Higher Education Enrollment Continues Decline

Total Subsidy-Eligible FTE Students*

*An FTE (full-time equivalent) student is based on one student taking 15 credit hours per semester or the equivalent. Subsidy-eligible FTEs include all but out-of-state undergraduate students.

Sources: Ohio Department of Higher Education; State Higher Education Executive Officers

- Total student enrollment at public colleges and universities reached a peak of 416,931 in FY 2011 and has decreased every year since, falling by a total of 86,563 (20.8%) to 330,368 in FY 2019.
- Nearly 72% of this decrease occurred on the two-year campuses (community colleges and university branches) where enrollment fell by 62,067 (32.9%) since FY 2011. Over this same time period, enrollment at four-year campuses (universities) fell by 24,496 (10.7%).
- The greatest enrollment declines during this period occurred from FY 2011 through FY 2015. Enrollment decreased by 59,516 (14.3%) over this span, representing 68.8% of the total decline since FY 2011. Of this decrease, two-year campuses accounted for 42,416 (71.3%) FTEs.
- The annual enrollment decreases beginning in FY 2012 came after strong enrollment growth between FY 2008 and FY 2011, especially on two-year campuses. This growth may have been partly due to the Great Recession. High growth in the two-year sector also occurred in prior periods of economic slowdown.
- According to a measure published by the State Higher Education Executive Officers, all but eight states¹ experienced a decrease in public higher education FTE enrollment from FY 2014 to FY 2019. Of the 42 states with a decrease, Ohio’s was the 11th smallest.

¹ The states with positive enrollment growth during this period are Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Texas, Alabama, California, Georgia, and Delaware.
Ohio’s average public higher education tuition and fees for four-year and two-year institutions remained above the nation’s averages in FY 2019, though the gaps have generally been decreasing over the past decade.

- In FY 2010, Ohio’s average tuitions were $1,363 (20.4%) and $729 (31.9%) higher than the nation’s averages for four-year and two-year institutions, respectively.
- The gap for four-year institutions has narrowed steadily, declining to $856 (9.3%) in FY 2019. However, the gap for two-year institutions widened to $769, the largest since FY 2011, after tapering off for over a decade. On a percentage basis, the gap for two-year institutions (23.2%) is smaller than FY 2010 but the largest since FY 2013, when average tuition in Ohio was 24.6% higher than the national average.
- The increased gap for two-year institutions in FY 2019 was likely due to the General Assembly’s authorization for community colleges to increase their tuitions by up to $10 per credit hour in FY 2019 to support quality academic programming. For FY 2018 and FY 2019, the General Assembly froze tuition and general fees at FY 2017 levels for public universities and their regional campuses.
- From FY 2010 to FY 2019, average tuition and fees at four-year institutions in Ohio increased by $2,010 (24.9%) from $8,058 to $10,068. Tuition and fees at Ohio two-year institutions increased by $1,068 (35.4%), from $3,014 to $4,082, during the same period. The national averages increased by $2,517 (37.6%) and $1,028 (45.0%), respectively.
- The General Assembly has imposed caps or freezes on annual increases in tuition and general fees every year in the past decade. For FY 2018 and FY 2019, the tuition restrictions did not apply to institutions participating in an Undergraduate Tuition Guarantee Program, which guarantees a cohort of students a fixed rate for general and instructional fees for four years.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics
SSI Funding Per Student Reached a Decade High in FY 2019

SSI Per FTE Student*

*An FTE (full-time equivalent) student takes the equivalent of 15 credit hours per semester. Out-of-state undergraduate students are not included as they are not eligible for state subsidy.

Source: Ohio Department of Higher Education

- On a per-FTE student basis, FY 2019 State Share of Instruction (SSI), the main state subsidy to public colleges and universities, increased 2.3% ($137) over FY 2018 and reached a decade high of $5,992. The increase in FY 2019 was due to decreased enrollment as aggregate SSI funding remained the same as FY 2018. Overall, enrollment at public higher education institutions decreased by a corresponding 2.3% from FY 2018.

- The increase in SSI per FTE student was not equal across higher education sectors. From FY 2018 to FY 2019, SSI per FTE student increased by 2.0% ($125) to $6,445 at four-year universities and their regional campuses and by 3.2% ($152) to $4,851 at community colleges. Community colleges experienced a greater enrollment loss (-3.1%) than did four-year universities and their regional campuses (-1.9%) in that year.

- In FY 2019, total SSI funding was $1.98 billion, flat with FY 2017 and FY 2018. This amount was $7.9 million (0.4%) less than FY 2010, which included over $281.0 million in federal stimulus funding provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. Over the last decade, total SSI funding peaked in FY 2011 at $2.0 billion, including $287.8 million in federal ARRA funding. With the loss of federal stimulus funding in FY 2012, SSI funding decreased in that year, on both a total and per-student basis.

- SSI, which helps support public institutions’ core academic activities, is allocated to campuses mostly through formulas primarily based on institutional outcomes, such as student course and degree completion.
This index compares Ohio’s educational attainment to the national average. An index score of 95 indicates that Ohio is 5% below the national average.

Although the percentage of Ohioans with postsecondary degrees is below the national average for all age groups, the percentages for younger Ohioans (ages 25 to 44) are closer to the national average than those for older Ohioans (45 and older).

For each age group shown in the chart above (beginning with 18 to 24 year olds), the index for Ohioans with at least a bachelor’s degree is 93.8, 93.4, 93.1, 89.3, and 82.0, respectively.

The percentage of Ohioans within each age group who hold at least a bachelor’s degree is 10.9%, 33.8%, 34.3%, 28.0%, and 23.1%, respectively, compared to national averages of 11.6%, 36.2%, 36.8%, 31.3%, and 28.2%.

Compared to all states plus Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico, Ohio’s percentage of people with at least a bachelor’s degree ranks 25th for ages 18 to 24, 28th for ages 25 to 34, 32nd for ages 35 to 44, 35th for ages 45 to 64, and 41st for ages 65 and over.

Ohio’s relatively low educational attainment for older age groups may reflect the state’s strong industrial and agricultural economic history. These industries often did not require a college education for many types of jobs.

Aggregating over all age groups, 26.8% of Ohioans had at least a bachelor’s degree in 2018. Ohio ranks 35th in this percentage; the national average is 30.1%. Compared with contiguous states, Ohio’s percentage is higher than Indiana (25.0%), Kentucky (22.9%), and West Virginia (19.9%), but lower than Pennsylvania (29.7%) and Michigan (27.3%).
Ohio Above National Average in Bachelor’s Degrees Granted Per Capita

Index of Degrees Granted Per Capita
(U.S. Average = 100)

- This index compares degrees granted by Ohio’s colleges and universities to the national average on a per-capita basis. An index score of 105 indicates that Ohio is 5% above the national average; an index score of 95 indicates that Ohio is 5% below the national average.

- In 2018, the number of bachelor’s degrees granted per capita in Ohio was slightly (1.3%) above the national average. In the last ten years, Ohio has hovered close to the national average on this indicator.

- In 2018, the number of associate degrees granted per capita in Ohio was 15.9% below the national average. This is more than 10 percentage points lower than in 2009, when the number of associate degrees granted per capita was 5.5% below the national average. Ohio had moved closest to the national average on this indicator in 2011 and 2012, when Ohio was 4.1% below the national average in both years. However, Ohio’s average moved away from the national average by 11.8 percentage points from 2012 to 2018.

- In 2018, the number of graduate degrees granted per capita in Ohio was 15.5% below the national average. Overall, the state has moved away from the national average on this indicator over the past decade. Ohio’s graduate degrees per capita were 10.8% below the national average in 2009.

- On a per-capita basis, Ohio ranked 30th, 26th, and 27th highest among the states in 2018 for associate, bachelor’s, and graduate degrees granted, respectively. Aggregating all postsecondary degrees granted, Ohio ranked 32nd in the nation.

- In 2018, Ohio granted 30,396 associate degrees, 71,661 bachelor’s degrees, and 30,306 graduate degrees. Public institutions accounted for 81.5%, 69.7%, and 67.5%, respectively, of the various degrees granted in the state.