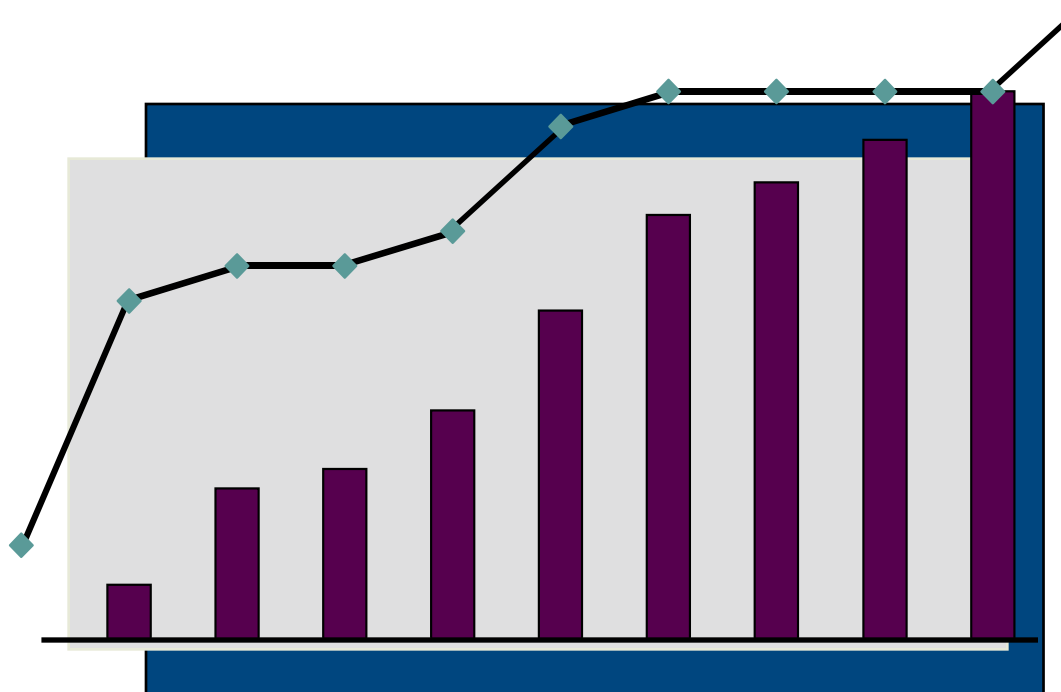


# A Report on a Survey of Osteopathic Medical School Growth, 2007-08

Thomas Levitan, MEd  
Vice President for Research and Application Services



**aacom**

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF  
COLLEGES OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE

# A Report on a Survey of Osteopathic Medical School Growth, 2007-08

Thomas Levitan, MEd  
Vice President for Research and Application Services  
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine

The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) surveyed its 25 member colleges to determine plans for class size growth through the 2012-13 academic year. AACOM worked with the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) to mirror a growth plan survey of the U.S. allopathic medical schools, thereby capturing a more complete picture of medical school growth over the next five years. The survey updates and supplements a similar survey administered in 2006-07 and published in May 2007.

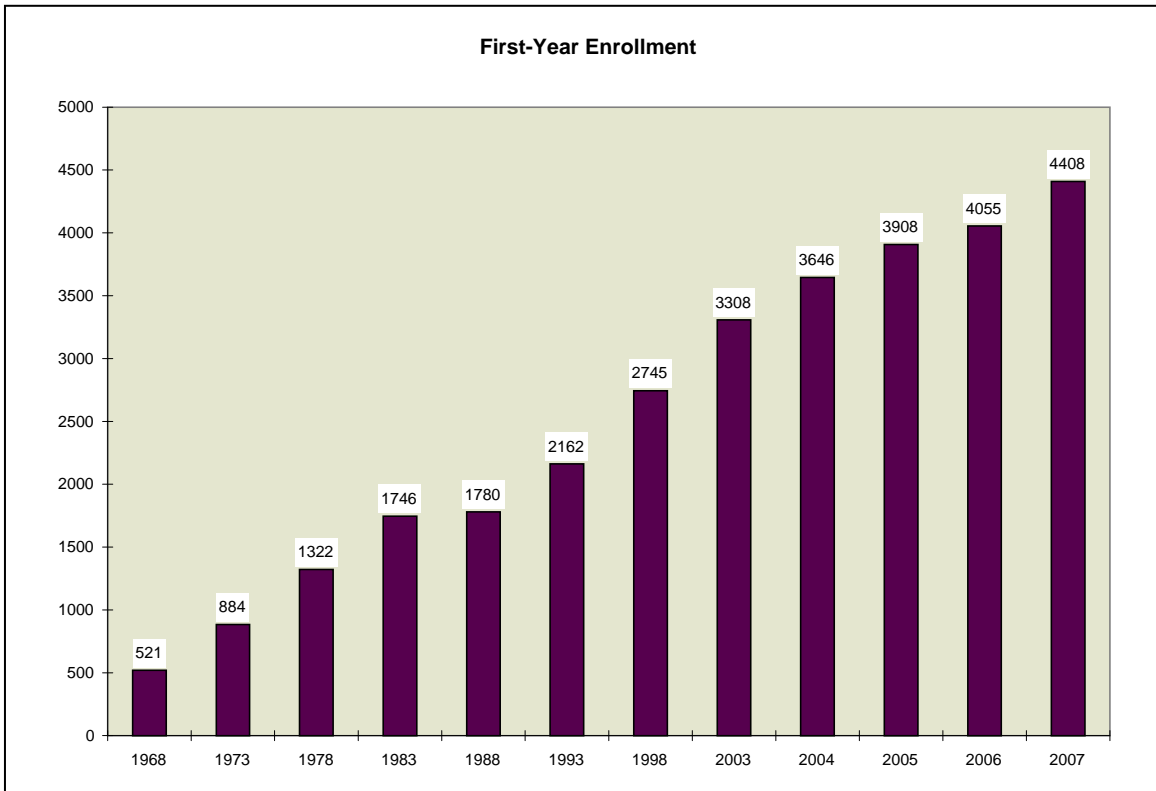
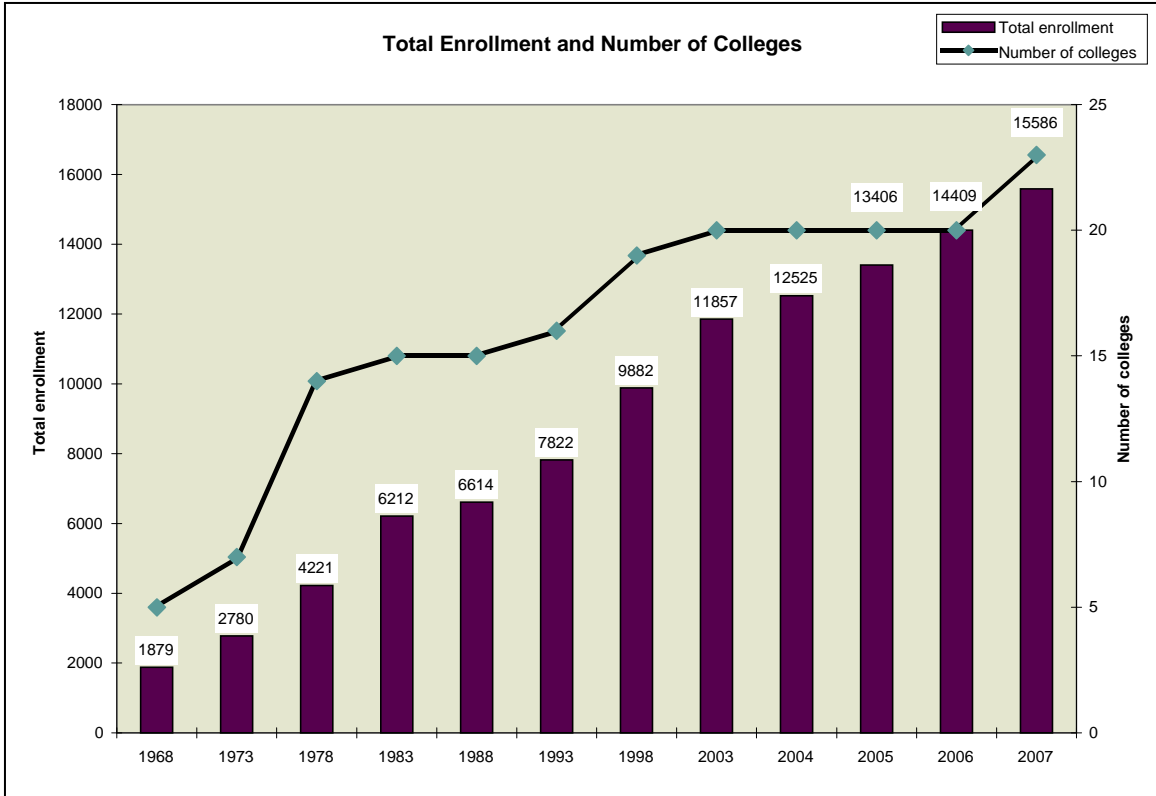
The survey was distributed to the deans (or their designees) of the 25 AACOM member colleges in October 2007. The survey was sent by e-mail to each college as a Microsoft Word document and in Adobe Acrobat format. For reference, surveys distributed to deans included some of their responses from the prior year's administration. Respondents were asked to return the survey by e-mail or fax. Several follow-up requests were made to those colleges that had not responded after two weeks, one month, and six weeks. Responses were received from 24 of the 25 colleges and included data for the three branch campuses. For two of the branch campuses, the responses came from the dean of the main campus; for one branch campus, the response came from the associate dean for the branch campus. One college did not respond to the survey – for this college, growth data from the 2006-07 survey were applied.

## Recent Enrollment History

Over the last 40 years, total enrollment in the nation's colleges of osteopathic medicine has increased more than eightfold, from 1,879 in academic year 1968-69 to 15,586 in academic year 2007-08. Over the same time period, first-year enrollment has increased from 521 to 4,408.<sup>1</sup> The number of osteopathic college graduates increased from 427 in 1969 to a projected 3,100 in 2007 (final data for 2007 graduates have not yet been received by AACOM), a rate of increase similar to that of enrollment. (With three new colleges accepting their first classes in 2007, there will be a four-year lag before the rate of increase in graduates catches up with the rate of increase in enrollment.)

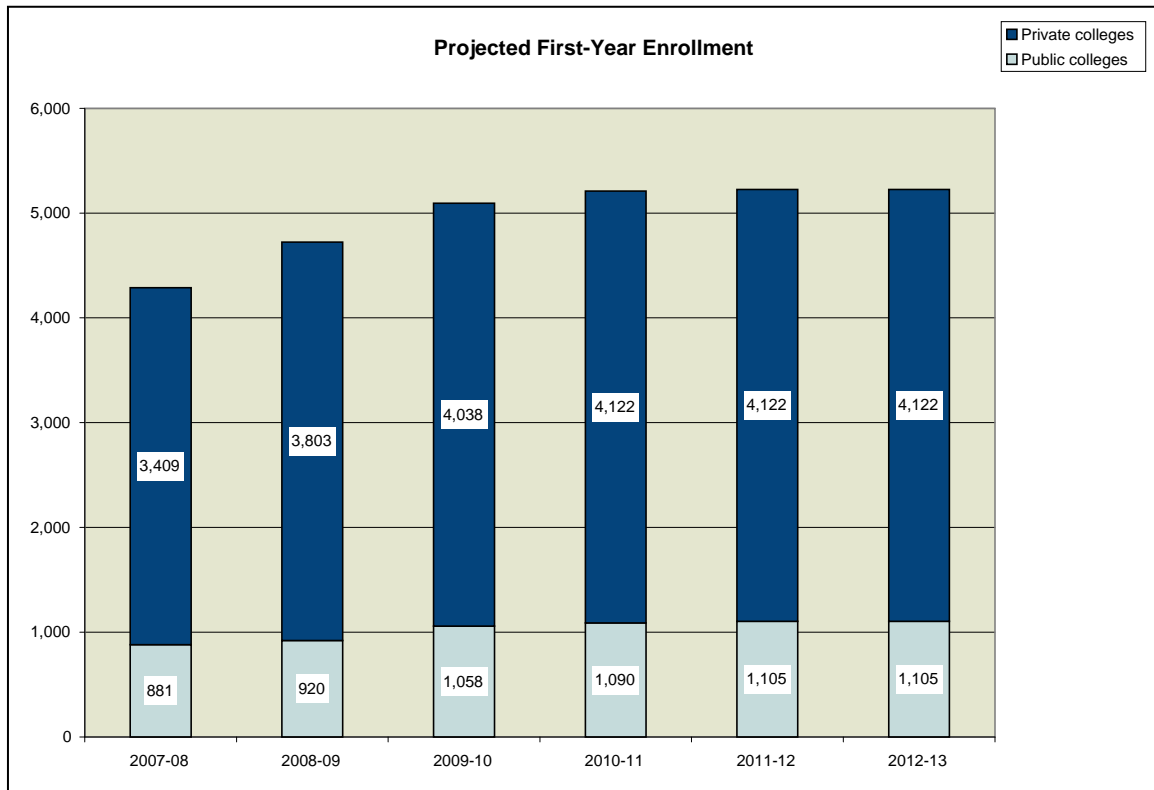
---

<sup>1</sup> Historical first-year enrollment reported here is actual enrollment in first-year classes and may include students who are on extended programs or repeating academic years for various reasons. These first-year enrollment figures may also include a variation of up to 8 percent over the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation (COCA)-approved class sizes, as allowed by accreditation standards. Enrollment *projections* are based on COCA-approved class sizes and college proposals to COCA for class size increases which may or may not be approved and do not include these variations.



## The Future

For academic year 2007-2008, the deans report COCA-approved first-year class sizes totaling 4,290 – 881 in public colleges and 3,409 in private colleges. This first-year enrollment is projected to climb to 5,227 in academic year 2012-2013, an increase of 22 percent. Private college enrollment is projected to increase to 4,122 (a 21 percent increase) and enrollment in public colleges is projected to increase to 1,105 (a 25 percent increase). Based on these projections, osteopathic medical schools will graduate approximately 5,020 DOs in 2016, compared with 3,100 in 2007 (based on a historic graduation rate of 96 percent).



Projected first-year enrollment

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Public colleges	881	920	1058	1090	1105	1105
Private colleges	3409	3803	4038	4122	4122	4122
<b>Total</b>	<b>4290</b>	<b>4723</b>	<b>5096</b>	<b>5212</b>	<b>5227</b>	<b>5227</b>

Over five years, five of the six public colleges report plans to grow the number of first-year students from 21 percent to 50 percent. Among the private colleges, eight of 19 plan growth ranging from 2 percent to 66 percent (these figures include projected growth of existing branch campuses).

Almost half of the projected total increase in first-year classes will occur in the 2008-09 academic year, when two new colleges—Pacific Northwest University of the Health Sciences College of Osteopathic Medicine and Rocky Vista University College of

Osteopathic Medicine—enroll their first classes of 70 and 150, respectively, and several other colleges have planned class size increases ranging from 4 percent to 66 percent (subject to COCA approval). And, while the survey queried growth projections for the next five years, very little growth was projected for the fourth year and none was projected for the fifth year. The planning horizon may not extend that far.

### **Activities supporting growth and expansion**

Respondents were asked to indicate activities in which they had engaged in support of growth and expansion. The most commonly reported activities were:

- Conducted assessments of financial needs and/or implications of expansion (reported by 16 respondents);
- Conducted an assessment of the depth and quality of the applicant pool (reported by 14 respondents);
- Added new clinical training sites (reported by 15 respondents);
- Hired new faculty (reported by 11 respondents); and
- Constructed new teaching space and/or reconfigured existing teaching space (reported by 11 respondents).

Only two respondents reported using consultants to study expansion and only three respondents reported seeking/obtaining state funding for expansion (all public colleges).

### **Opportunities and challenges**

Respondents were asked questions about how their colleges plan to manage growth. Of the 13 colleges reporting planned growth:

- All 13 either definitely or probably will increase clinical affiliations;
- Ten plan to definitely or probably expand their existing campuses; and
- Only four will either definitely or probably develop new regional campuses.

Asked whether growth would be targeted to specific populations, six of the 13 colleges planning growth report that the growth is targeted. Only one college specifically notes targeting enrollment increases on the basis of diversity of economic status and race/ethnicity in its growth plan; the other five indicate enrollment targets based on demographic and geographic factors (but these goals were based on meeting the needs of underserved populations – one urban underserved and four rural underserved).

Respondents also were asked about barriers to growth. The availability of clinical training sites is an issue of concern for deans of colleges, whether or not they are planning to grow. Of the 13 colleges reporting plans for growth, nine indicate that a possible shortage of clinical training sites is a cause for concern. Of the 12 colleges that are not planning for growth, six noted concern about a possible shortage of clinical training sites. Comments on this topic include:

- “Competition for rotations (despite a LARGE number of major teaching sites) looms for those places where MD and DO students co-exist. In places where allopathic schools are refusing DO students for rotations, our options are limited. Intrusion of offshore medical schools into our training areas is also occurring with HIGH payments for rotations to preceptors or hospitals. Our current model relies heavily on volunteer faculty who are loyal to our quality manner of education. We

- are concerned that future costs to pay these individuals will usurp strategic plans for other purposes.”<sup>2</sup>
- “With the expansion of old schools and the opening of new schools, there is the potential to overwhelm the availability of clerkships. We should partner with AAMC [AACOM’s MD college counterpart] to conduct an evaluation of capacity of clerkships.”
  - “As the numbers of institutions, both MD and DO, continue to grow their class sizes, and as pressures continue to increase regarding provider productivity, there will be either increased pressure to limit the numbers of students at training facilities or an increased pressure to pay for undergrad clinical education. Furthermore, as GME funding stagnates or decreases, that too will have a negative effect on undergraduate medical education opportunities. This may be especially felt at the primary care physician level.”

- Other concerns and barriers to growth noted by several respondents include:
- Funding for expansion of facilities, growth of faculty, and increased operating expenses of larger classes. Several respondents note that growth cannot be financed solely by increased tuition revenue.
  - Sufficient graduate medical education opportunities in specialties and geographic locations of interest to students.
  - The availability of qualified faculty in both basic and clinical sciences.

### **AACOM services in support of growth**

A set of questions asked respondents to indicate interest in data and programs that AACOM or other others might provide in support of institutional growth plans. Responses are presented in the tables below (listed in order of interest):

<b>Information on (respondents = N)</b>	<b>Very interested</b>	<b>Somewhat interested</b>	<b>Not interested</b>
Data and guidance on national, regional, and/or state physician workforce needs and standards (22)	59.1%	27.3%	13.6%
Curricular innovation (21)	61.9%	23.8%	14.3%
Faculty recruitment (20)	65.0%	20.0%	15.0%
Student recruitment (20)	50.0%	30.0%	20.0%
Costs and financing of medical school expansion (21)	42.9%	23.8%	33.3%
Creating regional/branch campuses (21)	38.1%	9.5%	52.4%

<sup>2</sup> The survey offered the opportunity to respond confidentially so none of the comments are attributed.

<b>AACOM programs (respondents = N)</b>	<b>Very interested</b>	<b>Somewhat interested</b>	<b>Not interested</b>
Publications describing best practices on issues related to enrollment expansion (financial strategies, curricular innovation, student and faculty recruitment) (22)	72.7%	27.3%	0.0%
Virtual interactions (listservs, webcasts, conference calls) of colleges facing similar issues related to enrollment expansion and planning for enrollment expansion (22)	36.4%	54.5%	9.1%
Face-to-face meetings of colleges facing similar issues related to enrollment expansion and planning for enrollment expansion (22)	36.4%	50.0%	13.6%

## Conclusion

A number of studies point to a significant shortage in the number of physicians in the United States over the coming decades. Factors contributing to the shortage include the aging and retirement of the current physician workforce, changes in work patterns of physicians entering the workforce, an aging population that will require more health care, changes in the economics of health care and many other factors. This anticipated shortage is well-documented.<sup>3</sup>

The nation's accredited osteopathic medical colleges are working to address this shortfall by growing class sizes to increase the availability of high-quality medical education to meet the needs of the nation. But there are many challenges and even barriers to growth. Some can be addressed by the colleges, but many of these issues will require participation by the entire osteopathic profession. Increased financial resources, greater numbers of qualified faculty, and high-quality clinical training opportunities all are required to meet the nation's health-care needs.

---

<sup>3</sup> Recent Studies and Reports on Physician Shortages in the U.S. Center for Workforce Studies, Association of American Medical Colleges. August 2007. <http://www.aamc.org/workforce/recentworkforcestudies2007.pdf>. Accessed December 28, 2007.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine  
 5550 Friendship Boulevard, Chevy Chase, MD 20815  
 301-968-4100