

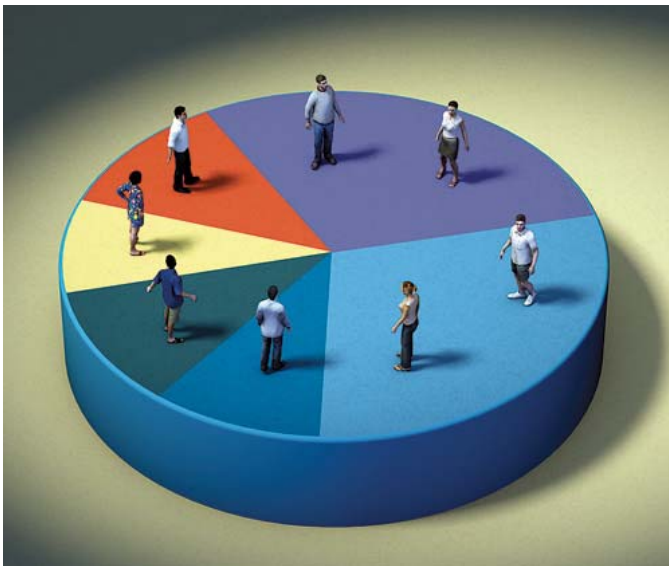
THE CHRONICLE

of Higher Education

Almanac of Higher Education 2012

As Typical Student Changes, So Do Worries About Costs

By Sara Lipka



Randy Lyhus for The Chronicle

As the economy sputters and outcry over the cost of college continues, more students keep enrolling—even if, in the past year, some have used campuses to protest their debt burden and what they see as other economic injustices.

Enrollment has ticked up, but who goes to college and how they do it are changing. Students long dubbed "nontraditional" have become more common. Colleges are seeing more adult learners, significant proportions of part-time students, and increasing mobility through transfers and dual enrollment.

Maintaining those enrollment gains is a looming concern. Some administrators, especially at private colleges, worry that liberal levels of tuition discounting to fill classes are unsustainable. And projections of the numbers of high-school graduates published in 2008 by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education continue to produce angst, especially in certain regions. The commission foresees declining numbers for the next six years in the Northeast and Midwest.

But, for now, the state of enrollment is healthy, at least according to the most recent available figures, from 2010. In the fall of that year, degree-granting colleges and universities enrolled more than 18 million undergraduate and nearly three million graduate students, up a total of more than 588,000 students over the previous year, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

That means almost half of the young people who completed high school are enrolled in higher education, compared with roughly a third three decades ago. Black, Hispanic, and white students are all going to college at increasing rates. The number of students entering college for the first time in 2010 was 2.1 million, up 6.8 percent over 2006, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

After three years of big increases in enrollment, community colleges saw a slight decline last year. From the fall of 2010 to 2011, total enrollment dropped nearly 1 percent, to 8.3 million. Still, the sector's enrollment is up 22 percent since 2007. But the surge, a result of the recession that began in late 2007, finally seems to have let up, said David S. Baime, senior vice president for government relations and research at the American Association of Community Colleges. "There's always a flattening after some especially bad economic downturns," he said.

Meanwhile, nondegree programs are on the upswing. Higher education's most common award is still the bachelor's degree, but certificates are the new runner-up, having surpassed associate and master's degrees, according to a report in June from Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce.

Certificates made up 22 percent of credentials awarded in 2010, compared with just 6 percent in 1980. The most common occupations of certificate holders are office work, transportation, health care, and metalworking.

Moving Around

Across sectors of higher education, colleges are adjusting to shifting patterns of enrollment. For instance, the general rule that students go to college close to home [doesn't hold true](#) as much as before, in part because of new recruitment strategies at public colleges crippled by declining state appropriations.

Given that out-of-state students pay higher tuition, Randy Hodgins, the former chief lobbyist for the University of Washington, said he once told a joke to his counterpart at the University of California that has more than a grain of truth: "The answer to both of our budget problems is, I take your kids and you take mine." In 2010, Arizona State University enrolled more freshmen from California than did six California State University campuses.

No matter where students start, about a third [switch](#) institutions at least once before earning a degree, according to new data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. The study, which covered the five-year period beginning in 2006, found that among students who transfer from four-year public institutions, more than half transfer "in reverse," to community colleges. Lower tuition and less-difficult courses may be [part of the appeal](#), observers speculated.

In examining mobility, the center also found that 7.7 percent of students attended more than one institution in the 2010-11 academic year. Colleges are trying to adapt: An agreement between the University of Texas at

El Paso and El Paso Community College, for example, allows students to move back and forth—and keep their financial aid—as long as they remain enrolled full time.

For the best picture of enrollment patterns, data collection must happen on the individual rather than institutional level, the National Student Clearinghouse has asserted this past year, adapting an idea that was proposed in a 2006 federal report but assailed by privacy advocates. The Education Department tracks institutions' totals, and that method can produce distortions, by, for instance, making transfer students look like dropouts.

Federal officials did announce, in April, a plan to broaden their collection of undergraduate data beyond only first-time, full-time students who don't transfer and who graduate roughly on time. Many observers cheered the change but doubted it could be accomplished easily.

Clifford Adelman, a senior associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy, has criticized the "sloppiness that has accumulated" in institutional databases that national numbers depend on.

"Making sure everybody can do it the same way, and with consistent results," he said, "will take a few years."

Protest Over Costs

Despite public debate about the value of college, young people seemed to affirm its worth. Four in five young adults think college is more important now than it was for their parents' generation, according to a poll last winter by two research and advocacy groups, Demos and Young Invincibles. Respondents also largely agreed that college is becoming increasingly unaffordable.

The extent to which a college can help students land a well-paying job after graduation carries increasing weight in their decision about where to enroll, according to the annual Freshman Survey by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles. Academic reputation, however, remains the most important factor students consider.

Politically, nearly half of students identify as "middle of the road," the survey showed, with 21 percent viewing themselves as conservative and 28 percent liberal. Over all, college freshmen's views on social issues like same-sex marriage and rights for illegal immigrants continued to be more liberal than in the past.

On campuses across the country this year, protests sprang up, many of them linked to the national Occupy movement. Some demonstrators focused on student-loan debt and college affordability, as students interrupted governing-board meetings, organized bus rides to statehouses, and put up and took down encampments. As the Occupy movement took hold nationally, protests at two University of California campuses, Berkeley and Davis, generated YouTube videos, lawsuits, and widespread criticism for campus police officers' harsh response.

But despite demonstrations across the country, only about 6 percent of respondents to the Freshman Survey anticipated taking part in campus protests. Although that may seem low, it's still one percentage point over 1968, a year of much campus unrest.

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A Sharper Focus on Cost and Whether Students Graduate

By Sara Lipka



Randy Lyhus for The Chronicle

Efforts to keep higher education affordable for all students and to promote not only access, but success—all in a climate of dwindling state appropriations and lean budgets—made the past year one of reckoning for colleges.

Total outstanding student-loan debt hit the \$1-trillion mark as federal officials scrambled to ease the burden on borrowers, partly by requiring colleges to disclose more about students' cost of attendance and financial-aid awards. A campaign-season debate arose in Congress over a scheduled interest-rate increase on some

student loans. And the national college-completion agenda prompted both attention to underrepresented students and scrutiny of graduation rates.

The Obama administration's goal, that by 2020 the United States will once again lead the world in the proportion of adults with a college degree, appeared in numerous reports, rife with recommendations on how to achieve that aim. But progress was slow. The Lumina Foundation, with its similar "big goal," that 60 percent of adults nationwide will have a college credential by 2025, has bad news: In 2010, [only 38.3 percent](#) of adults ages 25 to 64 had a degree, up less than half of a percentage point since 2008.

Seeing students through to graduation remained a challenge for colleges. By the Education Department's count, the national graduation rate hovered around 60 percent at four-year institutions (for completion of a bachelor's degree in six years) and half that at two-year colleges (for completion of a certificate or associate degree in three years), although those figures included only first-time, full-time students, a declining share of the college-going population. Rather than publishing institutions' retention, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center released students' "persistence," reporting that from the fall to spring of 2010, 85 percent stayed enrolled somewhere.

Community colleges got due attention this past year for serving underrepresented students, including nearly half of all minority undergraduates. The sector also faced heightened expectations, some self-imposed. Calling the American dream imperiled, the American Association of Community Colleges issued a report in April that acknowledged the sector's historic growth but unacceptable graduation rates. "It takes courage," said Walter G. Bumphus, the association's president, "to say we can do better."

But money to support students toward graduation was in short supply, especially at community colleges. By a 2-to-1 ratio, members of the National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges were pessimistic about the prospect of raising overall graduation rates as state budgets are reduced, a survey by the Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama [found](#).

More Aid, More Debt

Across higher education, the share of students receiving some type of financial aid continued to rise: More than four out of five full-time freshmen in college for the first time in the 2009-10 academic year had grants or loans, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Despite sticker prices rising faster than inflation, students' average net tuition dropped slightly in 2010 across sectors, except at for-profit colleges, the department reported.

Grant aid became [more common](#), going to roughly two out of three full-time undergraduates in the 2010-11 academic year, according to the College Board. And more of that aid—almost three-quarters—was federal, given rapid growth in the Pell Grant program, education benefits for military veterans, and tuition tax credits. The first two generated much discussion, including calls to tighten eligibility to save the Pell program, which is [projected](#) to cost \$5-billion next year, as well as restrictions on colleges' marketing to veterans, whom lawmakers worried the for-profit sector was especially after for their federal dollars. What the College Board called the [biggest change](#) in student aid in 2010-11, the American Opportunity Tax Credit, an expansion of tuition tax breaks introduced in the 2009 economic-stimulus bill, prompted criticism that such a subsidy may not benefit the neediest students.

Grants were only part of the story. Among bachelor's-degree recipients, a greater percentage—about two-thirds—took out loans, and the average amount of debt per borrower rose to more than \$25,000 for the Class of 2010, according to the Project on Student Debt. That burden has generated public outrage, and federal officials have responded.

Beginning last October, all colleges were required to post net-price calculators on their Web sites, to provide early estimates of what students would pay to attend. And federal officials urged colleges to adopt a standard form for displaying cost and aid information to students. Financial-aid administrators opposed that move, [arguing](#) that they should decide the best way to communicate that information.

The new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau took on college affordability, collecting complaints about private lenders. And Republicans and Democrats, neither wanting to make enemies of students this year, grandstanded their way to a last-minute [compromise to postpone](#) an interest-rate increase on student loans that would have cost individual borrowers on average about \$8 a month, over a 10-year or 20-year period.

Many colleges continued offering generous financial aid, but some seemed to have overextended themselves. Cornell University pulled back from its "no loans" policy this year, lowering families' income eligibility, and [Wesleyan University](#) curtailed its need-blind admissions. Still, colleges announced generous new policies, like one at the [University of California at Berkeley](#) to cap parental contributions for middle-income families.

Majors and Employment

The economy showed some signs of recovery for new graduates entering the job market: Employers planned to hire them at a rate slightly higher than last year's, according to the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University.

But although employment rates were higher for recent college graduates than for people with less education, job prospects varied by major. Architecture majors were the worst off, reported Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. In general, arts and humanities majors had higher unemployment rates than did their classmates in health and education.

"If your major sounds like a job—engineering, for instance, sounds like you're going to be an engineer—you're going to be in better shape," said Anthony P. Carnevale, director of the center.

But employers weren't necessarily satisfied with their new hires. Less than 10 percent of employers thought colleges did an "excellent" job of preparing students for work, according to a survey by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools. On all hiring criteria included in the survey, such as adaptability and critical thinking, applicants were performing below employers' expectations.

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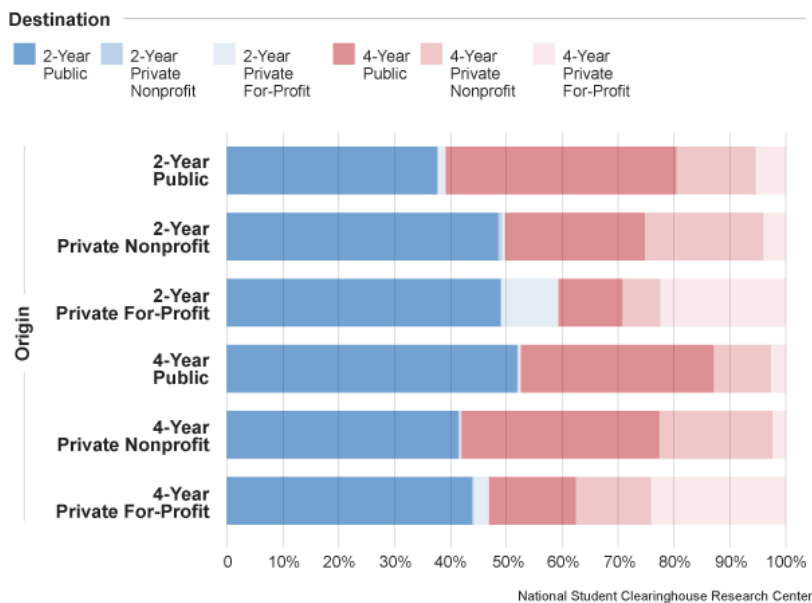
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Initial Transfer Destinations of Students Who First Enrolled in College in the Fall of 2006

The transfer destination chosen most frequently by students over all was a two-year public institution, although students already at a community college were somewhat more likely to move to a four-year public institution than to another community college.



Note: Figures may not add up exactly to 100 percent because of rounding. Results are based on an analysis of enrollment data for nearly 2.8 million full- and part-time students of all ages, at all institutional types.

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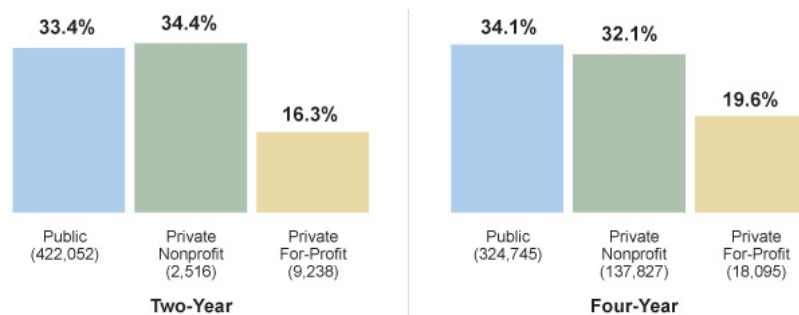
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5-Year Transfer Rates for Students Who First Enrolled in College in the Fall of 2006

One-third of all students switched institutions at least once before earning a degree. Students from public and private nonprofit colleges transferred at similar rates, while students at private for-profit colleges were far less likely to change institutions.

% of Students Who Transferred



Note: Figures are based on an analysis of enrollment data for nearly 2.8 million full- and part-time students of all ages, at all institutional types.

Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center

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