

## METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

### OVERALL TRANSFER ENROLLMENT (Dashboard Tabs 1-4)

#### INSTITUTION PANEL SELECTION

To accurately assess longitudinal trends in transfer enrollment and control institutional submission variability, the analyses focused on a fixed panel of institutions that submitted data to the Clearinghouse during the same time frame across all comparison years.

For the first part of this report, only institutions that submitted fall term enrollment data within the data submission window (specified in Term Definitions below) in 2021, 2022, and 2023 were included in the analyses. Institutions that discontinued or only started submitting enrollments at any point within these years were excluded.

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 2023 due to unusual file submission patterns. Our investigations suggest that such data noise is minor.

#### *Term Definition*

7/1 – 12/31 (Fall Term)

8/1 – 11/19 (Submission Window)

#### DATA COVERAGE

The final institution panel represents 88.5 percent of the Clearinghouse universe of institutions and 88.3 percent of undergraduate enrollment reported to the Clearinghouse as of November 19, 2023. See the following table for institution and enrollment coverage by sector:

<b>Current Sector</b>	<b>Institution Coverage</b>	<b>Enrollment Coverage</b>
Public Four-Year	94.3%	94.4%
Private Nonprofit Four-Year	87.4%	87.0%
Private For-profit Four-Year	69.8%	72.2%
Community Colleges	88.2%	87.7%
Public PAB	73.5%	85.7%
Public Two-Year	90.6%	88.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>88.5%</b>	<b>88.3%</b>

#### UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT POPULATION

This study includes degree-seeking undergraduate 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 19, 2023. This definition excludes students who have previously earned a baccalaureate or higher and current dual enrollees. It includes students that have previously earned an associates or undergraduate certificate and those who were dual enrolled prior to beginning their postsecondary career.

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.

- 1) First-time students or freshmen 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 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 if they previously were enrolled at a Title IV, degree-granting institution, and subsequently enrolled in another Title IV, degree-granting institution. 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 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 stopped out 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 the years 2020 and 2021 to determine the comparison groups.

#### **IN-STATE AND OUT-OF-STATE TRANSFER**

Transfers are considered in-state if the institution of current enrollment and the institution of previous enrollment are both located in the same state. They are considered out-of-state if both institutions 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) or a primarily online institution (any institution that reports more than 90 percent of its students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses) are excluded from state analyses.

## **ENTERING COMMUNITY COLLEGE COHORTS (Dashboard Tabs 5-6)**

Entering community college cohorts are identified by selecting all first time in college students who attended a public two-year or public primarily associate baccalaureate degree granting institution (PABs) in the fall term of interest. Students who were considered starters during a fall term 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 (former dual enrollment).

### **TRANSFER DEFINITION**

We use the same definition of transfer students used for overall transfer enrollment, but transfer is tracked throughout the year, as defined below, not fall to fall as in overall transfer enrollment.

- 1) Academic year transfer is defined by a student having a transfer record in either the fall or spring term of the applicable academic year. A transfer designation was only counted once within an academic year. If a student transferred twice within an academic year, the upward transfer record during the academic year was prioritized.
- 2) Academic year non-transfer students are those who enrolled at the same institution as their last enrolled institution. If a student did not have a transfer record in either the fall or spring term of the applicable academic year, they were classified as non-transfer.

#### *Term Definition*

7/1 - 12/31 (Fall Term; same as Overall Transfer Enrollment)

1/1 – 4/30 (Spring Term)

7/1 – 6/30 (Academic Year)

### **YEARLY OUTCOMES**

Students are counted in only one outcome category per year. Where the student is counted is based on a hierarchical order of outcomes listed below. For example, if a student completed a bachelor's degree, then that outcome was rolled over for each subsequent academic year, regardless of any subsequent enrollment or completion the student may have achieved. All outcomes are grouped by transfer pathway: lateral two-year or upward transfer. If a student has an upward transfer at any point during the six years, the upward transfer is captured.

- 1) Completed – Student earned any undergraduate-level credential, or the highest-level credential attained if there are multiple awards.
- 2) Enrolled – Students have not yet received any undergraduate-level credential but are still enrolled.
- 3) Not Enrolled – Students had no enrollments in the given academic year. This is not a terminal outcome. In other words, a student can be counted as “not enrolled” in one academic year, but then counted as “enrolled” in a subsequent year if the student returns to college.

## REPORT TERMS AND DEFINITIONS (Dashboard Tabs 1-7)

### TRANSFER PATHWAYS

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

- 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.
- Lateral transfer: Students who either transfer from a two-year to another two-year institution or from a four-year to another four-year institution.
- Reverse transfer: Students who transfer from a four-year to a two-year institution.

### RACE AND ETHNICITY

The report focuses on seven racial/ethnic categories: White, Hispanic, Black, Asian, Native American, Other, and Unknown/Missing. The ‘Other’ category includes Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, International, and Multiracial. 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 the following:

- Overall Transfer Enrollment Analysis: An average of 14 percent of all undergraduate enrollments and 9 percent of all transfer enrollments reflected in the report.
- Entering Community College Cohorts Analysis: An average of 18 percent of all community college starters reflected in the report.

### ADMISSIONS SELECTIVITY

Admissions 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.

We report on this measure for public and private nonprofit four-year institutions only. 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,” 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 across the admissions selectivity range (e.g., highly selective music schools, less competitive institutions of art), they were not included in the admissions selectivity analysis.

### **PRIMARYLY ONLINE INSTITUTIONS (POIs)**

POIs were identified based on the distance education survey items in the IPEDS fall enrollment survey for each respective year (using the 2021 survey for Fall 2023 estimates). An institution that reports more than 90 percent of its students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses is considered a POI. This applies as long as the entire institution—rather than a single branch campus—meets this enrollment threshold.

For the post-pandemic onset terms of 2021-2022 we applied the additional decision metric that a school’s pre-pandemic share of students enrolled exclusively in distance education (based on the 2019 IPEDS fall enrollment survey) had to be at least 80 percent, in order to omit institutions whose move to online status was driven by temporary pandemic needs. Using this method, there were 24 primarily online institutions identified in the overall transfer enrollment analysis panel.

### **PRIMARILY ASSOCIATE DEGREE GRANTING BACCALAUREATE INSTITUTIONS (PABs)**

As more and more associate colleges have begun to offer bachelor's degree programs, there has been a growing number of sector reclassifications by IPEDS, where two- and four-year colleges are determined based on program offerings. However, these reclassified four-year institutions often educate and award degrees primarily at the associate-degree level, which are considered Primarily Associate Degree Granting Baccalaureate Institutions (PABs). We identify PABs using the institution's Carnegie Classification, which relies on program offering (there must be one bachelor's-level program offered) and degrees awarded. PABs carry Carnegie Classifications of either 14 (Baccalaureate/Associate Colleges: Associate Dominant) or 23 (Baccalaureate/Associate College: Mixed Baccalaureate/Associate). 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 this level. To keep the panel methodology consistent across the years, the 2021 Carnegie designations were applied across all years analyzed in this report and we classified PABs as two-year institutions for all comparison years. In this report, community colleges are broadly defined to be inclusive of public PABs and public two-year institutions and are reported in a single category.

### **URBANICITY (CAMPUS SETTING)**

Urbanicity refers to the geographic location of a college categorized on a continuum ranging from urban to rural, as defined by IPEDS. The IPEDS codes incorporated the 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.
- *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.

### **COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM FOCUS**

The program focus of a community college is classified in the following four categories based on the 2021 Carnegie Classification for Associate Colleges:

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

## NEIGHBORHOOD INCOME

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 from high-income neighborhoods come from high-income families and the same is true for 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 (not campus) 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. These three restrictions—location of the first address, age at first enrollment, and data year of the first address—allow us to include over 94 percent of all undergraduates 24 and younger 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.

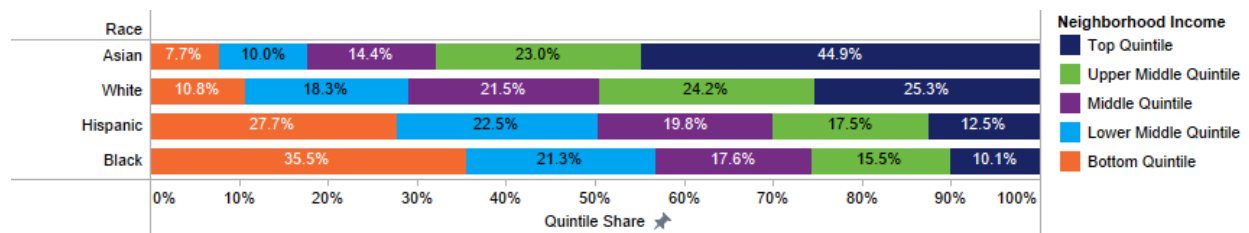
In this report, students with "missing" neighborhood income quintile values are those who have met the sample restrictions described above, but that (1) we were unable to geocode or (2) were geocoded to a tract for which ACS does not publicly publish income data. These missing rates vary depending on the analysis. Missing neighborhood income accounts for the following:

- Overall Transfer Enrollment Analysis: A range of 7.7 to 9.0 percent depending on the student group and year.
- Entering Community College Cohorts Analysis: A range of 8.3 to 10.3 percent depending on the cohort.

The inability to geocode (rather than geocoding to a tract 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 P.O. boxes and incomplete street addresses. These conditions may be correlated with both neighborhood and household income. In general, geocoding success decreases as maps become older as new streets and addresses are not included on older maps.

Geocoding success rates are also correlated with race. Because certain racial and ethnic groups have higher missing income values for this measure, we have limited the results presented in this report to only the four groups (White, Hispanic, Black, and Asian) whose missing rates are not higher than the overall missing rate in at least two of the six years presented in this report. Because ethno-racial groups are not uniformly distributed across neighborhood income quintiles, 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 reference:

**Figure M1. Distribution of 15–17-year-olds by Race/Ethnicity and Neighborhood Income Quintile**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2017-2021 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 and not included in home census tract estimates.

### SUGGESTED CITATION

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