

## 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 Clearinghouse participation grew over the period covered by this report, and 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 IPEDS enrollments at the time of publication, fall 2021 IPEDS enrollments were used as the basis for calculating the Clearinghouse coverage rates for fall 2022. 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: Most institutions use an October 15 census date when counting fall enrollments for IPEDS, but institutions have some flexibility in determining whether a given term should be counted as a fall term. For Clearinghouse reporting, institutions provide the start and end dates for each enrollment, rather than formally designating fall or spring terms. Fall terms included in the *Current Term Enrollment Estimates* are those that:

- a. began between August 15 and October 31, inclusive or
- b. ended between September 15 and November 30, inclusive or
- c. began before August 15 AND ended after November 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.

### Primarily Associate Degree Granting Baccalaureate Institutions (PABs)

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 institutions are considered PABs. PABs can be identified using the institutional category variable from the IPEDS Institutional Characteristics survey, or based on the [Carnegie Classifications](#). The IPEDS methodology identifies more institutions than the Carnegie Classifications, because Carnegie excludes tribal colleges and special focus colleges. We elect to use the more conservative Carnegie Classification, 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. Using the 2021 Carnegie Classification, 63.9 percent of institutions are public, 16.8 percent are private nonprofit, and 19.4 percent are private for-profit. 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. We have noted where this factor is driving results in the report. In this report, the number of PABs included by year is: 114 (2017), 146 (2018), 143 (2019), 142 (2020), 128 (2021), 136 (2022).

### Primarily Online Institutions (POIs)

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. Using this method, there were between 27 and 32 institutions identified depending on the year. POIs are predominantly for-profit four-year, multistate institutions. Beginning this year, POIs have been grouped with multistate institutions in the CTEE report. Previously, some POIs that were not already designated as multistate institutions by the Research Center had been included in state totals.

### Institutional Selectivity

Institutional selectivity is measured using the 2016 Barron's Selectivity Index, which evaluates the competitiveness of an institution based on several undergraduate admissions factors such as an institution's acceptance rate, as well as the college admissions test scores, high school GPAs, and high school rankings of its admitted students. Please note that all institutional selectivity analyses are unweighted, meaning that they are unadjusted for the coverage of the Clearinghouse's enrollment data. Utilizing the 2016 Barron's selectivity list, the ranking categories are as follows:

*Highly Selective:* Institutions identified as either "Most Competitive" or "Highly Competitive" according to the Barron's Selectivity Index. Their definitions are as follows:

- **Most Competitive:** Institutions that generally admit less than a third of their total applicant pool. Students that are admitted generally have a high school class rank in the top 10-20 percent of their graduating class, and high school grade averages from A to B+. SAT/ACT scores are in the top 80<sup>th</sup> percentile.
- **Highly Competitive:** Institutions that generally admit between a third to half of their applicant pool. Students that are admitted generally are in the top 20-35 percent of their high school graduating class, with high school grade averages from B+ to B. SAT and ACT scores are in the top 75<sup>th</sup> percentile.

*Very Competitive:* Institutions that generally admit between 50-75 percent of their applicant pool. Students that are admitted generally are in the top 35-50 percent of their graduating class and have high school grade averages of a B- or better. SAT and ACT scores are in the top 67<sup>th</sup> percentile.

*Competitive:* Institutions that generally admit between 75-85 percent of their applicant pool. Students that are admitted are generally in the top 50-65 percent of their high school graduating class and have a high school grade average of a B- or better. SAT and ACT scores are in the top 60<sup>th</sup> percentile.

*Less Selective:* Institutions identified as either "Less Competitive," "Noncompetitive," "Special Focus," or "Unranked," according to the Barron's Selectivity Index. Their definitions are as follows:

- *Less Competitive*: Institutions that generally admit more than 85 percent of their applicant pool. Students that are admitted generally rank in the top 65 percent of their graduating class and have high school grade averages below a C. SAT and ACT scores are below the top 60th percentile.
- *Noncompetitive*: Institutions that either admit more than 98 percent of their applicant pool, admit all in-state residents, but have some requirements for out-of-state students, or require evidence of a high school diploma from an accredited school.
- *Special Focus*: Institutions that are specialized, such as professional schools of art, music, or other disciplines. Schools oriented towards adult learners are also sometimes in this category.
- *Unranked*: All institutions not otherwise categorized in the Barron's selectivity index.

### Major Field of Study

Major field of study across all years has been harmonized to reflect the 2020 NCES Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) at the two-digit CIP family level.

### First-Time Freshman Enrollment

Beginning in fall 2020, 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 fall term start date, unless the previous enrollment record was *before they graduated from high school (dual enrollment) or before they turned 18 years old* in cases where high school graduation status was unknown. For years prior to 2020, the italicized portion of the above definition was not operational. Differences between the two approaches are minimal. In addition, this report removes graduate-level credential-seeking students from all years who were previously erroneously flagged as first-time freshmen. These students accounted for between 2.6 and 5.1 percent of previously reported freshman enrollment in the re-estimated years of 2017 to 2021.

### 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, all students without a valid identifier, including U.S. and international, are now included in the CTEE Expanded Edition report for all years. This is a large change given that the added students represent between 831,000 enrollments (or 4.2% of the national total) in 2017 and 1,168,000 enrollments (6.4% of the national total) in 2022.

### 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.](#)"

### Race/Ethnicity Data Coverage and Estimation

The Clearinghouse collects race and ethnicity data as an optional part of the enrollment reports it receives from institutions. The reporting categories are: Asian, Black, Hispanic (Latinx in this report), Native American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Non-Resident Alien, Two or More Races, White, Unknown (for students who opt not to report race/ethnicity to their institution), and missing (for students whose institutions did not report any category to the Clearinghouse). Due to the optional nature of reporting, the Clearinghouse has a 17 to 23% race/ethnicity

missing rate, on average. The rate is higher for freshmen, who have the least amount of time for a valid race/ethnicity to be reported to the Clearinghouse. To address this, we developed a conservative imputation method based on the rates at which those with a missing race/ethnicity are identified with a valid race/ethnicity in the subsequent year. This imputation has been applied only to fall 2022 undergraduate enrollment, including freshmen, in this report. The missing rate after imputation is 13.5% for all undergraduates (versus 16.9% before imputation) and 17.9% for freshmen (versus 31.2% before imputation). As the 2022 race and ethnicity data are imputed estimates for freshmen and for undergraduates, these data should be interpreted with caution. We do not impute race/ethnicity for graduate students due to relatively stable missing rates year-on-year.

### **Suggested Citation**

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