

### Enrollment Trends: a Double-Edged Sword

ENROLLMENT BY TYPE OF COURSE - DEGREE-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS -  
2012-2014

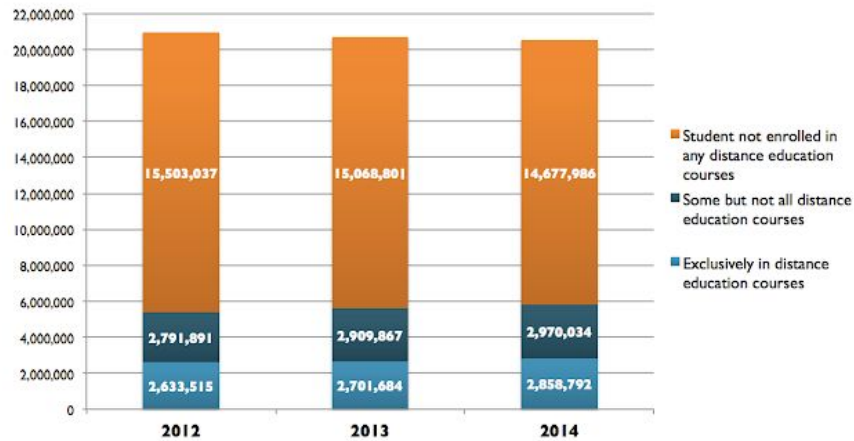


Figure 1 - Figure 1 analyzes the trend of enrollment by the type of course in degree-granting institutions and in distance education within the U.S. The data refers to courses that are attended in-person and those that are called “distance education courses” signifying online classes taken by students in higher education. From 2012 to 2014, the number of students not enrolled in any distance education courses decreases by 5.32% or 825,051. The number of students in some but not all distance (online) courses increases by 178,143 over the two-year period, signifying a 6.38% change. The number of students exclusively in distance education courses illustrates a positive change of 8.55% through an increase by 225,277 in two years. As the total enrollment for students in college institutions decreases overall, the number of students taking an online course(s) increases. Source: <http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/onlineportcard.pdf>

### Growing Popularity in Online Courses and Decreasing Interest in Degree-Granting Institutions:

Figure 1 captures the trend of the increasing number of students in higher education taking some or all distance education courses to receive a college degree online in the U.S. From 2012 to 2014, the number of students enrolled in some distance education courses increases by 6.38%. Additionally, the number of students learning exclusively through distance education courses increases from 2,633,515 in 2012 to 2,858,792 in 2014 - a positive change of 8.55%. Note how the overall number of students enrolled in degree-granting institutions from 2012-2014 significantly decreases by 825,051 students, underscoring a -5.32% change. Although this data comes from 2012-2014, the trends expressed in the data are relevant to the future of online schools.

As the light and dark blue bar graphs indicate, the number of students enrolled in online courses increases, yet, the orange bars depict an overall decrease in students enrolled in degree-granting institutions. This data acknowledges the fast-growing trend of online education. Figure 1 presents a double-edged sword comparison because two different occurrences can be observed in

the data. The positive increase in the number of students taking online courses represents the favorable occurrence, meanwhile, the negative change in overall college enrollment illustrates the unfavorable outcome. An understanding of the data's dual nature is crucial in order to determine the upward of online education.

### **Implications:**

With fewer students enrolling in physical degree-granting institutions and more students receiving their education online, there are significant implications on the sphere of education, such as changes in the physical institution. With the decreasing number of students enrolled in degree-granting institutions, how would these schools maintain a student body? If fewer students enroll in these institutions, would schools change their organizational structure? Could an online curriculum be the preferred choice of learning and completely replace education at physical institutions? As students prioritize factors such as flexibility, financial accountability, and accessibility; they may gravitate more toward distance education courses. The data trend suggests the growth of distance education courses among college students in the U.S from 2012-2014, which may indicate the continued growth of distance education into the future. In what year could this growth eventually lead to more students graduating from an online institution than a physical college? There are countless important questions to consider based off of the trends in Figure 1.

This data matters because it is opposite of what one might expect. Individuals may expect increases in student enrollment in degree-granting institutions and in online schools - yet only the latter is true. How does this online enrollment impact the physical, social, and emotional health of students? Does Figure 1 call upon the need to strike a balance between degree-granting institutions and how they should employ technology to their advantage *or* should society continue to let technology permeate the sphere of education? The double-edged sword in the 2012-2014 data illustrates the need to further analyze the variety and magnitude of implications in order to answer these questions.