FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 15, 2020

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Survey of Private, Nonprofit Colleges and Universities
Shows 2% Drop in Total Fall Enrollment

Enrollment decline more pronounced among Pell Grant recipients (8% drop)

WASHINGTON, DC – The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
(NAICU) released the results of a national enrollment survey of 292 private, nonprofit colleges and
universities showing the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on campuses across the country.

According to the survey, the sector experienced a 2% drop in total enrollment between the fall of 2019
and 2020, including a nearly 8% decrease among students who receive federal Pell Grant awards.

“College and university leaders have been remarkably resilient and creative in how they’ve
responded to both the serious health implications the virus has imposed on campus and the need to
adapt to continue educating their students in a safe environment,” said NAICU President Barbara
K. Mistick, D.M. “However, the data clearly demonstrate the significant impact the pandemic is
having on students and families, especially those who are low-income. Like other areas of the
economy, this pandemic has hit lower-income families especially hard and higher education is no
exception.”

Forty-three percent of private, nonprofit colleges and universities reported either no change or an
increase in their 2020 fall enrollment compared to last year, while 57% reported a decrease in
fall enrollment.

“Presidents in both the private and public sectors of higher education have had to make difficult
personnel, financial, and programmatic decisions to ensure the stability of their campus
communities,” said Mistick. “Unfortunately, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, these
decisions have included laying off or furloughing nearly 340,000 staff and faculty between
February and August. They also include making investments in Personal Protective Equipment
and other health and safety equipment, technology and security upgrades, and much more.”

Detailed Findings
NOTE: These data are weighted by institution type and reflect the differences in enrollment
between fall 2019 and fall 2020.

- Total enrollment in the private, nonprofit higher education sector is down 2.4%
  - Undergraduate enrollment is down 4%
Graduate enrollment increased 1.3%
- Full-time enrollment is down 2.5%
- Part-time enrollment is down 2%
- 42.9% of institutions report no change or an increase in enrollment
- 57.1% of institutions report a decrease in enrollment
- The median change in enrollment is -2.5% overall, with baccalaureate colleges having the largest typical decrease (-3.7%), followed by master’s colleges and universities (-3%), and doctoral universities (-1.9%)
- The median change in undergraduate enrollment across all types of institutions is -3.7%, but the median change in graduate enrollment is +1%

Method of Instruction
Undergraduate Students
- 72.8% of institutions are using a mix of in-person and remote learning to teach undergraduates this fall
- 12% are exclusively in-person
- 15.2% are exclusively online

Graduate Students
- 66.9% of institutions are using a mixed approach
- 4.7% are exclusively in-person
- 28.4% are exclusively online

Methodology
Between September 10, 2020 and October 6, 2020 NAICU surveyed 956 private, nonprofit colleges and universities. A total of 292 institutions submitted usable data, resulting in a 30.5% response rate. The sample was stratified by Carnegie classification types, including doctoral, master’s, baccalaureate, and specialized institutions. Weights were assigned to respondent institutions to reflect the universe of private, nonprofit colleges and universities. Enrollment definitions are identical to those used in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) by the National Center for Education Statistics. Data on Pell Grant recipients are from institutional research or financial aid offices.

NAICU serves as the unified national voice of independent higher education and reflects the diversity of private, nonprofit higher education in the U.S. Our member institutions include major research universities, faith-based colleges, historically black colleges and universities, minority-serving institutions, art and design colleges, traditional liberal arts and science institutions, women’s colleges, two-year colleges, and schools of law, medicine, engineering, business, and other professions. With more than 5 million students attending 1,700 independent colleges and universities in all 50 states, and more than 1 million employees, the private sector of American higher education has a dramatic impact on our nation’s larger public interests.

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