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Enrollment drops slightly at Mass. public colleges

Foreign student enrollment jumps at UMass

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JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

The campus of UMass Amherst.

By Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 27, 2015

Enrollment across Massachusetts' 28 public college campuses is down by 1.8 percent from a year ago, but several schools bucked the overall trend and saw their student counts increase, according to a report released Tuesday.

The overall decline was largely due to a 4.3 percent decrease in enrollment at the state's 15 community colleges, as 4,181 fewer students enrolled this fall, compared with last fall.

However, enrollment across the four University of Massachusetts undergraduate campuses rose by 1.7 percent — an increase of 952 students from last fall that was driven by dramatic jumps in enrollment of international students this year, including a 46 percent surge at the state's flagship in Amherst.

Meanwhile, the nine other state university campuses saw enrollment dip by 0.8 percent, or 320 students.

The data comes from a report presented Tuesday to the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education.

Officials said the decline in community college enrollment was to be expected because Massachusetts is one of 15 states whose populations of high school students are projected to shrink by more than 5 percent in the next eight years.

"Many of the community college enrollment declines correspond to population losses in certain regions of the state, such as Cape Cod and the Berkshires," the state board said in a statement Tuesday.

"These enrollment trends are part of a boom-to-bust cycle that is normal and reflective of both demographic changes and economic trends," said a statement from the board's commissioner Carlos Santiago.

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“Still, the overall enrollment dip does give us cause for concern because the Commonwealth is already experiencing significant shortages of college-educated residents needed to fill jobs in high-demand fields,” his statement continued. “With a shrinking high school population and looming retirements, we will need to work harder and smarter to increase the pool of potential college graduates in the coming years.”

From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, overall undergraduate enrollment at public colleges in Massachusetts declined from around 166,700 to 148,500, before rising steadily through 2013 when it peaked at about 196,850 students.

In each of the past two years, however, the number of students has dropped, reaching 190,800 in 2015. Officials attribute the vast majority of the decline to community colleges. Enrollment has dropped only slightly at state universities since 2013, while the UMass system has continued to grow each year.

While the flow of Massachusetts residents may be faltering, the flow of international students is strong.

The number of international students at the University of Massachusetts undergraduate campuses has nearly doubled, rising 91 percent to 3,150, between 2012 and 2015, officials said. Still, international students only account for 5.5 percent of the students.

“We believe that undergraduate enrollment across the UMass system continues to grow and has reached an all-time high because citizens across the Commonwealth, and beyond, recognize that UMass offers a world-class education at a fraction of what students and their families would be asked to pay at a private college or university,” said a statement from UMass President Marty Meehan.

“Given that UMass has achieved a position of international prominence, as evidenced in ranking after ranking, it’s not surprising that we are seeing soaring levels of interest from students here in Massachusetts, across the nation and around the world,” he added.

Enrollment changes at Massachusetts' public colleges

A look at which campuses have more students, and which have fewer, compared with last fall.

Campus	Fall 2015 undergraduate enrollment	% change from 2014
University of Massachusetts Amherst	22,748	2%
University of Massachusetts Boston	12,950	2%
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth	7,296	-2%
University of Massachusetts Lowell	13,309	3%
University of Massachusetts	56,303	2%
Bridgewater State University	9,608	0%
Fitchburg State University	4,200	0%
Framingham State University	4,477	-3%
Massachusetts College of Art and Design	1,862	-5%
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	1,457	-7%
Massachusetts Maritime Academy	1,571	12%
Salem State University	7,516	-1%
Westfield State University	5,606	0%
Worcester State University	5,515	-1%
State Universities	41,812	-1%
Berkshire Community College	2,127	-5%
Bristol Community College	8,761	-5%
Bunker Hill Community College	14,060	-1%
Cape Cod Community College	3,626	-5%
Greenfield Community College	2,049	-4%
Holyoke Community College	6,348	-4%
Mass Bay Community College	4,816	-10%
Massasoit Community College	7,637	-3%
Middlesex Community College	8,950	-3%
Mt. Wachusett Community College	4,106	-5%
North Shore Community College	6,961	-6%
Northern Essex Community College	6,628	-5%
Quinsigamond Community College	8,064	-5%
Roxbury Community College	2,290	-5%

Springfield Technical Community College	6,284	-5%
Community Colleges	92,707	-4%
All public colleges with undergraduate students	190,822	-2%

SOURCE: Massachusetts Board of Higher Education

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