

# Community College Estimated Growth: Fall 2010

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A just-completed survey from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) found that enrollment growth in fall 2010 slowed its pace at community colleges, increasing 3.2% from the previous year. This contrasts with more dramatic increases in recent years: more than 11% between fall 2008 and fall 2009, and nearly 17% between fall 2007 and fall 2009, based on results of a fall 2009 survey sent to AACC member-eligible institutions (Mullin & Phillippe, 2009). The survey also examined institutional capacity and other pressing issues facing member institutions.

## About the Survey

In late October 2010, AACC sent a survey to 888 AACC member public community colleges and received responses from 268 of them. This represents an overall response rate of 32%. Although the responses were broadly representative of the nation's community colleges, in several states no colleges reported data, and smaller, more rural colleges were slightly underrepresented in the responses. Therefore, some caution should be taken in interpreting these results.

## Results

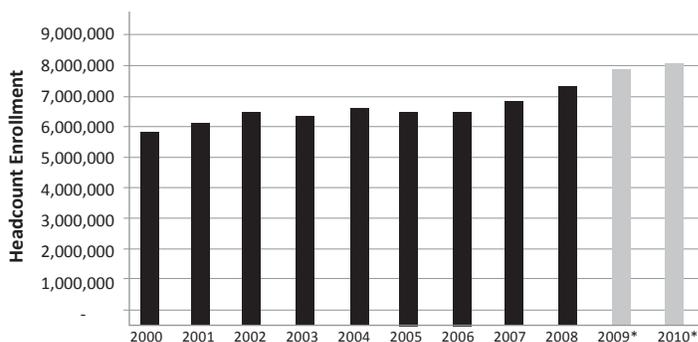
### Estimated Fall Headcount Enrollment

AACC's survey found that the total increase in enrollments was approximately 3.2%, equating to roughly 250,000 students. This marks the 8th out of the past 10 years that enrollment at community colleges increased (see Figure 1). Community college enrollments increased by more than 20% to an estimated total of around 8.2 million students over the last three years. 1.4 million more students were enrolled in fall 2010 than in fall 2007, when the recession had just begun.

For fall 2010, more than three out of every four colleges reported a year-over-year increase in enrollment, and half of the colleges reported enrollment increases of 3.5% or greater.

The data suggest that enrollment at larger

Figure 1  
Fall headcount credit enrollment in community colleges: 2000 to 2010



Source: AACC analysis of IPEDS fall enrollment files and AACC 2009 and 2010 fall enrollment surveys

colleges increased less than at smaller institutions. In addition, while the median increase was 3.5%, the average increase for all colleges was only 3.2%, which suggests that the increase nationally was slightly over 3%. This is a smaller increase than has been seen in recent years.

The data also suggest that there was a larger percentage increase in full-time enrollment than in part-time enrollment. Therefore, the data suggest that the increase in classes taken (and subsequently classroom and faculty resources) was greater than for overall enrollment. This increase in full-time enrollment could also suppress total enrollment growth in cases where classes reached capacity.

In addition to surveying institutions, AACC collected preliminary enrollment data from several state system offices. The data suggest that state policies may be a driving factor in the enrollment trends. Data from California indicate that overall enrollment in California is lower than in the previous fall, while in other states the enrollments are higher than the 3.2% national average. Many community colleges in California have capped enrollment due to drastic cuts in state funding.

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## Institutional Capacity

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The enrollment survey also inquired about institutional capacity. The results imply a system that is generally able to meet all students' demand, with only 86 out of 267 respondents (32%) reporting that they were unable to enroll every eligible student.

Respondents were also asked to identify why they were not able to serve all eligible students, if that was the case. The reasons included

- Insufficient funding: 53 institutions (20%).
- Limited physical capacity: 48 institutions (18%).
- Insufficient number of qualified staff: 31 institutions (12%).

Institutions were provided the opportunity to cite additional factors limiting capacity, and 24 (9%) provided responses. Their responses can be clustered into two categories: (1) Desired courses reached capacity/limited clinical placement and (2) students lacked financial means to pay/students arrived without processed financial aid forms.

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## Pressing Issues

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The survey also asked respondents to name the two most pressing issues facing the institutions. Overwhelmingly, respondents mentioned insufficient funding for instruction and infrastructure. Community colleges in California have capped enrollment due to drastic cuts in state funding.

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## References

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Mullin, C.M. & Phillippe, K. (2009, December). *Community college enrollment surge: An analysis of estimated fall 2009 headcount enrollments at community colleges* (2009-01PBL). Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.