About Minnesota State

Minnesota State is an interdependent network of 37 vibrant colleges and universities committed to collectively nurturing and enhancing a civically engaged, socially mobile, and economically productive Minnesota. As a system, we foster the success of all students, no matter where they are enrolled, and we support the vitality of all Minnesota communities, no matter where they are located. With seven universities and 30 technical and community colleges on 54 campuses throughout the state, Minnesota State is the largest single provider of higher education in Minnesota, and the fourth largest system of higher education in the country. Six out of ten undergraduates in the state are Minnesota State students.

We are deeply committed to being a place of hope and opportunity for students who dream of becoming our state’s next generation of professionals and leaders – no matter who they are or where they come from. This is critically important for students from communities traditionally underserved by higher education, including the 22 percent of our students who come from families of limited financial resources; 17 percent who are students of color and American Indian students; 13 percent who are first-generation students; and three percent who are veterans and service members. Minnesota State serves more students from these communities than all other higher education options in Minnesota combined.

Our campuses play an essential role in growing the state’s economy through talent development. Every year, the system enrolls roughly 375,000 students every year – 120,000 of whom are in non-credit courses and customized training programs designed for businesses – and awards over 38,000 degrees, certificates, and diplomas. Eight out of ten graduates get jobs in fields related to their programs and stay in Minnesota.

Reimagining Minnesota State: Three Big Questions

Through the Forum on Reimagining Minnesota State, we will learn together and respond to the three big questions presented by the Chair of the Minnesota State Board of Trustees that will inform the future of the system.

What is Minnesota State’s unique value proposition to the State of Minnesota? What are the key educational, economic, and social goals that Minnesota State must address to create a better way of life for all people of Minnesota?

How does Minnesota State foster a culture of innovation, collaboration, and partnership as we share responsibility for the achievement of our key goals? How do we empower our employees and
students to experiment with and collaborate on innovative approaches to move the needle on our key goals?

**How do we leverage our “systemness” to the benefit of our students and the state?** What is the unique role of our public higher education system that makes the system more than the sum of our parts? How does Minnesota State act more like an interdependent network that fosters the success of all students no matter where they are enrolled and supports the vitality of all Minnesota communities no matter where they are located? How will we offer a diversity educational delivery methods and continue to attract and serve a more diverse student population.
Forum on Reimagining Minnesota State
Session 4. The Student: Emerging populations and changing needs and expectations

Briefing Paper 4

By Dr. Lisa H. Foss, Chancellor’s Fellow

Description: Session 4 will dive into the changing nature of students and the demographic, generational, social and economic forces that will impact their needs and enrollment patterns in the future. Session 4: The Student will create opportunities to discuss how differing student populations bring different needs and learning and service expectations to higher education settings and how institutions are responding to serve those needs in innovative and impactful ways.

Forum Session 4 Discussion Questions:

1. How should Minnesota State reimagine how it responds to the diverse student populations that will look to its colleges and universities to further their professional and personal aspirations?

2. How could Minnesota State reposition itself to both drive new enrollments and continuously improve student outcomes?

3. What are strategies or promising innovations you are pursuing to respond to these types of disruptions outlined in the Session 4 Briefing Paper and presentations? How do you address issues of equity and inclusion within the execution of these and future strategies?

4. What are opportunities for Minnesota State institutions and other organizations to partner and collaborate in order to more successfully address these forces or pursue future strategies?

5. In order to address these disruptions, how might Minnesota State encourage, support, and enable greater innovation and entrepreneurial activities without losing its responsibility for advocacy and accountability?

The Challenge of Defining Today’s College Student

One challenge of developing an overview of today’s college student is that there is no one single profile of individuals attending postsecondary institutions. When many think of a college student, it brings to mind what are described as “traditional” students (18-22 years old, attending full-time, financially dependent on their parents, and living on campus). This group of students, while labeled as traditional, are increasingly in the minority of students attending colleges and universities today. Estimates are that this makes up about 15-17% of today’s college students and that percentage is declining.

The remaining 83-85% of individuals attending U.S. postsecondary institutions fall into the category of “non-traditional” which is defined by the National Center for Education Statistics as having one of the following seven characteristics: Has delayed enrollment in post-secondary education beyond the first year after high school graduation; attends part time; is financially independent from his or her parents;
works fulltime; has dependents other than a spouse; is a single parent; has no high school diploma or GED test credential

The profile of students within this large category of “non-traditional” represents a diverse group of individuals with very different attendance patterns and support needs. They include:
- 38% are over the age of 35
- 26% are parents
- 43% attend community colleges
- 40% enroll part-time
- 58% of students work while in college
- 55% are financially independent
- 34% of undergraduates are first-generation college students

The following graphic from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation describes “America as 100 College Students” to show the diversity of backgrounds, experiences and needs of represented on our college and university campuses today. [https://postsecondary.gatesfoundation.org/demographics/](https://postsecondary.gatesfoundation.org/demographics/)

As the graphic shows, U.S. postsecondary education is serving a diverse set of students, each with a diverse set of needs.
• **Diverse Students: 41% of students are non-white**
  Students of color are coming to college in increasing numbers — but these students aren’t as likely as white students to receive certificates and degrees. Closing these gaps is necessary to reduce income disparities and meet America’s workforce needs.

• **Older Students: 34% of students are 25 or older**
  Many students don’t attend college immediately after high school, and instead return years later. These students, most of whom have work and family obligations, need flexible and affordable programs that offer credit for what they’ve already mastered and support for what they haven’t.

• **Working Students: 72% of students work**
  Some students need to work part- or full-time to pay for their education; others are already in the workforce and are looking for a career change. Working students need flexibility so they can study at their own pace and on their own schedule.

• **Student Parents: 28% of students have children**
  Raising children demands tremendous time and financial commitments — and so does attending college. To better balance the two, students with children need flexible scheduling and child care options.

• **Low-income Students: 33% of students come from families earning $20,000 or less per year**
  The cost of college continues to rise, but grant aid programs aren’t keeping pace. As a result, students from low-income backgrounds work more and take fewer courses at a time, reducing their chances of graduating.

**Generation Z – A changing ‘traditional’ student**
While the percentage of students attending colleges and universities directly after high school is a declining percentage of the overall student population, they still constitute a significant segment of the college student market, and it is important to understand their changing views and expectations of college. The generation of student currently entering college is known as “Generation Z.” They were born between 1995 and 2012 and are just beginning to enter college.

Demographically, this cohort of students will be the most diverse population of traditional students. Demographic predictions are that Gen Z will include a smaller number of students, a greater proportion of non-white students, a greater proportion of students from low-income families, and a greater proportion of first-generation students.

Socially, this group of students was defined by the Great Recession and is much more worried about financial security and are more debt averse. They expect transparent pricing and aid and tuition discounts. According to a survey by the College Board, this generation is concerned about the cost of higher education (80%), with 1 in 5 believing it is the number 1 societal concern. One in four says that they are always stressed about finances.

Educationally, they are focused on the value and relevance of a degree. This generation is seen as being more skeptical and pragmatic than the millennial generation that preceded them. They cite getting a job as the top reason to enroll in college. Because they grew up immersed in technology, they are expecting a blend of traditional face-to-face, digital, and online learning, but they also understand technology’s limitations and are less interested in completely online courses and services. Availability and flexibility of options is most important to this generation. They also see the need to be more self-sufficient and
entrepreneurial with 42% expecting to work for themselves at some point in the future and nearly 75% believing that colleges should teach entrepreneurship to all students.

From a service standpoint, they are more interested in support services, as opposed to amenities, and want convenient access to career development, tutoring, advising, and mental health resources. They also expect services to be on-demand and available virtually through their mobile devices.

**Post-Traditional Learners**

As the traditional student becomes an increasing minority, some are questioning how to accurately describe the remaining 80% of the population served by today’s college and universities. One term that is being explored is the “post-traditional’ learner,” as a way to recognize that students within this population come to higher education with their own unique set of needs and expectations. Post-traditional learners have been described as students who:

- Are needed wage earners for themselves or their families
- Combine work and learning at the same time or move between them frequently
- Pursue knowledge, skills, and credentials that employers will recognize and compensate
- Require developmental education to be successful in college-level courses
- Seek academic/career advising to navigate their complex path to a degree

Post-traditional learners are a diverse group. They may or may not have completed a high school degree. Some are English language learners. Some are single parents, new immigrants, veterans, and/or those returning to college with or without previous postsecondary experience or degrees. They are financially independent and work full-time. Many will be able to could check more than one of the above boxes.

According to the 2010 American Community Survey, more than 60 percent of the U.S. population between the ages of 25 and 64 had no post-secondary education credential. Post-traditional learners represent a major untapped market for higher education and will be critical to meeting the U.S. workforce goals. The 2005 National Household Education Survey indicates that there may be as many as 37 million adults who are interested in work-related adult education but have been unable to participate.

One thing post-traditional learners have in common is that they complete their programs of study at a much lower rate than their ‘traditional’ counterparts. This is likely a reflection that the traditional campus-based, semester long, credit-hour mode of instruction does not meet the needs of post-traditional learners.

**Segmentation by Needs**

Segmenting students into traditional and post-traditional categories provides some insights into the unique educational and support needs of each group. This method has been criticized because it relies on segmenting students based solely on demographic and socio-economic factors, which provides an incomplete picture of the goals, needs and motivations of the students themselves and creates definitions that are convenient for institutions rather than the students.

Another way to understand different segments of students is to look at their deeper motivations for attending college and use this information to create better and more relevant educational delivery and support programs and services that more closely reflect their needs.
The Pantheon Group conducted a study of 3200 students enrolled in or considering enrolling in college and found students can be separated into six distinct and defined segments based on their motivations and mindsets rather than just demographics:

- **Aspiring Academics**: 18-24 year olds with an impressive academic profiles, and often come from wealthier families. They are academically driven and plan to go to graduate school. Availability of a specific major and the presence of a top-notch research faculty are valued. They represent 24% of the baccalaureate market.

- **Coming of Age**: 18-24 year olds who are not yet sure what they want to focus on but have the luxury of taking the time to figure it out. College is about broad academic offerings, an active social culture, and trying a variety of activities. They represent 11% of the baccalaureate market.

- **Career Starter**: 18-24 year olds who are extremely job-oriented and use college to advance their specific career prospects. They are focused on life after college and are looking for a college to assist them in reaching their career position in the shortest amount of time possible. They represent 18% of the baccalaureate market.

- **Career Accelerator**: older than traditional students, they aim for advancing their career at their company or within their current industry. They are primarily working adults with some prior college experience. They value non-traditional delivery methods, particularly online course. They represent 21% of the baccalaureate market.

- **Industry Switcher**: older than traditional students, they are going back to school to earn their bachelor’s degree to start a career in a completely different field. They are often in a more precarious financial position or unemployed. They represent 18% of the baccalaureate market.

- **Academic Wanderer**: older than traditional students, they don’t know exactly what they want from college but believe that obtaining a college credential will open doors for them. They are more likely to be unemployed and potentially have lower incomes. They are the most at-risk of the student segments. They represent 8% of the baccalaureate market.

The authors of the study recommend that the key to success for these segments is to provide differentiated programs and services designed to fit their needs. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Academic Offering</th>
<th>Student Supports</th>
<th>Services/Experiences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>4-Year Experience; Research Opportunities</td>
<td>Academic Advising; Opportunities to Build Graduate School Resume</td>
<td>Research Assistant/Teaching Assistant Positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming of Age</td>
<td>4-Year Residential Experience</td>
<td>Wide Range Academic Options and Extracurricular Activities</td>
<td>Social Culture; Sports Teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Starters</td>
<td>3-Year Degree Program; Experiential Learning Opportunities</td>
<td>Job Placement Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Accelerators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry Switchers</td>
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<td>Academic Wanderers</td>
<td>Weekend and Evening Schedules</td>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>Job Placement Assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*From: The Differentiated University: Better Serving the Diverse Needs of Tomorrows Students*
Critical Non-academic Needs
Cutting across the different segments of college students are a series of non-academic challenges that are impacting the student’s ability to be successful and the postsecondary institution’s ability to serve them well. Providing academic and support services in the future will need to include considerations of the following:

Mental Health: Increasingly college students are coming to campus needing support for mental health issues. According to the National College Health Assessment, one-third of college students report having felt so depressed within the last year that it was difficult to function. A 2013 survey found that 57% of women and 40% of men reported experiencing episodes of ‘overwhelming anxiety’ in the past year, and 33% of women and 27% of men reported a period in the last year of feeling so depressed it was difficult to function. This student reported data aligns with the experiences of college counselors. In a recent survey, 95% of college counseling center directors reported that students with significant psychological problems is a growing concern on their campus.

Learning Disabilities: Approximately 11% of college students meet criteria for some form of learning disability, and college systems are reporting marked increases in the numbers of students reporting problems focusing and seeking AD/HD diagnoses and accommodations.

Financial and Food Insecurity and Homelessness: Currently, 42% of independent college students live at or below the federal poverty line. The ability to pay for college, including tuition and the associated expenses of housing, transportation, food, and child care, are posing increasing challenges to many of today’s college students. Faced with these expenses, students report going without food in order to pay for school or are forgoing textbooks and materials which puts their learning at risk. In 2016, half of U.S. college students reported experiencing food insecurity, defined as being without reliable access to sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food, in the last 30 days. A study by the Wisconsin Hope Lab found that 14% of community college student had been homeless at some point. Food security occurs at two- and four-year institutions and disproportionately impacts students of color and first-generation college students. These same students reported that hunger or housing problems had an impact on their education.

Rethinking Delivery and Services to Support a Diversity of Learners
The recognition of the diversity of college students and their changing needs and expectations of postsecondary education may require a rethinking of how programs and support services are delivered. It may require moving away from a standardized delivery model to a more flexible, customizable approach to program and service delivery that can be accessed by students to meet their needs. A 2007 Lumina study of post-traditional learners identified key support factors: Convenience; affordability, good information regarding programs and processes, child care supports, and convenient course delivery systems.

One trend is the move toward more customized pathways to degree or credential completion that incorporate the demonstration of mastery as the marker of completion. Other trends include: Modular, east-to-access instruction; blended academic and occupational curricula; progressive credentialing of knowledge and skills (sub-degree level); financial, academic, and career advising that are available beyond traditional business hours; and public policy that reflects the complex task of balancing life, work and education.
Post-traditional learners are also looking for unique services that address their realities. These include prior learning assessment that allows them the opportunity to gain academic credit for previous academic and work experiences. They also are asking for navigation systems that guide them through want many experience as a confusing process of degree completion. Adult students need a clear pathway, including transparent information on what needs to be completed, how long it will take, and how much it will cost.

Students, both traditional and post-traditional, have changing expectations for the teaching and learning experience. Increasingly students are preferring hybrid classes that combine face-to-face and online learning. Post-traditional students need the flexibility, while more traditional students expect a deeper integration of technology into their learning experience. Students are looking for more experiential based coursework. Adult students want to apply the knowledge they have gained into their work environment, while more traditional students are looking for ways to connect their learning to the real-world and apply their learning to contexts and problems that are relevant to them. Many students are looking for a different relationship with their instructors. Instead of a ‘sage on the stage’ delivering fixed content that they can learn themselves, they are increasingly looking for a ‘guide on the side’ who will help facilitate their learning and create opportunities for connections across their learning experiences.
Who are Minnesota State Students?
The preceding section provided an overview of the national trends and discussions about the changing demographics and expectations of today’s college students. This section of the Briefing Paper provides an overview of Minnesota State students. Data was provided by the Minnesota State System Office Research – Academic and Student Affairs.

Geographic Distribution: In 2017, Minnesota State served 376,000 students: 229,830 (62%) in Greater Minnesota and 146,346 (38%) in the Twin Cities. Minnesota State is the 4th largest comprehensive public higher education system in the U.S. Of those students, 250,443 were credit students:
- 41% Twin Cities
- 13% Central Region
- 7% Northeast Region
- 15% Northwest Region
- 9% Southeast Region
- 15% Southwest Region

Trends in Enrollment: The total credit headcount peaked during the recession and has decreased since fiscal year 2013.
FY19 is projected to decline 1.0% then level off in FY20

Demographics: Minnesota State students are demographically diverse.
- 59% are in Greater Minnesota
- 26% are American Indian or Students of Color
- 34% are 25 or older (average age is 25)
- 55% are female
- 9,700 are veterans
- 31% are Pell-eligible
- 18% are first-generation (52% by the federal definition of neither parent has a Bachelor’s degree)
- 49% are from underrepresented groups

Students of Color and American Indian student enrollment has grown in all regions of the state
Students of Color and American Indian students comprise an increasing percentage of Minnesota State students.

**Students of Color & American Indian:** 2008 = 43,252  2017 = 65,017  **Increase** = 50.3%

**Other Students:** 2008 = 206,697  2017 = 185,425  **Decrease** = -10.3%

**Academics:** Our students are also academically diverse.
- 34% are traditional first-time undergraduates
- 34% are transfer undergraduate students
- 15.8% are in high school
- 12.5% are other undergraduate students
- 3.7% are graduate students
- 60% of college and 37% of university students enroll part-time
- 9% enroll at more than one college or university in a year
- 48% take one or more online courses and 16% are entirely online
- 40% of college and 18% of university entering undergraduate students take developmental courses
An increasing percentage of our students are enrolled on a part-time basis

Student Finances: The majority of our students use financial aid to help finance their education

- 57% of all students received some form of financial aid in 2017, down from 62% in 2013
- 52% of our students who apply for financial aid are considered to be independent of their parents
- 40% received grants
- 11% received scholarships
- 33% took out loans, down from 43% in 2013
- 3% received work-study awards or student employment
- Percent of graduates with student loan debt has begun to decline from the peak levels in 2012-2015
Background Readings