

Methodological Notes

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National Coverage of the Data

As of fall 2021, institutions actively submitting enrollment data to the Clearinghouse account for 97 percent of all enrollments at Title IV, degree-granting institutions in the U.S. Because coverage of institutions (i.e., percentage of all institutions participating in the Clearinghouse) is not 100 percent for any individual year, weights were applied by institutional sector and state to better approximate enrollments at all institutions nationally. Using all IPEDS Title IV, degree-granting institutions as the base population, weights for each institutional sector and state were calculated using the inverse of the rate of enrollment coverage for that sector and state in the relevant year. Given the unavailability of fall 2022 and fall 2023 IPEDS enrollments at the time of publication, fall 2021 IPEDS enrollments were used as the basis for calculating the fall 2022 and fall 2023 Clearinghouse data coverage rates in the Fall 2023 Current Term Enrollment Estimates report. To maintain consistency, these rates were also applied to estimate spring 2024 enrollment for this report. For detailed statistics on enrollment coverage, as well as other aspects of Clearinghouse data, view "[Working With Our Data.](#)"

Differences from IPEDS Data

National Student Clearinghouse data are nonadjudicated, administrative data that come directly from college and university registrars. The data differ from IPEDS survey data in several important ways:

1. Term definition: IPEDS does not conduct a spring enrollment survey, so there are no comparable IPEDS numbers for the spring. For Clearinghouse reporting, institutions provide the start- and end-dates for each enrollment, rather than formally designating fall or spring terms. Spring terms included in the Current Term Enrollment Estimates account for the academic terms that:

- a) began between January 15 and March 31, inclusive OR
- b) ended between February 15 and April 30, inclusive OR
- c) began before January 15 AND ended after April 30.

2. Degree-granting status: When referencing IPEDS enrollment counts, it is important to distinguish counts limited to degree-granting institutions from those that also include non-degree-granting institutions. NCES publishes both of these counts in IPEDS First-Look Reports. The Clearinghouse counts in this report are limited to Title IV, degree-granting institutions.

3. Enrollment status changes: Institutions submit data to the Clearinghouse throughout a given term, capturing changes in enrollment status from one submission to the next, with each showing the student enrolled as either full time, three-quarters time, half time, or less than half time during the term. For IPEDS reporting, an institution generally counts a student according to the student's enrollment status as of the institution's IPEDS census date.

Institutional Sector Classification

This report defines institutional sectors based on the Carnegie Classification. While the classification largely follows IPEDS sector designations, where there are differences between IPEDS and Carnegie, we follow the Carnegie Classification. These discrepancies primarily affect PABs (see below) as well as 35 institutions that are classified as 4-year by IPEDS and 2-year by Carnegie. Most institutions in the latter case (30) are public. The 2018 Carnegie Classification was used to assign sectors for spring 2019 to spring 2021 and the 2021 Carnegie Classification for spring 2022 to spring 2024. Where the institutions' Carnegie Classifications carry no information as to 2- versus 4-year status, or are not included in the Carnegie Classifications, IPEDS sectors are used. All sector classifications are

at the branch campus level, meaning that branch campus sectors may vary from main campus sectors. This includes PABs (see below) which were previously identified only at the main campus level.

Primarily Associate Degree Granting Baccalaureate (PAB) Institutions

As more and more institutions that previously focused solely on granting associate degrees have begun to offer bachelor's degree programs, there has been a surge in IPEDS reclassification of two-year institutions as four-year institutions, since IPEDS assigns two- or four-year designations based on program offerings. However, many of these reclassified institutions still confer most awards at the associate degree level. These are considered primarily associate degree granting baccalaureate (PAB) institutions. We identify PABs using the Carnegie Classifications. Specifically, those institutions classified as Baccalaureate/Associate Colleges: Associate Dominant (code 14) or Baccalaureate/Associate Colleges: Mixed Baccalaureate/Associate (code 23). Institutions with a 14 designation award 90 percent or more of degrees at the associate level while those with a 23 designation award more than 50 percent but less than 90 percent of degrees at the associate level. This method identifies institutions across control groups.

We only report enrollment trends separately for public PABs. Enrollment at private PABs is included in totals. Public PABs account for about 92 percent of all PAB enrollment between 2019 and 2021 and about 94 percent of all PAB enrollment between spring 2022 and spring 2024. One drawback of the Carnegie approach is that years in which a new classification is released are subject to large sector reclassifications between PABs and other sectors. Because of this, readers are encouraged to exercise caution in evaluating PAB enrollment trends between spring 2021 and spring 2022. Some of these changes are due to a net move of institutions out of the PAB category in the 2021 Carnegie Classification. For example, the large reported decrease in bachelor's enrollment between spring 2021 and spring 2022 at public PABs is a function of many institutions moving out of the PAB category and into a four-year designation. Many of these schools were among the 23-designated PABs which granted higher shares of bachelor's degrees.

The creation of separate sector designations for PABs by control (public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit), along with the designation of PABs at the branch campus level, leads to revised weights and updated estimates for spring 2019 to spring 2023 compared to the results published in the spring 2023 edition of this report.

Primarily Online Institutions (POIs) and Multi-State Institutions

Primarily online institutions (POIs) are identified based on the IPEDS fall enrollment survey data, specifically, from the distance education enrollment survey items. Any institution that reports more than 90% of its total enrollment as exclusively distance education enrollment prior to the pandemic era is considered a POI. This applies as long as the entire institution—rather than a single branch campus—meets this enrollment threshold. This method results in 28 to 32 institutions identified and participating with the Clearinghouse depending on the year. POIs are predominantly for-profit four-year, multi-state institutions. Beginning with the fall 2022 report, POIs are grouped with multi-state institutions. Previously, some POIs not already designated as multi-state institutions by the Research Center had been included in state totals.

Multi-state institutions are now defined using the IPEDS institutional characteristics survey for each respective year from spring 2019 to spring 2021. The 2021 survey was used for spring 2022 to Spring 2024 .

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965, HBCUs were established prior to 1964, with the principal mission of educating black Americans and are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the U.S. Secretary of Education to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered. Currently, there are 91 HBCUs identified in the Clearinghouse data. Because coverage of HBCU enrollment in Clearinghouse data varies by institutional sector, national HBCU enrollment counts are weighted by the inverse of HBCU coverage within each sector to produce undergraduate and graduate enrollment counts. In recent years,

institutions reporting their enrollments in time for inclusion in this report have represented a declining share of all HBCU enrollments, resulting in slightly larger weights applied.

Locale (Campus Setting)

Locale (Campus Setting) refers to the geographic location of a college categorized on a continuum ranging from urban to rural, as defined by IPEDS. The IPEDS codes incorporate the campus location's population size and distance from an urbanized area, resulting in 12 distinct codes, grouped into the following four categories:

- *Urban*: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city
- *Suburban*: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area.
- *Town*: Territory inside an urban cluster and outside an urbanized area.
- *Rural*: Territory outside of an urban cluster and outside an urbanized area.

Please note that all locale analyses are unweighted, meaning that they are unadjusted for differences in the coverage of the Clearinghouse's enrollment data by locale.

Community College Program Focus

The program focus of a community college is classified in the following four categories based on the Carnegie Classification for Associate Colleges:

- *High Transfer* – Institutions where 35.7% or fewer of their awards were in career and technical disciplines.
- *Mixed Transfer/Vocational* – Institutions where between 35.7 and 53.8% of their awards were in career and technical disciplines.
- *High Vocational* – Institutions with at least 53.8% of their awards were considered high career and technical program mix.
- *Other/Missing* – Includes institutions classified either as “special-focus two-year institutions” and those without a basic Carnegie classification.

The 2018 classification was used for spring 2019 to spring 2021 and the 2021 classification for spring 2022 to spring 2024. This measure is applied only to public 2-year institutions. PABs are not “Associate Colleges” in the Carnegie classification. Their codes do not include information on program focus. Analyses using this variable are unweighted, meaning that they are unadjusted for the coverage of the Clearinghouse's enrollment data by program focus.

Major Field of Study

Major fields of study across all years have been harmonized to reflect the 2020 NCES Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP). At the national level, enrollment by major field is now available at the four-digit CIP level. The four-digit level provides an intermediate level of detail between the two-digit, broad major families that we continue to report on, and the most-specific 6-digit codes. Four-digit codes that have 100 or fewer enrollments or are reported by fewer than three institutions in a given level (4-year, 2-year, PAB) and year have been suppressed.

First-Time Freshman and Dual Enrollment

First-time freshmen are defined as those students pursuing an undergraduate credential of any kind who had no enrollment or degree or certificate award records at a Title IV U.S. institution prior to the respective spring term start date, unless the previous enrollment record was before they turned 18 years of age or before they graduated from high school (dual enrollment), where high school graduation status is known in Clearinghouse data.

Due to the timing of high school diploma data availability, nearly all freshmen with prior enrollment records are identified using the age 18 threshold. We therefore consider undergraduate enrollees 17 and younger to be dual enrollees in this report.

Please note that all freshman analyses are unweighted, meaning that they are unadjusted for differences in the coverage of the Clearinghouse's enrollment data by classification.

Credential Type

The type of credential that a student's program of study leads to is reported to the Clearinghouse with each enrollment record. The reporting categories are:

- non-credential program
- undergraduate certificate or diploma program
- associate degree
- bachelor's degree
- post-baccalaureate certificate
- master's degree
- doctoral degree
- first-professional degree
- graduate/professional certificate

In this report, the "Other Graduate" category includes post-baccalaureate certificates as well as a small number of non-credential enrollments (about 2% of non-credential enrollments in each year) reported as graduate level by institutions. The "Other Undergraduate" category includes the remaining non-credential enrollments as well as enrollments that are missing credential level information and are assumed to be non-credential. Enrollment records that are missing credential level information account for between 4.5 and 5.5 percent of enrollment records included in this report depending on the year.

Gender Imputation

Institutions reported student gender to the Clearinghouse for about three-quarters of all students included in this report. Gender data for the remaining students were imputed using a table of name-gender pairs that the Research Center developed using data publicly available from the Census Bureau and the Social Security Administration as well as the institution-reported data. The imputation used only those pairs in which the name had at least two instances and was associated with a single gender in at least 95 percent of the instances. The imputation is accurate in 99.6 percent of the cases where gender was reported by institutions. For a detailed document describing this approach, see "[Working With Our Data.](#)"

Students Without Valid Identifiers

Students without a valid identifier reported to the Clearinghouse were previously presumed to be international students and thus excluded from previous editions of the CTEE report. In recent years, more U.S. students have appeared in this category. In order to better reflect the full population of students reported to the Clearinghouse, beginning with the fall 2022 CTEE report all students without a valid identifier, including U.S. and international, are included for all years.

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