

INSIDE HIGHER ED

The Biggest Movers Online

Federal data show the colleges and universities with the most students enrolled online in 2018 -- and which institutions grew and shrank from the year before.

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The Education Department's annual release of data about postsecondary enrollments is a font of information -- and we've already mined it for [an article](#) about the continuing (but slowing) rise in online enrollments in 2018. The proportion of all enrolled college students who took at least one online class continued to rise, edging up to 34.7 percent in fall 2018 from 33.1 percent the previous year. The rate of increase appears to be slowing ever so slightly, although online education remains the main driver of growth in postsecondary enrollments.

Other organizations have published their own analyses of the federal data in recent days, including the [Center for Distance Education Research on Monday](#).

We're going back to the well today, with a look at the 100 colleges and universities that had the most students who took at least one online course in fall 2018 -- and which added or shed students from the previous fall.

The names at the top of the table below will provide few surprises -- they are dominated by the several high-profile private nonprofit and for-profit universities that have led the list for most of this decade, though in slightly different order. [Western Governors University](#)'s aggressive expansion has catapulted it to the top. It is followed by Southern New Hampshire University, another fast grower (15.2 percent year-over-year growth and, like WGU, growing by nearly 73 percent over three years).

Southern New Hampshire and Western Governors were early movers among nonprofit universities to challenge the for-profit colleges that had largely captured the online market for adult learners in the 1990s and 2000s.

Meanwhile, the continued contraction of one of those for-profit institutions, the University of Phoenix -- which long outpaced other postsecondary institutions in online enrollments -- dropped it to third on the list. ([In 2015](#), Phoenix's enrollment of 162,003 more than doubled the next-largest online institution, Liberty University, at 72,519.)

The list also shows significant growth by several large public universities in recent years, with institutions like [Arizona State University](#) (nearly doubling online enrollments since 2015), [Florida International University](#) (up 10 percent from 2017, and 44 percent since 2015), the [Lone Star College](#) system and the University of Texas at Arlington ascendant. Numerous other flagship institutions and public university systems are [planning major investments in online learning](#), hoping to join the ranks of major national players.

Among the other notable shifts documented in the table below, Purdue University Global (formerly Kaplan University) suffered a decline in its transition from for-profit to nonprofit, as has Ashford University.

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, National Center for Education Statistics

https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2019/12/17/colleges-and-universities-most-online-students-2018?utm_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm_campaign=7a6385859f-DNU_2019_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fbc04421-7a6385859f-198467257&mc_cid=7a6385859f&mc_eid=0c2028f1a2