

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The *Stay Informed* series was created to help educational leaders and policymakers understand the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on postsecondary enrollments. The report’s dashboards continue to be updated within the first two months of every fall term to provide preliminary but timely enrollment updates to the education community using the latest enrollment data available through the Clearinghouse. The estimates provided in this report are preliminary and subject to revision. The [Current Term Enrollment Estimates](#) report, released every January, provides final enrollment estimates for the fall term.

The current report reflects 8.7 million enrollments reported as of September 26, 2024, by 51.9 percent of postsecondary institutions in the U.S. that are participating in the Clearinghouse. Analyses focus on year-over-year percent changes in enrollment between 2022 and 2023, 2023 and 2024, and the two-year cumulative percent change in enrollment from 2022 to 2024, based on a panel of institutions that consistently reported their fall term enrollments at the same point in the term in each of the years included in the report. Thus, a different set of institutions are included in each *Stay Informed* report.

NATIONAL COVERAGE OF THE DATA

Clearinghouse data track enrollments nationally and are not limited by institutional and state boundaries. 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. Unlike the [Current Term Enrollment Estimates \(CTEE\)](#) report series, where enrollments are weighted to account for variation in data coverage rates by institution sector and state, the *Stay Informed* series uses unweighted enrollment counts. This is because the emphasis is on year-over-year percentage changes in enrollment patterns rather than estimating total enrollment numbers. The two reports also differ in that the *Stay Informed* report only includes enrollments at institutions in the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. *CTEE* includes institutions in U.S. territories in the analysis. Hence, estimated enrollment changes may differ between the *Stay Informed* and *CTEE* reports due to the difference in methodology and institution coverage.

INSTITUTION PANEL SELECTION, TERM DEFINITION, COVERAGE

The analysis in this report is based on a fixed panel of all institutions that submitted data to the Clearinghouse during the same time frame across all comparison years. We created the panel to control for year-to-year variations in institutional coverage as well as in data submission dates.

To control for institutional coverage, only institutions that submitted enrollment data across all three years (2022-2024) were included in the panel. To control for submission timing variability among these institutions, only fall term data that was submitted within the data submission window (specified in Figure M1, below) in each of the three years was included. However, it is important to note that even with these controls, enrollments at some institutions in the panel may still have been overcounted or undercounted for 2024 due to unusual file submission patterns.

For Clearinghouse reporting, institutions provide school-specific start- and end-dates for each enrollment, rather than formally designating a term. The fall *Stay Informed* update contains the latest enrollments submitted by institutions within the time frames provided in figure M1.

Figure M1. Term Dates, Submission Window Dates, and Coverage for Stay Informed Panel

	Term Dates	Submission Window	Institutional Coverage	Enrollment Coverage
Fall 2024	Start between 7/1 – 12/1	7/1 – 9/26	51.9%	50.8% (8.7M/17.1M)

Note: Both institutional and enrollment coverage rates for fall 2024 data are calculated using fall 2023 data submissions as the denominator.

FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, 18-YEAR-OLDS, 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 U.S. postsecondary institution prior to their respective fall 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 younger than 18 to be dual enrollees in this report.

First-time freshmen 18-year-olds are those first-time freshmen who are 18 years old as of their institution's fall term start date.

GENDER IMPUTATION

Institutions reported student gender to the Clearinghouse for about three-quarters of all enrollments included in this report. Gender data for the remaining enrollment records 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 AND ETHNICITY DATA COVERAGE AND ESTIMATION

Not all institutions report race and ethnicity data to the Clearinghouse. *Missing* data (for institutions that do not report to the Clearinghouse) account for an average of 13.0 percent of all undergraduate enrollments and 20.3 percent of all freshman enrollments across panel years in this report. To account for differences in missing rates across years, undergraduate and freshman enrollments by race and ethnicity are estimated for the most recent year (fall 2024) based on previous years' patterns of data reporting. The fall 2024 missing rate after adjustments is 12.5 percent for undergraduates (16.2% before adjustment) and 16.7 percent for freshmen (30.9% before adjustment). An additional 2.8 percent of undergraduate students on average across panel years have race/ethnicity reported as *Unknown*, a valid reporting category meaning they do not report their race to their institution. Only the missing rate, and not the unknown rate, is the target of our estimation procedure. As the fall 2024 race and ethnicity data are adjusted enrollment estimates for freshmen and undergraduates, these data should be interpreted with caution. No adjustments are made for graduate students as their race/ethnicity missing rate is relatively stable year-over-year (between 15.5% and 16.5% in this report, depending on the year).

Additionally, the share of students with reported race/ethnicity *Unknown* has been rising over the period covered in this report. To understand the impact that this could have on the reported freshman enrollment declines by race and ethnicity, we estimated how much freshman enrollment declines for the major race/ethnicity groups included in this report could be explained by increases in *Unknown* reporting. These shares provide the maximum amount of the freshman enrollment declines for each race/ethnicity group that could be accounted for if the total increase in *Unknown* were attributed solely to students of each group in turn. For Multiracial freshmen, the increase in *Unknown* reporting could account for the entire decline in freshman enrollment. The maximal shares for White, Hispanic, Black, and Asian freshmen, are 11.5%, 42.0%, 75.5% and 84.6%, respectively. While these are guidance, it is highly unlikely that increases in *Unknown* reporting are attributable solely to freshmen from a single race/ethnicity group.

NEIGHBORHOOD INCOME MEASURE

The neighborhood income measure provides information about the relative socioeconomic level of students' pre-college neighborhoods for students originating from the 50 U.S. states and Washington, D.C. Neighborhood income is highly correlated with other indicators of neighborhood socioeconomic status (SES) such as home ownership, educational attainment, employment, and poverty. Research suggests that [students hailing from higher SES neighborhoods have better outcomes](#) in terms of college attendance and lifetime earnings, likely due to factors such as [access to high-quality schools, high-achieving peer groups, healthier natural environments, and limited exposure to violence and the criminal justice system](#). It is important to note that this is **not** a measure of family or individual income. Not all students who come from high-income neighborhoods come from high-income families and the same is true of students from low-income neighborhoods.

The measure utilizes street addresses reported to the Clearinghouse with each enrollment submission to locate students' homes in a particular census tract through geocoding. To best approximate socioeconomic origins, we use the first permanent address reported to the Clearinghouse for each student and apply the measure only to undergraduate students 24 and younger whose first higher education enrollment (including dual enrollment) occurred at age 19 or younger. Additionally, a small number of students, whose first enrollment predates 2010, are excluded due to the availability of external data sources needed to construct the measure. After these three restrictions—location of the first address, age at first enrollment, and data year of the first address—are taken into account, we are able to include 94 percent of all undergraduates 24 and younger in our panel in each term.

Income data for each tract are sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates. These are adjusted using Regional Price Parity values from the Bureau of Economic Analysis to account for price level differences by state and metropolitan area. The quintiles referenced in this report are of tract median household income adjusted for household size. Quintiles are based on the national distribution of median household income, adjusted for household size, among all census tracts in the 50 states and D.C.

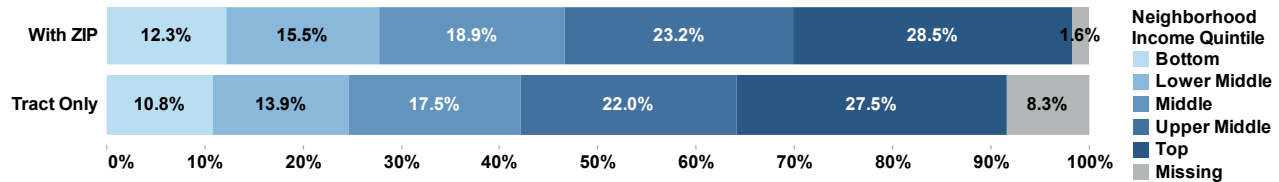
The vast majority (nearly 92%) of students included in the neighborhood income analyses in this report are successfully geocoded to a census tract. We also include an additional 6.6 to 7 percent (depending on the year) of students who match to ZIP codes but not tracts.¹ ZIP codes are generally larger than tracts, providing less granular measures of a student's pre-college neighborhood. To apply our tract-based neighborhood income measure to these students, we link ZIP codes to Census tracts using crosswalks produced by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). A student matching to a ZIP code is assigned weights equal to the share of all residential addresses within the ZIP code lying in tracts of each neighborhood income quintile. For each ZIP-code matched student, the sum of these weights equals 1. Specifically, a student matched to a ZIP code that overlaps with two tracts: one in the lower middle quintile and the other in the middle neighborhood income quintile, with each tract encompassing half the residential addresses in that ZIP code, would be assigned quintile values for each of those quintiles with weights equal to 0.5 for each.

Because our method assumes an equal probability of college-going from tracts of differing neighborhood income levels within the same ZIP code, we are likely slightly overestimating the share of students from lower-income neighborhoods using this method. However, as shown in figure M2, given the relatively small share of students assigned to income quintiles using ZIP code matches, the distribution of students by neighborhood income quintile does not differ greatly between an approach that includes only those students who are geocoded to census tracts and the one used here incorporating ZIP code matches. Inclusion of ZIP

¹ An additional small share of students (1.2% to 1.5% depending on the year) match to a ZIP code. However, we exclude these students because their address indicates a PO Box. Since PO Boxes are delivery addresses and not necessarily residential addresses, these students appear as Missing in our neighborhood income analyses.

code matches also allows us to provide information on neighborhood income background for student groups for whom tract-level geocoding is substantially less successful, such as students from rural areas.

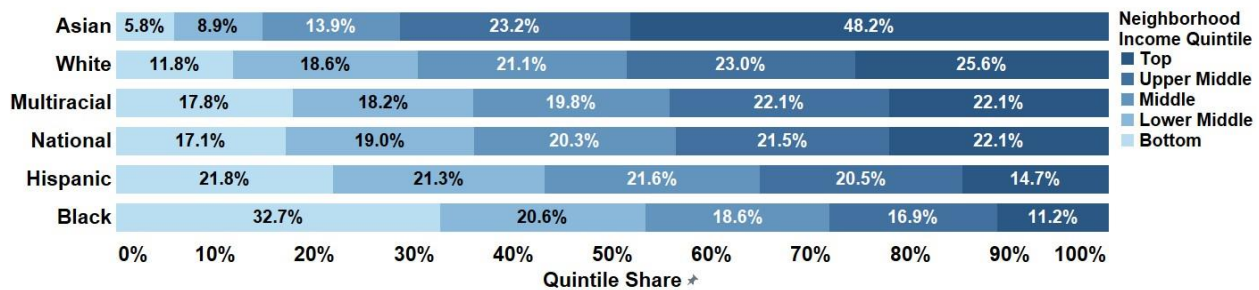
Figure M2. Comparison of Neighborhood Income Quintile Distribution for Undergraduates Using ZIP Code Matches and Tract-Only Matches, fall 2024



In this report, students with missing neighborhood income quintile values are those who have met the sample restrictions described above, but that (1) we were unable to geocode to either a tract or a ZIP code (including all PO Box addresses) or (2) were geocoded to a tract (or a ZIP code which overlaps such a tract) for which ACS does not publicly publish income data. These missing rates range from 1.4 percent to 1.9 percent depending on the student group (undergraduates or freshmen) and the year. The inability to geocode (rather than geocoding to a tract or ZIP code without income data) accounts for nearly all of these missing cases. Geocoding non-matches typically arise from issues relating to the quality of address data such as PO Box addresses and incomplete street addresses. Address quality may be correlated with both neighborhood and household income.

For neighborhood income results by students' race/ethnicity, it is important to note that ethnoracial groups are not uniformly distributed across neighborhood income quintiles. To aid in interpreting these data, we provide a baseline estimate of the population of all 15–17-year-olds in the U.S. residing in tracts of each neighborhood income quintile for each of the race/ethnicity groups we report on, as well as for the Nation overall in figure M3.

Figure M3. National Distribution of 15–17-year-olds by Race/Ethnicity and Neighborhood Income Quintile



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2018-2022 5-year Estimates. NOTE: Age 15-17 selected to approximate high school-age and to avoid the undercounting of 18–24-year-olds living away from home while enrolled in postsecondary education. These individuals are not included in home census tract estimates.

ENROLLMENT INTENSITY

Unlike the *Current Term Enrollment Estimates* report series where enrollment intensity is identified based on the first data submitted for a student in any given term, this report identifies enrollment intensity based on the latest data submitted. As a result, the intensity reflects the student's current workload as of the data cut-off date. The current analysis broadly categorizes enrollment intensity into full-time and part-time. The part-time category includes three-quarter time, half-time and less-than-half-time.

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, post-baccalaureate certificate and graduate/professional certificate are combined to form the “Graduate certificate” category. Enrollment changes for non-credential programs and missing program data are not shown in credential type breakouts but are included in totals elsewhere throughout the report.

MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY

Reporting on enrollment changes by field of study is based on the 2020 NCES Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP), aggregating six-digit CIP codes reported by institutions into CIP families at the two-digit level. Science and Engineering majors are defined at the six-digit CIP code level in accordance with the classification used by the National Science Foundation. The following disciplines are included: Biological and Agricultural Sciences; Computer Sciences; Earth, Atmospheric, and Ocean Sciences; Engineering; Mathematics; Physical Sciences; Psychology; and Social Sciences.

INSTITUTIONAL SHARE OF UNDERGRADUATE PELL GRANT RECIPIENTS

This report draws from [IPEDS Student Financial Aid and Net Price 2021-22 data](#) on the percent of undergraduate students awarded Pell Grants. IPEDS Pell recipient data is aggregated to the main campus (six-digit OPEID) level for our analysis. Using IPEDS data, we ordered institutions from smallest to largest share of undergraduates receiving Pell Grants. We then divided those IPEDS institutions into three groups (i.e., low, medium, high) of equal numbers of institutions for each sector. Using this approach, we report enrollment trends for low, medium, and high percent Pell institutions by sector, specifically for public 4-year, private nonprofit 4-year, and public 2-year and public PAB (combined). Other sectors are excluded due both to large variations in the share of Pell Grant recipients by sector and institution coverage. Because our approach is sector-specific, definitions of low, medium, and high percent Pell differ by sector. Sector tertile cutoffs are given in figure M4.

Figure M4. Tertile Cutoffs for Institutional Share of Undergraduate Pell Grant Recipients

	Public 4-year	Private nonprofit 4-year	Public 2 and PABs
High percent Pell	39.7% to 82.4%	39.8% to 100%	36.4% to 99.1%
Medium percent Pell	28.3% to 39.7%	25.8% to 39.8%	25.5% to 36.4%
Low percent Pell	0.0% to 28.3%	0.0% to 25.8%	0.0% to 25.4%

Results for these three major sectors should be interpreted with caution due to low coverage of high percent Pell institutions included in this report. Coverage rates for each sector are given in figure M5:

Figure M5. Institution and Enrollment Coverage by Institutional Share of Undergraduate Population with Pell Grants

	Public 4-year		Private nonprofit 4-year		Public 2-year and PABs	
	Institution Coverage	Enrollment Coverage	Institution Coverage	Enrollment Coverage	Institution Coverage	Enrollment Coverage
High percent Pell	42.6%	41.1%	28.8%	31.5%	27.1%	46.7%
Medium percent Pell	57.1%	61.5%	40.7%	55.6%	43.0%	43.7%
Low percent Pell	61.8%	67.4%	45.8%	55.0%	38.3%	46.3%

RECLASSIFICATIONS OF INSTITUTION SECTORS

This report defines institution sectors primarily based on the 2021 [Carnegie Basic Classification](#) for each academic year. Carnegie Classification and IPEDS sector designations align for the most part, but when there are differences, we follow the Carnegie Classification. These discrepancies mostly impact Primarily Associate Degree Granting Baccalaureate Institutions (PABs; see below). When a Carnegie Classification is missing for an institution, we utilize the institution's IPEDS sector (IPEDS Institutional Characteristics 2022-23) where available, and, finally, the sector reported by the institution to the Clearinghouse. Because our reporting is restricted to a fixed panel of institutions, institution sector definitions are applied consistently across all comparison years (2022-2024) in order to calculate year-over-year enrollment changes without the disruption of sector reclassifications between years.

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 2-year institutions as 4-year institutions, since IPEDS assigns 2- or 4-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 utilize the 2021 [Carnegie Basic Classification](#) to identify PABs. PABs are defined as institutions that offer at least one baccalaureate degree program and award more than half of their degrees at the associate level. These institutions are made up of two subcategories:

- *Baccalaureate/Associate Colleges - Associate Dominant (code 14)*: institutions that award 90 percent or more of degrees at the associate level, or
- *Baccalaureate/Associate Colleges - Mixed Baccalaureate/Associate (code 23)*: institutions that award more than 50 percent but less than 90 percent of degrees at the associate level.

This method identifies institutions across control groups (e.g., public, private nonprofit) – PAB control is identified using IPEDS data.

PRIMARILY ONLINE INSTITUTIONS AND MULTI-STATE INSTITUTIONS

Primarily Online Institutions (POIs) are identified based on the distance education survey items in the [IPEDS fall 2022 enrollment survey](#). Any institution where the primary campus reports more than 90 percent of its students (undergraduates and graduates combined) enrolled exclusively in distance education courses (online) is considered a POI. If a branch campus meets this threshold but the main campus does not, the institution is not considered a POI.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of institutions with more than 90 percent online enrollment more than quadrupled in 2020-2021 compared to the previous academic year. To account for institutions that temporarily shifted to online instruction during academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-22, our methodology considers an institution to be a POI in those pandemic years if 1) 90 percent of students were enrolled in exclusively distance education and 2) the institution had at least 80 percent exclusively online enrollment in 2019-2020. As of academic year 2022-2023, the methodology returns to the single-rule 90

percent threshold. Using this rule, a total of 51 institutions are identified in the Clearinghouse data, 17 of which are classified as POIs for the first time in the 2022-2023 academic year; most of them had made a full transition to primarily online instruction during the pandemic years. Of the 51 POIs, 24 that are designated as POIs in the 2022-2023 academic year are included in this report (47.1% institution coverage).

Multi-State Institutions are those with at least one branch campus that is operative in a state different from the main campus (six-digit OPEID). Institutional locations are identified based on [IPEDS Institutional Characteristics File: Fall 2022](#). Institutions in U.S. territories that have at least one campus in the United States are included.

POIs and multi-state institutions are combined for state-level analyses given POIs are predominantly for-profit 4-year, multi-state institutions.

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965, [Historically Black Colleges and Universities \(HBCUs\)](#) 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. There are 93 institutions identified in Clearinghouse data that are classified as HBCUs according to the 2021 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. For this report, 29 are included in the analysis (31.2% institution coverage).

HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTIONS

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are defined as institutions where 25 percent or more of their undergraduate full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment are Hispanic students. The Clearinghouse utilizes the HSI list released by [Excelencia in Education](#) which identifies 600 institutions as HSIs as of fall 2022. The Clearinghouse data covers 89 percent of HSIs for fall 2022 (494 institutions). For this report, 205 are included in the analysis (41.5% institution coverage).

ADMISSIONS SELECTIVITY

Admissions selectivity is measured using the 2016 Barron's Selectivity Index, which evaluates the competitiveness of an institution based on several admissions factors such as an institution's acceptance rate, college admissions test scores, high school GPAs, and high school rankings of its admitted students. 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 80th 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 75th 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 67th 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 60th 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.
- *Unranked*: All institutions not otherwise categorized in the Barron's selectivity index.

The Barron's Selectivity Index also includes a category called Special Focus which are 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. Given the Special Focus category includes institutions that span the range of admissions selectivity groups outlined above, these institutions (accounting for 1.9 percent of undergraduate enrollment at public and private nonprofit 4-year institutions) were not included in the admissions selectivity analysis.

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 three categories:

Urban: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city

Suburban: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area.

Rural & Town (combined):

- *Town*: Territory inside an urban cluster and outside an urbanized area
- *Rural*: Territory outside of an urban cluster and outside an urbanized area

STATE-LEVEL DATA COVERAGE

States are considered to have sufficient coverage if at least three institutions reported in the given state and there is at least 30 percent statewide enrollment coverage. Forty-two states and the District of Columbia (D.C.) have sufficient data to show in the interactive maps on the data dashboards for total enrollment, 42 states and D.C. have sufficient data for undergraduate enrollment, and 38 states and D.C. have sufficient data for graduate enrollment. Total, undergraduate, and graduate enrollment changes are not shown for Alaska, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, or Washington. Additionally, graduate enrollment changes are not shown for California, Hawaii, Minnesota, or Wyoming.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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