

## Enrollment at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC)

### A report in recognition of DMACC's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Joe DeHart, PhD

#### Introduction

In the spring of 1966 an experiment began in Iowa and across the nation. Access to quality higher education by all was a problem, and comprehensive community colleges were the solution. Looking back it must have been impossible for the founders of Iowa's community colleges to predict the impact that this experiment would have on the state's economy and higher education system.

DMACC began as a single office in an Ankeny storefront location in August 1966. In the spring of 1967 approximately 30 students were enrolled in a leased former grocery store in West Des Moines. In the fall of 1967, additional programs were offered in a leased roller rink and the basement of the Ankeny United Methodist Church. Approximately 295 college credit students were served in 1967. The former Boone Junior College became a part of the organization in the fall of 1968. Currently DMACC has six campuses and three centers located throughout its eleven county district. DMACC currently serves over 20,000 credit students each fall. Another 30,000 non-credit students are also served each year in adult education, English as a second language, high school equivalency and continuing education courses. Though this paper focuses on credit offerings, it is important to note the importance of DMACC's non-credit programs to the people and economies of its communities.

The challenge of looking at enrollment over DMACC's 50 years is the availability of enrollment information. As DMACC has grown and changed over time, so has its data systems with very few historical records remaining. DMACC's current student information system has some records that span the history of the college but much of the enrollment detail is only available from the late 1990s to the present. In addition to the current system, the report uses institutional data reports from 1987, 1990, 1991, and 1998. Also used were a collection of annual reports of the college from 1970 to 1991. Many thanks to Leonard Bengston, Manager of the Research, and Planning & Reporting Department for his excellent work and legacy.

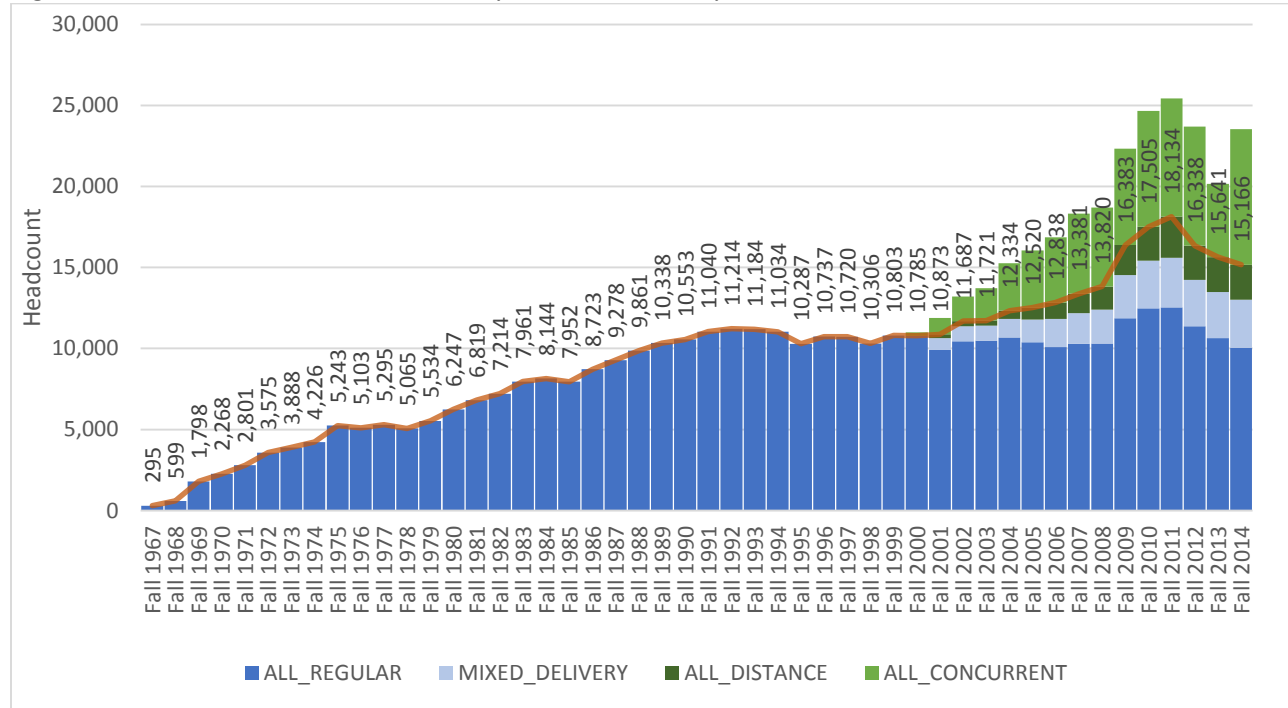
There are many types of enrollment that community colleges measure. Both headcount and credit hours are important, but this report will focus on headcount enrollment since this is the only type of enrollment data available spanning the existence of the college. This is also why this report only focuses on fall enrollment. Fall headcount enrollment is an accurate reflection of the number of students served at any given time. All of the enrollment data used in this report are unduplicated so that students are counted only once each term even when they may qualify for multiple categories. As you can see in this report, this often creates an additional section for students who span multiple categories being examined.

#### Historical enrollment

Figure 1 shows fall credit enrollment for 48 years from fall 1967 to 2014. This chart also includes a breakout of students by delivery method beginning in fall 2000 when concurrent enrollment occurring in area high schools and Internet delivery of distance education courses became available for students. Concurrent enrollment gives area high school students the opportunity to take college credit classes

while in high school. Both liberal arts and career-technical offerings are available to these students. Concurrent enrollment courses are primarily open to high school seniors and juniors but may be taken by freshmen and sophomores with school permission. Distance delivery includes primarily those students that take courses entirely online via the Internet and may never physically attend a DMACC campus or center. Traditionally distance education includes students receiving instruction off-site through the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) and via Iowa Public Television. The effect of these delivery options is very small on the total number of distance education students. For purposes of this report, distance education only includes students taking online courses via the Internet.

Figure 1- DMACC fall credit enrollment by term and delivery method



Up through the 1980s, DMACC experienced steady growth as the college continued to add campuses and programs. Enrollment stagnated during the 1990s with accelerated growth beginning in 2000 and continuing through 2011. Though growth occurred in all categories, the majority of growth was a result of concurrent and online programming. The red line in figure 1 shows the growth rate excluding concurrent enrollment in high schools. In 2008, with the unprecedented economic recession, traditional and online enrollment grew faster than at any other time in DMACC's history. During this period DMACC saw an influx of dislocated workers needing to train in new areas to improve their employability in a very competitive job market. Since the enrollment peak of 2011, enrollment has declined, returning to pre-recession levels. Between 2000 and 2008 the number of online-only students and the number of students taking a combination of traditional distance (online) offerings increased and has stabilized since about 2009. Concurrent enrollment continues to be a growing enterprise for DMACC, serving over 8,300 high school students in the fall of 2014, equivalent to about 44% of the total number of juniors and seniors within the DMACC district.

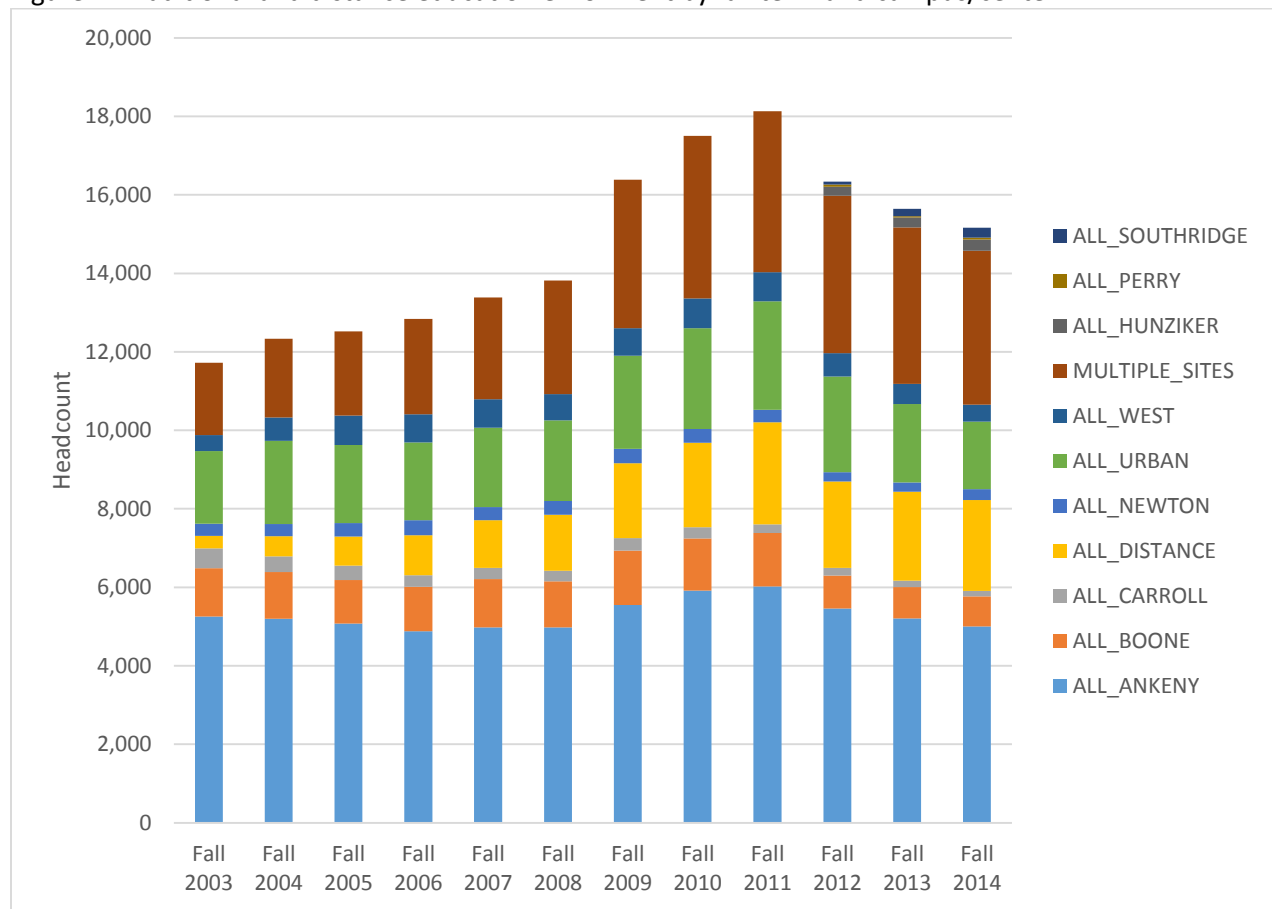
Since 1967, 322,920 students have earned at least one credit from DMACC. For comparison, this number is equivalent to about 40% of the estimated 814,000 people living in the DMACC service area.

(US Census, population estimates, 2014) Also, DMACC has graduated 59,739 students earning 75,589 degrees, diplomas and certificates. For comparison, the number of graduates is equivalent to the combined population of Ankeny, Saylorville and Polk City. Previous studies have shown that 85% of DMACC graduates remain in the state upon graduation. Chances are good that one encounters several DMACC alumni and/or graduates every day.

### Recent enrollment

Recent data allow a finer analysis of enrollment trends. DMACC currently offers credit classes at six campuses and three centers. Figure 2 shows enrollment by campus or center since 2003. Though online enrollments are traditionally counted in the campus or center providing the faculty for the course, this chart pulls out online students into a separate category. Students attending at more than one location or attending at a campus/ center and taking one or more online courses are counted in the multiple sites category. This figure does not include concurrent enrollment students.

Figure 2- Traditional and distance education enrollment by fall term and campus/center

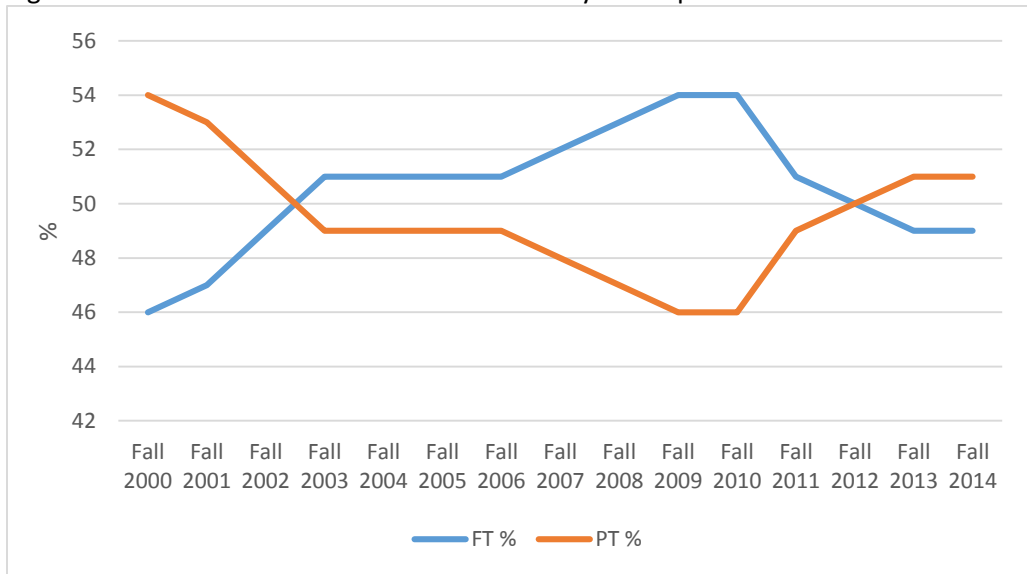


This chart shows stable enrollment at all campuses and centers with the top five enrollment categories being Ankeny Campus only students, students attending at multiple sites including distance education, distance education only students, Urban Campus only students, and Boone Campus only students. Students are increasingly attending multiple sites including online. It is not uncommon for students to attend one campus during the day, a campus closer to their home in the evening and take an online class from a third campus or center. Since 2012, DMACC has begun tracking enrollment at three

additional centers in Perry, IA (Perry Center), Ames, IA (Hunziker Center), and Southridge Center (south Des Moines).

Like many community colleges, DMACC serves many part-time students. Concurrent enrollment students are only part-time as they are full-time high school students. Many online students are part-time students based on their busy work and family schedules, needing the flexibility that online delivery provides. Figure 3 shows the percent of non-concurrently enrolled students by percent enrolled part or full-time. Overall, it continues to be roughly a 50/50 split between full and part-time students. From fall 2003 to fall 2012, the percent of full-time students exceeded part-time. Enrollment during the 2008-2011 recession saw a higher percentage of full-time students but has since stabilized. Since fall 2012, part-time has surpassed the percent of full-time students.

Figure 3- All non-concurrent enrolled students by full or part-time status



When examining regularly enrolled students attending classes at DMACC campuses/centers, the ratio of full-time to part-time is much closer, varying only a few percentage points. Students taking classes via only online delivery show a much larger discrepancy between full and part-time students. Figure 4 shows all regularly enrolled students, and though the trend is similar to figure 3, the gap between the two groups has narrowed considerably. Figure 5 shows a much larger gap between full and part-time students for distance education students with about 80% being part-time. Though this gap narrowed until fall 2010, since then the 80/20 split has been consistent.

Figure 4- All regularly enrolled only students by full or part-time status

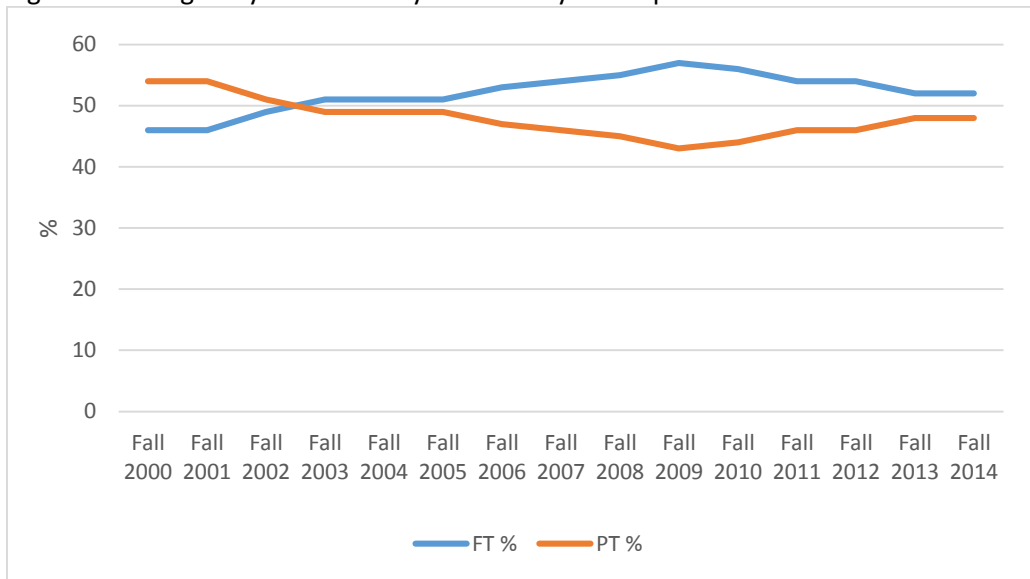
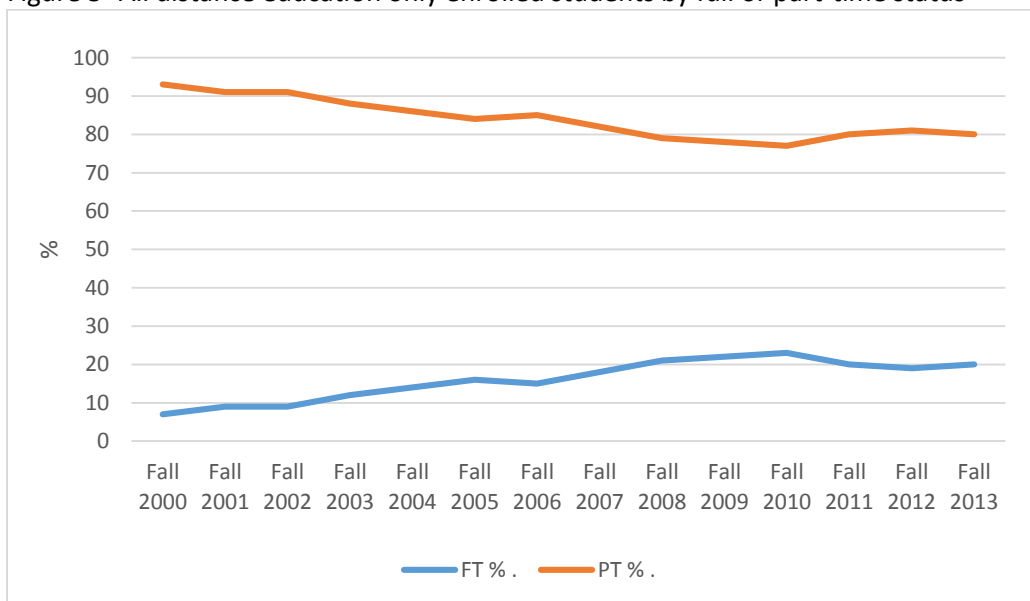


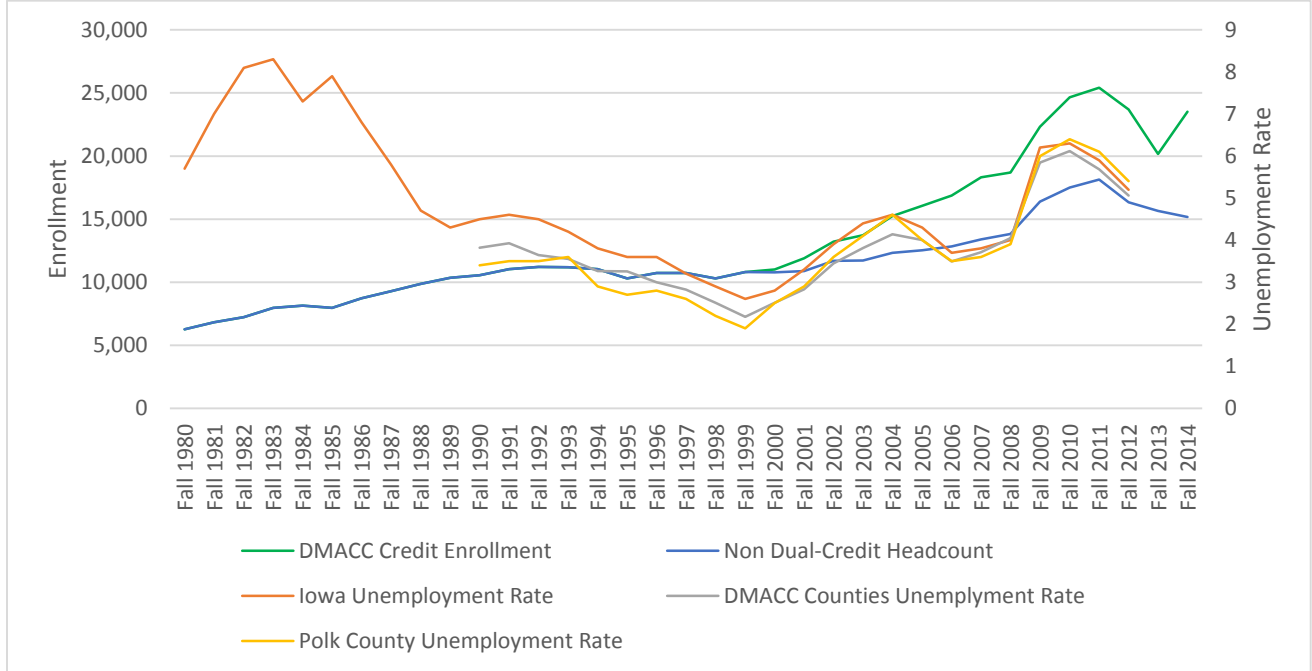
Figure 5- All distance education only enrolled students by full or part-time status



### DMACC enrollment and the economy

With the 2008 recession, it became very clear that there is a relationship between Iowa’s economic health and credit student enrollment. As unemployment rates grew and fell throughout the recession and recovery, so did DMACC enrollment. Many displaced workers qualified for training and re-training funds made available at the state and federal levels. Many people took advantage of these funds, resulting in double digit enrollment growth between 2008 and 2011. Figure 6 shows DMACC’s credit enrollment alongside unemployment rates for Iowa, the DMACC district and Polk County (US Dept of Labor).

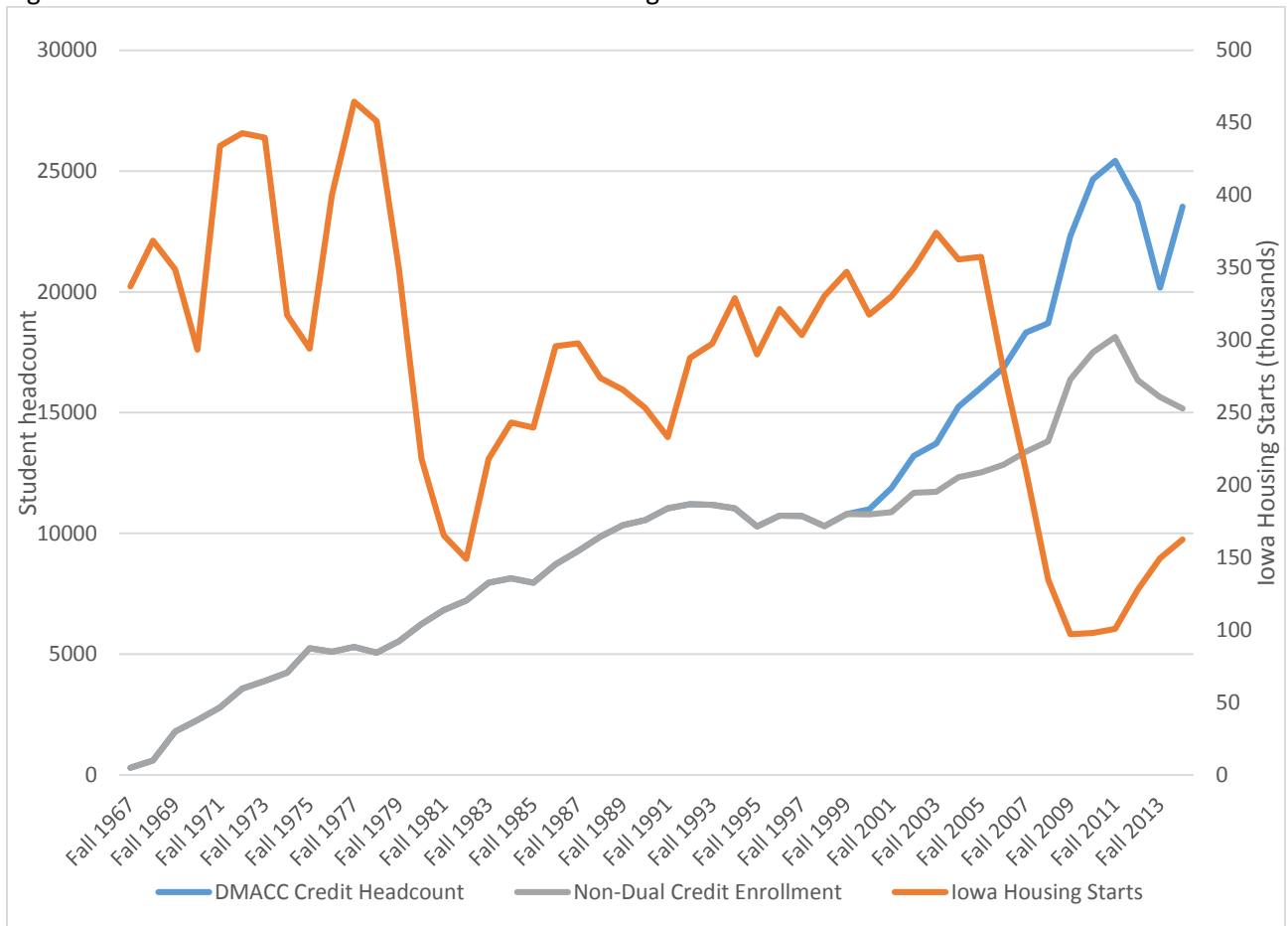
Figure 6- DMACC credit enrollment and annual unemployment rate



DMACC’s enrollment appears to lag behind the unemployment rate by 6 to 12 months. As the economy recovered and unemployment rates decreased, so did DMACC’s enrollment. This was the first time enrollment data show a clear relationship with unemployment rates. Enrollment was not affected during the “dot com” bust soon after the turn of the century. It is unknown whether this was related to the types of jobs lost in that recession or the severity or duration. However, the effects of the 2008 recession are still being felt at DMACC even eight years later.

A better but more complicated relationship between DMACC enrollment and the economy is shown when comparing annual residential housing starts (US Dept. of Labor) with DMACC credit enrollment. Starting around 1980, DMACC enrollment appears to increase with the number of Iowa housing starts. However, during times of economic stress the relationship between housing starts and enrollment is inversely related. Starting with the 2008 recession, the number of housing starts fell sharply while DMACC’s enrollment grew faster than at any point in its history. Though the relationship is very apparent with the 2008 recession, prior evidence of this relationship is apparent in the data. The early 1990s saw a significant decline in housing starts at the same time as a distinct enrollment bubble occurred in DMACC credit enrollment.

Figure 7- DMACC credit enrollment and annual housing starts in Iowa



Though the data suggest a relationship between the economy and DMACC credit enrollment, this relationship has not always existed. The data suggest that sometime in the mid-1980s, this relationship came into existence. This relationship is correlational in nature with no claims of cause-and-effect being made. However, the factors that drive the Iowa economy also affect DMACC enrollment. These past relationships are an important part of planning for DMACC's future.