

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The *Transfer, Mobility, and Progress* series is designed to track the impact of COVID-19 on postsecondary transfer and mobility, using the latest data available and the historical data from the two most recent years (2019 and 2020). It updates transfer data dashboards, disaggregated by various subgroups of students, programs, and institutions.

This fall 2021 report shows transfer pathways across 93 percent of the Clearinghouse universe of institutions reported as of November 18, 2021. It focuses on year-over-year percent changes in enrollment based on the same institutions' fall 2020 and fall 2019 enrollments as of November 18 of the applicable year.

NATIONAL COVERAGE OF THE DATA

Clearinghouse data track enrollments nationally and are not limited by institutional and state boundaries. As of fall 2020, 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. Since Clearinghouse data is comprised of student-level data, researchers can use it to link concurrent as well as consecutive enrollments of individual students at multiple institutions. Therefore, it presents a unique opportunity to follow students' individual transfer patterns over their whole postsecondary experience.

Unlike previous Transfer and Mobility reports where enrollment rates are weighted by data coverage rates, the *COVID-19 Transfer, Mobility, and Progress* series focuses on unweighted data. This is because the emphasis of this series is on year-over-year changes in transfer patterns at the same institutions (a "fixed panel") rather than estimating the total transfer numbers.

PRE-PANDEMIC BASELINE DEVELOPMENT

To accurately assess the impact of COVID-19 on postsecondary transfer and mobility, 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 in 2019, 2020, *and* 2021 were included in the analyses. Institutions that discontinued or only started submitting enrollments at any point within these years were excluded. To control for submission timing among these institutions, only fall 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 have been overcounted or undercounted for 2021 due to unusual file submission patterns. Our investigations suggest that such data noise is minor.

Term Definition

Report	Fall Term	Submission Window	Institutional Coverage
Fall #1	7/1 – 12/31	8/1 – 11/18	92.6%

Note: Coverage rates are calculated based on fall 2019 institution counts data.

STUDENT POPULATION, TRANSFER DEFINITION AND DIRECTIONS OF MOBILITY

In light of the pandemic and its mostly unpredictable consequences for higher education world, we decided to investigate a very inclusive subset of the student population to capture any possible unforeseen effects on transfer behavior due to COVID-19. As a result, some of the definitions and identification strategies differ from our standard transfer and mobility reports.

Undergraduate Student Population

This study includes all degree-seeking students who were enrolled at a Title IV, degree-granting institution in the U.S. in the fall of the applicable year, reported as of November 18. This definition also includes students who were

dual enrolled prior to beginning their postsecondary career but excludes current dual enrollees. We then look at students' enrollment history to classify students into the following three subgroups: (1) first-time students, (2) continuing students, and (3) returning students. Continuing and returning students were included only if they had not previously earned a bachelor's degree or higher. However, students were included as either continuing or returning students if they had previously earned an associates or undergraduate certificate.

- (1) Freshmen or first-time students are those who had no enrollment records or degree/certificate awards at Title IV U.S. institutions prior to the fall of the applicable year, unless the previous enrollment record was before the student turned 18 years old or before the student graduated from high school (prior dual enrollment). Freshmen are not included in the analysis of student transfer and mobility for this report.
- (2) Continuing students are those students who had at least one valid enrollment in the previous spring or summer term prior to their fall enrollment.
- (3) Returning students are those students who returned after a stop-out and were therefore not enrolled in the same year prior to their fall enrollment.

Transfer Definition

We define students as transfer students in fall 2021 if they previously were enrolled at a Title IV, degree-granting institution, and subsequently enrolled in another Title IV, degree-granting institution in fall 2021. Note that we only consider the change of institution a student is enrolled in, regardless of whether academic credits are recognized between institutions. For more in-depth analysis of transfer patterns, we group all transfer students into two categories:

- (1) Continuing transfer students are those who had at least one valid enrollment record in the spring term or summer term and enrolled in the fall term at an institution different than their last enrolled institution.
- (2) Returning transfer students are those who had previously enrolled in postsecondary education but had stopped out up until the fall term, and re-enrolled in the fall at an institution different than their last enrolled institution.

Non-transfer students are either continuing or returning students defined as above who enrolled in fall at the same institution as their last enrolled institution. The same logic is applied to years 2019 and 2020 to determine the comparison groups.

Directions or Pathways of Student Transfer and Mobility

This report also investigates differences in the directions of student mobility. We categorize the following types or pathways of student mobility:

- (1) Upward transfer: Students who transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution, with or without first receiving an award (either a certificate or associate degree). This is also known as vertical transfer.
- (2) Lateral transfer: Students who either transfer from a two-year to a two-year institution or from a four-year to a four-year institution.
- (3) Reverse transfer: Students who transfer from a four-year to a two-year institution.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

The report focuses on six racial/ethnic categories: White, Asian, Black, Latinx, Native American, and Other. The 'Other' category includes Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, International, Multi-Race, and Unknown/Missing students. 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 16 percent of all enrollments, and an average of 10 percent of all transfer enrollments reflected in this analysis.

IN-STATE AND OUT-OF-STATE

Transfers are considered in-state if both institutions (of current enrollment and previous enrollment) are located in the same state, out-of-state if they are in different states. These designations apply regardless of the student's

state of residence. Transfers to or from a multi-state institution (with campuses in more than one state) are excluded from state analyses.

SELECTIVITY INDEX

The Barron's Selectivity index evaluates the competitiveness of an institution based on several admissions factors such as an institution's acceptance rate, SAT score, high school GPA, and high school class rank. Utilizing the 2016 Barron's selectivity list, the ranking categories are as follows:

- *Highly Selective* are 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* are 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.

RECLASSIFICATIONS OF INSTITUTION SECTORS

This report defines institution sectors based on the IPEDS fall 2019 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 the purposes of this report, we classify primarily associate degree-granting bachelor's institutions as two-year institutions for all three comparison years regardless of when such sectoral shift occurred. Therefore, it would have no impact on year-over-year enrollment changes in the four-year or two-year college sector.