

Forecasting College Enrollment Growth using Google Trends

Viktor M. Kiss^{*} and Edgar Maldonado^{**}

*Metropolitan State University of Denver
Computer Information Systems and Business Analytics Department
Colorado, USA*

Abstract: This paper tests whether publicly available Google Trends data improve forecasts of state-level fall college enrollment growth. Using annual data for the 50 U.S. states and Washington, DC from 2004 to 2024, it adds grouped education-related search measures to a baseline model with lagged enrollment growth, state fixed effects, and a linear time trend. Alternative education pathway searches show the strongest signal, but overall forecast gains are negligible, with only trivial changes in RMSE and MAE. Robustness checks excluding COVID years and focusing on the post-2012 period lead to similar conclusions, indicating limited incremental forecasting value for publicly available search data.

Keywords: Enrollment Forecasting, Google Trends, Higher Education, Panel Data, Predictive Modeling

^{*} Corresponding author. Email: vkiss@msudenver.edu; ^{**}Email: emaldon3@msudenver.edu