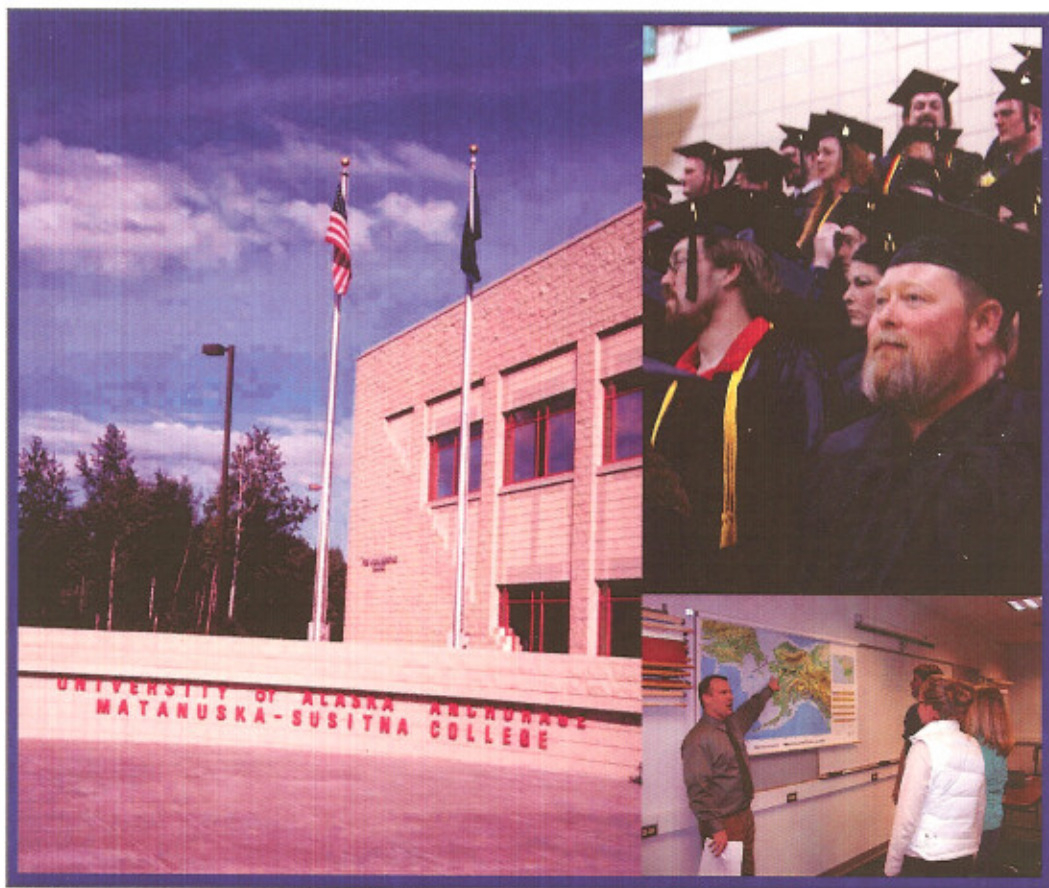


# Matanuska-Susitna College

UNIVERSITY *of* ALASKA ANCHORAGE

## ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN 2006-2010



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## Executive Summary

This document is intended to serve as a guide for the management of enrollment at University of Alaska Anchorage Matanuska-Susitna College. It identifies goals for enrollment, retention, and high demand programs, opportunities that the College can exploit, strategies that the College can use to take advantage of opportunities, critical factors in achieving goals, and methods to measure progress.

The overarching theme of this document is that the Matanuska-Susitna campus of the University of Alaska Anchorage is poised to take advantage of many opportunities offered by partnerships both within the University of Alaska and the surrounding community. For example, over 50% of the students who took classes at Mat-Su during the fall 2005 semester were actually registered in a degree program offered through the Anchorage campus, and many of the degree-seeking students who are enrolled here will finish their degrees in Anchorage. Mat-Su and Anchorage are currently partnering to offer 2-year degrees in nursing and elementary childhood education and a Bachelor of Human Services degree. Students are admitted to the Anchorage program with courses taught at Mat-Su to eliminate the necessity of a commute.

With the rapid growth of the Valley's population comes the opportunity to expand these types of partnership programs in ways that will benefit both campuses. It is advantageous for students who attend Mat-Su College to receive a degree with the prestige of the University of Alaska Anchorage because UAA is a name that is recognized nationally while Mat-Su College is not. The advantage to the Anchorage campus in offering courses at Mat-Su lies in the opportunity to provide a new level of accessibility to students. Cooperation between the Mat-Su and Anchorage campuses to expand the course offerings on the Mat-Su campus will encourage enrollment and retention of students, who would otherwise choose other options because of the disruption that either commuting or relocating to Anchorage would cause in their lives. The bottom line is that if the University of Alaska Anchorage offers more courses at the Mat-Su campus, it will have greater influence on potential students' educational choices in what will soon be the second-most populated area of the state.

Conditions within the various local government entities are favorable for the College as well. The Mat-Su Borough Assembly has made improving higher education opportunities for Valley residents a priority and the city councils and chambers of commerce of Wasilla and Palmer are also supportive. A new hospital located near the campus is also interested in exploring opportunities for cooperation, and the construction in the near future of a technical preparatory high school offers great potential for increasing enrollment in Mat-Su's vocational education programs. New recruiting methods for area high school students have shown increasing success in encouraging enrollment among traditional student populations.

Following this summary is an introduction that highlights Mat-Su College within the community it serves by giving data on the campus, student body, service area characteristics, market penetration, and a brief history of past enrollment strategies and accomplishments. It points out that Mat-Su College is located on a large rural campus in the fastest growing region of the state. 1,572 students attended courses here during the fall 2005 semester. The College offers many traditional 2-year college technical programs, but serves primarily as a feeder for the Anchorage campus.

The enrollment, retention, and high demand programs sections of the document each have sections detailing trends, projections and targets, opportunities that the College can exploit, strategies that can be used to take advantage of those opportunities, and timelines for the accomplishment of tasks.

Enrollment has increased during six of the past seven fall semesters. There is a strong increase in the percentage of traditional students among those who attend the College, but non-traditional students still account for almost 60% of the total student body. The College will strive to match the Mat-Su Borough's growth rate with the caveat that many of the people who are moving into the Valley are not interested in pursuing higher education. The single greatest opportunity in this regard lies in the way that the College pursues its marketing program.

Retention of first-time full-time freshmen has been improving for the past six fall semesters with the exception of 2004. The College believes that retention rates will continue to improve as the result of our retention efforts. There is, however, a problem in using first-time freshmen as the standard by which retention is measured. It ignores students who enroll for the first time at Mat-Su College who have already taken courses elsewhere. Most of the College's students fall into this category. It also ignores those students who take their first courses at the College then enroll in a degree program offered by the Anchorage campus while still attending courses at Mat-Su. The College needs to identify a new method for measuring retention that offers more utility in what we really need to know.

High demand programs are showing an increase in overall enrollment even though the percentage of the total student body enrolled in these programs is decreasing. This is due to two factors: the emphasis on the general 2-year associate degree program and the number of students taking courses on the Mat-Su campus who are declared UAA majors. In the first case, the general 2-year associate degree can lead people into degree programs that are deemed high demand, but it is not considered "high demand" on its own. In the second, students who have declared a major at the Anchorage campus are counted in Anchorage's statistics rather than Mat-Su's whether or not they are enrolled in courses that are taught here. These really are issues of semantics that are overshadowed by the single most important opportunity in the area of high demand programs: the need being expressed by the Valley's students for Anchorage and Mat-Su to find ways to expand academic partnerships to improve the quality of higher education in the Valley.

The final section identifies the critical factors that will affect the College's ability to meet its performance goals. Some factors are beyond our control, but most are within the College's sphere of influence.

## Introduction

### Campus Profile

Mat-Su College is a community campus of the University of Alaska Anchorage. It is located forty miles north of Anchorage in the fastest growing area of the state on a 950 acre campus. Mat-Su College serves an area approximately the size of West Virginia. 1,572 students enrolled in the fall 2005 semester.

The College offers a wide range of courses from developmental to lower division undergraduate through a mix of vocational programs and traditional academic courses. Upper division undergraduate courses in human services are offered in cooperation with the University of Alaska’s Anchorage campus. The College is looking forward to working with the Anchorage campus to expand upper division course offerings as demand warrants. In the fall 2005 semester, the College offered 312 course sections with an average class size of 14 students. Class sizes have increased over the past 5 years, but they are still below the UAA average of 17.

The current focus of the College is on the provision of core general education courses that prepare students to enroll in degree programs offered by the University of Alaska Anchorage. In addition to this function, the College also offers a variety of vocational certificate and degree programs.

<b>Certificates</b>	<b>AAS</b> Associate of Applied Science	<b>AA</b> Associate of Arts
Architectural Drafting Civil Drafting Mechanical & Electrical Drafting Structural Drafting  Computer Information & Office Systems  Computer & Networking Technology  Refrigeration & Heating Technology	Accounting  Architectural & Engineering Technology  Computer Information & Office Systems  Computer Systems Technology  Fire & Emergency Services Technology*  Human Services  Refrigeration & Heating Technology  Small Business Administration  Telecommunications, Electronics & Computer Technology	General Program

\*Not accepting applicants at this time

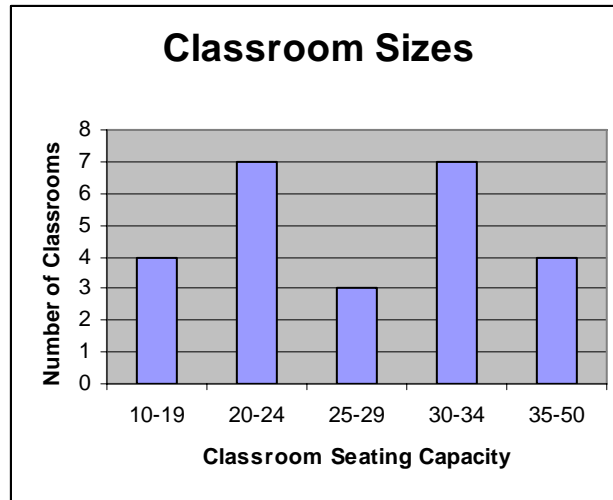
Partnership programs offered at Mat-Su College include the coursework necessary to complete the Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Development, Associate of Applied Science in Nursing, and Bachelor of Human Services degrees with the actual degree being awarded by the University of Alaska Anchorage.

In order to support the general provision of higher education within the Valley, the College operates a testing center for distance education students. Testing center staff members are also available to proctor tests for students who need to reschedule examination dates in the traditional courses offered at the College.

Mat-Su College has a total of 25 classrooms and 10 dedicated labs. Classrooms range in seating capacity from 10 to 48 students. The breakdown by seating capacity is shown on the following graph.

Classrooms have differing capabilities to use technology. Fifteen classrooms have only basic instructional technology including an overhead projector and DVD/VCR. Six classrooms add an instructor station with a computer and LCD projector. Four classrooms have computer stations for each student.

In addition, the College maintains three mobile instructor stations equipped with a computer, DVD/VCR, and LCD projector that can be moved between classrooms as needed.



Laboratory spaces are dedicated for art (2), biology, chemistry, computer technologies (2), nursing, office systems technology, photography, and refrigeration and heating.

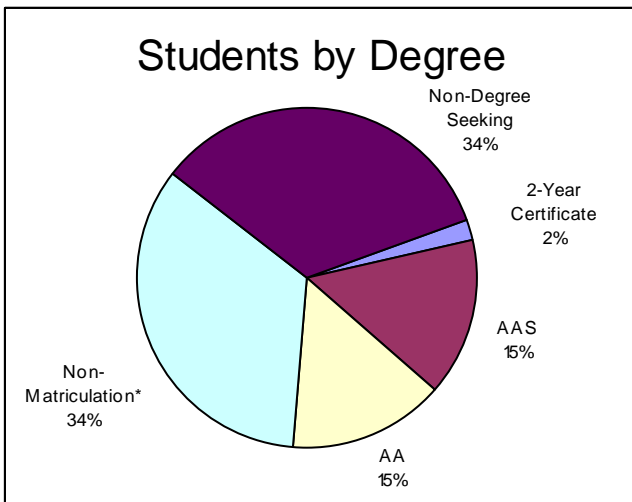
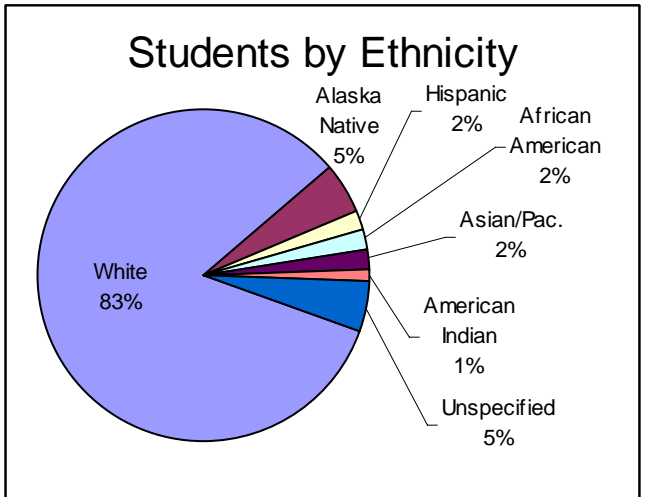
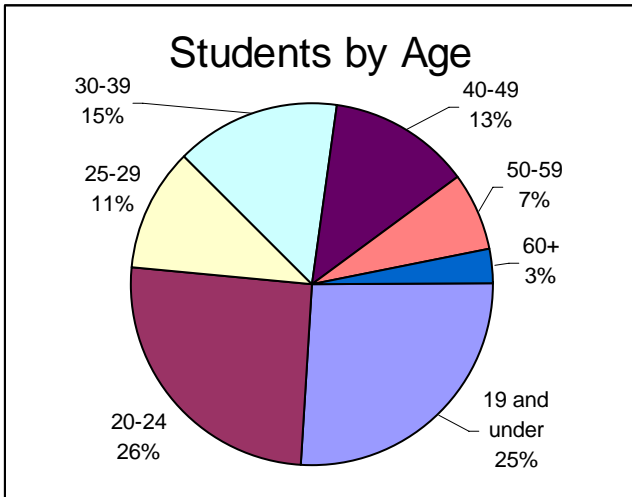
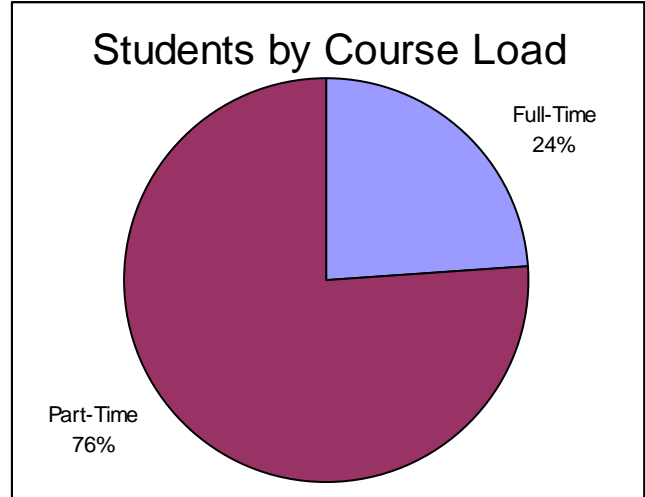
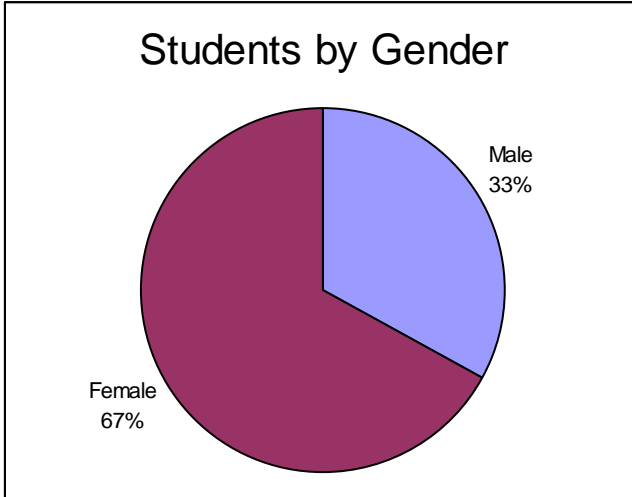
The College also has a learning resource center to assist students with questions related to math and English, a computer lab with 17 stations, and a library with about 43,000 volumes for student research. The library shares a catalog system with all of UAA’s libraries and the Anchorage Municipal Libraries bringing the total number of volumes within easy reach of students to about 750,000 items. An active interlibrary loan program provides access to material that is not available locally. The Internet-based database resources available to students on the Anchorage campus are also available at Mat-Su. Through these, students are able to access the text of over 3,000 journals.

Mat-Su College shares a T-1 Internet connection which is rated at 1.544 megabits/second. Mat-Su’s Computing and Technology Services Department reports that current bandwidth usage strains our network’s internet connection during peak periods. They are examining ways to increase bandwidth to support proposed increases in computer usage resulting from increases in distance education and a proposed voice over IP phone system.

## Student Profile

The typical Mat-Su student is a woman in her mid to late 20’s who graduated from a local high school in the top half of her class with a 3.0 high school GPA. She earned an ACT composite of 21 or a combined SAT of nearly 1000. She has attended Mat-Su College before, but has not declared a degree. She takes between 6 and 9 credit hours and works while attending college. She will transfer to another institution to complete her baccalaureate degree.

The actual demographics of the students who attended Mat-Su College during the fall 2005 semester were:

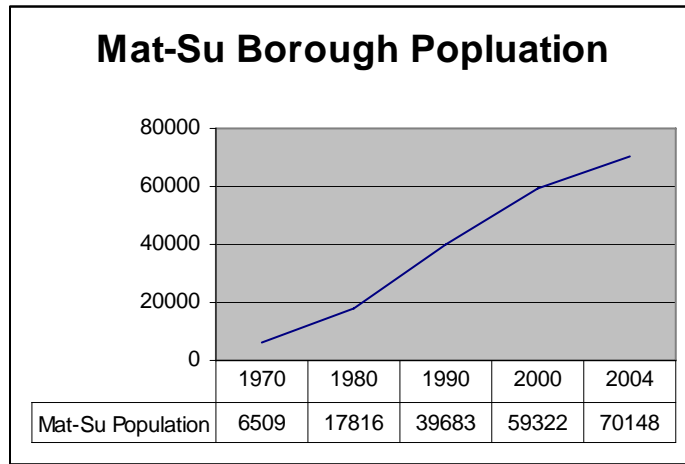


Student profile data is from Table A of the UAA Trendbook which can be viewed at <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/opra/trendbook.cfm>.

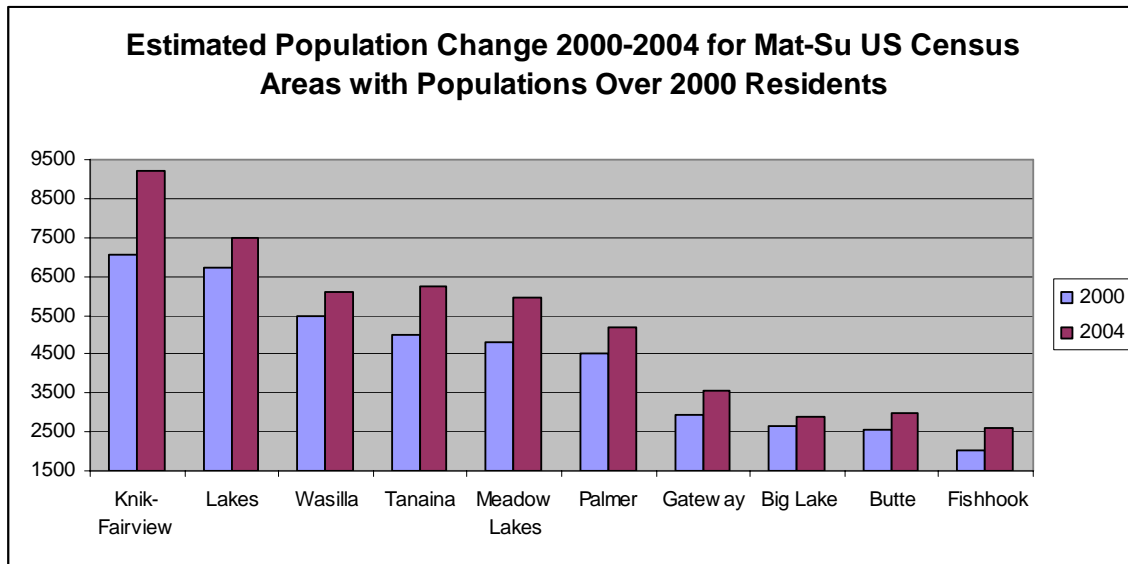
\*Non-Matriculation students are registered in a program at UAA, UAS, or UAF or are registered as a non-degree seeking student at another campus. The overwhelming majority of these students are registered at the Anchorage campus.

### Service Area Characteristics

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is located north of Anchorage, Alaska and covers an area of 24,682 square miles. 70,148 people called the Mat-Su Valley “home” in 2004 according to Dave Hanson, Director of the Mat-Su Borough’s Department of Economic Development. Data he provided shows that Valley’s population has risen rapidly since 1970.



The principal population centers with population figures from the 2000 US Census are Knik-Fairview\* – 7,049, Lakes\* – 6,706, Wasilla – 5,469, Tanaina\* – 4,993, Meadow Lakes\* – 4,819, Palmer – 4,533, Gateway\* – 2,952, Big Lake – 2,635, Butte – 2,561, Fishhook\* – 2,030, Willow – 1,658, Houston – 1,202, Lazy Mountain\* – 1,158, Sutton-Alpine\* – 1,080, Farm Loop\* – 1,067, Y\* – 956, Talkeetna\* – 772, and Buffalo-Soapstone\* – 699. Locations marked with an asterisk are Census Designated Places and Areas rather than incorporated towns.



Estimates for the number of residents in 2004 from the December 2005 issue of *Alaska Economic Trends* are Knik-Fairview – 9,223, Lakes – 7,467, Wasilla – 6,109, Tanaina – 6,265, Meadow Lakes – 5,945, Palmer – 5197, Gateway – 3,554, Big Lake – 2,912, Butte – 2,963, Fishhook – 2,606, Willow – 1,856, Houston – 1,368, Lazy Mountain – 1,233, Sutton-Alpine – 1,154, Farm Loop – 1,138, Y – 1,072, Talkeetna – 844, and Buffalo-Soapstone – 744. The majority of the residents live within 30 miles of the College. It is worth noting that four of the five largest population centers within the Borough are unincorporated areas and that three of the four largest unincorporated areas are experiencing growth rates much higher than those of Wasilla and Palmer. Of the ten locations with 2004 estimated populations above 2,500 residents, five are estimated to have grown at least 20% since 2000. The remaining five are estimated to have increased by at least 11%.

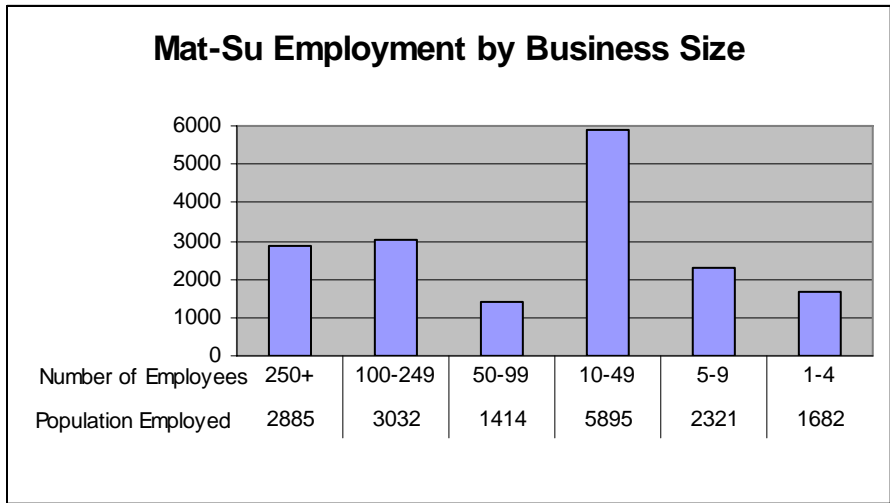
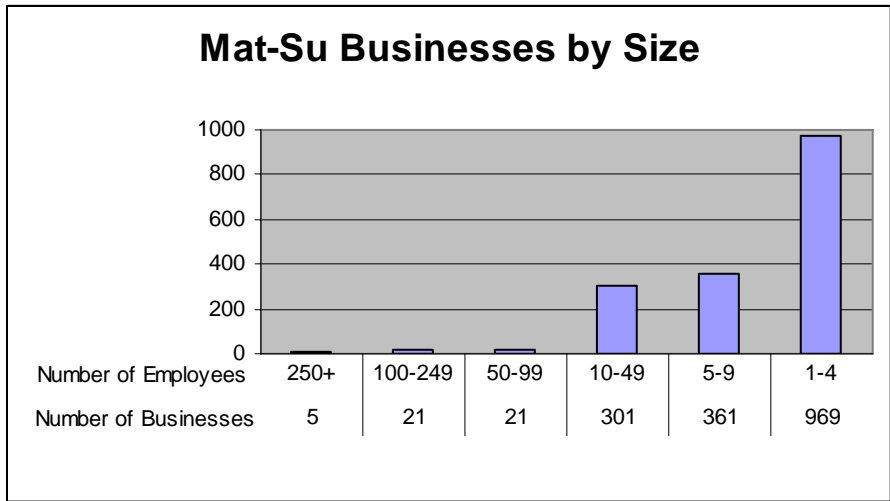
December 2005’s *Alaska Economic Trends* notes that the Mat-Su Borough’s population has grown at just under 4% per year since 2000 and has increased its percentage of the state’s total population from 7% to

11% since 1990. The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development projects that the Mat-Su Borough will become Alaska’s second most populated area by 2018. This outlook is reflected in the Mat-Su Borough’s Long Range Transportation Plan which estimates that the Borough’s population in 2025 will be over 175,000. The vast majority of the area’s growth is from in-migration of people both from within Alaska and from other states.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has the second largest public school district in Alaska. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District’s FY 2007 Administration Recommended Financial Plan notes that 15,446 students were enrolled in 2006 and projects an enrollment of 16,025 students for 2007 (<http://www.matsuk12.us/FileLib/admfinplan.pdf>). The Valley also has a significant number of families who choose to educate their children either at home or at one of the area’s private schools.

*Alaska Economic Trends* states that only 55% of the residents who reside in the Mat-Su Borough actually work here and says that 34% is a conservative estimate of the population of wage earners who commute daily from the Borough to Anchorage. Chart 3 of the December 2005 issue shows that there are over 9,000 Mat-Su to Anchorage commuters and also over 2,000 who make the trip from Anchorage to Mat-Su. These figures show the inter-connected nature of the Anchorage/Mat-Su Borough area. The proposed construction of a bridge over the Knik Arm will provide a second access route into Anchorage and will cause growth in Big Lake, Houston, and Willow. Further development of Port Mackenzie and a new ferry system in the Knik Arm are also likely.

Area employers are predominantly small businesses. 58% have fewer than 5 employees and 97% have less than 50. In terms of the number of persons employed by area businesses, one third of the local workforce is employed by businesses employing more than 100 persons, one-third by businesses with 10-49 employees, and the remaining third employed by businesses with fewer than 10 employees. The chart data to the right was provided by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section’s web site.



The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly is extremely supportive of higher education. It has made the offering of four year degree programs within the Valley a priority in its economic development plan and has expressed a desire to work with UAA's Mat-Su College to build a new library/auditorium on the College campus in support of this goal. It is envisioned that the building would also contain additional classroom space. Such a structure would enhance the University of Alaska Anchorage's presence in the Valley and allow us to more effectively pursue Chancellor Maimon's vision of the college as a town square.

Additionally, both the Borough and the College have discussed the possibility of the construction of a residence hall. The Borough believes that a capital campaign for such construction could be undertaken with relative ease. If so, the cost to UAA would be limited to the land on the Mat-Su campus for the building site and future operation and maintenance. The addition of a residence hall would facilitate the expansion of the College's recruitment boundaries, allowing it to serve rural Native Alaskans and bush students currently underserved by the state system of higher education. It would also facilitate the hosting of conferences, Elderhostel, and so forth. The College is exploring several methods of acquiring housing.

Cooperation between the College and the Borough is also reflected in the development of a new program to train emergency medical technicians in rural areas. The program is being designed to minimize the number of class sessions during which students must be on campus. The Borough has pledged \$100,000 for program development.

## **Market Penetration**

During the past four semesters, Mat-Su College enrolled 9-10% of all individuals between the ages of 20 and 24 living in the Valley. In fall 2005, 69% of Mat-Su's enrolled students are graduates of Valley high schools. This is a significant increase from fall 2000, when only 49% of the student body came from local high schools.

Mat-Su has enrolled between 3% and 3.6% of the Valley's total college-age population over the past four years. From 2002 to 2005 the median age for students enrolled in the fall semester has declined from 27 to 24. While the percentage of the students attending Mat-Su College who are categorized as "traditional students" is increasing, 59% of Mat-Su students in fall 2005 were still in the "non-traditional" category. Enrollment trends indicate successful efforts to increase market penetration among area high schools have not been matched by efforts to reach non-traditional students. Increased marketing efforts to reach that segment of the population are needed.

## **History of Past Strategies and Accomplishments**

During the past five years, Mat-Su College focused on three main strategies: improve the academic quality of courses and programs; build relationships with key community leaders to improve our response to the needs of the region; and help students improve their attitudes toward and expectations of college.

Initial efforts to improve academics centered on hiring and retaining high performing adjunct faculty and setting clear expectations for course outcomes. Faculty designated department area coordinators to improve communication and oversight, and administration surveyed adjuncts to gain a better understanding of support needs and aspirations.

Early results of efforts to improve academic standards are encouraging. Data taken from end of semester surveys in fall 2001 showed that students in fewer than 4% of Mat-Su classes reported that "time on task" (i.e. hours spent studying outside of class) met University of Alaska Anchorage department averages. By spring 2005, students in 51% of Mat-Su classes reported studying as much or more than UAA department averages.

In conjunction with local government officials and the University of Alaska Anchorage School of Education, Mat-Su College undertook development of courses that combine traditional on-campus face-to-

face course work with participation via distance education methods for significant portions of the curriculum. These “blended” courses respond to community needs since many of the students residing in the area Mat-Su College serves cannot travel to campus with the frequency required by a traditional course.

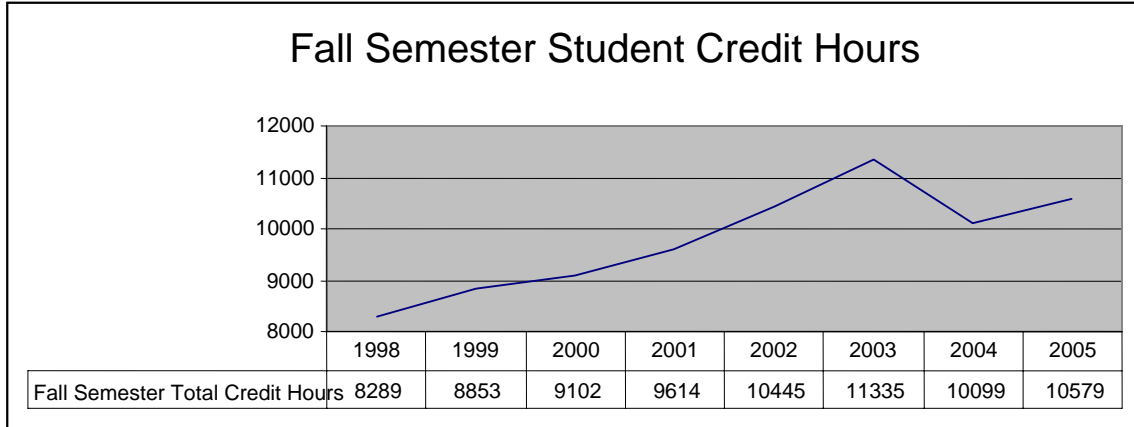
During the development of blended courses for the UAA’s Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Development, students were given additional assessments at the beginning of their program to gauge the eventual impact of the change, and courses were scheduled carefully to enable students to maximize enrollment and minimize commuting time. Now that preliminary work necessary to implement a change in instructional method is complete, other courses and programs can more easily be converted to a blended format, and plans are underway to do so. The push to utilize a blended format builds on the continuing growth and appeal of distance education (which grew at Mat-Su College from 44 students in 1998 to 208 students in 2003) while mitigating many of the typical pitfalls of distance education, such as poor retention rates.

Between AY03 and AY05 a series of support services were developed under the banner “Early Alert Retention Strategies” (EARS). The highlight of the series was an Early Alert mechanism that enabled faculty to refer a student showing early signs of academic trouble to Student Services for follow-up. A new position was added to Student Services to help connect referred students to campus resources such as academic counselors, the learning resource center, or faculty. In addition, students placed on academic warning or probation at the end of the semester were given additional attention before registering for future classes, and a series of study skill workshops were developed and delivered several times per semester. A pre-semester New Student Orientation (NSO) took place for the first time ever at Mat-Su College prior to the fall 2005 semester and was repeated in spring 2006. The focus of NSO was on forming appropriate expectations in the minds of students since retention research shows that students who know what to expect of college integrate into the environment more easily. Response to NSO was better than anticipated with over 80 new students attending the fall event.

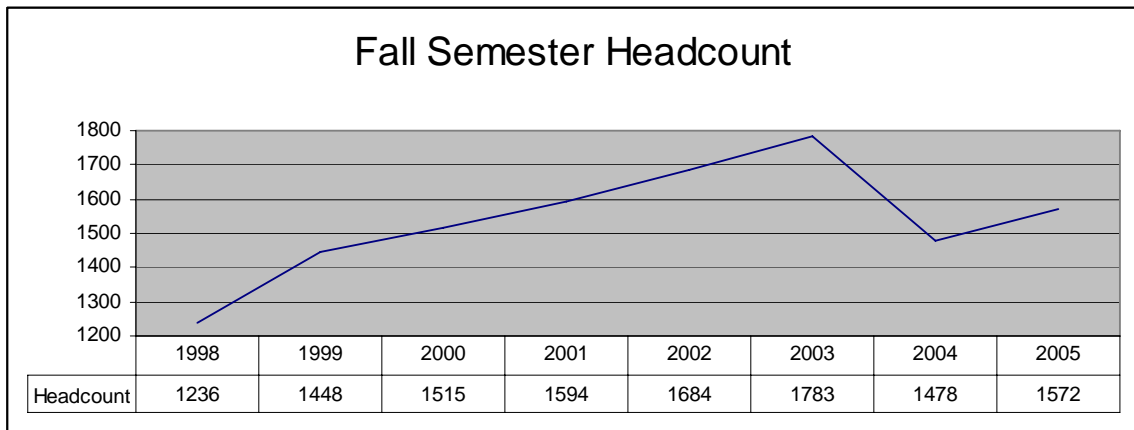
In addition to support services, Mat-Su College paid particular attention to key policies and assessment measures that impacted student learning and retention. Procedures were put in place to help faculty enforce prerequisites and placement testing. Faculty continue to fine tune these issues recognizing the importance of providing a clear and consistent message to students and ensuring that students have appropriate foundational knowledge when pursuing college-level work. Newly integrated computerized end of semester outcome surveys provide feedback for instructors usually within 7 days after grades are submitted. Prior to this process, student responses were not available for 6 months or more. Timely feedback enables instructors to address course content issues immediately. Finally, the first full cycle of educational assessment plans were implemented in spring 2006. These plans included multiple indicators to measure program effectiveness and, once the data is analyzed, may reveal issues affecting retention that may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

# Enrollment

## Trends

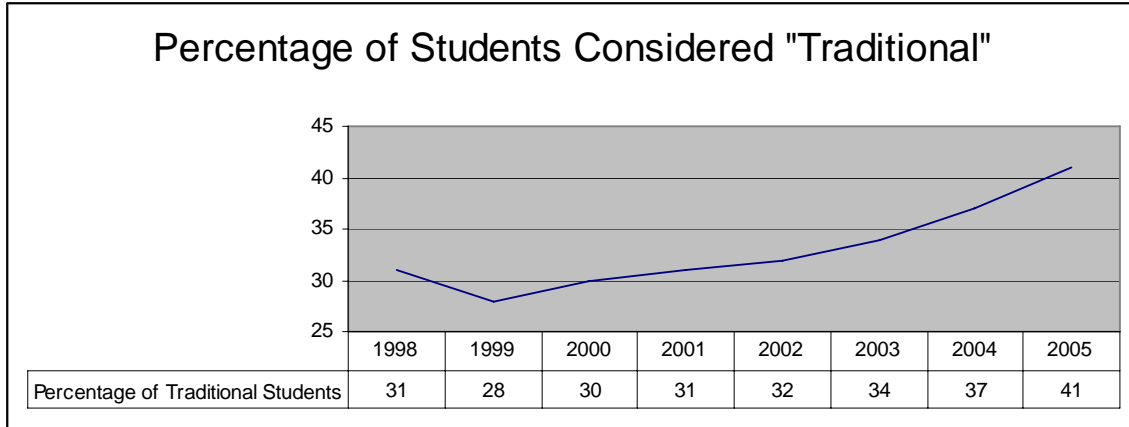


With the exception of an 11% decrease in 2004, total credit hour production has grown consistently since 1998. With the additional exception of 2000, growth has exceeded 4%. 2002 and 2003 saw increases of 8.6% and 8.5%.

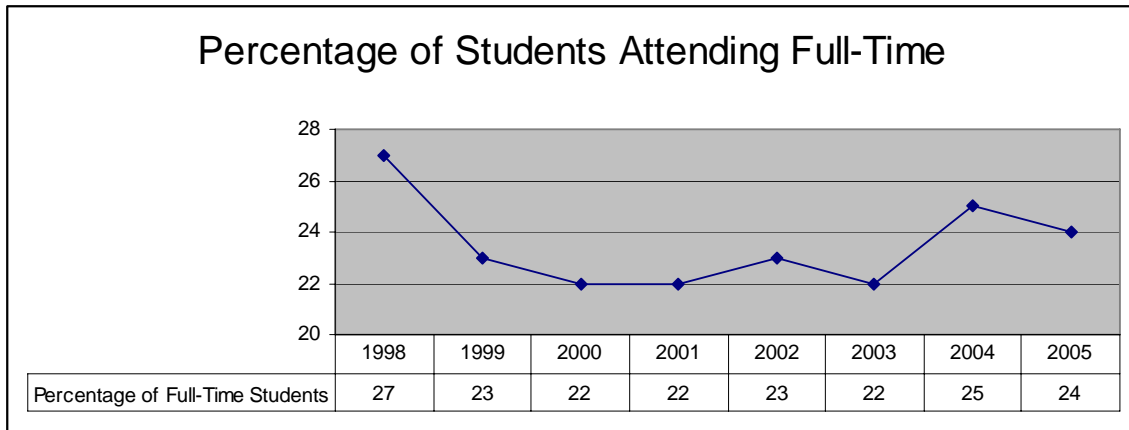


Headcount statistics for Mat-Su College have increased at a rate of between five and six percent since 1999 with the exception of a 17% drop in 2004 that resulted from a confluence of multiple factors including improved academic standards, tuition increases, the lack of need-based scholarships to offset the impact of tuition increases among low income students, and a strong local economy that drew many students into the workforce.

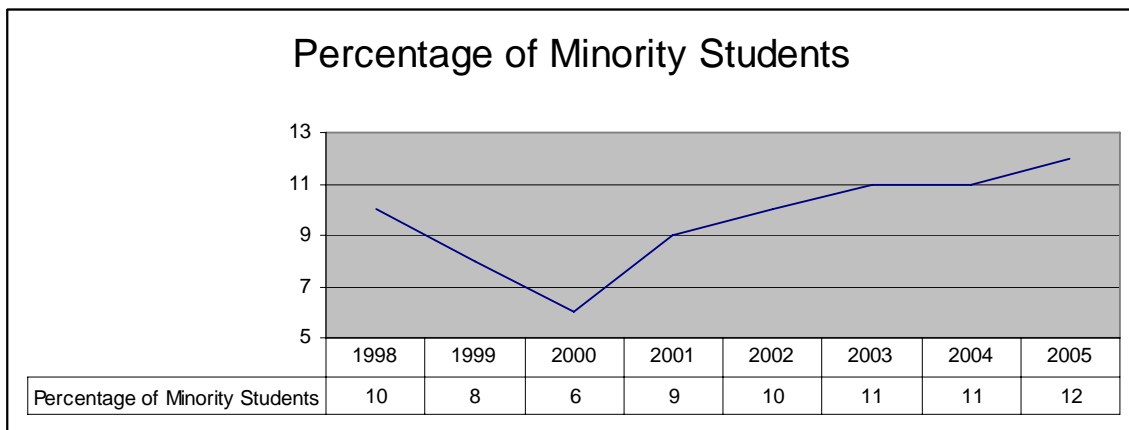
While trends in total credit hour production and head count do move in the same direction each year, only in 2001 did they move anywhere near the same percentage. In four of the remaining six fall semesters between 1999 and 2005, the percentage rise in head count is greater than the percentage rise in credit hour production. In two semesters, head count has a smaller percentage swing. During those two semesters, 2002 and 2003, it is interesting to note that, while the number of full-time students increased, their percentage of the total student population actually decreased. This situation also occurred between 1999 and 2000.



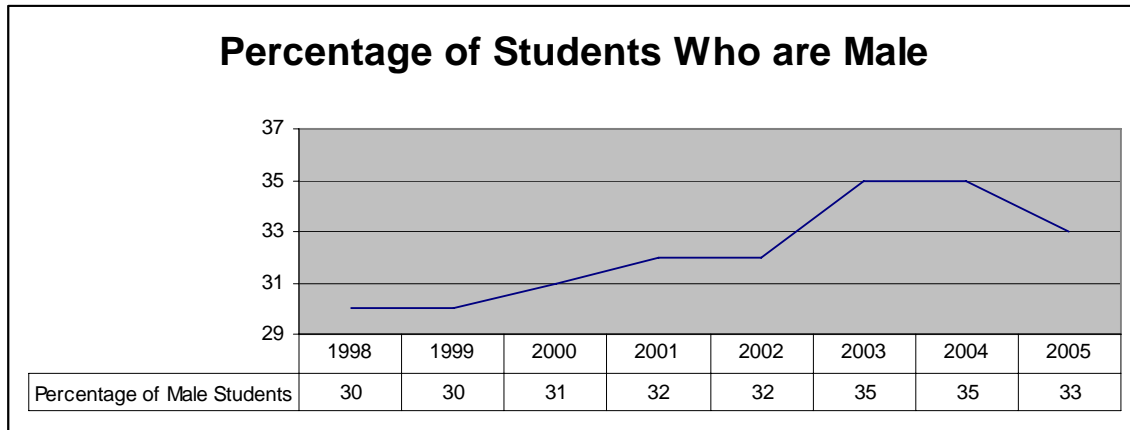
There is a definite and consistent increase in the percentage of enrolled students who fall into the “traditional” category. Interestingly, this trend, which began in 1999, does not seem to be reflected by the percentage of students who attend Mat-Su College full-time. An upward trend may be developing, however.



The percentage of full-time students for the fall semesters between 1999 and 2005 have ranged between 22% and 25%. There may be a trend toward increasing full-time enrollment. There does not seem to be a significant correlation, however between “traditional” and “full-time” students. This suggests that other factors are influencing the decision to become a full-time student.



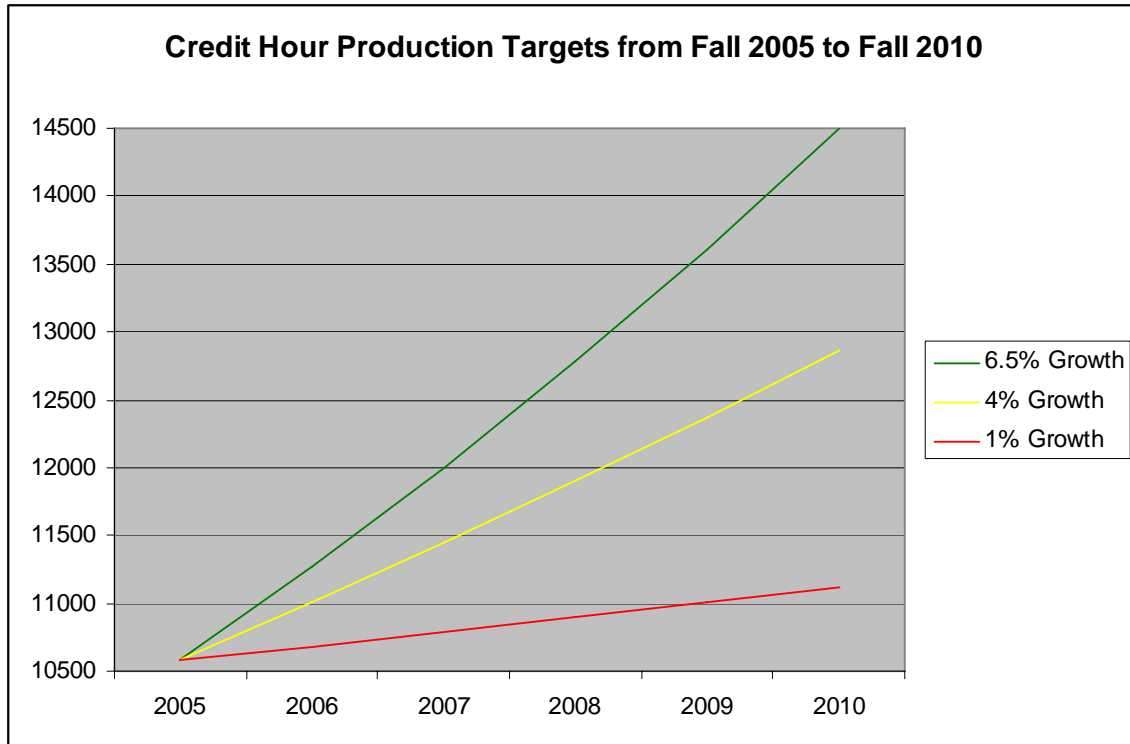
The percentage of enrolled students who are members of an ethnic minority is also increasing as is the percentage of students who are male.



### Projections and Targets

UAA’s general enrollment management plan calls for a 3% increase in enrollment per year through 2009. The University of Alaska has identified three areas that are expected to contribute most of the growth: non-traditional students, graduate students, and improved retention. Community campuses are specifically referenced as major contributors to UAA’s enrollment growth. While Mat-Su College does not directly contribute students to graduate programs, we do contribute well prepared students to the University of Alaska’s undergraduate programs.

From fall semester 1995 to fall semester 2005, credit hour production growth has averaged slightly less than 1%. This growth rate factors in the drop in enrollment in 2004 and a general decline in enrollment from 1995 to 1998. Between 1998 and 2003, fall semester credit hour production growth averaged slightly less than 6.5%. The Mat-Su Borough projects that the area’s growth rate will continue to grow at 4% per year for the near future. These three figures show historical trends and provide benchmarks for future enrollment goals depending on the environment in which the College finds itself operating.



Factors, such as economic and demographic changes in the service area, the elementary/secondary education system, college student characteristics, degree/certificate programs offered, curriculum characteristics, retention and degrees earned, personnel characteristics, financial characteristics, and college infrastructure will influence the number of students that the College can enroll. That said, the College will strive to match the projected growth rate of the Mat-Su Borough (which is currently projected at 4%) and will aspire to maintain a 6.5% growth rate for the next five years.

### Opportunities and Strategies

**Mat-Su Valley Growth:** The large influx of population in the Valley provides a pool of new potential students. It also presents the College with a marketing challenge since we cannot rely on a longstanding reputation to entice these new residents to enroll at Mat-Su College. The College faces competition from Wayland Baptist University and Embry-Riddle University for our student pool. We are also in competition with colleges and universities in the lower 48 in the form of distance education. These are realistic observations—not complaints. Competition fosters innovation. The challenge and the opportunity are to create an environment in which the College can leverage the resources of the University of Alaska to continue to promote growth.

Improved promotion can be accomplished by:

- Hiring a staff member with expertise in marketing.
- Developing a comprehensive marketing plan that identifies the groups on which the College wants to focus its recruitment efforts as well as the most effective tools for reaching the target groups. Once that is completed, the College will develop marketing campaigns that effectively presents us to those groups.
- Continuing to offer information sessions for prospective students every other Friday.

**Course Scheduling:** Offering courses at times when students can take them is a critical element of any marketing effort, but it stands on its own as an opportunity for promoting enrollment because of its focus on the way the College does education. Scheduling is more than simply making sure that there are classrooms available for each course offered. It involves minimizing conflicts with other courses, arranging schedules so that students can make efficient use of their time, and creating clear progressions in course offerings that lead to the completion of a degree within a definite and reasonable time frame.

Improved course scheduling can be accomplished by:

- Determining the most popular times at which courses can be offered.
- Determining the courses that are highest in demand and scheduling sufficient numbers of course sections to meet that demand.
- Evaluating course offerings to ensure that the courses required for degrees are offered on a regular schedule.
- Hiring more full-time faculty to teach the increased number of courses that will be required as enrollment rises. Full-time faculty have more flexibility in the times at which their courses are offered because their college course offerings are their primary considerations and they are not trying to arrange classes around other careers.
- Affirming that some community members' educational goals do not include the completion of a degree program and developing educational opportunities that recognize the difference between degree-seeking and non-degree-seeking students.

**Blended Format Courses:** Blended format courses are advantageous to the College in two respects. First, they allow students who cannot attend traditionally structured courses because of the time required on the campus the opportunity to pursue higher education. They differ from traditional distance education courses by requiring more face-to-face contact to promote student interaction with instructors and peers and encourage higher course completion rates. Second, there are physical limits to the number of persons that can be taught on the Mat-Su College campus at any single time, and the construction of new classroom space is a lengthy process. If the College grows at the rate of 4% per year, classroom space will become a limiting factor to enrollment growth in three years. Increasing the efficiency with which space is used is critical to the success of this enrollment management plan. Careful course scheduling can help, but it can only go so far.

To take advantage of blended format courses, the College will need to:

- Continue to identify courses that can be converted to blended format.
- Increase development of blended format courses.
- Offer release time to faculty members for the development of blended format courses.

**Remedial Education:** There is a demonstrated need for increased remedial education programs that must be met if efforts to increase academic quality are to be maintained. Without addressing this issue, a high percentage of the potential student population will not be able to take advantage of the opportunities the College offers.

To meet this need the College must:

- Define the structure of a remedial education program for Mat-Su College that functions with degree program course sequencing in a way that allows students to make meaningful progress toward a degree while not compromising on academic quality. One possibility may be a summer remedial education institute.
- Hire sufficient faculty and staff members to meet the demand for remedial education courses.

**Rural Campus Location:** The College's rural location offers an opportunity to reach out to students who are uncomfortable in an urban setting. The College can position itself as a transition campus where students who are unfamiliar with the routines common in more highly populated areas of the state can gain the life experience to function effectively in that type of environment.

Strategies for development include:

- Determining the characteristics, cultural traits, and size of the potential student population who would benefit from this program.
- Determining program requirements including program costs, structure, student housing, extra-curricular needs, peer mentoring programs, and staffing.

**Current Climate among Community Government and Business Leaders:** The College is experiencing an upwelling of support among community government and business leaders. Support for the College is currently high in the Wasilla and Palmer Chambers of Commerce as well as in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly. The Borough Government's support includes offers of financial assistance in the pursuit of higher education programs that it would like to see developed within the Valley.

Taking advantage of this trend will involve:

- Increasing communication with community stakeholders.
- Working with those stakeholders to identify the necessary skills that the Valley's workforce will need both in the current job market and five to ten years in the future.
- Looking for ways in which the College can enhance the Valley's quality of life such as the Emergency Medical Technician program that will increase the skills of medical personnel in the rural areas of the Borough.
- Work with the Borough to encourage the development of a new community center that includes greatly expanded library facilities.
- Expanding strategic partnerships with the Mat-Su Borough School District. Changes to the school district's calendar that go into effect next fall align our spring semesters more closely.

**Lack of Male Students:** The overwhelming predominance of female students as a percentage of the enrolled student population suggests that the College simply does not offer courses that appeal to men. This statistic is true at many colleges and universities nationwide and suggests a potentially large and underserved market.

To reach this market it will be necessary to:

- Examine research on the reasons that the male population chooses not to pursue higher education. It may be necessary to perform original research to identify region-specific factors.
- Examine programs that are successful in attracting men in large numbers.
- Design courses that build on the strengths of those successful programs.
- Create a marketing campaign to target the male population.

## **Timelines and Accountability**

Accountability for each of the following items will be a short written report by the person or committee that is tasked with the item's completion that includes appropriate information for documenting and evaluating progress toward accomplishing the task.

**2006-2007**

- Develop a marketing plan for the College that includes market research on target groups and the funding necessary to reach them.
- Bring marketing budget into alignment with the marketing plan.
- Determine whether or not a marketing coordinator should be employed by the College and find funding for the position if it is determined to be an appropriate personnel pursuit.
- Explore opportunities for a person to perform institutional research for the College.
- Develop a communication plan to reach prospective students in the public, private, and home school communities.
- Evaluate and revise the high school visitation program.
- Evaluate the recruitment process for tech prep programs.
- Look for partnership opportunities with the tech prep high school that is to be constructed in the Valley.
- Explore the potential for a bridge program for high school seniors who are interested in attending Mat-Su College.
- Evaluate and revise admissions testing procedures as necessary.
- Develop a counselor/principal newsletter to keep the public schools informed of Mat-Su College events.
- Coordinate survey efforts with the Mat-Su Borough to determine the most popular times at which courses could be offered and the types of courses that are desired by members of the community.
- Coordinate a survey to determine the types of skills that area employers need from employees with local chambers of commerce and businesses.
- Ramp up the remedial education program to meet enrollment needs.
- Develop an integrated plan to move remedial education students into college level course work that allows remedial students to progress toward a degree while in the developmental program.
- Identify additional areas of cooperation with the Mat-Su Borough Government, local businesses, and chambers of commerce.
- Design an employer and former student survey to assess the effectiveness of the programs offered by the College.
- Maintain focus on academic quality.
- Revise the College website.

**2007-2008**

- Identify underserved student populations.
- Explore the potential for on-site recruitment at local companies and businesses.

- Implement the marketing plan and continue to develop advertising campaigns.
- Perform a market study to determine the need for a residence hall.
- Evaluate and revise the communication plan for prospective students.
- Strengthen communication with the Mat-Su Valley business community.

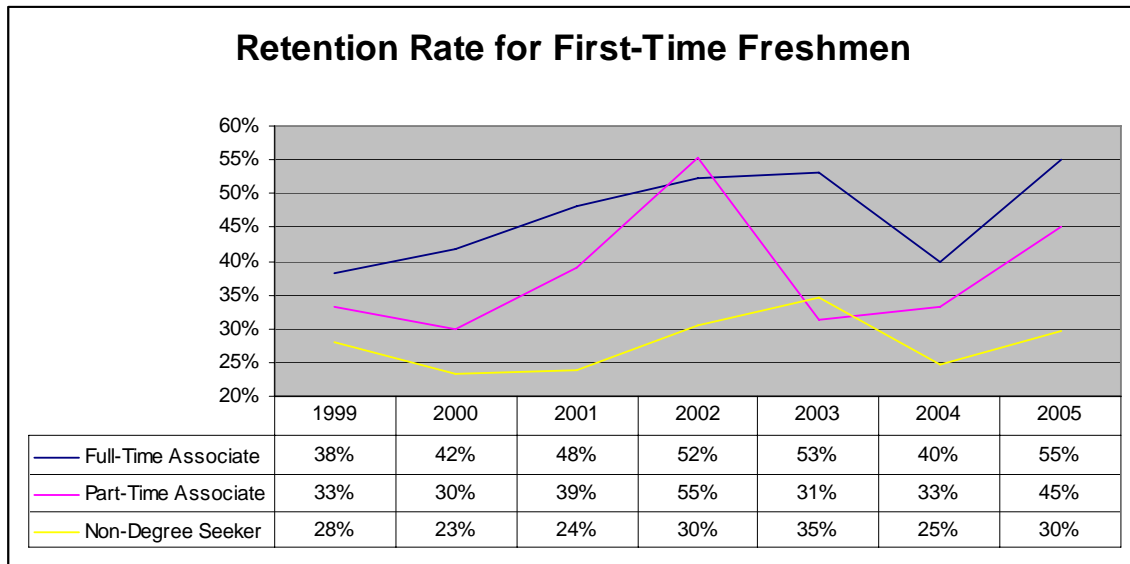
**2008-2009**

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the counselor/principal newsletter.
- Evaluate and revise course offerings.
- Explore funding for a residence hall if the market study indicates the demand exists for one.

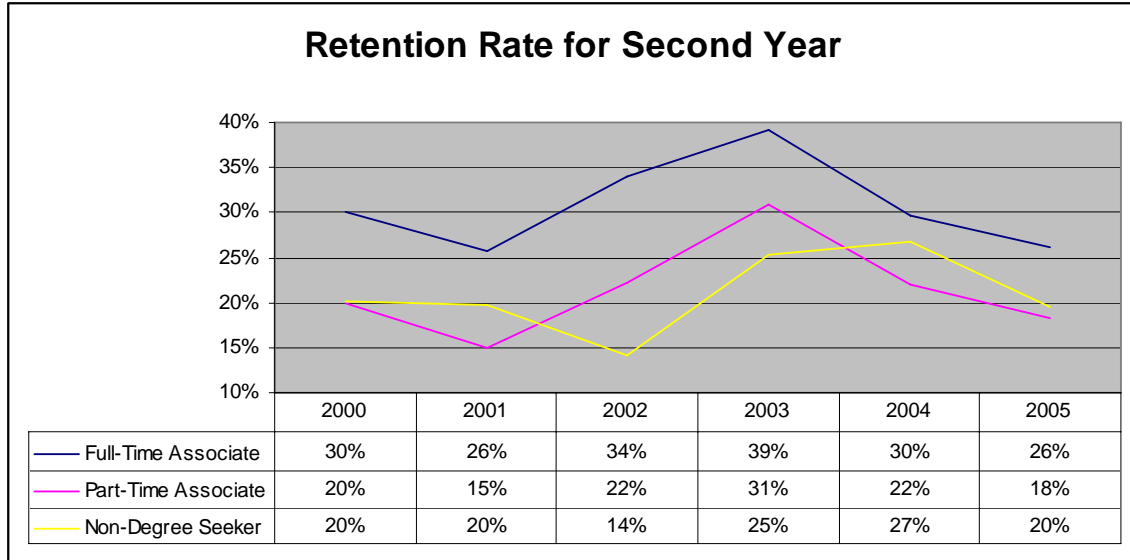
## Retention

In this discussion of retention, first-time freshmen are used as a benchmark because they are the normal standard of measurement. Limiting the discussion of retention rates to this category of student, however, may not be the best means of measuring the College’s overall success in retaining the types of students who have traditionally attended here. For example, first-time freshmen tend to be young adults. Only 51% of the students who enrolled in fall 2005 were under 25. Only 25% of the students were under 20. The greater the age of the student, the higher the probability that he or she has taken college courses before. Mat-Su College will investigate other data that can measure retention for a broader range of students.

## Trends



Retention rates for first-time freshmen who are taking at least 12 credits have increased for six of the last seven years. Of significant note is that following the dramatic decrease in retention for full-time associate degree seeking students, retention rates for this category of student actually rebounded to follow the trend of increasing at 1% per year that began in 2002. Retention rates for part-time associate degree seeking students are more puzzling. There does seem to be a general upward trend, but the spike in 2002 makes the flow of data harder to interpret. An encouraging fact is that four of the past six years have seen gains in retention. It is also true, however, that the retention rate for part-time associate degree seeking students has been below 35% in four of the last seven years. Retention of non-degree seeking students appears to be cycling between 25% and 35%. There may be a positive trend among this group as well. There have been gains in retention rates during four of the past six years, but it is difficult to tell. Mat-Su College also offers certificate programs, but since first-time freshman enrollment is low, a single student’s decision to maintain enrollment in the program can cause a change in the retention rate of up to 33%. Consequently, certificate programs have shown retention rates from 0% to 67% in the past seven years with no discernable pattern. It is important to note that the majority of the students who enroll in certificate programs are not first-time freshmen.



When retention rates are followed into the second year, full-time degree seeking students still have a higher retention rate. The rate is lower due to students graduating, but the retention rate itself declines in three out of five years. The retention rate for part-time degree seeking students becomes similar to non-degree seekers and also shows declines in three of the past five years. Students who transfer from Mat-Su College to the Anchorage campus and students who enroll in an Anchorage degree program while still taking courses here are not currently counted as “retained”.

A larger trend appears in the data in that Mat-Su College is successfully retaining first-year students, but gains in this area do not equate to long-term retention. After seven years, 35% of full-time students and 27% of part-time students who declared intent to pursue an associate degree have graduated. There is a problem with the data, however. Considering Mat-Su’s proximity to Anchorage and the prevalence of jointly enrolled students, long-term retention rates would be more meaningful if students transferring into an Anchorage degree program were counted in the Mat-Su College retention rate as well.

## Projections and Targets

If the current trend continues, Mat-Su College should see its retention rate among first-time full-time associate degree seeking students rise by 1% per year for the next five years. This would raise the retention rate from 55% to 60%. Since retention rates fluctuate from year to year, our target is to retain 60% of first-time full-time associate degree seeking students for two years during the period between the 2006 and 2010 academic years.

The rate for part-time associate degree seeking students should also increase at an average rate of 1% per year, but the retention rate fluctuates quite a bit more on a year-by-year basis. If past history is a predictor of future performance, next year’s retention of part-time associate degree seeking students will fall back to around 35% before rising for the next two years. Mat-Su College’s target for this category of student is to have a retention rate of 50% for two of the years between the 2006 and 2010 academic years.

Non-degree seekers are the most difficult group for which to project retention rates. Retention is up over seven years ago, but the last four years have shown two 5% increases and a 10% decrease that resulted in no net change in the average retention rate for the period. Mat-Su’s target will be to maintain the current retention rate for this category of student.

## Opportunities and Strategies

**Increasing Number of Traditional Students:** Success in the recruitment of local high school students has resulted in increases in the numbers of traditional students in terms of both head count and percentage of the total student population. Many of these students are destined to continue their education in degree programs offered by the Anchorage campus. As noted in the above “Trends” section, the Mat-Su College retention rate is not accurately measured because it is currently limited to students who are not enrolled in Anchorage degree programs. Nonetheless, the College will strive to improve the campus environment in ways that will make it an even more appealing choice as a location for students to pursue their educational goals within the University of Alaska system regardless of the campus at which they are actually enrolled. In order to improve retention, the College has identified five specific areas of opportunity on which to focus its efforts: academic quality, academic support, campus involvement, communication with students, and course scheduling.

**Academic Quality:** Students’ perceptions of the value of a degree center on whether or not they are learning what they perceive to be necessary toward attaining their educational goals. If students do not see any benefit, they will not waste significant amounts of time and money on a handshake and a piece of paper. The College has made significant improvement in its academic quality and must capitalize on its current progress in this area.

Strategies to accomplish this are:

- Performing exit interviews of students who choose to withdraw from the College to determine why students choose to leave before completing a degree. Currently, only anecdotal evidence exists.
- Maintaining the current emphasis on the interrelated nature of different academic disciplines and the value of applying different perspectives and sound reasoning to the solutions of problems.
- Continuing the College’s current support for faculty development to improve the quality of instruction.
- Developing an online orientation for adjunct faculty members to familiarize them with the academic resources that are available to them and the expectations the College has for academic rigor.
- Exploring the demand for occupational endorsements that build measurable skill sets while students advance toward a complete degree.
- Mining new and existing data on its students’ educational goals to help the College identify the most appropriate measurements to evaluate its success in meeting the Valley’s educational needs.

**Academic Support:** Academic support involves both course scheduling and programs that are central to the learning environment but are not directly involved with classroom instruction. Academic support programs are vital to the overall campus environment and students’ perceptions that the College wants them to succeed.

Strategies for success include:

- Evaluating current placement testing policies and procedures to make sure they are placing students in the appropriate level of English and mathematics courses.
- Creating need-based scholarships to offset rising tuition costs.
- Evaluating the success of the Early Alert Retention Strategies program to determine its effectiveness and make adjustments as necessary.

- Monitoring orientation and advising of new and at-risk students to determine the benefit of making orientation and advising mandatory.
- Developing a Banner module to track advisory student content.
- Continuing the change within the Student Services Department from a service culture to an engagement culture that is resulting in it taking a more proactive role in student life at the College.
- Exploring the need for a career counselor position that would assist students in locating internship opportunities and employment after obtaining their degrees.

**Course Scheduling:** The course scheduling process is an area in which the College recognizes a need for improvement. Changes in this area will encourage retention by improving the quality of students' interaction with the College during critical periods of their academic careers.

Improvements can be made by:

- Examining current course sequencing to ensure that students are able to plan their academic progression toward their degrees with confidence.
- Ensuring that an adequate number of course sections are available to meet student demand.
- Evaluating current course scheduling practices to see if they result in courses being offered at the times students need them and with spacing to ensure that course scheduling conflicts are kept to a minimum.
- Scheduling registration so that currently enrolled degree-seeking students get first choice of course offerings
- Identifying areas where more full-time instructors are needed.
- Working within the UAA system to respond to student requests to increase the number of upper-division courses that are available on the Mat-Su campus.
- Exploring the possibility of a faculty exchange program between the Anchorage and Mat-Su campuses.

**Campus Involvement:** Academic factors are not the only ones that determine whether or not students will choose to remain enrolled at a college. Students who are actively involved in campus life and form support networks of friends there are less likely to leave.

The College can encourage students to become more engaged in campus life by:

- Assessing the value of implementing a first year experience program. Nationwide data suggest the positive impact of such initiatives on the quality of the campus experience and the retention of newly-admitted students.
- Identifying a location that will clearly serve as a commuter student lounge. The cafeteria is a likely spot to evolve into a multi-use space that provides recreational and lounging/studying space in addition to food service for students.
- Exploring the possibility of using student worker positions to involve students in the business life of the College and allow students to offset some of the pain caused by tuition increases.
- Establishing a student mentor program to help new students learn how to adapt to college life.

**Communication of Expectations:** Students need to know the rules of the road from the start so that they will not be surprised by them later on. Clear communication in this regard can prevent much stress.

Strategies Mat-Su College will employ in this area include:

- Assessing the fall 2005 orientation program for its effectiveness and making appropriate adjustments for the fall 2006 orientation program.
- Continuing the development of an on-line orientation for students.
- Adopting materials being developed by UAA to disseminate the academic expectations for its students or using them as a model for the preparation of our own.

## **Timelines and Accountability**

Accountability for each of the following items will be a short written report by the person or committee that is tasked with the item's completion that includes appropriate information for documenting and evaluating progress toward accomplishing the task.

### **2006-2007**

- Evaluate the course scheduling process to identify methods by which course scheduling conflicts can be minimized.
- Develop and publish a program course sequence for each program that includes information on when each course will be offered.
- Evaluate whether or not to offer a first year experience program.
- Evaluate and revise the student orientation program.
- Evaluate placement testing practices and revise as needed.
- Initiate mandatory advising for at-risk students.
- Evaluate the advising needs of freshmen.
- Develop print materials to publicize academic expectations.
- Evaluate the EARS program and revise as necessary.
- Evaluate the policy of strict enforcement of GER prerequisites and revise as necessary.
- Develop an online orientation.
- Identify potential locations for a commuter lounge.
- Cultivate the Student Government Association.
- Identify ways in which Student Services can take a more active role in planning and implementing student activities.
- Define "retention" as it applies to Mat-Su College and identify appropriate methods by which it can be measured.
- Coordinate retention efforts through committee oversight.

- Define an exit interview process for students who completely withdraw.
- Identify methods to encourage students to see how their courses work together to help them solve real-world problems.
- Continue to support faculty development.
- Explore faculty development opportunities in partnership with Anchorage and other UAA campuses.
- Evaluate the current full-time faculty/adjunct faculty teaching structure for its success in meeting student needs for courses.

**2007-2008**

- Develop an online orientation for new faculty members.
- Revise freshman advising practices as indicated by the previous year's evaluation.
- Create a commuter lounge.
- Implement new measurements for retention.
- Experiment with new methods by which Student Services can take a more active role in planning and implementing student activities.
- Evaluate and revise the course scheduling process as necessary.
- Evaluate and revise the online student orientation as necessary.

**2008-2009**

- Evaluate the online orientation for new faculty members and revise as necessary.
- Evaluate measurements for retention rates and revise as necessary.

## High Demand Programs

### High Demand Program Offerings

“High demand programs” implies two things: degree programs that are projected to be highly employable in the future and areas of study that are popular with students. The two are not necessarily the same. The first implies meeting the demands forecasted by state and local governments for building and maintaining a workforce that will attract and retain high quality jobs to the area. This is a highly desired outcome for our college. The second implies meeting student desires for personal enrichment and caters to the human desire for self-improvement. This is also a highly valued tradition of higher education.

In order to meet the state’s needs for an educated workforce, the University of Alaska developed a list of high demand job area degree programs based on the 2000-2010 Occupational Forecast from the State of Alaska Department of Labor.

Of the programs on that list, Mat-Su College offers:

#### Certificate Programs:

- Architectural Drafting
- Civil Drafting
- Computer and Network Technology
- Computer Information and Office Systems
- Mechanical and Electrical Drafting
- Structural Drafting
- Telecommunications and Electronics Systems.

#### Associate of Applied Science Programs:

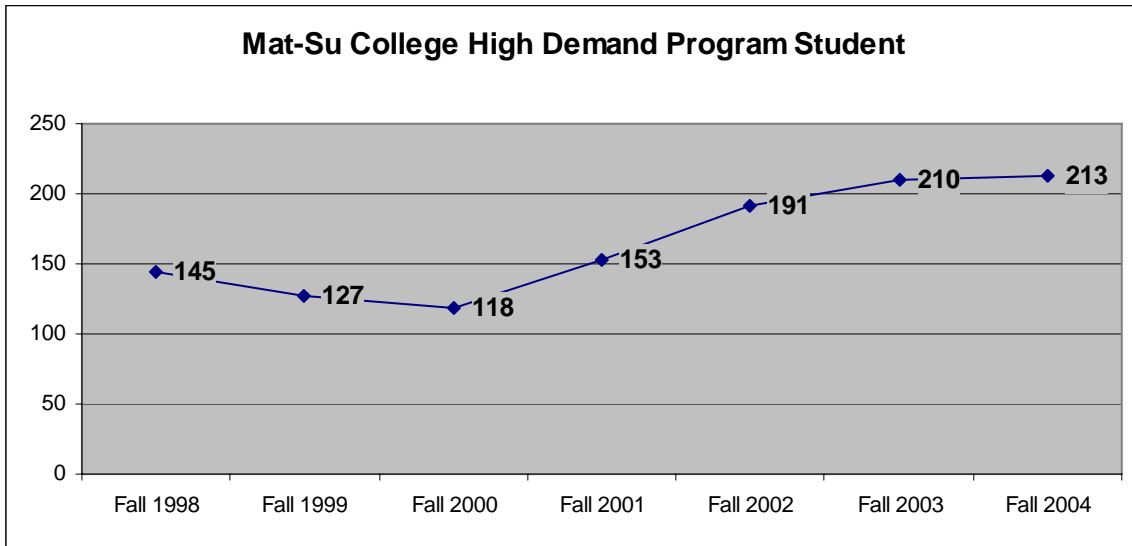
- Accounting
- Architectural and Engineering Technology
- Computer Information and Office Systems
- Computer Systems Technology
- Human Services
- Small Business Administration
- Telecommunications, Electronics, and Computer Technology

Although they are not on the official list, Mat-Su College also offers highly successful certificate and AAS programs in Refrigeration and Heating Technology, which are the only programs of their kind offered in Alaska.

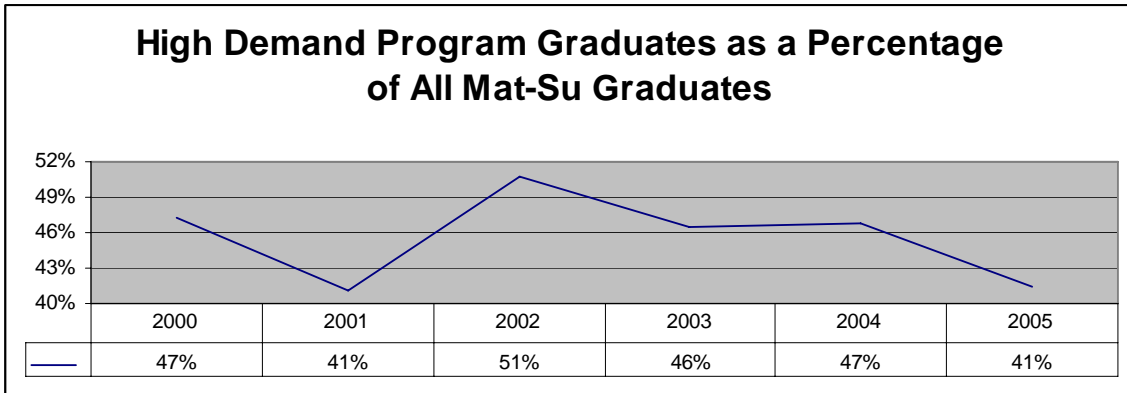
Partnerships with the Anchorage campus allow Mat-Su College to offer Borough residents the opportunity to pursue the Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Development, Associate of Applied Science in Nursing, and Bachelor of Human Services degrees locally. Although the courses are held on the Mat-Su campus, the actual degree is granted by Anchorage.

## Trends

In the fall semester of 2004, 213 students were enrolled in programs officially labeled as “high demand” by the University of Alaska. This number is actually a bit deceptive because 337 additional students who attended classes on the Mat-Su campus were actually registered as degree-seeking students at another University of Alaska campus. Enrollment of students in high demand programs has increased 47% since the fall of 1998.



High demand program graduates represented 41% of the degrees and certificates granted by Mat-Su College in AY 2005. This is lower than the six-year average of 46%.



The Mat-Su Borough says that the fields with the highest number of new jobs in the Valley from 2000 to 2004 were health care and social assistance, leisure and hospitality, construction, retail trade, and government. In percentage terms, professional services and financial services also showed high growth.

In terms of the programs that are popular with students, it must be noted that the general Associate of Applied Science and Associate of Arts degrees enroll the highest number of students. In 2005, however, the number of degree seeking students enrolled at Mat-Su College was lower than the number of students attending Mat-Su College courses who were actually admitted to a degree program at the Anchorage campus of UAA.

### Projections and Targets

Credit hour production in high demand programs should grow in line with overall student enrollment. The College will target a 4% average growth rate and aspire to reach 6.5% growth for the next 5 years.

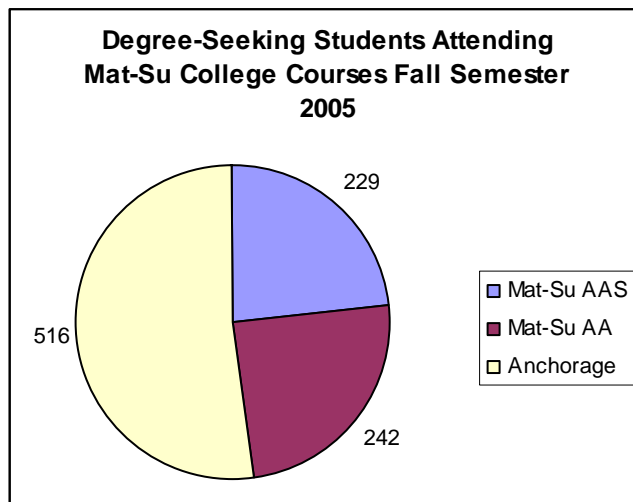
## Opportunities and Strategies

**Relationships with Local Governments and Businesses:** A huge opportunity exists to work with Mat-Su Borough and city governments and local businesses to identify and design courses that will meet the future needs within the Borough for a skilled workforce.

This opportunity will be exploited by:

- Working with the Mat-Su Borough, local governments, and local businesses to identify education needs within the Valley.
- Developing courses to meet needs where none are currently offered to build the highly skilled workforce that will attract and keep new businesses within the Valley.

**Partnerships with UAA:** Students who are declared UAA majors have constituted approximately 50% of the degree-seeking student population of the Mat-Su campus for the past six years—a fact that illustrates the importance of the relationship between the Anchorage and Mat-Su campuses. It is advantageous to students who attend Mat-Su College to receive a degree with the prestige of the University of Alaska Anchorage because UAA is a name that is recognized nationally while Mat-Su College is not. The advantage to the Anchorage campus in offering courses on the Mat-Su campus is that it provides a new level of availability to students. There has been a longstanding assumption that students who are unable to pursue their educational goals at Mat-Su College will simply transfer to the Anchorage campus. While this may be historically true, potential transfer students now have many choices available to them other than attending classes in Anchorage: attending a university located in another state, enrolling in a distance education program from another university, and attending Wayland Baptist University in Wasilla. Working in partnership with the Anchorage campus to expand course offerings on the Mat-Su campus also encourages potential students to enroll who otherwise would not because of the disruption that either commuting or relocating to Anchorage would cause in their lives. The bottom line is that if the University of Alaska Anchorage offers more courses at the Mat-Su campus, it will have greater influence on potential students' educational choices in what will soon be the second-most populated area of the state.



Strategies for building partnerships include:

- Capitalizing on the success of current partnership efforts to foster improved relationships between Mat-Su College and academic departments on the Anchorage campus.
- Exploring the possibility for a faculty exchange program between the Mat-Su and Anchorage campuses.

## **Timelines and Accountability**

Accountability for each of the following items will be a short written report by the person or committee that is tasked with the item's completion that includes appropriate information for documenting and evaluating progress toward accomplishing the task.

### **2006-2007**

- Work with the Mat-Su Borough Government and local businesses to evaluate how well current course offerings meet the needs of employers for skilled labor in the Mat-Su Valley
- Identify areas in which Mat-Su can work in partnership with Anchorage to make upper-division courses locally available to Mat-Su Borough residents
- Build stronger relationships with academic departments on the Anchorage campus to increase the number of upper division courses offered on the Mat-Su campus

### **2007-2008**

- Develop courses as necessary to meet the needs of Mat-Su Borough employers for skilled labor
- Explore the potential for a faculty exchange program between the Mat-Su and Anchorage Campuses

### **2008-2009**

- Implement the faculty exchange program if it is acceptable to both campuses.

## Critical Factors in Meeting Performance Goals

In recognizing the factors that are essential in meeting the goals that are outlined in this document, Mat-Su College must both capitalize on its strengths and recognize opportunities for improvement. Some factors are outside the direct control of the College. We must find ways to influence those factors to our advantage whenever possible.

### Enrollment:

**Goal:** Enrollment growth will equal the growth rate of the Mat-Su Borough.

#### Critical Factors:

- Marketing
  - A comprehensive plan to raise community awareness of the College and its programs
  - Identifying potential student groups and targeting them using the most effective media
  - Appropriate levels of staff time and resources devoted to marketing
  - The College's visibility as a cultural and educational center within the Mat-Su Borough
  - Prominent signage on major roads leading to the College
  - New student orientation programs
  - Relationship with the Mat-Su Borough School District and other secondary education providers
  - Prestige of UAA degree
  - Cost per credit hour of attendance at Mat-Su College vs. the perceived value of a degree from another institution
  
- Location
  - Rapidly growing area
  - Location of the campus in relation to the population centers of the Borough
  - Ability to serve the local community without the necessity of a commute to Anchorage
  - Ability to support students from rural areas as they transition from village to urban environments
  
- Admissions policies
  - Student placement testing
  
- Courses offered
  - Areas of study
    - Multiple education tracks to meet student expectations for both degree-seeking and non-degree seeking students
    - Degree programs desired by potential students
    - Continual assessment of degree programs for relevance to student demand and the Borough's job market
    - Faculty pool to support degree programs
    - Regular offerings of the courses required for degree programs
    - Coordination with departments on the Anchorage campus
  - Semester by semester offerings
    - Sufficient sections of high enrollment courses
    - Minimal scheduling conflicts for high enrollment courses
    - Availability of courses at times when students can take them
    - Availability of upper division courses
    - Availability of developmental courses
    - Blended format courses
    - Adjunct faculty pool
    - Full-time faculty pool

- Classroom space
  - Blended course offerings
  - Course scheduling
  - Capital projects to create new classroom space for continued growth
- Competition
  - Distance education programs offered by other universities
  - Wayland Baptist University
  - Embry-Riddle
  - Out-of-state colleges and universities
- Relationship between Mat-Su and Anchorage campuses
- Bandwidth
- Access to UA and UAA resources

## **Retention:**

**Goals:** Retain 60% of the first-time full-time freshmen and 55% of the first-time part-time freshmen for two of the next 5 years. Retain 37% of non-degree seeking students for one of the next five years with an additional year at or above 33% retention.

### **Critical Factors:**

- Campus environment
  - Condition of facilities
  - Friendly atmosphere
  - Ease of navigating College procedures
  - Helpful staff
  - Students' perceptions of their value to the College
- Instruction
  - Faculty pool
  - Courses offered
  - Course scheduling
  - Class size
  - Academic quality
  - Accessibility of faculty to students
  - Relationship of Anchorage and Mat-Su faculty within academic departments
  - Cost and availability of required course materials
  - Access to information sources
  - Access to tutorial help
  - Relevance of courses as perceived by students
- Identification of at-risk students
- Advising and counseling for students
- Computing resources
  - Adequate number of computers available for student use
  - Adequate bandwidth

**High Demand Programs:**

**Goal:** Growth at a rate equal to overall enrollment growth.

**Critical Factors:**

- Relationship with the Mat-Su Borough and neighboring cities
- Relationships with area chambers of commerce and businesses
- Relationship with the Mat-Su Borough School District
- Relationship between Anchorage and Mat-Su campuses affecting ability to offer courses in high demand areas
- Community support
- Adequate resources to support high demand programs
- Bandwidth
- Ability to attract and retain new faculty members
- Ability to create new courses and programs