

Enrollment, quality of students still increasing at WVU

BY E. GORDON GEE

As we conclude another commencement season, I find myself pausing to muse on the wonderful experiences our graduates had at WVU and in Morgantown, their home among the hills.

More than 4,000 bright, young minds headed out into the world with a degree in their hands and a love for this community in their hearts. It is a time to celebrate their successes while we prepare for the fall arrival of our incoming freshmen, eager to start the journey their predecessors just completed.

And though I know the Class of 2016 was an incredibly talented group of individuals, it is with great anticipation that we welcome their successors.

In a recent advertisement placed in *The Dominion Post* (May 15), it was noted that our enrollment numbers have fallen and that we are not on target to reach 40,000 students. That could not be further from the truth.

In fact, let me share some truly transformative statistics with you regarding the recruitment of our fall 2016 class:

- First-time freshman applications to WVU have increased by 30.5 percent from 2015.

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- The number of admitted students has increased by 25 percent from 2015.

- The number of admitted international students, in particular, has increased by 33 percent from 2015.

- Our incoming freshmen average ACT and SAT scores were higher in fall 2015, moving to 24 (ACT) and 1043 (SAT). The national average for ACT is 21, while the national average for SAT is 1006.

The advertisement also noted our current enrollment is less than in 2007.

Again, that is not an accurate statement. In 2015, we had 28,776 students on Morgantown's campus, as compared to 28,113 in 2007.

In addition, total enrollment for the Morgantown campus has increased by nearly 2.5 percent between 2007-15. And on our divisional campuses of Potomac State College and WVU Tech, we have seen an enrollment increase of 14 percent over the previous year.

In fall 2015, WVU had a system-wide enrollment of 31,514. With the news our admissions office shares on a weekly basis with me, I expect more than 5,000 new freshmen will move

into Morgantown this August.

We are diligently working toward significant enrollment growth in Morgantown. Combined with WVU Tech, including our new campus in Beckley, and continued growth in Keyser, I am even more confident that we will reach our goal of 40,000 students system-wide by 2020.

But perhaps the most remarkable and encouraging statistic is this: In fall 2015, students choosing to participate in our Honors College increased by 27 percent from the previous year. And for the fall 2016, we are expecting another 15 percent increase.

These engaged and energetic students yearn for an academic environment that will stimulate their inquisitive minds, propel them into service learning and encourage them as they explore all the possibilities from which they can choose. They could go anywhere to pursue their dreams — and they chose WVU.

And while I am pleased with the numbers, what pleases me even more is that people are taking notice. Students and their families are realizing — perhaps for the first time in a very long time — that WVU is a unique

institution that is positioned to deliver a quality education. We are committed to remaining accessible and affordable so that all who seek the benefits of higher education may do so.

Though I am always sad to bid farewell to the graduating class, I quickly find the joy in taking selfies with new faces. The freshmen class of 2016 is one of the brightest and most talented this university has yet to welcome.

They are eager to participate in undergraduate research, launch their ideas into new businesses and make a difference in the lives of others. They balance work and play, aspire to see the world, yet have an innate calling to return home to share what they learn.

And as these new students join their upperclassmen, together they will continue to bring recognition to WVU as an institution renowned for its strong academics, life-changing research and health care, vibrant student life and innovative ideas that will lead us all to a greater sense of purpose and prosperity.

E. GORDON GEE is president of WVU. This commentary should be considered another point of view and not necessarily the opinion or editorial policy of *The Dominion Post*.