Enrollment Update

Plattsburgh State University has made tremendous progress advancing new initiatives which have led to several positive outcomes in our 2005 recruiting class. We experienced significant increases in our 2005 full time, first-time student population (1,030) which was higher this year than in over 10 years. Comparative enrollment data for fall 2005 indicates that enrollment in most categories increased over 2003 and 2004, especially full-time, first-time undergraduates, full-time transfers and full-time graduates. Total graduate enrollments in 2005, which was higher than in 2003 and 2004, was considerably below levels between 1999-2002 resulting from a decrease in our part-time graduate enrollments. Our enrollment objective is to maintain enrollment stability for our undergraduate and graduate students. By 2010, we expect to enroll a student body that will include an undergraduate population of approximately 5,388 students (89%) and a graduate student population of 660 students (11%).

Enrollment Management Activities

- Collaborative efforts with an EM firm (Noel Levitz) led to the development of a successful Financial Aid Leveraging Plan which helped to increase the quality of our undergraduate population. Changes in our merit scholarship awarding practice were adopted to optimize the relationship between our financial aid investments, enrollment levels, selectivity and diversity profiles, and net operating revenue, and to provide incentives to target groups of students such as high ability students to enroll.

- The Admissions office further refined the effectiveness of our Recruitment Management System which, among other things, allows us to personalize communications with prospective students to help increase our enrollments. This system is an integral part of the admissions office new Inquiry to Application Conversion Plan which is designed to increase the size of our inquiry pool and conversion rate of student inquiries to actual applicants. This plan includes strategies to enroll higher quality students, to target students by academic program of interest; and increase the proportion of students from ethnic minority backgrounds.

- A Branding and Marketing Campaign with Media Logic was continued and an important component of this effort included The “Destination: Plattsburgh” campaign which focused on getting prospective students and their families to make the trip to campus. The secondary objectives were to raise overall name awareness, and to generate interest in our college from the North Country to the Capital District.

- For the first time, third and fourth year undergraduate courses that lead to bachelor’s degrees in Criminal Justice and Psychology were offered at our Extension Center at ACC. A total of 45 students are now enrolled in these two programs. Upper-division courses at ACC in Childhood Education and Management are planned to be offered in Fall 2006. This initiative has helped to increase the number of transfer enrollments this year and will help to offset any future enrollment declines on this campus.

- Several curriculum changes were made to help increase our applicant base in 2005 (499 more applications than in 2004). Study options became majors, new programs were added (Business, Journalism, Expeditionary Studies, Environmental Studies, Communications, and Nutrition), several programs were renamed, and majors expanded in some departments.
• As part of our coordinated Strategic EM process over the past two semesters to better understand the market we serve, the Marketing Research Subcommittee was involved in conducting a declination study to better understand the reasons why students who are accepted decide not to enroll and a perceptual study to identify factors that influence students to enroll. Program availability and affordability were the two top reasons why students apply to our college, and us being "not the right match" and "too far from home" were the top reasons why students decline to attend.

• The administration addressed the use of financial modeling techniques to optimize the relationship between financial aid investments, enrollment, and net operating revenue.

Retention Efforts

It is essential that recruitment and retention efforts be coordinated in a planned approach for student success and to determine which particular factors have a positive influence on student retention behavior. Consistent with this policy, the further development of retention efforts has been assumed this year by the newly established First-Year Council and Academic Support Services Council. The appointment of a Director of First-Year Programs and Retention Efforts was also made to help with the coordination of our many programs focused on the academic success of first-year students and their ultimate persistence and graduation. As part of our renewed retention effort, the Whiteface Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE) program was started in the fall of 2005 to ease the transition to college through increased staffing, programming efforts, and mentoring relationships in an attempt to increase retention and graduation rates, as well as to increase the quality of college life and levels of satisfaction of students' residence hall experience. The First Year Council established a retention goal for students entering WISE program in 2005 that is 4.5% above the retention rate of first-year students entering in 2004.

Since the retention of first-time students carries a longer positive economic impact, our goal is to try to ensure that a greater proportion of the increase in retained students will be in the first-time student group. Thus, an important retention goal is to decrease our first-year freshman and new transfers attrition rate to 20% by fall 2010 from our current rate of ~ 23% for fall 04-05. Over the past 10 years or so total undergraduate attrition has varied within a narrow range of about 20-22% which is approximately 5% less per year than the national average for 4-year public institutions. Since 2000, our overall attrition rate declined by about 2% from 22 to 20% and we plan to continue this positive trend through 2010 (18% rate). Our 6-year graduation rate which had also been increasing by about 1% every year for the last few years showed a decrease of about 3% to 55.7% for those graduating by 2004. This is still 3% higher than the average for SUNY comprehensive colleges. In fact, our 6-year graduation rate is 13th highest in the nation (May 2003) and 3rd highest among the SUNY University Colleges. With increased retention we expect this rate to continue to increase with a projected rate of about 60% for the entering 2000 cohort graduating in 2005. Our 4-year graduation rate averaged over the last 5 years is about 33%, and we expect it to increase to 35% by 2010.

Student Selectivity

Many changes in the freshmen merit scholarship awarding process were adopted to make more scholarships available for high-achieving students to help increase the yield on this cohort. For example, 919 more freshmen merit award scholarships were offered in 2005 as compared to 2004 which resulted in an increase in our yield of freshmen awarded a scholarship from 25% in Fall 2004 to 26.5% in Fall 2005. As a result of our increased Financial aid awarding structure, we have exceeded our 2005 enrollment goal for entering high ability students (Groups 1 and 2, as determined by SAT and High School Avg.). Forty percent of our enrolling freshmen in 2005 were within groups 1 and 2, reflecting a dramatic increase of 5% over 2004, 6% over 2003 and 8% over 2002. Our long term goal is to slowly increase the number of
freshmen in Groups 1 and 2 to 44% by 2008. With this change in the profile mix, we anticipate an increase in the average SAT score of the freshman class from 1054 in 2005 (which is 10 points higher than 2004) to 1070 by 2010. Since 2001, the mean high school average of entering freshmen remained essentially the same and the mean SAT increased from 1045 in 2001 to 1054 in 2005. In 2005 the mean SAT was higher by 7-10 points over each of the past four years.

Student Diversity

Another EM goal successfully met involved an increase in student diversity. The freshman admissions in each of the last three fall classes illustrates a diversity enrollment percentage greater than 14%. The current incoming Fall 2005 freshman class represents a self identified diversity profile of 16.6% which is about 2% higher than in 2004 and 1% above 2003. Our EM goal is to continue to work toward the goal of increasing minority enrollment of the entire undergraduate class from our current level of 11% to 13% or more of total enrollment by 2010. Since 2000, the total undergraduate domestic out of state student enrollment increased by 63% (142 in fall 2000 to 232 in 2005) and total international student enrollment increased from 166 in fall 2000 to 392 in 2002 but has since declined to 305 in 2005. The total number of domestic-out-of state and international students represent 10% of the undergraduate population which is considerably higher than all other SUNY 4-year university colleges which typically average 1-2% in this category. International students’ proportion of the undergraduate student body has increased from 0.6% in 1996 to ~6% 2005

Online Courses

Another important aspect of our EM plan includes the anticipated increase of online courses, and the need to continue to develop the appropriate support and infrastructure to support online and distant learners. For instance, in 2005, there was a dramatic increase in online course offerings and online course enrollments over previous years. A total of 140 Web courses, enrolling 2,372 students were offered in fields such as Nursing, Anthropology, Business, Biology, Library Skills and Education. Continued increases in online courses is anticipated during the next few years and a significant increase of web-based course management as part of traditional courses is expected.

Enrollment Management Goals

Our EM goals are to continue to 1) improve the quality and diversity of our student population, 2) improve retention through effective student programming and mentoring activities, 3) conduct more marketing research activities to better understand the market we serve and 4) incorporate careful fiscal planning in our enrollment strategy.