



Postsecondary Fall Enrollment Net Migration Trends Remain Unchanged During COVID-19

by Sean Simone, Ph.D., Stephanie Holcomb,
and Kristine Joy Bacani

October 2021

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Introduction

To mitigate the spread of COVID-19, many colleges and universities in the United States adopted remote policies, shifting campus operations and instruction from in-person to virtual in 2020. Since many students were not physically required to be present on college campuses, one would expect a large shift in national enrollment and a disruption of the migration of high school students attending college in

other states. However, newly released preliminary data from the National Center for Education Statistics reveal a different story of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected overall college student net migration patterns. This research brief details a review of trends over the past 20 years of overall national data on postsecondary student enrollment, net migration, and the impact of the pandemic.

Overall Postsecondary Student Enrollment

As of the 2020 data used for this analysis, overall fall enrollment was 3.3% lower than in 2019 following the onset of the pandemic. The decrease was more pronounced for first-time full-time students, for whom there was a 9.2% decrease in enrollment from 2019 to 2020. During periods of recession, enrollment typically increases as people leave the

workforce for postsecondary education, but the recession associated with the pandemic did not yield the same growth in enrollment. Data over the next few years will likely provide a complete story of the enrollment trends as a new pattern normalizes.

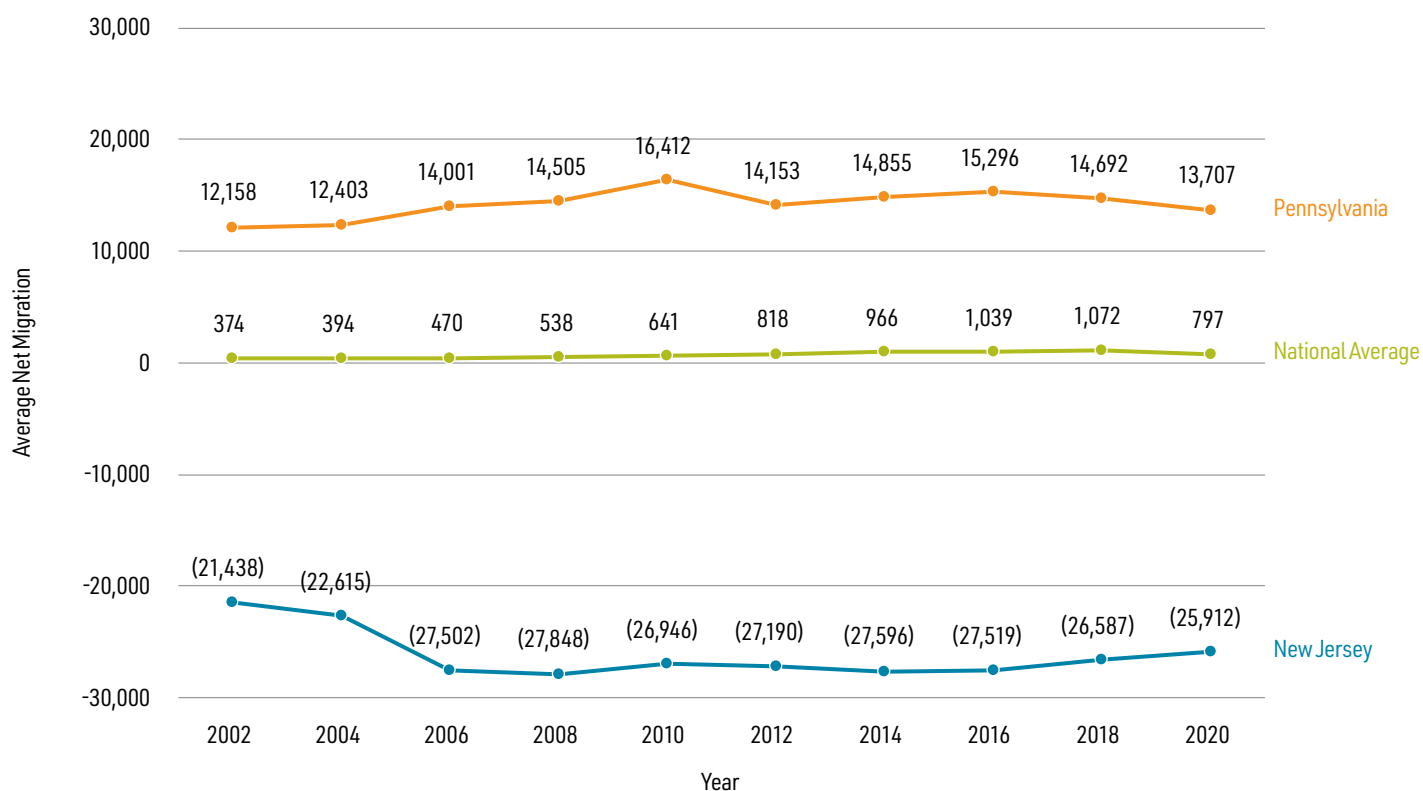
Net Postsecondary Student Migration

Figure 1 shows the national average of total net migration of postsecondary students from 2002 to 2020. The trends have remained relatively stable over this period. While many colleges and universities shifted to remote instruction, overall net migration has remained stable during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar to the fall of 2018, approximately three quarters of states (36 out of 50) and the District of Columbia had a positive net migration of high school students attending college full time for the first time. The remaining 14 states had a negative net migration (more residents out-migrate for college than nonresidents in-migrate for college).¹ Pennsylvania continues to be the top importer of

postsecondary students with a net migration of +13,707, followed by Arizona (+9,875) and Indiana (+9,362) for fall 2020. Conversely, New Jersey continues to be the top exporter of postsecondary students with a net migration of -25,912, immediately followed by Illinois (-17,969) and Texas (-14,529). It appears that the pandemic did not disrupt migration patterns. While researchers hypothesized that more students would attend institutions closer to their homes during the pandemic, the introduction of virtual/remote instruction allowed many students to continue attending institutions outside of their state of residence.

¹ Ruiz, R. (2020). *The "where" of going to college: Residence, migration, and fall enrollment* [web log]. <https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/post/the-where-of-going-to-college-residence-migration-and-fall-enrollment>.

Figure 1: Net Migration of Postsecondary Students by State, 2002–2020



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

Note: Net migration is calculated as the total number of students entering the state for postsecondary education minus the total number of postsecondary students who completed high school in the state but enrolled in postsecondary education out of state.

Conclusion

There is little evidence in the data that supports major disruptions in the migration of first-time, full-time college students in the fall of 2020. While there were many other disruptions resulting from the pandemic (especially fiscal), students continued to attend out-of-state institutions

consistent with past trends. As in-person instruction and more normal operations return in 2021 and 2022, the Heldrich Center will be sure to monitor future trends to see if a post-recession/pandemic increase in enrollment is delayed.

Appendix A. Net Migration by State or Jurisdiction, 2018 and 2020

State/Jurisdiction	2018	2020
Pennsylvania	14,692	13,707
Arizona	7,394	9,875
Indiana	10,332	9,362
Alabama	7,837	7,719
Iowa	7,387	6,868
Ohio	6,731	6,697
District of Columbia	5,724	6,228
Utah	5,723	6,116
Massachusetts	6,508	5,832
Rhode Island	5,924	5,713
South Carolina	6,329	5,686
North Carolina	5,294	5,066
West Virginia	3,631	3,544
Oklahoma	3,790	3,534
Tennessee	2,541	3,422
Mississippi	4,601	3,420
Wisconsin	3,270	3,368
Kentucky	2,974	3,288
Kansas	3,629	3,063
Arkansas	3,530	2,912
New York	5,880	2,641
Idaho	2,309	2,571
Vermont	2,511	2,293
Oregon	3,098	2,214
Louisiana	1,969	2,165
Michigan	1,516	2,145
North Dakota	2,634	2,126
Missouri	1,521	1,934
Virginia	2,530	1,509
South Dakota	1,648	1,455
Maine	1,270	1,353
Montana	1,498	1,270
Nebraska	1,339	1,135
Delaware	1,354	841
Florida	522	586
New Hampshire	1,228	521
Wyoming	755	291
New Mexico	(133)	(134)
Alaska	(1,256)	(1,216)
Hawaii	(1,896)	(1,343)
Colorado	176	(1,384)
Outlying Areas	(1,642)	(1,508)
Nevada	(1,274)	(1,615)
Georgia	(230)	(1,905)
Connecticut	(4,297)	(3,177)
Washington	(1,236)	(3,213)
Minnesota	(5,047)	(5,727)
Maryland	(7,229)	(7,987)
California	(12,533)	(13,384)
Texas	(12,496)	(14,529)
Illinois	(19,974)	(17,969)
New Jersey	(26,587)	(25,912)
National Average	1,072	797

Acknowledgments

The authors of this brief were Heldrich Center staff Sean Simone, Ph.D., Director of Research and Evaluation; Stephanie Holcomb, Research Project Manager; and Kristine Joy Bacani, Research Project Assistant. InBum Chung was the graphic designer. Robb C. Sewell was the editor.

About the Heldrich Center

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University is devoted to transforming the workforce development system at the local, state, and federal levels. The center, located within the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, provides an independent source of analysis for reform and innovation in policymaking and employs cutting-edge research and evaluation methods to identify best practices in workforce development, education, and employment policy. It is also engaged in significant partnerships with the private sector, workforce organizations, and educational institutions to design effective education and training programs. It is deeply committed to assisting job seekers and workers attain the information, education, and skills training they need to move up the economic ladder.

As captured in its slogan, “Solutions at Work,” the Heldrich Center is guided by a commitment to translate the strongest research and analysis into practices and programs that companies, community-based organizations, philanthropy, and government officials can use to strengthen their workforce and workforce readiness programs, create jobs, and remain competitive. The center’s work strives to build an efficient labor market that matches workers’ skills and knowledge with the evolving demands of employers. The center’s projects are grounded in a core set of research priorities:

- ▶ Career and Technical Education
- ▶ Data Collection and Analysis
- ▶ Disability Employment
- ▶ Job Seekers in Transition
- ▶ Program Evaluation
- ▶ Trend Analysis

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