

**MSU Works to Combat Projected Enrollment Decline**

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Mississippi State University is working to combat a predicted decline in enrollment through innovative recruitment initiatives across departments.

The College and University Professional Association for Human Resources is one of many sources that predict a decline in public school enrollment, and consequently university and college enrollment, due to the low birthrates in the 2008 Great Recession. This decline in applicants poses a problem for MSU.

John Dickerson, MSU associate vice president for enrollment, said the enrollment cliff is not set to affect MSU until around 2026, but that the university has been working hard the past three years to prepare.

Dickerson said MSU focuses on all avenues of enrollment, such as high schoolers, community colleges, adult learners, international students and graduate students across the nation. By laying the foundation to recruit students outside of just high schools, MSU can build strong relationships with those who may not be traditionally targeted to attend.

"We've added some additional staff on the recruitment side to help us address this. We have additional staff that are located outside of the state of Mississippi to try to help just make us more marketable to out-of-state students. Working with our high schools and working in our community colleges, we've put some emphasis on the undergrad side with international

students. Lots being done on student success with advising First Year Experience classes for academic support so that the students who come have a better opportunity to be successful and stay," Dickerson said.

Dickerson said the university is using unique recruiting tactics by targeting technical students and industries through the [Bachelor of Applied Science](#).

"Because we know they have a number of employees who earned the two-year technical degree and they want to give their employees the opportunity to get their bachelor's degree. And so the folks in Professional Continuing Studies have done a really good job of trying to develop partnerships there as well. And now we have the BAS, we can certainly do that," Dickerson said.

Lindsey Shelton, director of MSU Graduate Admissions and Enrollment Marketing, wrote her dissertation on this very topic and researched the factors to increase graduate school enrollment with a shrinking applicant pool. Shelton learned that students are more likely to officially enroll with graduate schools that responded quickly. Shelton helped integrate the Direct Admit Program to improve the acceptance rate of qualified graduate applicants at MSU.

"One of our strategies for trying to offset this enrollment cliff is to really improve the speed with which we can admit students. We have lots of applicants. So, if we can capitalize

on the people that are already showing interest, getting them turned over quickly and get on the decision, I think that will help to offset the deficit that we're going to see," Shelton said.

Shelton said MSU's Graduate School has increased efforts in recruiting across the world through a larger recruiting staff, targeted online advertisements and growing the Thrive in Five accelerated graduate degree program, specifically among Shackouls Honors College students.

Shelton noted program names play a role in increasing enrollment. She explained that many degree programs may be considered antiquated and that students may not be aware that modern programs are offered at MSU under different names.

"We've got these young up-and-coming people and they're looking for things that are catching light, things to do with AI, cyber skills, cybersecurity. Well, we offer a lot of these things, but they might not be called that. We might need to shift some of those things so that we can pour into the programs that are really attracting new graduate students," Shelton said.

Jake Hartfield, the director of Orientation & Events, said recruitment and orientation events are continuing to be improved based on survey feedback and that Orientation & Events have explored new ways to recruit prospective students. Hartfield

said making intentional and impactful connections with prospective students is recruiting's goal.

"That's our goal - to make feel make people feel connected and not just like another number or another guest that's attended our campus. And that's just one way, I think for our Scholars Recognition Day that we've kind of changed our approach to be a little bit more intentional with developing those relationships and those bonds with their academic college and their interests," Hartfield said.

Dickerson, Shelton and Hartfield all agreed that overcoming the enrollment cliff is a team effort and that the best way to recruit students to MSU is through current students.

"I think for readers, I would say that everybody's a recruiter, and everybody can share the MSU message whether you're a current student, faculty member or staff member, and so that's what makes the institution stronger. So, I would encourage that everybody should be sharing their initial experience and talking about it and your communities and talking about it within your family and friends," Hartfield said.