

## **University of Alaska Fairbanks**

### **Analysis of Spring 2012 to Spring 2013 Enrollment Trends**

The student headcount for the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) as a whole decreased 4.8% from spring 2012 to spring 2013, a decrease of 452 students. The SCH decrease was smaller (-2.8%), and full-time enrollment decreased less than part-time enrollment (-3.1% vs. -6.4%). The 2012 to 2013 trends were quite different in magnitude among the campuses. The two urban campuses (Fairbanks and the Community and Technical College) had headcount decreases of 5.7% and 11.3%, respectively. The Rural College, which includes UAF eLearning and Distance Education, was up 9.9% in headcount. Opening headcount at Kuskokwim (16.0%) and Chukchi (4.2%) campuses was up, while headcount decreased compared with spring 2012 at Northwest (-38.8%), Bristol Bay (-22.4%), and Interior-Aleutians (-8.2) campuses. However, because of late start classes, opening enrollment figures are usually not good indicators of final semester enrollment at rural campuses.

Enrollment trends differed by class standing; freshman enrollment was down, but sophomore, junior and senior enrollment increased 2% in aggregate. Only a minority of first-time freshmen (FTF), about 1/6 of the number enrolling in fall, enroll in the spring semester. However, their numbers are down sharply from spring 2012 for the UAF MAU (-15.7%) and UAF CTC (-14.4%). Fairbanks campus FTF headcount was up slightly (2.5%), but first-time graduate student enrollment was down 10%. That probably traces directly to the fact that federal agencies have delayed funding decisions on research grant proposals, which might otherwise have provided funding for new graduate students.

Over the past decade, spring semester enrollment has correlated very strongly with fall enrollment for the UAF MAU ( $r^2 = 0.98$  for SCH). In part that correlation is simply because more than 90% of degree-seeking students enrolled in a fall semester enroll again in spring (excluding those who graduate in December), and the rest is due to similar external conditions still applying in the spring semester. To reiterate the conditions affecting fall enrollment, a major factor in the decreased enrollment for UAF as a whole is that a drop for non-pay (DNP) policy was reinstated in Fall 2012. That policy was not in force from Fall 2009 through Fall 2011. DNP means that students who do not pay their tuition and fees or establish a payment plan by the deadline are dropped from all of their classes, and must arrange to be reinstated if they want to continue to be enrolled. The impact of DNP in fall 2012 was a decrease of 184 students (-1.7%) for UAF as a whole. The results for spring 2013 are not final yet, but will be close to 100 students; fewer students are being affected due to extra effort on the part of Financial Aid and the UAF Bursar's Office.

A second important reason for decreased enrollments is the decreased number of high school graduates in Alaska, which peaked in 2010 and has been declining since. Fairbanks North Star Borough School District 2012 graduates decreased slightly more (-5.7%) than the statewide average relative to 2011. High school graduates of rural high schools within the UAF region decreased 3.3% (State of Alaska, Department of Education and Early Development).

A third reason for decreased enrollments traces to economic conditions. Both nationally and for UAF CTC, postsecondary enrollment tends to decrease with decreasing unemployment. CTC FTF enrollment correlates best with the unemployment rate the previous year. Fairbanks September unemployment (6.1%) was the lowest rate since November of 2007 and was significantly less than that in September 2011 (6.8%). Fairbanks unemployment peaked in the period from December 2008 to April 2010 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). It is likely that some prospective students secured employment and consequently chose not to enroll. This interpretation is consistent with the fact that spring 2013 FTF at Fairbanks campus were up slightly, while FTF at CTC decreased 14%. CTC students are more likely to

defer education plans if employment is available, since their reason for attending is often to get a job or a better job as quickly as possible.

In contrast to trends for most units, the Rural College (RC) enrollment increased. RC enrollment is dominated by UAF eLearning and Distance Education students. For spring, headcount is up 10.1% and SCH are up 16.3%; eLearning is offering 17 new online courses and additional sections of several existing courses. They recruited by calling previous eLearning students and by placing ads in newspapers around the state. However, some of the eLearning growth has been due to Fairbanks students choosing online over face-to-face classes, and that has negatively impacted enrollment figures for the School of Management and College of Liberal Arts in particular.

It is too soon for a detailed analysis of rural campus enrollments, so that will be deferred until the spring closing report. Rural campuses have a large proportion of part-time students, and many of their students haven't yet enrolled on the opening freeze date; total rural campus closing enrollments are typically more than 60% greater than the opening enrollments, but with large variations from year to year at the individual campuses. Partnerships with K-12 schools, including Tech Prep and dual credit courses for students and professional development for teachers, constitute a substantial part of enrollment. Several of the campuses also offer professional development courses in cooperation with other employers.

In summary, there are several factors responsible for UAF enrollment trends from spring 2012 to spring 2013, including administrative changes, declines in the population of recent high school graduates, increasing employment opportunities in Fairbanks, and continuing economic stress and uncertainty, especially in rural areas. In order to increase future enrollment despite these unfavorable conditions, UAF has been increasing effort on student retention with the intensive advising initiative and increasing efforts to recruit transfer students from western states. There is continued strong effort to recruit Alaskans, especially through dual credit and Tech Prep partnerships with high schools.

### **Short Summary:**

The student headcount for the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) as a whole decreased 4.8% from spring 2012 to spring 2013. The SCH decrease was smaller (-2.8%), and full-time enrollment decreased less than part-time enrollment (-3.1% vs. -6.4%). The 2012 to 2013 trends were quite different in magnitude among the campuses. The two urban campuses (Fairbanks and the Community and Technical College) had headcount decreases of 5.7% and 11.3%, respectively. The Rural College, which includes UAF eLearning and Distance Education, was up 9.9% in headcount. Total rural campus enrollment was down 14%, but opening enrollment figures are usually not good indicators of final semester enrollment at rural campuses. Enrollment trends differed by class standing; freshman enrollment was down, but sophomore, junior and senior enrollment increased 2% in aggregate. Only a minority of first-time freshmen (FTF), about 1/6 of the number enrolling in fall, enroll in the spring semester. However, their numbers are down sharply from spring 2012 for the UAF MAU (-15.7%) and UAF CTC (-14.4%). Fairbanks campus FTF headcount was up slightly (2.5%), but first-time graduate student enrollment was down 10%.

These enrollment trends can be attributed to the following:

- Over the past decade, spring semester enrollment has correlated very strongly with fall enrollment for the UAF MAU ( $r^2 = 0.98$  for SCH), and so the decreasing trend for fall 2012 is reflected in spring 2013.

- To reiterate the conditions affecting fall enrollment, a major factor in the decreased enrollment for UAF as a whole is that a drop for non-pay (DNP) policy was reinstated in Fall 2012.
- A second important reason for decreased enrollments is the decreased number of high school graduates in Alaska, which peaked in 2010 and has been declining since.
- A third reason for decreased enrollments traces to economic conditions. Both nationally and for UAF CTC, postsecondary enrollment tends to decrease with decreasing unemployment. Fairbanks September 2012 unemployment (6.1%) was the lowest rate since November of 2007.
- Graduate student enrollment was impacted by the delay in proposal funding decisions at several Federal agencies. Grants are an important source of research assistantships needed to recruit graduate students in the sciences and engineering.

In order to increase future enrollment despite these unfavorable conditions, UAF has been increasing effort on student retention with the intensive advising initiative and increasing efforts to recruit transfer students from western states. There is continued strong effort to recruit Alaskans, especially through dual credit and Tech Prep partnerships with high schools.