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## Our Opinion: Enrollment milestone at UIS

**THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER**

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When Richard Ringeisen took the reins as chancellor of the University of Illinois Springfield in early 2001, he spoke of big plans.

"We plan to create a new kind of public university, one which numbers among the best liberal arts universities in the country, while retaining and, in fact, enhancing its ties to state government," Ringeisen said.

That fall, the university welcomed the first freshman class in its history. As the decade progressed, the campus grew both physically — it now truly has the look and feel of a college campus — and in enrollment. Perhaps it's fitting that UIS's latest milestone comes as Ringeisen prepares to retire at the end of next month.

UIS announced last week that its enrollment for the current academic year topped 5,000 for the first time in the school's history. The 5,174 students enrolled this year is a 4.3 percent increase over last year.

"To say we are excited would be an understatement. For our enrollment to surpass 5,000 marks a milestone for us," Ringeisen said.

Included in the total enrollment are 1,626 students who take classes online exclusively. That speaks in part to what always has been UIS's mission — catering to older students who need flexible study schedules. It also points to the school's next goal, which "will probably be to have 5,000 students taking classes on campus and 2,000 living on campus," Ringeisen said. (There are 1,089 students living on campus now.)

That's a worthy goal, though not merely for growth's sake. Ever since becoming the third University of Illinois campus in 1995, UIS' growth in numbers has matched the growing strength of its reputation. It's given area students a viable, four-year option that didn't exist a decade ago.

Though some may view it as superficial, we think UIS's effort to increase its sports profile — as evidenced in its joining the Great Lakes Valley Athletic Conference — eventually will pay big dividends in stirring community attachment to the university.

Here's hoping Ringeisen's successor can continue the university's steady climb.

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