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Contact: Mark Gunderman, Communications Specialist
Chippewa Valley Technical College
Desk: 715-831-7288
Cell: 715-210-4714
mgunderman1@cvtc.edu

Despite Trends, CVTC Shows Enrollment Growth

Total number of students enrolled in classes up 25 percent since 2015

Eau Claire, WI – Chippewa Valley Technical College is countering a statewide trend of declining technical college enrollment by showing recent increases in students. College leaders attribute CVTC's positive numbers to new programs and delivery methods, evolving marketing strategies, and growth in apprenticeship and high school dual credit programs.

Enrollment in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) declined by 20 percent since the Great Recession, according to a recent report by Wisconsin Public Radio, citing WTCS figures. Total headcount fell by 79,158 students between 2010 and 2017. This includes statewide headcount reductions of 5.5 percent in 2014-15, 1 percent in 2015-16, and 5.7 percent in 2016-17, before rebounding for a 2.3 percent increase in 2017-18.

However, CVTC has been an outlier in these trends, WTCS enrollment statistics show. CVTC's headcount increased from 15,126 in 2015 to 18,083 in 2018. The most recent figures show a 2019 headcount of 18,910, representing a 25 percent increase since 2015.

WTCS reported that statewide full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment fell by 18,367, or 22 percent between 2010 and 2017, an expected trend as the economy improved after the Great Recession. That includes a system-wide FTE drop of 3.6 percent in 2016-17 and 0.5 percent in 2017-18. AT CVTC, FTE enrollment increased from 2016-17 to 2017-18 by 4.5 percent, the largest increase in the state. Only two other technical college districts showed FTE enrollment increases over that period.

"Technical college enrollment is counter-cyclical to the economy," said CVTC President Bruce Barker. "During hard economic times, technical college enrollment goes up as people come back to school to update their skills or find a new career. But as the economy improves, enrollment stabilizes and starts to drop."

Falling numbers of high school graduates statewide also leave a smaller pool of new young students for colleges to draw from, a factor that has hit universities harder than it has technical colleges, Barker pointed out.

So how has CVTC overcome these trends?

“At CVTC we work hard to offer programs that produce graduates who meet the needs of local employers and are at the same time programs that students are interested in taking,” Barker said. “Fortunately, we have great teams of professionals who work closely with businesses to ensure our programs remain relevant, and who know how to deliver to potential students the message of what CVTC can do for them.”

“We reach out to people where they are, both physically and electronically,” said Joni Geroux, director of marketing, communications, recruitment, workforce solutions and continuing education. “We have excellent teams that meet personally with prospective students in area schools, businesses, and at community events, and we maintain a strong presence on the media platforms where people interact with one another and get information on what’s happening in the community.”

CVTC programs that have shown the most significant enrollment growth by headcount over the past five years are in some of the highest-demand fields. Refrigeration, Air Conditioning & Heating Service Technician grew from 19 to 57 students, a 200 percent increase. Plumbing Apprentice grew from 21 to 56 students, a 167 percent increase; Industrial Mechanical Technician from 24 to 50, up 108 percent; and Electricity Apprentice from 62 to 126, up 103 percent.

More flexibility in course delivery has also been a factor, making it easier for people working full time to enroll in CVTC classes and programs. The number of online course delivery enrollments grew from 3,233 in 2015 to 5,186 in 2019, a 60 percent increase.

CVTC has also seen an explosion of growth in its high school transcribed credit programs in which high school students can earn college credits. Total student count in transcribed credit classes grew from 1,767 in 2014-15 to 4,655 in 2018-19. The high school academies program in which high school students take a cluster of classes in a subject area taught by CVTC faculty has also grown rapidly. Since the academies programs debuted in 2015-16, total student count has grown from 16 students in two schools to 398 students in 41 schools.

With over 155 programs offered both online and on-campus, Chippewa Valley Technical College delivers superior, progressive technical education which improves the lives of students, meets the workforce needs of the region, and strengthens the community. CVTC programs are designed with input of business and industry to prepare graduates for today’s jobs, with 95 percent employed within six months of graduation and associate degree graduates earning an average annual salary of \$46,816.

Cutline:

Gas Utility Construction & Service Instructor RC Jensen shows a typical gas fitting to a potential student and his parents at an open house event in May. The creation of new programs like Gas Utility and personal outreach to students have been helpful in keeping CVTC enrollment numbers strong despite statewide trends of falling student headcounts.

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