

UB Engineering School enrollment ranks No. 1 in New England

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University of Bridgeport boasts more engineering students earning master's degrees than other colleges or universities in New England, and combined enrollment in its masters and PhD engineering programs ranks second in the area, according to American Society for Engineering Education.

The enrollment rankings come amid fresh warnings that the number of engineers graduating from U.S. colleges and universities is on the decline.

"University of Bridgeport is going in a different direction," said Michael Gibbons, director of data research at ASEE, which on June 20 released the enrollment findings in its annual report, "Profiles of Engineering and Engineering Colleges."

In the fall of 2007, 1,175 students were enrolled in master's degree engineering programs at UB, followed by MIT, which had 1,085 master's degree engineering candidates. A combined 1,185 engineering students were attaining either a master's or a PhD from UB, second in New England behind MIT's total enrollment of 2,636.

Dr. Tarek M. Sobh, dean of UB's School of Engineering, credits robust enrollment to new interdisciplinary curricula that allow engineering students to work in diverse fields such as e-commerce, robotics and automation, intellectual property management, and bio-medical engineering.

"The curriculum has been such that students are not only coming to get a degree, but they're also getting real skills and using cutting-edge technology that the market requires," said Sobh. "That's the attraction."

Such growth is atypical.

In 2007, 73,315 engineering students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities to earn a bachelor's degree, a drop of 1.2 percent and the first decline in seven years, according to ASEE.

The number of engineering students nationwide who are earning master's degrees has fallen by 8.8 percent since 2005, while the number of PhD recipients has grown 11 percent since 2004.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Labor Department estimates a need for 160,000 more engineers during the period from 2006 up through 2016.

"There's a lot of concern about a potential engineering gap in the U.S. Degrees at all levels, but especially for electrical engineering, computer engineering, and computer science, have been going down in the last several years," said Gibbons. "Bridgeport is one of the few schools where things are expanding."