

Fall 2011: Estimated Headcount Enrollment and Pell Grant Trends

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After a number of years of enrollment growth at the nation's community colleges, total headcount enrollments leveled off in fall 2011 from the previous year. A collaborative analysis of the American Association of Community Colleges and the National Student Clearinghouse shows an enrollment decrease of almost 1%

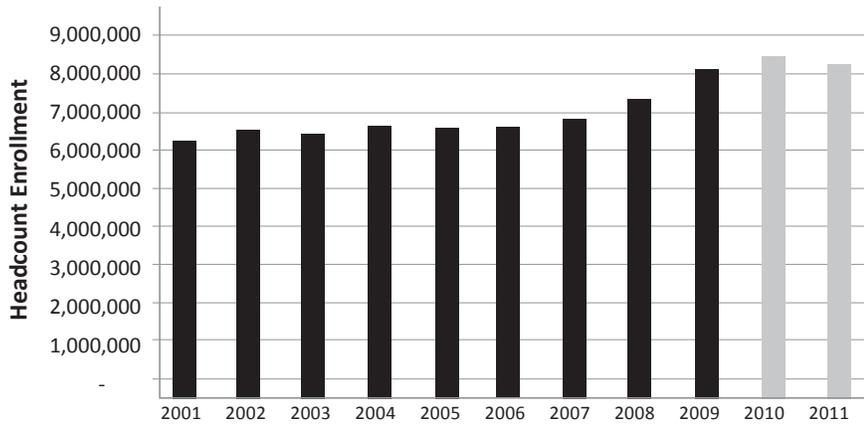
from fall 2010 to 2011. Despite this slight decline, enrollments remain up 21.8% since fall 2007 (see Figure 1).¹ This explosive growth was undoubtedly fueled by the economic downturn—historically, community college enrollments spike during bad economies—and occurred at a time of widespread state and local funding

cuts, placing huge strains on campuses across the country.

The change in community college enrollments this fall resulted in part from a drop in full-time students and a slight increase in students enrolled part-time. The reasons for the decline in full-time students could be due to a variety of factors. There seems little reason to think that reduced intensity of enrollment is due to an improvement in economic conditions.

While the number of enrollments decreased in fall 2011 compared with fall 2010, the number of community college students receiving Pell Grants increased by 17% during the first quarter of the program, from just over 1.7 million students in first quarter of 2010 to approximately 2 million students in 2011.² This is another sign that the slight drop in enrollments may not be due to students being in better financial circumstances. Community colleges served a larger proportion of all Pell Grant recipients. The community college share rose from 31% to 34%

Figure 1
Fall Headcount Credit Enrollment in Community Colleges: 2001-2011



Note. Data for 2010 and 2011 are estimated. From AACC analysis of IPEDS fall enrollment data files and collaborative AACC and National Student Clearinghouse data analysis.

Table 1
Distribution of Cumulative Pell Grant Recipients and Funds, by Sector and Program Quarter: 2010-2011 and 2011-2012

Program Year	Quarter	Sector							
		Public 2-year		Public 4-year		Private nonprofit		For-profit	
		Recipients	Funds (Billions)	Recipients	Funds (Billions)	Recipients	Funds (Billions)	Recipients	Funds (Billions)
2010-2011	Quarter 1	1,708,369	\$3.2	2,026,990	\$4.2	765,960	\$1.6	964,439	\$2.0
	Quarter 2	2,514,530	\$5.1	2,325,705	\$5.3	976,718	\$2.2	1,568,469	\$4.3
	Quarter 3	3,180,077	\$9.8	2,578,894	\$9.7	1,101,313	\$4.1	1,961,837	\$6.6
	Quarter 4	3,395,781	\$11.1	2,648,019	\$10.4	1,150,413	\$4.5	2,237,997	\$8.6
2011-2012	Quarter 1	2,000,228	\$3.6	2,201,160	\$4.6	781,163	\$1.6	848,900	\$1.7
Percentage Distribution									
2010-2011	Quarter 1	31%	29%	37%	38%	14%	15%	18%	18%
	Quarter 2	34%	30%	31%	31%	13%	13%	21%	25%
	Quarter 3	36%	32%	29%	32%	12%	13%	22%	22%
	Quarter 4	36%	32%	28%	30%	12%	13%	24%	25%
2011-2012	Quarter 1	34%	32%	38%	39%	13%	14%	15%	15%

Note. Data for each quarter represent cumulative, year-to-date values. Recipients reflect a count of unique recipients who have an actual disbursement. Funds represent the actual disbursement on Common Origination and Disbursement (COD) system for the respective time period and are presented in current dollars. Quarter 1 represents activity between July 1, 2011 and September 30, 2011. Adapted from Federal Student Aid (2011).

(see Table 1). The total number and proportion of Pell Grant recipients attending for-profit institutions, which was 964,000 or 18% of recipients in the first quarter of 2010, dropped to 849,000 or 15% in 2011. College recipients at both public 4-year and private nonprofit institutions received

approximately the same percentage of funds and colleges in these sectors served the same percentage of recipients as a year ago. Overall, Pell Grant program costs in the first quarter increased to \$11.6 billion, compared to \$11.4 billion inflation-adjusted dollars at the same time the year before.³ This

\$0.2 billion dollar increase is much slower than in recent years, and this slowing of growth could presage less fiscal pressure on the program, which would be a welcome development.

References

Federal Student Aid. (2011). *Programmatic volume reports: Grant volume* [Database]. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Available from <http://federalstudentaid.ed.gov/datacenter/programmatic.html>

Notes

¹ The collaborative analysis between the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the National Students Clearinghouse (NSC) is based on a 4-year matched set of institutions from fall 2008 to 2011. Fall was defined as any term with a start date between August 15 and October 31. As with IPEDS, these data reflect enrollments, not headcounts, and are therefore not unduplicated. AACC and NSC worked together to frame the analysis. NSC then conducted the data extraction and analysis and provided national aggregate counts to AACC. At no time did AACC staff have access to student-level or institutional-level data. Percentage change estimates provided by NSC were applied by AACC to known fall enrollment counts for fall 2009 to produce 2010 and 2011 estimated values.

² Total year-over-year increases in Pell Grant program participation, for the first quarter of the program year, increased by 6.6%.

³ The current dollar cost of the program for the first quarter in 2010 was \$11.1 billion.