

North Central’s Student Body During the Great Depression

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The Student Body Prior to 1929

Before the Great Depression, a large part of the student body were Evangelicals. According to an article from the *Chronical* on May 30, 1922, 88% of the students at North Central were members of an Evangelical church. As a predominantly Evangelical school, North Central attracted many Evangelical students from other states, which is why in 1928, nearly 73% of the junior and senior students were from out of state.

**COLLEGE ENROLLMENT
DOES NOT SUFFER FROM
EFFECTS OF DEPRESSION**

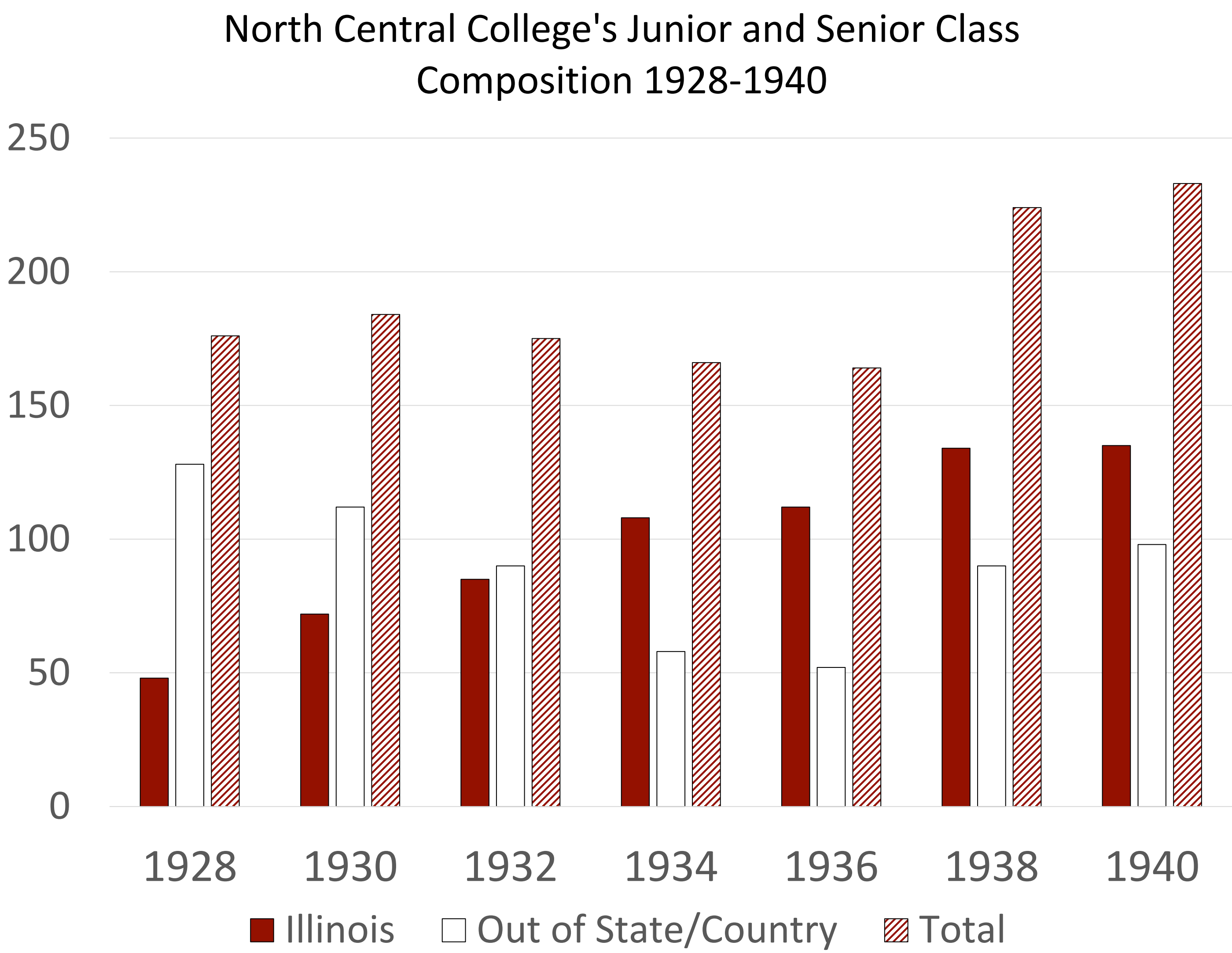
**Transfers from Other Schools Form Un-
usual Percentage in Number
of New Students**

Resilient Student Body

As shown in the graph to the right, the Great Depression didn’t hurt the college’s enrollment as much as it affected other universities. During the depression, many private colleges had to raise tuition by large amounts causing enrollment to drop, this was not the case at North Central. In an edition of the *Chronical* from September 20, 1932, the headline reads “College enrollment does not suffer from effects of depression: Transfers from other schools form unusual percentage in number of new students”. This supports the idea that North Central was able to escape the harsh effects the depression had on many other universities at the time. After 1936, when some argue the depression ended, the junior and senior classes at North Central grew a combined 60 students by 1938.

Locally Grown Students

Many know of the stock market crash of 1929 which led to what is known as the Great Depression. North Central College, like many other universities at the time, was not isolated from the economic crash. Following the economic collapse, North Central’s student body went through a metamorphosis in the 1930s. As seen in the graph below, the student body switched from being less than 30% are residents of Illinois in 1928, to being almost 60% of the student population by 1940. This change in where students were coming from coincided with the decline of Evangelical students at North Central.



An Incomplete Record

Before 1932, North Central’s yearbook, *The Spectrum*, only contained individual photos and hometown of the senior and junior classes. In the 1932 edition, individual photos of the sophomores were added sans hometown, and in 1933 the freshmen were added as well. Due to the absence of their hometown in the yearbook they were excluded from the figures. While these numbers are based on information from the yearbooks, which do not always include the entire student body, I believe the general trends, as seen in the graph, are correct.

Behold! The Automobile!

The rise of personal automobiles led to a new type of student at North Central College, the commuter. Prior to the 1930s students lived in Naperville or on-campus. In the 1930s, cars allowed students from surrounding communities to attend North Central without the need to move on-campus. This certainly aided in the growing number of students at North Central from Illinois.



Sources

NCC *Spectrum*, 1928,1930,1932, 1934, 1936, 1938, 1940.
NCC *Chronical*, “Pres. Rall’s Annual Report” 30 May 1922,
“North Central College Gym and Field House” 4 February
1930, ”College Enrollment Does Not Suffer From Effects of
Depression” 20 September 1932.
Photos found from:
NCC Digital Photos Archive, AV1406.
Additional Source Material:
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College: 150 years. A Promising start.* Naperville, IL: North
Central College, 2011.