METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The *Clearinghouse Enrollment Insights* series offers higher education institutions, policy makers, and researchers a continuous and cohesive understanding of enrollment trends. The series comprises three reports released throughout the academic year. The *Preliminary Fall Enrollment Trends* report provides a first look at fall enrollment trends (the current report, released in November), followed by comprehensive final data in the *Final Fall Enrollment Trends* report (previously known as the *Current Term Enrollment Estimates* fall report, which is typically released in January). The *Final Spring Enrollment Trends* report (previously known as the *Current Term Enrollment Estimates* spring report, which is typically released in early June) provides final data on spring enrollment trends. These reports are the same trusted research with an evolved structure to better serve the planning and decision-making of educational leaders.

The current report reflects approximately 8.5 million enrollments reported as of September 25, 2025, by 49.4 percent of postsecondary institutions in the U.S. that are participating in the Clearinghouse. Analyses focus on year-over-year percent changes in enrollment between 2023 and 2024, 2024 and 2025, and the two-year cumulative percent change in enrollment from 2023 to 2025, based on a panel of institutions that consistently reported their fall term enrollments at the same point in the term in each of the years included in the report. Thus, a different set of institutions are included in each year's *Preliminary Fall Enrollment Trends* report. Because of the limited data coverage, estimates provided in this report are preliminary and subject to revision. The *Final Fall Enrollment Trends* report will be released in January and provide final enrollment estimates for the fall term.

NATIONAL COVERAGE OF THE DATA

Clearinghouse data track enrollments nationally and are not limited by institutional and state boundaries. As of fall 2024, institutions actively submitting enrollment data to the Clearinghouse account for 97.5 percent of all enrollments at Title IV, degree-granting institutions in the U.S. Unlike the *Final Fall Enrollment Trends* report, where enrollments are weighted to account for variation in data coverage rates by institution sector and state, the *Preliminary Fall Enrollment Trends* report uses unweighted enrollment counts. This is because the emphasis is on year-over-year percentage changes in enrollment patterns rather than estimating total enrollment numbers. Hence, estimated enrollment changes may differ between the *Preliminary Fall Enrollment Trends* and *Final Fall Enrollment Trends* reports due to the difference in methodology and institution coverage.

INSTITUTION PANEL SELECTION, TERM DEFINITION, COVERAGE

The analysis in this report is based 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 year-to-year variations in institutional coverage as well as in data submission dates.

To control for institutional coverage, only institutions that submitted enrollment data across all three years (2023-2025) were included in the panel. To control for submission timing variability among these institutions, only fall term data that was submitted within the data submission window (specified in Figure M1, 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 still have been overcounted or undercounted for 2025 due to unusual file submission patterns.

For Clearinghouse reporting, institutions provide school-specific start- and end-dates for each enrollment, rather than formally designating a term. The *Preliminary Fall Enrollment Trends* report contains the latest enrollments submitted by institutions within the time frames provided in figure M1.

Figure M1. Term Dates, Submission Window Dates, and Coverage for the Panel

	Term Dates	Submission Window	Institutional Coverage	Enrollment Coverage
Fall 2025	Start between 7/1 – 12/1	7/1 – 9/25	49.4%	46.1% (8.5M/18.4M)

Note: Both institutional and enrollment coverage rates for fall 2025 data are calculated using fall 2024 data submissions as the denominator.

GENDER IMPUTATION

Institutions reported student gender to the Clearinghouse for about three-quarters of all enrollments included in this report. Gender data for the remaining enrollment records were imputed using a table of name-gender pairs that the Research Center developed using data publicly available from the Census Bureau and the Social Security Administration as well as the institution-reported data. The imputation used only those pairs in which the name had at least two instances and was associated with a single gender in at least 95 percent of the instances. The imputation is accurate in 99.6 percent of cases where gender was reported by institutions. For a detailed document describing this approach, see "Working With Our Data."

RACE AND ETHNICITY DATA COVERAGE AND ESTIMATION

Not all institutions report race and ethnicity data to the Clearinghouse. *Missing* data (for institutions that do not report to the Clearinghouse) account for an average of 12.3 percent of all undergraduate enrollments across panel years in this report. An additional 3.2 percent of undergraduate students on average across panel years have race/ethnicity reported as *Unknown*, a valid reporting category meaning they do not report their race to their institution. Students with *Missing* or *Unknown* race and ethnicity data are growing across panel years, showing a 21 percent increase in fall 2025 over 2024, and a 20 percent increase in fall 2024 over 2023.

To account for differences in missing rates across years, undergraduate enrollments by race and ethnicity are estimated for the most recent year (fall 2025) based on previous years' patterns of data reporting. The fall 2025 missing rate after adjustments is 13.6 percent for undergraduates (15.5% before adjustment). Only the missing rate, and not the unknown rate, is the target of our estimation procedure.

As the fall 2025 race and ethnicity data are adjusted enrollment estimates for undergraduates, these data should be interpreted with caution. No adjustments are made for graduate students as their race/ethnicity missing rate is relatively stable year-over-year (between 13.6% and 14.9% in this report, depending on the year).

NEIGHBORHOOD INCOME MEASURE

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 who come from high-income neighborhoods come from high-income families and the same is true of students from 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 address reported to the Clearinghouse for each student and apply the

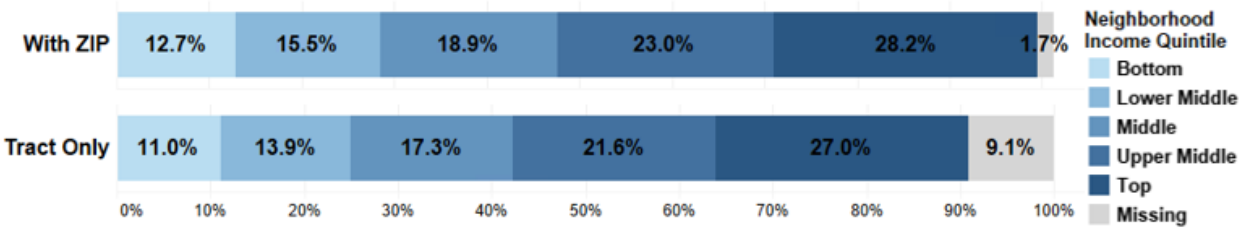
measure only to undergraduate students 24 and younger whose first higher education enrollment (including dual enrollment) occurred at age 19 or younger. Additionally, a small number of students, whose first enrollment predates 2010, are excluded due to the availability of external data sources needed to construct the measure. After these three restrictions—location of the first address, age at first enrollment, and data year of the first address—are taken into account, we are able to include 93 percent of all undergraduates 24 and younger in our panel 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.

The vast majority (91%) of students included in the neighborhood income analyses in this report are successfully geocoded to a census tract. We also include an additional 6.9 to 7.6 percent (depending on the year) of students who match to ZIP codes but not tracts.[1] ZIP codes are generally larger than tracts, providing less granular measures of a student's pre-college neighborhood. To apply our tract-based neighborhood income measure to these students, we link ZIP codes to Census tracts using crosswalks produced by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). A student matching to a ZIP code is assigned weights equal to the share of all residential addresses within the ZIP code lying in tracts of each neighborhood income quintile. For each ZIP-code matched student, the sum of these weights equals 1. Specifically, a student matched to a ZIP code that overlaps with two tracts: one in the lower middle quintile and the other in the middle neighborhood income quintile, with each tract encompassing half the residential addresses in that ZIP code, would be assigned quintile values for each of those quintiles with weights equal to 0.5 for each.

Because our method assumes an equal probability of college-going from tracts of differing neighborhood income levels within the same ZIP code, we are likely slightly *over*estimating the share of students from lower-income neighborhoods using this method. However, as shown in figure M2, given the relatively small share of students assigned to income quintiles using ZIP code matches, the distribution of students by neighborhood income quintile does not differ greatly between an approach that includes only those students who are geocoded to census tracts and the one used here incorporating ZIP code matches. Inclusion of ZIP code matches also allows us to provide information on neighborhood income background for student groups for whom tract-level geocoding is substantially less successful, such as students from rural areas.

Figure M2. Comparison of Neighborhood Income Quintile Distribution for Undergraduates Using ZIP Code Matches and Tract-Only Matches, fall 2025



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 to either a tract or a ZIP code (including PO Box addresses) or (2) were geocoded to a tract (or a ZIP code which overlaps such a tract) for which ACS does not publicly publish income data. These missing rates range from 1.7 percent to 2 percent

[1] An additional small share of students (1.2% to 1.4% depending on the year) match to a ZIP code but are excluded because their address indicates a PO Box. Because PO Boxes are delivery addresses and not necessarily residential addresses, these students appear as Missing in our neighborhood income analyses.

depending on the year. The inability to geocode (rather than geocoding to a tract or ZIP code 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 PO Box addresses and incomplete street addresses. Address quality may be correlated with both neighborhood and household income.

ENROLLMENT INTENSITY

Unlike the *Final Enrollment Trends* report series where enrollment intensity is identified based on the first data submitted for a student in any given term, this report identifies enrollment intensity based on the latest data submitted. As a result, the enrollment intensity reflects the student's current workload as of the data cut-off date. The current analysis broadly categorizes enrollment intensity into full-time and part-time. The part-time category includes three-quarter time, half-time, and less-than-half-time.

CREDENTIAL TYPE

The type of credential that a student's program of study leads to is reported to the Clearinghouse with each enrollment record. The reporting categories are:

- Non-credential program
- Undergraduate certificate or diploma program
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Post-baccalaureate certificate
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- First-professional degree
- Graduate/professional certificate

In this preliminary report, we show data for undergraduate certificate or diploma program, associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctoral degree. Enrollment changes for other credential types are not shown due to lower coverage but are included in the totals.

MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY

Reporting on enrollment changes by field of study is based on the 2020 NCES Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP), aggregating six-digit CIP codes reported by institutions into CIP families at the two-digit level.

RECLASSIFICATIONS OF INSTITUTION SECTORS

This report defines institution sectors primarily based on the 2021 Carnegie Basic Classification for each academic year. Carnegie Classification and IPEDS sector designations align for the most part, but when there are differences, we follow the Carnegie Classification. These discrepancies mostly impact Primarily Associate Degree Granting Baccalaureate Institutions (PABs; see below). When a Carnegie Classification is missing for an institution, we utilize the institution's IPEDS sector (IPEDS Institutional Characteristics 2023-24) where available, and, finally, the sector reported by the institution to the Clearinghouse. Because our reporting is restricted to a fixed panel of institutions, institution sector definitions are applied consistently across all comparison years (2023-2025) in order to calculate year-over-year enrollment changes without the disruption of sector reclassifications between years.

PRIMARILY ASSOCIATE DEGREE GRANTING BACCALAUREATE INSTITUTIONS (PABs)

As more and more institutions that previously focused solely on granting associate degrees have begun to offer bachelor's degree programs, there has been a surge in IPEDS reclassification of 2-year institutions as 4-year institutions, since IPEDS assigns 2- or 4-year designations based on program offerings. However,

many of these reclassified institutions still confer most awards at the associate degree level. These are considered primarily associate degree granting baccalaureate (PAB) institutions.

We utilize the 2021 Carnegie Basic Classification to identify PABs. PABs are defined as institutions that offer at least one baccalaureate degree program and award more than half of their degrees at the associate level. These institutions are made up of two subcategories:

- *Baccalaureate/Associate Colleges - Associate Dominant (code 14):* institutions that award 90 percent or more of degrees at the associate level, or
- *Baccalaureate/Associate Colleges - Mixed Baccalaureate/Associate (code 23):* institutions that award more than 50 percent but less than 90 percent of degrees at the associate level.

This method identifies institutions across control groups (e.g., public, private nonprofit) – PAB control is identified using IPEDS data.

ADMISSIONS SELECTIVITY

Admissions selectivity is measured using the 2016 Barron's Selectivity Index, which evaluates the competitiveness of an institution based on several admissions factors such as an institution's acceptance rate, college admissions test scores, high school GPAs, and high school rankings of its admitted students. 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 the range of admissions selectivity groups outlined above, these institutions (accounting for 1.8 percent

of undergraduate enrollment at public and private nonprofit 4-year institutions) were not included in the admissions selectivity analysis.

LOCALE (CAMPUS SETTING)

Locale (Campus Setting) refers to the geographic location of a college categorized on a continuum ranging from urban to rural, as defined by IPEDS. The IPEDS codes incorporate the campus location's 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

Town: Territory inside an urban cluster and outside an urbanized area

Rural: Territory outside of an urban cluster and outside an urbanized area

STATE-LEVEL DATA COVERAGE

States are considered to have sufficient coverage if at least three institutions reported in the given state and there is at least 40 percent statewide enrollment coverage as of September 25, 2025. Thirty-five states and the District of Columbia (D.C.) have sufficient data to show on the data dashboards for total enrollment, 34 states and D.C. have sufficient data for undergraduate enrollment, and 37 states and D.C. have sufficient data for graduate enrollment.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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