



Introduction

The first edition of the *SREB Fact Book on Higher Education* was distributed in 1956. That edition featured data on enrollment and revenues by state. Since then, the *Fact Book* has expanded to include selected data on society, in general, that affect participation in postsecondary education such as demographics, K-12 enrollment and high school graduation rates as well as data such as, state and local government expenditures, that show changes in support for postsecondary education. The *Fact Book* also reports college enrollment data disaggregated by characteristics such as age, sex and race/ethnicity so that states can determine if some groups are underrepresented when compared with the overall population. Student success performance metrics such as degrees awarded and retention, progression and graduation rates are also featured in the *Fact Book*. In addition, data that are often used to determine college affordability, such as cost of attendance, tuition and fees and student financial aid and debt, are included. Finally, data on topics ranging from dual enrollment and e-learning to faculty salaries and state funding for higher education are also found in the *Fact Book*.

Data collected in the SREB-State Data Exchange survey serves as the foundation for the *Fact Book*.

The *Fact Book* consists of six chapters covering topics related to postsecondary education. The first chapter on **population and economics** provides context for the remaining chapters. This chapter includes data such as poverty rates and per capita income that affect education outcomes. The chapters that follow cover student **participation** in postsecondary programs, **completion** of degrees from certificates and associate degrees to graduate and professional degrees, the **affordability** of college coupled with the effect of rising costs on families, the changes in postsecondary staffing including **faculty**, and the factors that influence institutional **budgets and expenditures**.

These chapters provide data and analysis policymakers need to answer key questions. Without current, high-quality data and timely comparisons across states and regions, policymakers are left without insights they need to answer key questions and make important, often critical, decisions. The *Fact Book* provides data to help answer these questions, including the ones that follow.

How have states changed over time with respect to student success, college affordability and meeting workforce demands?

- How is education attainment changing in a state? Is the state on track to meet education attainment goals?
- Are the percentages of residents who have graduated from high school, college and graduate school adequate to meet workforce demand?
- How has a state changed with respect to personal income levels, per capita wealth, employment growth and unemployment rates?
- Are there race/ethnicity gaps with respect to high school graduation, college enrollment and college completion?

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- What percentage of students persist and progress through college?
 - How long does it take students to complete bachelor's degrees? Do they accumulate the appropriate number of credit hours for the degree?
 - How many degrees were awarded in high-demand fields of study?

Are states making postsecondary education affordable for their residents?

- Are the costs to attend universities, colleges, and technical colleges or institutes in line with students' and families' ability to pay?
- Are states providing adequate amounts and appropriate types of student financial aid?
- What percentage of graduates have student debt, and what is the average amount of debt per graduate?

How has state support for postsecondary education changed over time?

- Is higher education revenue keeping pace with inflation and changes in enrollment?
- How do state and local budgets fund education in comparison to other major priorities? Are these budgets responding appropriately to changing needs for services?
- How has spending by postsecondary institutions changed with respect to instruction, research, public service, academic and administrative support, and student scholarships?

Although the amount of postsecondary education data collected continues to increase, the quality of those data has not necessarily increased. We encourage you to contact the SREB-State Data Exchange agencies in Appendix B for state-specific context on these data.

As always, SREB welcomes feedback on the *Fact Book*. For those who are interested in doing their own analysis, the SREB Data Services website at www.sreb.org/fact-book-ed-data provides access to much of the data used to create the tables and graphs in the *Fact Book*.