

Enrollment

Numbers

College enrollment in the U.S. is down 1.7 percent ([Holland](#)).

Enrollment fell from 29.5 million in 2010-11 to 26.4 million in 2017-2018 ([Lederman](#)).

Enrollments at for-profit colleges have dropped 47% while enrollments at public 4-year colleges have increased 12% ([Lederman](#)).

"In the half decade beginning in 2025, the HEDI predicts that the cohort size of 18-year-olds will shrink more than 650,000, while the number of first-time college-goers contracts by nearly 450,000" (Grawe).

"Between 2000 and 2015, the number of Latinx college students more than doubled, to 3 million. Their share of overall college enrollment rose between 1996 and 2016 from 8 to 19 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau" ([Cantu](#)).

Nearly 40 percent of college students are 26 years old or older (Klein-Collins).

The number of students aged 25-34 could increase 21% by 2022 ([Murchison](#)).

34% of undergrad respondents at AACSC institutions cited location as the reason for choosing a campus, and 14% cited financial reasons, such as affordability (Clayton and Torpey-Saboe).

"23% [of Gen Z respondents] believe in avoiding debt at all costs" (Golden).

The number of U.S. institutions eligible for federal financial aid has dropped from 6,502 in 2017-2018 to 6,138 the following year ([Lederman](#)).

Between 2008 and 2017, metropolitan areas "enjoyed nearly 99% of all job and population growth" ([Sweenson](#)).

"According to a 2018 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, only 27% of college graduates work in a field related to their major" ([Coffey](#)).

Introduction

Enrollment must be a focus area for any chancellor in the current economic and demographic climate. As Nathan D. Grawe has shown in *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*, the "birth dearth" that occurred during the Great Recession will leave some parts of the country, such as the Northeast and Midwest, with much smaller pools of college-going students in the next decade. Already, we have seen significant declines, as college enrollment fell from 29.5 million in 2010-2011 to 26.4 million in 2017-2018, although it has actually risen at public 4-year institutions by 12 percent (Lederman). The makeup of this enrollment is changing, as well: the number of Latinx students is up dramatically, and EAB projects that the number of students aged 25-34 could increase 21 percent by 2022.

To maintain the healthy enrollments necessary to sustain an institution, universities must recognize these changes and adapt. Leveraging technology, such as geofencing and other forms of targeted marketing, can help admissions offices be more effective in their recruiting efforts, but it is perhaps even more important that institutions work strategically to shape themselves into "destination campuses." After all, as Grawe notes, demand actually will increase for top-tier schools, and they may not be able to grow sufficiently to accommodate this growth, so other institutions could stand to make up for other losses by attracting these students. Rather than continuing business as usual and waiting for the students to show up, we must identify and refine our distinctive identities—as institutions that specialize in, say, experiential education or innovation—and strive to be the best at who we are. Strategic planning is crucial to success in these efforts.

In Indiana, where we already are seeing declines at most of our regional institutions, IU Kokomo is beating the odds and achieving enrollment growth over the past several years. Behind this success is a combination of innovative and strategic recruitment strategies, as well as the successful development of a distinctive identity, realized through our KEY initiative.

Initiatives and Strategies

KEY: Based on outcomes that employers and educators value, the KEY ("Kokomo Experience and You") is a four-year experiential-learning initiative featuring retreats, internships, research and service-learning projects, and educational trips to scores of destinations, including Yellowstone National Park, Silicon Valley, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Disney World. KEY experiences not only enrich students' educational experiences, but also contribute powerfully to an attractive brand for IU Kokomo, creating an appealing package for prospective students.

Yield Events: When Indiana University began using a common application for all of the campuses a few years ago, IU Kokomo began staging "yield events," which feature dynamic experiential activities, such as nursing simulations and business competitions in our "Cougar Cage."

Insights

"If top-ranked schools do not grow by 15 percent to meet fully the increase in their demand, significant relief may be available for second-tier institutions" (Grawe).

". . . as educational attainment rises across current adult cohorts, we can expect that future cohorts of 18-year-olds will have parents with higher educational attainment. This fact creates a strong, positive counterforce to the demographic changes noted in chapter 1" (Grawe).

". . . the 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index, a study of over 30,000 graduates, found no correlation between college selectivity and future job satisfaction or well-being" (Pope).

"Given the research on what matters in college, the best advice for choosing the right one would seem to be finding a place where the student will be engaged, in class and out, by all that the college has to offer" (Pope).

". . . when we surveyed nearly 4,800 new college freshmen from more than 900 schools about their enrollment experience, there appeared to be more interest in academic programs than in cost or other financial information, at least based on what students were seeking on college websites and in digital ads" (Olsen).

"Working Professionals" include at least four types: 1) "Career Starters" ("Recent graduates seeking professional degree before entering workforce"), 2) "Career Climbers" ("Mid-career professionals seeking graduate degrees for promotion or raise"), 3) "Career Changers" ("Mid-career adults seeking graduate degrees to move into new fields"), and 4) "Career Crossers" ("Mid-career professionals seeking cross-training to advance in current fields") (Attis).

"The majority of incoming freshmen attending public four-year colleges and universities enroll within 50 miles of their home, the study found. And the farther students live from any particular college, the less likely they are to enroll" (Wexler).

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Engagement with Regional Schools: IU Kokomo has developed strong relationships with regional K-12 schools, particularly through our Center for Educational Partnerships, a network of administrators from more than 30 school districts. Furthermore, we sponsor several academic and athletic camps, and we welcome thousands of K-12 students to our campus.

Athletics: In a short span of time, IU Kokomo has gone from 0 to 12 sports, most recently adding men's baseball and women's soccer. Sports attract athletes who wish to remain active in their sports while also contributing to our dynamic college experience. Our student-athletes have above-average grade-point averages, and they tend to graduate in four years.

Summer Programs: Clemson University sponsors classes and college visits to help students become accustomed to the notion of college and begin completing applications. "Known as Emerging Scholars, the program brings high school students to the Clemson campus every summer to help them establish a college-going mindset, giving them academic enrichment, one-on-one tutoring, and lessons in leadership" ([Lumina](#)).

Employer Partnerships: Employers play a key role in connecting their employees to higher education. For example, IU Kokomo offers its MBA program to a cohort of Fiat Chrysler employees, and Cleary University is providing free tuition to employees of a restaurant firm ([Education Dive](#)).

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