



**BLOG POST · NOVEMBER 19, 2025**

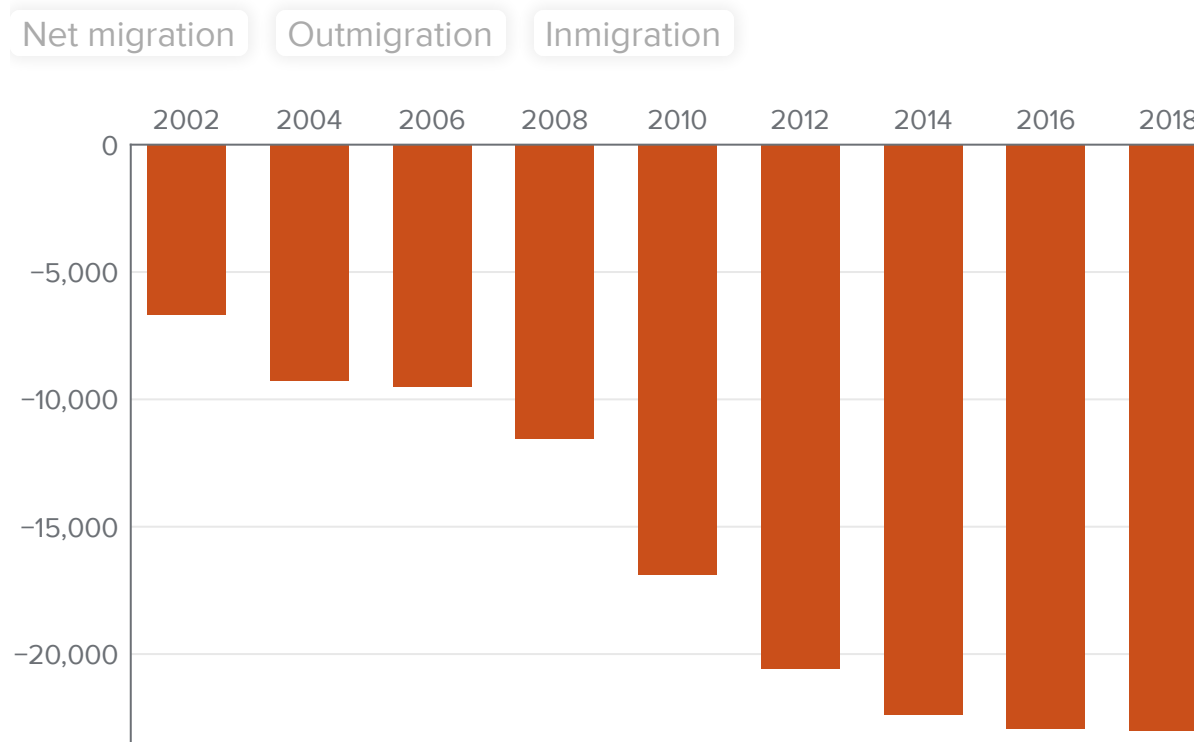
# More California Students Are Attending College Elsewhere

Charlie Wigul and Hans Johnson

California is home to the largest higher education system in the United States and has some of the nation’s most affordable and highest-ranked public universities. So it may come as a surprise that large numbers of recent high school graduates are leaving the state to attend college. In fact, that number has nearly quadrupled over the last twenty years. Where are students going—and how do these other schools stack up against California’s public systems?

Net losses of California’s college-bound high school graduates have grown dramatically, reaching almost 24,000 students in 2022—more than those enrolling in UCLA, UC Berkeley, Stanford, USC, Cal Poly SLO, and San Diego State combined. The share leaving the state has reached 15%—up from 8.5% in 2002. Net losses have increased over time to both private and public institutions, with a slight majority (54%) of students headed to out-of-state public schools.

### First-year undergraduate students are leaving California in growing numbers



**SOURCE:** Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)  
**NOTES:** Migration figures represent first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who graduated from high school in the past 12 months. Data is for all degree-granting institutions in the US.  
**FROM:** PPIC Blog, November 2025.  
Download image | Embed | Get the data

California’s first-time undergraduates tend to choose schools in a handful of other states. The three most popular destinations in 2022 were Arizona, Oregon, and New York.

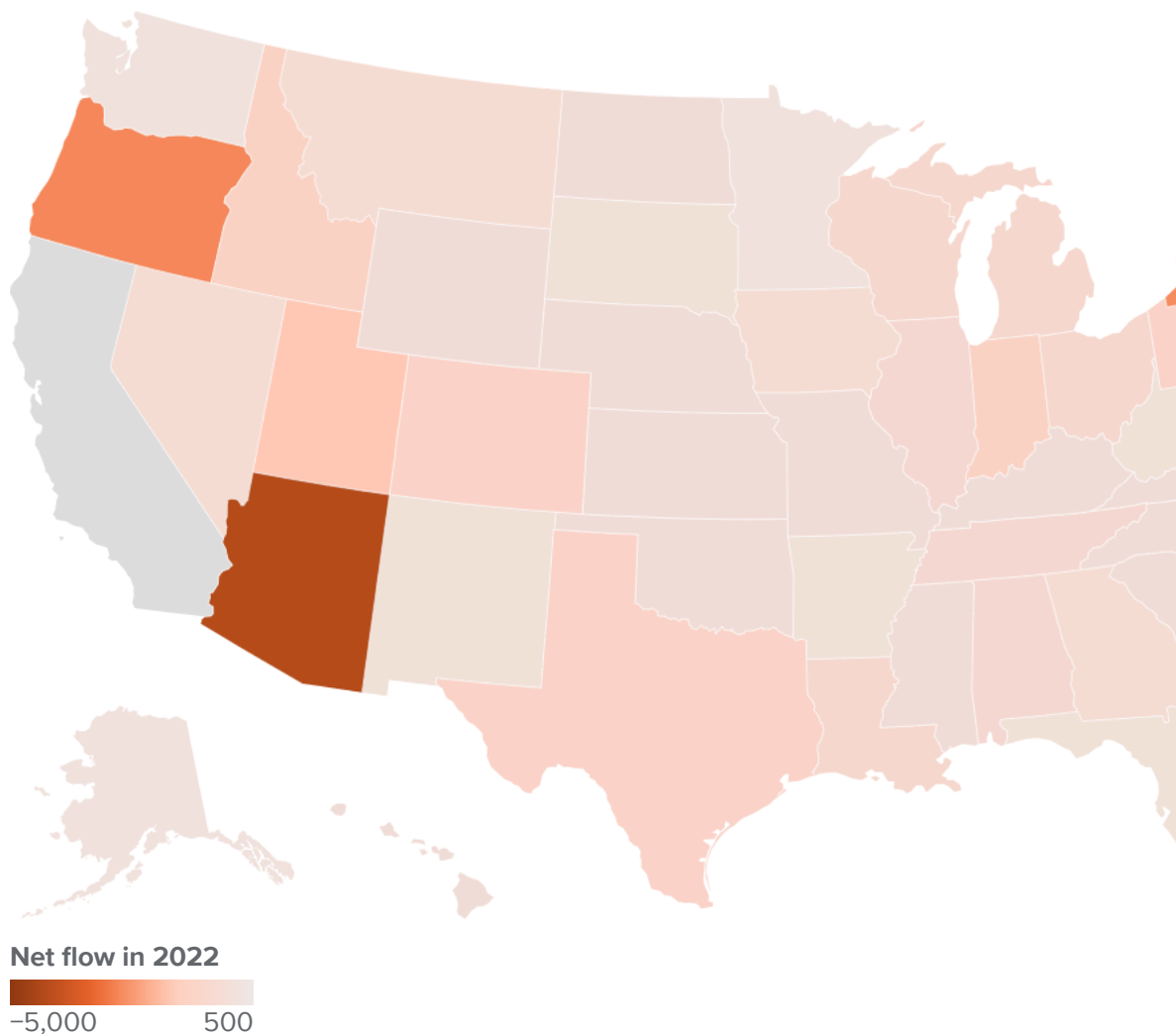
In Arizona, the top choices were Arizona State University (ASU), Grand Canyon University (GCU), and University of Arizona (U of A). These schools are notably less selective than both the UC and CSU systems. However, ASU and U of A have graduation rates comparable to CSU; graduation

rates at GCU are much lower. GCU is significantly cheaper than its counterparts, with a majority of its undergraduate students enrolled fully online.

In Oregon, the University of Oregon (U of O) was the primary draw. This public university is less selective than both UC and CSU but has a higher graduation rate than CSU—by 9 percentage points in 2022. U of O is markedly more expensive for Californians, with tuition and fees costing more than five times as much as the average CSU.

Unlike Arizona and Oregon, New York is home to a wide array of small, generally private liberal arts schools, which drew the majority of California undergraduates. These schools have similar acceptance and graduation rates to UCs, but are more expensive on average.

### California is losing first-time undergraduate students to a select few states



**SOURCE:** Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)  
**NOTES:** Net flow represents first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who graduated from high school in the past 12 months. Data is for all degree-granting institutions in the US.  
**FROM:** PPIC Blog, November 2025.  
[Download image](#) [Embed](#) [Get the data](#)

Most students leaving California are targeting institutions that fall between UC and CSU in terms of student outcomes—such as graduation rates—but aren’t necessarily more prestigious than CSU. Overall, almost 3 out of 4 new undergraduates going out of state attended institutions with lower graduation rates than the UC system, while 4 in 5 enrolled at institutions with higher graduation rates than CSU. The vast majority of these students are at colleges that are less selective than UC, and around half are at colleges that are more selective than CSU.

More research is needed on the exact factors driving recent high school graduates out of state, but understanding where students are going and what the trends are over time is critical to making improvements. Ensuring that California’s high school students have full knowledge of the advantages of staying in state for college—for example, access to Cal Grants—could help. Direct admissions programs, such as [a CSU pilot program](#) developed with Riverside County, also hold promise. Working to reduce the out-of-state flow of California’s undergraduates should be a high priority—and a key part of building a highly educated, highly skilled workforce for years to come.

**TOPICS**

- Affordability
- Cal Grants
- California State University
- Completion
- Higher Education
- Population
- tuition
- University of California