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Education

How Mount St. Joseph University defies national trends with enrollment growth



Mount St. Joseph Centennial Field House

CORRIE SCHAFFELD | CBC



By [Lara Schwartz](#) – Staff reporter, Cincinnati Business Courier

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Story Highlights

- Mount St. Joseph University welcomed its largest first-year class in 15 years.
- The university's personalized recruitment approach has increased campus visits significantly.
- Mount St. Joseph implemented automatic admission for students with 3.0+ GPA.

Despite a declining national college enrollment rate, one small Cincinnati university is bucking the trend.

Mount St. Joseph University, located in Delhi Township, welcomed its largest incoming first-year undergraduate class in 15 years this fall, at a time when colleges across the country are facing enrollment declines.

Mount St. Joseph's first-year class grew by 12% over last year, with students coming from 13 different U.S. states. Total fall enrollment was nearly 2,000 students, an increase from last year's 1,500.

Chris Powers, vice president for enrollment, said the university's smaller size works in its favor.

“What gives us an advantage, being a smaller school, is we’re able to really personalize our recruitment approach,” Powers told me.

Mount St. Joseph works to make personal connections to each student, which has helped increase its number of campus visits to more than 2,000 over the last year. The university also follows up with each student via mail on holidays and birthdays, which Powers said is the personal touch students are drawn to.

“It’s that type of touch that we’re seeing through our analytics that students really appreciate,” he said.

The number of students deciding against pursuing a college education is increasing. Coupled with the anticipated enrollment cliff, which is the predicted significant decline in college enrollment set to begin around 2025 due to lower birth rates after the 2008 recession, overall college enrollment has declined.

In the state of Ohio, total enrollment has decreased 11.4% over the last 10 years, according to the Ohio Department of Higher Education, which is on par with national trends.

Schools that defy this decline are often larger state schools, [like the University of Cincinnati](#). However, Mount St. Joseph has worked against the trend despite its size.

This past year, Mount St. Joseph implemented an automatic admission system for applicants with a grade point average of 3.0 or higher. The university also doesn’t require an application fee and works to provide a generous amount in scholarships, according to Powers.

“It’s kind of a relief to some students. There’s a lot of anxiety around applying to schools, if you’re going to get admitted or not,” Powers said. “I think this takes some of the stress off.”

Powers said this has increased the number of applications the university receives.

Mount St. Joseph also prides itself on its successful academic programs, specifically nursing, education and computer science. Its nursing program has a 100% pass rate for the National Council Licensure Examination.

Similarly, the university has made investments in its athletics facilities and programs, which Powers said has brought students in from out of state.

The university debuted a \$18 million, 86,000-square-foot field house and fitness center in early 2021. About 44% of students were involved in one of the school's 21 NCAA Division III sports teams at the time.

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Mount St Joseph unveiled the Centennial Field House & Austin E. Knowlton Fitness Center to media Tuesday morning. The \$18 million project is the largest on campus in nearly two decades.

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Other investments, according to Powers, have gone toward the student experience, particularly toward mental health resources for students.

Overall, Mount St. Joseph focuses heavily on recruiting from the Tri-State by meeting with local high school leadership and by beefing up its faith-based education emphasis in marketing strategies.

“We’re really proud of being a faith-based institution and a lot of students are still looking for that,” Power said. “We really try to market around that.”

Mount St. Joseph University is the [10th-largest in the region](#), according to *Courier* research.

THELIST

Cincinnati Area Colleges and Universities

Total local enrollment

Rank	Prior Rank	Business name (Prior rank)
1	1	University of Cincinnati
2	2	Miami University
3	3	Northern Kentucky University
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