

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

THE WORK FORCE

Colleges Have Shed a Tenth of Their Employees Since the Pandemic Began

By *Dan Bauman*

NOVEMBER 10, 2020



LISA MCLEOD

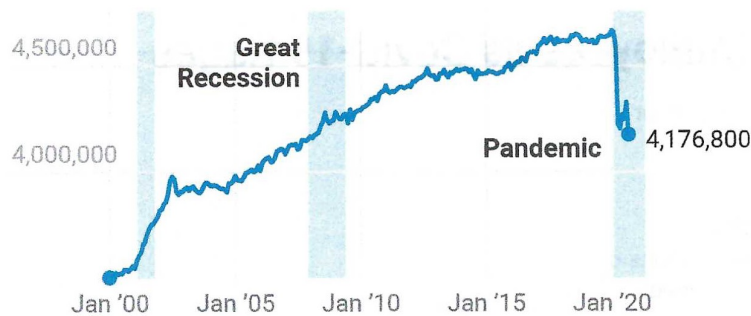
Federal data show an unprecedented contraction in the higher-education work force this year. At Guilford College a recent display of empty chairs and benches illustrated campus job cuts.

September, the traditional start of the fall semester, saw the [continuation](#) of historic job losses at America's colleges just as they sought some return to normalcy amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Preliminary estimates suggest that a net 152,000 fewer workers were employed by America's private (nonprofit and for-profit) and state-controlled institutions of higher education in September, compared with August, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which calculates industry-specific employee figures. The net number of workers who left the industry from February to September now sits at around 484,000.

A Closer Look at the Higher-Ed Work Force Since 2000

Estimated number of workers employed by institutions of higher education



Shaded periods indicate recessions. Values are seasonally adjusted. September estimates are preliminary. Additional technical information about The Chronicle's analysis can be found here: <https://bit.ly/ChronicleLaborData>.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Put another way, higher education has shed at least a tenth of the labor force it had before the start of the pandemic.

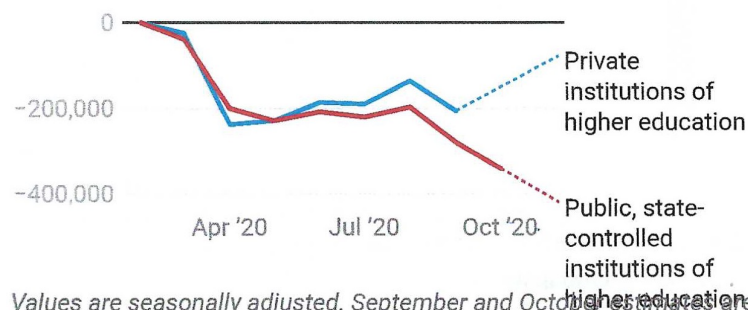
In practice, some of those work-force reductions have meant the elimination or cutting back of any number of services at colleges across the country. Certain [degree offerings](#) and [sports programs](#) are likely to be gone for good on some campuses, even after a Covid-19 vaccine is approved, manufactured, and widely distributed. Meanwhile, other classes of employees [have seen](#) their workloads increase as institutions demand pre-pandemic productivity levels, fewer workers or not.

Terminations are already underway at North Carolina's Guilford College, which announced plans last week to discontinue nearly half of its academic majors and lay off 16 tenured professors, according to the [Greensboro News &](#)

Record. West Virginia State University also announced last week that it would cut 16 positions.

Colleges Continue to Shed Employees as Covid-19 Rages

Cumulative job losses since February 2020, by sector



Values are seasonally adjusted. September and October 2020 data are preliminary. Additional technical information about The Chronicle's analysis can be found here: <https://bit.ly/ChronicleLaborData>.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

The Bureau of Labor Statistics data don't account for the many employees who lost their jobs because of the scaled-back business of such companies as those under contract to prepare food and clean facilities on fully operational campuses.

A more-nuanced picture of higher ed's job losses remains out of reach for the time being. But national analyses have found that low-income workers, workers without a college degree, and Black and Hispanic Americans are enduring greater economic hardship than the rest of the population is.

A Washington Post analysis in September found job losses from the pandemic had "overwhelmingly affected low-wage, minority workers most."

"Black women, Black men, and mothers of school-age children are taking the

longest time to regain their employment,” the *Post* concluded.

And at the Pew Research Center, analysts [found](#) that, among workers laid off due to the coronavirus, lower-income adults were less likely to have found new jobs than were middle- and upper-income adults.

We welcome your thoughts and questions about this article. Please [email the editors](#) or [submit a letter](#) for publication.

DATA

THE WORK FORCE

ADMINISTRATION



Dan Bauman

Dan Bauman is a reporter who investigates and writes about all things data in higher education. Tweet him at [@danbauman77](#), or email him at dan.bauman@chronicle.com.

RECOMMENDED READING
