EDUCATION

Cincinnati State enrollment is up and still growing. What's driving the growth?

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Cincinnati State Technical and Community College's enrollment this fall is the highest it's been in a decade, officials said.
Landon Bost/The Enquirer

Cincinnati State Technical and Community College is ready to welcome its largest student body in a decade on Monday. The college is an anomaly among Ohio's 23 community colleges, which are largely seeing declined enrollment since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The college, which has locations in Clifton, Harrison, Evendale and Middletown, had 8,868 students enrolled four days before classes begin. But community colleges tend to see a sharp uptick in enrollments in the day or so before classes start, so Cincinnati State officials anticipate 9,000 or more students to register for the fall.

That would be nearly a 33% increase in first-day fall enrollment since pandemic losses in 2020. Of course, more students typically enroll as the semester goes on and throughout the school year each year.
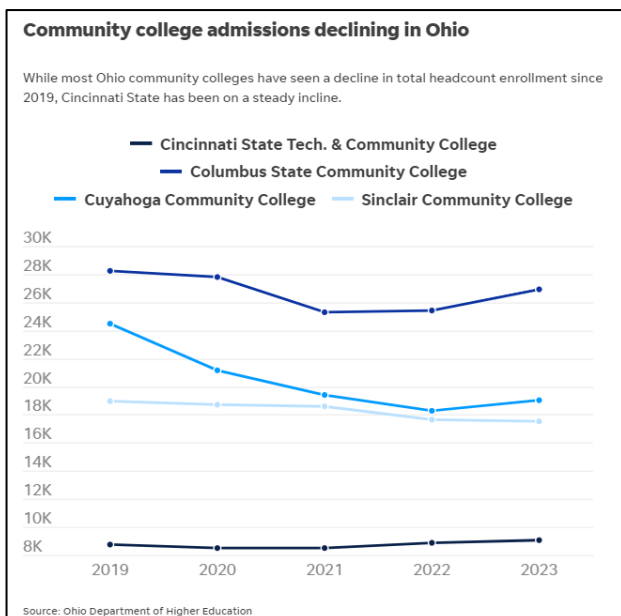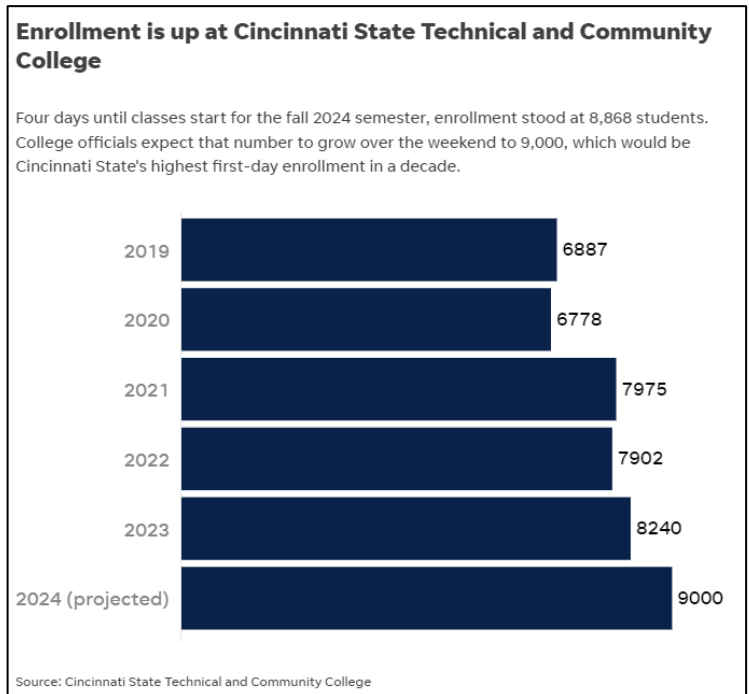
Most community colleges in the state have seen declining enrollment since 2020, and total Ohio community college enrollment is down by about 30,000 students, or 16%, in that time, according to the Ohio Department of Higher Education's data.

Only six of Ohio's 23 community colleges have seen total headcount enrollment growth since 2019:

- Cincinnati State.
- Edison State Community College.
- Marion Technical College.
- Northwest State Community College.
- Rio Grande Community College.
- Washington State Community College.

"We are an open-access institution, which means that we want to make sure that individuals of all different backgrounds can come to our college," Monica Posey, Cincinnati State's president, told The Enquirer on Thursday. "Access involves convenient class schedules, but then also affordability."

The college prides itself on having small classes, affordable tuition and quality faculty to support students of all kinds. There's a healthy mix of recent high school graduates, mature students starting college classes in their 40s or older, people coming back to finish degrees they started decades ago and even current high schoolers taking College Credit Plus classes. College Credit Plus is a program that allows high schoolers to receive college credit before graduating high school.

Enrollment is up at Cincinnati State Technical and Community College

Four days until classes start for the fall 2024 semester, enrollment stood at 8,868 students. College officials expect that number to grow over the weekend to 9,000, which would be Cincinnati State's highest first-day enrollment in a decade.

Year	Enrollment
2019	6887
2020	6778
2021	7975
2022	7902
2023	8240
2024 (projected)	9000

Source: Cincinnati State Technical and Community College

For the fall semester, Cincinnati State students can register for classes at $188.64 per credit hour. For full-time students, that's between $5,000 and $6,000 for the year, less than half what it costs to attend local four-year universities like University of Cincinnati.

"People are recognizing the value. They're concerned about costs and how you can get an education that's affordable but then also will lead to great employment," Posey said. "The other value that individuals are recognizing more is the concept of starting at a community college, two years at Cincinnati State at a low tuition, but then transferring on for the bachelor's at another institution going into their junior year."

Community college admissions declining in Ohio

While most Ohio community colleges have seen a decline in total headcount enrollment since 2019, Cincinnati State has been on a steady incline.

Cincinnati State Tech. & Community College
Columbus State Community College
Cuyahoga Community College   Sinclair Community College

Source: Ohio Department of Higher Education

Bachelor's degrees at community college and planning for more growth ahead

But Cincinnati State is also expanding its own bachelor's degree programs. The college began offering a Bachelor of Science in nursing last fall, after the Ohio Department of Higher Education announced two-year institutions could add applied bachelor's degree programs in fields with strong workforce needs starting in 2018. Cincinnati State also now offers bachelor's degrees in culinary and food science and land surveying.

The bachelor's in nursing is most successful, Posey said, as the program has 55 students enrolled this fall. Because of that growth, and thanks to a $1.5 million grant from Hamilton County, the college is expanding opportunities for nursing students through a new practical nursing lab, more instructors and scholarships.

The college is also seeing more interest in certificate programs, Posey said.

Cincinnati State programs grow since last fall

The college is expecting 9,000 students or more this fall, more than 9% higher than last year. Below are some of Cincinnati State's fastest growing programs.

Health and Safety enrollment up 28%
The college's health and public safety division is its largest division. There are 2,286 students enrolled so far this fall, up 28% from last year.

Culinary Arts enrollment up 13%
The Midwest Culinary Institute's pastry and culinary arts programs are up to 190 students, showing 13% growth from last year.

Associate of Science degree up 23%
Students enrolled to get an associate's degree in science, which is the first two years of a STEM degree at an Ohio university, is up 23% from last year.

Source: Cincinnati State Technical and Community College

And Cincinnati State's aviation maintenance technology program has more than doubled in size over the last four years, with 200 students registered for classes in the fall. This is good news for a field with high workforce needs, and Cincinnati State officials said a growing number of women are pursuing aviation, too.

What's next? Posey said the college is now turning its attention to supporting workforce needs in construction, cybersecurity and early childhood education. The college could easily serve up to 13,000, she said, in the next few years. That's why the institution is investing in renovation projects and new lab spaces.

"And also space for students to be on campus, and to collaborate and build relationships with other students," Posey said.

Starting this fall, Cincinnati State is supporting a program for students dealing with all types of mental health conditions. It's free, Posey said, and operates on a drop-in basis.

Students who are veterans, those who deal with gambling addiction, students who have experienced trauma and others with mental health needs will be able to attend groups and get support on campus.

We're doing much more to help students," Posey said. "Whatever type of personal needs they might have."