



They're Not Just Hiring Administrators

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A new report [http://www.sheeo.org/pubs/Fall_Staffing-Final05-24-2011.pdf] might give pause to critics who accuse public colleges either of expanding their staffs willy-nilly or of responding to budget cuts by slashing spending in areas that hurt students.

The analysis by the State Higher Education Executive Officers shows that over the last decade, the biggest staffing growth actually came in areas like faculty, graduate assistants and academic support and student services. And while staffs grew, they did not keep pace with rapidly expanding enrollments, suggesting that institutions were striving to become more efficient.

“I think what the report really says is that institutions are doing their very best to meet student needs in the context of the resources they have and the enrollment demands,” said Paul E. Lingenfelter, president of SHEEO. “It’s sort of logical that when enrollments are growing, you don’t necessarily add more physical plant operators. You don’t add more senior administrators. You add people that are actually providing instruction and student support, and I guess I’m not surprised that the data show what they do show. There has been a lot of growth in student services over the years, but I think that’s partially been driven by student demands.”

The report used human resources data from 2001-2009 in the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System to identify trends in staffing at public colleges and universities. It breaks numbers down by institutional Carnegie classification, and by the area of employment and full- or part-time status of staff.

As seen in the table below, the number of overall employees at all types of institutions grew from 2001 (1,969,500) to 2009 (2,239,859), by a total of 14 percent at all institutions, and by as little as 6 percent (at research-intensive institutions) and as much as 18 percent at associate-degree-granting colleges and very research-intensive universities.

But because enrollments also boomed during that period, increasing by about 2 million students (or 24 percent), the staff per 100 full-time enrolled students actually fell across the board, too. At two-year institutions, for instance, enrollments grew by 29 percent, so the number of staff per FTE actually declined by 8 percent from 2001 to 2009, as did the overall figure for all institutions.

Growth in Employees Per Full-Time-Equivalent Students, by Institution Type, 2001-2009

Institution Type	Staff Per 100 Full-Time-Equivalent Students			% Change		
	2001-2	2005-6	2009-10	2001-05	2005-09	2001-09
Associate-Degree Granting						
Annual Student FTE*	3,690,725	4,170,138	4,744,527	13%	14%	29%
Total Staff (Full-time and Part-time)	573,633	619,142	677,381	8%	9%	18%
Total Staff/100 FTE	15.54	14.85	14.28	-4%	-4%	-8%
Baccalaureate, Master's, Doctoral						
Annual Student FTE*	2,265,200	2,536,550	2,706,132	12%	7%	19%
Total Staff (Full-time and Part-time)	395,827	428,220	465,010	8%	9%	17%
Total Staff/100 FTE	17.47	16.88	17.18	-3%	-3%	-2%
Research, High Activity						
Annual Student FTE*	1,591,478	1,764,431	1,900,924	11%	8%	19%
Total Staff (Full-time and Part-time)	718,740	709,939	765,399	-1%	8%	6%
Total Staff/100 FTE	45.16	40.24	40.26	-11%	-11%	-11%
Research, Very High Activity						
Annual Student FTE*	1,037,224	1,220,902	1,270,428	18%	4%	22%
Total Staff (Full-time and Part-time)	281,300	309,736	332,069	10%	7%	18%
Total Staff/100 FTE	27.12	25.37	26.14	-6%	-6%	-4%

Total

Annual Student FTE*	8,584,627	9,692,021	10,622,011	13%	10%	24%
Total Staff	1,969,500	2,067,037	2,239,859	5%	8%	14%
Total Staff/100 FTE	22.94	21.33	21.09	-7%	-7%	-8%

Despite the smaller ratio overall, there has been growth in a few areas. Colleges across the board are relying more on part-time faculty members, a group that grew 2 percent per 100 FTE since 2001, while full-time faculty declined 9 percent. Graduate assistants also increased in number by 1 percent. And “other professionals” -- including staff in academic support, student services and institutional support -- grew by 6 percent.

The biggest declines came in clerical/secretarial/technical workers, whose numbers decreased consistently over the decade for a 24-percent total drop; and service/maintenance/skilled crafts staff, whose numbers also fell consistently but to a lesser extent, with a 20-percent overall decline. “These are areas where institutions are likely gaining economies of scale – as student FTE increases, the number of staff remains consistent, resulting in a decline in staff per 100 student FTE,” the report says.

Executive/administrative and managerial positions also fell 20 percent over all during the period, but the decline happened early in the decade and the numbers stayed relatively flat afterward, even growing by 1 percent in the latter half of the decade. (Despite the large percentages of all these declines, they don’t translate into a lot of bodies. For instance, the number of managers per 100 FTE went from 1.14 in 2000-1 to 0.91 in 2009-10.)

In most areas, growth -- and smaller declines -- happened in the second half of the decade, despite increasingly gloomy budget pictures.

Lingenfelter attributes this trend -- like many of the report's other findings -- to enrollment patterns and student demand. All types of colleges added staff, but different institutions added them in different areas. For instance, “other professionals,” the group that grew more than any other, expanded mostly at research institutions. Associate-degree-granting colleges, meanwhile, grew much more in faculty than in any other category.

“It’s clear that the mixture of staffing and other professionals really just reflects the increasing complexity of the institutions. There are just more functions,” Lingenfelter said. “It’s pretty obvious that research universities have a lot more ‘other professionals’ than institutions that focus almost entirely on instruction. And I think there’s been a tendency for people to figure ‘other professionals’ were administrators. I think the real pattern suggests they’re lab technicians and service providers, and people just doing IT work and other things that have grown so dramatically over the past 10 years.”

— Allie Grasgreen