

NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE®

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National Postsecondary Enrollment Trends: Before, During, and After the Great Recession

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center Signature Report Reveals Emerging Patterns

Herndon, Virginia, July 14, 2011 – The recent economic downturn did not affect college enrollment as much as had been feared, according to research by the [National Student Clearinghouse® Research Center™](#). This report, the first in a series of Signature Reports™, highlights emerging patterns among traditional-age, first-time students enrolling in colleges and universities before, during, and after the recession. The study followed fall enrollment each year from 2006 through 2010. Postsecondary institutions face challenging environments during recessions because they do not know how students and their families will respond when both opportunity costs and families' abilities to pay are declining. They are uncertain about how many students will enroll, if they are more likely to attend public or private institutions, if traditional-age students are more likely to enroll part time or full time, or if current enrollees are more likely to persist or drop out. This report helps both institutional and public policy makers craft more effective policy responses during uncertain times.

“The findings are somewhat surprising given the depth of this recession,” said Dr. Don Hossler, Executive Director of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center and a published expert in student achievement and college choice and enrollment. “Through adapted enrollment management, recruitment, and financial aid strategies, institutions appear to have weathered these recent years better than many had anticipated.” **(Attached is a graph charting enrollment numbers from 2006-2010.)*

Report findings:

- Community colleges experienced increases in enrollment.
- The four-year private sector maintained its market share more effectively than was predicted.
- The proportion of students enrolling full time in public two-year institutions increased slightly; four-year institutions saw virtually no change.
- Each region of the country experienced distinct enrollment patterns.
- Persistence rates (continued enrollment with any U.S. institution) were considerably higher than retention rates (continued enrollment within the same institution) in all institutional categories, with gaps between the two measures ranging from just under 10% to over 18%.

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[“National Postsecondary Enrollment Trends: Before, During, and After the Great Recession,”](#) and all subsequent Signature Reports, have immediate relevance for institutional and public policy makers during these uncertain times. The Research Center collaborates with higher education institutions, states, school districts, high schools, and educational organizations. The reports use a unique data resource, the StudentTrackerSM database administered by the National Student Clearinghouse, to count individual student pathways across institutions. The database comprises more than 110 million student enrollment and degree records reported several times a term to the Clearinghouse by its more than 3,300 participating colleges and universities, enrolling 93% of all postsecondary students. StudentTracker provides a unique and invaluable research tool for studying enrollment and graduation patterns nationwide.

[Signature Reports](#) focus on important issues related to students’ college access and progression nationwide. The Research Center hopes to expand the knowledge base on student enrollment and other important student outcomes by releasing reports in the future that will examine student transfer patterns, graduation, and more. To download the report, go to www.studentclearinghouse.org/signature/.

“The use of Clearinghouse data for this type of report is groundbreaking because it represents the first-ever look at national trends and statistics using actual enrollment records reported by the institutions. Moving ahead, future Signature Reports will continue to leverage the unique ability of Clearinghouse data to examine national and regional access, persistence, transfer and completion rates, providing institutional researchers, education policy makers, and other decision makers the tools to take powerful and informed actions,” said Rick Torres, President and CEO of the Clearinghouse.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE RESEARCH CENTER

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center is the research arm of the National Student Clearinghouse. The Research Center collaborates with higher education institutions, states, school districts, high schools, and educational organizations as part of a national effort to better inform education leaders and policymakers. Through accurate longitudinal data outcomes reporting, the Research Center enables better educational policy decisions leading to improved student outcomes. To learn more, visit <http://research.studentclearinghouse.org>.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE

The National Student Clearinghouse (a non-profit formed in 1993) is the unique and trusted source for higher education enrollment and degree verifications. The Clearinghouse serves as a single point of contact for the collection and timely exchange of accurate and comprehensive enrollment, degree and certificate records on behalf of its more than 3,300 participating higher education institutions, which represent 93% of the national enrollment.

Through its verification and reporting services, the Clearinghouse saves higher education institutions cumulatively nearly four hundred million dollars annually. Most Clearinghouse services are provided to colleges and universities at little or no charge, including enhanced transcript and research services, enabling institutions to redistribute limited staff and budget resources to more important student service efforts. All Clearinghouse services are operated in full compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

In addition, the Clearinghouse provides accurate FERPA compliant verifications to student loan providers, employers, student credit issuers, the U.S. Department of Education, and others who access its registry more than half a billion times annually. For more information, visit www.studentclearinghouse.org.

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National Student Clearinghouse Research Center – Signature Report 1: *Postsecondary Enrollment Trends: Before, During, and After the Great Recession*

Principal Findings & Implications

COMMUNITY COLLEGE INCREASES DROVE OVERALL ENROLLMENT TRENDS

Changes in postsecondary enrollments and the types of institutions in which students enrolled primarily affected community colleges, where enrollments rose through 2009 and then declined slightly in 2010. These trends may have been driven by two groups of traditional-age students: (1) students who, in a better economy, might have enrolled in other types of institutions but chose to enroll in community colleges instead, possibly to save money; and (2) students who, in a better economy, may have entered the workforce directly after high school, but chose to enter college instead. Community college enrollments experienced modest declines in 2010, coinciding with increased strains on community college budgets and a declining population of high school graduates, both of which may have fueled enrollment declines.

SOME MARKET SHARE CHANGES FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

The private sector maintained its market share of student enrollments more effectively than predicted, given the concerns about affordability going into the recession. Private sector enrollments declined slightly in 2010. Enrollments in public four-year institutions declined in 2009 and experienced a modest upswing in 2010.

SHIFTS IN ENROLLMENT INTENSITY WERE SMALL

The recession does not appear to have resulted in notable shifts in the proportion of students enrolled full time or part time. The proportion of students enrolled full time in four-year institutions remained the same; the proportion of students enrolled full time in public two-year institutions increased slightly.

ENROLLMENT PATTERNS DIFFERED ACROSS GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS

The West and South experienced noticeable enrollment increases with the 2007 and 2008 cohorts, while enrollment increases in the Northeast occurred later, in 2009. The West saw higher concentrations of students enrolled in the two-year sector. Enrollment patterns in the Midwest institutions remained stable. In the South, enrollment increased steadily through 2009 and declined in 2010.

PERSISTENCE RATES PROVIDE KEY INSIGHTS ON STUDENT PATHWAYS

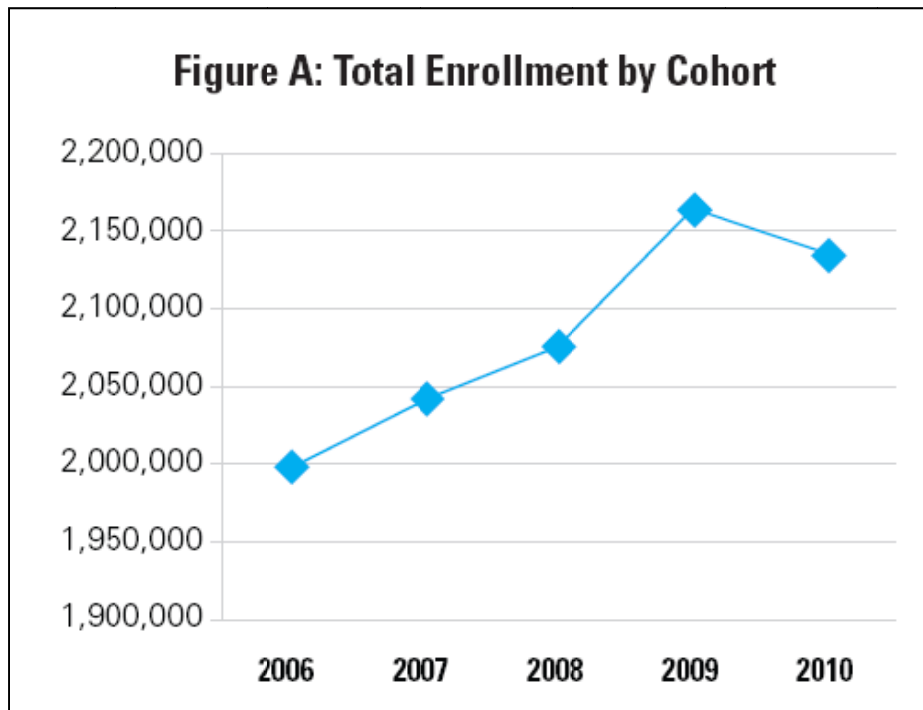
This report offers new estimates for two often-cited, but frequently conflated measures of student and institutional success: student retention (continued enrollment within the same institution) and student persistence (continued enrollment within any U.S. institution). The results of this study show that persistence rates were considerably higher than retention rates in all institutional categories, with gaps between the two measures ranging from just under 10% to over 18%. For example, about 65% of new traditional-age students nationally were still enrolled in higher education one year after starting at a community college, even though only about 50% of them were enrolled at the same institution where they began. At public four-year institutions, those rates were about 85% and 73%, respectively.

Surprisingly, results showed relatively few shifts in retention or persistence coinciding with the recession. That is, students appeared no more likely to transfer or drop out of postsecondary education during the recession than before it began. Through adapted enrollment management, recruitment, and financial aid strategies, institutions appear to have weathered the recession years better than many had anticipated.

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College Student Enrollment Numbers 2006 - 2010



*Each cohort includes all traditional age (under age 21), first-time-in-college students who enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions in the fall semester of each year from 2006-2010.

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National Student Clearinghouse Research Center – Signature Report 1: *National Postsecondary Enrollment Trends: Before, During, and After the Great Recession*

Facts

- The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (the Research Center), started in 2009, will release Signature Reports with the goal to expand the knowledge base on student enrollment and other important student outcomes.
- While there is a large body of evidence with solid insights into the impact of recessions on the enrollment behavior of adult students, far less is known about how recessions affect traditional-age, first-time students. In this first Signature Report, the Research Center closes this gap by providing emerging national and regional patterns among traditional-age, first-time students enrolled in colleges and universities during the fall terms each year 2006 through 2010.
- By examining postsecondary enrollment patterns, the Research Center provides a better understanding of this issue, which is valuable information in addressing several key concerns for higher education institutions and higher education policy:
 - Developing a more detailed view of student’s college choice processes during the recession.
 - Gaining insights for institutions’ enrollment and retention policies and practices.
 - Shedding light on the educational attainment of the current generation.
- The Clearinghouse obtains its data on enrollment (which the Research Center used in this report) from its more than 3,300 participating colleges and universities several times per term. The data submission is voluntary and provides important cost-saving benefits to the institutions.
- The data for this report was taken from the StudentTracker database administered by the Clearinghouse, covering 93% of college enrollments across all postsecondary institutions nationwide, including two- and four- year public and private institutions as well as for-profit and non-profit institutions.
- The second Signature Report will focus on student transfer patterns examining national transfer rates for students who start in various institution-types, for full- and part-time students, and also transfer rate by geographic region.
- Today, the Clearinghouse is the leading provider of educational reporting, verification, and research on behalf of its participating institutions to the nation’s colleges and high schools, student lending community, federal government, state and other educational agencies, students and alumni and thousands of employers and other organizations.
- Educational institutions and organizations can obtain more information on the Clearinghouse data and how to work with it by visiting <http://research.studentclearinghouse.org>. (Media organizations should contact media@studentclearinghouse.org.)