



November 13, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HECC 4th week fall enrollment data shows steep declines for community colleges

SALEM, Ore. – Fourth week fall term enrollment data released today by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) shows significant declines statewide in community college enrollment for Fall Term 2020 as compared to Fall Term 2019.

Fourth week enrollment data is the best indicator of a college's enrollment because students generally cannot drop a course after the fourth week of the term, so enrollment stabilizes.

The HECC Office of Research and Data has reported that the number of community college students fell 23 percent and FTE (full-time equivalent) fell 19 percent from the previous fall. All 17 of Oregon's community colleges saw declines between fall 2019 and fall 2020, with colleges near where devastating wildfires ravaged earlier this year experiencing some of the steepest declines. The HECC data includes enrollment for students in both credit and non-credit courses.

Enrollment declines are also evident across all racial/ethnic groups, with the largest drop among Hispanic/Latinx and white students. Community College Hispanic/Latinx enrollment fell from 17.7 to 16.7 percent of total enrollment, and white student enrollment fell from 57.3 to 55.7 percent, compared to the 2019-20 academic year.

"We've had a pretty good indication that fall enrollment would see a significant decline, but actually seeing the numbers is sobering," said Cam Preus, Executive Director of the Oregon Community College Association (OCCA). "It paints a very real picture of just how devastating the impacts of COVID-19 and the wildfires have been on our students, and, in turn, our community colleges."

Oregon's data is in line with nationwide data showing sharp enrollment declines in post-secondary institutions across the country, with community colleges seeing the largest drops.

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