

Recruitment and retention initiatives boost state university enrollments

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Enrollment of new students from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education increased by 22 percent this fall at the 32 Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, according to a new report presented to the Board of Trustees. These groups include students of color, low-income students and students whose parents did not attend college.

The state colleges and universities system enrolled 7,300 new underrepresented students. In addition, 8,000 more underrepresented students returned to the system's institutions this fall, a 15 percent increase over a year ago. The total number of underrepresented students this fall is 94,302, an increase of 18 percent.

"These increases are important for the state of Minnesota," said Chancellor James H. McCormick. "The numbers show we have made substantial progress in recruiting and retaining more underrepresented students, although the economy also played a role in the increase."

To help the state's employers maintain their competitive edge in the global marketplace, Minnesota needs more students from these groups to complete postsecondary programs as aging baby boomers retire and the state's population grows more diverse, McCormick said. The system produces 33,500 graduates each year. Eighty percent of them stay in Minnesota to work or continue their education.

Though the state colleges and universities have been working to improve recruitment and retention of underrepresented students for years, a system initiative called "Access, Opportunity and Success" began in the fall of 2007. The Board of Trustees allocated \$11 million a year for the initiative.

The system provided funds to every college and university to expand programs and services that have proven to be effective. The best practices include programs to help new students succeed in the transition from high school, advisors who routinely initiate contact with students, learning communities of students, summer programs and tutoring.

Brochures, posters and a Web site in nine languages also reached out to students from non-English speaking backgrounds in the 8th through 10th grades to explain the benefits of attending college and to encourage them to prepare for college.

"Underrepresented students often face barriers to entering college and succeeding once they get there," McCormick said. "The Legislature and the governor have supported this initiative, and we are grateful for their interest. It is gratifying that we are making some notable progress, but we still are a long way from eliminating the achievement gap that separates low-income and minority students from others."

Enrollment was up in nearly all subgroups. The number of new students of color this fall grew by 16 percent, new first-generation college students increased by 21 percent and new students eligible for Pell grants increased by 37 percent. Pell grant eligibility is typically used by higher education institutions as an indication of family income.

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system comprises 32 state universities and

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community and technical colleges serving the higher education needs of Minnesota. The system serves about 250,000 students per year in credit-based courses and an additional 140,000 students in non-credit courses.