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PUBLIC UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE ENROLLMENT IN THE MOUNTAIN WEST, 2019-2021

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Prepared by: Dielle T. Telada, Katie M. Gilbertson, and William E. Brown, Jr.

PURPOSE:

On June 10, 2021, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center released the Spring 2021 *Current Term Enrollment Estimates (CTTE)* report.¹ The report provides estimated postsecondary enrollment numbers based on the Clearinghouse universe of institutions. The impact of COVID-19 related disruptions has caused higher education enrollment to fall to what the National Student Clearinghouse suggests are “new lows.” This fact sheet explores trends in higher education enrollment at Mountain West colleges during the 2020 and 2021 Spring semesters.

ABOUT THE DATA:

The National Student Clearinghouse CTEE report series is published every December and May with up-to-date national enrollment estimates by institutional sector, enrollment intensity, age group, gender, major field, and state-level enrollment estimates. This fact sheet examines the current term enrollment estimates at higher education institutions as reported by the most recent CTEE report in Mountain West colleges. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center uses data classifications for two-year and four-year institutions that differ from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).²

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Four Mountain West states (Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico) reported a decrease in their public two-year college enrollment data, with New Mexico experiencing a 16.9 percent decrease in enrollment from Spring 2020 to Spring 2021.
2. New Mexico reported consistent decreases in public four-year college enrollment from Spring 2019 to Spring 2021. On the contrary, Arizona and Utah enjoyed consistent increases in public four-year college enrollment from Spring 2019 to Spring 2021.
3. Nevada saw a 9.4% decrease in enrollment at public two-year colleges from Spring 2020 to Spring 2021 and a 4.1% decrease in enrollment at public four-year institutions from Spring 2020 to Spring 2021.
4. Private four-year college enrollment grew in Spring 2021 for each of the four Mountain West States that reported this data (Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah).
5. Spring 2021 public two-year college enrollment data ranges from 131,387 students in Arizona to 9,546 students in Nevada. Nevada enrolls 25 percent fewer students compared to New Mexico and 30 percent fewer students compared to Utah.
6. Spring 2021 public four-year college enrollment data ranges from 186,496 students in Arizona to 87,707 students in Nevada. Nevada enrolls 80 percent more students compared to New Mexico and 64 percent fewer students compared to Utah.

¹ National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, “Overview Spring 2021 Enrollment Estimates,” 2021 (nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Spring_2021.pdf).

² See Methodological Notes, “Overview Spring 2021 Enrollment Estimates,” 2021 (nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Spring_2021.pdf).

Table 1 presents the enrollment data for public two-year colleges in the Mountain West states from 2019 to 2021. Across all three years, Arizona reported the greatest number of students at two-year colleges, while Nevada enrolled the fewest students. Colorado was the only state to increase enrollment at public two-year colleges in Spring 2019 by 6.4 percent, followed by a 6.3 decrease in Spring 2020. Utah was the only state to increase enrollment during the Spring 2021 semester, exhibiting the most stable enrollment numbers among the Mountain West states. Nevada and New Mexico decreased public two-year college enrollment from 2019 to 2021. The year 2021 proved to be the worst year for the Mountain West states, with an average decrease in enrollment of 9.86 percent.

Table 1: Public Two-Year Colleges Enrollment Data, 2019-2021

	Spring 2021	% Change from Previous Year	Spring 2020	% Change from Previous Year	Spring 2019	% Change from Previous Year
Arizona	131,387	-14.2%	153,137	1.7%	150,597	-6.1%
Colorado	58,526	-9.0%	64,317	-6.3%	68,673	6.4%
Nevada	9,546	-9.4%	10,533	-0.6%	10,593	-2.3%
New Mexico	38,535	-16.9%	46,381	-4.7%	46,013	-4.7%
Utah	32,192	0.2%	32,142	2.5%	31,369	-0.7%

*Adapted from National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, "Term Enrollment Estimates Spring 2021," 2021.

Table 2 provides the enrollment data for public four-year colleges in the Mountain West from 2019 to 2021. Colorado totals the most students during Spring 2019 but was surpassed by Arizona in Spring 2020 and 2021. New Mexico enrolled the least number of students across the four years. Arizona and Utah experienced growth in public four-year college enrollment for all three years, while enrollment decreased in New Mexico each year. Nevada was the only state to have its highest enrollment amount during Spring 2020.

Table 2: Public Four-Year Colleges Enrollment Data, 2019-2021

	Spring 2021	% Change from Previous Year	Spring 2020	% Change from Previous Year	Spring 2019	% Change from Previous Year
Arizona	186,496	3.2%	183,556	5.3%	174,264	7.1%
Colorado	166,452	-3.7%	172,905	-1.0%	174,607	0.9%
Nevada	87,707	-4.1%	91,419	1.5%	90,056	-0.7%
New Mexico	48,615	-6.9%	52,244	-7.1%	56,213	-2.3%
Utah	137,039	1.3%	135,307	0.8%	134,186	3.3%

*Adapted from National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, "Term Enrollment Estimates Spring 2021," 2021.

Table 3 displays the enrollment data for private four-year colleges in the Mountain West states from 2019 to 2021. Due to lack of sufficient data, there are no numbers to report for Nevada in this category. Utah had the greatest number of students at private four-year colleges from 2019 to 2021 while New Mexico had the least. Arizona enjoyed a 577.2 percent increase in private four-year enrollment in Spring 2019. Arizona and Utah increased enrollment all three years, while Colorado witnessed a decrease in Spring 2020 and New Mexico experienced a decrease in Spring 2019.

Table 3: Private Four-Year Colleges Enrollment Data, 2019-2021

	Spring 2021	% Change from Previous Year	Spring 2020	% Change from Previous Year	Spring 2019	% Change from Previous Year
Arizona	107,531	7.2%	100,269	4.8%	95,669	511.7%
Colorado	29,855	4.5%	28,577	-4.3%	29,870	2.0%
Nevada	-	-	-	-	-	-
New Mexico	1,688	1.3%	1,666	4.0%	1,603	-8.5%
Utah	188,662	7.6%	175,413	4.7%	167,597	12.5%

*Adapted from National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, "Term Enrollment Estimates Spring 2021," 2021.