ABAC Enrollment Up for 4th Consecutive Semester

TIFTON—Spring semester 2015 numbers show that the enrollment at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College is on the rise for the fourth consecutive term. And ABAC President David Bridges couldn’t be happier about that fact.

“It’s really remarkable when you consider the enrollment situation across the University System,” Bridges said. “We have an identity. We have a legacy. People know who we are.”

A total of 3,138 students are enrolled for the 2015 spring term, a slight increase over the 3,132 students enrolled during the 2014 spring semester. ABAC was the only college or university south of Macon in the University System of Georgia to increase its enrollment in both the 2013 and 2014 fall semesters.

“It comes down to focus and mission,” Bridges said. “That’s the reality of the situation. What has sustained us is the almost double digit growth in some of our upper division classes in agriculture, natural resources, and biology.”
ABAC now offers bachelor’s degrees in diversified agriculture, biology, business and economic development, natural resource management, golf course and turfgrass management, and rural studies. Over 1,100 students major in the bachelor’s degree programs.

“We started with 40 students in those programs in January of 2008, and now the number keeps going up every semester,” Bridges said. “I believe our next jump in enrollment will probably be in the Stafford School of Business where we have a new bachelor’s degree in business and economic development. That degree will be particularly popular among students who have an interest in family-owned businesses.”

ABAC students from 150 Georgia counties, 18 states, and 28 countries are four weeks into the spring semester. In the 2014 spring term, ABAC was one of only three state colleges in the University System to increase its enrollment.

“Our new strategic plan is titled ‘Destination ABAC’ for a lot of different reasons but the number one reason is that we want ABAC to become a destination college,” Bridges said. “With a shrinking number of high school graduates in Georgia, the top students will have more and more choices. We want them to make ABAC their first choice.”

Bridges said the strategic plan actually places more emphasis on graduating students from ABAC than it does on enrolling students as freshmen.

“We have had four consecutive semesters where the number of graduates increased over the previous year,” Bridges said. “That’s the kind of numbers that are good for ABAC, for the community and for the state of Georgia.”
“Think about it. When students stay at ABAC for four years to get one of our bachelor’s degrees, they are much more likely to stay in this area, find employment, and raise families.”

Bridges said the ABAC graduation rate is twice the average graduation rate of the 13 state colleges in the University System of Georgia.

In the 2012 fiscal year, ABAC’s economic impact on Tifton and the surrounding area was $261,313,451. With all 1,300 beds filled at ABAC Lakeside and ABAC Place on campus, that economic impact will be magnified in years to come when an increasing number of students choose four-year degrees.

“We have some businesses in Tift County that have been here a long time,” Bridges said. “That’s great for the community. But we have other businesses that are gone before you know it. Businesses come and go. Colleges come and grow. It’s a win-win situation for ABAC and this area.”

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