

Enrollment Planning at Florida Atlantic University

Enrollment planning at Florida Atlantic University involves a combination of centralized and decentralized activities. Centralized enrollment planning activities are focused in the office of the University Provost and Chief Academic Officer. In this context, enrollment planning and management activities are coordinated through a university level Enrollment Management Conference, which includes approximately 25 members from throughout the university community whose functions directly relate to student enrollment issues. The scope of membership includes undergraduate and graduate admissions, registrar, advising, financial aid, associate academic deans from each college, campus representatives, retention, and orientation under the chairmanship of the Associate Provost for Enrollment Management.

Centralized enrollment planning begins with collation and analysis of information likely to directly affect future enrollment at the university. Information of particular interest includes:

- Projections of high school graduates for Florida and the six-county area served primarily by FAU
- Demographic projections of two age groups of primary interest, 18-24 year olds and 25-44 year olds
- Enrollment patterns and projections at neighboring community colleges
 - Broward Community College
 - Palm Beach Community College
 - Indian River Community College
 - Miami-Dade College
- External factors likely to affect enrollment
 - Population movements (in and out migration)
 - Housing trends (construction, sales, prices)
 - Economic indicators (Pratt & Whitney, Motorola, Scripps)
 - Other factors (Community Colleges offering 4 year degrees, Cuba, weather)

Based on analysis of such factors, the Provost's office works with the President and university Board of Trustees to develop a long-range enrollment plan for the university in compliance with BoG/DCU guidelines. The current version of this plan calls for FAU to grow from a present enrollment level of approximately 26,000 students to nearly 36,000 by 2016-17. This plan is built on a model that considers factors affecting each major stream of students into the university, including at the undergraduate level entering freshmen, community college transfers with AA, AS or no degree, other transfers, and non-degree seeking students.

The university also centrally monitors and directs resources to meet the needs for general education and service courses to meet student demand and in accordance with state and university goals, in areas such as nursing and education, as modified by delimiters such as the availability of faculty and space and market demands. Programmatically, the university centrally monitors and analyzes the results of program reviews, programmatic accreditation reviews, and departmental assessments for enrollment related trends and information.

Programmatic enrollment planning is primarily and initially conducted at the departmental and college level. Each department tracks internal and external factors likely to affect demand for particular majors, including current and projected information from the field on market demand, the results of departmental reviews and assessments, and the kinds of factors mentioned above. These departmental and college planning efforts come together in the planning and budgeting

cycle of the university as the colleges put forth their annual budget proposals. In this process the university is able to focus on a select group of critical programs. Where program demand is clear and the priority is high, the university can use available resources to increase staffing to meet demand, IF other conditions can also be met, such as the availability of space and of qualified faculty.

It is important to recognize as well what universities do NOT do. Universities do not direct students into majors. Students are advised, counseled, tested, evaluated, and informed, but they are not DIRECTED into majors. Universities attempt to respond to the student demand that is shaped by thousands of individual decisions. Students select their own majors based on many factors, chief of which is interest, but these decisions may be affected by many things such as financial incentives in the form of scholarships and loan forgiveness programs. The federal and state governments have successfully employed many such programs to recruit health care workers and teachers, for example.

Universities often are not prescient enough in our planning. For example, five years ago FAU anticipated continued strong growth in engineering programs, which enrolled 2,422 students in 1998-99. No university anticipated the dot.com crash, which drove computer science and engineering enrollments downward. No university anticipated the September 11, 2001 attacks, which resulted in severe tightening of visa controls for international students and sent graduate engineering enrollments nationwide plummeting as Chinese and Indian students now seek higher education in Australia. FAU was not aware in advance of the closing of Pratt and Whitney and Motorola plants in Palm Beach County. As a result of these unforeseeable events, FAU engineering enrollments this year are 2,358, a drop of 64 students from five years earlier.

As a final thought on university planning for programmatic enrollments, realistic planning demands an acknowledgement that many factors limiting programmatic enrollment are beyond the control of universities. For example, FAU is currently building a new nursing building, through the generosity of a private supporter, and the university desires greatly to expand nursing enrollments in this soon-to-be-available space. Two factors severely limit this growth: the lack of availability of hospital clinical space and the lack of qualified faculty. The development of community college four-year nursing programs will exacerbate these shortages, as the number of clinical spaces and faculty are finite and limited. Similarly, teacher education programs are limited primarily by diminished desire of today's students to enter the teaching profession. Most of the universities in the state could produce more teachers if more students were interested in the profession. The factors limiting such interest include relatively low salaries and perceived unattractive working conditions. Again, community college four-year teacher education programs will merely draw from the same pool and decrease university enrollments in this vital area.