

Methodological Notes

The *Stay Informed* series is designed to track the impact of COVID-19 on postsecondary enrollment, using the latest data available and the historical data from the two most recent years as pre-pandemic baselines. The series started as rapid response reporting for fall 2020 by tracking enrollment changes once a month for various subgroups of students, programs, institutions, states or regions. These monthly reports showed that in-pandemic enrollment changes were highly consistent throughout the fall 2020. This has led to the change in reporting cycle for the spring 2021, twice per term, rather than monthly.

This first-look spring 2021 report represents 6.7 million enrollments reported as of February 11, by 43 percent of Title IV degree-granting institutions in the U.S. that are participating in the Clearinghouse. Analyses focus on year-over-year percent changes in enrollment from 2019 to 2020 and from 2020 and 2021, based on the same institutions reporting the same time in the given year.

NATIONAL COVERAGE OF THE DATA

Clearinghouse data track enrollments nationally and are not limited by institutional and state boundaries. As of fall 2019, 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 regular Current Term Enrollment Estimates 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 changes in same-institution enrollment patterns rather than estimating the total enrollment numbers.

PRE-PANDEMIC BASELINE DEVELOPMENT

To accurately assess the impact of COVID-19 on postsecondary enrollments, the analyses focused 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 the variations in data submission dates.

To control for institutional coverage, only the institutions that submitted enrollment data across the three years 2019-2021 were included in the analyses. Institutions that discontinued or started submitting enrollments at any point within these years were excluded. To control for submission timing among these institutions, only spring term data that was submitted within the data submission window (specified in Term Definition, 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 2021 due to unusual file submission patterns. Our investigations suggest that such data noise is minor.

TERM DEFINITION

For Clearinghouse reporting, institutions provide the start- and end-dates for each enrollment, rather than formally designating a term. Each iteration of the *Stay Informed* updates contains the latest enrollments submitted by institutions within the time frames below.

| Updates | Term Dates | Submission Window | Institutional Coverage | Enrollment Coverage |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| First Look Spring 2021 | Start between 1/15 – 4/5 or end between 2/15 – 4/30 or start before 1/15 <i>and</i> end after 4/30 | 1/1 – 2/11 | 43.3% | 39% (6.9M/17.7M) |

Note: Both institutional and enrollment coverages are calculated using the spring 2020 data.

RACE AND ETHNICITY DATA COVERAGE

Not all institutions report race and ethnicity data to the Clearinghouse. *Missing* data (for institutions that do not report to the Clearinghouse) and *Unknown* data (for students that do not report to their institution) account for an average of 25 percent of all enrollments, combined. Not all institutions that report race and ethnicity data populate the *Non-Resident Alien* category, and not all international students may be non-resident aliens. This results in an undercounting of international students generally.

ENROLLMENT INTENSITY

Unlike the regular Current Term Enrollment Estimates report series, enrollment intensity is identified based on the latest data submitted for a student in any given term. 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.

PRIMARILY ONLINE INSTITUTIONS

Primarily online institutions (POIs) are identified based on the IPEDS 2018 fall enrollment survey data, specifically, from the distance education enrollment survey items. Any institution that reports more than 90 percent of its undergraduate and graduate enrollments combined enrolling exclusively in distance education courses prior to the pandemic era is considered a POI. Following this method, a total of 34 institutions in the Clearinghouse data are identified as POIs, and 19 of these are included in this report. POIs are predominantly for-profit four-year, multi-state institutions.

RECLASSIFICATIONS OF INSTITUTION SECTORS

This report defines institution sectors based on the IPEDS fall 2018 Institutional Characteristics data, the most current data available at the time of the publication. Our reporting is restricted to the fixed panel of institutions, and the institution sector defined by the latest IPEDS data is applied consistently across all comparison years 2019-2021. This way we can estimate COVID-19's effects without disruptions of the sector reclassifications in between years. For instance, community colleges that were converted to primarily associate degree-granting bachelor's institutions in the intervening year would be categorized as primarily associate degree-granting bachelor's institutions for all three comparison years, having no impact on year-over-year enrollment changes in the community college sector.

URBANICITY (CAMPUS SETTING)

Refers to the geographic location of a college categorized on an urban continuum ranging from city to rural, as defined by [IPEDS](#). The IPEDS codes incorporate the population size and distance from an urbanized area, resulting in 12 different codes, grouped into the following four categories:

- City: Territory inside 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.

MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY (MAJOR)

Reporting on the field of study is based on the NCES Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP), first analyzing at the six-digit CIP level and categorizing into CIP families at the two-digit level. Science and Engineering majors are defined in accordance with the six-digit CIP levels used by the National Science Foundation, and the following disciplines are included: Biological and Agricultural Sciences; Computer Sciences; Earth, Atmospheric, and Ocean Sciences; Engineering; Mathematics; Physical Sciences; Psychology; and Social Sciences.