

Enrollment may be down, but Initiatives are up

ASHLEY GLASPER

With a one-year decline of 603,000 students in the Spring of 2020. College enrollment took a much higher hit than the previous year according to the [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#).

According to the NSCR undergraduate students accounted for all of the decline. Also accounted for are community colleges who took a bigger hit with a decline of 476,000 fewer students. In the Fall 2020, [Michigan](#) alone, saw a -7.1% percentage change and in Fall 2021, an -1.4%. For both years the enrollment coverage remains at 71.3%.

At Oakland University, Shane Lewis, director of admissions, states that OU's enrollment dropped by 7.4% in 2021, as opposed to their 2.4% drop in 2020. To combat this shortage of students OU has rolled out a number of initiatives to get future students in and current students retained.

"When you are considering an institution like Oakland, it's significantly important for them [students] to get on campus and to really picture themselves here and really get a feel for the atmosphere on campus...and they were not able to do that starting in Spring 2020," says Lewis.

Due to this, Lewis believes that this had a huge impact on recruitment for the Fall 2021 class. Which in turn ignited the virtual tours for incoming students so that they can still see campus and get a feel for their future enrollment.

Another issue that colleges face with lower enrollments is tuition cost. At OU, tuition went up [4.2%](#) in the year 2021. "Students are torn between pursuing higher education, and providing for their family, and when they can get jobs at \$15 an hour, it's much more enticing to go right into the workforce and harder for us to show how higher education can be the better option in the long run." Lewis states.

According to Lewis, programs like "[Golden Grizzly Tuition Guarantee](#)," which is a loan free tuition-based enrollment, will help incoming students realize that tuition can be affordable.

Lewis also states that another reason for enrollment declining is the shrinking demographics, meaning that there were fewer students born 18 years ago and that shrinkage is going to continue through the 20's, 30's and beyond.

In another effort to boost enrollment, OU has also been making appeals to the transfer students as well.

According to Lewis, “First and foremost, we want to make this a friendly destination for transfers. We’re trying to work in the backend for ways that it’s going to be more of a beneficial experience for them.”

“We have developed transfer guides for all 28 Michigan community colleges that students can go by major or unit to determine what are the best classes they should take at that community college to transfer directly into their degree program here at Oakland” says Lewis, “that being said, we also have 40 articulation agreements with various community colleges, we also have 18 reverse transfer agreements.”

Within the last year the [transfer policy](#) has eliminated the limit on credits that will transfer to the university. “I think again, shifting that policy, being more friendly to transfer students has gone a long way in showing that we value a transfer student, that we’re here to support them through to graduation.” says Lewis.

OU has implemented many policies within the last couple years that are in hopes of higher enrollment rates within the next couple of years. As Lewis says:

“...this is a really great place to be, it’s not just what you get in the end. It's because of everything you’re going to get in the middle.”

Interviews:

Shane Lewis

Splewis@oakland.edu