



## The Impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education in United States

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### Abstract

It is probably safe to say that higher education has seen very little disruption for the past 50 years where things have been fairly stable. While advancement in technology has brought some changes to higher education making online education more viable, higher education remained fairly unchanged. This paper looks at the various impact of the pandemic including political, financial, domestic and international student enrollment challenges, online education and faculty impact.

With wide spread of Covid-19, higher education started to see its biggest impact in the past fifty years. There is little doubt that Covid-19 has impacted education worldwide but probably more so in the United States than other nations due to how the system of education in the United States is set up. Universities/college campuses are places where students live and study in close proximity to each other. They are also buzzing cultural hubs where students are brought together from nations around the world. For example, the system of higher education in the United States is set up to provide a comprehensive experience for students including taking classes, living on campus, engaged in extracurricular activities, holding a job at the university and learning to lead. This makes the system of education in the U.S. much more than an institution that provides education and grant diplomas but rather a living community where students not only learn academic content and skills but learn much more.

*Key words: Covid-19, enrollment, online education and political*

### Student Enrollment

Higher education in the U.S. was taking a hit in terms of student enrollment before the pandemic. For example, the total number of college students dropped from 19.8 million to 19.6 million just between 2017 and 2018. This drop is likely to continue due to a “demographic cliff”, where a sharp fall-off in enrollments for traditional college-age students beginning in 2025, resulting from a decline in birth rates that began with the financial crisis and recession of 2008. Schools across the nation have been watching and talking about this cliff and several smaller schools have already closed their doors knowing that they are unlikely to survive such enrollment declines. This enrollment decline has forced many schools to increase their financial aid packages by giving scholarships, tuitions discounts and other financial assistance to students to curb this enrollment decline. This resulted in some significant financial challenges for many higher education institutions across the United States.

### Online Education

The pandemic has forced most if not all higher education institutions in the U.S. to shift to online education. This was probably the biggest shift in higher education in recent years where faculty needed to change their mode of instruction from mainly face-to-face to online. This required a significant adjustment both on the faculty and student side making technology the most important aspect of higher education during this period. All faculty had to switch to some sort of an online learning system such as Canvas and blackboard relying more on tools such as

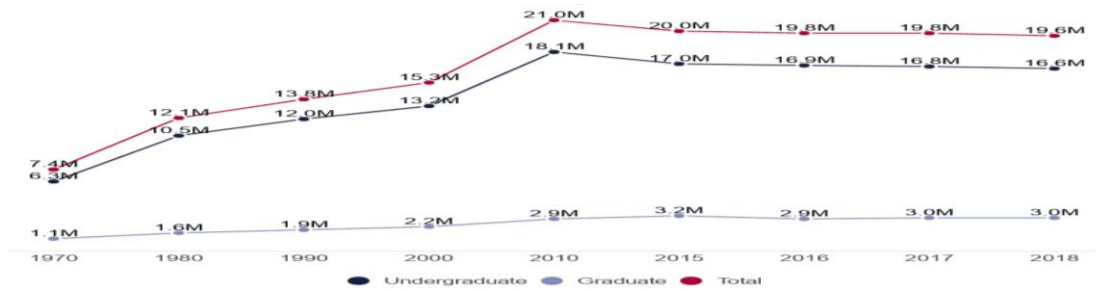


Zoom to deliver their content. This brought significant changes for most of the faculty particularly ones that have not had any experience teaching online. These faculty had to be quickly trained to set up their online courses, learn various technological tools and get comfortable delivering content via online.

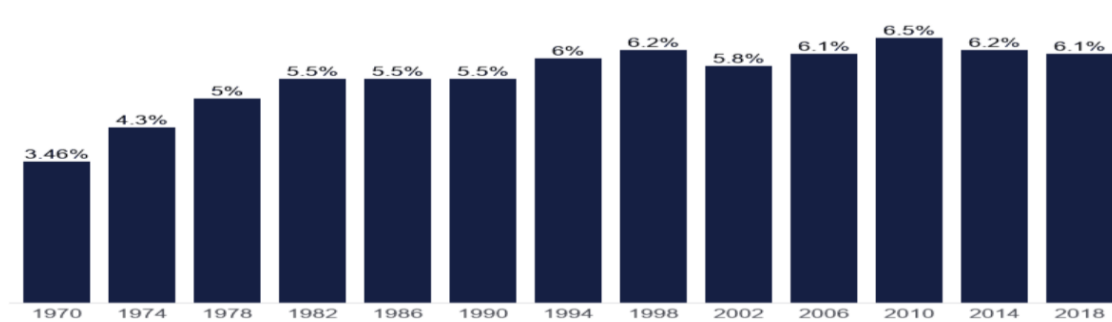
### Shifting Infrastructure Investment

The pandemic had not only changed how online education is viewed in the United States but also how shifting investment in infrastructure might be needed. As online education become more common and accepted, does universities need to shift some of their investment from buildings to online infrastructure? To shift education from face-to-face to online education, schools were required to make significant investments in technology such as making Zoom, WebEx and other communication tools available to their faculty and staff. Moreover, faculty had to be provided with resources such as laptops, tables, webcams, etc. to be able to teach online. More importantly, many schools had to convert their classrooms to state of an art classrooms enabled with various technologies. We suspect that this shift in investment is likely to continue as schools look at online education to be more of the mainstream ways of delivering content.

### The U.S. Higher Education HISTORICAL COLLEGE ENROLLMENT



### College Enrollment as a Percentage of the Total U.S. Population



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