

# Peer Cities: 2020 Update

*Prepared by the Center for Economic and Business Research*



CENTER OF ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS RESEARCH

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## About the Authors

The Center for Economic and Business Research is an outreach center at Western Washington University located within the College of Business and Economics. In addition to publishing the Puget Sound Economic Forecaster the Center connects the resources found throughout the University to assist for-profit, non-profit, government agencies, quasi-government entities, and tribal communities in gathering and analyzing useful data to respond to specific questions. We use a number of collaborative approaches to help inform our clients so that they are better able to hold policy discussions and craft decisions.

The Center employs students, staff and faculty from across the University as well as outside resources to meet the individual needs of those we work with. Our work is based on academic approaches and rigor that not only provides a neutral analysis perspective but also provides applied learning opportunities. We focus on developing collaborative relationships with our clients and not simply delivering an end product.

The approaches we utilize are insightful, useful, and are all a part of the debate surrounding the topics we explore; however, none are absolutely fail-safe. Data, by nature, is challenged by how it is collected and how it is leveraged with other data sources; following only one approach without deviation is ill-advised. We provide a variety of insights within our work – not only on the topic at hand but the resources (data) that inform that topic.

We are always seeking opportunities to bring the strengths of Western Washington University to fruition within our region. If you have a need for analysis work or comments on this report, we encourage you to contact us at 360-650-3909 or by email at [cebr@wwu.edu](mailto:cebr@wwu.edu).

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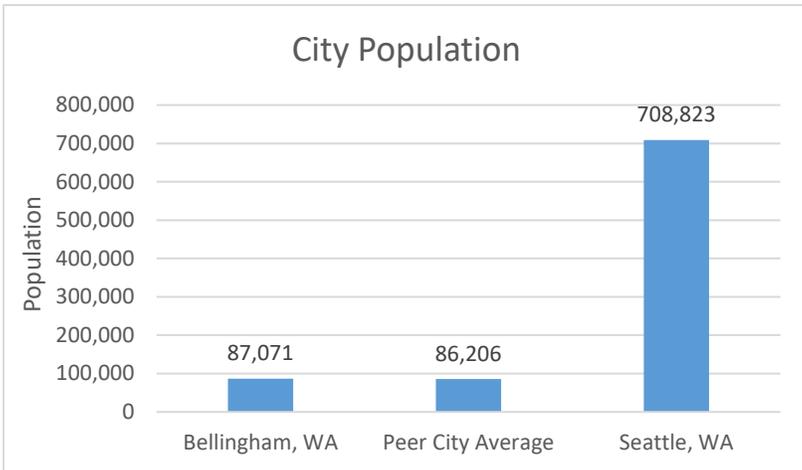
## Executive Summary

The Bellingham, WA Peer Cities Report summarizes economic statistics from Bellingham, Seattle, the United States as a whole, and a sample of cities that are similar to Bellingham’s unique environment, also known as **peer cities**.

Bellingham’s economic wellbeing is often measured in reference to that of Seattle, despite the fact that the two cities are vastly different in size and population characteristics. By comparing Bellingham to other cities with similar

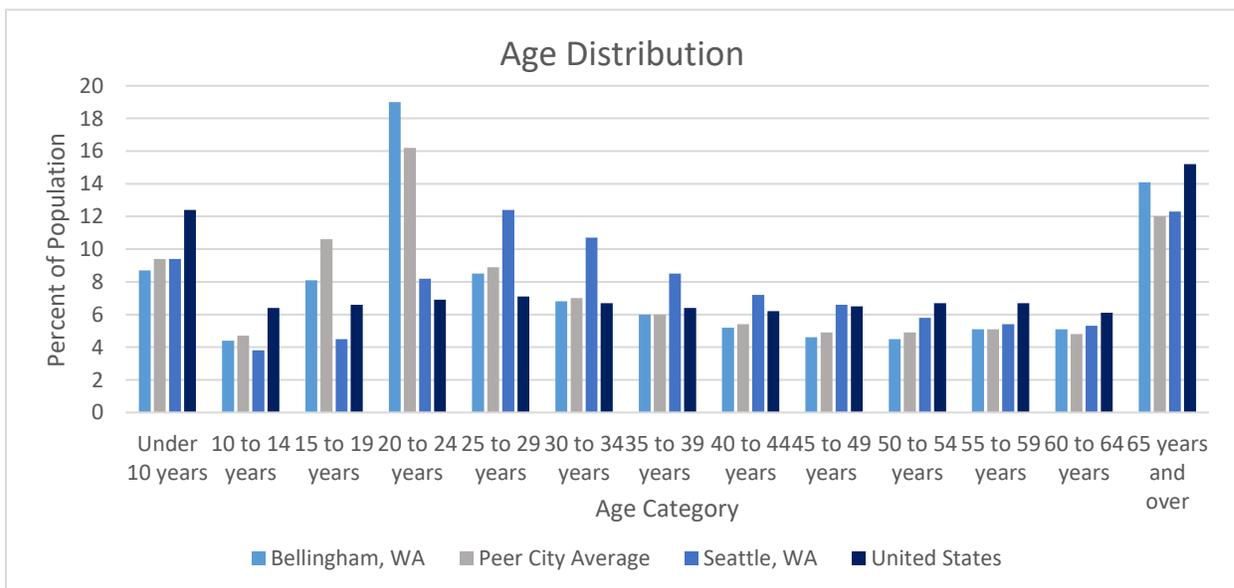
**Peer Cities:**  
Cities similar to Bellingham’s unique demographics and economy

environmental factors (mid-size towns with medium-population public universities) in addition to Seattle, this report hopes to facilitate more meaningful comparisons of economic wellbeing. The original report was created in 2017, which used data from 2015. This report serves as an update, utilizing data from 2018.



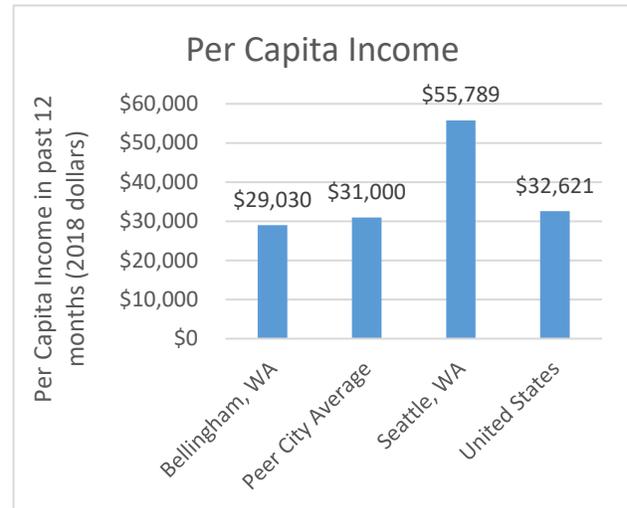
Bellingham is much more similar to the average peer city than to Seattle on a number of population characteristics:

- Bellingham and the peer cities each have a significantly larger proportion of their population between the ages of 20 and 24 than Seattle and the United States.** This may be a result of the higher education opportunities in these areas – **Bellingham and the peer cities have higher rates of undergraduate enrollment than Seattle** by roughly 12 percent.

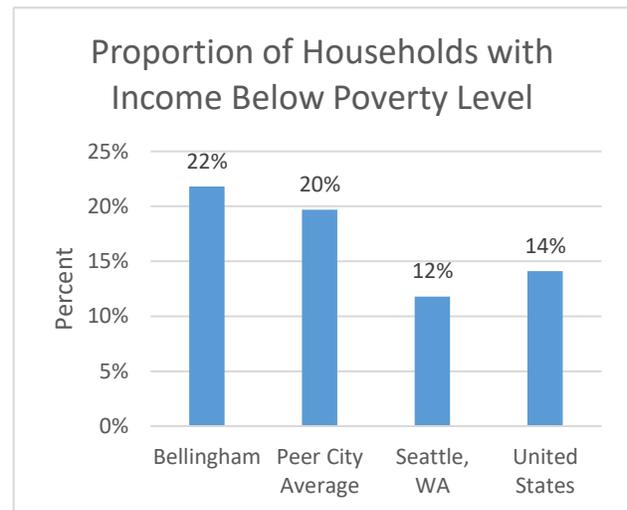


These similarities in population characteristics likely influence the following economic outcomes. However, despite the similarities between Bellingham and the peer cities, it appears that Bellingham is not doing as well as the peer cities in terms of income and poverty:

- Bellingham and the peer cities each report **lower per capita income** than Seattle, as well as the national average. **Bellingham also has the lowest median household income** of all areas reported.
- The median household in Bellingham earns **roughly \$7,000 less than the peer city average** which is a significant gap considering their similarity in cost of living.

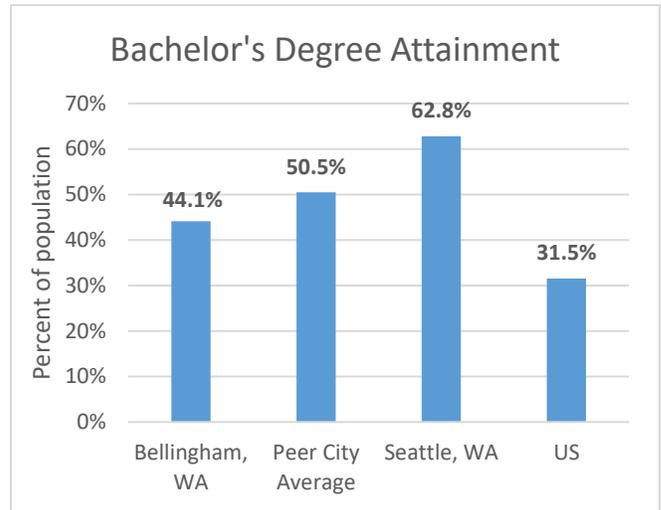


- **Bellingham has a higher proportion of households with income below poverty level** than the peer city average, the national average, as well as Seattle. Women in all areas present higher rates of poverty compared to men, but Bellingham presents the highest gender disparity in poverty, with approximately 3 percent more women below the poverty line than men.



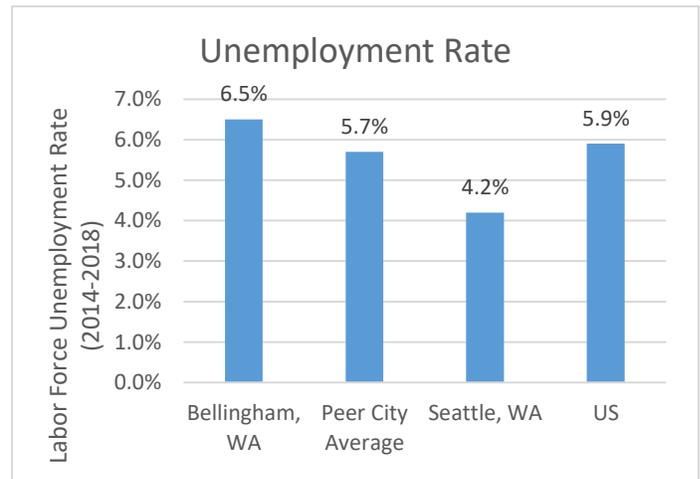
Even though Bellingham and the peer cities each have a large portion of their population enrolled in higher education, it appears that Bellingham has retained less people with higher education degrees than the peer cities and Seattle:

- **44.1 percent of Bellingham’s population has their bachelor’s degree or higher**, which is approximately 6 percent less than the peer city average.
- For each area, female students make up more than half of the enrolled students. However, **only 52% of graduate or professional school students in Bellingham are female**, compared to almost 60% for the peer city average.



Bellingham is also unique in some of its labor force statistics:

- **The rate of unemployment in Bellingham is slightly higher than the peer city average** and the national average.
- On average, **Bellingham residents work 33.6 hours per week**, which is less than the peer city average.
- **Bellingham and the peer cities work less weeks per year** than Seattle and the national average, which is expected based on their identity as college towns.



**Bellingham has a lower proportion of its population employed in management, business, science, and arts occupations, as well as the professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management industry.**

## Methodology

Data for this report was obtained from the US Census American Community Survey (2013-2018). Each area reported (excluding the US average) was gathered as city data, opposed to county or overall metropolitan area (MSA). Metropolitan areas are conglomerations of defined urban areas, whereas cities are what compose these metropolitan areas.

Data are based on a sample, and therefore are subject to sampling variability. It should be noted that the American Community Survey is administered by mail, and so it does not include individuals without a permanent address. Specific documentation on code lists, subject definitions, data accuracy, and statistical testing can be found on the American Community Survey website in the “Data and Documentation” section. Sample size and data quality measures (including coverage rates, allocation rates, and response rates) can be found on the American Community Survey website in the “Methodology” section.

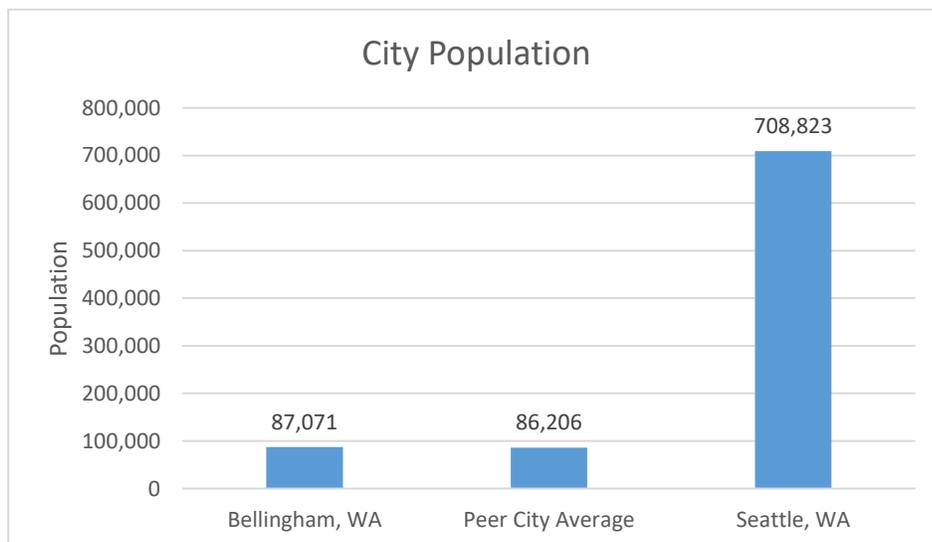
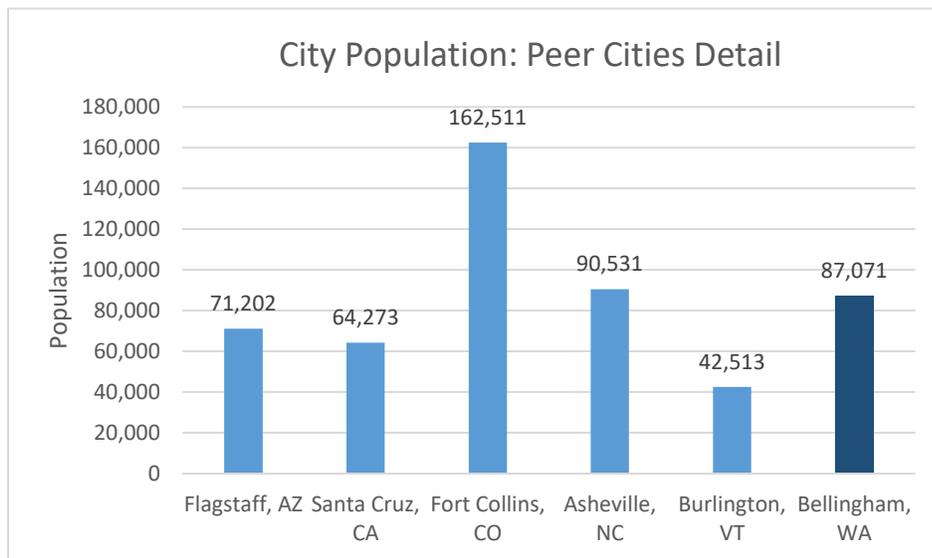
The peer cities included in this report are Flagstaff, AZ; Santa Cruz, CA; Fort Collins, CO; Asheville, NC; and Burlington, VT. These cities were chosen based on the fact that they are all mid-sized college towns with a similar population (of the city and universities) to that of Bellingham, WA. The economic statistics for the peer cities are combined into the “Peer City Average,” or the arithmetic mean of the five peer cities for each statistic.

## Population Characteristics

### Total Population

The total population size of Bellingham (87,071) is more similar to the peer city average (86,206) population than that of Seattle (708,823). While the population of each peer city ranges, from 42,513 in Burlington, VT to 162,511 in Fort Collins, CO, each of them still represent a mid-size city that, on average, is very representative of Bellingham's population.

Even though the population size difference between Bellingham and Seattle may seem obvious, it is important to keep in mind when considering economic statistics. The characteristics of the labor force in a large metropolitan city are naturally going to differ from those of a mid-size city simply based on population size and the types or sizes supported.

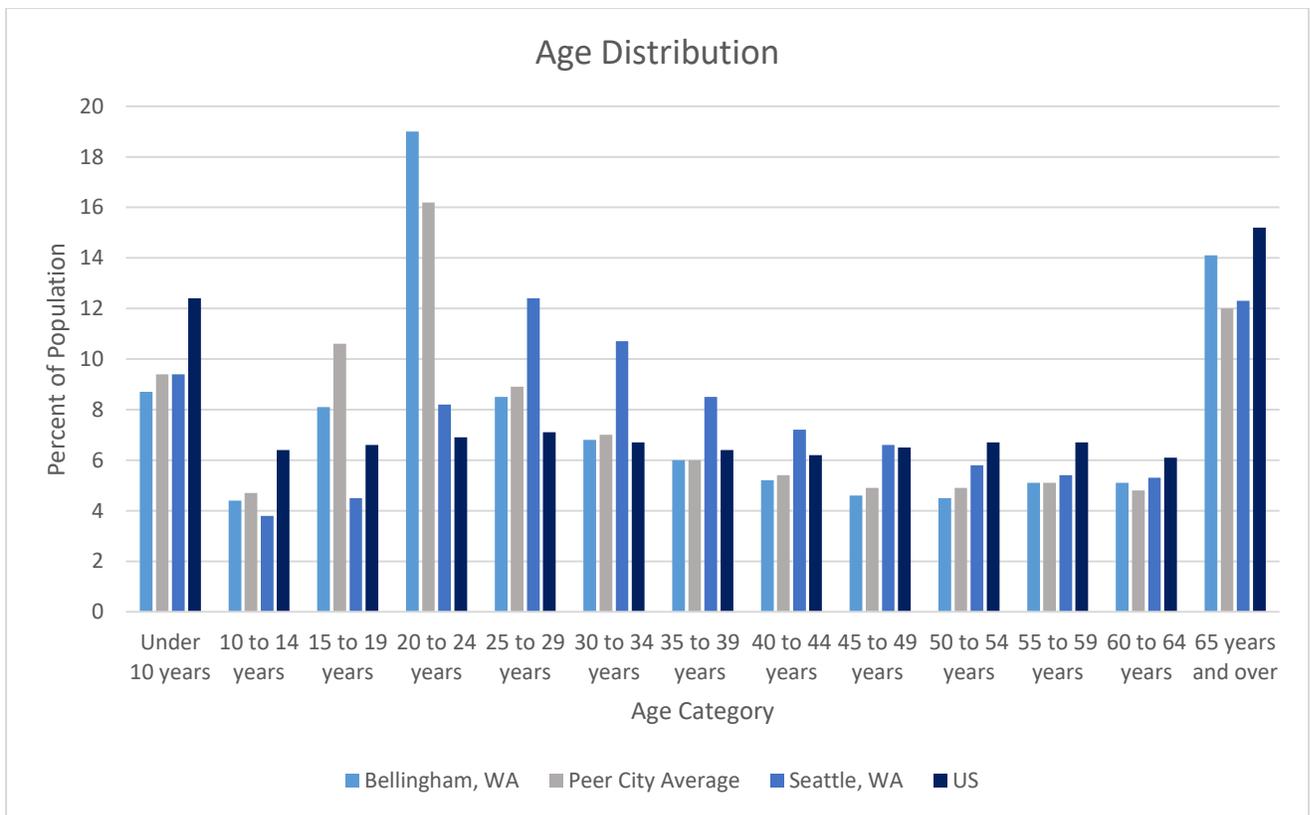


## Age Distribution

As expected, based on their identity as college towns, Bellingham and the peer cities have a significantly larger proportion of population in the 20 to 24 age range (19.0 and 16.2 percent, respectively) than Seattle (8.2 percent) and the United States (6.9 percent). However, Seattle has a higher proportion of 25 to 29-year-olds (12.4 percent) than Bellingham (8.5 percent) and the peer cities (8.9 percent), and a higher proportion of 30 to 34-year-olds (10.7 percent, in Seattle) than Bellingham (6.8 percent) and the peer cities (6.9 percent). These mid-size college towns are known to attract people in this age category for higher education, but don't seem to retain this population once they graduate because of the lower supply of job opportunities and comparative wages for college graduates.

Compared to each peer city, Seattle has a larger proportion of population in every age category from 25 to 45. Seattle is an attractive place to live for young and middle-age professionals – it has a wider range of job opportunities with higher pay.

Bellingham differs from the peer city average in the senior age category, 65 years and older. 14.1 percent of Bellingham's population is 65 years or older, compared to 12 percent of the peer cities populations, on average. The higher proportion of seniors in Bellingham could contribute to the lower per capita and median income that is seen in following sections.

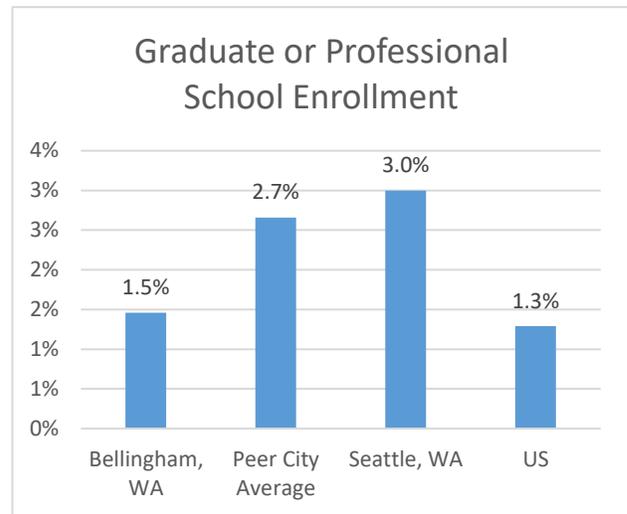
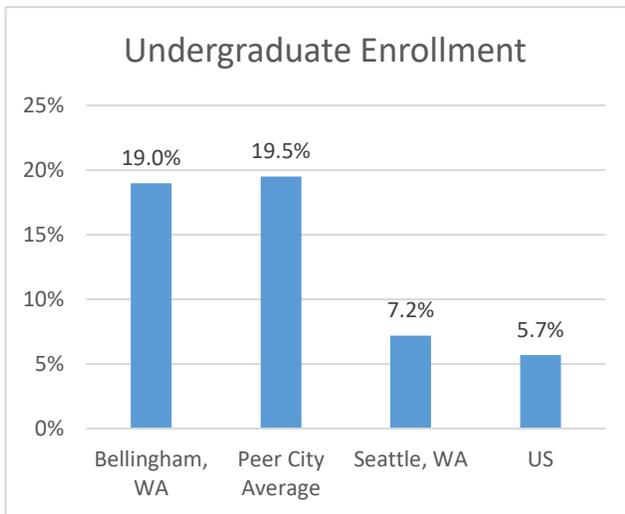


## Higher Education Enrollment

Concerning undergraduate enrollment as a percent of population, Bellingham and the peer cities are much more heavily comprised of undergraduate students (19 percent and 19.5 percent, respectively) than Seattle (7.2 percent) or the nation (5.7 percent).

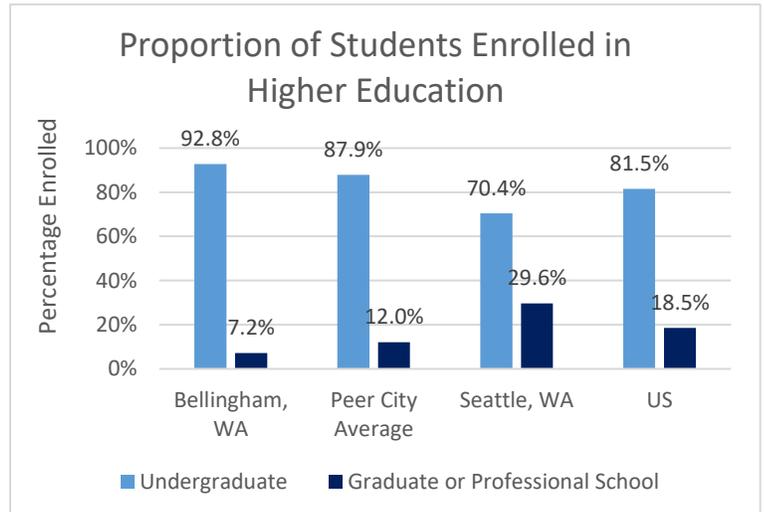
Regarding proportion of the population enrolled in graduate or professional school, Seattle has the highest rate of enrollment (3 percent), followed by the peer cities (2.7 percent). Bellingham (1.5 percent) is closer to the national average (1.3 percent) for proportion of graduate or professional school enrollment.

While Bellingham and the peer cities represent similar populations enrolled in higher education overall, it is interesting to note that Bellingham has a lower proportion enrolled in graduate or professional school than the peer city average. This could be based on the programs offered at the institutions within each college town.



## Undergraduate versus Graduate Students

It is to be expected that out of all the students enrolled in higher education, a much smaller proportion of students will be enrolled in graduate or professional school in comparison to undergraduate programs. However, both Bellingham and the peer city average have significantly lower proportions of graduate or professional students, with Bellingham having the lowest rate at 7.2 percent followed by the peer city average at 12 percent. The national average is 11.3 percent higher than Bellingham's rate (18.5 percent) and Seattle has the highest ratio out of all the areas reported with more than a quarter of students (29.6 percent) enrolled in higher education pursuing a graduate or professional degree.

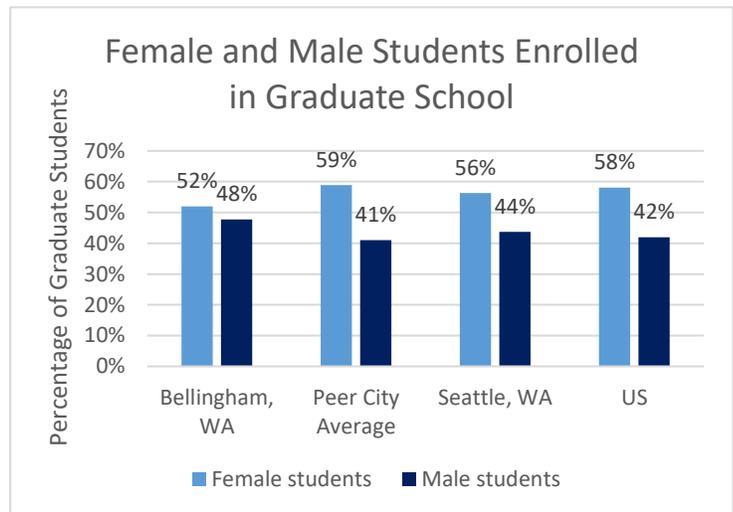
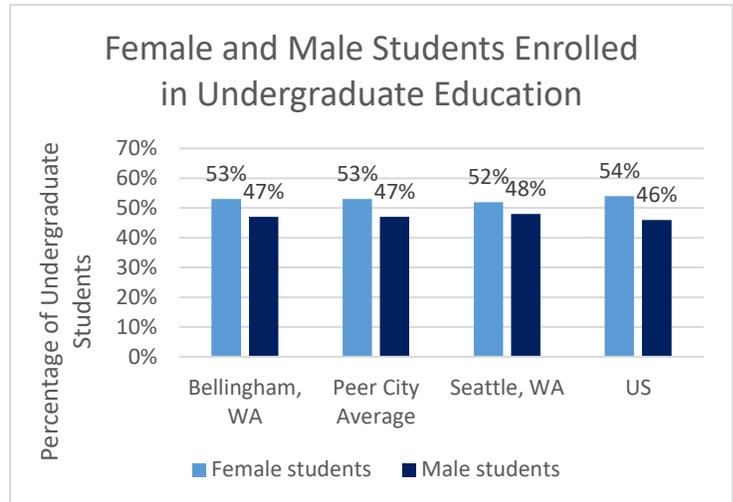


Despite a comparable cost of living, the discrepancies between the proportion of undergraduate and graduate or professional students out of all the students enrolled in higher education in Bellingham compared to the peer cities can be attributed to the variety of programs available and employment opportunities available to students.

### Gender Differences

There is a distinct difference in the proportion of female and male students enrolled in higher educational institutions. Female students make up more than 50 percent of the population of undergraduate students for Bellingham, the peer city average, Seattle, and the national average. The national average has the largest difference in proportion of female and male students (54 percent and 46 percent, respectively).

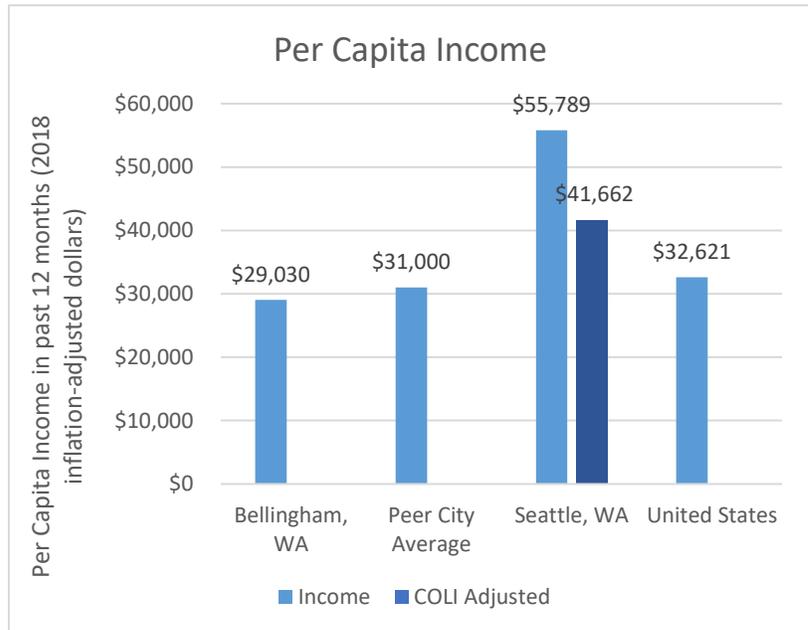
This difference holds for graduate school enrollment as well, although the difference in proportion is slightly smaller. Bellingham has the most equal proportions of female and male students (52 percent and 48 percent respectively). The peer city average has the most notable division between female and male students with a 18 percent difference in the number of students enrolled (59 percent female students and 41 percent male students).



## Income and Poverty

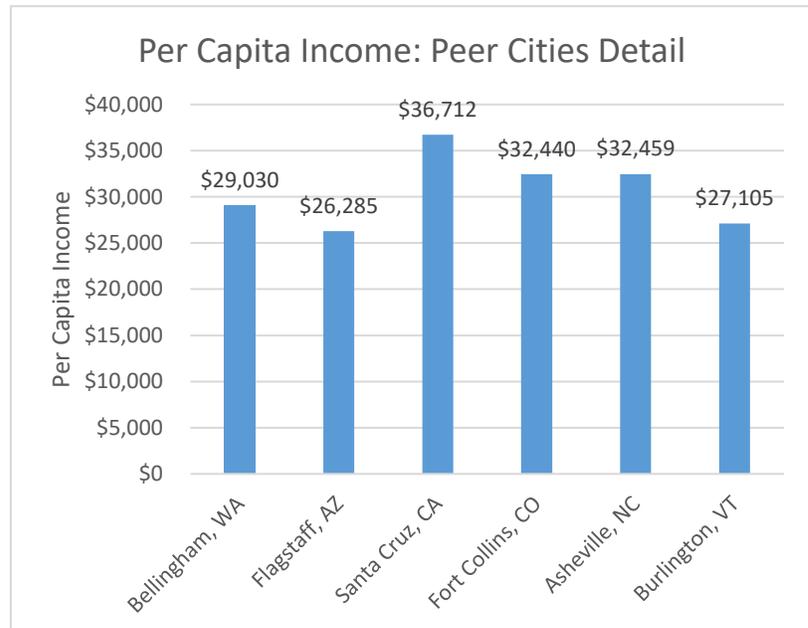
### Per Capita Income

Bellingham has the lowest per capita incomes (\$29,030) compared to the Peer Cities average, Seattle, and the United States. While it is expected that Bellingham's per capita income would be lower than Seattle (\$55,789) even after cost of living adjustments (COLA), it is important to note that it is also lower than the peer city average (\$31,000) as well as the national average (\$32,621). Incomes are reported in 2018 inflation adjusted dollars. The peer cities and Bellingham have similar cost of living indices (see Cost of Living), thus, COLA were only conducted for Seattle.



### Per Capita Income: Peer Cities Detail

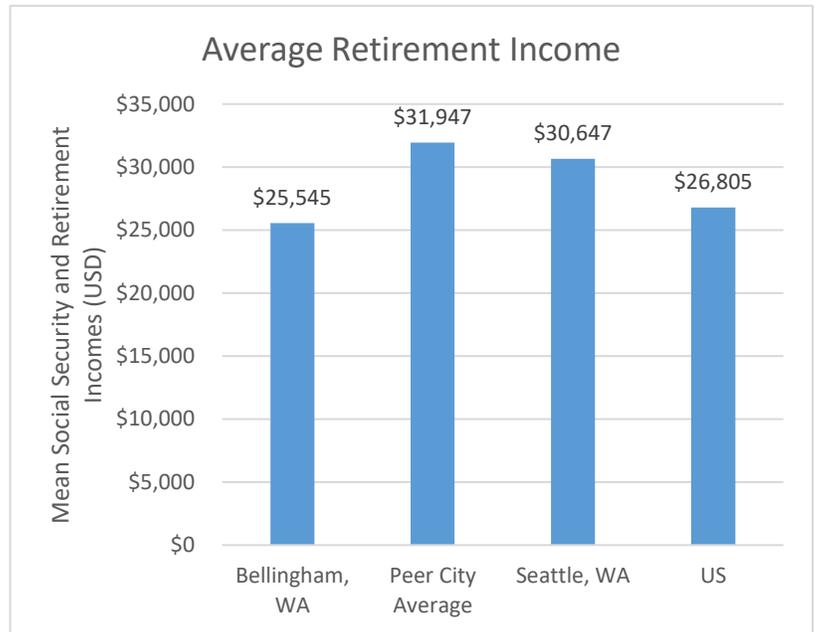
Even though Bellingham has one of the lowest per capita income compared to the peer cities overall, it still has a higher per capita income than some of the individual peer cities – Flagstaff (\$26,285) and Burlington (\$27,105). This indicates that Bellingham is still within the range of peer city incomes, and that a per capita income of \$29,030 may not be abnormally low.



## Retirement Income

As seen in the per capita income section above, Bellingham has the lowest per capita income out of all the locations reported. Since Bellingham and the peer cities are all college towns, it would be expected that they would have lower per capita incomes compared to Seattle and the US. However, Bellingham's per capita income (\$29,030) is lower than the peer cities average (\$31,000), which is influenced by the amount of retirement income people are living off of in Bellingham and the peer cities.

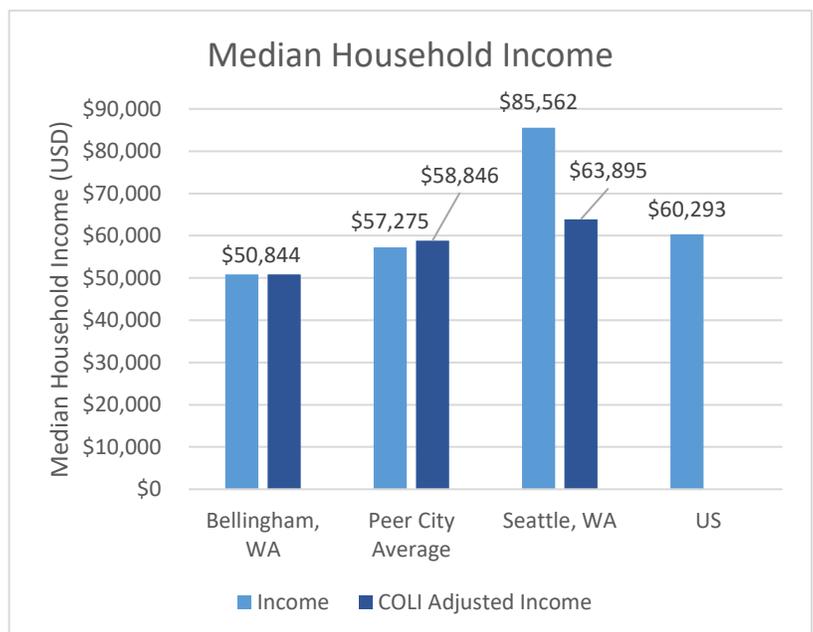
As shown in the graph, the average retirement income in Bellingham (\$25,545) is significantly lower than the average retirement income for the peer cities (\$31,947). This difference in retirement income, coupled with the fact that Bellingham has a larger percentage of its population 65 years or older, explains why Bellingham's per capita income is lower than the peer cities average.



## Median Household Income

Bellingham also represents the lowest median household income (\$50,844) compared to the Peer Cities average, Seattle, and the United States. The measurement of median income is often more useful than per capita income since outlying incomes (extremely high or low incomes) will skew the mean, while the median (50<sup>th</sup> percentile earner) is not affected by these outlying incomes.

The median household in Bellingham earns roughly \$6,400 less than the peer city average (\$57,275), which is a significant gap considering the rough similarity in cost of living (outlined in the next section). Bellingham also has a much lower median household income than Seattle (\$85,562) and the national average (\$60,293). Bellingham also has a much lower median household income than Seattle (\$85,562) and the national average (\$60,293). However, after taking into account cost of living

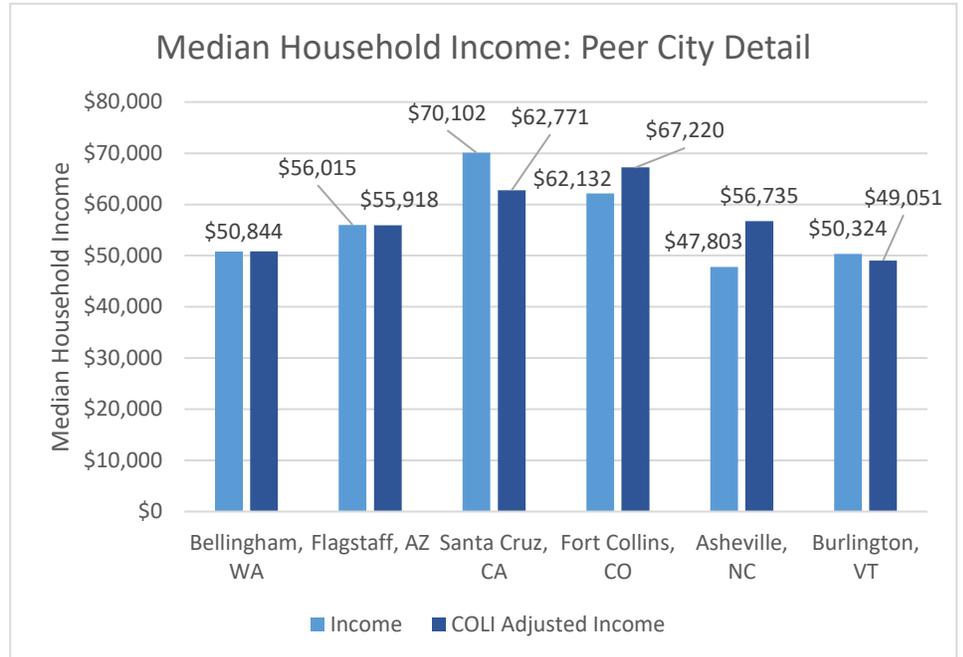


differences using Bellingham as a base, median incomes are much more comparable, yet still higher in the peer cities and Seattle.

As a reminder, in reviewing income data it is important to understand that Census data provides both a family, where all members of a household are related by blood or marriage, and household, where all members living at a single address are counted. In our analysis, we examine household statistics due to the nature of the types of households likely to be present in a largely university-based community.

### Median Household Income: Peer City Detail

While the average peer city median household income is much larger than that of Bellingham, the peer cities range from \$47,803 to \$70,102. Bellingham (\$50,844) lies on the lower end of this range, indicating that we may be more similar in economic characteristics to Asheville and Burlington rather than Santa Cruz and Fort Collins.

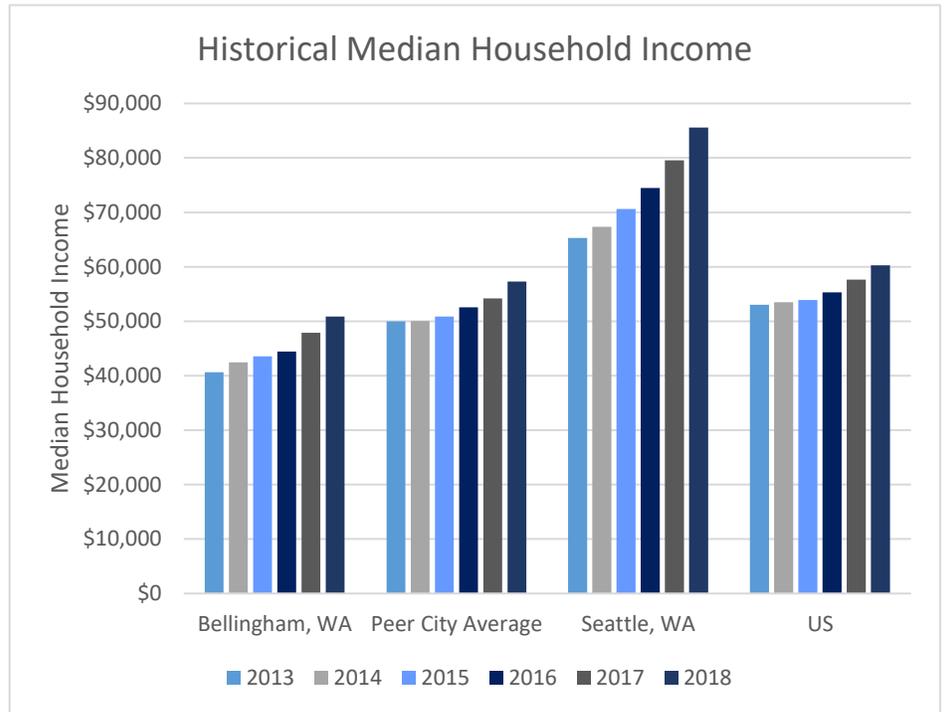


## Historical Trends in Median Household Income

Median household incomes have been rising since 2010. In Bellingham, median income has increased from \$40,648 in 2013 to \$50,844 in 2018. The peer cities have an average median income that is growing slightly less than Bellingham, from \$49,969 (2013) to \$57,275 (2018).

Seattle's median income has been rising at the highest rate – from \$65,277 in 2013 to \$85,562 in 2018.

Median incomes in Seattle, Bellingham, and the peer cities have all been growing faster than the national average, which has grown from \$53,046 in 2013 to \$60,293 in 2018.



## Cost of Living

Based on the 2018 Cost of Living Index (COLI) provided by the Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER), composite indexes of the cost of living for the areas in this report can be a useful tool in comparing relative per capita or median incomes.

The following table outlines the composite index (a combination of weighted indexes for grocery, housing, and other categories of household spending) for Bellingham, Seattle, and the peer cities. In the case of Santa Cruz and Fort Collins there is no data available for those specific cities, instead a range of the indexes within each state (CA and CO, respectively) is reported. Santa Cruz's range excludes the COLI for San Francisco due to the city's uncharacteristically high cost of living, with an index value of 196.3.

Generally speaking, the peer cities have similar costs of living to Bellingham. The data are subject to sampling error, but no confidence interval is able to be determined since judgement sampling was used in the data collection process. Burlington (118.6) and Flagstaff (115.8) have very similar cost indices to Bellingham (115.6), while Asheville has a slightly lower cost index (97.4). As expected, Seattle's cost of living (154.8) is significantly higher than that of Bellingham and the peer cities.

The range for CO is similar to the range of indexes for the other peer cities, if not slightly lower due to the low bound of 93.0 in Pueblo. A comparable city in CO to Fort Collins is Colorado Springs, also a mid-size college town approximately the same distance from the metropolitan hub Denver. Colorado Springs has a similar cost index (98.8) to Asheville, slightly lower than Bellingham.

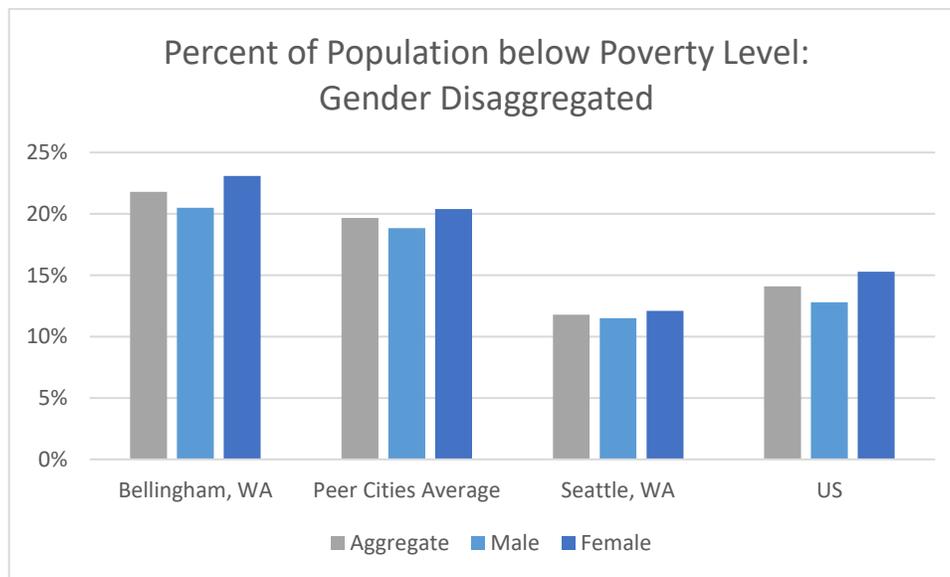
Location	Cost of Living Index (2018)	Cost of Living Index (2015)
<b>Bellingham, WA</b>	115.6	113.4
<b>Flagstaff, AZ</b>	115.8	116.4
<b>Santa Cruz, CA*</b>	103.7-154.5	106.7-176.4
<b>Fort Collins, CO*</b>	93.0-120.7	85.6-117.4
<b>Asheville, NC</b>	97.4	97.5
<b>Burlington, VT</b>	118.6	123.8
<b>Seattle, WA</b>	154.8	140.3

## Poverty

Bellingham has a higher proportion of households with income below poverty level (21.8 percent) than the peer city average (19.7 percent), the national average (13.1 percent), as well as Seattle (11.8 percent).

While the peer city average percent of population below the poverty line is slightly lower than that of Bellingham, they only differ by approximately 2 percent. However, when examining the percent of population below the poverty level by gender, the difference in poverty rates between males and females is greatest in Bellingham. Women are 3 percentage points more below the poverty line than men are in Bellingham, compared to 1.5 percentage points in the peer cities.

The 2018 weighted poverty thresholds (obtained from the US Census Data section) for different household sizes are described below.



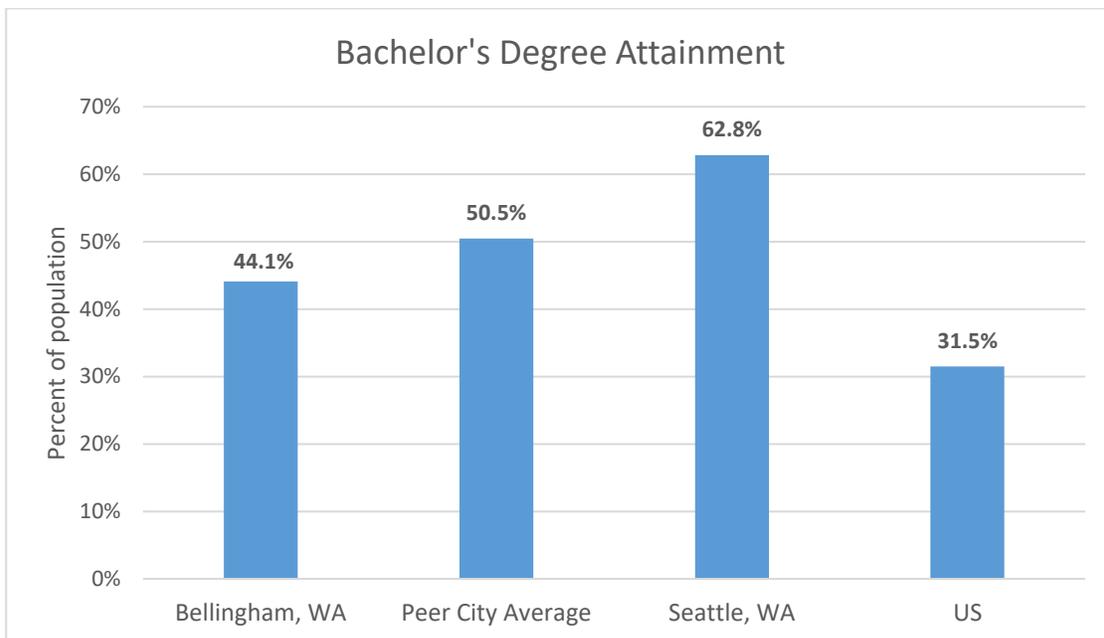
Size of family unit	Weighted average poverty thresholds
<b>One person (unrelated individual):</b>	\$12,784
Under age 65	\$13,064
Aged 65 and older	\$12,043
<b>Two people:</b>	\$16,247
Householder under age 65	\$16,889
Householder aged 65 and older	\$15,193
<b>Three people</b>	\$19,985
<b>Four people</b>	\$25,701
<b>Five people</b>	\$30,459
<b>Six people</b>	\$34,533
<b>Seven people</b>	\$39,194
<b>Eight people</b>	\$43,602
<b>Nine people or more</b>	\$51,393

## Education

### Bachelor's Degree Attainment

While Bellingham does have a larger proportion of residents with their bachelor's degree (44.1 percent) than the national average (31.5 percent), it has approximately 6 percent less than the peer city average (50.46 percent) and 18 percent less than Seattle (62.8 percent).

The fact that Bellingham has the highest rate of current undergraduate enrollment (described in Population Characteristics section), yet a lower proportion of residents with their bachelor's degree than the peer cities and Seattle, would suggest that many come to Bellingham for college but leave the city soon after graduation. The difference here between Bellingham and the peer cities may indicate that the peer cities provide more attractive job opportunities for their local college graduates, retaining them after college at a higher rate than Bellingham.

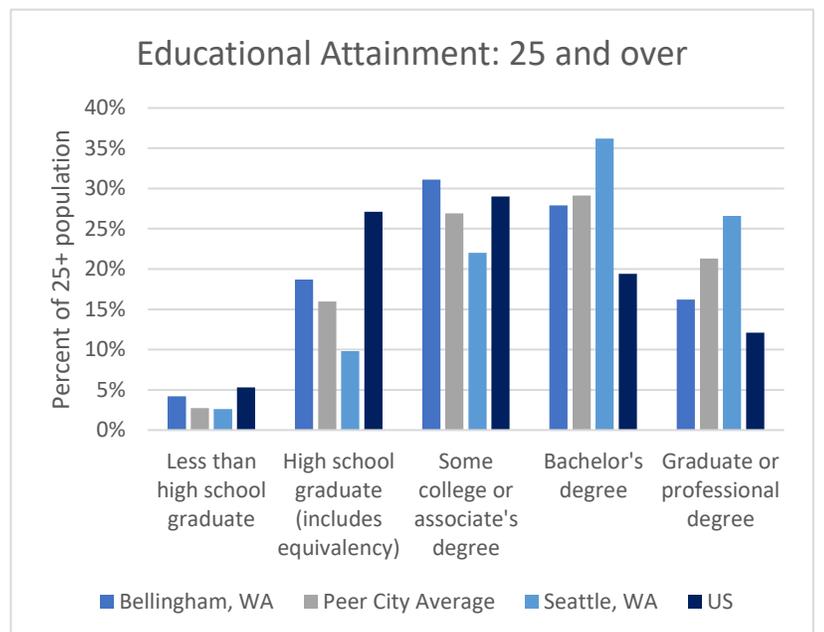
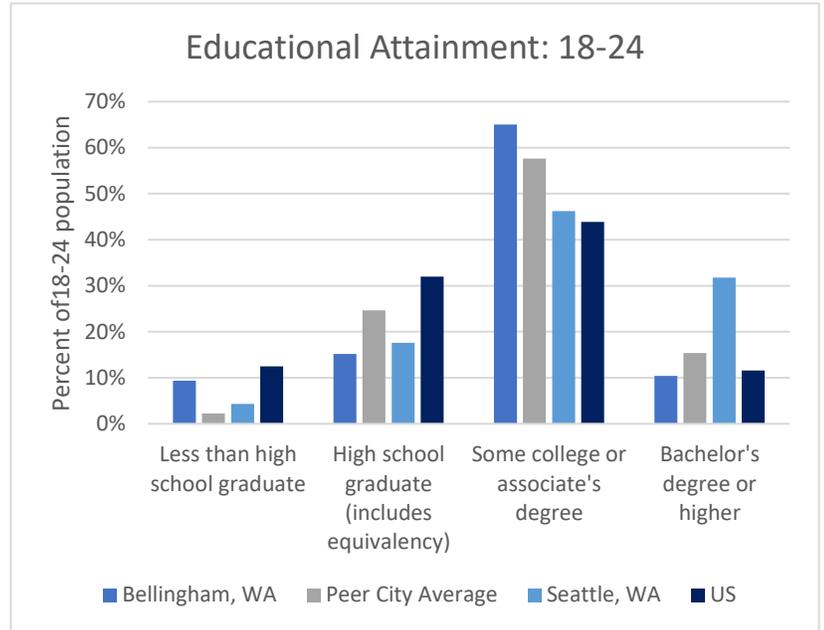


## Educational Attainment

Within the population of 18 to 24 year-olds, Bellingham has the highest proportion of residents that have attained some college education or their associate's degree (65.5 percent), but the lowest proportion of residents with their bachelor's degree or higher (10.4 percent). However, within this age group, Bellingham does look fairly similar to the peer city average in terms of higher educational attainment, but differs noticeably in terms of high school education.

Similarly, for the population age 25 years or older, Bellingham has the highest proportion of residents whose highest level of education is some college or associate degree (31.1 percent). Bellingham does have a higher proportion of residents with their bachelor's degree (27.9 percent) or their graduate or professional degree (16.2 percent) than the national averages (19.4 and 12.1 percent, respectively), but a lower proportion in these categories than the peer city average (29.1 and 21.3 percent, respectively) as well as Seattle (36.2 and 26.6 percent, respectively).

This corresponds to the previous finding on education that indicates college students may come to Bellingham for their education but leave once they have earned their degree at a higher rate than that of the peer cities and Seattle.

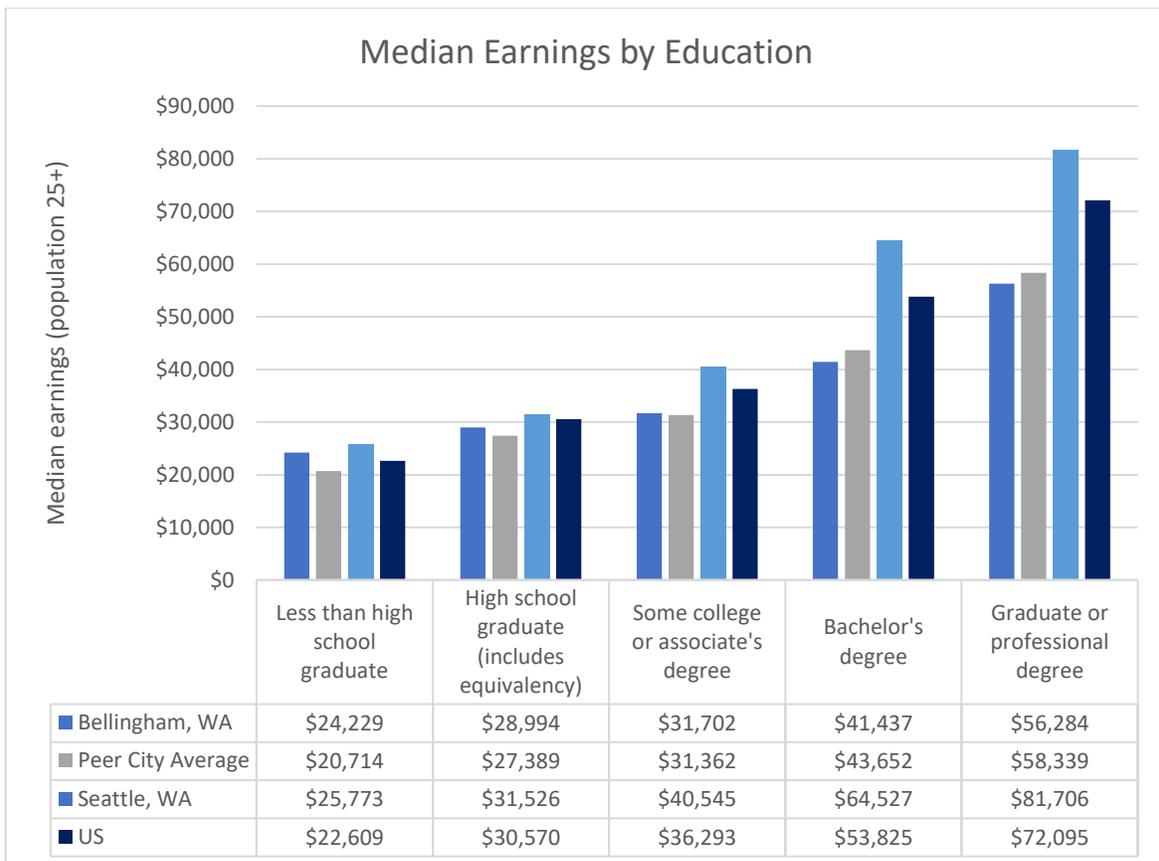


## Effect of Education on Earnings

Bellingham and the peer cities have fairly similar returns for each level of education – Bellingham has a slightly lower median income for those with their bachelor’s degree (\$41,437) than the peer city average (\$43,652), as well as for those with their graduate or professional degree (\$56,284 in Bellingham and \$58,339 in the peer cities). While the peer cities may have a greater population with their bachelor’s degrees and graduate or professional degrees than Bellingham, it appears that Bellingham is still paying those with their higher education degrees similarly to the peer cities.

However, Seattle and the US have significantly higher median incomes for those with bachelor’s degrees and graduate or professional degrees than Bellingham and the peer cities. For those with bachelor’s degrees, the national median income is \$53,825, and the Seattle median income is \$64,527 (approximately \$23,000 more than Bellingham). For those with their graduate or professional degree, the national median income is \$72,095, and the Seattle median income is \$81,706 (approximately \$25,000 more than Bellingham).

While it is expected that Seattle would have much higher return to higher education, it is interesting that the national median income would be so much higher than Bellingham and the peer city average for those with higher education degrees. This may potentially be explained by cost of living considerations being factored into salaried jobs that are common for those with graduate degrees, making Seattle’s income significantly higher than other points of comparison.

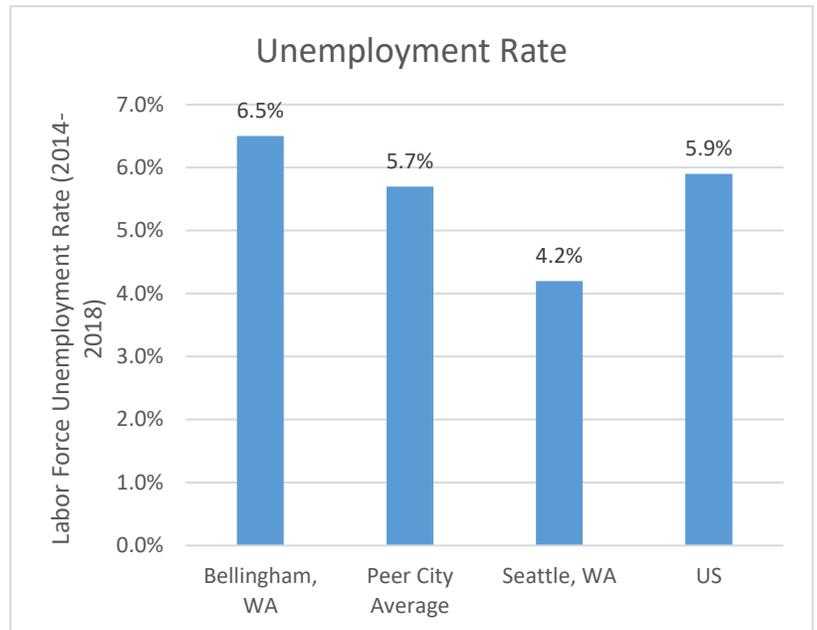


## Labor Force

### Unemployment

The rate of unemployment in Bellingham (6.5 percent) is slightly higher than the peer city average (5.7 percent) and the national average (5.9 percent), and more than 2 percent higher than Seattle (4.2 percent).

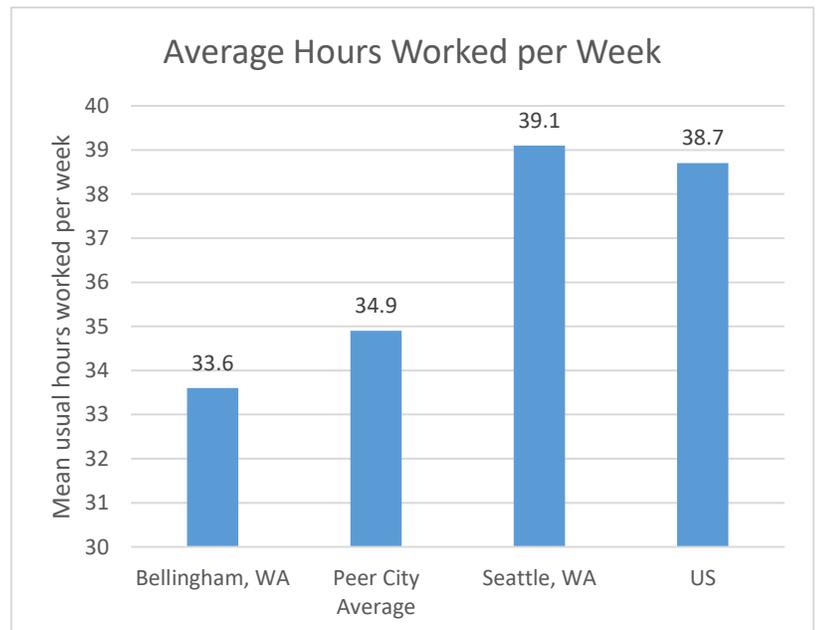
Similar to the proportion of households with income below poverty level (Income and Poverty section), since the peer city average is so similar to the national average, we would hope to see that Bellingham has a similar unemployment rate to the peer cities, however in connection to its higher poverty rate, Bellingham's unemployment rate is 0.8 percent higher than the peer city average, and 2.3 percent higher than Seattle's.



### Hours Worked Per Week

On average, Bellingham works 33.6 hours per week, 1.3 hours less than the peer city average (34.9 hours).

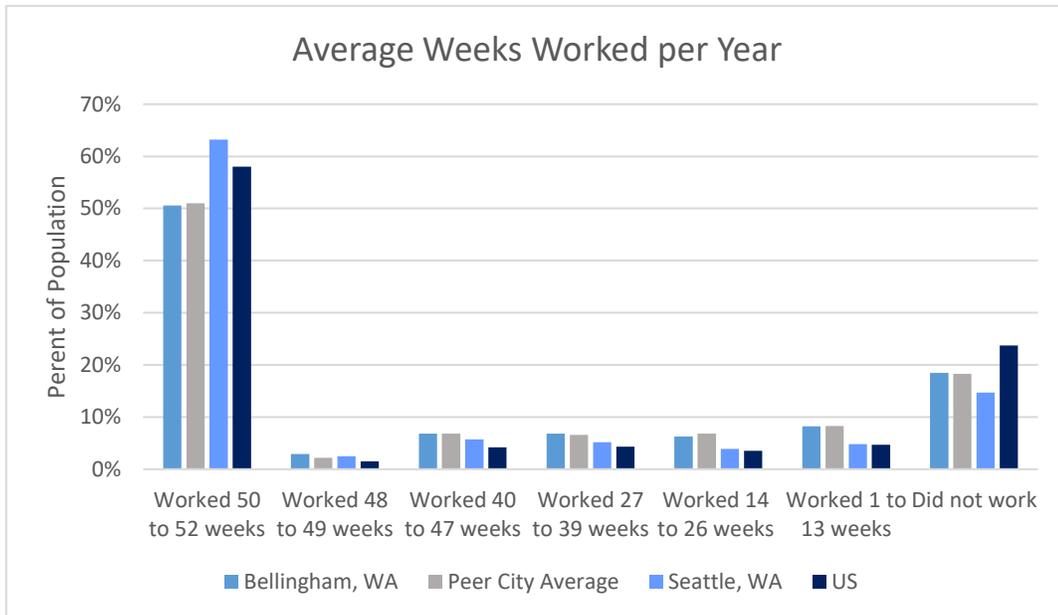
Both Bellingham and the peer cities work less hours per week on average than Seattle (39.1 hours) and the nation (38.7 hours). This is expected based on the nature of work in college towns – it is likely that there is a greater proportion of part-time workers in college towns, which would have a negative effect on the average hours worked per week in Bellingham and the peer cities.



## Weeks Worked Per Year

Bellingham and the peer cities are very similar in terms of the number of weeks the entire population works per year, with less than a 1 percent difference between the percent of the population working in each category.

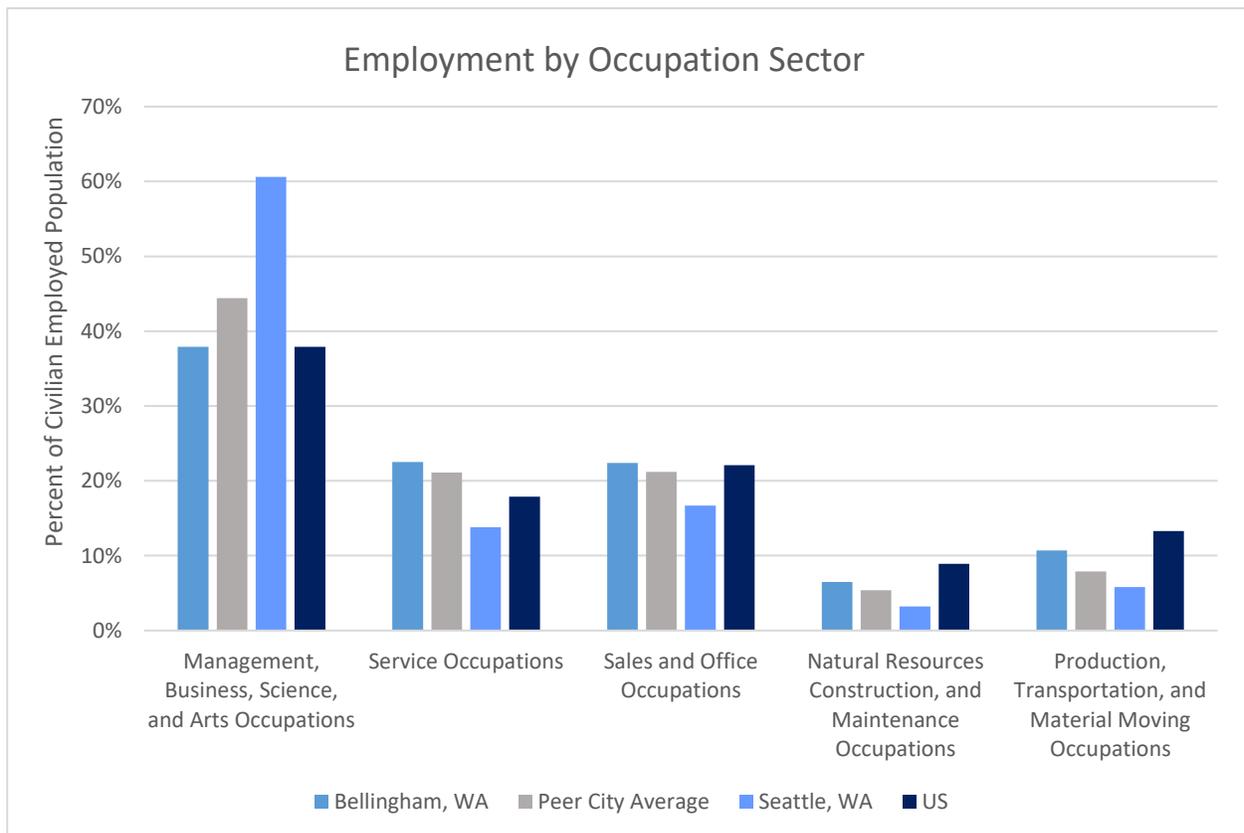
Compared to Seattle, less of Bellingham's population works 50 to 52 weeks per year (50.6 percent, compared to 63.2 percent in Seattle) and more of Bellingham's population did not work at all (18.5 percent, compared to 14.7 percent in Seattle).



## Occupation Sector

Compared to the peer cities, a smaller proportion of Bellingham’s workforce is employed in management, business, science, and arts occupations (37.9 percent, compared to 44.4 percent in peer cities), and a slightly larger proportion is employed in each other occupation sector, most notably in service occupations (22.5 percent in Bellingham, compared to 21.2 percent in peer cities). It is important to keep in mind that these are percentages of the overall employed population in each area – for example, even though Seattle has a lower proportion of people employed in service occupations than Bellingham, they likely have more service occupation jobs overall because of their higher population.

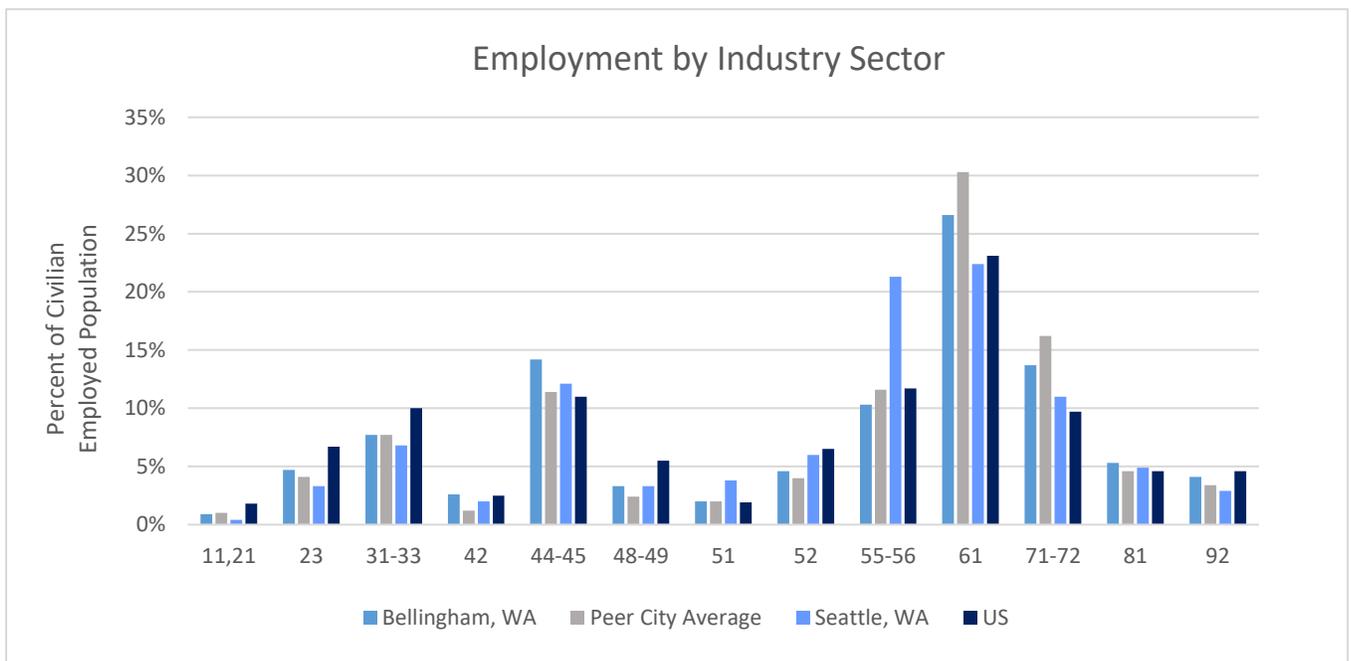
Seattle’s workforce has a strong emphasis on management, business, science and arts occupations (60.6 percent). Seattle has the lowest proportion of the population in all other occupation sectors, compared to the national average as well as Bellingham and the peer cities.



## Industry Sector

Compared to the peer city average employment, Bellingham has a comparable proportion of the population employed in most of the industries, with a few notable exceptions. The retail trade industry is the only sector where Bellingham has a significantly higher percentage of the population employed (14.2 percent) compared to the peer city average, Seattle, and the national average (11.4 percent, 12.1 percent, and 11 percent, respectively).

However, Bellingham has a smaller proportion of the workforce employed in the educational services, and health care and social assistance industry (26.6 percent) as well as the arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation and food services industry (13.7 percent) than the peer city average (30.3 percent and 16.2 percent, respectively). Bellingham does still have a higher proportion of the workforce in these two industries than both Seattle and the national average.



NAICS Code	Industry
<b>11,21</b>	Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, mining
<b>23</b>	Construction
<b>31-33</b>	Manufacturing
<b>42</b>	Wholesale trade
<b>44-45</b>	Retail trade
<b>48-49</b>	Transportation and warehousing, and utilities
<b>51</b>	Information
<b>52</b>	Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing
<b>55-56</b>	Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services
<b>61</b>	Educational service, and health care and social assistance
<b>71-72</b>	Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services
<b>81</b>	Other services, except public administration
<b>92</b>	Public administration

## Median Earnings by Industry Sector

The following table represents the median earnings per job based on industry sector, based on the 2018 national data for the civilian employed population. The median earnings in different industries, combined with Bellingham's difference in industry composition compared to the peer cities, could contribute to the fact that Bellingham has a lower per capita and median household income than the peer cities (on average).

For example, Bellingham has a higher proportion of the population employed in retail trade (median income of \$23,462), and educational services, health care, and social assistance (\$35,088) than the peer cities, which are some of the lower-earning industries. Bellingham has the same percentage of its population employed in manufacturing (\$45,879) than the peer cities, which is one of the middle earning sectors, and it has about 10 percent less of its population employed in professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management (\$46,390).

However, Bellingham does have a higher, or equal, percentage of its population employed in public administration (\$55,127), information (\$53,171), and the combined sector finance and insurance, real estate, rental and leasing (\$51,670) which are the sectors with the highest median earnings. This is an improvement from historical figures where Bellingham tended to have either similar or lower percentages of workers in these sectors.

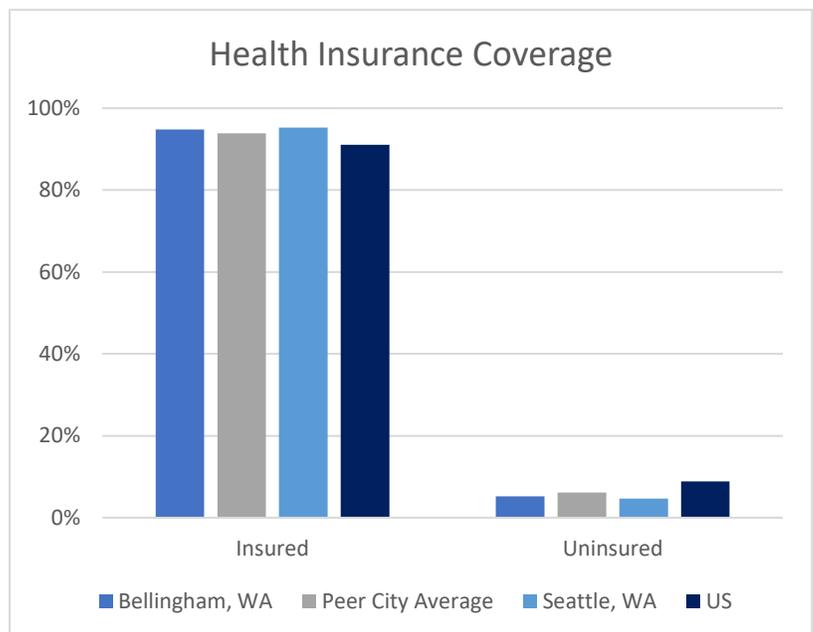
Industry Sector	Bellingham, WA	Peer City Average	Seattle, WA	United States
<b>Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining</b>	0.9%	1%	0.4%	1.8%
<b>Construction</b>	4.7%	4.1%	3.3%	6.7%
<b>Manufacturing</b>	7.7%	7.7%	6.8%	10%
<b>Wholesale trade</b>	2.6%	1.2%	2%	2.5%
<b>Retail trade</b>	14.2%	11.4%	12.1%	11%
<b>Transportation and warehousing, and utilities</b>	3.3%	2.4%	3.3%	5.5%
<b>Information</b>	2%	2%	3.8%	1.9%
<b>Finance and insurance, real estate, rental and leasing</b>	4.6%	4%	6%	6.5%
<b>Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management</b>	10.3%	11.6%	21.3%	11.7%
<b>Educational services, and health care and social assistance</b>	26.6%	30.3%	22.4%	23.1%
<b>Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services</b>	13.7%	16.2%	11%	9.7%
<b>Other services, except public administration</b>	5.3%	4.6%	4.6%	4.9%
<b>Public administration</b>	4.1%	3.4%	2.9%	4.6%

Industry Sector (Sorted by Median Earnings)	Median Earnings per Job (US)	Number of Jobs (annual employment) in Bellingham
Public administration	\$55,127	1,864
Information	\$53,171	907
Finance and Insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	\$51,670	2,069
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management	\$46,390	4,659
Manufacturing	\$45,879	3,515
Wholesale Trade	\$45,633	1,197
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	\$44,749	1,505
Construction	\$39,263	2,128
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	\$37,480	12,078
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	\$35,123	423
Other services, except public administration	\$25,495	2,393
Retail Trade	\$23,462	6,472
Arts, Entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	\$17,217	6,222

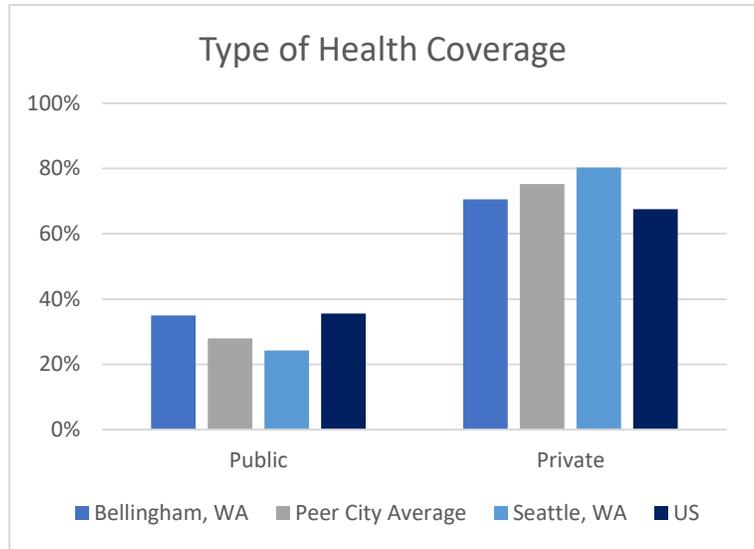
## Other Economic Characteristics

### Health Insurance

Bellingham and the peer cities have almost identical proportions of the population with health insurance coverage (88.7 and 88.4 percent, respectively). Seattle has a slightly higher rate of coverage (91.2 percent), and the nation as a whole has a slightly lower rate of coverage (87.0 percent). Overall, there does not appear to be much variation in health insurance coverage between the areas reported.



There is slightly more variation between locations with regard to the type of health insurance coverage (public or private). While Bellingham does have a higher proportion of the insured population with private health insurance than the national average (69.3 and 66.1 percent, respectively), it is a lower proportion than that of the peer cities (72.0 percent) and Seattle (78.0 percent).

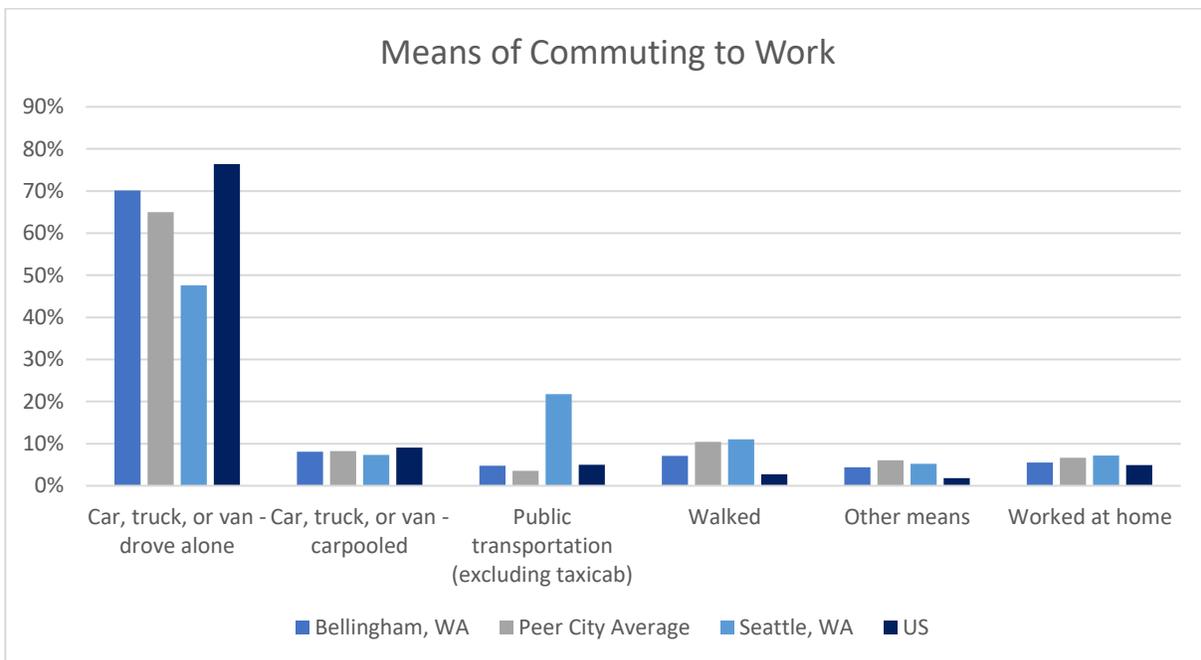


### Means of Commuting

Bellingham’s workforce commutes to work by very similar means as the peer cities – there is no more than a 2 percent difference between the Bellingham and peer city average workforce populations within each category.

Bellingham does commute via car truck or van (alone) much more than Seattle (67.1 percent, compared to 50.1 percent in Seattle), but much less than the national average (76.4 percent).

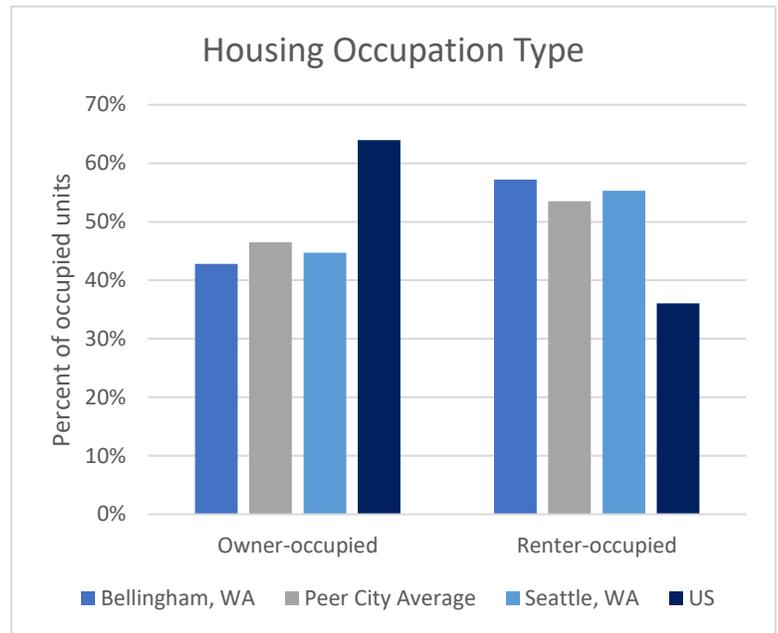
Seattle stands out in the public transportation category – 20.1 percent of its workforce uses public transportation for their commute, compared to 5.2 percent in Bellingham, 3.6 percent in the peer cities, and 5.1 percent nationally. This is expected based on Seattle’s more extensive public transportation system.



## Housing

In terms of housing occupation type, Bellingham, the peer cities, and Seattle have a very similar composition of owner-occupied and renter-occupied units – Bellingham and Seattle have an identical proportion of owner-occupied units, 46.1 percent, while the peer city average is 46.8 percent.

However, all of these areas have less owner-occupied units than the national average (63.9 percent), and subsequently more rental units than the national average (36.1 percent).



## Conclusion

Overall, we can conclude that Seattle, WA, is not a completely accurate comparison point for the internal economic and demographic structure of Bellingham, WA. Instead, when attempting to draw comparisons, the peer cities such as Fort Collins, CO; Santa Cruz, CA; Flagstaff, AZ; etc. should be used. While Bellingham still presents characteristics that are not found within these peer cities – such as a high percentage of retired persons – in general, we can draw more meaningful comparisons and conclusions about Bellingham based on the peer cities instead of Seattle. We are able to provide support to the notion that geographical proximity does not equate to a comparable economic landscape.

More specifically, from these comparisons between the peer cities and Bellingham, we are able to confirm that Bellingham still persists in its issues in retaining graduates from its four-year universities within the local job market. Talent that is generated within Bellingham tends to leak outside of the city. Moreover, poverty is a worsening issue in all areas examined, but is especially pronounced in Bellingham. This could be a product of a variety of unique characteristics to Bellingham – high percentage of population in retirement, high unemployment, high housing costs, little opportunity for high-income jobs, or, more likely, a combination of numerous factors.

Lastly, when examining the data presented in this report, further conclusions can be drawn by also comparing data over time with the previous version of this report that was published in 2017. The curious reader is encouraged to examine both reports.