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UNM-LA Enrollment up for the eighth straight semester

The figures are in and the news is good. For the eighth straight semester, enrollment is up at UNM-Los Alamos. According to UNM-LA's Institutional Researcher Valida Dushdurova, headcount is 6.8% higher in Fall 2010 than Fall 2009. Student credit hours and full time enrollment numbers are both up 9.6% over last year.

This is great news for UNM-LA, because the campus struggled with falling enrollment from 2004 to Spring 2008. Sources at UNM-LA point to two factors contributing to this drop in enrollment—Northern New Mexico College became a four-year school, able to grant bachelor's degrees, and Los Alamos National Laboratory changed its policies affecting reimbursement and time off for enrolling in classes.

What has contributed to the increase in enrollment? Dr. Patricia Boyer, director of Student Services at UNM-LA points to teamwork on the part of her staff and the UNM-LA Faculty.

“UNM-LA Student Services staff and faculty have created an enrollment management plan to increase enrollments. This plan and the necessary collaboration has not only erased the barriers between faculty and staff, but has also resulted in productive, fun, hands-on activities for our 'college seeking' high school and junior high school students throughout northern New Mexico,” she said.

“Since fall is when high school seniors investigate potential colleges, each fall we invite 11th and 12th graders to our campus, while each spring we invite 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th graders to our campus,” Boyer said.

“Student Services works hard to set up a fun and educational visit, student government provides funds for snacks for our visitors, and faculty work hard to provide on-hands, fun and interesting activities for our visitors. After receiving a number of letters from visiting counselors thanking us for the upbeat, fun and hands-on approach we provide, we, as a campus - can pat ourselves on the back for our successful ventures,” Boyer said.

According to Dushdurova, the fast growing categories of students are the concurrent enrollment and dual credit programs that enroll students currently attending high school. The students in these programs receive college credit while still in high school. Students in the dual credit program also receive high school credit.

“ In the last two years we have had a 500% growth in the number of concurrent and dual credit students enrolled at UNM-LA, said Dushdurova. “We usually had between 30 and 40 concurrent and dual students enrolled every Spring Semester, but in Spring 2009 we had 197. In Spring 2010 we had 220 students and in Fall 2010 we have 219 concurrent and dual credit students enrolled.”

Another area of high growth is among students who attend UNM-LA with the intention of transferring to a bachelor’s program at a four-year college or to the Bachelor and Graduate Program through Extended University on the UNM-LA campus.

“In Fall 2009 we had a 31% increase in the number of transfer students. In Spring 2010 we had a 25% increase in the number of transfer students,” Dushdurova reported.

One reason for this increase may be the success of UNM-LA students when they transfer. In a study conducted by Dushdurova, UNM-LA students who transferred to UNM’s main campus in Albuquerque, showed impressive academic performance.

“Students have earned 47% A’s and 32% B’s in all of their coursework,” said Dushdurova. “ A closer look shows that this kind of grade ratio holds true to their performance in science and math courses as well, where they earned 41% A’s and 33% B’s, proving again that UNM-LA’s reputation of providing students with strong math and science skills holds true and puts our transfers at an advantage at their destination school. Our students also do well in their English course work, earning 38% A’s and 39% B’s in the subject at UNM in Albuquerque,” she said.

According to the study, these numbers are considerably higher than those for students who start out on the Albuquerque campus.

Once students decide to attend UNM-LA focus shifts to retention. UNM-LA has a number of tactics in place to retain students.

“ Our retention strategy includes mandatory advisement, early alert AND mid-term alert systems; Help Days provided by faculty the Fridays before mid-terms and finals; constant contact with faculty with struggling students, ADA accommodations, and finally—a listening ear when needed,” Boyer said.

Teamwork has really paid off for UNM-LA.

| “As we can plainly see, in this world of funding driven by student -head count and credit hours, recruitment and retention is not any one department's responsibility and definitely not any one person's responsibility,” said Boyer. “Any successful recruitment and retention strategy is dependent on the dedication and work load of many individuals who create a united whole.”