KU’s freshman class grows while setting academic, diversity records

LAWRENCE – The incoming freshmen at the University of Kansas have the highest collective ACT score in the school’s history, are the most diverse in the school’s history and reverse a decline in freshman enrollment dating back to 2009.

As of the 20th day of classes, 3,771 incoming freshmen were enrolled at KU, a 5.3 percent increase over last year and the most since 2009. Kansas students accounted for two-thirds of the year-to-year growth.

The average ACT score of these new Jayhawks is 25.1, the first time an incoming class has had an ACT above 25 and two-tenths of a point above last year’s record-setting class. The class is also the most diverse in KU history, with 21.3 percent being minority students.

Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little said that growing the freshman class while also increasing its academic readiness and diversity is both challenging and necessary if KU is to truly achieve its mission of educating leaders.

“Students who are more prepared when they arrive at KU are more likely to finish with a degree. We want every student who can be successful here to come study with us and are going to do everything we can to encourage these future leaders to join our university,” Gray-Little said.

Gray-Little attributed the size, preparation and diversity of the freshman class to a more aggressive approach to outreach and recruitment, coupled with the creation of four-year renewable scholarships that reward achievement and complement KU’s four-year fixed tuition compact.

“We want students and their families to know they have a place at KU. There are unique benefits from studying at a national research university, and our new four-year scholarships are making it more affordable for them to do so,” Gray-Little said.

While the freshman class grew, KU’s overall enrollment declined by 2.7 percent to 27,939 as a result of several factors. First, the fall 2008 incoming class, which set a record for its size, is now graduating at a record pace. This, when coupled with smaller freshman classes in the intervening years and a 2.7 percent decline in graduate enrollment this year, caused a drop in overall enrollment.

“While we are pleased with the quality, quantity and diversity of this year’s entering class, there’s still a lot of work to be done. We’re going to continue to communicate to students and their families the unique benefits and value associated with attending a flagship research university,” said Matt Melvin, vice provost for enrollment management.

Applications for fall 2013 are being accepted online. The deadline to apply for renewable scholarships is Nov. 1. KU awards $50 million in undergraduate scholarships and grants each year.

The School of Engineering experienced a 22 percent increase in new freshmen as it expands to meet the state’s need for more engineers. Similarly, the School of Pharmacy grew its enrollment by 6.7 percent, and the School of Medicine grew by 2 percent as both strive to meet the needs of Kansas communities.

The School of Nursing saw 9.3 percent growth in its enrollment, while the School of Business allowed more freshmen to be admitted directly, resulting in a 141 percent increase in its freshman class.

Overall, 66.3 percent of KU students are from Kansas, 25.4 percent are from other states, and 8.3 percent are international students. By level, 68.5 percent are undergraduates, and 31.5 percent are graduate students. The student body is 51.1 percent female and 48.9 percent male, while 16.7 percent are minorities.