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Bachelor’s Degree Enrollment Skyrockets at ABAC

TIFTON—Students at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College have fallen in love with bachelor’s degrees.

Early numbers from the first day of fall semester classes on Wednesday indicate that 41 per cent of ABAC students are now involved in four-year degree programs, up from 33 percent in the fall term of 2014.

“Students across the state and the country are becoming more aware every year that ABAC is a full-fledged baccalaureate-degree granting institution,” ABAC President David Bridges said. “We started junior and senior level classes in January of 2008 with 41 students. Right now, we have 1,394 students in bachelor’s degree programs.”

Bridges said 882 freshmen are enrolled, an increase of 10 students over the freshman enrollment number of 2014. He said the total fall semester enrollment should be around the same number as the 2014 fall term enrollment of 3,457 students.
“ABAC is making a huge leap forward as far as bachelor’s degrees,” Bridges said. “ABAC produced the largest number of graduates in its history at the end of the spring term, and more of those than ever before walked across the graduation stage with bachelor’s degrees.”

Although all the numbers are still preliminary, the bachelor’s degree in business and economic development has achieved phenomenal growth, up 58.4 percent over the fall of 2014 with 255 students committed to the program. Still in its infancy, the degree became a part of the Stafford School of Business on March 25, 2014.

Bridges said the bachelor’s degree in diversified agriculture still leads the charge for the college with 502 students, an increase of 25.2 percent over last fall. The natural resource management degree is up 9.7 percent with 237 students in the program. Those two programs provide the backbone of the 1,165 students in the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources, which occupies 32 percent of the total student population.

Dr. Johnny Evans, Dean of the School of Science and Mathematics, said the bachelor’s degree in biology continues to be a popular destination for ABAC students. Enrollment is up in that particular area 10.5 percent to a total of 242 students.

Living on campus is more popular than ever before at ABAC. Dr. Chris Kinsey, Director of Residence Life, said around 1,400 students are living at ABAC Lakeside, ABAC Place, and Comer Hall. All spaces in the residence halls are filled for the second consecutive year.

That should boost the economic impact of ABAC in the Tifton area since many of the students who couldn’t find housing on campus are looking to rent houses and apartments. The latest figures from the University System of Georgia showed ABAC had an annual impact of $281,563,172 on Tift and surrounding counties.
The biggest reason that on-campus housing filled up is that ABAC continues to be a draw statewide, in the United States, and around the globe. Director of Enrollment Management Donna Webb said the fall term enrollment includes students from 153 of Georgia’s 159 counties, 24 states, and 23 countries.

“We’re off to a great start,” Bridges, who enters his 10th fall term as president, said. “It’s always exciting to begin a new year. I challenged the freshmen at the convocation on Tuesday to meet back in Gressette Gym in 2019 to receive their bachelor’s degree diplomas, and I believe many of them are planning to do just that.”

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