

Undergrad Enrollment Fell as COVID-19 Cases Surged

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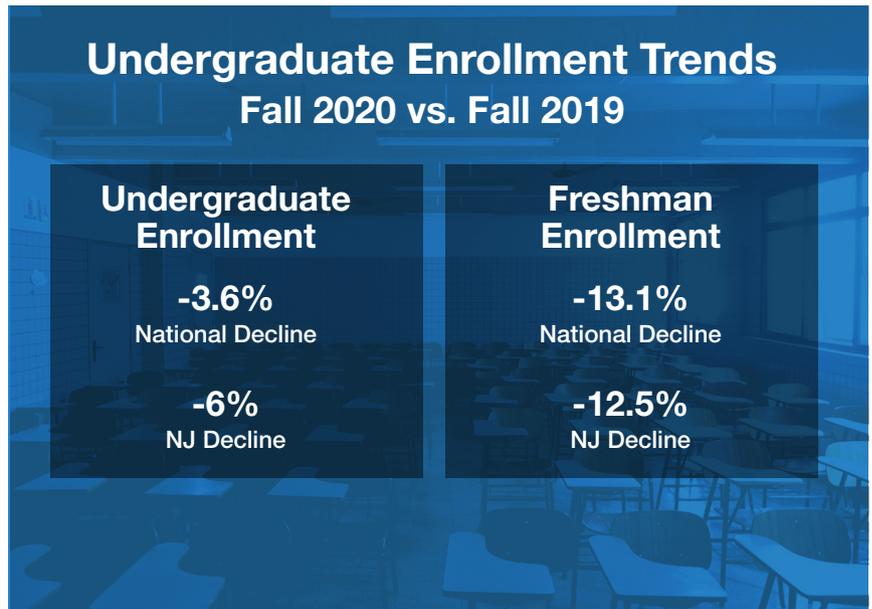
Preliminary statistics indicate New Jersey's two- and four-year post-secondary institutions experienced a larger percentage decline last fall in undergraduate enrollment than the national average. Total national undergraduate enrollment decreased 3.6%, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, while New Jersey's postsecondary institutions experienced an average 6% decline, according to the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE).

4-Year Institutions: The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center categorizes four-year institutions that primarily confer bachelor's degrees into three sectors: public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit. The Center estimated that nationally, public and private nonprofit institutions experienced an overall enrollment decline of 0.7% and 1.4%, respectively, last fall compared to fall 2019. Private for-profit institutions, however, experienced a 6.4% in-

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crease in national undergraduate enrollment during the same time span.

In comparison, New Jersey's four-year institutions, both public and private, experienced a larger percentage decline in total undergraduate enrollment compared to the fall of 2019. The state's four-year public in-



stitutions experienced a 1.8% decline while its private nonprofit institutions and private for-profit institutions experienced a 4.3% and 2.9% decline in total undergraduate enrollment, respectively, according to OSHE.

2-Year Institutions: National enrollment at two-year institutions, which predominantly award associate degrees, declined by 10.1% in fall 2020 compared to the previous fall, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. In comparison, OSHE estimated New Jersey's community colleges experienced a 12.5% decline in overall enrollment during the same time span.

Freshman Enrollment: Freshman enrollment declined more significantly than overall total undergraduate enrollment: 13.1% nationally and 12.5% in New Jersey. According to the National Student

Clearinghouse Research Center, a sharp enrollment drop at two-year institutions was the major factor in the unprecedented freshman enrollment drop seen nationally – a reduction that was “almost 20 times higher than prior year's pre-pandemic decline.”

Many experts have suggested that enrollment declines in the fall of 2020 were likely due to students deferring a year to avoid online classes, in the hope of getting an in-person educational experience later. As mass production and distribution of Johnson & Johnson's one-dose vaccine helps ramp up vaccination efforts this spring, conversations about a return to normalcy are front and center. Will the trend of undergraduate enrollment decline continue into the fall of 2021 or will the 2020 numbers become another statistical outlier caused by COVID-19? **NJB**