

State Postsecondary Program Review

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In recent decades, a rapid expansion of academic programs has become a defining trend in higher education. Nationwide, academic programs have increased by more than 40% between 2002 and 2022, according to [an analysis](#) by The Chronicle of Higher Education. During this period, the number of bachelor's degree programs grew from 14,506 to 19,524, while master's and doctoral degrees increased by nearly 30% as well. In addition to degrees, the rapid proliferation of non-degree credential options has expanded the availability of short-term program offerings for students. According to [Credential Engine](#), more than 1.8 million unique credentials are offered by more than 130,000 providers.

While the number of available programs and degrees has expanded significantly, student enrollment has grown at a much slower pace. Between 2002 and 2022, student enrollment increased by just 8% and projections from the [Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education](#) show a 13% decline in high school graduates through 2041. In addition to demographic challenges, enrollment of international students is also declining. The [Institute of International Education](#) found that total international student enrollment declined 1% in fall 2025, while new international student enrollments declined by 17%.

Enrollment shifts are also not evenly distributed. Many flagship universities are seeing strong enrollment and revenue growth, while smaller institutions often struggle to attract students. A Wall Street Journal [analysis of 748](#) public four-year colleges and universities found that prominent state universities increased enrollment in 2023 compared to 2015. In the same period, smaller regional state universities saw enrollment fall.



Key Takeaways

- The number of academic programs offered by colleges and universities grew by more than 40% between 2002 and 2022.
- State policymakers are increasingly engaging in the oversight of academic programs, examining enrollment trends, workforce alignment and program outcomes to inform funding and governance decisions.

While some of the expansion in academic programs reflects growing specialization and designing offerings for workforce-targeted demand, [some experts argue](#) the array of programs is too broad to support a declining student population. In recent years, several colleges including [Syracuse University](#), [University of North Texas](#) and [University of North Carolina Asheville](#) have shuttered some academic programs in response to low enrollment and mounting fiscal pressures.

State Legislative Action

In recent legislative sessions, state policymakers have explored more active roles in the review of academic programs. Legislators have considered a variety of approaches to promote clear alignment of program offerings, reallocation of resources toward high-needs programs, and reviews of programs with low enrollments. While approaches vary by state, these efforts generally seek to improve efficiency, strengthen return on investment and ensure academic offerings align with institutional and workforce needs.

Reallocation Of Funding to Reinvest in High-Need Sectors

This approach aims to tie institutional funding decisions to support allocations toward programs that are high-skill or high-demand. It can require colleges or universities to develop strategic plans to reallocate funding based on legislatively established and approved criteria. These plans can then be approved by a higher education coordinating board or legislature for funding to be reallocated.

In 2025, [Utah](#) passed [HB 265](#) which created the Higher Education Strategic Reinvestment Act. It required the state's eight colleges and universities to develop a plan for strategic reallocation of programs that are high-skill and high-demand. Criteria for the development of these plans included: demonstrated enrollment data, completion rates, professional outcomes, workforce demands, program-level costs, instructional mission and core general education curriculum. As part of the reallocation, the legislature withheld 10% of each institution's base instructional funding, that would be reallocated in accordance with the plan developed by the institution and approved by the Utah Board of Higher Education and reviewed by legislative committees. The legislation also provides that institutions may not supplant the funding by raising tuition or fees.

Institutions developed plans including numerous strategies to reallocate funding. The University of Utah eliminated 81 courses and degree programs. Utah Valley University reduced administrative costs and shifted instructional priorities to include applied artificial intelligence and health wellness offerings. Salt Lake Community College approved new investment in workforce targeted and high-demand transfer programs, along with reduced administrative costs. By February 2026, the review process found all eight plans compliant and approved reallocation.

Review of Low Enrollment Programs

This approach requires review of degree programs with low enrollments. Legislation or administrative actions create a threshold for the number of graduates (typically between 5-15 per year) and programs that do not meet this threshold are subject to additional review requirements. The review can be conducted by a state higher education coordinating board, the institution, or legislative committee.

In 2025, [Ohio](#) enacted [SB 1](#) which included provisions to review low-enrollment degree programs. The legislation specifies institutions shall eliminate undergraduate degree programs that confer an average of fewer than five degrees in that program annually over any three-year period. Institutions may appeal for waivers and the Chancellor of Higher Education may grant waivers and allow programs to continue conditionally. In spring 2026, institutions announced the



first round of programs impacted by these standards and detailed 82 programs across the state that would be eliminated. Programs eliminated at multiple institutions include dance and performing arts programs, physics and mathematics programs, as well as several specific humanities programs.

In 2025, **Indiana** passed [HB 1001](#) requiring state educational institutions to review each degree program at least once every seven years and created low enrollment degree thresholds. The legislation establishes that if a degree program has a low number of graduates, institutions must request permission from the Commission for Higher Education to continue the program. The number of graduates is set in statute based on the following degree types, associate's: 10 graduates, bachelor's: 15 graduates, master's: seven graduates, and doctorate: three graduates.

In April 2026, the Commission [released the results](#) of the first review of programs and found that of the 2,300 programs offered in the state, more than 1,000 fell below the established thresholds. The review found that these degree programs serve approximately 4% of all graduates. Of these programs, 470 will continue, 370 will be merged or consolidated and 120 will be eliminated or suspended.

Review/Removal of Funding for Programs with Low Earnings Outcomes

States have also responded to the passage of federal accountability standards by considering using the federal designation of “low-earning outcomes programs.” This standard requires who complete an undergraduate program to earn more than a comparable high school graduate. In 2026, at least [nine states](#) considered legislation that would prohibit state funding to programs designed as “low-earnings outcome.” In some cases legislation also included provisions to bar state financial aid to students enrolled in these programs. By using the new federal accountability framework, these state proposals would extend the consequences of a low-earning outcomes designation beyond federal student aid to include state funding, state financial aid and program continuation decisions. **Indiana** passed [SB 199](#) that requires institutions to seek approval from the Commission of Higher Education to continue any program identified as a “low earning outcome program.” If not approved, the program is eliminated.

Modification of New Program Approval Processes

States have also considered modifications of approval processes for new academic programs that institutions seek to authorize before state coordinating boards. These modifications can address how institutions may file objections for proposed programs or establish different processes based on institutional mission or to address online programs. In 2024, **Maryland** passed [HB 1244](#), which established a new process for academic program approval based on state and regional workforce needs, as well as creating separate processes for the approval of graduate and online programs.

Broad Governance Reviews & Reorganizations

Other states have considered program review through broader review of state postsecondary education and talent development systems. As states evaluate their overall talent strategy, postsecondary attainment goals and workforce development plans, some have specifically included provisions related to reducing the number of programs offered at colleges and universities. In 2026, **Oregon** passed [HB 4124](#) which directs the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to conduct a study of the condition of the state's postsecondary education system and to develop detailed recommendations for the design. The legislation requires the framework to include reviews of academic programs and unnecessary program duplication. **Utah** passed [HB 352](#) in 2026 which requires the Utah Board of Higher Education to organize the institutions of higher education within the state's system of higher education into geographic regions to ensure certain products of horizontal and vertical integration including articulated programs.

Federal Action

The [One Big Beautiful Bill Act](#) (H.R. 1), the tax cut and domestic policy law signed by President Trump in July 2025 included numerous substantial [provisions related to education](#) and accountability for postsecondary education.

H.R. 1 introduced a student loan accountability measure known as the “earnings premium measure.” This test requires the majority of students who complete an undergraduate program to earn more than a comparable high school graduate. Similarly, the majority of students who complete a graduate program must earn more than a comparable bachelor's degree holder. Any program that fails this “earnings premium test” in two out of three consecutive years would be considered a “low-earning outcomes program” and would lose access to student loans. The department will begin collecting data in 2027, and schools could lose access to federal aid starting in the 2028-29 academic year. [Preliminary data](#) suggests 95% of programs nationwide will pass the earnings premium measure; however undergraduate certificates have an estimated 29% failure rate.

NCSL Resources

- [NCSL Postsecondary Bill Tracking Database](#)
- [State Legislative Responses to the Education Provisions in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act](#)

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