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COVID and Hurricane continue to affect classes and activities

Silent halls, and libraries that are even quieter than usual, are now not an uncommon sight in the American college landscape.

With the advent of a global pandemic and multiple natural disasters targeting the local area, the world has turned upside down. Among the many different topsy turvys of this era, is the fact that enrollment at many colleges, especially community colleges, has found itself plummeting. This has resulted in altered classes, affected extracurriculars, and flattened budgets.

While Pensacola State (PSC) has, by simple observation, found itself as one of those colleges, exact data has been scarce. The admissions office of PSC was reached out to but did not give any reply or make comment on the subject matter as of the time of writing.

Even on the national level, the quickness of the proliferation of the virus has made statistics gathering difficult, though not impossible.

Upon being reached for comment, a statistician from the National Centers for Educational Statistics (NCES) initially said that they had no comment to give. However, the Commissioner of the NCES, James Woodworth, later did reply, saying “It will take some time before NCES has official enrollment data that can show the impact of COVID on enrollment... However, NCES has worked with the Census Bureau to collect more real time information on COVID impacts.”

Despite this only being the first round of surveys and estimates, the data is, nonetheless, quite telling.

In the State of Florida alone, upwards of an estimated 34% of college students have cancelled or scaled-back their class schedules and college plans this fall semester. This trend isn't just in Florida alone either. Across the country, it is estimated that as much as 42% of college students have scaled-back, or outright cancelled, their class schedule.

While Woodworth cautions that these numbers are “experimental,” he said that they nevertheless, “meet high standards for quality” and were quite accurate for the purposes of immediate reporting.

While the extent that PSC has been numerically affected by the pandemic is difficult to discern at the time, the effect of those incidents have had noticeable effect.

Less classes overall are being offered this semester due to the uncertainty. Classes, of both the in-person and virtual varieties, have seen lower levels of attendance.

“We’ve definitely had less enrollment and less students in our classes,” Spanish Professor Amber Carey said, “the face-to-face classes, of course, have to be smaller cause we’re social distancing, so that makes sense, but the online ones, [I’ve] seen a slight decrease in them [as well].”

Classes were not the only ones seeing problems as a result of the outbreak. Student activities and clubs have also seen hardships in recruiting and retaining members during this time. As Carey, who is also the Faculty Advisor of the Robinson's Honor Scholars said, "this summer recruitment was very hard, I think because it was so uncertain and no one knew what to expect for fall, I didn't have as successful a recruitment period this summer."

Though, some hope is still here on the activities front, as a certain amount of uncertainty weakens. Carey said, "this fall, it was, a little bit below average, but not as bad as I had anticipated."

However, it is not only the pandemic that has affected classes and activities. While the effects it may have on enrollment and attendance is not yet clear, the overactive Atlantic hurricane season has already resulted in makeup classes and messed-up schedules. "We lost two weeks now, so now I have that Friday classes [sic], which sucks," Pensacola State student Eli Smith said. Smith is not alone by any means, many students across the various campuses have found themselves in extra classes because of altered schedules.

It is, as of yet, unclear on how this issue may be solved, as the pandemic continues to rage on and recovery from the, still extant, hurricane season continues. No matter the solution, it lies as one of many issues on the long road to our mutual global recovery.

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