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PSU reports lower enrollment

Although this year's undergraduate enrollment at Pittsburg State University is the second highest in the university's history, overall headcount declined by 2.9 percent, primarily because of declines in graduate and off-campus courses, university officials said today. The headcount drop of 194 students followed three years of record enrollment at Pittsburg State. The enrollment data were reported today by the Kansas Board of Regents and PSU.

This fall, a total of 6,537 students are enrolled at PSU. That compares to 6,731 last year. University officials reported that undergraduate enrollment slipped by just 38 students, a decline of less than 1 percent. PSU's undergraduate headcount this fall is 5,493. Graduate enrollment, at 1,044, was off by 156 students or 13 percent from 2003.

Despite the overall drop in headcount enrollment, FTE (full time equivalent) numbers were down only slightly from the previous fall. FTE is calculated by dividing the number of undergraduate credit hours produced by 15, which is considered a full-time course load. PSU's FTE enrollment this fall is 6,150, which is down 65, but is still the third highest in the university's history. This fall, PSU students are enrolled in 87,430 hours of instruction.

"A few things stand out in this report," said Lee Christensen, associate vice president for academic programs and services. "Our undergraduate numbers, while down slightly, remain healthy. Graduate and off-campus continuing studies enrollments are the areas in which the university has experienced most of the enrollment loss this semester. Additionally, the university's continuing high credit hour production indicates that the majority of our students are taking full course loads."

PSU President Tom Bryant said that while this semester's enrollment decline was expected, it was, nonetheless, "a matter of concern for the university."

"We've had several years of very good enrollment numbers and even with this year's slight decline, the current enrollment is still the fifth highest in the university's history," Bryant said. "The numbers this year point to several areas that we have already begun to work on."

The president noted that earlier this spring, the university began a comprehensive examination of its communications and marketing efforts. That process is continuing and this fall's enrollment data will be considered in that study.

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“We live in a dynamic and changing world and Pittsburg State University must be able to change with it,” Bryant noted. “The demographics in our traditional base in southeast Kansas are changing and over the next decade, we expect to see a gradual decline in the number of high school graduates available. Also, we know that as society has changed, the needs and expectations of potential students, particularly those at the graduate level, are different from what they were just a few years ago. I am confident we are going to address those issues effectively.”

Bryant said this year’s enrollment decline adds urgency to one of PSU’s top priorities: sustained, managed growth. Achieving that goal will require a significant investment in scholarships, Bryant said.

“The university is currently in the midst of a campaign to double scholarship aid for students,” Bryant said. “Last year, PSU awarded about \$1.5 million in scholarships to students and we’re proud of that. But nationwide, as the cost of a college education not only increases, but falls increasingly on students and their parents, the importance of scholarships in recruiting good students increases as well.”

Bryant said he believes the future remains bright for PSU and that this fall’s enrollment decline can serve as a catalyst for the university to plan for future enrollment growth.

“When the news is always good, there’s no reason to work harder or smarter,” Bryant said.

PSU Enrollment Comparison, 2003-2004

	2003	2004	Difference
Undergraduate	5,531	5,493	(-38, -0.7 percent)
Graduate	1,200	1,044	(-156, -13 percent)
Headcount	6,731	6,537	(-194, -2.9 percent)
FTE	6,215	6,150	(-65, -1.0 percent)