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NSU enrollment down slightly, but many numbers higher

(Tahlequah, Okla.)—With an improvement in the economy coupled with stricter admissions policies, enrollment at Northeastern State University fell slightly for the fall 2011 term. NSU's three campuses have a combined enrollment of 9,400, which also includes distance learning sites.

Enrollment surged at the Muskogee campus with an increase of 24.7 percent. But as an indicator of an improving economy, the number of credit hours that students are carrying only increased about six percent from last year. The Muskogee campus saw increases for students and credit hours enrolled with 399 and 2,782 respectively.

NSU's graduate school set a 10-year record for students as well as credit hours production with 7,534 hours logged in classrooms, an increase of 0.9 percent beyond last year's number of 7,470.

In addition to economic factors, NSU has also moved deliberately to strengthen its recruitment, acceptance and retention plans that will closely meet Oklahoma's future workforce needs.

"We are developing a strategic enrollment plan that will define our student mix for the future," said NSU President Martin Tadlock. "Rather than focusing purely on numbers of students who are enrolled, we are focusing more on admissions criteria and success indicators that match what we know makes for a successful educational experience that will lead to graduation."

"We see a dynamic trend change for our Muskogee campus," said Jerrett Phillips, interim executive director of enrollment management. "When Connors State College moves its Muskogee branch to the NSU-Muskogee campus in early spring 2012, we expect to see a seamless integration of student enrollment between our institutions that will continue to increase our student numbers."

At the larger campuses, figures were down 0.7 percent at Tahlequah and 12.5 percent at Broken Arrow.

This fall's enrollment is a decrease of 2.4 percent from the fall 2010 number of 9,634, a figure that was just 53 students shy of NSU's record.

"There are a number of factors which can affect our enrollment," Tadlock said. "The past two summer sessions we have opened a much larger number of class sections, which enabled students to accelerate their studies and graduate and enter Oklahoma's workforce sooner." That was enhanced by an increase last summer in a new federal aid program, which has since been eliminated due to federal budget reductions.

Tadlock added, "The upswing in the Tulsa metropolitan job market also influenced some of our Broken Arrow students to delay or discontinue their pursuit of a degree."

After admitting the largest freshman class in school history in fall 2010, NSU adjusted its admissions procedures. This term's freshman class is smaller than last year's but still large, numbering 2,057.

"These changes are designed to positively influence student retention and graduation rates," Phillips said. A key benefit was that many more students entered NSU this year after declaring a major, which led to each college seeing an enrollment increase. One outcome was that there are fewer students who entered NSU unsure of their professional interest, which can lead them to drop out.



Students walk through Centennial Plaza on Northeastern State University's Tahlequah campus. Total enrollment for the Tahlequah, Muskogee and Broken Arrow campuses is 9,400 students for the fall 2011 semester.

The College of Liberal Arts saw the largest increase in students enrolled, up 6.8 percent. The College of Science and Health Professions also saw a large increase of 4.7 percent. NSU has targeted CSHP for growth at all three campuses because of a shortage of health care workers anticipated in Oklahoma in 2012. The state is also expecting a shortage of professionals in science, technology, engineering and math by 2014.

Additionally, NSU is working to boost enrollment in the College of Business and Technology. CBT saw a 2.9 percent increase in students.

Enrollment figures for the College of Education increased 1.4 percent.

NSU's Oklahoma College of Optometry has 110 doctoral candidates, a minor reduction in enrollment from last year as OCO returned to its target admissions figure.

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