



Postsecondary National Policy Institute

COVID-19 & ONLINE EDUCATION

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions across the country shifted to online instruction for the spring semester, affecting thousands of students. This shift online continued into the fall 2020 semester and is likely to continue into the spring.

GENERAL TRENDS

The College Crisis Initiative documented the 2020 spring and fall semester plans of just under 3,000 colleges, community colleges, and universities in the United States.

- 96% of tracked institutions moved to online instruction for the spring 2020 semester.
- 65% of tracked institutions moved to online instruction for the fall 2020 semester.
 - Of these institutions, 16% were fully online; 52% were primarily online; and 32% adapted a hybrid model.¹
- 35% of tracked institutions resumed in-person coursework for the fall 2020 semester.
 - Of these institutions, 66% were primarily in person, and 11% were fully in person.

ENROLLMENT TRENDS

- Fall 2020 enrollment for U.S. institutions decreased 9.5% at community colleges, 2.1% at private, non-profit four-year institutions, 1.9% at public four-year institutions, and 0.1% at private, for-profit institutions from fall 2019.
- Undergraduate enrollment for the fall 2020 semester decreased 4.4% overall and across all race/ethnicity groups.
 - Native American student enrollment decreased 9.6%; Black student enrollment decreased 7.5%; white student enrollment decreased 6.6%; Hispanic student enrollment decreased 5.4%; and Asian student enrollment decreased 3.1%.
- Graduate enrollment increased 2.9% overall and across all race/ethnicity groups.
 - Hispanic graduate student enrollment increased 13.3%; Black student enrollment increased 8.9%; Native American student enrollment increased 7.3%; Asian student enrollment increased 7.0%; and white student enrollment increased 3.9%.
- At primarily online institutions (POIs) -- institutions where at least 90% were enrolled exclusively online prior to COVID-19 -- undergraduate enrollment has increased 4.9% and graduate enrollment has increased 9.7%.

¹ Coursework “primarily online” is defined as courses being taught primarily online with the exception of some courses, like labs, being held in person. Under a “hybrid” coursework model, instructors can choose both the mode and frequency of delivery, such as holding some weeks’ classes online and others in person, or alternating weeks where some students are in person while others are online.

STUDENT EXPERIENCES

- In May, 90% of students reported being concerned about the shift to online education. Twenty-four percent of students dropped one or more courses as a result of the shift to online.
- In May, 45% of students stated that internet connectivity issues interfered with course participation.
- The spring 2020 shift to online courses negatively affected students' satisfaction with their course.
 - Prior to the shift online, 87% of students were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their courses. Only 59% of students were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their courses after going online.
- In May, 57% of students reported online courses did a worse job at keeping them interested in the course content than in-person courses. Seventy-nine percent of students identified motivation as a major or minor problem with online courses.
- An August 2020 survey found that 41% of returning students preferred returning to campus and taking courses in a hybrid model; 30% preferred staying at home and taking all courses online; 17% preferred to return to campus and take all courses in person; and 9% preferred to return to campus but take all courses online.

FACULTY EXPERIENCES

- In August, when asked to evaluate their pre- and post-COVID-19 perception of online learning as an effective instructional method, 45% said their perception of online learning has become more favorable since the start of COVID-19, whereas only 17% said it had become more negative.
- In early August, 40% of faculty anticipated using a combination of synchronous and asynchronous online teaching methods for the fall 2020 semester, up 4% from the spring semester.
 - Seventy-one percent of faculty were satisfied with student learning outcomes for the spring semester via synchronous education; 66% were satisfied with student learning outcomes via a combination of synchronous and asynchronous education; and 61% were satisfied with student learning outcomes via asynchronous education.
- In one survey conducted in August 2020, 49% of faculty agreed that "online learning is an effective method for teaching," up 10% from a similar survey conducted in May.

SOURCES

["The College Crisis Initiative \(C2i\)," Davidson College, September 2020.](#)

["COVID-19: Stay Informed with the Latest Enrollment Information," National Student Clearinghouse, November 2020.](#)

["Higher Ed and COVID-19: National Student Survey," SimpsonScarborough, April 2020.](#)

["COVID-19 Student Survey," California Student Aid Commission, July 2020.](#)

["Suddenly Online: A National Survey of Undergraduates During the COVID-19 Pandemic," Digital Promise, 2020.](#)

["Higher Ed and COVID-19: National Student Survey, Pt. III – The Fragility of Trust," SimpsonScarborough, August 2020.](#)

["Time for Class: COVID-19 Edition, Part 2," Every Learner Everywhere, October 2020.](#)

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