

Colleges expand summer sessions

June 19 2009, By Patricia Alex, The Record (Hackensack N.J.)

Summer session -- once a relatively small piece of the academic calendar -- is now a full-blown term for most colleges and universities, with more offerings, more students and more of an expectation that you can't graduate in a timely manner without it.

At Rutgers University's flagship campus in New Brunswick/Piscataway, N.J., there are more than 13,500 students signed up for 1,315 courses that run over three summer sessions from late May to the middle of August, said Liz Hough, director of the summer sessions.

The state university has one of the biggest summer schedules in the country and it has many permutations -- three-week, four-week, six-week and 12-week courses. Some classes meet every weekday for three weeks; others meet every Saturday for 12 weeks. There are hybrid classes -- a mix of online and traditional teaching.

About two-thirds of Rutgers students will take at least one summer course by the time they graduate, said Hough. "A lot of our students are working at least part time. So taking courses in the summer and winter help them keep on track," Hough said.

The summer and, to a lesser extent, winter sessions also help schools keep up with the demands of a population bulge that has swelled enrollment and often made it difficult for students to register for the courses they need. New Jersey schools, for example, mostly enroll their own students at summer break, but also host some state residents who attend school out of state and want to catch up while home.

Even with the summer sessions, a minority of students are able to graduate in four years -- only about a third nationally.

This year -- with joblessness running high -- more students have opted to stay in school over the summer break.

At Montclair State University, enrollment in graduate courses is up 8 percent -- usually a sign of a bad economy that either has people retraining or unable to enter the job market. Rutgers has seen a jump this summer in the number of business professionals signing up for its mini-MBA programs, said Sandy Lanman, spokeswoman for the school. The students earn graduate certificates in areas such as bio-pharma.

"Any time you have people unemployed, it's almost inevitable, for public universities anyway, that you have more enrollment," said Stephen Hahn, associate provost at William Paterson University in Wayne.

He said that teacher training and online courses at William Paterson are in heavy demand. The university is offering air-conditioned dormitory space and has also discounted summer-session tuition and fees -- \$275 per credit as opposed to the \$353 students will pay in fall.

For the first time this year, Rutgers has allowed students to pay for summer classes on an installment plan. The school also offered a hundred \$500 scholarships for summer sessions.

As summer sessions have ramped up over the last decade, campuses have become way less sleepy during the dog days, with dormitories, dining halls and recreation centers generally running on a 12-month schedule.

"We're looking to build a sense of community," said Jamieson Bilella, director of the summer sessions at Montclair State. And, he said,

flexibility is key. Like Rutgers, Montclair State is running a number of sessions of varying duration over the summer, and students can often register right up until the first day of classes.

The courses can be intense -- the coursework that would be spread out over 15 or 16 weeks in a regular semester is compressed into six or even three weeks. "There's a lot more focus and more immersion," Hough said.

"There's a lot of studying, we cover four chapters in a day," said Eric Wahad, who is taking a three-week biology class in animal behavior at MSU. "We have an exam every week!"

But Wahad, a sophomore from Clifton, N.J., says he's happy for the chance to get ahead on the credits he needs for graduation.

Many students use the session to finish off requirements at the end of their college careers. Even the best [students](#) can get caught short of credits as they eye the finish line.

Rafael Juliano of Hackensack, N.J., is making an incredible leap this fall -- from Bergen Community College to Brown University. Juliano, who has worked while attending school, has always taken summer courses to make his credit load during the regular school year more manageable. (Bergen's summer session is booming, with enrollment up at least 5.6 percent this year.)

Juliano has a 4.0 average, and a generous scholarship package awaits him at Brown. But he doesn't want to head off to the prestigious private school without that associate's degree from Bergen. So he is taking that one last class in statistics this summer.

"I'm having a bit of trouble getting too focused on it," he said. "It's

[summer](#) and you tend to be more relaxed. But it's interesting and I think I can do well and keep my average."

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