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Schools

State pushes community college enrollment

PBCC tries to attract more students

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The numbers speak for themselves.

About 3,221 fewer students in Palm Beach County public schools this year compared to last- the biggest decline in student enrollment since 1971.

Florida Atlantic University enrollment dropped from 26,095 in the 2005-2006 school year to 25,750 this year.

Enrollment among Lynn University graduate students dropped 6.4 percent from last year and 2 percent among undergraduate students.

And community colleges are no different.

Since fall 2004, Palm Beach Community College (PBCC) has experienced a "slight decline" in student enrollment, according to Grace Truman, Director of College Relations. But before that, Truman said, the local community college had five straight years of increased enrollment from 1999 to 2004. PBCC's 2005-06 total enrollment count was 47,998 down from 2004-2005 count of 48,208. Prior to that was 2003-2004 count of 49,485- the last year of student enrollment increase. These statistics are totaled from its four college campuses: Boca Raton, Lake Worth, Palm Beach Gardens, and Belle Glade.

“We’ve tried to pinpoint the reason. What we were told was that people with college age students are moving to the county in less numbers,” Truman said.

But she added, “It’s nothing heart stopping,” and student enrollment increased this spring by about 65 students as compared to last spring.

Could that slight increase have anything to do with recruitment strategies?

With these increased student enrollment declines throughout Palm Beach County, schools have put out all the stops to recruit more pupils.

State push

Even the state Department of Education is pushing for student enrollment at the community college level.

Education Commissioner Jeanine Blomberg recently launched a new campaign, “Go Higher- Get Accepted,” to help high school seniors enroll at state community colleges before graduation.

“It is vitally important for students to continue their education after high school,” said Commissioner Blomberg. “Nearly 90 percent of students say they want to pursue more education after graduation, but only half of them do. This campaign helps students understand their options and achieve their goals.”

The Florida Department of Education and FACTS.org, Florida’s online student advising system are coordinating the statewide campaign. During April, a team of 23 community college administrators will visit 94 high schools throughout Florida. These teams will help students assess career interests, choose the type of degree or certificate to pursue, submit an application for admission and apply for financial aid. FACTS.org is coordinating the statewide campaign and providing promotional support with web pages, direct mail pieces, posters and other materials. It is expected that the campaign will successfully reach more than 32,000 students.

“Community colleges are a great opportunity for all Florida students to get a quality education at an affordable price,” said Community College Chancellor

David Armstrong. "We encourage every high school student to enroll in their local community college and achieve the American Dream through a great college education that will lead to an outstanding career and higher quality of life."

The campaign is modeled after the 2006 "College Connection" program at Austin Community College at San Marcos High School in Texas. In the first year of the program, the percentage of San Marcos students enrolled at Austin Community College increased from 34 to 45 percent.

"Florida saw an opportunity to borrow a campaign that was so successful in Texas and apply it here in Florida," said

FACTS.org Executive Director Connie Graunke, Ph. D. "Our goal is that every high school senior, by the time they walk across the stage to get their diploma, will have received a letter of acceptance to a college or university. That will make the next step of going to college easier."

PBCC push

PBCC is also pushing for more students through recruitment strategies. The college will participate in the state program.

"We're on board with it," Truman said. "Whatever we can do with the direction of the state. We'll be taking new campaigns to the high schools."

Already, PBCC has recruitment strategies in place. Some include student ambassadors and outreach staff meeting with high school students, guidance counselors and others.

At those meetings, Truman, said school representatives touch on the benefits of attending community colleges. Some include smaller and more personalized classes, cost effectiveness, and it's close to home.

Additionally, "We impress the easy transition from community colleges to the state universities," she said.

An array of academic student support services also adds to PBCC's community feel.

"We have that kind of support for students," Truman

said.

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