



DEALING WITH THE ENROLLMENT CLIFF IN HIGHER ACCOUNTING EDUCATION

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Abstract

This research extends Joyce's (2024) retrenchment research to how to deal with the forecasted "enrollment cliff" in higher education. Rural regional universities need to address the "enrollment cliff" by rethinking their purpose and restructuring their organizations. Among the challenges is the phasing out of low-demand degree on-campus programs; ensuring value-added courses and programs; and possibly considering incorporating additional artificial intelligence to courses adding accounting data analytics as an emerging course of study.

Keywords

Enrollment Cliff, Regional Universities, Artificial Intelligence, Data Analytics

Introduction: The "Enrollment Cliff"

A significant decline in prospective first-time full-time freshmen is forecasted; and this will include accounting majors. While regional institutions are forecasted to experience declining enrollment, leading institutions are forecasted to experience increasing enrollments, Campion (2020) predicted to see an increase.

Regional public universities need to address the "enrollment cliff" by rethinking their purpose and restructuring their organizations. Among the challenges is the phasing out of low-demand degree on-campus programs; the grouping of the accounting students with business students and related areas (including Justice Studies) into one "professional school;" the incorporation of a university studies program in which all incoming freshman will start their academic journey.

A sharp decline in prospective first-time full-time freshmen is forecasted to enter in academic year 2025-2026, Adams (2020, Part I) value. and this decline will include accounting majors. Not only is there a forecasted decline in the projected numbers of college enrollment in the U.S., but also other factors such as race and ethnicity play a part in the sharp decline.

Yet, the enrollment cliff does not impact all states equally: some states are "net receivers" of college-going students, others are "net losers," Rosowsky (2024). In addition, there has been a shift of students away from regional public universities to the larger public flagship and land grant universities, Rosowsky (2024).

According to Drozdowski (2023), predicts that "only the only the wealthiest and market savviest" higher education institutions will be able to survive the enrollment cliff. A full restructuring is needed to deal with the enrollment cliff, Kline (2019).

Regional Public Universities

Unfortunately, regional public universities are especially vulnerable. It has been argued that states have "overbuilt state higher education system of colleges and universities, one that is not (or no longer) justifiable given student enrollments, their degree objectives, or their preferred learning modalities. Adams (2020, Part II) suggests universities assess existing courses and services and determine their net value. Barrios 2023) recommends that faculty simply do their best in their jobs. Fortunately, accounting graduates continue to be in strong demand. States are facing the reality that several campuses may not be viable in their current form for much longer.

Artificial Intelligence and Accounting Data Analytics

Hu (2022) suggests artificial intelligence needs to become an increased portion of accounting education. Artificial intelligence and accounting education was also studied by Dangi and Saat (2021); and they found that it is unlikely for educational technology experience to impact accounting educators' adoption of technology. Çiftci, et al., (2022) study connections of sustainability reporting, corporate governance, and environmental performance with the application of artificial intelligence in accounting education.

Public accounting and CPA certification is not for all accounting students. Data analytics provides an alternative to the public-accounting track, and it is an increasingly popular aspect of accounting education. King (2022) reviews variances in accounting analytics education based on university enrollment, and identifies best practices within the population and concludes additional data analytics accounting education should be enhanced within most undergraduate programs. Hassna (2023) views data analytics as a means to transform accounting education from application of a value chain. Distance education and data analytics is discussed by Ifenthaler (2022). Foster and Francis (2020) advocate data analytics to improve student performance in higher education. "Big Data" (2022) maintains that the revolution in the use of data analytics for decision making in higher education "has not only begun but is well underway."

Summary and Conclusion

The extent of the impact of the "enrollment cliff" is not yet determinable. However, the forecast is for the best endowed and most market savvy institutions to continue to grow while rural public universities may drop. By reconsidering purpose and restructuring organizations, low-demand courses and programs may need to be reduced. Growing value-added courses should be enhanced and better promoted. Incorporating additional artificial intelligence to accounting courses as an add to already solid accounting programs. Accounting data analytics as an emerging course of study can foster interest for accounting students not necessarily interested in following a CPA public accounting career.

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