

NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE®

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More Than One-Third of College Students Are Over 25

Herndon, Virginia, April 19, 2012 – 38 percent of all postsecondary students in a fall term are adult learners, according to a new study by the National Student Clearinghouse® Research Center™. This Snapshot Report™ looks at enrollment trends of adult learners from Fall 2009 to Fall 2011. An adult learner is defined in this study as any student, undergraduate or graduate, 25 years of age or older as of October 15 of the respective year. [Snapshot Reports](#), which are released throughout the year, draw on college enrollment data provided to the National Student Clearinghouse by its more than 3,300 participating postsecondary institutions.

The adult learners group is often overlooked, and it continues to be an understudied topic in postsecondary research. The Clearinghouse uses individual student-level data instead of the more commonly used institutional-level data found in most studies. It also has complete age data, which allows a more accurate picture of this group. The report breaks down adult learners into three age groups in order to observe differences in trends based on age: 25-29, 30-39, and 40 and over. A major finding indicates that the percent of adult learners attending college on a full-time basis has been steadily increasing and that is true for all three age groups.

Other findings, on average for three years, include:

- 54 percent of adult learners age 25-29 were full-time students
- 34 percent of adult learners age 40 and over were full-time students
- About 66 percent of adult learners were enrolled in public institutions
- The proportion of students attending for-profit schools among the 25-29 age group is smaller than the proportion for the 30-39 and the 40 and over groups (13 percent vs. 19 percent for the latter two groups)
- A higher proportion of younger students are more likely to attend four-year institutions than are older students; the three-year average is 65 percent for the 25-29 age group and 55 percent for the 40 and over age group. Nonetheless, the proportion of students attending four-year institutions is higher than those at two-year institutions in all three age groups of adult learners.

An industry trend suggests that formerly small student populations of transfers and part-timers, for example, are growing – becoming the “new normal.” Dr. Don Hossler, Executive Director of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, notes that “these enrollment trends reveal that increasing numbers of adult students, whether they are enrolled in undergraduate or graduate programs, enrolled

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full-time. Federal, state, and institutional policy makers will find these patterns of interest for reasons ranging from planning for the number of students who will be seeking more federal and state financial aid to the ways in which institutions plan services for adult students.”

In its [Signature Report™](#) series, the Research Center has previously reported on student transfer rates, where it found that over one-third of college students transfer to a different institution within five years. A Snapshot Report on student persistence showed that 92.5 percent of students stayed in school – although not necessarily the same school – a much higher figure than previously reported.

“Our reports have shown that students lead complex academic lives with many different pathways to completion. Using our reports, academia and government alike will better be able to shape policies to fit emerging trends,” stated Hossler.

A third Signature Report on college reverse transfer is slated for release this summer. All reports published by the Research Center provide valuable insight on students' postsecondary access, college enrollment patterns, and other success outcomes.

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 nonprofit 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 96 percent of all students in public and private U.S. institutions. The Clearinghouse also provides thousands of high schools and districts with continuing collegiate enrollment, progression, and completion statistics on their alumni.

Through its verification and reporting services, the Clearinghouse saves the education community 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. Clearinghouse services are designed to facilitate an institution's compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, The Higher Education Act, and other applicable laws.

In addition, the Clearinghouse provides accurate, timely enrollment and degree 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.