

Enrollment challenges could be facing country

BY ALDEMARO ROMERO
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

A recent report predicts big and immediate changes in demographics for higher education in Arkansas and the United States in general.

For example, the United States will experience in the immediate future a growing diversity of student bodies, a leveling in enrollments, growth of community colleges and the rising cost of a college education.

These are conclusions reached by the latest report of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. This is a 15-state coalition commonly known as WICHE. They issue their projections every four or five years to help colleges plan. Data they use are birth rates, migration patterns and elementary and secondary school enrollments.

The study is called "Knocking at the college door: Projections of high school graduates by state and race/ethnicity 1992-2022."

Peak reached in graduates

According to the study, it is estimated that, at the national level, we have reached a peak this year in terms of high school graduates, meaning that there will be a continuing decline in the number of students seeking higher education from now until 2015 when it will increase again.

The changes will be very different throughout the United States. States such as Nevada and Arizona will see dramatic growth between now and 2015, while northeastern states such as Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York and North Dakota will see a dramatic decrease in the number of high school graduates, the study says.

Arkansas will show

QuickINFO

Arkansas is classified as a state with rapid expansion and will see a growth of 12,000-20,000 graduates per year until 2022, according to a recent study.

gains with a growth of 12,000-20,000 graduates per year between now and 2022, the study says. Arkansas, together with Idaho, Indiana and North Carolina, are classified by the report as states with rapid expansion. These states will see increases between 10-20 percent in the number of high school graduates.

These changes are largely propelled by the growth of the Hispanic population, particularly in the southern states. The study says that by 2022 almost half of all public school graduates will be minorities, and the number of Hispanic high school graduates in Arkansas will surpass the number of African Americans for the first time in 2019.

It is expected that the quality of high school graduates will continue to decline, which means that colleges and universities will have to offer more remedial courses and will have to accept more transfer students from 2-year colleges.

How should colleges prepare for these new realities of lower enrollments and a more diversified student body? One way to show an institution is more diverse in its academic programs that might interest those students could be through degrees not traditionally offered by universities, such as hospitality and culinary arts.

Another possible way to boost the number of



Joy Trauth | Special to The Sun

According to a recent report, minorities will make up nearly half of high school graduates in Arkansas by 2022.

ENROLLMENT: Foreign students could help alleviate institutions' problems

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international students may be foreign students who pay tuition in full and come from markets that are growing not only because of their population sizes but also because of their improving economic conditions. Given the weak dollar (when compared with other currencies), the U.S. higher education market is becoming an increasingly attractive one. Chinese, Indian and Arab students are examples of those markets.

The fact that the report projects that the size of Arkansas' high school graduate body is no guarantee that our universities will continue to enhance their enrollment. We can expect bigger competition from northeastern schools that, because of their prestige and larger financial aid to students, could take away a sizable portion of Arkansas' high school graduates, particularly the brightest ones.

We, at places like Arkansas State University, will have to invest more time, effort and money in raising

the profile of the institution through outreach programs in order to remain competitive.

For more information,

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On the Net
www.wiche.edu
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