

Experiencing a Staggering Growth of New Students at a Metropolitan University in the Face of Funding Cuts

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Abstract

Over a four-year period, the University of South Florida (USF), a large multi-campus metropolitan university in Tampa, Florida, saw the number of annual new degree-seeking students increase by 46%. Unfortunately, during the most recent year (academic year 2001/02), the increase in students was met with a 9.6% budget cut resulting from decreased state revenue. Interestingly, while this hefty increase in new students was occurring, calls continued to be heard for increased student recruitment. This paper shows the growth, identifies why many failed to perceive what had happened, while noting some of the resulting effects.

Introduction

This paper calls attention to the rather massive increases in the enrollment of new degree-seeking students that have occurred at USF in recent years.

Methods

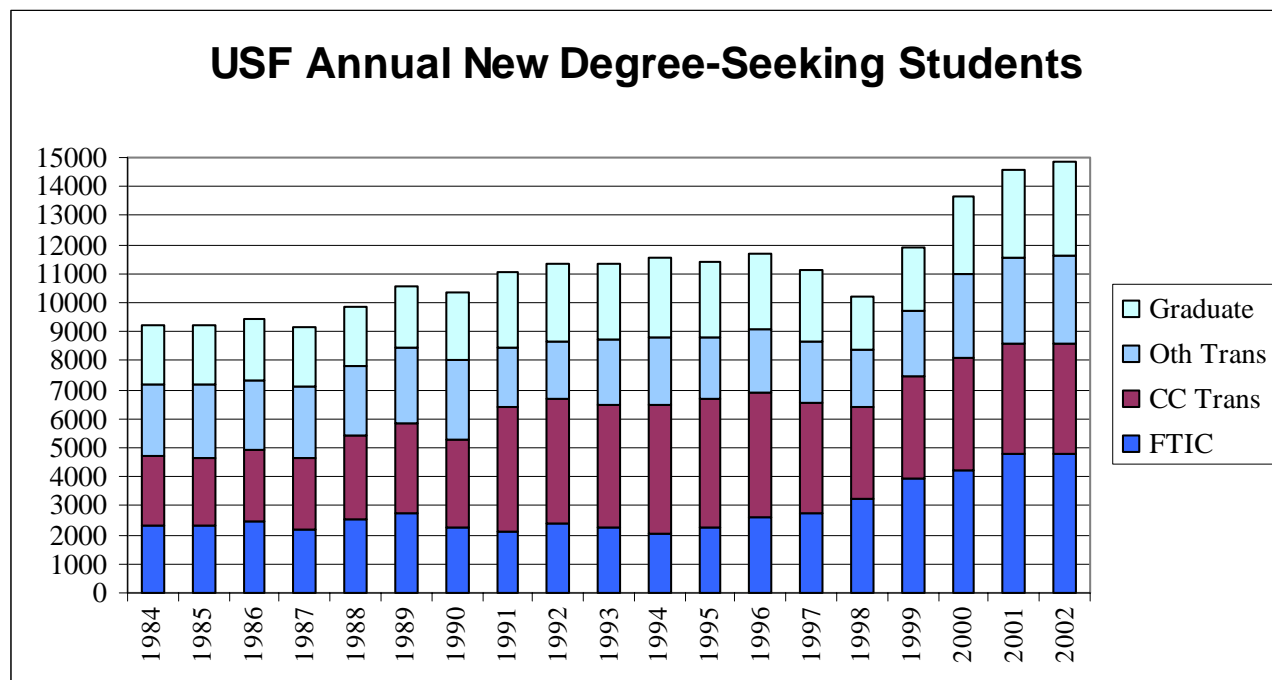
All data included in this report are drawn from historical USF technical reports:
<http://usfweb.usf.edu/usfirp/infomart/>

Findings

Figure 1 shows the rather amazing increase in enrollment of annual new degree-seeking students that occurred between 1998 and 2002 at USF.

Graduate, other transfer,¹ and FTIC students all increased by 50% or more, while only community college transfers saw a moderate 17% increase.

Figure 1
Total New Degree-Seeking Students by Student Level, 1984-2002



¹ At USF, transfer students are classified into two categories, (1) those coming from a Florida community college, and those coming from any other higher education institution (e.g. non-Florida community college or 4-year institution).

One might think that this overall growth of 46% in a four-year period indicates either a relaxation of admissions criteria, or, an increased yield of admitted students. However, as Figure 5 in the Appendix shows, generally, the percentage of admitted students has tended to drop rather than increase, for all student types. This suggests that no relaxation of admissions criteria occurred. Looking at the enrolled percentage of admitted (yield), although these show increases for FTIC (1999-2000), graduate students (1999-2000) and other transfers (1999-2000), these changes alone shouldn't cause the large increase. Rather, it appears to be more a result of the increasing applicant numbers (Figure 4) with some contribution from a slightly higher yield for most student types.

USF Unclassified Student Enrollment Has Dropped Recently

The top panel of Figure 2 shows a general downward trend in the enrollment of non-degree-seeking (unclassified) students recently, while the bottom panel shows that the greatest reductions among such students has occurred during the most recent two spring and fall semesters and the most recent summer.

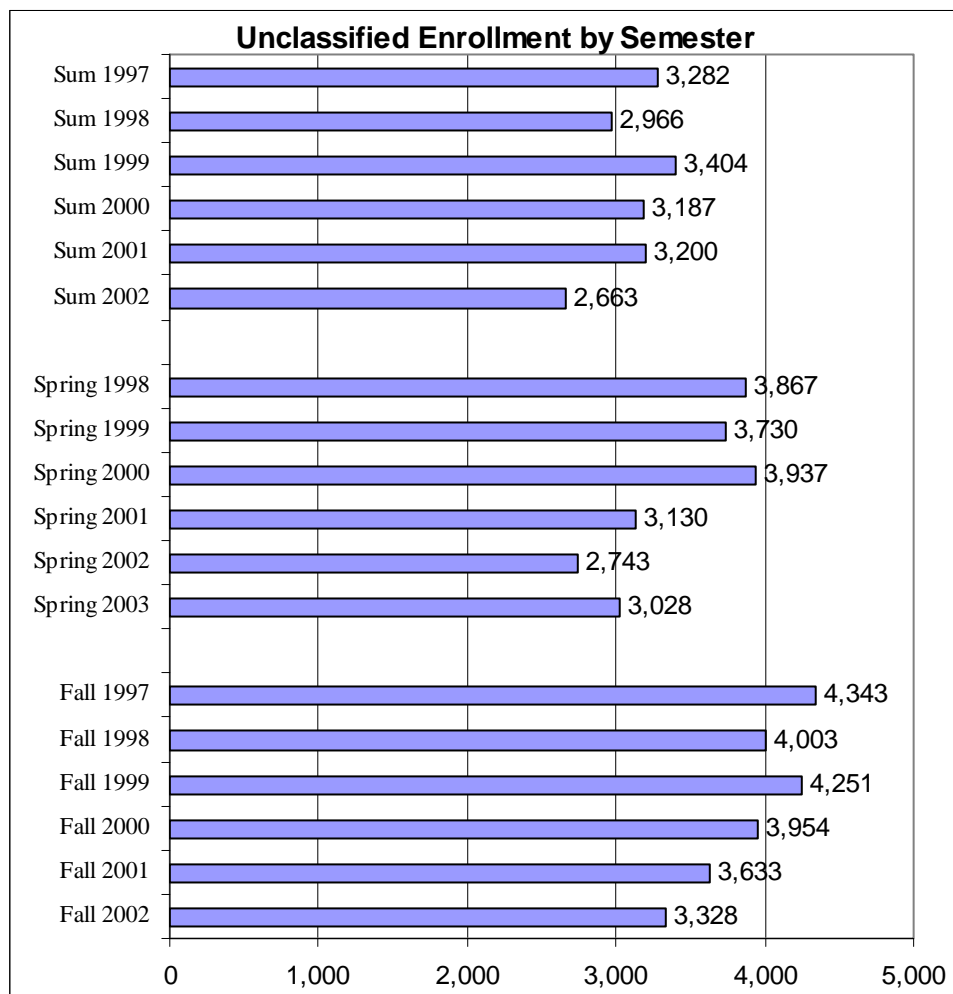
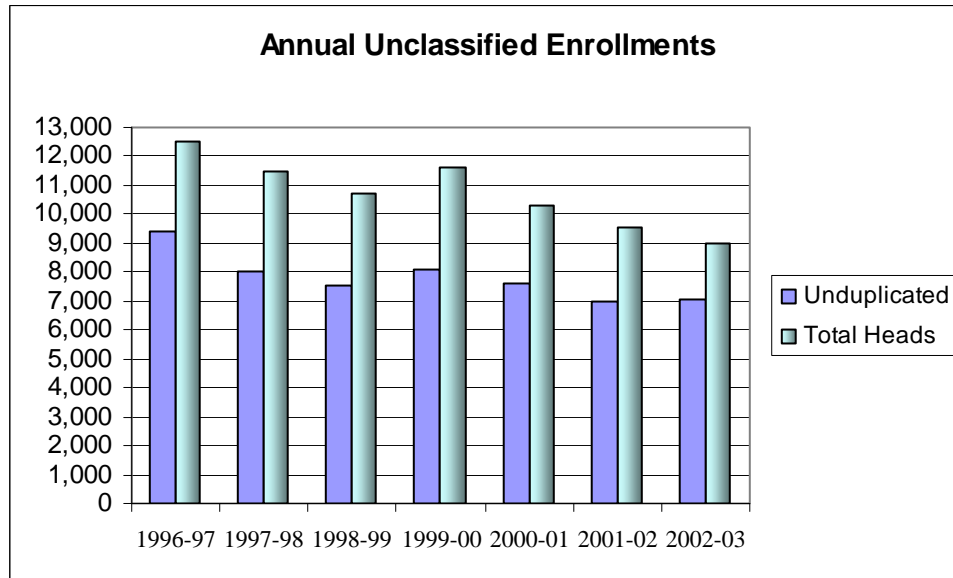
- Unduplicated annual unclassified headcounts have dropped from over 9,000 in 1997-98 to some 7,000 from 2001-2003 (<http://usfweb.usf.edu/usfirp/infomart/Major10/>). As the top panel of Figure 2 shows, this translates to a total reduction of over 3,000 heads during the year, and offsets a considerable amount of the growth shown in Figure 1).
- The bottom panel shows that summer enrollment was the most consistent semester among unclassified students, although, the drop that occurred in 2002 is almost surely a result of the cutback in course offerings described in the section titled: "How Have We Dealt with This Growth in the Face of Large Budget Cuts. "

Given the current economic environment and the attitude in Tallahassee, it appears likely that non-degree-seeking students will find it more difficult to enroll in courses at USF at least during the near future.

- It also appears possible that at least some of the increases in new-degree-seeking students (Figure 1) may result from more students enrolling as degree-seeking rather than non-degree-seeking (unclassified). This may have occurred either due to natural processes or, as a result of stimuli from the Academy.

Figure 2

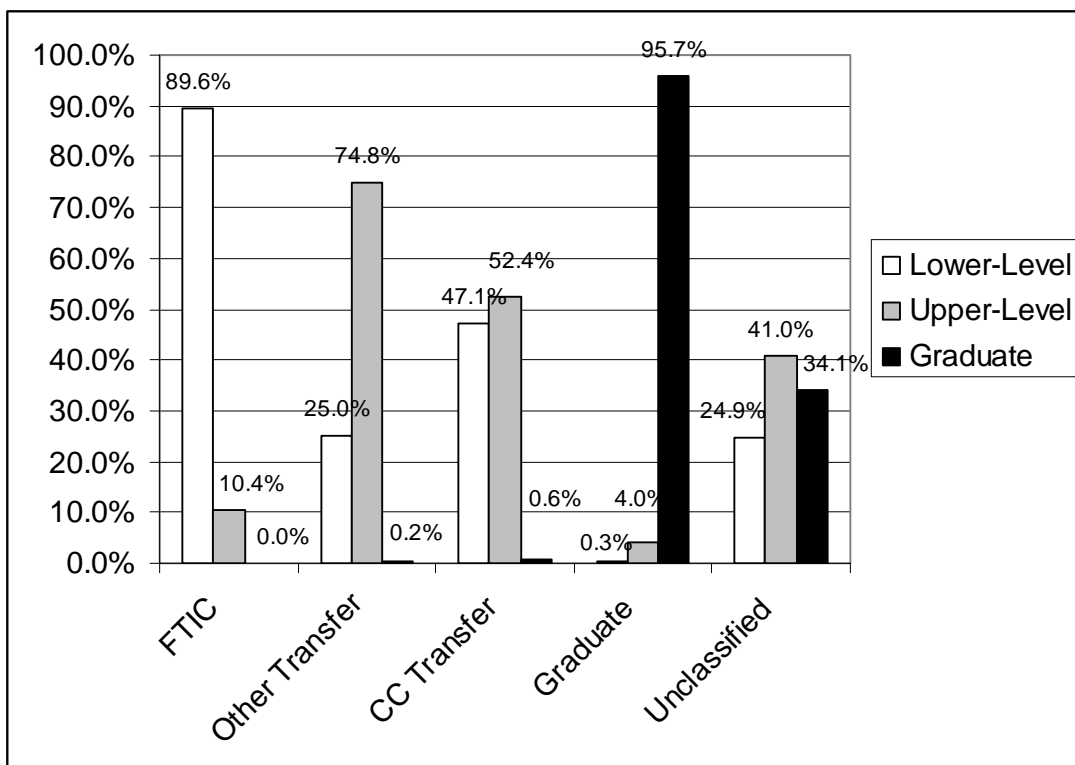
Recent Trends in Unclassified Enrollment at USF



SCH Distribution Among New Students

- Figure 3 shows that new unclassified students distribute the SCH they take more widely than any other type of new students.
- Unsurprisingly, new FTICs take primarily lower-level courses (89.6%), and graduate students primarily graduate courses (95.7%).
- Community college transfer enrollment distributes about equally between lower-level and upper level courses, and this, despite the fact that some 90% of these students have earned an AA degree prior to matriculating at USF.
- Other transfer students take considerably more upper-level than lower-level courses.

Figure 3
Annual SCH Contribution by New Student Type



How Has USF Dealt with This Student Growth in the Face of Large Budget Cuts

As Figure 2 shows, thanks to a drop in the number of non-degree-seeking students, the growth in total students has been somewhat mitigated. Obviously, more students require more resources, and budget cuts have hurt. At USF, a fervent attempt has been made to limit the impact on students, thus, most budget cutting and non-replacement of employees has occurred in Administrative areas. Despite this, in the summer semester 2002, the College of Arts & Sciences, by far the largest at USF, cut its course offerings by 38%. Summer is the most profitable time to reduce course offerings, because expensive rank faculty teach almost all summer courses. Faculty were also asked to increase their course caps, and all agreed. Thus, SCH was only reduced by 25%, and the number of non-degree-seeking enrolled students dropped by 17%. This was a stopgap measure that may have to become policy-like, because, even more budget cuts loom on a somewhat bleak funding horizon.

Appendix

Figure 4

Applied, Admitted and Enrolled by Student Level – 1996 to 2002 Fall Cohorts

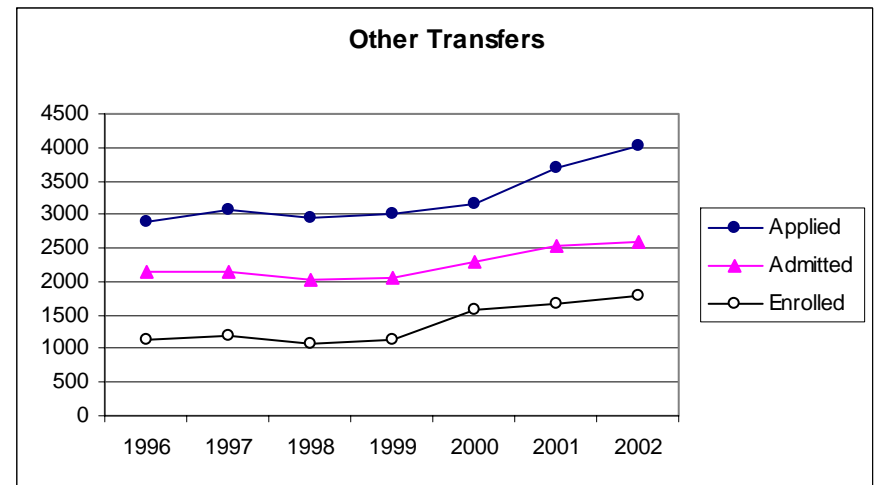
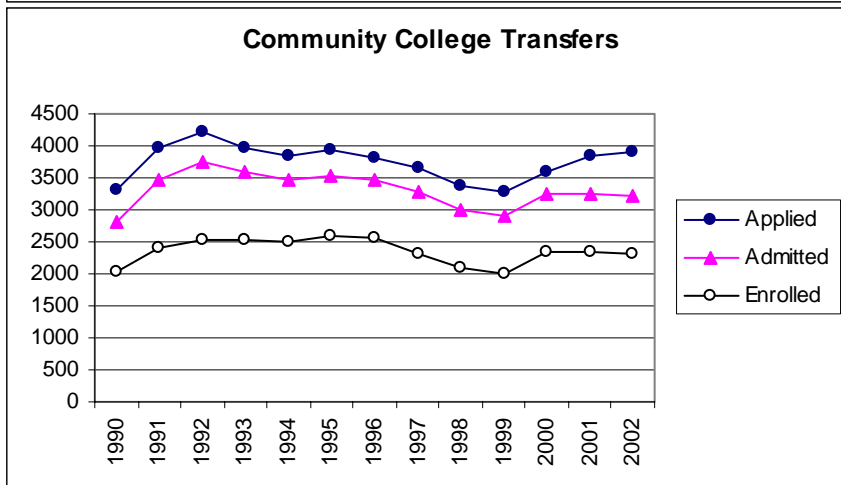
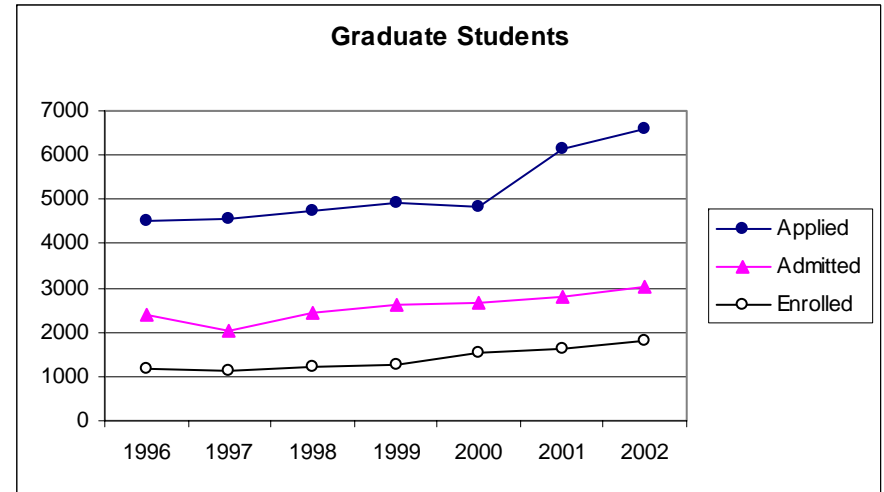
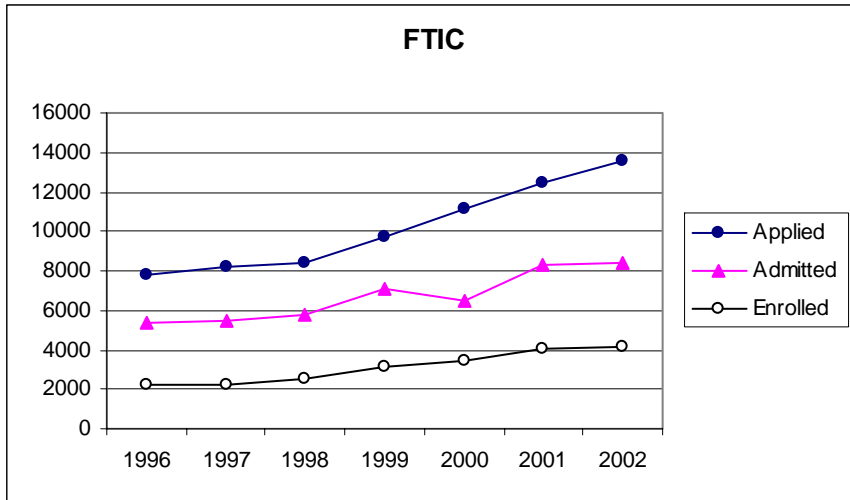


Figure 5

Ratio of Applied to Admitted and Admitted to Enrolled by Student Level – Fall 1996-2002

