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Arkansas Colleges, Universities See Decrease in Headcount, Increase in FTE

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. – The number of students enrolled in Arkansas higher education is down slightly, but full-time equivalent enrollment (FTE) is up from last fall, based on preliminary data released by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) on Monday.

“Final enrollment numbers won’t be available until after the semester ends, and figures released today are based on a ‘snapshot’ of enrollment on the 11th day of classes,” said Shane Broadway, interim director at ADHE. “We’ll be able to further analyze enrollment trends when final data is collected at the end of the semester.”

Some campuses actually saw an increase in both categories, but the average enrollment at the 33 public colleges and universities was down 2.0 percent while FTE was up 0.5 percent when compared to final data from last fall. On the 11th day of classes, enrollment stood at 170,056. A year ago, the final actual enrollment finished at 174,589.

At Mid-South Community College, enrollment dipped slightly (10 students) from Spring 2013, 1,786 to 1,776, but FTE increased from 1,014 to 1,095.1. MSCC’s headcount remains higher than two of its more established sister institutions in the Arkansas Delta, Arkansas Northeastern College (1,425) and East Arkansas Community College (1,388).

“Changes in Pell grants have precipitated most of the enrollment losses, not just in Arkansas but across the country,” said MSCC President Dr. Glen Fenter. “Pell grants are the primary funding source for most community college students. Even though it is counter intuitive, it has become more difficult for poor students who aren’t as academically prepared to get aid. If we don’t educate folks in community colleges, they’re going to end up on our tax-consumption rolls.”

“In our case, we have enjoyed some stability in enrollment. For this particular semester, we’re very fortunate to be where we are. Our recruiting and admissions people have done great work in keeping students enrolled.”

Arkansas State University-Newport, with campuses in Newport, Jonesboro and Marked Tree, tops the state’s regional list with 2,064 students. Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas, with campuses in Helena-West Helena, DeWitt, and Stuttgart, is serving 2,039 students this fall.

Four-year universities saw an average increase in enrollment of 0.4 percent, with an increase in FTE of 3.6 percent. Two-year colleges saw a decrease in enrollment of 6.0 percent and a decrease in FTE of 5.6 percent. Total enrollment at all Arkansas colleges and universities has increased by more than three percent over the last five years or since Fall 2009.

Some universities across Arkansas saw increases in enrollment, including Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, which grew its student body by 4.0 percent, raising total numbers to 11,385. University of Central Arkansas in Conway raised its enrollment by 3.8 percent to 11,534 students. University of Arkansas at Fayetteville saw an increase of 3.3 percent, with 25,341 students enrolled. Southern Arkansas University at Magnolia and University of Arkansas Medical Sciences also saw increases in enrollment, while others had decreases ranging from 1.2 to 7.5 percent.

Two-year schools with the highest increases include College of the Ouachitas in Malvern, which had a jump of 6.1 percent to a total of 1,498 students. Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas had an increase of 3.0 percent, bringing its headcount to 2,039. Cossatot Community College of the University of Arkansas had the third-largest increase at 2.6 percent, with 1,575 students enrolled for fall.

Arkansas State University-Mountain Home and ASU-Newport had an increase of 2.3 percent and 1.0 percent, respectively. University of Arkansas at Morrilton had an increase of 0.2 percent. The remaining 16 colleges had decreases ranging from 1.8 to 14.8 percent.

The private schools saw an average decline in enrollment of 2.9 percent, and the FTE data was not available for those schools. The nursing schools – Baptist Health and Jefferson School of Nursing – saw an average increase of 16.6 percent.

ADHE projects between 35,500 and 37,500 students will receive the Academic Challenge Scholarship this academic year or \$113-117 million in funds. Nearly 33,000 scholarship recipients received \$133 million in fiscal 2013.

The ADHE is responsible for carrying out the policy directives of the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB), approving and reviewing college and university academic programs and developing funding recommendations for the state's 11 public universities and 22 public two-year colleges as well as several other post-secondary entities. In addition, the agency is responsible for distributing approximately \$170 million annually from state revenues and lottery funds intended to ease the financial burden of students seeking an education beyond high school.

The application period for all ADHE scholarships is Jan. 1 through June 1 for the upcoming 2013-14 academic year. For more information regarding scholarship application, visit www.adhe.edu.