

# **Enrollment Drivers and Trends**

## **Data Summary**

Prepared for the  
Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse

September, 1997

# **ENROLLMENT DRIVERS AND TRENDS DATA SUMMARY**

## **Introduction**

This report looks at two aspects of student enrollment at Clearinghouse Partner institutions. The first is enrollment drivers. These are the main factors that go into most students' choice of what institution to attend. A survey of high school students by Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development (AECD) and interviews with Clearinghouse partner registrars gave us a list of the main measurable drivers. We then found such statistics as are available on each of these drivers to try to identify trends and determine to what degree the supposed drivers have influenced enrollment levels.

The second is the commonly assumed growth in part-time learning. Part-time learning, according to conventional wisdom, is a growing area of post-secondary education, just as part-time employment is seen to be a growing part of the work world. This report sets out to test the truth of this "wisdom" in northern Alberta. Looking at data from AECD's Common Information System (CIS) and consulting the registrars at the Clearinghouse member colleges, this report examines the levels of part-time credit enrollment over three years, 1993-95, 1994-95, and 1995-96; and the general trends since then.

## **ENROLLMENT DRIVERS**

### **Methodology**

The first step was determining the most important, measurable enrollment drivers. According to AECD's "1995 High School Survey" recent high school graduates who had enrolled in colleges were most influenced by programs offered, location (how close the schools are to their homes) and tuition levels. Of these, programs was the most important by a wide margin. (1995 High School Summary Final Report, p. 20.) An informal survey of Clearinghouse partner registrars corroborated the findings of the AECD survey.

It should be noted that the AECD survey does bypass a number of potential students who have never finished high school. Many of those live in isolated communities and may have family or work responsibilities which make it impossible to travel a long way for training. In these cases local availability of training takes on greater importance.

Once the drivers were determined we devised methods of comparing them between colleges and/or over time.

### *Programs*

This was the most difficult driver to measure. In order to determine which institutions had the largest number of unique programs we used a chart listing which programs were available at what Alberta institutions in the AECD document, "It's About Time, 1996-1997". This document does not go into sufficient detail to identify unique programs within broader study areas (such as Keyano's Native Addictions Worker program or Fairview's Harley-Davidson Motorcycle Mechanic program) but it provides the most direct comparison available. In order to get some sense of program changes over time we compared calendars for 1996-97 and 1997-98 for each of the Clearinghouse partner institutions to see what courses have been added or dropped.

### *Location*

We have chosen to express location in terms of the number of people for whom each college is the (at least arguably) closest post-secondary institution. This is measured using census population figures for each college's primary catchment area from 1991 and 1996 (for the breakdown of the colleges' catchment areas, please see the report, "Census 96 Population and Dwelling Counts Data Summary").

### *Tuition*

This is the easiest of the enrolment drivers to measure. Using data supplied by AECD, tuition levels and changes from 1993-94 to 1996-97 are compared for the Clearinghouse partners and a selection of other Alberta post-secondary institutions.

## **Findings**

### *Programs*

GPRC had the highest number of courses listed on the "It's About Time" chart that were not listed anywhere else in northern Alberta. Most of these unique programs were in university studies or university transfer courses. Lakeland has ten regionally unique programs listed. Among them are; Interior design, Floral Design, Real Estate Appraisal, and Tourism programs.

Fairview led the way in terms of courses not available elsewhere in Alberta, with beekeeping and veterinary medical receptionist programs.

Most colleges are offering the same courses in 1997-98 as last year. Some notable additions are: Fairview's Office Administration Diploma, Silviculture Studies, and Cooperative Trades Orientation; Grande Prairie's Bsc. in Computing and Information Systems (through Athabasca University); and Keyano's Preparation for Academic and Career Education, Literacy for Employment Training and Automotive Service Technologist programs.

### Location

#### Census Population levels in the Clearinghouse Partners' Primary Catchment Areas

Catchment Area	1991 Population	1996 Population	% Change
GPRC	64 779	70 953	+9.5
Fairview College	39 442	41 896	+6.2
AVC - LSL	33 575	36 547	+8.9
Lakeland College	62 622	66 387	+5.9
Keyano College	37 407	36 124*	-3.4

\* This figure has been disputed by officials in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo who insist that the population has risen over the census period. The population of Wood Buffalo is certainly rising currently.

Those colleges with a number of outlying campuses, such as AVC - LSL are at an advantage in providing local access to many otherwise isolated students. The development of the Alberta North partnership will help all of its members in this regard.

### Tuition

#### Full-year, Full-time Tuition levels at Post-secondary Institutions, 1993 to 1996

	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	% Change
GPRC	\$867	\$1 210	\$1 430	\$1 650	+90
Fairview	\$818	\$1 279	\$1 555	\$1 705	+108
AVC-LSL	\$389	\$440	\$580	\$800	+106
Lakeland	\$962	\$1 081	\$1 296	\$1 514	+57
Keyano	\$842	\$950	\$1 248	\$1 562	+83
GMCC	\$852	\$960	\$1 216	\$1 442	+69
Medicine Hat	\$991	\$1 099	\$1 319	\$1 543	+56
Mount Royal	\$1 206	\$1 314	\$1 362	\$1 588	+32
NAIT	\$897	\$1 005	\$1 224	\$1 448	+61

Source: AECD Business Planning and Evaluation

While there is no direct correlation between tuition levels and enrollment, fees at the Clearinghouse institutions have, on the whole, risen more than those for the other Alberta institutions sampled, and full-time equivalent enrollment figures have dropped for most Clearinghouse colleges while they have risen in Alberta public colleges overall.

Enrollment (measured as full-time equivalents) in Clearinghouse partner institutions, 1993-94 to 1996-97

College	1993-94	1996-97	% Change
GPRC	1 733.7	1 365.0	-21
Fairview College	945.1	930.0	-1.6
AVC - LSL	1 550.0	1 250.0	-19
Lakeland College	1 501.9	1 450.0	-3
Keyano College	1 182.7	1 300.0	+10
All Alberta Public Colleges	27 212.5	28 800	+6

Two other points from the AECD survey are worth repeating here:

- *Graduates from the Edmonton and Calgary regions tended to enrol in degree granting institutions while those from rural areas preferred colleges or technical institutes.*
- *Programs were chosen primarily because of personal interest rather than employment prospects. (1995 High School Survey Summary, p.4)*

## Summary

Enrollment levels cannot be explained by easily measurable factors alone. Each institution has its own set of intangibles such as reputation and relationship with the local community. Higher than average tuition rate increases are coincident with dropping enrollment in the region as a whole however.

## ENROLLMENT TRENDS

### Methodology

Statistical information for this part of the report comes from AECD's Common Information System. This data, for the years 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 looks at part-time enrollment by individual student (or "head count") and by full-time equivalent (FTE). The data is also broken down by subject area. Further information came from discussions with registrars of Clearinghouse partner institutions, AECD personnel and personnel from local adult and community education societies.

### Limitations

The CIS data is not consistent. Until recently, each college reporting into the system has had its own methods of recording enrollment, and those systems have changed over the years. For example, the sudden jump in part-time enrollment reported by Lakeland College between 1994-94 and 1995-96 (from 361 to 1,410 students) is due to a change in reporting procedures. Perhaps the most significant point regarding the CIS data is that it does not include non-credit or continuing education courses. It should also be noted that the information received from registrars is based on their personal impressions rather than on statistical analysis.

### Findings

The statistical data points to a slight upward trend in the number of part-time learners but a reduction in the number of courses that they take. What these figures do not show but that registrars and others do see is the growth in non-credit and continuing education learning. Rather than take full programs on a part-time basis, people appear to be focusing on improving specific employment and practical skills.

Part-time Enrollment (by head count)

College	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96
GPRC	937	859	834
Fairview	856	853	893
AVC - LSL	824	815	903
Lakeland	240	361	1 410
Keyano	2 726	3 019	3 062
Clearinghouse	5 533	5 907	7,102

From CIS data on part-time credit enrollment, 1993-94 to 1995-96:

- The number of courses taken by each part-time student in one year dropped overall. The average FTE per head count ratio dropped from .176 to .152 (not including Lakeland College whose reported figures dropped from .851 to .078 FTE per student registered).
- Overall, the most popular part-time courses are in Business and in College and University Preparation. At Grande Prairie Regional College, Arts and Science courses are the most popular. There are few clear patterns regarding the growth in popularity of any given subject areas; however, Agriculture, Biological and Life Sciences, Chemical and Resources Related and Service and Hospitality appear to be growth areas.
- The part-time FTE numbers dropped over the three years for every college except Keyano.
- Part-time FTEs as a percentage of total FTEs dropped overall among Clearinghouse partners from 16.6% in 1993-94 to 12.9% in 1995-96. The overall drop occurred despite slight increases at GPRC and Keyano.

### **Comments from Interviews**

- While one college reported that business is the most popular subject for part-time courses, most others point to computer courses as the most popular. This is driven by the increasing use of computers in the workplace. One registrar pointed out that fewer people are taking management programs in favour of upgrading their computer skills.
- Distance delivery is often used for part-time study; as a result the growth of Alberta North may lead to an increase in part-time numbers.
- There has been a significant increase in part-time registrations in the past year as students schedule education around their jobs in a growing job market. This increase is expected to continue.
- Steve Nicely, of AECD, sees growth in the popularity of Continuing Education courses, especially in accounting and computers.
- Over the past several years, community and adult learning societies in Peace River and Grimshaw have seen an increase in the popularity of short courses (less than 10 hours), particularly those teaching practical skills for the home or the workplace. Many of the students in such courses are asking for certificates of completion, even for very short seminars.
- There is a growing availability of information in books and on the Internet which allows individuals to find out about personal interest topics on their own rather than through a college or adult education society. This may reduce demand for some personal interest courses.

## **Summary**

Part-time learning does appear to be a growing phenomenon in northern Alberta. What makes data on credit enrollments seem to say otherwise is the fact that most of the growth is in non-credit and Continuing Education courses.

Part-time learners want to improve their employability. They are less interested in building up credits to a diploma than in gaining specific practical skills.

## **Sources**

Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development, Common Information System, enrollment data.

--- "1995 High School Survey", Summary, and Final Report, both May, 1997.

Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse, "Census 1996 Population and Dwelling Counts", May, 1997.

## **Contacts**

Rocky Beacon, Registrar, Fairview College, 835-6685

Balvir Joshi, Registrar, Keyano College, 791-4801

Janet Keip, Peace Association for Life Long Learning

Jean Madill, Registrar, GPRC, 539-2928

Steve Nicely, AECD, Policy Development, 422-4847

Dianne Rhyason, Registrar, Lakeland College, 853-8429

Teresa Sinclair, Registrar, AVC - LSL, 849-8604

Sharon Szmata, Grimshaw-Berwyn Adult Learning, 332-1110

Harald Zimmer, AECD, Business Planning and Development, 427-7145