

North Dakota University System

Changes in College Attendance Patterns of Traditional College Students

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine the attendance patterns of “traditional college students”. The customary definition of traditional college students is those who enroll in college immediately after high school and attend full time, however, due to the limitations of available data it is difficult to identify at what age students first entered the higher education system. Therefore, this study defines traditional college students using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) definition of a first time student. Under this definition, a student is traditional if attending college as a full time student, seeking an undergraduate degree, and has not enrolled in any prior college courses for credit with the exception of dual credit enrollment while in high school.

The data source for this study is the NCES IPEDS Fall Enrollment survey, which has collected and publicly reported data online for first time college students since 2001.

While national IPEDS data shows that the number of student who enter college as first time students has decreased slightly, from 51% to 47% between 2001 and 2016, data for NDUS shows a more dramatic decrease from 64% to 51% in the same time period. Note, however, that although the current rates for NDUS are higher than the national average (51% as compared to 47%), the difference in earlier years was much greater (64% for NDUS compared to 51% national). Thus, it can be inferred that NDUS is beginning to more closely reflect national attendance patterns for traditional college students.

Within NDUS, several patterns emerge from the data:

- The percentage of incoming students considered traditional is declining overall, at every college level and at every institution, with the single exception of *North Dakota State University* that has observed an increase in this demographic.
- Among the institutional types, the largest decreases in traditional college student attendance rates are observed at the Regional Universities, with a nearly 30% decrease.
- The Research Universities show the smallest decrease, with a rate of -2%. However, this decrease is composed of a -10% at the *University of North Dakota* which is counterbalanced by a +6% increase at *North Dakota State University*.
- The largest average change in rate for the 2001-2016 timeframe is at *Valley City State University*, with a 48% decrease.
- *Lake Region State College* has the smallest percentage (17%) of students enrolling as traditional.

Non-Generalizability of Data

As can be seen from the data presented in this report, the percentage of an incoming class of college students who are classified as traditional based on the IPEDS definition of first time, full time students varies among institutions, from as high as 73% at *North Dakota State University* and as low as 17% at *Lake Region State College*. Additionally, the percentage of traditional students at individual institutions varies across the historical timeline of data collection, for instance, *Williston State College* has ranged from a high of 100% in 2001 to a low of 47% in 2016.

These variances across both institutions and time support the assertion that metrics for IPEDS first time cohorts are not generalizable to the institution as a whole, and as such, are *inadequate for making comparisons among institutions.*

Scope of this report

This report is intended to show the changes in attendance patterns for traditional college students enrolled in the North Dakota University System (NDUS) over a sixteen-year period between 2001-2016. This encompasses the entirety of Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reported data since the inception of online IPEDS reporting.

It is not the intent of this report to identify correlations or causes for changes in student attendance patterns.

For the purpose of this report, “traditional college student” defines a demographic of student attending college for the first time, attending full time, and seeking an undergraduate degree. The term “traditional college student” should not be confused with “traditional courses”, which is limited to the delivery mode of a course (not a student) and represents courses taken on campus in the traditional face-to-face manner.

Definition of “Traditional Student”

The commonly held definition of “traditional college student” is the student who has recently completed high school, enrolls in college full time, and attends continuous semesters with the intent to complete a college degree or certificate. Under this definition, three factors must be true for a student to be traditional:

1. The student must be a recent high school graduate (age 18-21)
2. The student must be attending college full time
3. The student must be seeking a degree at the undergraduate level

The (National Center for Education Statistics) has tracked traditional student cohorts for a number of years, identifying what percentage of any incoming college class is attending traditionally. The NCES terminology for this group of students is “first time, full time” (FTFT), defined as students who have no prior post-secondary experience, attend college for the first time at the undergraduate level, and are full time students [<https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/Downloads/Forms/IPEDSGlossary.pdf>].

For this report, the IPEDS definition of first time, full time undergraduate student cohort is used to denote “traditional college student”. Regarding the use of this IPEDS definition:

- The IPEDS definition does not specifically denote the age of a student, and under the IPEDS definition any student attending college as a first time, full time undergraduate is included, regardless of age.
- Students who took dual credit coursework in high school are an exception to prior postsecondary experience, and are considered first time students when enrolling in college after high school graduation.
- Part time students, transfer students, and students enrolled only in non-credit or non-degree coursework are not included in the first time, full time student definition, regardless of age at which they enroll in coursework.

Data Source/Method

Publicly available NCES IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey data years 2001 through 2016 is used to report the number of traditional college students enrolling in a NDUS institution each year. This data was self-reported by each institution to IPEDS during each reporting year.

Due to variances in rates from year to year, a three-year rate average is obtained by averaging the first three years and the last three years of data for each institution. Differences in averages are used to determine an overall change in rates for institutions.

Three-year mean averages are included in the [Appendix](#).

Results

National Data

IPEDS first time, full time, degree-seeking undergraduates, datasets can be utilized to calculate national percentages. Survey data indicate that of the 4,918,985 college students newly entering a college in the fall of 2016, 2,343,983 (47%) of them entered as first time, full time degree seeking undergraduates [IPEDS Complete Data File>Fall Enrollment, 2016]. For the 2001 entering college cohort of students, 2,283,001 (51%) entered as FTFT students from a total of 4,447,095 [IPEDS Complete Data File> Fall Enrollment, 2001]. This data shows that on a national level, the change in percentage of students entering college as first time, full time, degree-seeking undergraduates has decreased by less than 5% since 2001.

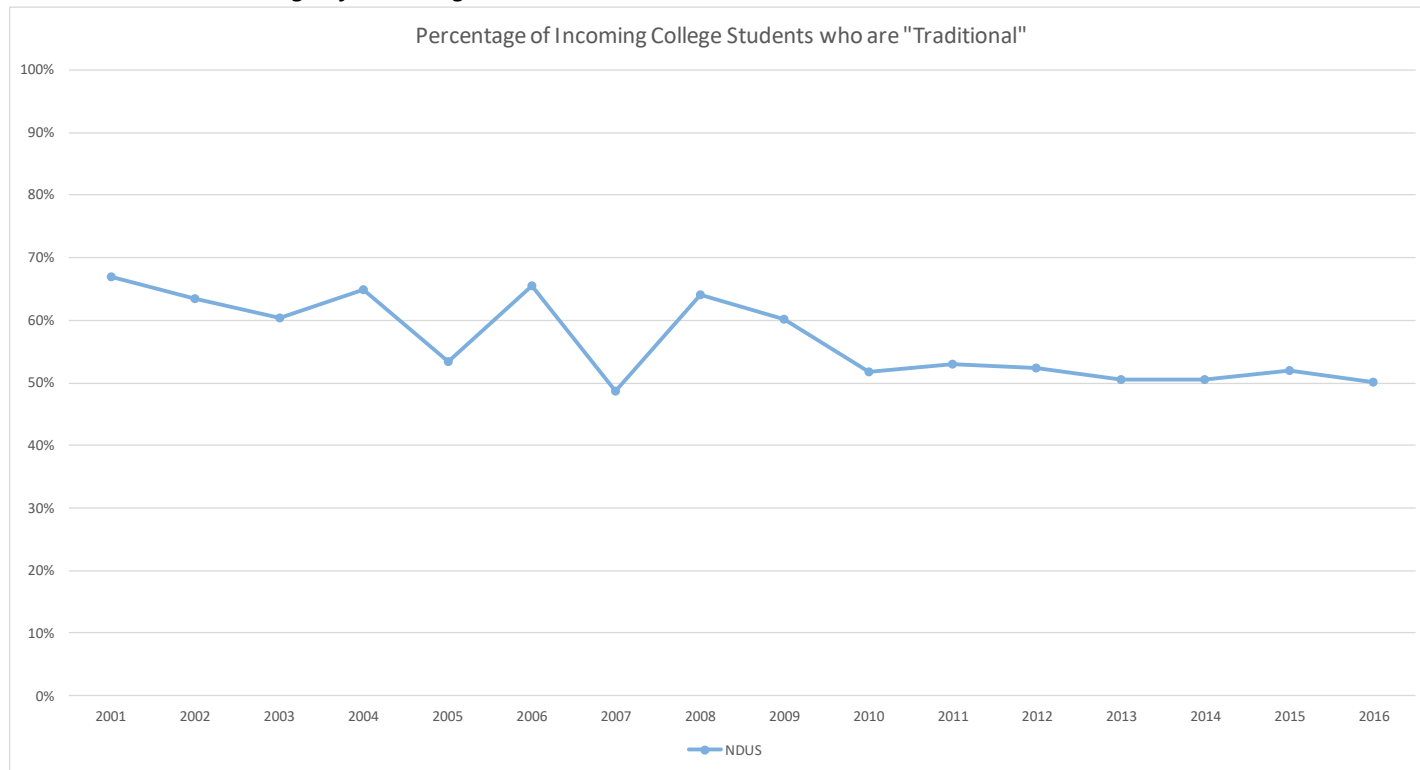
Table 1: National Means for Students Enrolling in College as Traditional Students (Years 2001 & 2016)

IPEDS Year	Total Students Entering College	Total Students Entering College as first time, full time degree seeking	Percentage of students entering college as "Traditional"
2001	2,283,001	4,447,095	51%
2016	2,343,983	4,918,985	47%

NDUS System Level

NDUS has seen a 17% decrease in the number of incoming students classified as traditional, from a high of 64% to a current low of 51%. At the beginning of the millennium approximately two out of three incoming students were considered traditional, whereas the most recent data shows this to be only one out of every two.

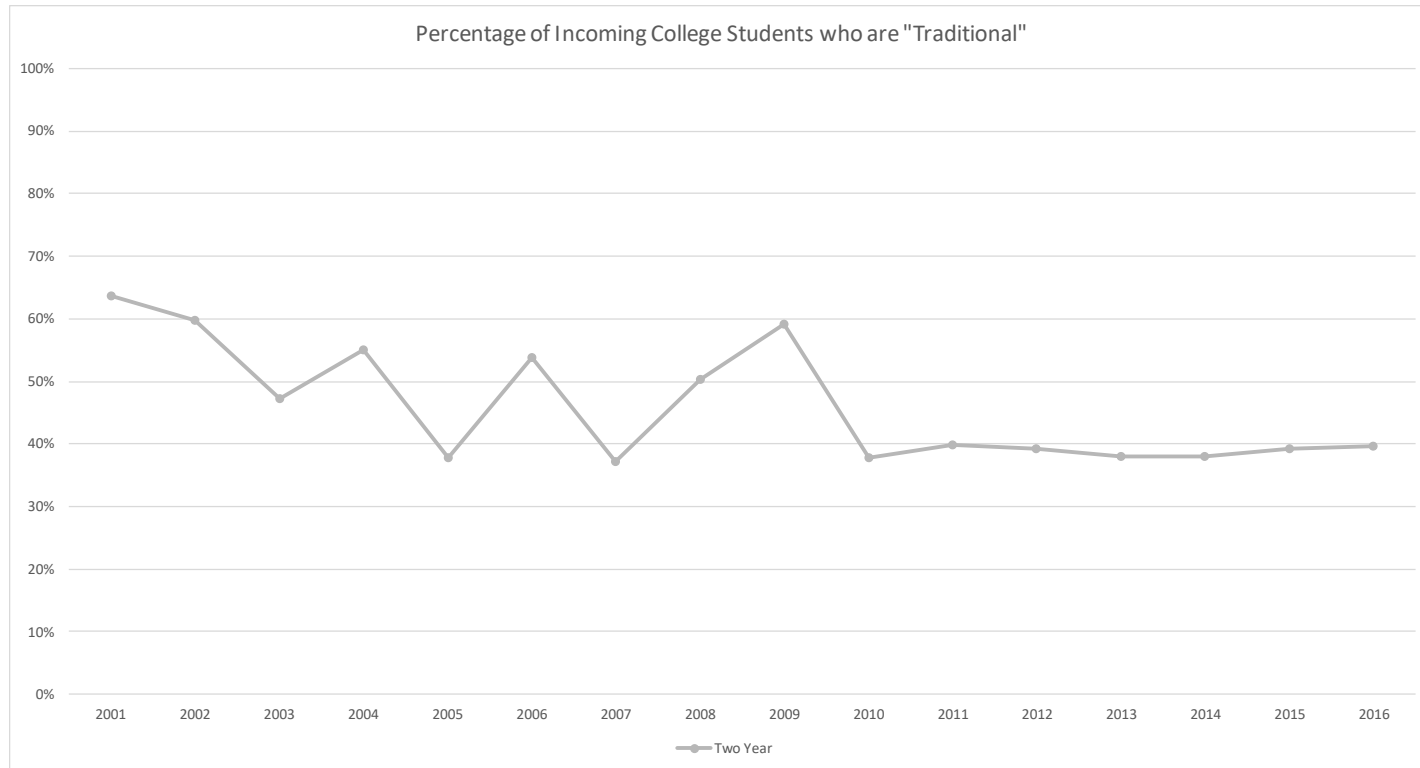
Chart 1: NDUS Percentage of Incoming Students who are "Traditional"



Two Year Community Colleges

At two-year community colleges, the percentage of students entering college traditionally has decreased from 57% to 39%, accounting for a change of -18%. In the past sixteen years, traditional students at the community colleges has changed from a majority to a minority.

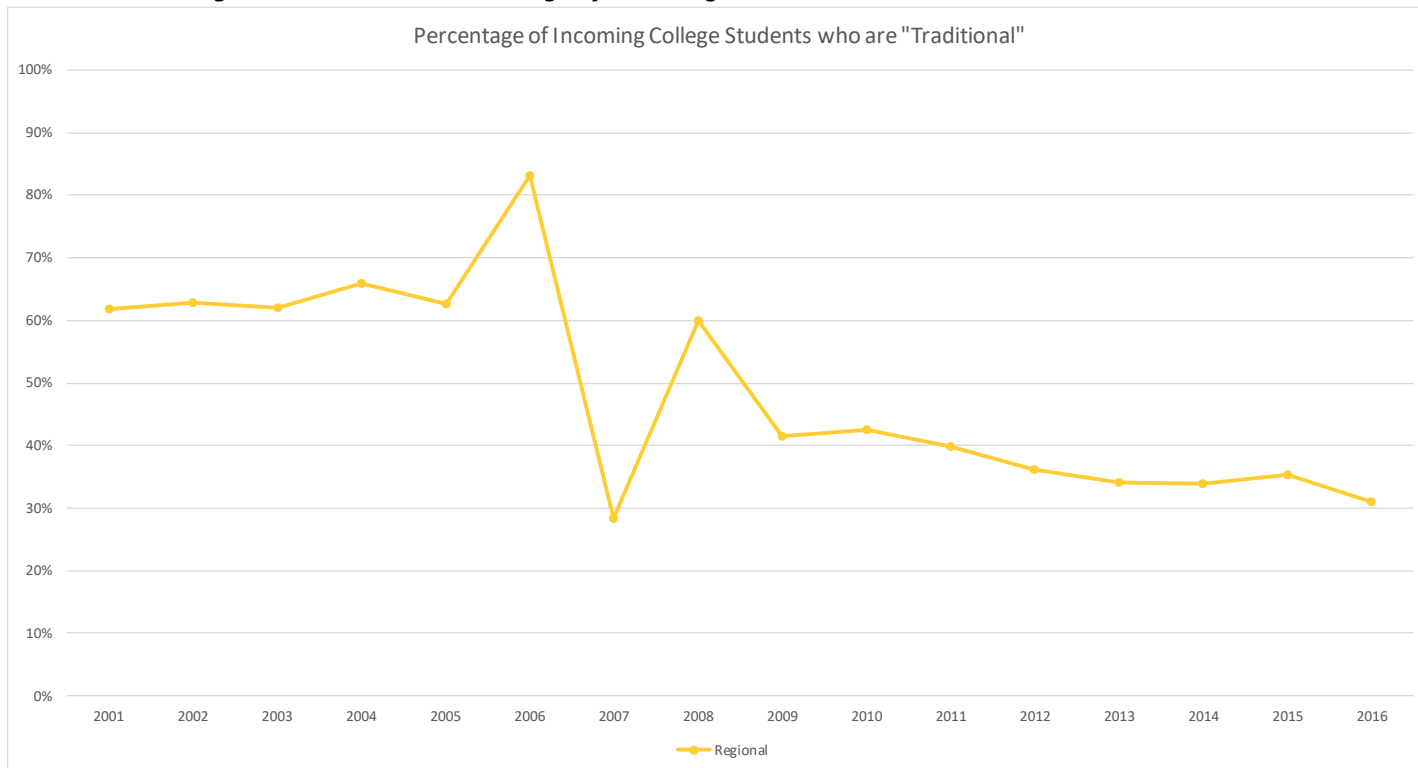
Chart 2: NDUS Two Year Community College Percentage of Incoming Students who are "Traditional"



Regional Universities

Regional universities have observed the greatest change in percentages of students considered to enter as traditional, from a high of 62% to a current low of 33%. Where at the beginning of the millennium two of three incoming students were traditional, it is now only one out of three. Similar to the two-year community colleges, the demographic of incoming students at the regional universities has changed from one where traditional students were the majority to where they are now the minority.

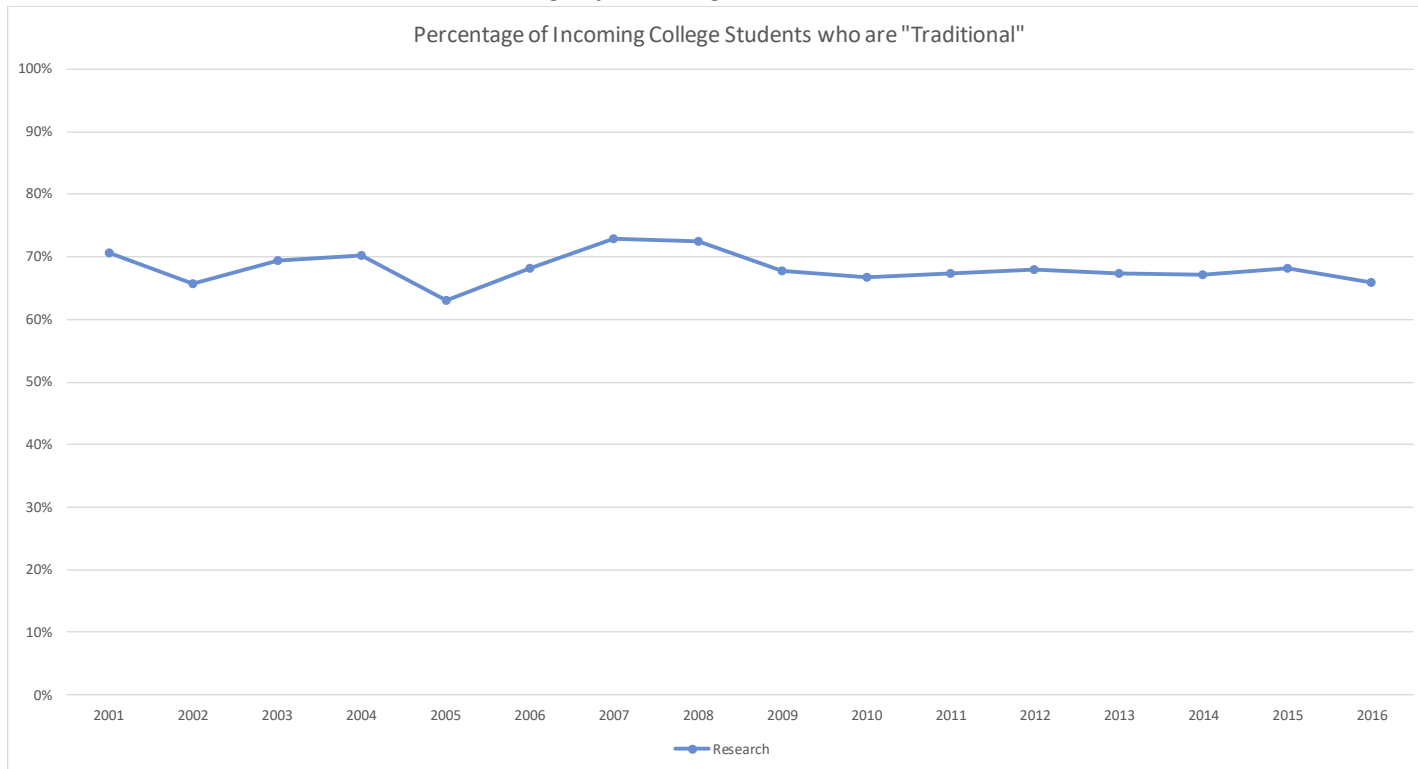
Chart 3: NDUS Regional Universities Percentage of Incoming Students who are "Traditional"



Research Universities

The most stability in the percentages of students entering as traditional is observed at the research universities, where the data has seen only a 2% decrease over the sixteen-year period, from 69% to 67%. A deeper dive into this data does reveal that rates increased for NDSU (67% to 73%) at the same time a decrease was seen at UND (70% to 60%) resulting in an overall stable average. Charts for individual institutions are presented in the Institution Level section.

Chart 4: NDUS Research Universities Percentage of Incoming Students who are "Traditional"



Institutions

There are variabilities in the data when analyzed at the institutional level, with differences observed among the institutions, as well as within institutions across time. Current data across institutions show that the highest percentage of students entering as traditional is at *North Dakota State University* (73%) and the lowest is at *Lake Region State College* (17%). When viewed across time, the largest change in rates is observed at *Williston State College*, which ranged from a high of 100% in 2001 to a low of 47% in 2016.

- Institutionally, all NDUS colleges and universities exhibited decreases in the percentage of students attending as traditional except *North Dakota State University*, which experienced more than a 5% increase.
- Degree of decrease varies among institutions, with the largest difference in percentage observed at *Valley City State University*, which has seen a 48% drop.
- The institution with the smallest percentage of traditional students is *Lake Region State College*, where 17%, or less than 1 in 5, students are traditional.
- The institution with the highest percentage of traditional is *North Dakota State University*, where 73% or nearly 3 in 4 students are traditional.

Charts are presented here for each college and university in alphabetical order.

Chart 5: Bismarck State College

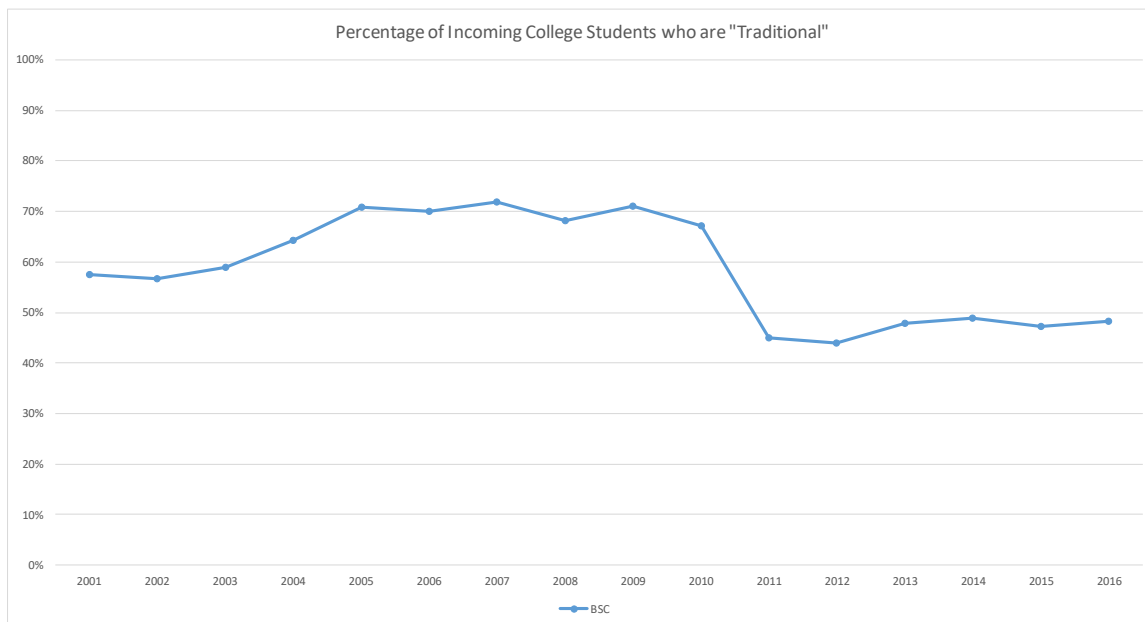


Chart 6: Dakota College at Bottineau

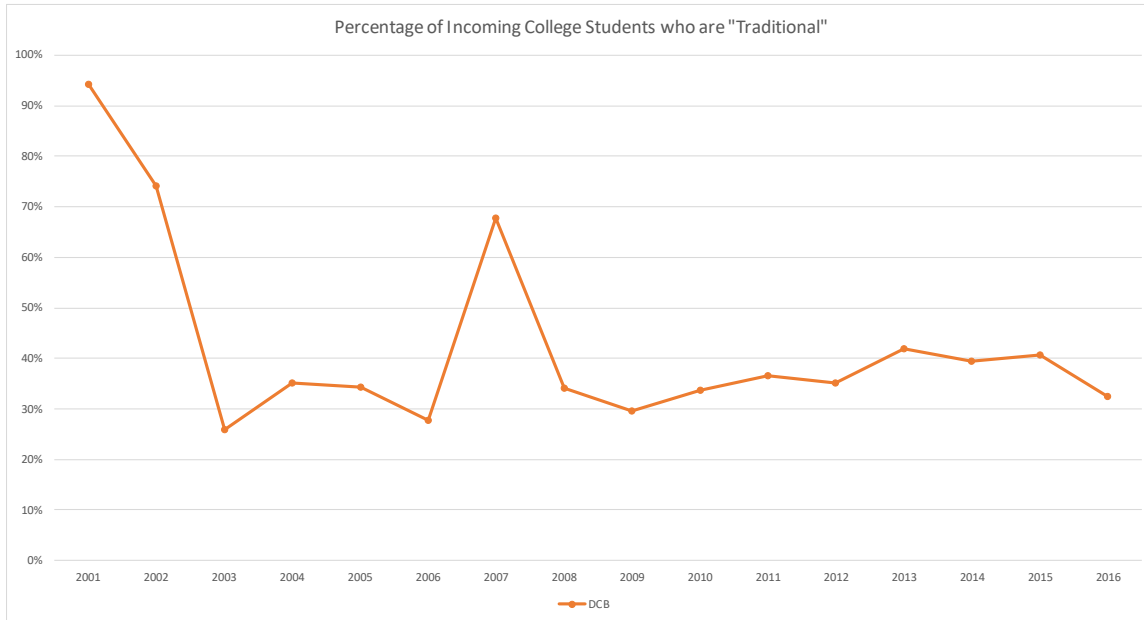


Chart 7: Dickinson State University

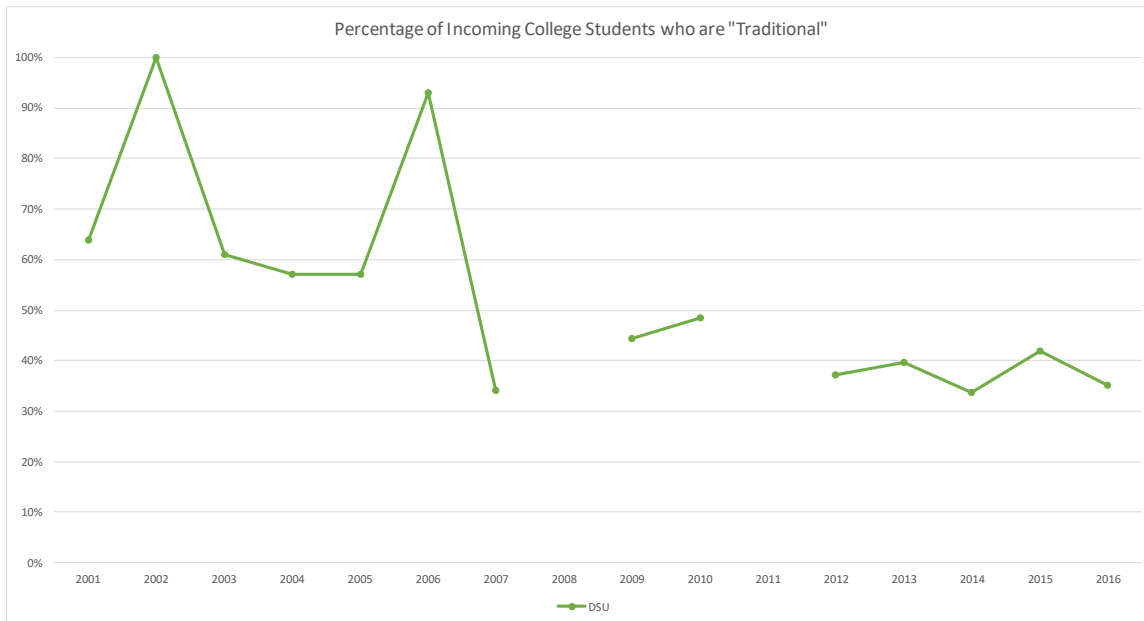


Chart 8: Lake Region State College

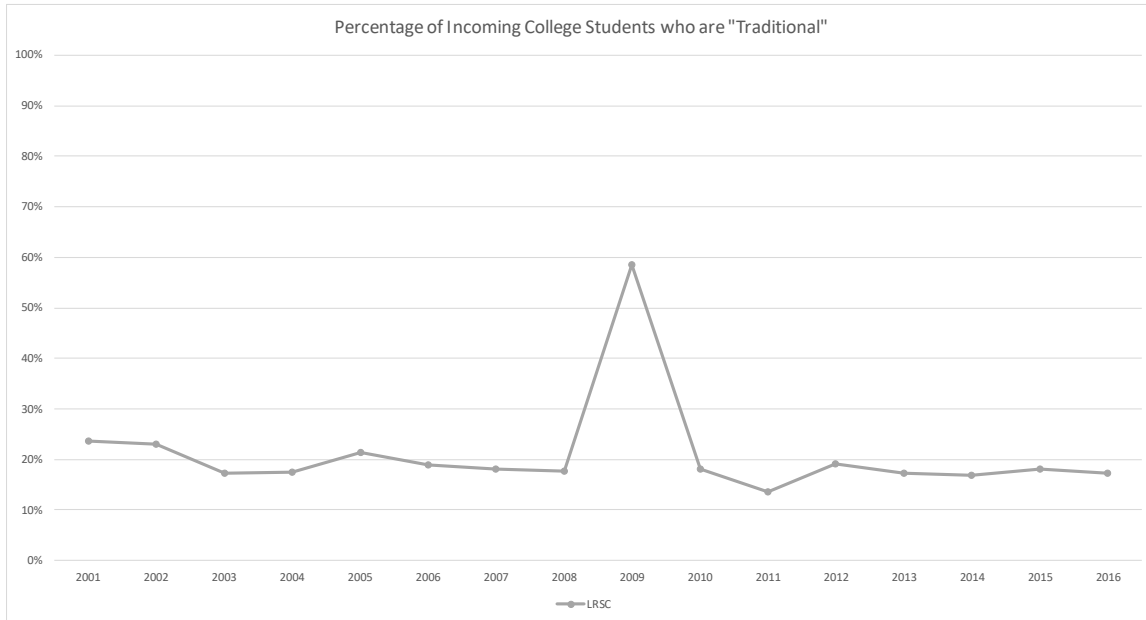


Chart 9: Mayville State University

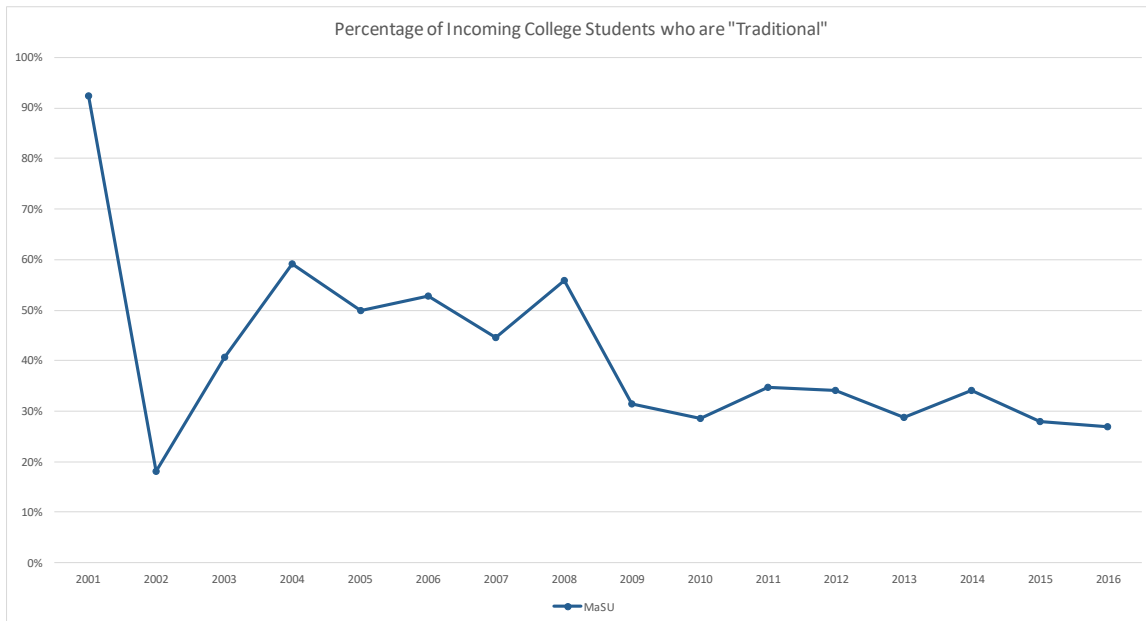


Chart 10: Minot State University

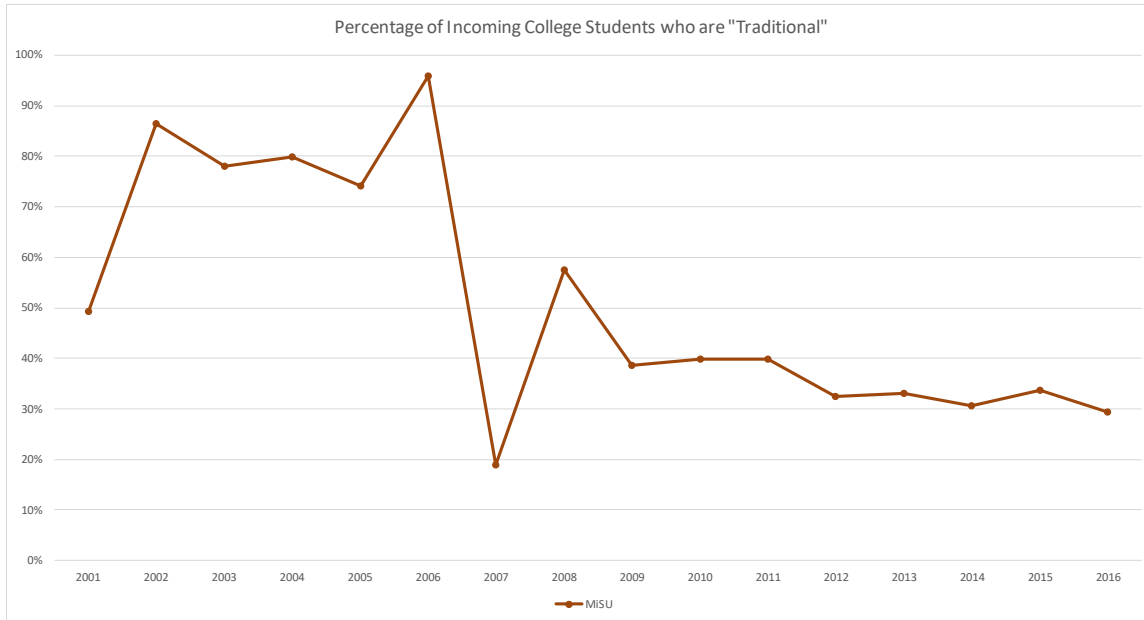


Chart 11: North Dakota State College of Science

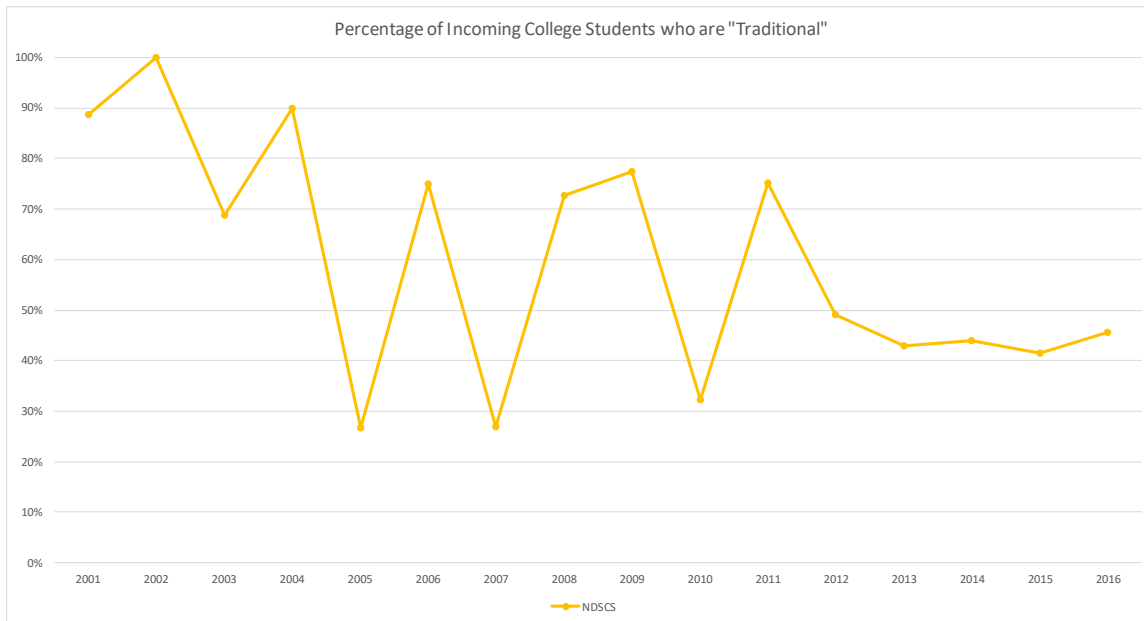


Chart 12: North Dakota State University

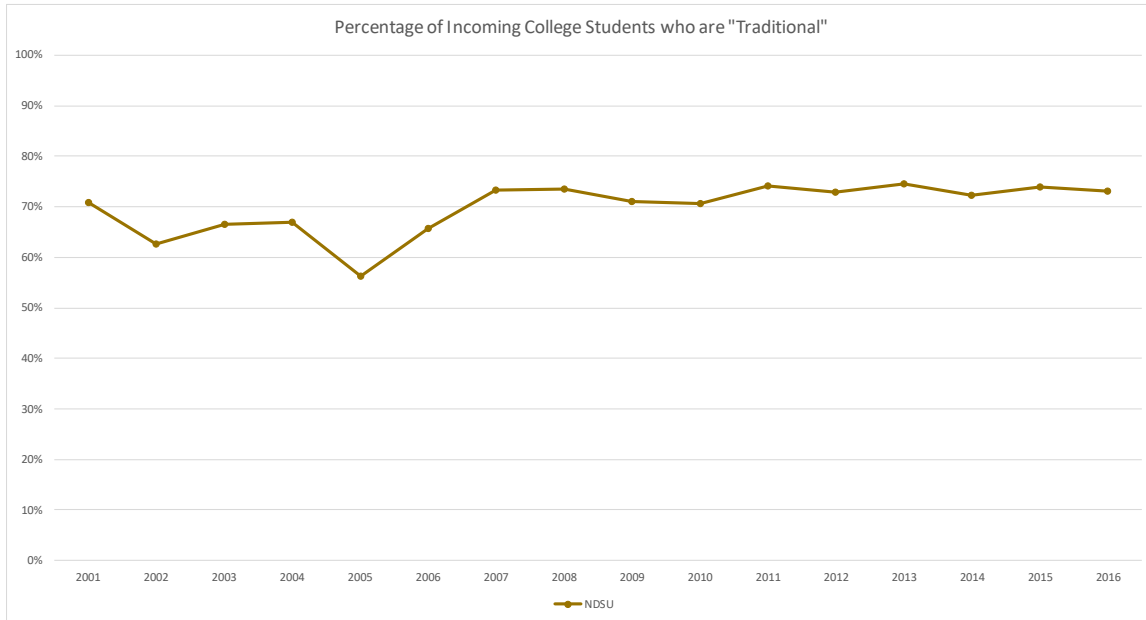


Chart 13: Valley City State University

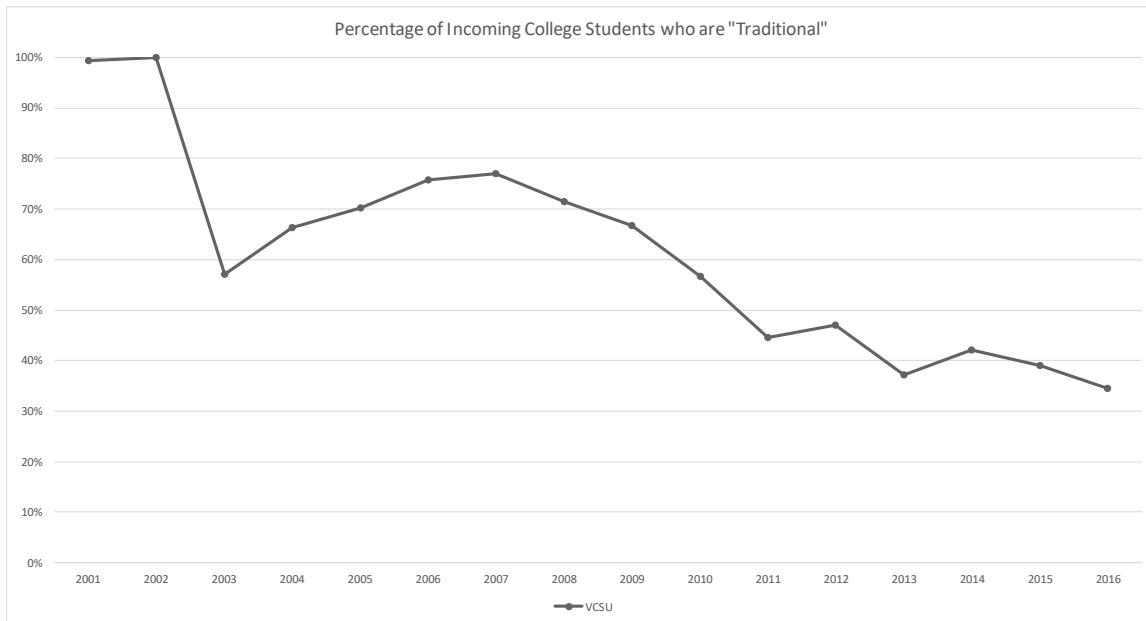


Chart 14: University of North Dakota

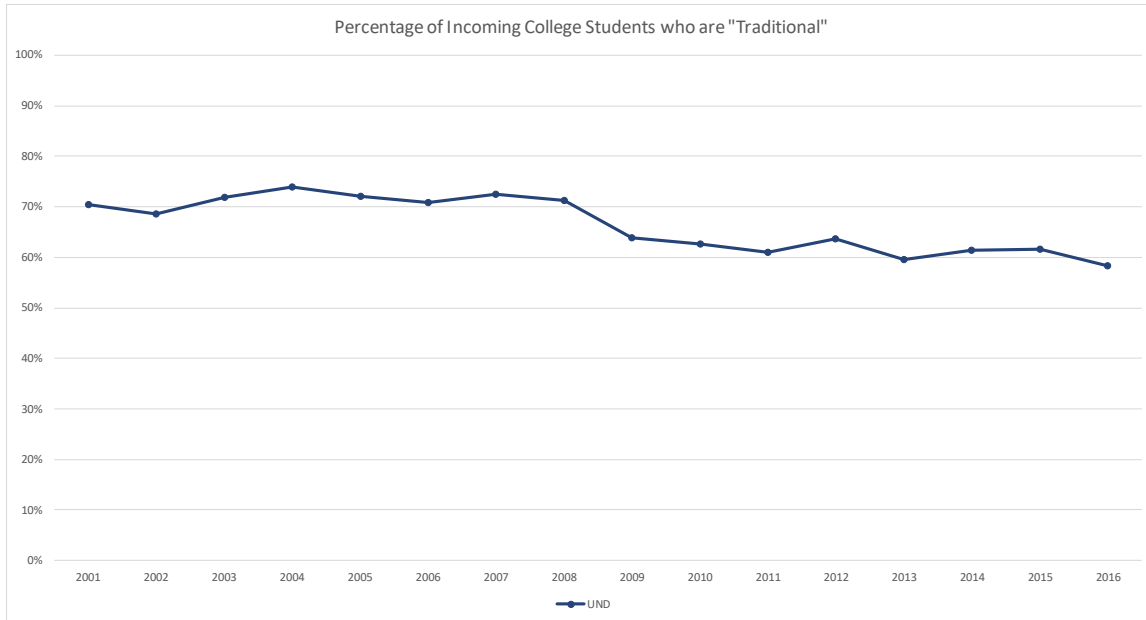
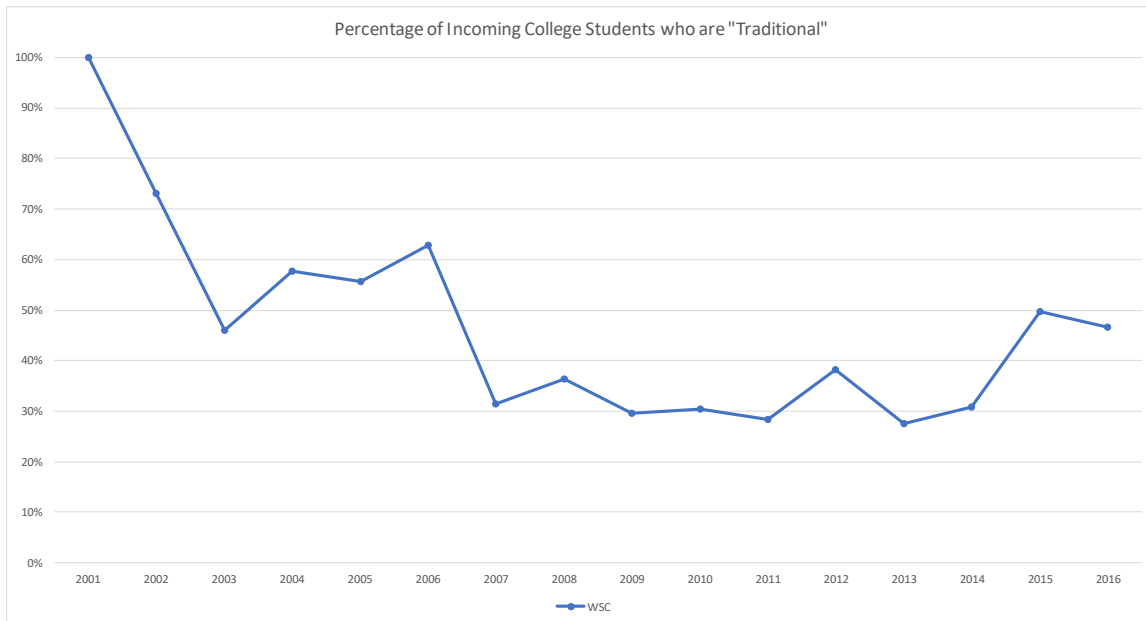


Chart 15: Williston State College



Appendix

Table 2: Percentage of New Students Entering as First Time, Full Time Degree Seeking

Institution	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
BSC	58%	57%	59%	64%	71%	70%	72%	68%	71%	67%	45%	44%	48%	49%	47%	48%
DCB	94%	74%	26%	35%	34%	28%	68%	34%	30%	34%	37%	35%	42%	39%	41%	33%
LRSC	24%	23%	17%	17%	21%	19%	18%	18%	58%	18%	14%	19%	17%	17%	18%	17%
NDSCS	89%	100%	69%	90%	27%	75%	27%	73%	77%	32%	75%	49%	43%	44%	41%	46%
WSC	100%	73%	46%	58%	56%	63%	31%	36%	30%	30%	28%	38%	27%	31%	50%	47%
DSU	64%	100%	61%	57%	57%	93%	34%		44%	49%		37%	40%	34%	42%	35%
MaSU	92%	18%	41%	59%	50%	53%	45%	56%	31%	29%	35%	34%	29%	34%	28%	27%
MISU	49%	86%	78%	80%	74%	96%	19%	57%	39%	40%	40%	33%	33%	31%	34%	29%
VCSU	99%	100%	57%	66%	70%	76%	77%	71%	67%	57%	44%	47%	37%	42%	39%	34%
NDSU	71%	63%	67%	67%	56%	66%	73%	73%	71%	71%	74%	73%	75%	72%	74%	73%
UND	71%	69%	72%	74%	72%	71%	73%	71%	64%	63%	61%	64%	59%	61%	62%	58%
NDUS	67%	63%	60%	65%	53%	65%	49%	64%	60%	52%	53%	52%	51%	51%	52%	50%
Two Year	64%	60%	47%	55%	38%	54%	37%	50%	59%	38%	40%	39%	38%	38%	39%	40%
Regional	62%	63%	62%	66%	63%	83%	28%	60%	41%	43%	40%	36%	34%	34%	35%	31%
Research	71%	66%	69%	70%	63%	68%	73%	73%	68%	67%	67%	68%	67%	67%	68%	66%
Four Year	68%	65%	68%	69%	63%	71%	55%	71%	60%	60%	61%	60%	58%	58%	59%	56%

Table 3: Three Year Means for Percentage of New Students Entering as First Time, Full Time Degree Seeking

Institution	2001-2002-2003	2015-2016-2017
	Average	Average
BSC	58%	48%
DCB	65%	38%
LRSC	21%	17%
NDSCS	86%	44%
WSC	73%	42%
DSU	75%	37%
MaSU	50%	30%
MiSU	71%	31%
VCSU	86%	38%
NDSU	67%	73%
UND	70%	60%
NDUS	64%	51%
Two Year	57%	39%
Regional	62%	33%
Research	69%	67%
Four Year	67%	58%

Note: Mean Percentages calculated based on summation of actual student counts for three-year periods.