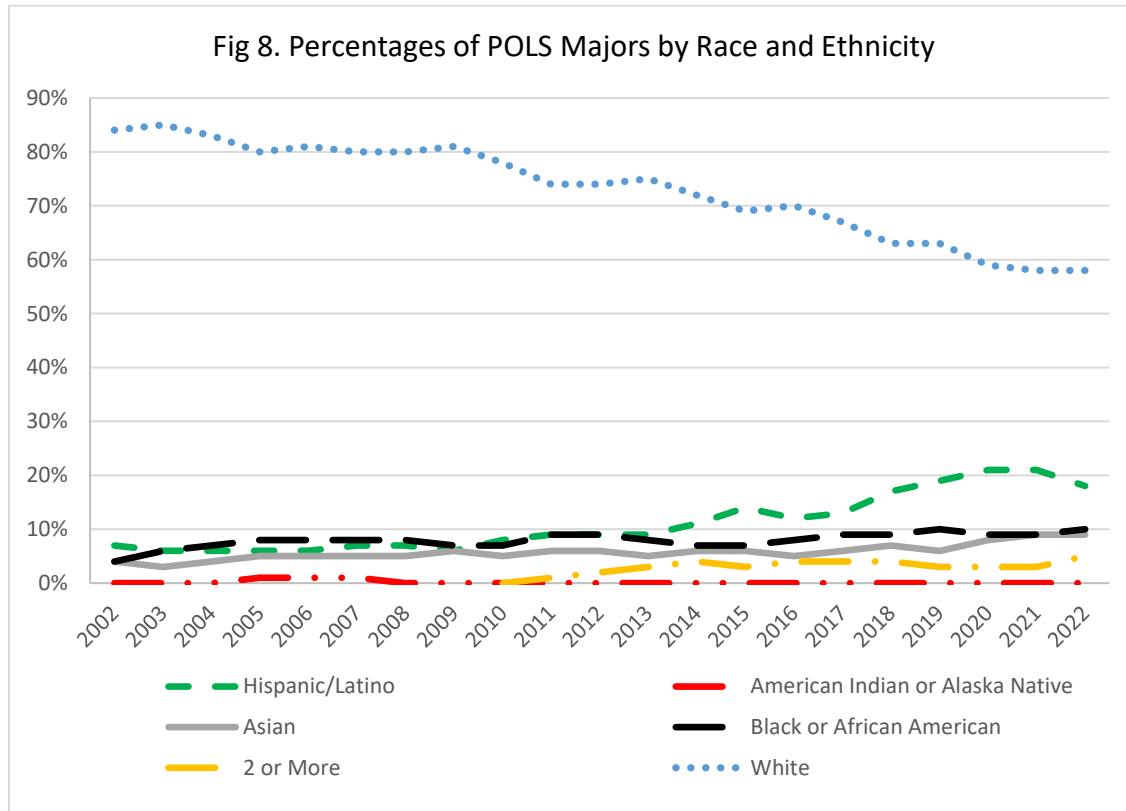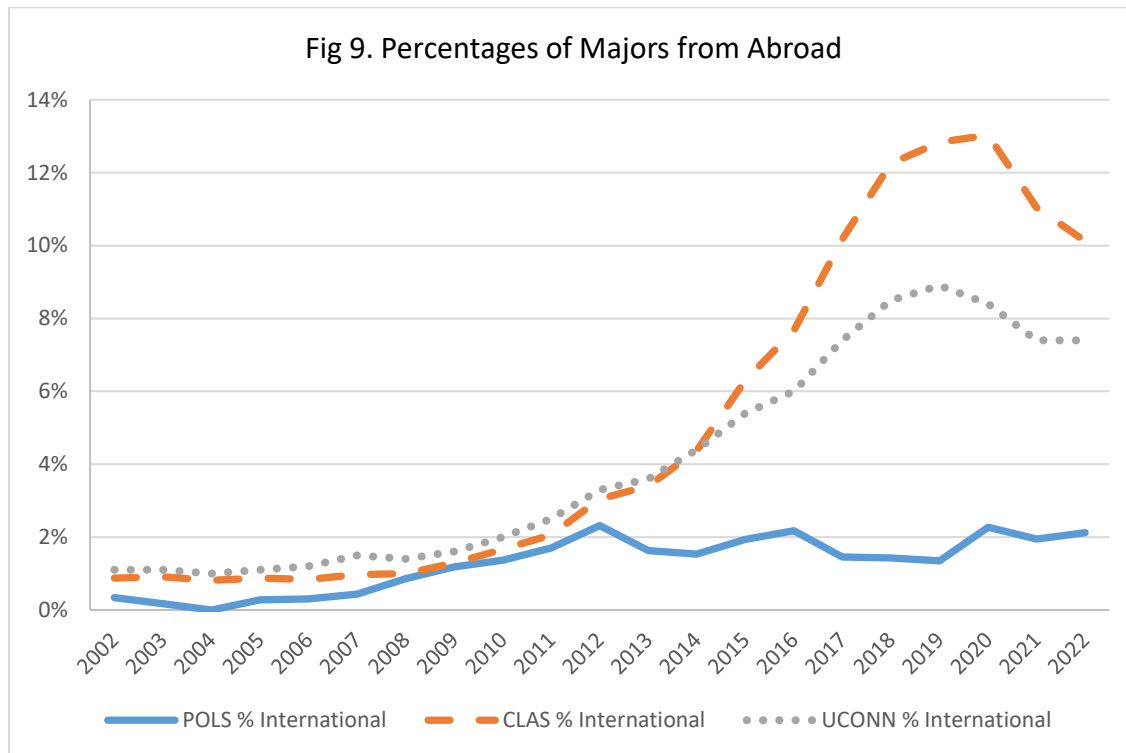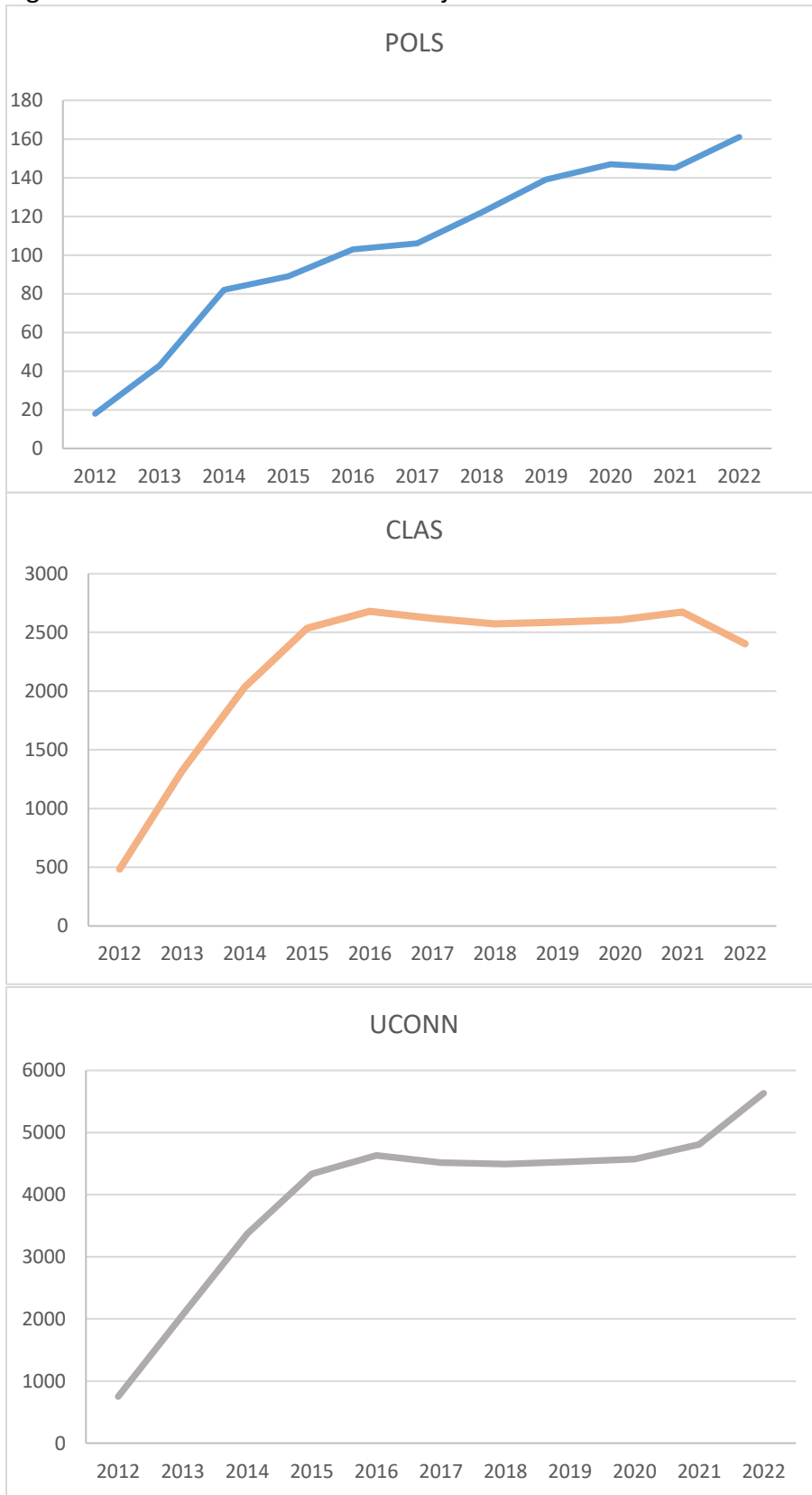Fig 8. Percentages of POLS Majors by Race and Ethnicity

Figure 9 records the growth in international students by major. POLS has had relatively few majors from abroad. They peaked at 14 in 2012, comprising roughly 2% of all majors. Enrollment in CLAS peaked at roughly 13% in 2020 before dropping off during the pandemic. The corresponding figure for UCONN is about 9%.

Fig 9. Percentages of Majors from Abroad

The final section of this report concerns first-generation students. Figure 10 demonstrates the number of POLS first generation majors grew steadily from 18 in 2012 to 161 in 2022—a 9-fold increase. By contrast, CLAS experienced continuous growth in first-generation students from 2012 through 2016 (a 5.5-fold increase). Then, the growth in CLAS first-generation students leveled off before declining in 2022. UCONN also experienced substantial growth in first generation students between 2012 and 2016. The number remained stable until 2020, and then increased over the next two years. (UCONN experienced a 7.5-fold increase over the entire period.) It is important to note the early and largest increases in first-generation students resulted from the initial ramping up of first-generation program.

Fig 10. Trends in First-Generation Majors

Finally, Figure 11 shows that first-generation students make up a substantial percentage of POLS majors. This group of students comprises a slightly larger portion of CLAS majors. They are somewhat less well represented among UCONN's student body as a whole.

Fig 11. Percentages of First Generation Majors