

Connecticut Public College Enrollment Trends

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Issue

Describe enrollment trends at Connecticut's public colleges and compare them to general enrollment trends nationwide.

Summary

College Enrollment Data (2018 to 2023)

In 2018, total enrollment between two- and four-year Connecticut public colleges was 112,861, compared to 89,932 in 2023 (a 20.3% decrease).

Total enrollment for the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU), including community colleges, was 82,275 in 2018 and fell to 63,405 in 2023 (a 22.4% decrease). As shown in Table 1, below, Western Connecticut State University ("Western") in Danbury had the greatest decrease (26.7%), and Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven had the least (12.2%).

In contrast, enrollment at the University of Connecticut (UConn)-Storrs and across all UConn campuses rose during this timeframe. UConn's total enrollment was 31,646 in 2018, which rose to 32,332 in 2023 (a 2.2% increase). At Storrs, total enrollment was 18,768 in 2018 and rose to 19,067 in 2023 (a 1.6% increase).

Total enrollment in colleges across the United States in 2018 was 19,239,345 compared to 18,350,951 in 2023 (a 4.6% decrease). Thus, college enrollment at public colleges in Connecticut is decreasing at a greater amount than college enrollment nationwide, with UConn being the exception (i.e., a 4.6% decrease nationwide, 22.4% decrease across the CSCU system, and 2.2%

increase for UConn). Similarly, total enrollment at community colleges in Connecticut was 47,912 in 2018 compared to 34,991 in 2023 (a 27% decrease), which is a substantially greater decrease than that at community colleges nationwide (a 14.3% decrease).

While college enrollment saw a substantial decline during pandemic years, the data in tables 1 and 2 suggests that enrollment numbers may be rising. In 2023, there was an increase of 1.2% nationwide, the first increase since the pandemic. In Connecticut, Central Connecticut State University (“Central”) in New Britain, UConn-Storrs, and all UConn campuses combined saw increases of 0.6%, 4.3%, and 0.6%, respectively, from 2021–2023, similarly suggesting rising enrollment post-pandemic. However, Eastern Connecticut State University (“Eastern”) in Windham, Southern, and Western continued their downward trends.

Connecticut Data

The table below provides enrollment data for 2018 through 2023 (all credential types, full- and part-time) for (1) Connecticut’s state universities, by location; (2) all UConn campuses; and (3) the state’s community colleges.

Table 1: Enrollment for Public Connecticut Colleges, 2018–2023

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change Overall
Central	11,822	11,154	10,652	9,653	9,468	9,712	-17.8
Eastern	5,208	4,980	4,645	4,321	4,083	3,979	-23.6
Southern	10,050	9,817	9,331	8,788	8,889	8,820	-12.2
Western	5,642	5,631	5,246	4,802	4,417	4,137	-26.7
UConn (Storrs)	18,768	18,510	18,572	18,289	18,702	19,067	1.6
UConn (all campuses)	31,646	31,687	32,669	32,146	32,096	32,332	2.2
Community Colleges	47,912	45,905	38,978	37,116	36,126	34,991	-27

Source: CSCU and community colleges: [Fall Headcount Enrollment Trends](#); UConn: [Student Enrollment](#).

Nationwide Data

The table below provides total enrollment numbers for colleges nationwide (including a subset for community college enrollment) during these same years, 2018 to 2023.

Table 2: Nationwide Enrollment, 2018–2023

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change Overall
Total*	19,239,345	19,113,803	18,666,527	18,207,436	18,158,132	18,350,951	-4.6
Community Colleges**	5,207,812	5,124,412	4,665,285	4,326,589	4,331,164	4,463,488	-14.3

*Includes enrollment from all school types (e.g., public or private, two-year or four-year programs) and credential types (e.g., associates, bachelors, or masters)

**Public two-year institutions

Source: [NSCRC Current Term Enrollment Estimates](#) (see [Data Appendix](#) spreadsheet).

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