June 30, 2006

Colleges and universities across the country are facing enrollment decline. Following semesters of record growth, the market of college-bound students is shrinking and enrollments are falling. In response, some institutions are scrambling to create opportunities to cast their nets wider and deeper, all in an attempt to help stabilize enrollment in a dwindling market. Although analysts predicted the decline, the reality is tough to face.

At Cuyahoga Community College, we have been more fortunate than many. Our Enrollment Management (EM) team consisting of academic and student affairs, marketing and communications, TSR, FBS, and institutional planning staff members meet on a regular basis to analyze our enrollment status and plan improvements to enrollment related processes and procedures. Enrollment at the College has always been cyclical in nature, evidenced by the accompanying chart. Factors such as the national and local economy, county population changes, and high school graduation rates all contribute to the raise and fall in our enrollment. As we enter the 2006-2007 academic year, we are experiencing the expected decline in enrollment. National enrollment management consultants as well as our own internal professionals predicted this downturn in enrollment which began last fall semester and continues through our current summer semester.
This chart tracks an increase in headcount, followed by a leveling out and then a decrease from FY 99 through FY 05. During the current summer term, we experienced a 6% decline in headcount enrollment, compared to FY 05, along with a 3.8% decline in FTE. To help identify enrollment trends, the Office of Institutional Planning has developed a new tool for monitoring our seven-country draw area. These enrollment maps are produced periodically during open registration and track changes in the number of students registered for credit classes at the College. Student enrollment by zip code of residence is compared to the same point in the registration process from the previous year. Additional maps, detail enrollment counts by new, continuing and returning status.

In our review of data related to student enrollment, the EM team analyzed information on the conversion rate of summer term “applied students” to “enrolled students”. As the chart below shows, 50% of the students who completed an application to the College actually enrolled in summer classes. In spite of a 50% conversion rate and a 6% decline in enrollment, the number of applied students has remained constant. While we would like even more prospective students to submit an application to the College, we also know that we must do a better job of converting those who apply to enrolled
students. What would our summer enrollment be today if the percentage of applied students to enrolled students were increased? Our data also reveals that a similar conversion percentage exists for fall semesters.

During the past four months the EM team has been reviewing intake procedures and fulfillment mechanisms to become even more responsive to students. We have studied our technology applications and made improvements, such as the implementation of the online application for admission. We have held focus groups of new summer students to gain their perspective on the enrollment process; made numerous changes to the college web site and to InfoAccess; expanded the use of email to prospective and current students; piloted IM with students and increased outbound telephone calls. A group of health careers programs are piloting a new process for prospective students to request and receive program information and admission packets. We have introduced new outreach procedures and expanded communications to prospective students and applicants. Open houses and recruitment events have been coupled with follow-up activities to prospective students. There is still much to be done as we focus on the fast approaching start to the fall semester!

An enrollment decline affects all units and employees of the College. We must all work together to strengthen and improve processes and procedures in order to minimize the enrollment decline. You might ask, “How can I help?”

You may be familiar with the Keep In Touch (KIT) program. Implemented two years ago, KIT was an initiative developed to assist with student retention. Employees telephoned currently enrolled students throughout the academic term to offer assistance and to just keep in touch. Tracking student success, the results showed that students who participated in the KIT program experienced a higher retention rate then those who did not.

Building on this success, and in an effort to increase our conversion rate, the EM team is implementing a KIT program for new students who have applied for the fall semester but have not yet registered for
classes. We are inviting all employees to be a part of this special initiative. Volunteers will call and track new students beginning in July, all the way through to fall semester enrollment. Callers will provide assistance to the new students through the various steps of the enrollment process. This includes assessment, financial aid, new student orientation, academic advising and registration. Employees participating in this KIT program do not have to be experts in each of these enrollment steps. Rather, they will serve as a friendly voice to students, helping them navigate through our process for enrollment.

The good news is that our applicant base has increased. As of June 28th, there were 3,992 new applicants to the College for the fall semester compared to 3,316 last year. Of this group, 790 have enrolled in classes. Volunteers in the KIT program will call those who have not yet enrolled in an effort to facilitate their next steps and help them matriculate. This chart shows new student data on the various steps in the enrollment process and the number of students who have completed each step. The KIT Applied Not Registered telephone campaign kicks off on July 10th and continues through August 25th. A short Training session for KIT volunteers will be held at convenient locations on each of our three campuses. This session will give callers the tools needed to get started. All Tri-C employees are encouraged to participate in the enrollment management effort. This important initiative supports our College goals, the strategic plan and our AQIP endeavors. And, it can help you meet one of your PEP objectives for FY 07! To become a KIT volunteer, contact any of the Dean of Student Affairs Offices.

We need your help to launch a successful Fall 2006.

Together we can make a difference!