

## College enrollment drops in Ohio

The state's 61 campuses saw numbers drop 2% this fall.

Posted: 11:27 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2013  
BY MEAGAN PANT - STAFF WRITER

Nearly 10,500 fewer students are taking classes at Ohio's public colleges and universities this year, mirroring a national trend and representing the third year in a row that enrollment has dropped in the state amid an improving economy.

Enrollment decreased 2 percent this fall compared to last at the state's 61 public college and university campuses, according to the Ohio Board of Regents. Last year, the number of students fell 5.9 percent at the public schools, taking enrollment closer to pre-recession levels.

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Amanda Alvarado (center) and Victoria Kirnos (right) look through paper samples inside the engineering building's paper testing facility during Paper Science 201 class at Miami University Wednesday, Sept. 4, 2013. NICK DAGGY / STAFF  
"It's a reflection of an improving economy," said Sean Creighton, executive director of the Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education. "We're seeing the nontraditional students returning to the workforce."

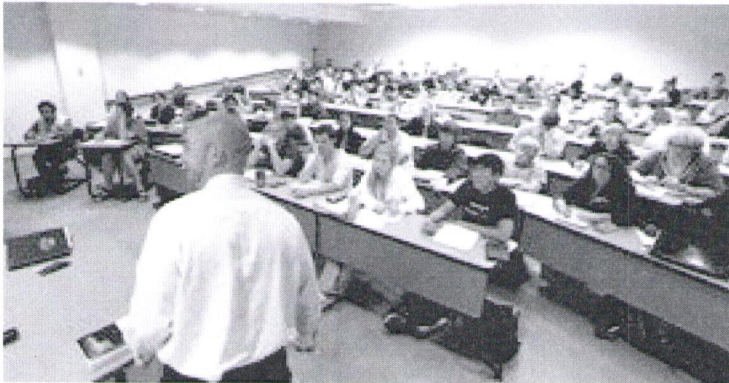
About 510,900 students are enrolled this fall at the public schools, which do not represent all of the college-goers in Ohio, who also attend private

universities and for-profit colleges here.

Changes varied widely at individual campuses, but schools attributed the overall decrease to the improved economy — which typically means fewer people are going to college — fewer high school graduates, more competition from other institutions and a continued effect from the transition from a quarter calendar to one based on semesters, said Jeff Robinson, spokesman for the Board of Regents.

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Wright State University College of Engineering and Computer Science Dean Nathan Klingbeil teaches Introductory Mathematics for Engineering Applications, a class specifically designed to teach topics most used by first and second-year engineering students. CHRIS STEWART / STAFF

“Those institutions with increases cited new campus facilities and increased marketing among the reasons for increases,” he said.

“And while enrollment can fluctuate based on the strength of the job market and the economy, Ohio is leading a national movement to focus on how we can ensure that more students finish college and earn their degrees,” Robinson added.

Ohio needs more college students because the state is lagging behind in an effort to increase the educational attainment of its residents. Just 35.5 percent of working-age Ohioans had at least an associate’s degree in 2011, which was down from 35.8 percent the year before, according to the Lumina Foundation.

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Students in a Clark State Community College diesel technology program attend class on Tuesday, September 24, at the Miami Valley Career Technology Center in Clayton. Brad Hall of Springfield reads his textbook while instructor Bill Fisher works with Bobbi Miller, also from Springfield. CHRIS STEWART / STAFF

At this rate, the state will fall short on the number of workers with a college education it needs to fill jobs, Lumina found. By 2018, 57 percent of the 3.3 million jobs in Ohio will require education beyond high school, according to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

At some schools, students are flocking to programs associated with jobs. Wright State University's enrollment in its College of Engineering and Computer Science increased nearly 25 percent to more than 3,000 students, the school announced.

Clark State Community College saw its enrollment hold steady, and experienced an increase in some areas, including its new diesel technology program.

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Diesel tech student Derek Higgins, 26, said he plans to finish his associate's degree even though he landed a full-time job shortly after enrolling in the program. The Vandalia resident decided to pursue the field after leaving Urbana University when he realized a teaching career wasn't for him.

"I definitely want to see it through, that way I can say, yes I do have a

college degree,” he said. “From an employer standpoint, they can tell that I’m interested in what I’m doing. I’m not just here for a job. It makes me stand out a little bit more to employers.”

Gary Coates, 42, decided to join the program after years of driving a truck.

“It was time for a career change,” he said. “It was just too many long hours and I got tired of driving so much.”

He was offered a full-time job at Stoops Freightliner a month after enrolling, but said he plans to graduate.

“It’s just a matter of I started something, and I want to see it through and finish it,” he said. “It only took me 20 years after getting out of high school to figure that out.”

Private universities saw slight enrollment increases this year.

Wittenberg University’s enrollment increased by 57 students to 1,788, according to the school.

Urbana University has more than 1,500 students this fall, and expects that number to grow when additional non-traditional academic programs start later this month, said David Ormsbee, vice president for enrollment management. He said enrollment will be level with last year by the end of the term.

Cedarville University, a Baptist school, announced record enrollment of 3,459 students enrolled, 73 more than last fall. The university attributed the increase to a jump in graduate students from the newly created Doctor of Pharmacy and Master of Business Administration programs.

The University of Dayton purposefully accepted a smaller freshmen class after years of record enrollment to bring the total number of students to 11,287, according to unofficial data from the university.

All the colleges and universities could face a “jarring” change because the number of high school graduate in Ohio and nationwide is falling. Ohio is expected to see a decrease of 5 to 15 percent in the coming years, and nationwide the dip is the first in 17 years, according to the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education.