Colleges see dwindling ranks of high school graduates

By MARA ROSE WILLIAMS, McClatchy Newspapers

Published: Tuesday, Jul. 19, 2011 - 5:15 am

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- The Columbia and Kansas City campuses of the University of Missouri again will be awash in freshmen this fall.

But it may be a high tide.

In eight years, if a recent national report is correct, the number of high school graduates in Missouri will fall by 5 percent.

An aging population, coupled with a decline in high school graduates entering college and the workforce, is a matter for national concern, experts say.

Seeing the writing on the marker board, some area educators are looking past the freshman glut and trying to entice other sources of college fodder, including former dropouts.

Overall, fairly flat national high school graduation rates until 2020 are predicted by the Center for Law and Social Policy and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

The decline is most pronounced in parts of New England, Ohio, Michigan, North Dakota, Massachusetts and New York. Connecticut, for example, expects a 10 percent drop in high school students, the report says.

Kansas will fare somewhat better with a dip of only 1 percent.

Some of the Midwest declines come from out-migration but, in general, the report said, the high school student population is shrinking with declining birth rates, said Vickie Choitz, senior policy analyst with the law center.

On the Kansas City and Rolla campuses, educators already are addressing shifting trends, including encouraging old faces to return and finish up.

In December, UMKC began an aggressive search for adults who left in the past decade without a diploma.

Using the National Student Clearinghouse, which verifies college enrollment and degrees granted, UMKC found 475 to call about returning to finish up.
"We only looked at people from the Kansas City, Missouri, area," said Jennifer DeHaemers, assistant vice chancellor for enrollment management. "People who would logistically want to come back."

One reason for this initiative is Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon's goal to improve the ratio of residents with a college degree from 37 percent to 60 percent by 2025.

Besides the soon-to-stagnate student pool, the state institutions also find themselves struggling with an 8.1 percent budget cut in fiscal year 2012.

"We know from history and from studies such as these that post-secondary education provides enormous economic benefits to individuals and their communities," said David Russell, Missouri higher education commissioner.

"We need to graduate 4,000 more students each year if we are to meet our state's future workforce needs."

While in this slow economic recovery jobs for college students may be slim, employment demanding some post-secondary training will rise 16 percent by 2018. At that point, two-thirds of all jobs will require it, according to a state-by-state analysis.

With more non-traditional students being recruited, colleges and universities also are embracing some different ways for their campuses to deliver credit hours. That means four-year schools are launching more online courses and are being more flexible about when classes are offered. In some cases, it may even mean designing classes more attractive to older students.

Unlike the Kansas City and Columbia campuses, Missouri University of Science & Technology is not expecting more freshmen this year. However, the Rolla school last year had a record enrollment, the largest since the 1980s. The school's strategic plan had projected 6,500 students at this point, but it's now 7,200.

"We do have capacities, and we do have some programs that are bursting at the seams, mechanical and civil engineering for example. We can't grow much more," said Andrew Careaga at Missouri S&T.

Educators acknowledge that enrollment is cyclical and are well aware of the expected demographic changes.

So at Rolla, too, dropouts are considered an important source of college fodder. Many located by S&T are only one math class away from a degree.

Richard Sluder, vice provost for enrollment management at the University of Central Missouri, said the Warrensburg school enrolls about 50 such students a year, many on a general studies track.

"And with a little work, maybe a three-hour class, they finish with a degree," he said.
Man arrested on suspicion of sexual misconduct at Ellis Library

Tuesday, July 19, 2011 | 1:30 p.m. CDT; updated 7:29 p.m. CDT, Tuesday, July 19, 2011

BY HOLLY BENDER

COLUMBIA — **MU police arrested a man Monday on suspicion of second-degree sexual misconduct for exposing himself in a restroom in Ellis Library on Friday.**

It was reported to Ellis Library security Friday that Willy Wray Wood, 53, was in an enclosed stall when he got the attention of another occupant and exposed himself, MU Police Chief Jack Watring said.

Police included photos of Wood in an announcement sent to MU students and employees Monday. He was recognized and arrested when he returned to Ellis Library.

Wood posted a $500 bond Monday, according to the Boone County Sheriff's Department. Watring said no charges had been brought as of Tuesday morning.
College leaders urge Congress to save Pell Grants

NO MENTION

Mara Rose Williams

University of Missouri-Kansas City Chancellor Leo Morton joined college leaders Tuesday on Capitol Hill and pleaded for lawmakers to spare funding for Pell Grants.

Pell Grants, which unlike loans don't have to be paid back, help about 10 million lower-income students afford a college education.

In its effort to deal with the nation's debt, Congress is considering cutting the program nearly in half, which could bounce about 1.5 million students off the grants, the Washington Post reported earlier this week.

Morton was in Washington with college leaders from across the country. They were backed by a contingent of students chanting, “You say cut back — we say fight back.”

Many students at the morning event said such a cut would greatly affect them.

“For many students, Pell is the beacon of hope. It is what we have to stay in school,” said Victor Sanchez, a recent graduate from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

He graduated with $14,000 in debt, but said the cost of college would have been astronomical for him without the Pell Grants he received.

Currently, the maximum Pell Grant allotment is $5,550 a year, about a third of the yearly cost of most four-year public colleges and universities.

Morton, who grew up poor in Alabama, told the gathering of senators, students and educators that had it not been for federal grant programs, he would not have been able to attend Tuskegee University.

“Without those grants, I would not be here today,” Morton said.
At UMKC, 33 percent of the students depend on Pell Grants to pay for their education, Morton said. In 2008, 2,358 UMKC students received Pell Grants, totaling $6.3 million. Last year, 3,108 students there received a total of $11.9 million.

This year, the university expects Pell Grant disbursements to total $13.2 million.

Pell Grant recipients make a substantial financial contribution to their institutions in tuition dollars. At UMKC this year, these students “contribute 10 percent of our net tuition,” Morton said.