

COVID-19
TRANSFER, MOBILITY, AND PROGRESS
Fall 2020 Final Report



ERRATA

April 12, 2021

After issuing the Final Fall 2020 report on Dec 21, 2020, a classification error was discovered that affected “returning” and “continuing” student counts for fall 2019. Returning student outcomes have been largely affected, as listed below. Although there are additional corrections throughout the report (including all the figures), those changes are minimal and there is no impact on the report’s main findings and implications.

- Decline in returning students during the pandemic was less than previously reported, revised from -16.7% to -8.4% in fall 2020 and from +7.9% to -0.7% in fall 2019 (Figure 1a).
- At community colleges, drop in returning students during the pandemic should be -13.7% as opposed to -18.7% (Figure 1a; page 14).
- Public four-year transfer-in students originating from community colleges without an associate degree increased less than previously reported during the pandemic, revised from +1.8% to +0.2% (page 8).
- Returning transfer student enrollment at primarily online institutions grew 6.9% during the pandemic as opposed to the reported +4.1% (page 13).
- Returning students transferring into community colleges during the pandemic dropped 13.7% as opposed to -16.4% and the corresponding number for public four-year colleges remained stable (+0.1%) as opposed to the reported 6.4% decline (last paragraph of page 13).

As the second in the series, this follow-up issue updates the results from the [first look fall 2020 report](#) that depicted student mobility as of September 24. As the fall semester is nearing its end, with more colleges reporting as of November 19, 2020, this report provides a more complete picture of the fall 2020 student transfer patterns that are attributable to the effects of COVID-19.

BACKGROUND – Transfer Pathways Amidst a Pandemic

Even before the pandemic turned the higher education landscape on its head, many college students intending to transfer struggled to manage the complexities of available transfer options, a task particularly daunting for underrepresented student groups. As [prior research](#) from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center shows, Black and Hispanic students are significantly less likely than their Asian and White peers to transfer from a two-year to a four-year college as well as to leverage two-year institutions in summer enrollment between spring and fall terms at four-year institutions (behavior known as “summer swirling”). Lower income students beginning at a community college also transfer at much lower rates than higher income students and subsequently graduate with a bachelor’s degree at only half the rate of their higher income counterparts, according to [new research](#) from the NSC Research Center.

Early disruptions in institutional reopening plans due to COVID-19, coupled with the disparate economic and health impacts of the virus across different populations, make navigating these transfer options even more difficult. Black, Hispanic, and Native American populations in the U.S. have seen disproportionately high COVID-19 cases and virus-related deaths compared to Whites. [Some four-year colleges](#) appear to be streamlining the transfer process this year in an effort to maintain enrollment and improve diversity amidst the pandemic, but the scope and impact of this trend remains unclear.

Moreover, typical pathways of transfer and mobility may be altered due to student concerns borne out of the pandemic, related to family finances, health, childcare, or a sudden need to move closer to home, circumstances that may affect the rate at which students transfer from four-year to two-year colleges (reverse transfer), for example, or within institutional sectors (lateral transfer). This research series attempts to quantify how the transfer and enrollment gaps by race and ethnicity and other student characteristics that existed before the pandemic may be affected by these disruptions.

COVID-19 TRANSFER, MOBILITY, AND PROGRESS REPORT SERIES

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reports on the shifting transfer landscape during COVID-19 in a rapid response series. We issue two reports per academic term, starting with a first look of the term, followed by the end of term update.

This second issue is the final report for the fall of 2020, detailing end-of-term student mobility patterns as of November 19, 2020. It focuses on the fixed panel of institutions, representing 92 percent of the Clearinghouse universe of institutions, roughly 2,600 institutions and 12.5 million students without prior undergraduate completion.

The effects of the pandemic will be updated in the subsequent issues to be released in Spring 2021. Later reports in this series will provide a fuller picture of transfer and mobility trends, based on a full academic year’s data, and through the possible inclusion of additional data such as income, borrowing status, college reopening model, or program type, to name a few.

With support from Ascendium Education Group and the ECMC Foundation, we will publish a total of nine rapid response transfer updates and special reports over the next two years.

HIGHLIGHTS

Transfer enrollment shows a steep decline of 8.1 percent this fall compared to fall 2019, in contrast to a 2.4 percent drop this fall among non-transfer students—continuing or returning students enrolling in the same colleges they attended prior to the fall. All directions of transfer pathway are showing the signs of disruption from the pandemic, according to the latest data available at the time of publication. Reverse transfers—four-year college students transferring into two-year colleges this fall—decreased the most, by 19.4 percent, followed by lateral transfers (-12.6%) and upward transfers (-0.7%).

Former students who stopped out prior to the outbreak are far less likely to have come back this fall, down by 16.7 percent after a 7.9 percent growth the year prior. Those who did were more likely to have chosen a different institution than their last enrolled institution, and a growing number of these students are enrolling in a primarily online institution. Only primarily online institutions, where more than 90 percent of students enrolled exclusively online before the pandemic, show an increase in returning transfer students this fall.

Behind the 8.1 percent nationwide decline in student mobility are sizable gaps between four-year and two-year colleges. Four-year colleges experienced relatively smaller declines in students transferring into four-year colleges (transfer-in enrollment), falling by 2.6 percent from last fall, as opposed to a more severe decrease of 18.9 percent in two-year colleges' transfer-in enrollment. Public four-year institutions maintained relatively steady transfer-in enrollments amid the pandemic, with a growing share of continuing students transferring from two-year colleges.

Method in Brief

This report series quantifies the impact of the pandemic on the various transfer pathways through three different lenses: First, by comparing the number of students whose enrollment in fall 2020 occurs at a different institution from their last enrollment (*transfer enrollment*) to the numbers of similar students in fall 2019 (pre-pandemic baselines); second, by comparing the percent change in these numbers between fall 2019 and fall 2020 to the similar change occurring between 2018 and 2019 (pre-pandemic baseline trend); and third, by comparing the share of transfer students among all students enrolled in fall 2020 to the share in fall 2019 (*transfer-in rate*).

Transfer and Mobility Definition

We track the transfer and mobility pathways of students who enroll in fall 2020 without prior undergraduate completion. Transfer and mobility are defined as any change in a student's enrolled institution irrespective of the timing, direction, or location of the move, and regardless of whether any course credits were transferred from one institution to another. Transfer and mobility are tracked across institutions, sectors, and states—even including these movements occurring over summer terms, after a lapse of enrollment, or even if the movements later prove to have been temporary.

Three Student Groups

First-time students: Students with no previous college enrollment or degree/certificate award records unless the previous record is prior to when they turn age 18 or they graduate from high school. These students make up 16.6 percent of the fall 2020 undergraduates as of November 19. This number declined from 18.0 percent from the same time in the previous year. Data on first-time students is provided as context, although these students are not included in the analysis of transfer and mobility.

Returning students: Students who had a stop-out without undergraduate completion and re-enrolled in the current term. These students have no enrollment records in the preceding term (spring or summer 2020 for this report) and at least one enrollment at some point before that term. This group represents 8.1 percent of undergraduates, down from 9.3 percent last fall.

Continuing students: Students who continued enrollment from the preceding term (spring or summer term 2020 for this report), with or without having earned an associate degree or certificate. These students comprise 75.2 percent of undergraduates, up from 72.7 percent in fall 2019.

Our analysis of student mobility focuses on returning and continuing students, who are further distinguished between transfers and non-transfers (see the Methodological notes).

Latest data adds more evidence for the disproportionately large impacts on the underserved students during the current pandemic. While Hispanic students and Black students have been hit especially hard generally, their transfer mobility has fallen precipitously across all institution sectors, particularly considering the gains made by Hispanic students up until the pandemic hit.

High-level findings include:

- Transfer students decreased considerably this fall (-8.1%), more than triple the drop in non-transfer students (-2.4%, not counting freshmen). But four-year colleges experienced relatively smaller declines in transfer-in students as well as overall enrollments during the pandemic.
- Student mobility fell in all transfer pathways this fall.
- Black and Hispanic transfer students decreased most precipitously at community colleges, whereas Asian students made gains in the four-year college sector.
- Male student mobility declined sharply during the pandemic, regardless of age.
- While fewer students re-enrolled this fall after a stop-out, more opted for a primarily online institutions this fall than they did pre-pandemic.

1

Transfer enrollment decreased sharply this fall compared to fall 2019 (-8.1%), in contrast to a 2.4 percent drop in non-transfer students.

Three months into the fall semester, overall undergraduate enrollment is running 4.9 percent lower than last fall, largely due to sharp drops in two groups of students—students returning after a stop-out (-16.7%) and freshman enrollment (-12.4%) (**Figure 1a**). Both groups declined substantially, regardless of institution type. Freshman enrollment was impacted the most as their share fell 1.4 percentage points from last fall, to 16.6 percent of undergraduate enrollment, while the share of returning students declined 1.2 percentage points to 8.2 percent (**Figure 2**).

Continuing students who maintained enrollment from the preceding term (spring or summer 2020) decreased only marginally from last year (-1.5%), no more than the pre-pandemic rate of decline (Figure 1a). This dip is caused by the community college sector, while continuing student enrollment increased in all other institution sectors.

Transfer student enrollment is down 8.1 percent this fall, compared to a 1.7 percent drop in the preceding year (**Figure 1b**). The pre-pandemic trend for transfer student enrollment is similar to that of non-transfer student enrollment (-1.7% vs. -0.5% in 2019), but the declines are much larger for transfer students during the pandemic, by more than three times the decline in non-transfers (-8.1% vs. -2.4% in 2020). As a result, transfer students are a smaller proportion of overall undergraduate students this fall, down 0.4 percentage points to 11.6 percent (Figure 2).

Behind the 8.1 percent nationwide decline in student mobility are sizable gaps between four-year and two-year colleges. Students transferring into four-year institutions (transfer-in enrollment) fell 2.6 percent over last year, relative to a more severe decrease of 18.9 percent in students transferring into two-year colleges (Figure 1b). Particularly, public four-year institutions maintained relatively steady transfer-in enrollment, demonstrating a 1.9 percent decline this fall, compared to a 1.1 percent decline the year prior (see **Figure 7**), and a growing share of continuing transfer students originating from community colleges.

Figure 1a. Change in Undergraduate Enrollment by Student Group and Institution Sector

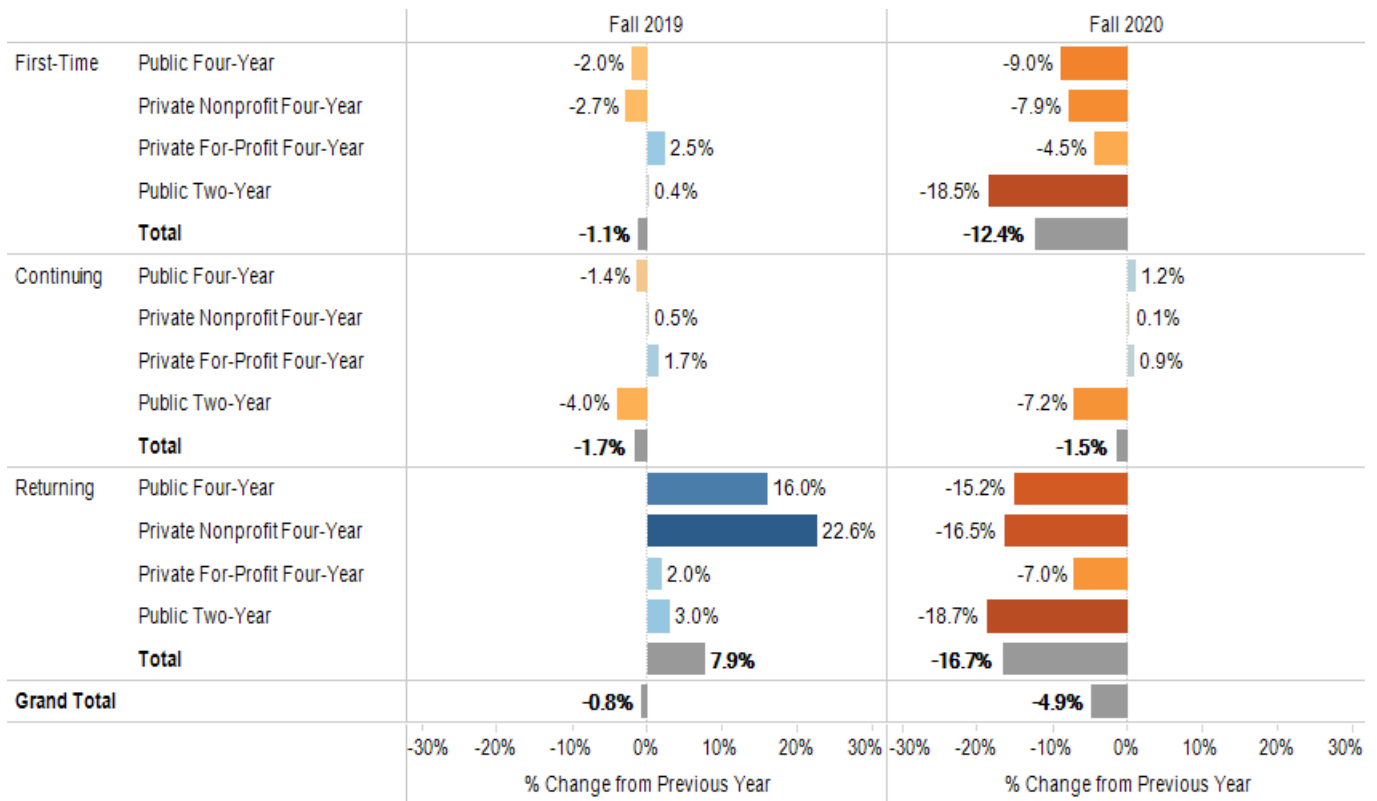


Figure 1b. Change in Transfer and Non-Transfer Enrollments by Institution Level

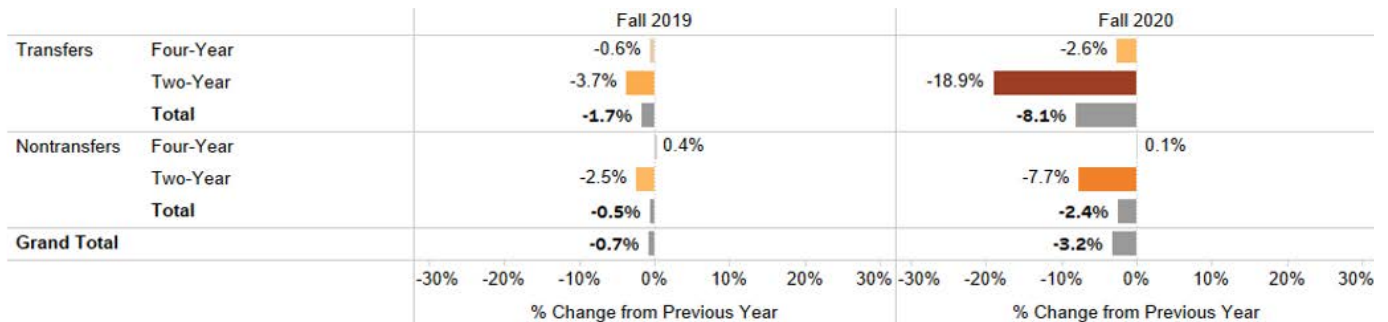
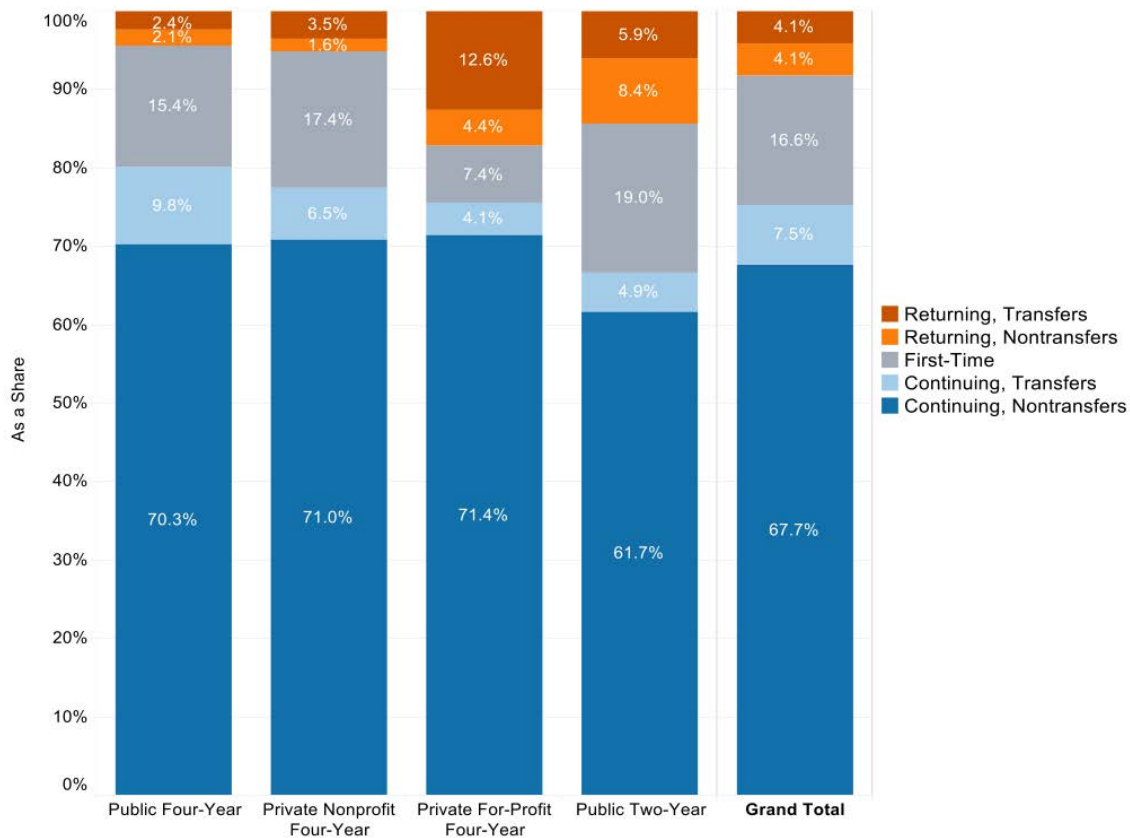


Figure 2. Fall 2020 Undergraduates at a Glance



Note: This report excludes undergraduate enrollees who had previously earned a bachelor's degree or higher and dual-enrolled high school students.

2

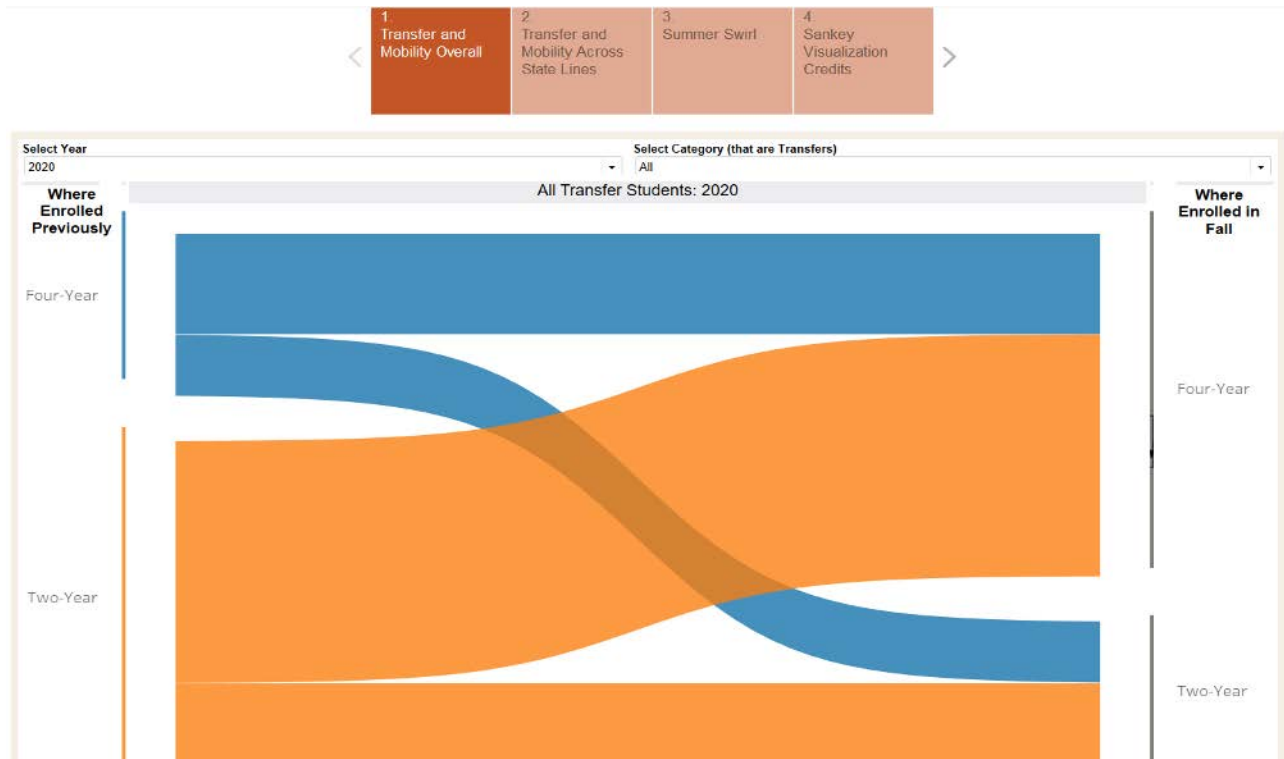
Students are less mobile during the pandemic, along all transfer pathways.

Figure 3 shows that overall, the largest decrease occurred in reverse transfers from four-year to two-year institutions, dropping by more than five times the pre-pandemic rate of decline (-19.4% vs. -3.6%). After accounting for this drop, reverse transfers now comprise 12.5 percent of all transfers, down 1.7 percentage points from last fall (see **Figure 4**). Reverse transfer declines are steeper for public college students (-21.6%) than private college students (-14.9%).

Lateral transfers—students transferring from a four-year to another four-year college, or a two-year to another two-year college—decreased four times more than the pre-pandemic rate of decline (-12.6% vs. -3.1%; see Figure 3). Subsequently, their share fell 1.9 percentage points to 38 percent of all transfers. Lateral transfer decreases are more pronounced for two-year college students than four-year college students (-18.5% vs. -6.7%).

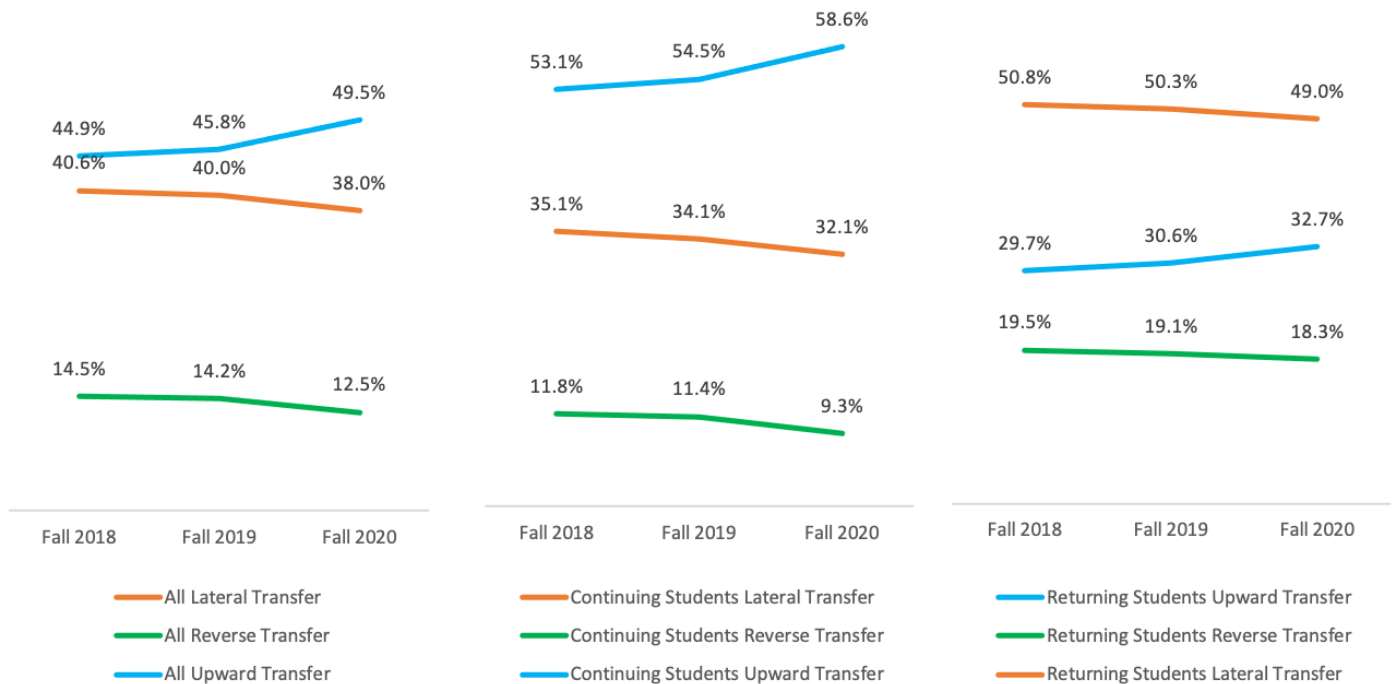
There is a small 0.7 percent drop from last fall in upward transfers from two-year to four-year institutions (see Figure 3). This drop is contrasted with a slight increase in the pre-pandemic trend (+0.2%). However, because all other types of transfer pathways dropped more substantially, upward transfer is becoming a more prevalent pathway of student mobility during the pandemic. Upward transfers are growing as a proportion of all transfer-in students, up 3.7 percentage points from 2019, to 49.5 percent nationally (see Figure 4). This shift is even more pronounced among continuing students, for whom upward transfer now comprises 58.6 percent of transfer enrollment, up 4.1 percentage points from last year (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. Transfer and Mobility Overall: Fall 2019 and Fall 2020



Note: Click [here](#) for the chart with full interactivity

Figure 4. Distribution Shifts Across Transfer Pathways by Student Group: Fall 2018 – Fall 2020



While upward transfers declined slightly this fall, there are a couple of notable trends. Four-year institutions (public and private) show a 1.8 percent increase in transfer students from community colleges without an associate degree, in contrast to a 0.4 percent drop in the preceding year. Also notable is a 2.5 percent growth in four-year college students who transferred from an out-of-state community college. Transfers that crossed a state line comprise 24 percent of all upward transfer pathways, up 0.7 percentage points from last fall (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 5. Transfer and Mobility Crossing State Lines: Fall 2019 and Fall 2020



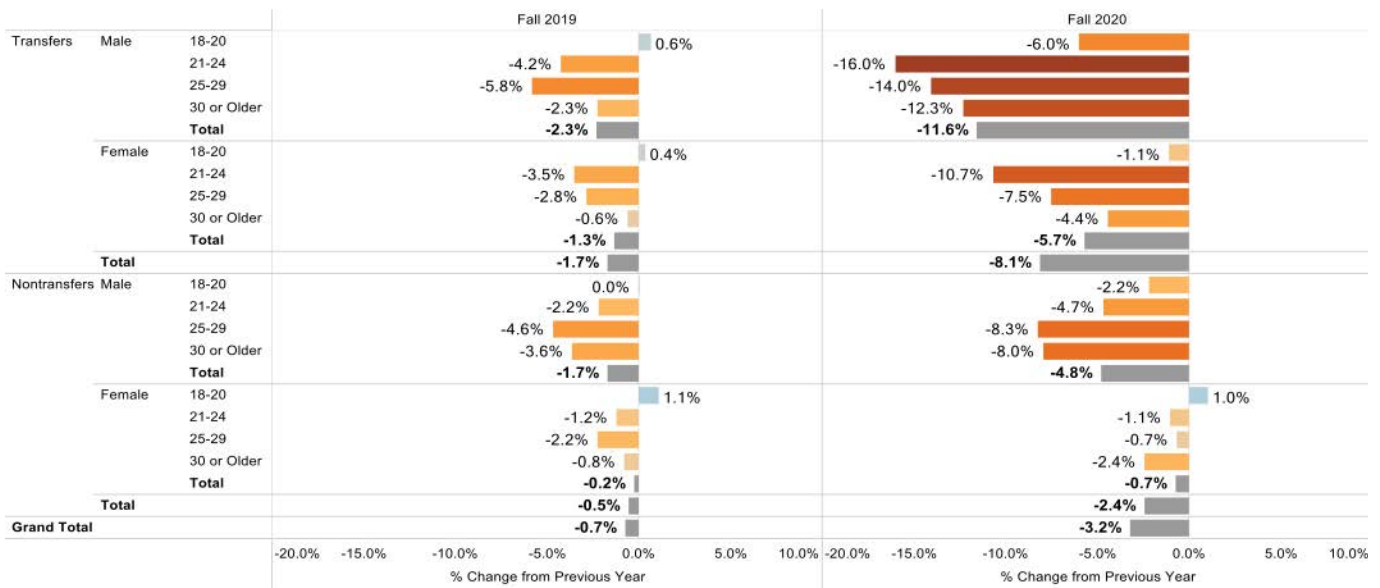
Note: Click [here](#) for the chart with full interactivity

3 Male student mobility declined sharply during the pandemic, regardless of age.

Figure 6 shows male transfer students declining more substantially than females, 11.6 versus 5.7 percent overall, as well as in every age category. The gender disparity was much smaller before the pandemic (-2.3% and -1.3%, respectively).

In addition, enrollment for women aged 18-20 was rising before the pandemic for both transfers and non-transfer students, but declined only for transfers in fall 2020. This trend is similar for men, albeit with a much sharper decline among transfers during the pandemic.

Figure 6. Change in Transfer and Non-Transfer Enrollments by Gender and Age Group

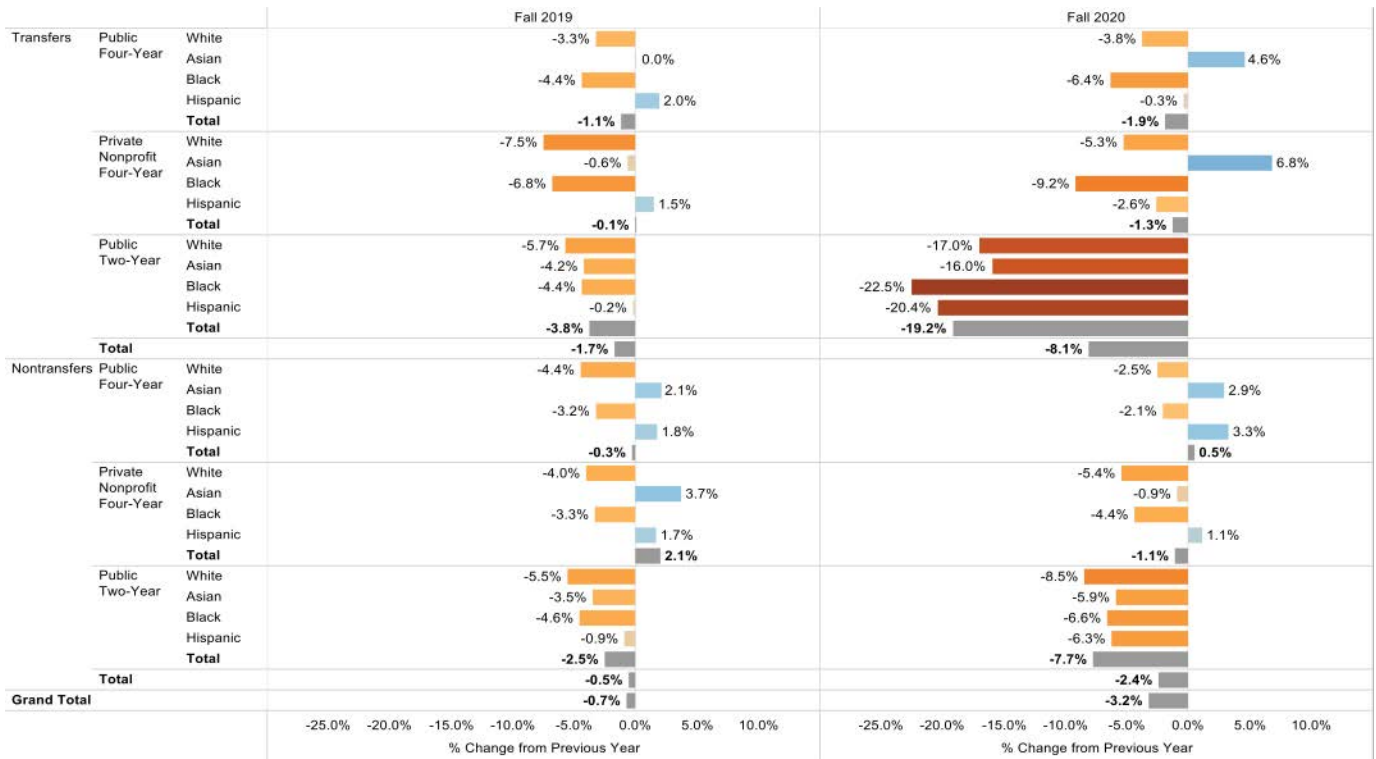


4

Black and Hispanic transfer students decreased most precipitously at community colleges, whereas Asian students made gains in the four-year college sector.

As shown in **Figure 7**, transfer enrollment fell sharply for Black and Hispanic students enrolling in a community college this fall (-22.5% and -20.4%, respectively). Black transfer enrollment dropped the most across all sectors, including private nonprofit four-year institutions (-9.2%) and public four-year institutions (-6.4%). Hispanic transfer students were increasing in four-year colleges prior to the pandemic, publics and privates alike, but are now showing declines of 0.3 and 2.6 percent in these sectors. Asian transfer students, on the other hand, were the only group to grow at public four-year (+4.6%) and private nonprofit four-year institutions (+6.8%), but dropped sharply at community colleges (-16.0%).

Figure 7. Change in Transfer and Non-Transfer Enrollment by Institution Sector and Race and Ethnicity

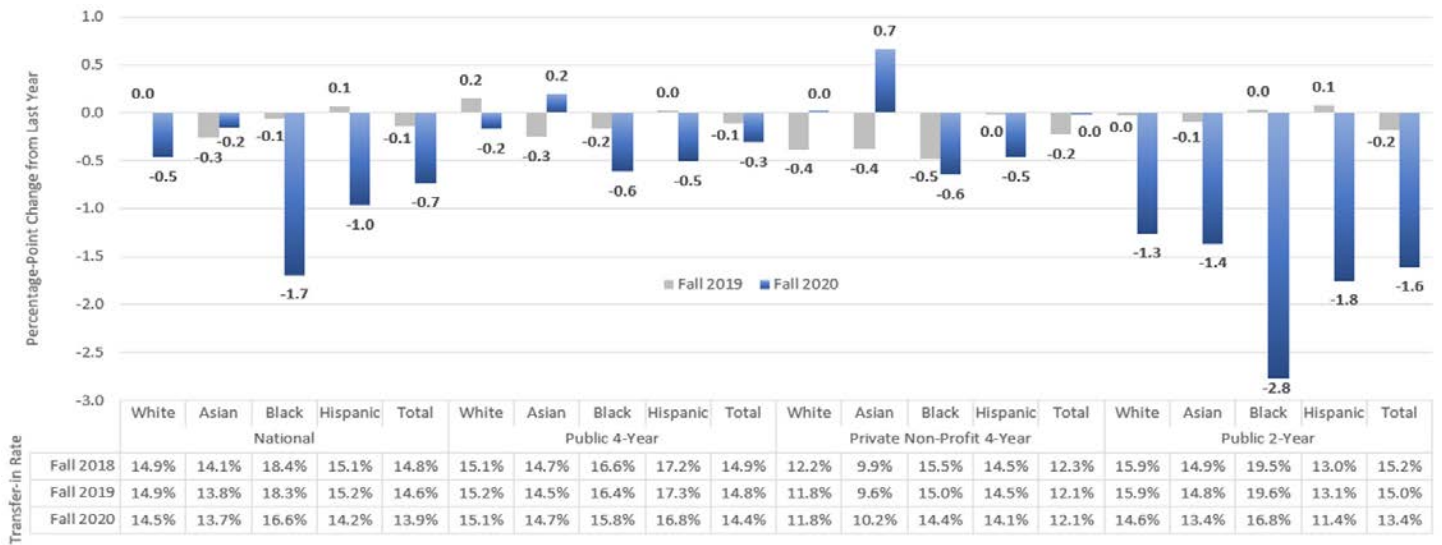


Overall, fewer Black and Hispanic students enrolled this fall than they did pre-pandemic. In addition, those who enrolled were more likely to stay at their last enrolled institutions, signifying decreased student mobility during the pandemic.

Figure 8 shows declining transfer-in rates for Black and Hispanic students nationally over last fall, down by 1.7 and 1.0 percentage points, respectively, compared to small drops among white and Asian students, down by 0.5 and 0.2 percentage points, respectively. Moreover, among returning students this fall, Blacks were the only group to show a dip in transfer-in rate (-0.5 percentage points, not shown in the figure).

These declines in Black and Hispanic transfer-in rates were largely due to their losses in the community college sector (-2.8 and -1.8 percentage points, respectively), though their rate decreases were steeper than their White and Asian counterparts at public and private nonprofit four-year institutions as well.

Figure 8. Change in Transfer-In Rate by Race and Ethnicity for Select Institution Sectors



5

Students transferring into public four-year colleges this fall are mostly continuing students originating from two-year colleges, although student transfer increased among returning students.

Nationally, only 10.0 percent of continuing students in fall 2020 transferred from a different institution, indicating a 10.0 percent transfer-in rate for continuing students (see **Figure 9**). Over the last three years, the transfer-in rate was on a steady decline. In contrast, this rate grew from 46.9 to 50.2 percent this fall for returning students overall. All institution sectors show an increase, except for private for-profit four-year institutions, where the transfer-in rate declined to 74.0 percent after an increase in the preceding year.

The makeup of transfer-in enrollment varies widely by sector (see **Figure 10**). As of this fall, students transferring into public four-year colleges are predominantly continuing students (80.5%), whereas students returning after a stop-out account for the vast majority of those transferring into private for-profit four-year institution (75.4%). At community colleges, just under half are continuing students (45.4%), with the majority returning after a stop-out. Among the latter, almost two-thirds are lateral transfers from other community colleges.

Roughly two out of every three students transferring to public four-year colleges this fall (62.5%) are continuing students originating from two-year colleges. This proportion is 1.7 percentage points larger than last year’s, thanks to a 0.9 percent increase in the upward transfers. Private nonprofit four-year colleges also show a growing share of continuing transfers from two-year colleges, comprising 41.4 percent of total transfer-in students in this sector this fall.

Figure 9. Overall Transfer-In Rate by Student Group and Institution Sector: Fall 2018 – Fall 2020

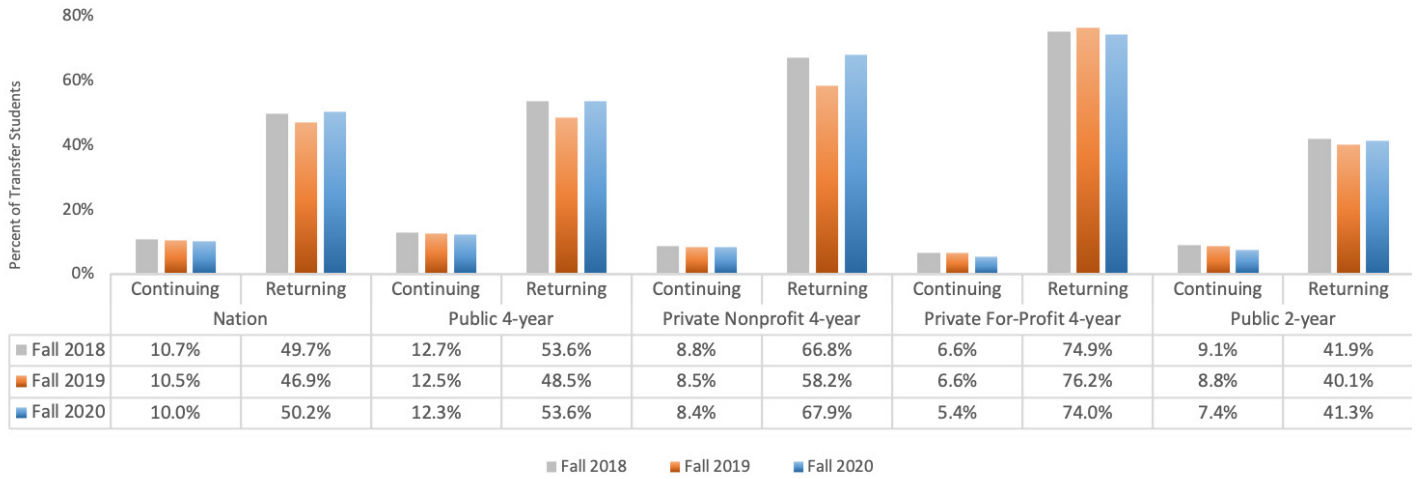
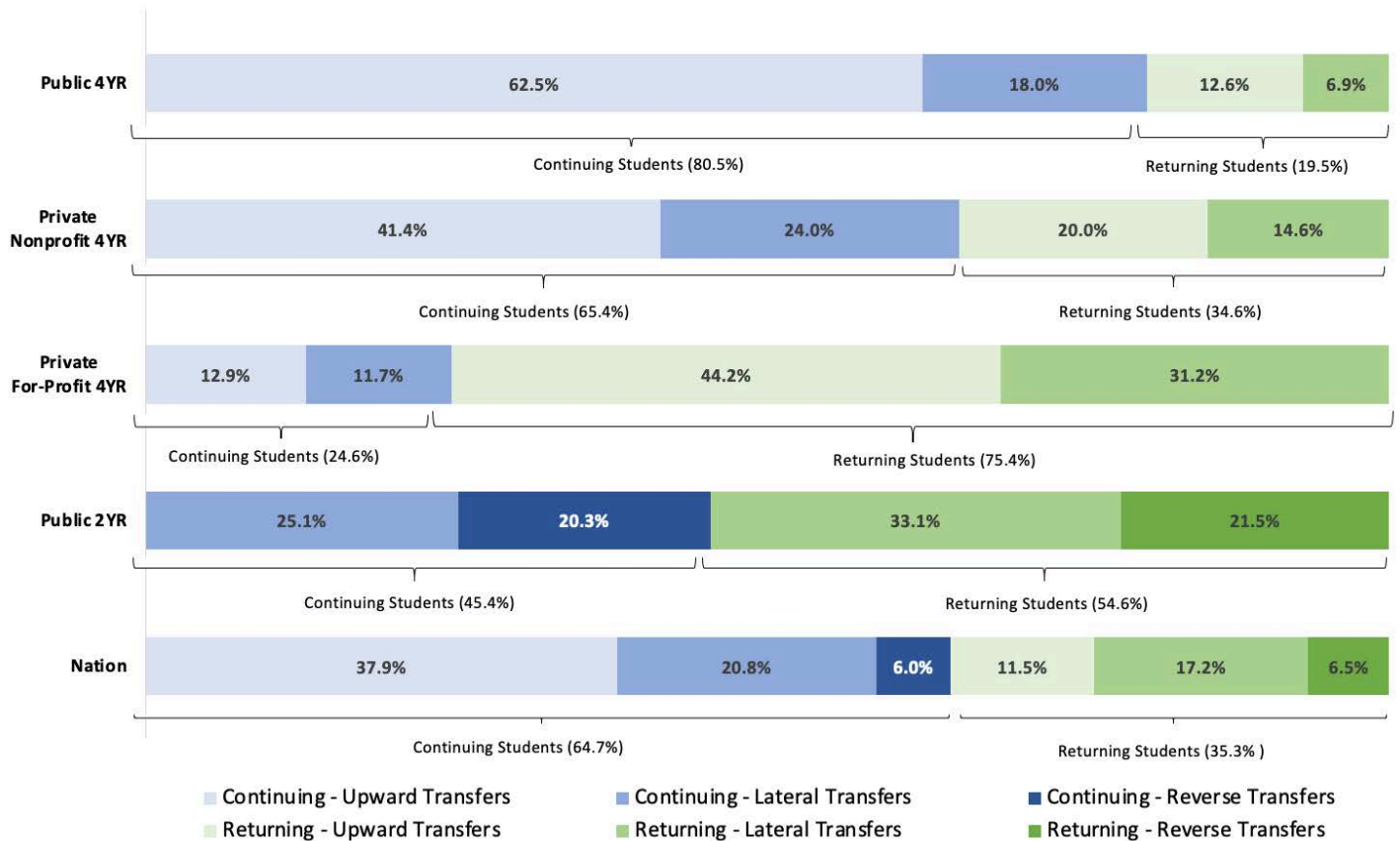


Figure 10. Distribution of Transfer-In Pathways by Student Group and Institution Sector: Fall 2020



While re-enrolling after a stop-out is far less common in general this fall (down 16.7% after a 7.9% growth last year), more returning students transferred to a primarily online institution this fall than they did pre-pandemic.

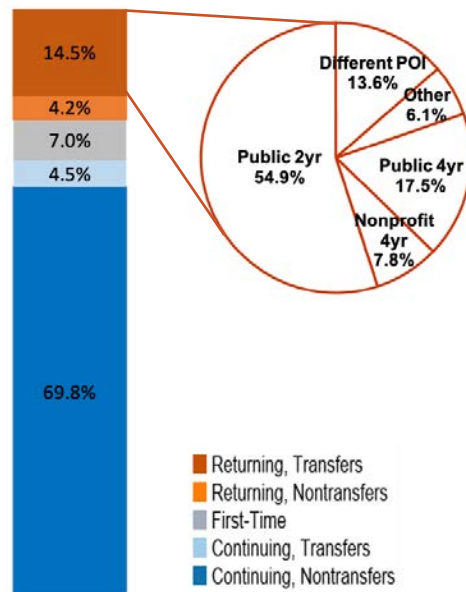
Former students with some college but no baccalaureate degrees transferring to a primarily online institution (POI) have grown this fall. Only POIs, where more than 90 percent of students enrolled exclusively online before the pandemic, show a growing influx of returning transfer students this fall. Returning transfer student enrollment is steadily growing at POIs, although at a slower pace this fall (4.1% compared to 6.5% last fall). It is notable that despite this fall's nationwide decline in returning students, 14.9 percent of them chose a POI, up from 12.9 percent last fall.

Figure 11 illustrates that 14.5 percent of undergraduate enrollment in these institutions is comprised of returning transfer students. In contrast, returning transfer students account for only 5.9 percent of community college students (see Figure 2). POIs continue to enroll more returning transfer students even though most campuses have transitioned to delivering instruction online during the pandemic.

Notably, community colleges are the most common type of institution in which they previously enrolled, accounting for 54.9 percent of returning adults transferring into POIs this fall (Figure 11). This proportion has increased by 1.2 percentage points from last fall.

By contrast, community colleges show a steep drop this fall (-16.4%, not shown in the figure), as well as public four-year colleges (-6.4%, not shown in the figure), in the number of returning transfer students.

Figure 11. Undergraduate Profile at Primarily Online Institutions: Fall 2020



Note: Data represents 94 percent of all POIs identified in the Clearinghouse data, mostly, for-profit four-year institutions.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The fall 2020 student transfer landscape is becoming clearer with 92 percent of the Clearinghouse universe of institutions analyzed in the fixed panel of institutions as of November 19, 2020. The decline in student transfer and mobility is steep and widespread. While non-transfer student enrollment (continuing or returning students this fall who did not transfer) decreased somewhat from last fall (-2.4%), transfer student enrollment showed a much deeper decline of 8.1 percent. All directions of transfer pathway—reverse, lateral, and upward—show signs of disruption from the pandemic.

Within the declines in transfer, there is also more evidence of demographic disparities. No evidence to date can dispute the pandemic's disproportionately larger impacts on Black and Hispanics students, not only for the magnitude of their general enrollment losses but also for losses in the numbers of students who transfer. In contrast, more Asian students are transferring into public and nonprofit four-year institutions than they were pre-pandemic.

The divides between two-year and four-year institutions are another form of disparity that emerged. Compared to their two-year counterparts, four-year colleges (particularly publics) show no major transfer-in student enrollment shortfalls, thanks to the relatively steady student transfers from two-year colleges amid the pandemic.

However, a multifaceted threat to community college enrollment—an 18.5 percent drop in freshmen, a 19.6 percent decline in reverse transfers, an 18.7 percent drop in returning students, and 7.2 percent fewer continuing students—presents potentially serious implications for the sector and for the students it serves. If the current trends continue, these divides will only grow, with a troubling risk that institutions will not survive, and would-be students will not manage to come back next year.

The general dampening of student mobility identified in this report could have a lasting impact on postsecondary success and attainment, including affordable access to bachelor's degrees for community college students, and critical opportunities for course-correction by students in all institutions whose goals have changed or who seek a stronger institutional fit. It is not clear whether the pandemic is driving students to stay put because decision-making and administrative hurdles are more difficult to overcome without face-to-face guidance and advising, because financial and technological barriers are weighing more heavily on students and their families, or because they are simply more reluctant to risk changing institutions amid the uncertainty of the health and economic crises. As the pandemic continues to constrain these avenues of institutional choice, however, students will face ever larger barriers to degree completion, promising careers, and socioeconomic mobility.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The *Transfer, Mobility, and Progress* series is designed to track the impact of COVID-19 on postsecondary transfer and mobility, using the latest data available and the historical data from the two most recent years (2018 and 2019) as pre-pandemic baselines. It updates transfer data dashboards bimonthly, disaggregated by various subgroups of students, programs, institutions, states, or regions.

This final report for fall 2020 transfer pathways represents 92 percent of the Clearinghouse universe of institutions reported as of November 19, 2020. It focuses on year-over-year percent changes in enrollment based on the same institutions' fall 2019 and fall 2018 reporting as of November 19 each year.

Report	Fall Term	Submission Window	Institutional Coverage
Fall #1	8/1 – 12/31	8/1 – 9/24	53.9%
Fall #2	8/1 – 12/31	8/1 – 11/19	91.8%

NATIONAL COVERAGE OF THE DATA

Clearinghouse data track enrollments nationally and are not limited by institutional and state boundaries. As of fall 2019, institutions actively submitting enrollment data to the Clearinghouse account for 97 percent of all enrollments at Title IV, degree-granting institutions in the U.S. Since Clearinghouse data is comprised of student-level data, researchers can use it to link concurrent as well as consecutive enrollments of individual students at multiple institutions. Therefore, it presents a unique opportunity to follow students' individual transfer patterns over their whole postsecondary experience.

Unlike previous Transfer and Mobility reports, where enrollment rates are weighted by data coverage rates, the *COVID-19 Transfer, Mobility, and Progress* series focuses on unweighted data. This is because the emphasis of this series is on year-over-year changes in transfer patterns at the same institutions (a "fixed panel") rather than estimating the total transfer numbers.

PRE-PANDEMIC BASELINE DEVELOPMENT

To accurately assess the impact of COVID-19 on postsecondary transfer and mobility, the analyses focused on a fixed panel of all institutions that submitted data to the Clearinghouse during the same time frame across all comparison years. We created the panel to control for

year-to-year variations in institutional coverage as well as the variations in data submission dates.

To control for institutional coverage, only the institutions that submitted enrollment data in 2018, 2019, and 2020 were included in the analyses. Institutions that discontinued or only started submitting enrollments at any point within these years were excluded. To control for submission timing among these institutions, only fall term data that was submitted within the data submission window (specified in Term Definition below) in each of the three years was included. However, it is important to note that even with these controls, enrollments at some institutions in the panel may have been overcounted or undercounted for 2020 due to unusual file submission patterns. Our investigations suggest that such data noise is minor.

STUDENT POPULATION, TRANSFER DEFINITION AND DIRECTIONS OF MOBILITY

In light of this pandemic and its mostly unpredictable consequences on the higher education world at this point, we decided to investigate a very inclusive subset of the student population to capture any possible unforeseen effects on transfer behavior due to COVID-19. As a result, some of the definitions and identification strategies differ from our standard transfer and mobility reports.

Undergraduate Student Population

This study includes all degree-seeking students who were enrolled at a Title IV, degree-granting institution in the U.S. in the fall of the applicable year, reported as of November 19. This definition also includes students who were dual enrolled prior to beginning their postsecondary career but excludes current dual enrollees. We then look at students' enrollment history to classify students into the following three subgroups: (1) first-time students, (2) continuing students and (3) returning students. Continuing and returning students were included only if they had not previously earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Students were included as either continuing or returning students if they had previously earned an associates or undergraduate certificate.

- (1) Freshmen or first-time students are those who had no enrollment records or degree/certificate awards at Title IV U.S. institutions prior to the fall of the applicable year, unless the previous enrollment record was before the student turned 18 years old or before the student graduated from high school (prior dual enrollment).

-
- (2) Continuing students are those who had at least one valid enrollment in the same year prior to their fall enrollment in the same year.
 - (3) Returning students are those who returned after a stop-out and were therefore not enrolled in the same year prior to their fall enrollment.

Transfer Definition

We define students as transfer students in year 2020 if they were enrolled at a Title IV, degree-granting institution after January 1, 2020, and subsequently enrolled in another Title IV, degree-granting institution in fall 2020. Note that we only consider the change of institution a student is enrolled in, regardless of whether academic credits are recognized between institutions. For more in-depth analysis of transfer patterns, we group all transfer students into three categories:

- (1) Continuing transfer students are those who had at least one valid enrollment record in the Spring term or the Summer term and enrolled in fall at an institution different than their last enrolled institution.
- (2) Returning transfer students are those who had previously enrolled in postsecondary education but had stopped out up until the fall term, and re-enrolled in the fall at an institution different than their last enrolled institution.
- (3) Non-transfer students are either continuing or returning students defined as above who enrolled in fall at the same institution as their last enrolled institution.

The same logic is applied to years 2018 and 2019 to determine the pre-pandemic baselines.

Directions or Pathways of Student Transfer and Mobility

This report also investigates differences in the directions of student mobility. We categorize the following types or pathways of student mobility:

- (1) Upward transfer: Students who transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution, with or without first receiving an award (either a certificate or associate degree). This is also known as vertical transfer.
- (2) Reverse transfer: Student who transfer from a four-year to a two-year institution.

- (3) Lateral transfer: Students who either transfer from a two-year to a two-year institution or from a four-year to a four-year institution.
- (4) Summer Swirl: Students who only enroll in a different institution for the summer and return to their last enrolled institution in the fall. For the purpose of this report, Summer Swirlers are considered Continuing non-transfer students in the fall.

All types of transfers, plus Summer Swirlers, are collectively termed "Mobility."

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Not all institutions report race and ethnicity data to the Clearinghouse. Missing data (for institutions that do not report to the Clearinghouse) and unknown data (for students that do not report to their institution) account for an average of 25 percent of all enrollments, combined. For the rest of the student populations, the race/ethnicity category includes White, Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Two or More Races and Non-Resident Aliens.

IN-STATE AND OUT-OF-STATE

Transfers are considered in-state if both institutions (of current enrollment and previous enrollment) are located in the same state, out-of-state if they are in different states. These designations apply regardless of the student's state of residence. Transfers to or from a multi-state institution (with campuses in more than one state) are excluded from state analyses.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Causey, J., Harnack-Eber, A., Lang, R., Liu, Q., Ryu, M., and Shapiro, D. (December 2020), COVID-19 Transfer, Mobility, and Progress, Report No. 2, Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.