

More UIS students living on campus

Graduate students down significantly

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Continuing a trend that began three years ago, undergraduate enrollment at the University of Illinois at Springfield continues to increase, along with the number of students living on campus.

However, the number of graduate students, mostly part-time, declined significantly, and UIS Chancellor Richard Ringeisen says that's a concern.

A total of 2,889 undergraduates have enrolled at UIS this fall compared to 2,861 last year, while the number of graduate students decreased from 1,990 last year to 1,822 this fall.

The total number of students enrolled at UIS is 4,711, compared with 4,850 in fall 2007.

"We are beginning to see a change in our student body — there are more full-time students," Ringeisen said. "Historically, the university has had a much larger part-time student population, but now we're seeing more students taking larger course loads."

The university also posted another increase in the number of freshmen this fall to 311.

"One of our magic numbers has been to get to 300 freshmen," he said. "We're comfortable that these freshmen are good students who will be able to graduate with a four-year degree from us."

There are 1,050 students living on campus, another record.

Ringeisen said UIS anticipated the change by building additional townhouses and a new residence hall that opened this fall. There are 132 freshmen living in Founders Hall even as work to finish the building continues. A total of 218 freshmen and sophomores are living in Lincoln Residence Hall, completed in fall 2001 for the first class of freshmen at UIS.

Ringeisen said Founders Hall will have about 230 beds, but all those weren't needed for incoming freshmen this year.

Ringeisen said almost 30 percent of the freshman class is made up of minority students, including 23 percent African-Americans. About 40 percent of the class comes from the Chicago area and another 30 percent from the Springfield area.

The drop in graduate students probably is related to the struggling economy, said Marya Leatherwood, director of enrollment management.

"Graduate students tend to study on a part-time basis and are more apt to be affected by what's happening with the economy. We can only assume that is true in this case," she said.

"That's a pretty good drop in head count," Ringeisen said. "It is mostly continuing graduate students, not new ones, and I think the economy has an effect on it."

"There's not a lot of optimism about the economy out there, and I think people have decided to postpone their graduate studies," he said. "And that's too bad."

He said graduate student enrollment is more program-specific than undergraduate enrollment, and he will get together with the deans and faculty of master's degree programs "to see what we can do to help them return."

"One of our focuses is on retention of students, both at the graduate and undergraduate level," Ringeisen said.

He said UIS is approaching a time when "we'll be talking about having an ideal number of students, although we certainly want to bring our graduate student numbers back up to a higher level.

"We have to pay attention to that drop in (graduate student) numbers and address that issue," he said.

Online and blended learning enrollments are both up at UIS this fall. There are 1,200 students majoring in online degree and certificate programs, an increase of 11 percent compared to the 1,082 students enrolled online last fall. Online students represent just more than 25 percent of the total number

of students at UIS.

Enrollments in blended learning classes, where the number of visits to the campus is reduced because students take some regular class sessions online, total 232, up nearly 54 percent from last fall.

"I think that's the future for students who are within driving range of the campus, but who aren't too close," Ringeisen said.

"The growth in online and blended programs is consistent with national trends," said Ray Schroeder, director of UIS' Office of Technology-Enhanced Learning. "Students are seeking to reduce the costs, in terms of both time and money, of commuting to classes on campus."

He noted that more than 135 UIS faculty members are teaching at least one online class this fall.

Slightly more than 38 percent of online majors have mailing addresses outside of Illinois, and nearly 85 percent of the Illinois online students live outside of Sangamon County.

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