

Letter to the Editor — Rick Muma

The Sunflower, October 5, 2017

The Sunflower published incorrect and misleading information in the article “Headcount Padding: Wichita State reports largest student increase in state,” on Monday, Oct. 2.

I’m responsible for leading the university’s enrollment efforts, and much of the misinformation could have been prevented had I been interviewed prior to the story being published.

The fact is, during the past two years, hundreds of students, faculty and staff have been involved in the university’s enrollment efforts. More than 40 students are currently employed in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, and many more are associated with enrollment efforts in their colleges and academic departments.

To state that the university padded enrollment at the “last minute” is absolutely false and a disservice to the hundreds of university employees, including student workers, who have worked on our enrollment efforts. It implies that their work was somehow nefarious in nature and questions their integrity.

As the leader of WSU’s enrollment efforts and one who believes integrity is so important as a professional, it sickens me to think that somehow The Sunflower believed that we were leading the university down a path that lacked integrity.

I’d encourage everyone to revisit the university’s Strategic Enrollment Plan (SEM) – wichita.edu/semplan. In our efforts to be transparent, our plans for growing enrollment have been available on that website for the past two years. It utilizes best practices readily available in the higher education literature.

In that plan you’ll find the university’s enrollment goals, including Goal 5 to increase non-degree for-credit enrollment (badges, market-based tuition courses, etc.) by 14 percent annually through fall 2020. This goal is the main focus of The Sunflower article pointing out “last-minute enrollment of non-degree-seeking senior citizens, high school students and working professionals in half-credit-hour courses.”

The truth is the Faculty Senate approved a document to allow and encourage such offerings in 2015 – www.wichita.edu/j/?5917. There was nothing “last-minute” about this goal.

In order to reach the SEM plan enrollment goal of more than 18,000 students by 2020 (not counting WATC students), we will need to grow enrollment by about 5 percent annually in all areas, traditional, transfers, online and even non-degree bound students.

After surveying local employers and getting their input, we were confident that we'd see an increase in badge enrollment with the right mix of offerings. That's why more than 30 new badges were developed by the colleges and approved by faculty during the last year in various subjects. We started marketing and offering scholarship incentives for some of our badges in early August because most working professionals with families wait until school resumes before enrolling. Several of our employees have been involved in developing badges and travel the U.S. speaking at conferences about this innovative approach that opens up access to higher education.

Providing these types of opportunities, including the timing, are nothing new to WSU. For example, the previous administration annually provided hundreds of thousands of dollars of scholarships for students, which grew our high school concurrent enrollment. In the fall of 2011 the university provided full scholarships for 402 high school students and 906 the following spring. Those enrollments counted in past headcount totals.

In addition to enrollment increases in non-degree initiatives this fall, we have increases among first-time new freshmen (1,436, the most in university history for the second consecutive year) and minority students among all freshmen (24.2 percent).

We also saw continued growth in students majoring in online programs (32 percent increase) and continued growth in students living along the I-35 corridor (38 percent increase). All of these increases are a result of our SEM plan goal of growing enrollment to 18,000 students.

We intend to continue using the SEM plan to guide our enrollment efforts, and we will likely see increases in non-degree initiatives. We believe this is the wave of the future and a game-changer for higher education.

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