

UPDATED AND REVISED PROJECTIONS OF WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
FULL-TIME UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENTS BY CLASS, FALL, 1983, TO FALL, 1988

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This report provides updated and revised projections of full-time undergraduate enrollments at Western Kentucky University.* The base for each projection series is 1982's actual fall enrollments; and yearly enrollments by class are projected for 1983 to 1988.

A set of four projections is presented, providing a range of alternative futures. The high and low projections are intended to illustrate the two extremes - the highest and lowest enrollments likely. It is not anticipated that enrollments will reach either of these extremes in any of the years ahead; but the expectation is that enrollments will fall between them each year. The Median I and II projections are more consistent with average trends and typical years of the recent past; and they are intended to reflect more closely the anticipated short term future changes and trends in enrollments. Since the intermediate Medium I and Medium II projections are likely to be more useful for planning purposes, attention will be focused on them.

The impending period of declining enrollments that many have warned about seems to have arrived. WKU experienced a drop of nearly 2% in its full-time undergraduate enrollment from 1981 to 1982; and further declines which may be alarming to those worried about the consequences of fewer students are projected. Both Medium series project declines in enrollment at WKU beginning with Fall 1983 and continuing to Fall 1987. If some of the most representative trends of the past few years continue, WKU can expect an enrollment decline of between 100 (-1.1%) and 583 (-6.5%) students by next fall; and WKU may experience a pronounced enrollment decline of 11% to 22% over the next five years. By 1987 there may be approximately 1 to 2,000 fewer students at WKU than there are at present. (See Table A)

*Previous reports were issued in March, 1980 and February 1981. See the 1980 report for a detailed description of the methodology used. The detailed assumptions and tables used in projection series have not been included here, but are available upon request.

A number of factors and trends underly these projections and need to be briefly discussed. A big contributor to the anticipated decline in college enrollments is the projected decline in high school seniors and graduates in Kentucky beginning in 1983. Projections made using Kentucky Department of Education statistics on high school seniors and data from the Council on Higher Education on high school graduates show a substantial decline of 16-17% in the number of high school graduates from 1982 to 1986. This is somewhat similar to the projected 22% decline nationally in high school graduates during the 1980's. (See: Frankel and Gerald. Projections of Educational Statistics to 1990-91, Vol. I, 1982: 14)

Nationally, the 18-24 year old population is expected to decrease by 15% during the 1980's. As pointed out above, in Kentucky the pool from which college freshmen has traditionally come is also expected to shrink. Coupled with this decline of high school graduates is the fact that a relatively small proportion of Kentucky high school graduates enter college. For the last three years for which data are available - 1979, 1980, and 1981 - only 50.4%, 54.5%, and 48.6% of spring high school graduates went to college in Kentucky the next fall. Western's share of the high school graduates has never been higher than 5.5% (1974) and in 1979, 1980, and 1981 only 4.8%, 5.0%, and 4.7% of Kentucky high school graduates entered Western as first-time freshmen. If the proportion of high school graduates who go on to Western remains slightly less than 5%, the number of first-time in-state freshmen at WKU will also decline.

Even though the ratio of full-time to first-time freshmen rose in the 1980's over what it had been in previous years, perhaps indicative of an increase in older students now beginning college, (roughly a ratio of full-time/first time of 1.6), full-time freshmen are still expected to decrease 10 to 17% from 1982 to 1986. Retention of freshmen students has also

been a problem at Western. The survivorship rate from freshmen to sophomore year has declined from 63% in 1978/79 and 1979/80 to 56% in 1980/81 and 1981/82. The Medium projections have also taken this trend into account.

In times of a decreasing supply of traditional-aged college students and in times of increasing costs and economic difficulties, declining full-time enrollments become inevitable unless vigorous steps are taken to actively recruit and retain non-traditional students. At the national level, the expected enrollment drop during the 1980's is projected to be offset by an increasing enrollment of students 25 years old and over. However, much of this anticipated increase may be in the form of part-time and graduate enrollments, and may have little effect on projected full-time enrollment declines. Also, it should be cautioned that such an exceptional aging of the college population, corresponding to the aging of the baby boom generation, will not occur automatically. The pool of baby boomers is there, but great effort and innovative programs are needed to attract them to or back to the campuses.

If WKU's goal is to increase or at least maintain current full-time enrollment levels, one has to question several recent decisions which are likely to affect such levels. Policies at the state and university level, such as those which impose admission and transfer requirements on in- and out-of-state students and those which eliminate out-of-state tuition waivers for students of neighboring states (however admirable they may be academically or otherwise), will make it harder for some students to attend WKU, and are likely to have the effect of contributing to even further declines in enrollments. Policies such as these may offset whatever other efforts are made to increase enrollments.

The projections presented here show what is most likely to happen if current trends continue and what the outcomes will be if no changes are initiated to avert them. The projections are illustrative, not predictive;

Table A. Updated and Revised Projections of Western Kentucky University Full-Time Undergraduates by Class, 1983 to 1988*

Class	Actual 1982	Projected Fall Enrollments, W.K.U.					
		1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
<u>Low Series</u>							
Freshmen	3374	2888	2751	2631	2592	2625	2707
Sophomores	2060	1819	1557	1483	1418	1397	1415
Juniors	1683	1497	1321	1131	1077	1030	1015
Seniors	<u>1858</u>	<u>1604</u>	<u>1427</u>	<u>1259</u>	<u>1078</u>	<u>1027</u>	<u>982</u>
Total	8975	7808	7056	6504	6165	6079	6119
<u>Medium I Series</u>							
Freshmen	3374	3116	2968	2839	2797	2833	2922
Sophomores	2060	1884	1740	1657	1585	1562	1582
Juniors	1683	1663	1493	1379	1313	1256	1238
Seniors	<u>1858</u>	<u>1759</u>	<u>1706</u>	<u>1560</u>	<u>1441</u>	<u>1372</u>	<u>1312</u>
Total	8975	8392	7907	7435	7136	7023	7054
<u>Medium II Series</u>							
Freshmen	3374	3366	3207	3068	3023	3062	3157
Sophomores	2060	2000	1995	1901	1818	1792	1815
Juniors	1683	1669	1620	1616	1540	1473	1451
Seniors	<u>1858</u>	<u>1840</u>	<u>1825</u>	<u>1772</u>	<u>1767</u>	<u>1684</u>	<u>1611</u>
Total	8975	8875	8647	8357	8148	8011	8034
<u>High Series</u>							
Freshmen	3374	3986	3798	3634	3579	3626	3738
Sophomores	2060	2189	2586	2464	2357	2322	2352
Juniors	1683	1709	1816	2145	2044	1955	1926
Seniors	<u>1858</u>	<u>1934</u>	<u>1964</u>	<u>2087</u>	<u>2465</u>	<u>2349</u>	<u>2246</u>
Total	8975	9818	10164	10330	10445	10252	10262

*Prepared by Paul R. Wozniak, Professor of Sociology, Western Kentucky University, January, 1983.

and scenarios other than the ones presented here can be constructed using a different combination of assumptions. What these projections suggest are declining enrollments at WKU through the next five years if recent patterns persist. It is hoped that such projections will prove useful in planning for and initiating changes that will permit the university to define and achieve its future enrollment and academic goals.