

Lee, Julie M

Subject: ASAP 25: On Enrollment

From: Ducoffe, Robert H <ducoffe@uwp.edu>

Sent: Monday, June 6, 2022 12:00 PM

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Colleagues,

“Grow Enrollment” is the second goal in the [Academic and Student Affairs Plan 2025](#) (ASAP 25). Despite increases in three of the last four years, it is a tale of two trends at UW-Parkside, recent growth in master’s degree students and continued long-term declines in undergraduate enrollments. There is an excellent interactive web portal where you can look at these data yourselves: <https://www.wisconsin.edu/education-reports-statistics/enrollments/>.

Let’s begin with the bad news.

In 1973, UW-Parkside enrolled 4,854 undergraduates. By Fall 1983, undergraduate enrollment reached an apex of 5,715. It declined since then reaching a low in Fall 2021 of 3,376, a reduction of 30 percent from 1973 and 41 percent from the highest level in 1983. Over the last decade, undergraduate enrollment at UW-Parkside decreased by 29 percent, across the UW System excluding Madison by 20 percent, and nationally by 9 percent. ^[i]

On the master’s side, the campus enrolled its first graduate students, 201 of them, in 1978. This grew to 359 in 1982 and then, from 1992 to 2017, remained mostly under 200 students. Since Fall 2018, master’s enrollment spiked from 235 to 767 in Fall 2021, an increase of 226 percent. Graduate program enrollments across the UW System increased about 4 percent in the last decade and 10 percent nationally over a similar period. ^[ii]

So, what should we take-away from these data?

Let’s start with the easier answer first.

Enrollment in master’s degree programs is growing rapidly and is driven by various new programs, six online with UW Extended Campus and other UW institutions, three online programs with Academic Partnerships, and six face-to-face degree programs that we field on our own. What we are doing seems to be working so continuing these efforts makes sense. One opportunity has become apparent. With the larger number of graduate students, we need to devote more attention to how we serve them in areas like admissions processes, academic policies, advising and student services, and communications. I plan to conduct an internal search for a colleague to lead such efforts early in the fall semester.

On the undergraduate side, we are experiencing trends affecting most institutions (though our declines are steeper). The causes are thought to be demographics or macroeconomic trends over which we have no control including, for example, a strong economy that leads individuals to leave college or postpone it to work, flat or declining high school graduates from lower birth rates, and higher college costs as states disinvest in higher education and families assume more of these obligations. ^[iii] Also, some jobs previously requiring a bachelor’s degree no longer do as employers react to a tight labor market. ^[iv]

Here is a summary of what we need to do from the ASAP 25 (pages 64-71):

- Continue increasing retention and graduation rates - Boosting reenrollment and lessening attrition will help shore up undergraduate enrollment within what is expected to be a flat to declining regional market.
- Encourage more students in our region to go to college - High school graduates in Kenosha and Racine are less likely to go to college and attendance rates fell precipitously during COVID. Among our strategies to address

this, the Parkside Access to College Credits program is a key lever, even more so now that we received approval to offer concurrent enrollment courses for free beginning Fall 2022.

- Continue to encourage program innovation - Especially in expanding adult and degree completion markets, we need to offer more collaborative programs, badges, certificates, and returning student initiatives. We should also seek to clarify our vision for how to balance in-person and remote delivery of our programs. The traditional undergraduate market may be declining, but the non-traditional higher education market, including those who have “stopped-out”, is not, and immense national providers like Western Governors, Southern New Hampshire, Arizona State, and even larger corporate competitors, are ahead of us.
- Increase financial aid - For students who struggle to afford or focus on their college education, we need to enhance funding to fill more of the “gaps” between aid available and the remaining costs of their education. More scholarships will help us recruit students considering multiple institutions. Increasing scholarships is the leading goal in UW-Parkside’s first comprehensive fundraising campaign and we should not forget that emergency grants help students confront unplanned financial challenges that are barriers to completion.
- Follow through on implementing new Fall 2022 transfer pathways with Gateway Technical College, our largest feeder institution - Gateway sends us 100 students per year and, going forward, we should expect their transfers to graduate at 66 percent higher rates.
- Continue efforts to prepare for Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) designation – To earn this recognition, we need to bolster the services we provide to Hispanic students and should follow-through on the planned hire of an additional staff member to support this initiative.
- Expand open educational resources (OER) – An effort piloted through the leadership of the campus Library involved ten colleagues planning to adopt no-cost materials for their classes. This has the potential to reduce costs for students significantly if additional professors become engaged.
- Develop a new strategic enrollment management plan - We are developing an enrollment management plan that includes increasing college-going, strengthening our admissions “funnel”, identifying efforts in student markets where there is greater potential for growth, and incorporating plans to optimize financial aid and recruitment strategies and tactics.

Thanks for reading this far and I welcome your comments or questions.

- Rob

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^[i] Undergraduate Enrollment, National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cha>.

^[ii] Postbaccalaureate Enrollment, National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/chb>

^[iii] Fewer Students are Going to College. Here’s Why That Matters, Nadworny, Elissa and Larkin, Max, Morning Edition, National Public Radio, December 16th, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/12/16/787909495/fewer-students-are-going-to-college-heres-why-that-matters>.

^[iv] Dropping the Degree as a Hiring Requirement, Lederman, Doug, Inside Higher Ed, June 3, 2022, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/06/03/state-eliminates-bachelors-degree-requirement-many-jobs>.