

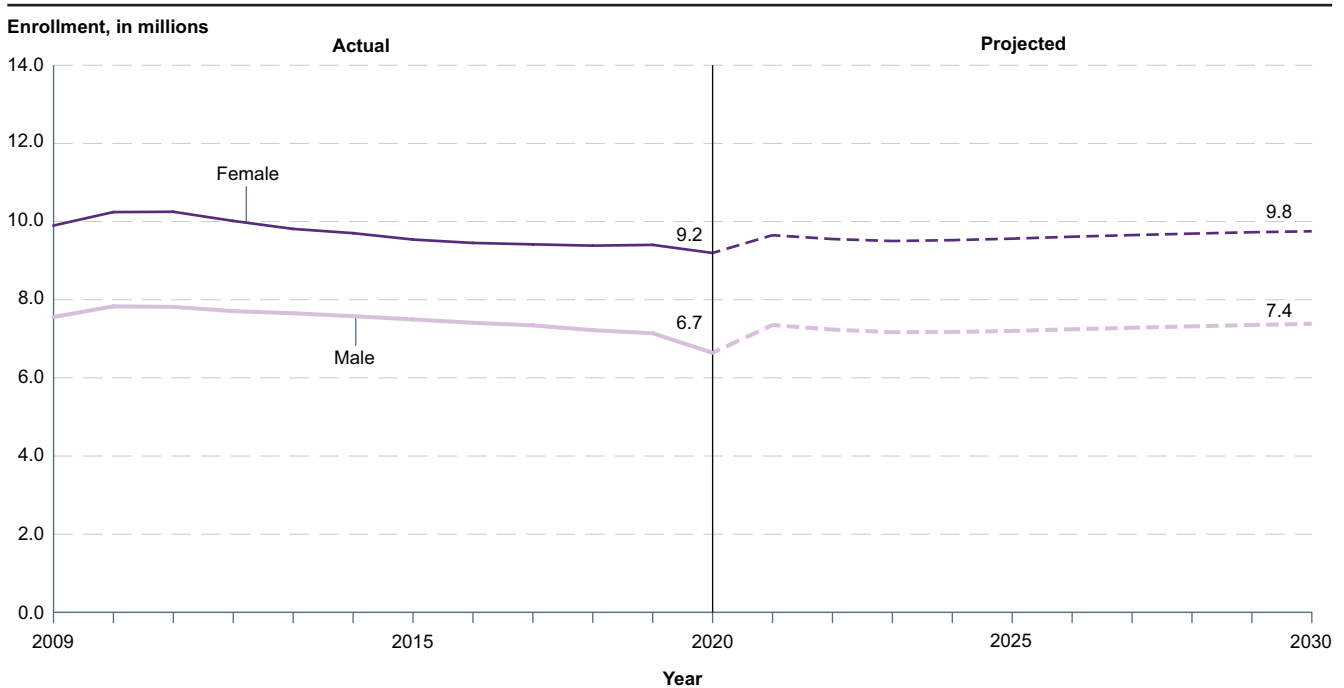
# Undergraduate Enrollment

*Between fall 2009 and 2020, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions decreased by 9 percent (from 17.5 million to 15.9 million students). However, between fall 2020 and 2030, total undergraduate enrollment is projected to increase by 8 percent to 17.1 million students.*

In fall 2020, the first year in which fall enrollment may have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States<sup>1</sup> was 15.9 million students.<sup>2</sup> Between 2009 and 2020, total

undergraduate enrollment decreased by 9 percent (from 17.5 million to 15.9 million students). In contrast, total undergraduate enrollment is projected to increase by 8 percent (from 15.9 million to 17.1 million students) between 2020 and 2030.

**Figure 1. Actual and projected undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by sex: Fall 2009 through fall 2030**

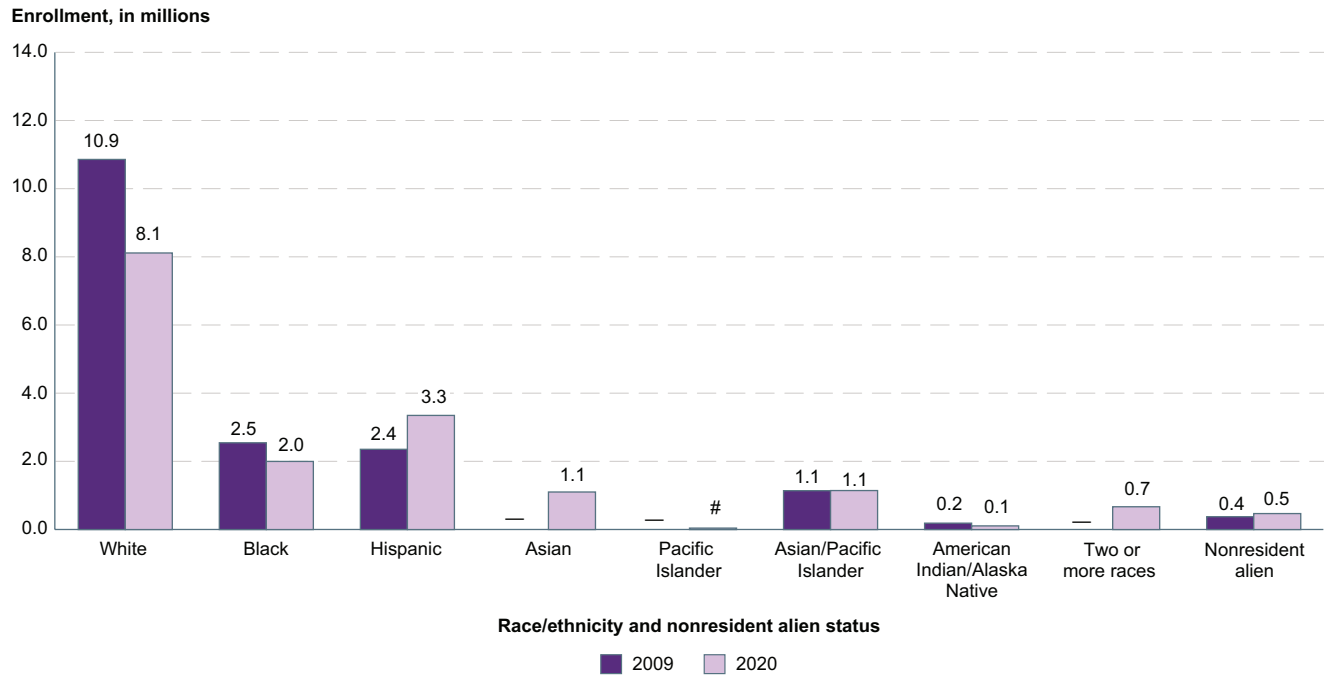


NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Projections were calculated after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and take into account the expected impacts of the pandemic. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2010 through Spring 2021, Fall Enrollment component. Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Projection Model, through 2030. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 303.70.

In fall 2020, female students made up 58 percent of total undergraduate enrollment (9.2 million students), and male students made up 42 percent (6.7 million students). Enrollment patterns for female and male students exhibited similar trends between 2009 and 2019. During this period, female and male enrollments both decreased by 5 percent (from 9.9 million to 9.4 million female students and from 7.6 million to 7.1 million male students). This translates to an average drop in enrollments of about half of one percent each year for both male and female students. In 2020—the first year in

which fall enrollments were impacted by the coronavirus pandemic—female enrollment was 2 percent lower than in 2019, while male enrollment was 7 percent lower. This change, in the first fall of the pandemic, marked the largest single-year decline in male enrollment over the period. In contrast, female and male enrollments are projected to increase by 2030. Between 2020 and 2030, female enrollment is projected to increase by 6 percent (from 9.2 million to 9.8 million students), and male enrollment is projected to increase by 11 percent (from 6.7 million to 7.4 million students).

**Figure 2. Undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and nonresident alien status: Fall 2009 and fall 2020**

— Not available.

# Rounds to zero.

NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Disaggregated data on undergraduate students who were Asian, Pacific Islander, and of Two or more races were not collected in 2009. In 2009, data for undergraduate students who were Asian included students who were Pacific Islander. In 2009, students of Two or more races were required to select a single category from among the offered race/ethnicity categories (i.e., White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian/Alaska Native). Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Race/ethnicity categories exclude nonresident aliens. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

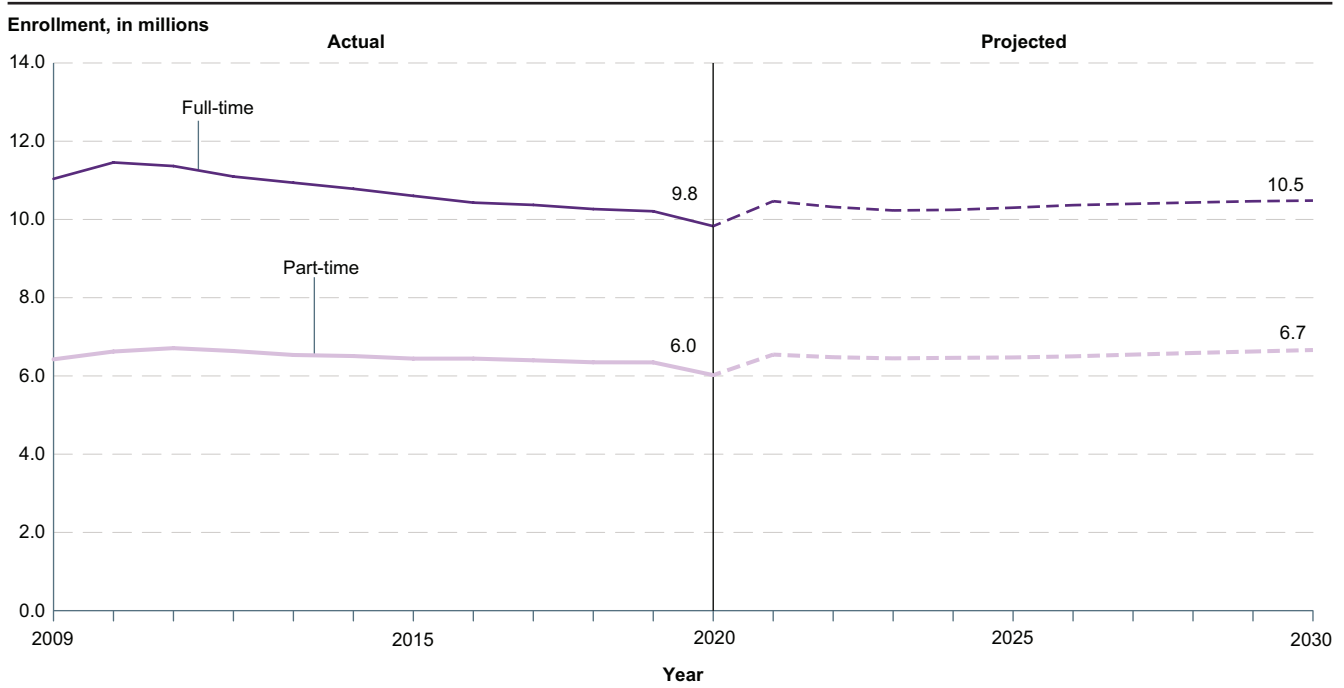
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2010 and Spring 2021, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 306.10; and *Digest of Education Statistics 2015*, table 306.10.

Of the 15.9 million undergraduate students enrolled in fall 2020, some 8.1 million were White, 3.3 million were Hispanic, 2.0 million were Black, 1.1 million were Asian, 669,000 were of Two or more races, 107,300 were American Indian/Alaska Native, and 42,500 were Pacific Islander. Trends in undergraduate enrollment between 2009 and 2020 varied across those racial/ethnic groups for which data were available.<sup>3</sup> During this period, American Indian/Alaska Native enrollment decreased by 43 percent (from 187,600 to 107,300 students), White enrollment decreased by 25 percent (from 10.9 million to 8.1 million students), and Black enrollment decreased by 21 percent (from 2.5 million to 2.0 million students). In

contrast, between 2009 and 2020, Hispanic enrollment increased by 42 percent (from 2.4 million to 3.3 million students). Asian/Pacific Islander enrollment remained steady (at 1.1 million students). All racial/ethnic groups had lower undergraduate enrollment in fall 2020 than in fall 2019.

In fall 2020, U.S. degree-granting postsecondary institutions enrolled 468,900 nonresident alien<sup>4</sup> undergraduate students, a 25 percent increase from 376,500 students in 2009. In contrast, nonresident alien undergraduate enrollment was 15 percent lower in 2020 than in 2019 (468,900 vs. 548,600).

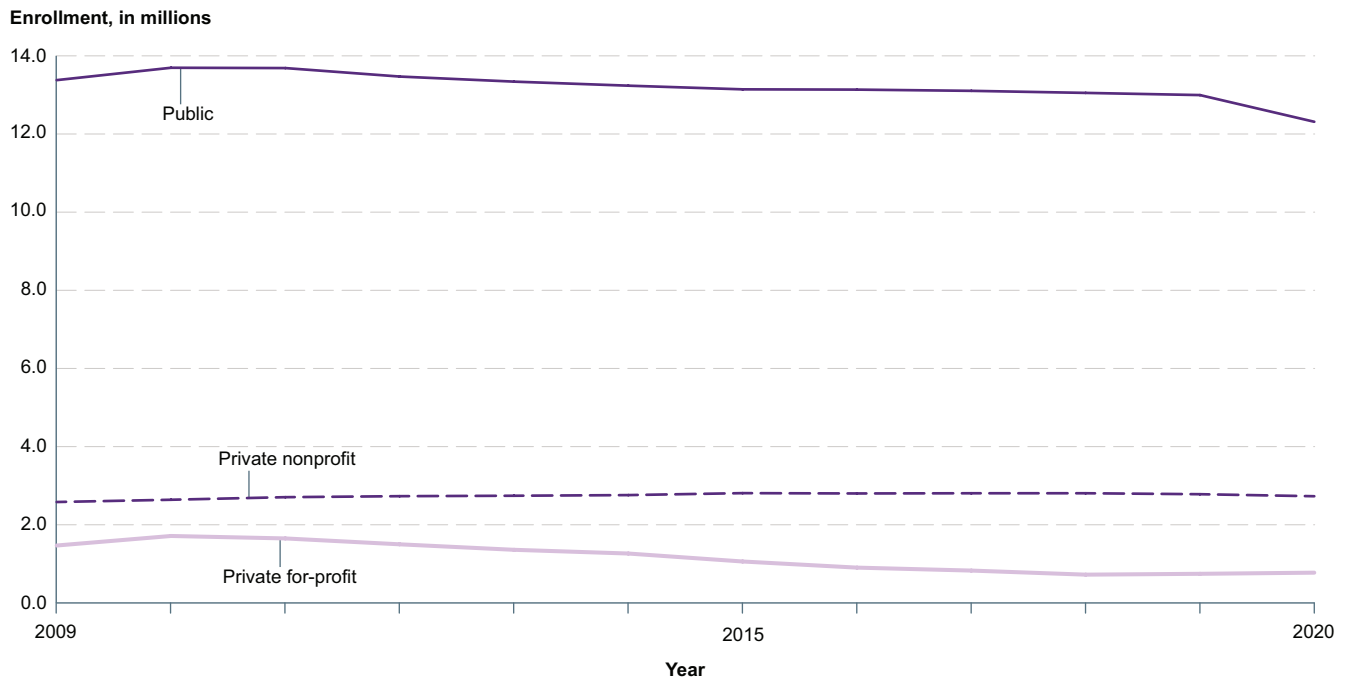
**Figure 3. Actual and projected undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by attendance status: Fall 2009 through fall 2030**



NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Projections were calculated after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and take into account the expected impacts of the pandemic. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2010 through Spring 2021, Fall Enrollment component. Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Projection Model, through 2030. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 303.70.

In fall 2020, U.S. degree-granting postsecondary institutions enrolled 9.8 million full-time and 6.0 million part-time undergraduate students. Between 2009 and 2020, full-time enrollment decreased by 11 percent (from 11.0 million to 9.8 million students) and part-time enrollment decreased by 6 percent (from 6.4 million to 6.0 million students). Compared with 2019, enrollment

in 2020 was 4 percent lower for full-time students and 5 percent lower for part-time students. Between 2020 and 2030, full-time enrollment is projected to increase by 7 percent (from 9.8 million to 10.5 million students) and part-time enrollment is projected to increase by 11 percent (from 6.0 million to 6.7 million students).

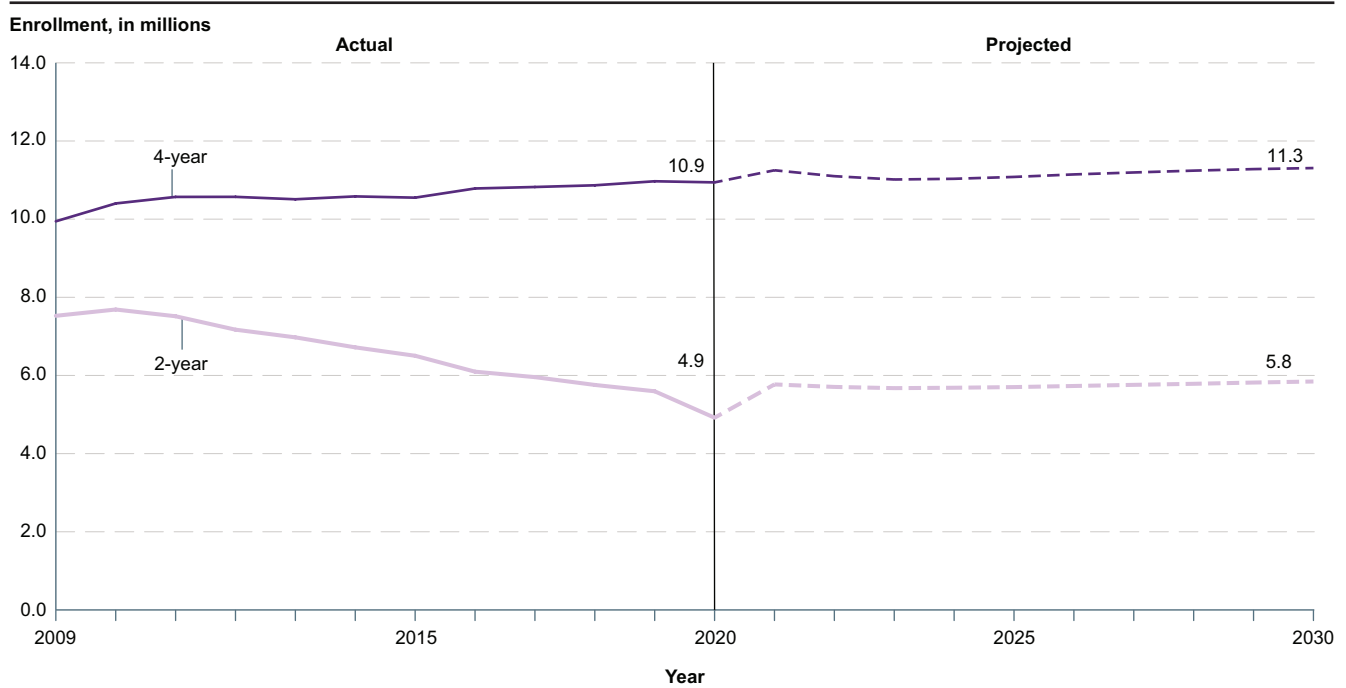
**Figure 4. Undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by control of institution: Fall 2009 through fall 2020**

NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2010 through Spring 2021, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 303.70.

In fall 2020, undergraduate enrollment was higher at public institutions (12.3 million students) than at private nonprofit institutions (2.7 million students) and private for-profit institutions (787,800 students). Between fall 2009 and 2020, enrollment in private for-profit institutions decreased by 47 percent (from 1.5 million to 787,800 students), and enrollment in public institutions decreased by 8 percent (from 13.4 million to 12.3 million students). Compared to fall 2019, enrollment at public institutions was 5 percent lower in 2020. In contrast,

enrollment at for-profit institutions was 4 percent higher in fall 2020 than in fall 2019, marking the first positive single-year change in enrollments at these institutions since 2010. Meanwhile, enrollment in private nonprofit institutions showed a general 6 percent increase throughout the period (from 2.6 million students in 2009 to 2.7 million students in 2020). However, enrollment in private nonprofit institutions was 2 percent lower in 2020 than in 2019.

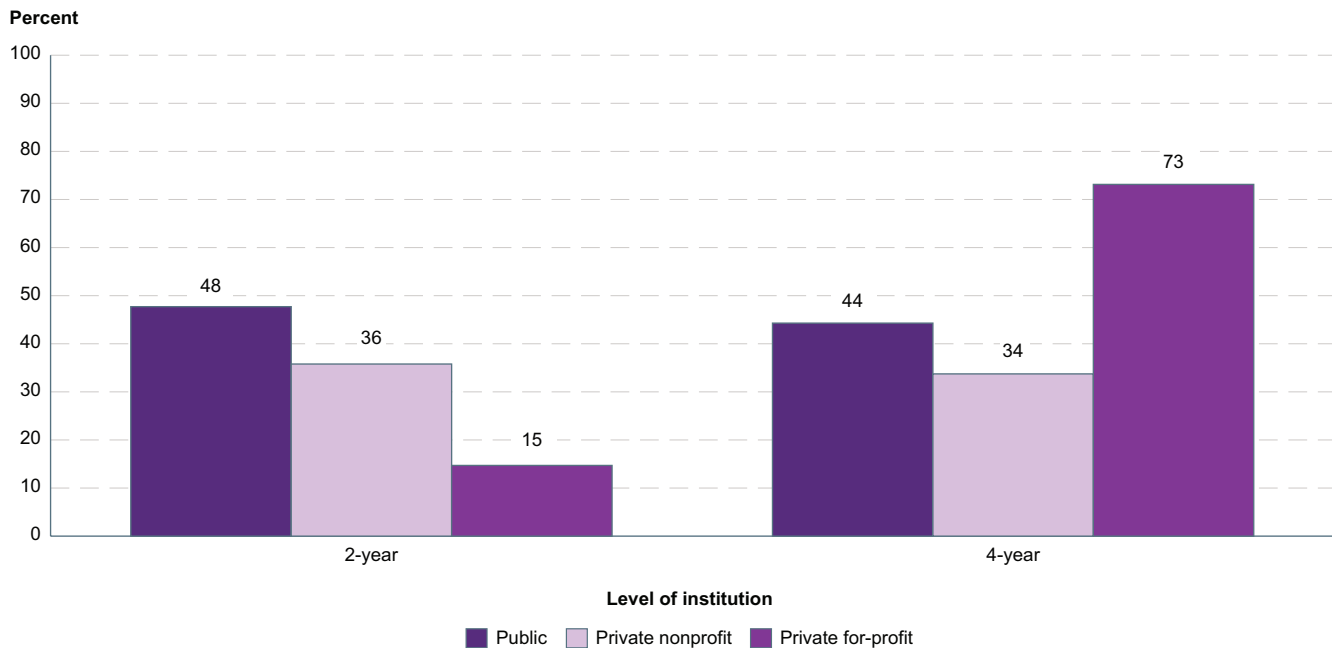
**Figure 5. Actual and projected undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level of institution: Fall 2009 through fall 2030**



NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Projections were calculated after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and take into account the expected impacts of the pandemic. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2010 through Spring 2021, Fall Enrollment component. Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Projection Model, through 2030. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 303.70.

In fall 2020, the 10.9 million students enrolled in 4-year institutions made up 69 percent of total undergraduate enrollment; the remaining 31 percent (4.9 million students) were enrolled in 2-year institutions. Between 2009 and 2020, enrollment increased by 10 percent at 4-year institutions (from 9.9 million to 10.9 million students), while enrollment decreased by 35 percent at 2-year institutions (from 7.5 million to 4.9 million students). The annual percentage change in 2-year enrollments ranged from 2 percent to 6 percent between

2009 and 2019. In comparison, 2-year enrollment was 12 percent lower in fall 2020 than in fall 2019, marking the largest single-year decline between 2009 and 2020. Between 2020 and 2030, undergraduate enrollment in 4-year institutions is projected to increase by 3 percent (from 10.9 to 11.3 million students) and enrollment in 2-year institutions is projected to increase by 19 percent (from 4.9 million to 5.8 million students). For 2-year institutions, most of the increase by 2030 is projected to come from a 17 percent rebound between 2020 and 2021.

**Figure 6. Percentage of undergraduate students at degree-granting postsecondary institutions who enrolled exclusively in distance education courses, by level and control of institution: Fall 2020**

NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Distance education uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the student and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously. Technologies used for instruction may include the following: the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcasts, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communication devices; audio conferencing; and videocassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, only if the videocassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with the technologies listed above.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2021, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 311.15.

Distance education<sup>5</sup> courses and programs provide students with flexible learning opportunities. These became especially important in the spring of 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic began to disrupt education in the United States.<sup>6</sup> In fall 2020, some 75 percent (11.8 million) of all undergraduate students were enrolled in at least one distance education course, and 44 percent (7.0 million) of all undergraduate students exclusively took distance education courses. The number of undergraduate students enrolled in at least one distance education course was 97 percent higher in 2020 than prior to the pandemic in fall 2019 (11.8 million vs. 6.0 million). The number of undergraduate students exclusively enrolled in distance education courses was 186 percent higher in 2020 than in 2019 (7.0 million vs. 2.4 million).

Among undergraduate students who took distance education courses exclusively, 5.5 million (34 percent)

were enrolled in institutions located in the same state in which they resided and 1.3 million (8 percent) were enrolled in institutions in a different state.<sup>7</sup>

The percentage of undergraduate students enrolled exclusively in distance education courses varied by control of institution (i.e., public, private nonprofit, or private for-profit). In fall 2020, the percentage of students at private for-profit institutions who took distance education courses exclusively (60 percent) was higher than that of students at public institutions (46 percent) and private nonprofit institutions (34 percent). In particular, the percentage of students who took distance education courses exclusively was highest at private for-profit 4-year institutions (73 percent). Despite enrolling only 4 percent of undergraduates, private for-profit 4-year institutions accounted for 6 percent of undergraduates who were enrolled exclusively in distance education courses.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Data in this indicator represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

<sup>2</sup> Data in this indicator may not sum to 15.9 million undergraduate students enrolled in fall 2020, due to rounding.

<sup>3</sup> Disaggregated data on undergraduate students who were Asian, Pacific Islander, and of Two or more races were not collected in 2009. In 2009, data for undergraduate students who were Asian included students who were Pacific Islander. In 2009, students of Two or more races were required to select a single category from among the offered race/ethnicity categories (i.e., White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian/Alaska Native).

<sup>4</sup> In the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), racial/ethnic data were not collected for nonresident alien students, and their data were compiled as a separate group. Race/ethnicity categories exclude nonresident aliens.

<sup>5</sup> Distance education uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the student and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously. Technologies used for instruction may include the following:

the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcasts, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communication devices; audio conferencing; and videocassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, only if the videocassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with the technologies listed above.

<sup>6</sup> According to the 2019-20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20), 84 percent of undergraduate students reported having some or all classes moved to online-only instruction in spring 2020 due to the pandemic. For more information, see the *First Look at the Impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic on Undergraduate Student Enrollment, Housing, and Finances (Preliminary Data)* (NCES 2021-456).

<sup>7</sup> Not all students taking distance education courses exclusively are specified separately in this comparison; for instance, students residing outside the United States or those whose location is unknown are not specified separately. Percentages were based on all students who took distance education courses exclusively, regardless of their location.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 303.70, 306.10, and 311.15; *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 311.15; *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 306.10; *Digest of Education Statistics 2015*, table 306.10

**Related indicators and resources:** [Characteristics of Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions](#); [College Enrollment Rates](#); [Differences in Postsecondary Enrollment Among Recent High School Completers](#) [*The Condition of Education 2016 Spotlight*]; [Immediate College Enrollment Rate](#); [Postbaccalaureate Enrollment](#); [STEM Degrees](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Undergraduate Enrollment](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Young Adult Educational and Employment Outcomes by Family Socioeconomic Status](#) [*The Condition of Education 2019 Spotlight*]

**Glossary:** Control of institutions; Degree-granting institutions; Distance education; Enrollment; Full-time enrollment; Part-time enrollment; Postsecondary institutions (basic classification by level); Private institution; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group; Undergraduate students