

Driving Enrollment: Efficacy through Intentionality

Institutional Effectiveness

June 2015

Historically, OCC has operated without an organized enrollment strategy, except in a limited number of programs where enrollment is driven by accreditation or facility concerns. The end result creates a situation where on a year-to-year basis enrollment is more random and creates a level of uncertainty. In turn, this places greater pressure on support services when enrollment is high and greater inefficiencies when enrollment is low. While effectively managing enrollment is a complex undertaking driven by a multitude of converging factors, understanding these factors and their inter-dependencies allows for more effective and consistent delivery of curriculum and support services to our students.

Over the past 20 years the college has experienced significant fluctuations in headcount enrollment (figure 1). Meanwhile, credit hour enrollment has progressed more steadily, reaching a historical peak during the recession years of 2008 – 2010 (figure 2). The convergence of population shifts, economic conditions and alternative educational opportunities are three external factors that directly affect enrollment. However, these factors impact headcount and credit hour enrollment in different ways.

College-wide credit hours and average annual unemployment rate for Oakland County (figure 3) have a nearly perfect correlation, suggesting that the factor most impacting credit hour enrollment in recent years was primarily driven by the county unemployment rate. With unemployment projected to decline further over the next few years (Fulton & Grimes, 2015), the college is likely to experience a continued drop in credit hour enrollment over the short term.

OCC is not alone in this situation either, as many of the southeast Michigan community colleges have experienced the same peaks and valleys in enrollment since the recession. As seen in figure 4, of the six community colleges in Southeast Michigan, all saw increases in enrollment during the recession, and nearly all saw decreases as the economy began to recover. When we looked closely at the changes in headcount from 2005-06 to 2013-14, we saw that OCC was up 6% overall (figure 5a), while Macomb Community College was down 4% overall (figure 5b).

Because community colleges serve different geographic regions of Michigan, it's reasonable that they will not always follow the same trend. For instance, 51% of Oakland county adults age 25 and over already have an associate's degree or higher (figure 6), compared to 29% of Wayne County residents (American Community Survey, 2013). Oakland County has experienced steady declines in the populations age 18 and below as well (figure 7), while Wayne County school districts have a much more even distribution of the total number of students by grade for 2014-15. Competition is also a factor, not to mention online competition; there has been steady growth in the number of post-secondary institutions in Oakland County in the past 60 years (figure 8).

One significant consequence of the recent drop in credit hours seen post-recession is a decline in tuition based revenue. Once the increased revenue was lost, the true impact of the loss in revenue from property taxes during the recession became apparent. OCC Vice-Chancellor of Administrative Services Peter Provenzano has shared with the college such details and informed us of our significant budget deficit. While Mr. Provenzano has called for action, he has been careful to note that generic increases in enrollment are not a viable fix.

Counterintuitive as it seems, increases in enrollment cost the college more, as tuition does not cover the true costs associated with delivering the curriculum in a large number of programs and disciplines. In addition, increasing enrollments should occur in tandem with other increases in services (and therefore spending) in order to maintain a quality learning environment for our students.

While declining enrollment is expected to continue over the short term, in general, some 26% of OCC programs and disciplines saw stable and in some cases growing enrollment over the past three years. Therefore, it's apparent that there are additional factors at play when considering enrollment at a discipline level. Such factors include community need, student interest, quality and content of the curriculum, scheduling, mode of delivery as well as awareness and promotion. Enrollment is also impacted in these programs via effective retention strategies (i.e., increase the persistence of current students from term to term).

Figure 1. Unduplicated Headcount (Credit and Non-Credit)
Source: michigancc.net

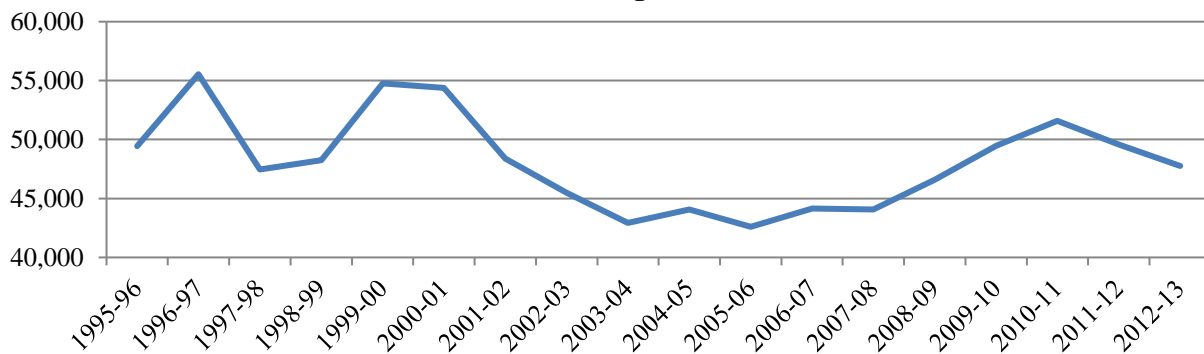


Figure 2. Credit Hours (Credit and Non-Credit)
Source: michigancc.net

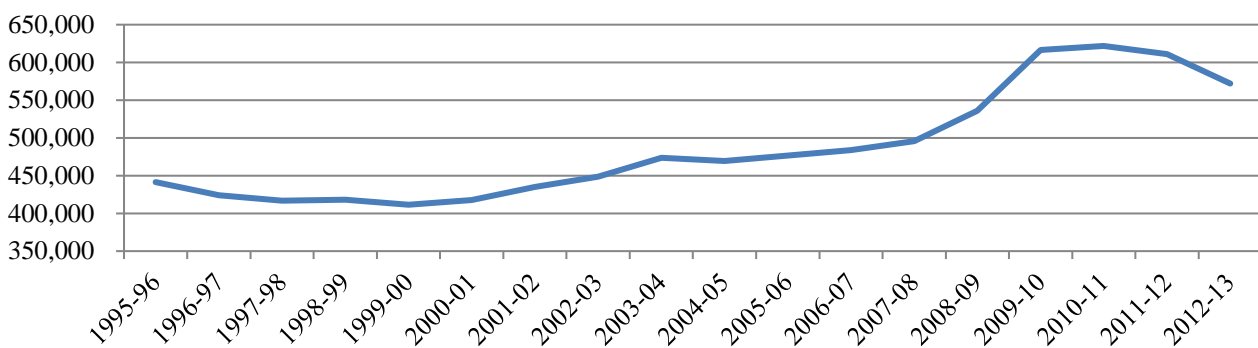


Figure 3. Oakland County Unemployment Rate- Annual Average
 Source: research.stlouisfed.org

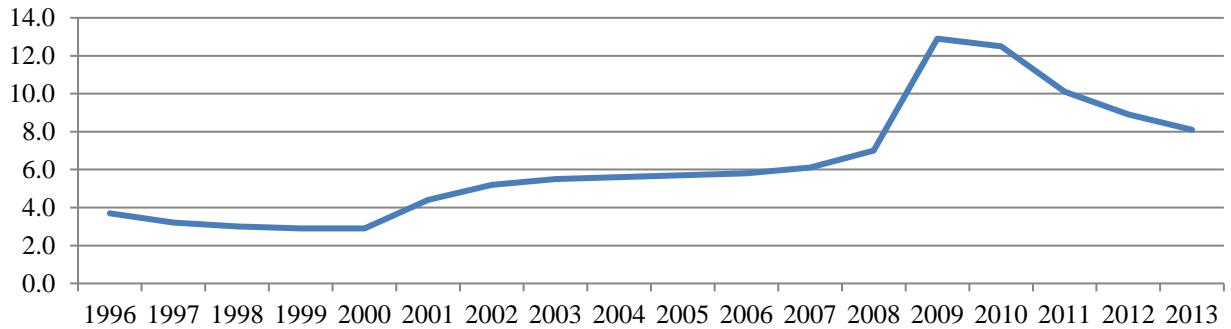


Figure 4. Percent Change in Headcount (Compared to Prior Year Term): Southeast Michigan Community College Enrollment Since Fall 2009
 Source: MACRAO.org

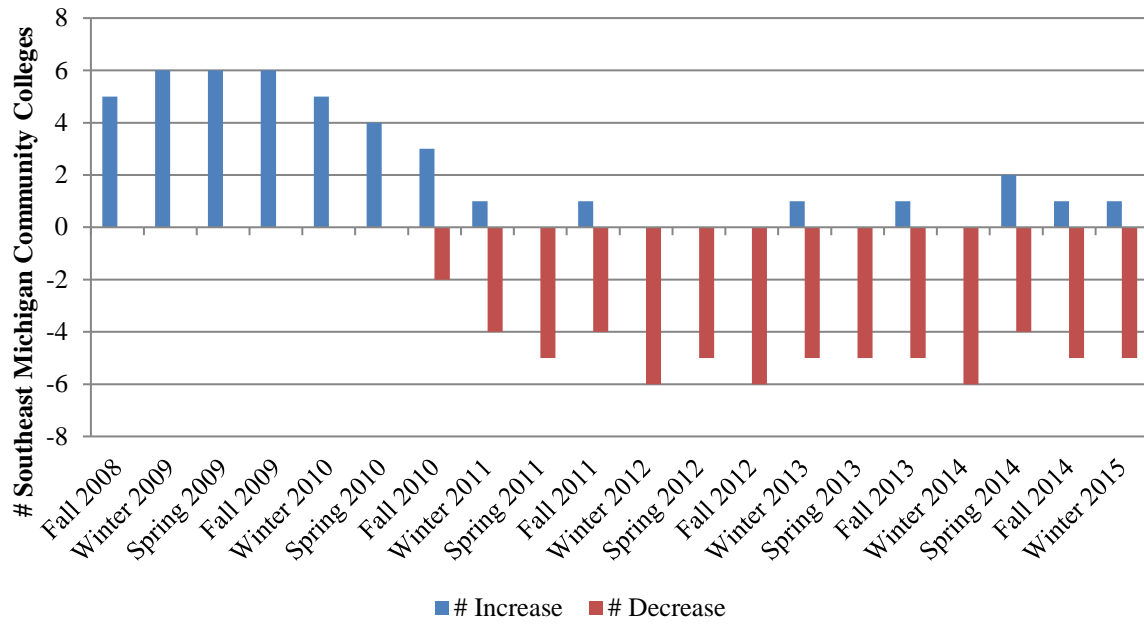


Figure 5a. Oakland Community College Headcount
Source: www.michigancc.net

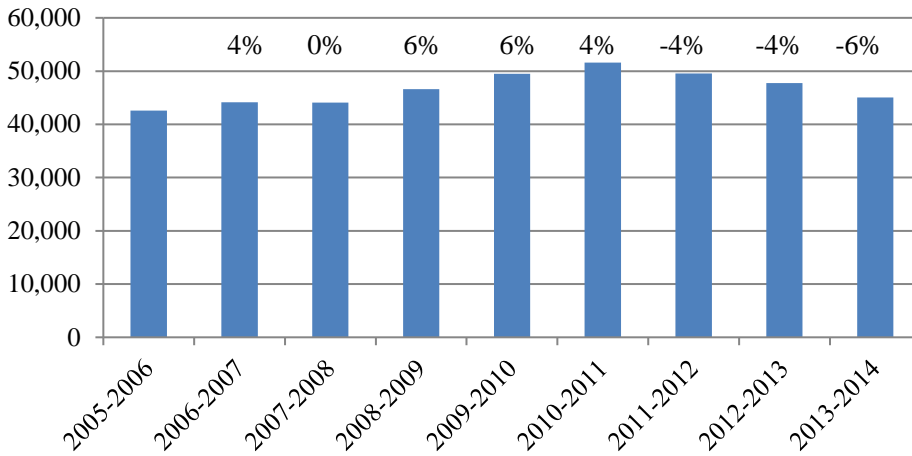


Figure 5b. Macomb Community College
Source: www.michigancc.net

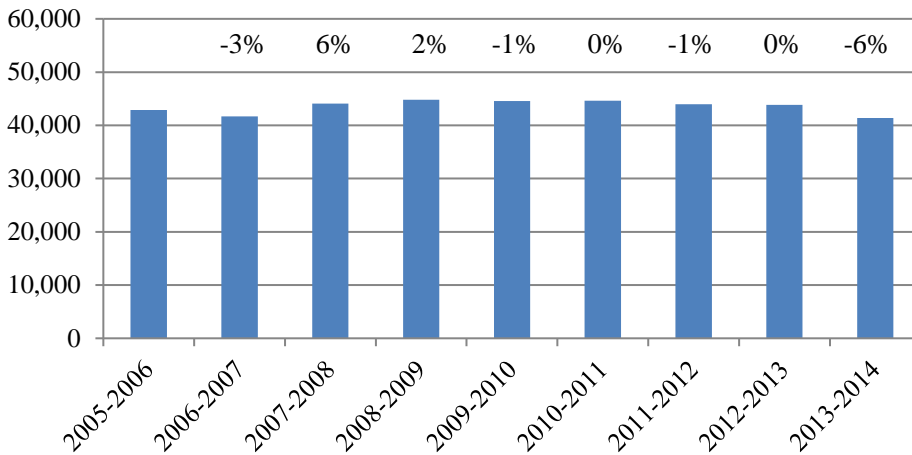


Figure 6. Percent Educational Attainment Oakland County 2013
 Source: American Community Survey

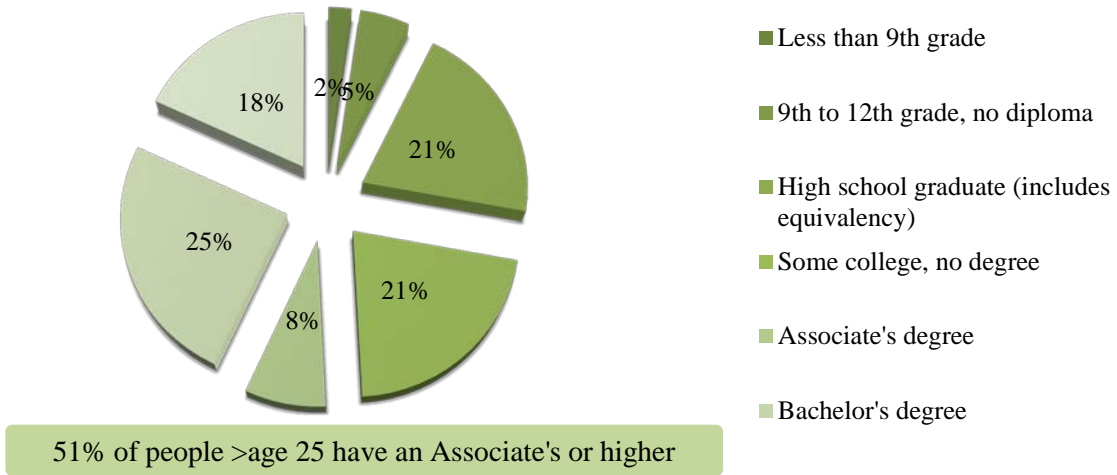


Figure 7. Number Students K-12 Oakland Schools 2014-15
 Source: MIschools.org

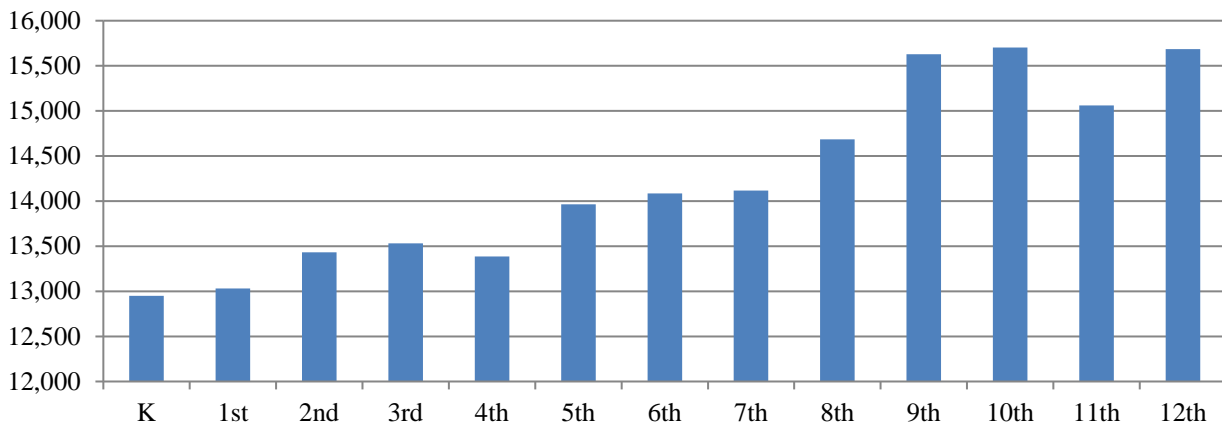


Figure 8. Number of Post-Secondary Institutions in Oakland County by Decade
Source: Council for Higher Education Accreditation

