

Staring into the Abyss: Does Accounting Face a Looming Enrollment Crisis?

Erik S. Boyle¹, Marcus Burger², Rana Mazumder³

ABSTRACT

Leaders in higher education have predicted that declining birth rates since 2008 will lead to an enrollment cliff in higher education in which enrollment rates, which have steadily increased for decades, will reverse directions. Because many university budget models are predicated on increases to tuition, changes to this model can be catastrophic for universities that fail to plan ahead. We review recent trends in accounting degrees awarded, both individually relative to other business school and university degree awards, to better understand how accounting is positioned in the lead-up to this enrollment cliff. We review public data from the National Center for Education Statistics and find that accounting degrees awarded in the United States have steadily decreased since 2015. This decrease has occurred across institution types and demographic characteristics, indicating that there are fundamental issues with accounting that need to be addressed. Although the profession has taken some initial steps to encourage more students into the field of accounting, such as making changes to licensure procedures and requirements and encouraging accounting programs to seek out STEM designation, more measures may be needed for the supply of accountants to keep pace with future expected demand.

Keywords: accounting education, higher education, college enrollment, enrollment cliff, student demographics, STEM

JEL Classifications: I20, I21, I23, I26

Declarations of interest: None

Funding: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Full text can be accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaccedu.2025.100967>

¹ College of Business, Idaho State University, 921 S. 8th Avenue Stop 8020, Pocatello, ID 83209, USA. Email: erikboyle@isu.edu.

² Corresponding author. Thomas School of Business, University of North Carolina at Pembroke, 543 Prospect Rd., PO Box 1510, Pembroke, NC 28372, USA. Email: marcus.burger@uncp.edu.

³ Deloitte, LLP. Email: ranamazumder6@gmail.com.