

# Undergraduate Enrollment

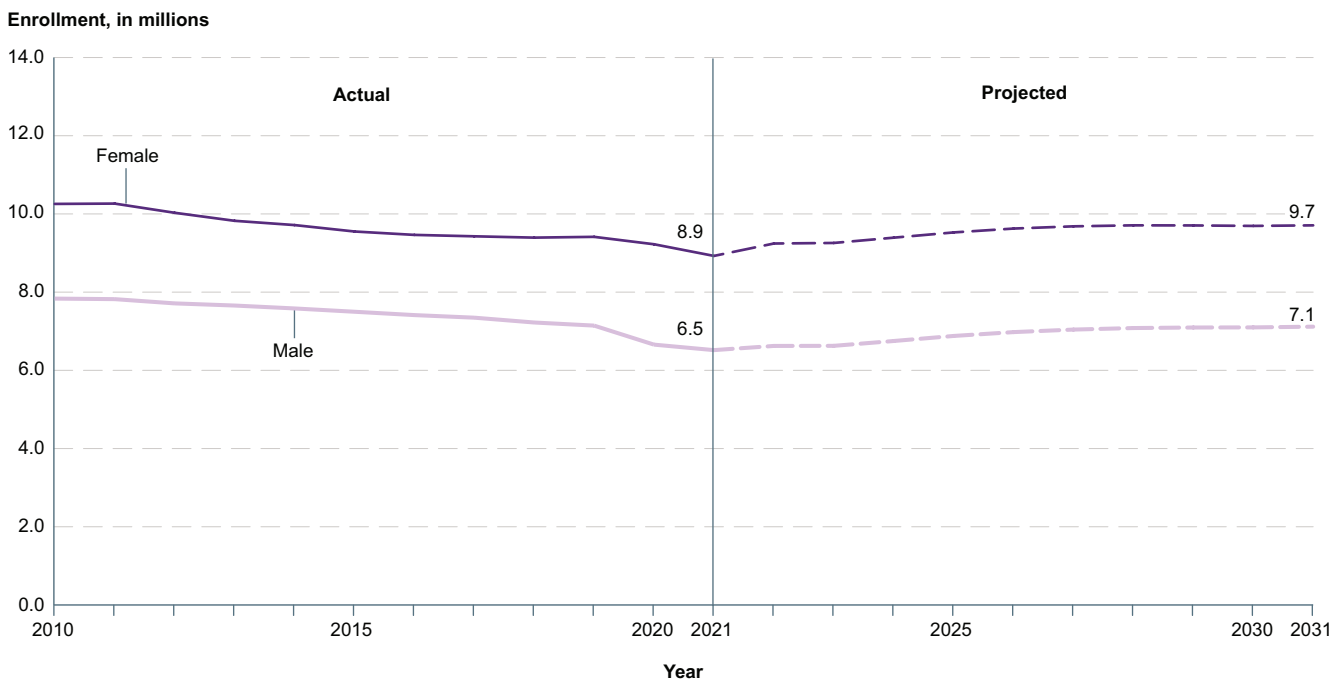
*Between fall 2010 and fall 2021, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions decreased by 15 percent (from 18.1 million to 15.4 million students). However, between fall 2021 and fall 2031, total undergraduate enrollment is projected to increase by 9 percent to 16.8 million students.*

In fall 2021, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting<sup>1</sup> postsecondary institutions in the United States<sup>2</sup> was 15.4 million<sup>3</sup> students, 3 percent lower than in fall 2020 (15.9 million students). This continued the downward trend in undergraduate enrollment observed before the coronavirus pandemic. Overall, undergraduate

enrollment was 15 percent lower in fall 2021 than in fall 2010, with 42 percent of this decline occurring during the pandemic. In contrast, total undergraduate enrollment is projected to increase by 9 percent (from 15.4 million to 16.8 million students) between 2021 and 2031.<sup>4</sup>

## Undergraduate Enrollment by Sex

**Figure 1. Actual and projected undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by sex: Fall 2010 through fall 2031**

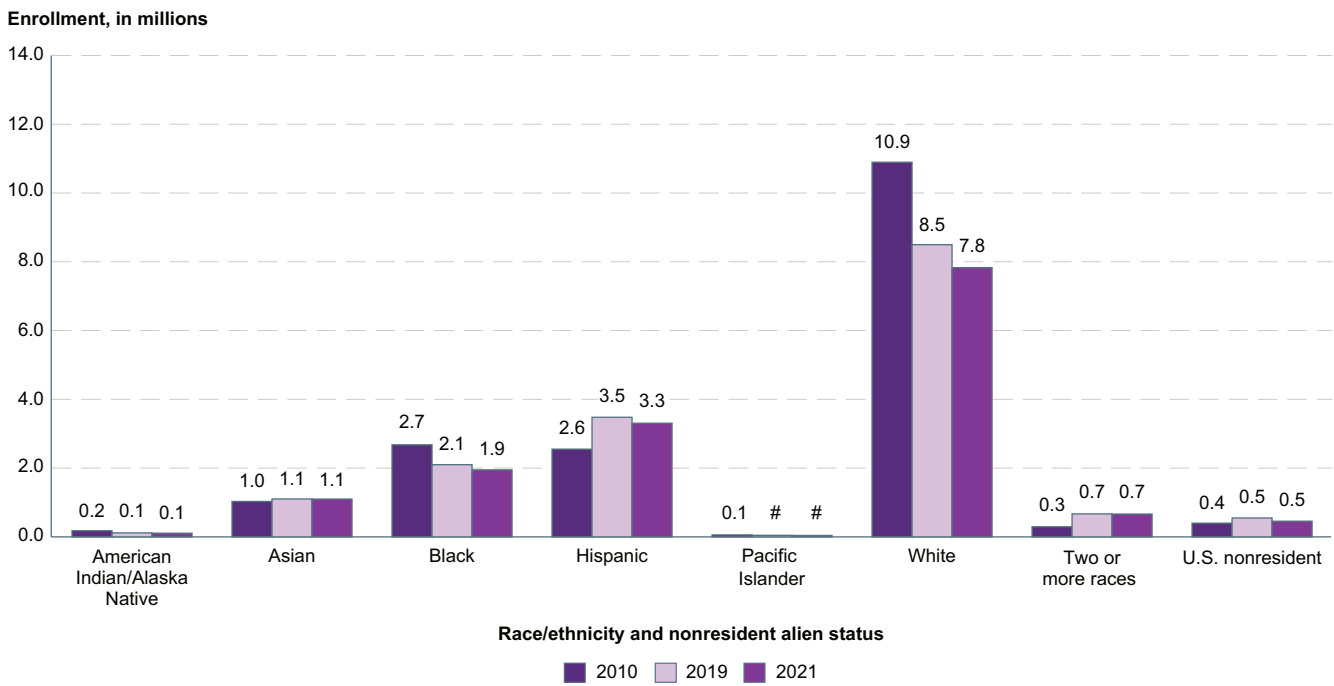


NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Projections were calculated after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and take into account the expected impacts 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 2011 through Spring 2022, Fall Enrollment component. Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Projection Model, through 2031. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 303.70.

In fall 2021, female students made up 58 percent of total undergraduate enrollment (8.9 million students), and male students made up 42 percent (6.5 million students). Between 2010 and 2021, male enrollment decreased by 17 percent (from 7.8 million to 6.5 million students) and female enrollment decreased by 13 percent (from 10.2 million to 8.9 million students). Over this period,

male enrollment saw its largest single-year decline in fall 2020 (7 percent), while female enrollment saw its largest single-year decline in fall 2021 (3 percent). In contrast, between 2021 and 2031, female and male enrollment are both projected to increase by 9 percent (to 9.7 and 7.1 million students, respectively).

**Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Nonresident Status****Figure 2. Undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and nonresident status: Fall 2010, 2019, and 2021**

# Rounds to zero.

NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Race/ethnicity categories exclude U.S. nonresidents. 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 2011, Spring 2020, and Spring 2022, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 306.10.

Of the 15.4 million undergraduate students enrolled in fall 2021,

- 7.8 million were White;
- 3.3 million were Hispanic;
- 1.9 million were Black;
- 1.1 million were Asian;
- 663,100 were of Two or more races;
- 107,000 were American Indian/Alaska Native; and
- 41,000 were Pacific Islander.

Trends in undergraduate enrollment between fall 2010 and fall 2021 varied across racial/ethnic groups. During this period, the enrollment decreased for

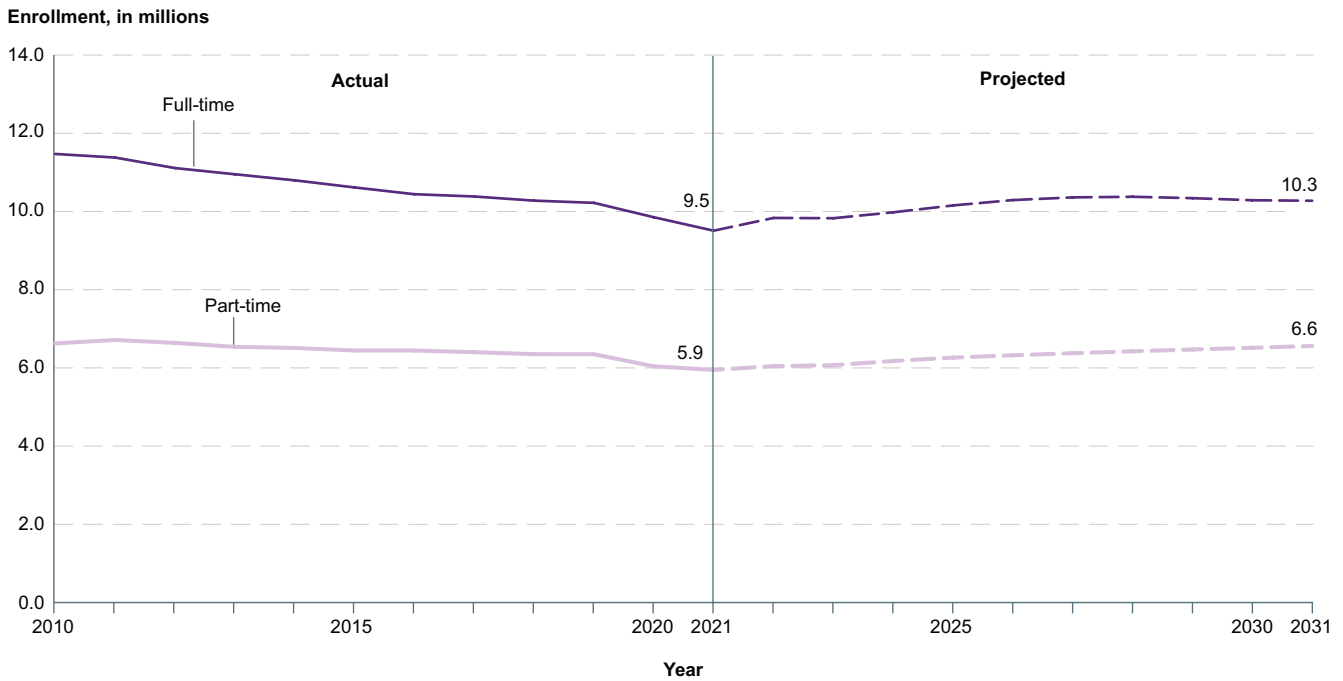
- American Indian/Alaska Native students (by 40 percent, from 179,100 to 107,000 students);
- Pacific Islander students (by 29 percent, from 57,500 to 41,000 students);
- White students (by 28 percent, from 10.9 million to 7.8 million students); and
- Black students (by 27 percent, from 2.7 million to 1.9 million students).

In contrast, between fall 2010 and fall 2021, enrollment increased for

- students of Two or more races (by 126 percent, from 293,700 to 663,100 students);
- Hispanic students (by 30 percent, from 2.6 million to 3.3 million students); and
- Asian students (by 7 percent, from 1.0 million to 1.1 million students).

All racial/ethnic groups had a lower number of undergraduate students enrolled in fall 2021 than in fall 2020 or fall 2019, the year prior to the pandemic. The difference between enrollments in fall 2021 and fall 2019 ranged from less than one half of 1 percent lower for Asian students to 9 percent lower for Pacific Islander students.

Enrollments of undergraduate U.S. nonresident students<sup>5</sup> in U.S. degree-granting postsecondary institutions increased by 38 percent from fall 2010 to fall 2019 (from 398,400 to 548,600), but fell during the pandemic. Nonresident undergraduate enrollment was 3 percent lower in 2021 than in 2020 (455,500 vs. 468,800) and 17 percent lower in 2021 than in 2019 (455,500 vs. 548,600).

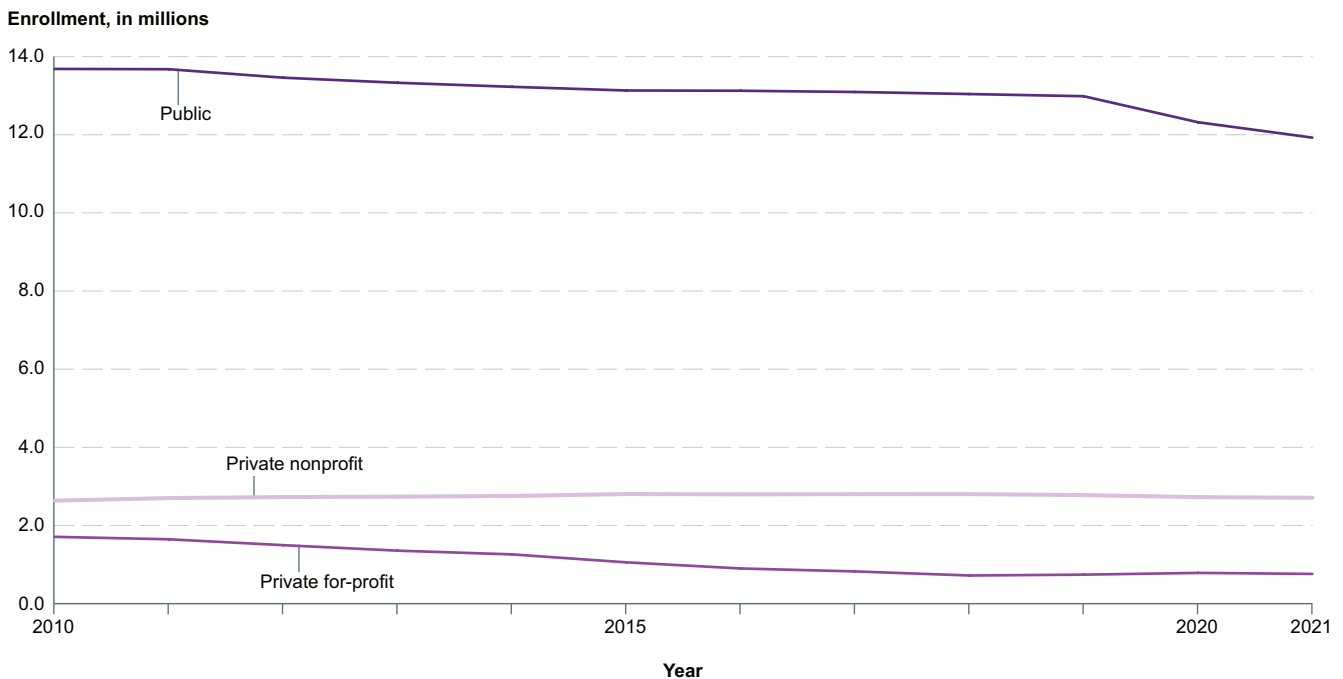
**Undergraduate Enrollment by Attendance Status****Figure 3. Actual and projected undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by attendance status: Fall 2010 through fall 2031**

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 2011 through Spring 2022, Fall Enrollment component. Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Projection Model, through 2031. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 303.70.

In fall 2021, U.S. degree-granting postsecondary institutions enrolled 9.5 million full-time and 5.9 million part-time undergraduate students. Between 2010 and 2021, full-time enrollment decreased by 17 percent (from 11.5 million to 9.5 million students) and part-time enrollment decreased by 10 percent (from 6.6 million to 5.9 million students). Compared with enrollment in

2020, enrollment in 2021 was 3 percent lower for full-time students and 2 percent lower for part-time students. In contrast, between 2021 and 2031 full-time enrollment is projected to increase by 8 percent (from 9.5 million to 10.3 million students) and part-time enrollment is projected to increase by 10 percent (from 5.9 million to 6.6 million students).

**Undergraduate Enrollment by Control of Institution****Figure 4. Undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by control of institution: Fall 2010 through fall 2021**

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 2011 through Spring 2022, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 303.70.

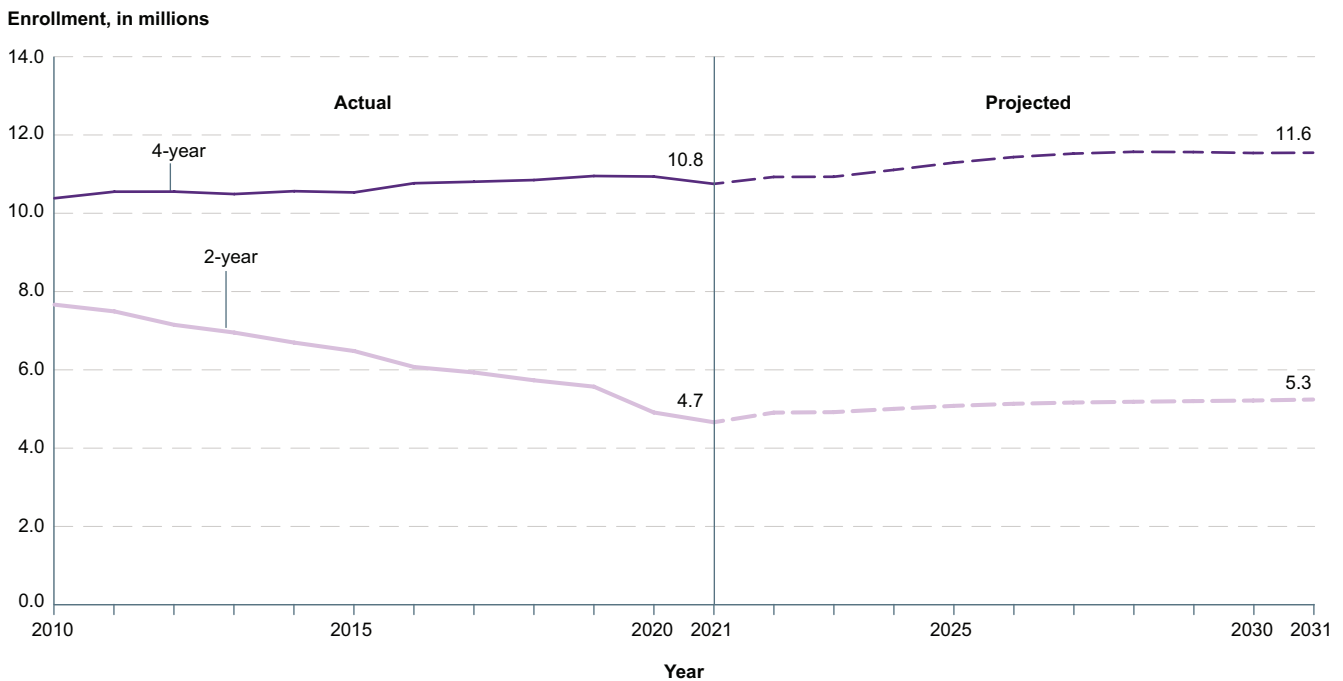
In fall 2021, undergraduate enrollment varied by control of institution (i.e., public, private nonprofit, or private for-profit):

- 11.9 million students (77 percent) were enrolled at public institutions;
- 2.7 million students (18 percent) were enrolled at private nonprofit institutions; and
- 777,400 students (5 percent) were enrolled at private for-profit institutions.

Between fall 2010 and fall 2021, enrollment in private for-profit institutions decreased by 55 percent (from 1.7 million to 777,400 students), and enrollment in public institutions decreased by 13 percent (from 13.7 million to 11.9 million students). Meanwhile, enrollment in private nonprofit institutions was higher in 2021 than in 2010 but showed no consistent trend throughout this period.

Compared with enrollment in fall 2020, enrollment in fall 2021 was 3 percent lower at private for-profit institutions and public institutions and 1 percent lower at private nonprofit institutions.

Retention rates measure the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following fall. Among the 2 million first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students who entered degree-granting institutions in fall 2020 (about 12 percent of all undergraduate students), the overall retention rate in fall 2021 was 76 percent. Retention rates in fall 2021 were higher at private nonprofit institutions (81 percent) than at public institutions (75 percent) or private for-profit institutions (62 percent).

**Undergraduate Enrollment by Level of Institution****Figure 5. Actual and projected undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level of institution: Fall 2010 through fall 2031**

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 2011 through Spring 2022, Fall Enrollment component. Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Projection Model, through 2031. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 303.70.

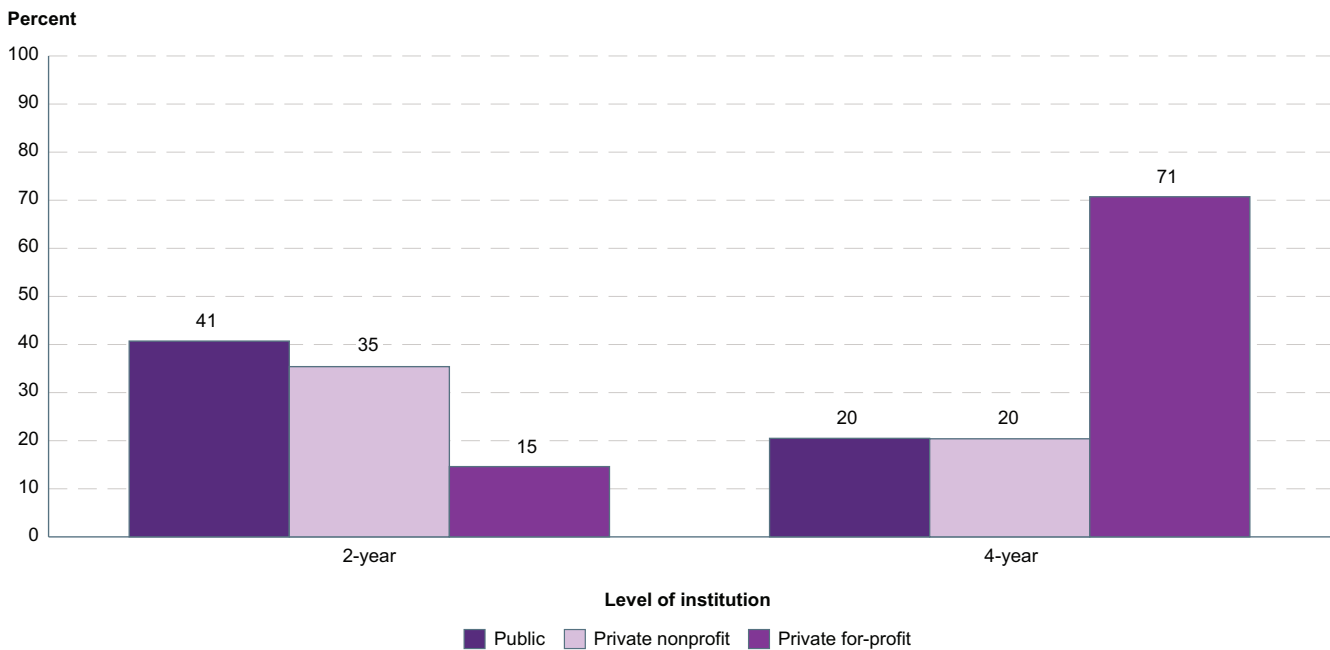
In fall 2021, the 10.8 million students enrolled in 4-year institutions made up 70 percent of total undergraduate enrollment; the remaining 30 percent (4.7 million students) were enrolled in 2-year institutions. Between 2010 and 2021, enrollment

- decreased by 39 percent at 2-year institutions (from 7.7 million to 4.7 million students); and
- increased by 4 percent at 4-year institutions (from 10.4 million to 10.8 million students).

However, enrollment at 4-year institutions was 2 percent lower in fall 2021 than in fall 2020 or fall 2019.

By 2031, undergraduate enrollment in 4-year institutions is projected to increase by 7 percent (from 10.8 to 11.6 million students) and enrollment in 2-year institutions is projected to increase by 12 percent (from 4.7 million to 5.3 million students).

Among first-time, full-time undergraduate students who enrolled in 2020, the retention rate in fall 2021 was higher at 4-year than at 2-year degree-granting institutions (81 vs. 61 percent).

**Undergraduate Enrollment by Distance Education Participation****Figure 6. Percentage of undergraduate students at degree-granting postsecondary institutions who participated exclusively in distance education courses, by level and control of institution: Fall 2021**

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 2022, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 311.15.

Distance education<sup>6</sup> courses and programs provide students with flexible learning opportunities. In fall 2021, some 9.4 million students, or 61 percent of all undergraduate students, were enrolled in at least one distance education course. Some 4.4 million students, or 28 percent of all undergraduate students, took distance education courses exclusively. As a percentage of total undergraduate enrollment in fall 2021, participation in distance education was lower than in fall 2020,<sup>7</sup> the first fall of the coronavirus pandemic, but remained higher than fall 2019. Specifically, the percentage of undergraduate students enrolled in at least one distance education course was

- 36 percent in 2019;
- 75 percent in 2020; and
- 61 percent in 2021.

The percentage of undergraduate students who took distance education courses exclusively was

- 15 percent in 2019;
- 44 percent in 2020; and
- 28 percent in 2021.

Of the undergraduate students who took distance education courses exclusively, 3.2 million (74 percent) were enrolled in institutions located in the same state in which they resided and 1.0 million (23 percent) were enrolled in institutions in a different state.<sup>8</sup>

In fall 2021, the percentage of undergraduate students who took distance education courses exclusively varied by control of the institution at which those students were enrolled. Specifically, those who were enrolled in distance education courses exclusively made up

- 58 percent of students at private for-profit institutions;
- 28 percent of students at public institutions; and
- 21 percent of students at private nonprofit institutions.

In particular, the percentage of students who took distance education courses exclusively was highest at private for-profit 4-year institutions (71 percent). Despite enrolling only 4 percent of undergraduates, private for-profit 4-year institutions accounted for 10 percent of undergraduates who were enrolled exclusively in distance education courses.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs.

<sup>2</sup> Data in this indicator represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

<sup>3</sup> Data by subgroup in this indicator may not sum to 15.4 million undergraduate students enrolled in fall 2021 due to rounding.

<sup>4</sup> Projections were calculated after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and take into account expected economic and demographic impacts of the pandemic.

<sup>5</sup> In the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), data for the U.S. nonresident category are collected alongside data for racial/ethnic categories. Race/ethnicity categories exclude U.S. nonresidents.

<sup>6</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>7</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>8</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 2022*, tables 303.70, 306.10, 311.15, and 326.30; *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 311.15; *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, 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; Retention rate; Undergraduate students