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Dr. Brian O. Hemphill became Radford University's president in June of 2016 when the previous president, Penelope Kyle, retired after nearly 11 years in the position.

The end of the Spring 2019 semester will bring us into Dr. Hemphill's third year as Radford's president.

With the available data, we can learn a sense of how well the university has been doing in the years since the beginning of Dr. Hemphill's tenure, and investigate the five-year strategic plan to examine what progress has been made on each of the plan's goals.

**This overview is not comprehensive and is an ongoing investigation into Radford University's retention and undergraduate enrollment rates.**

## Background

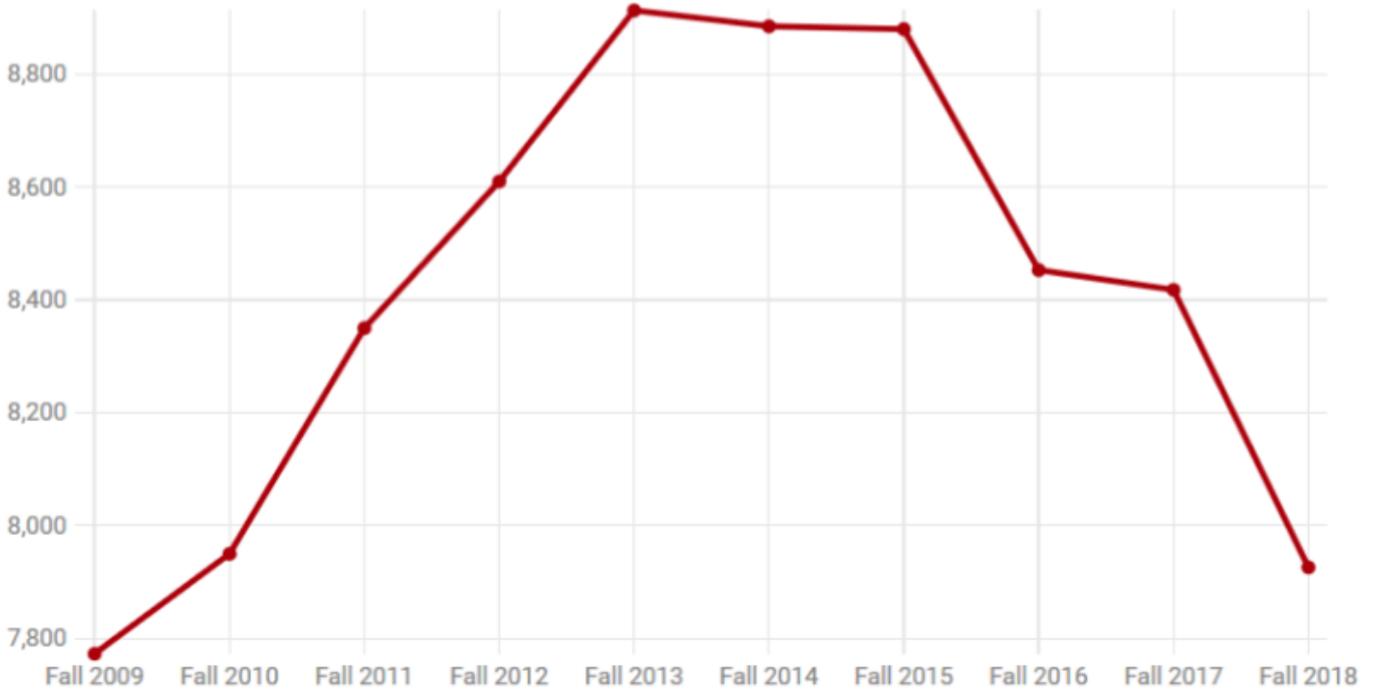
Dr. Hemphill was quite different coming into the position in 2016 than Kyle was in 2005. Kyle comes from a [non-education background](#) - in the years before serving as Radford's president, she was the director of the Virginia Lottery, and she also has a doctorate in law from the University of Virginia.

In contrast, Dr. Hemphill has a doctorate in Higher Education Administration from The University of Iowa and was the 10th president of West Virginia State University from 2012 to 2016.

According to [Virginia Business](#), he has published books about topics concerning higher education. Quite different from Kyle, Dr. Hemphill was educated for and had experience running a university.

# Fall Term Enrollment

## Fall Term Undergraduate Headcount 2009 - 2018



Source: Radford University

The [Radford Factbook](#) keeps track of enrollment statistics such as Fall term headcount. This measure shows how many students are enrolled in the university at the start of the term.

[As the data show](#), the number of students enrolled at the undergraduate level each Fall rose steadily during the latter half of Kyle's presidency, peaking at nearly 9,000 undergrad students in the Fall of 2013, and then declining during the transition of presidents by 427 undergrad students during the Fall of 2016. However, the decline in Fall 2016 cannot be attributed to President Hemphill, as an incoming class is built over the course of the preceding academic year according to Radford University Relations.

The total Fall undergrad headcount between Fall 2015 and Fall 2018 has fallen by 954 undergrad students, making the total number of enrolled undergrad students in Fall 2018 7,926.

# Student Retention

## Undergraduate Student Retention for Radford University 2014 - 2017

Hemphill's presidency began June 2016, meaning Fall 2016 retention numbers are the earliest during his tenure. We can see that in 2016, retention levels were up in each level except Sophomores, however the 2017 numbers dropped to lower than in 2015. This data is far too recent to draw specific conclusions, but it is notable that the 2017 retention level for new freshmen is the lowest it has been in at least 20 years, 70.9%.

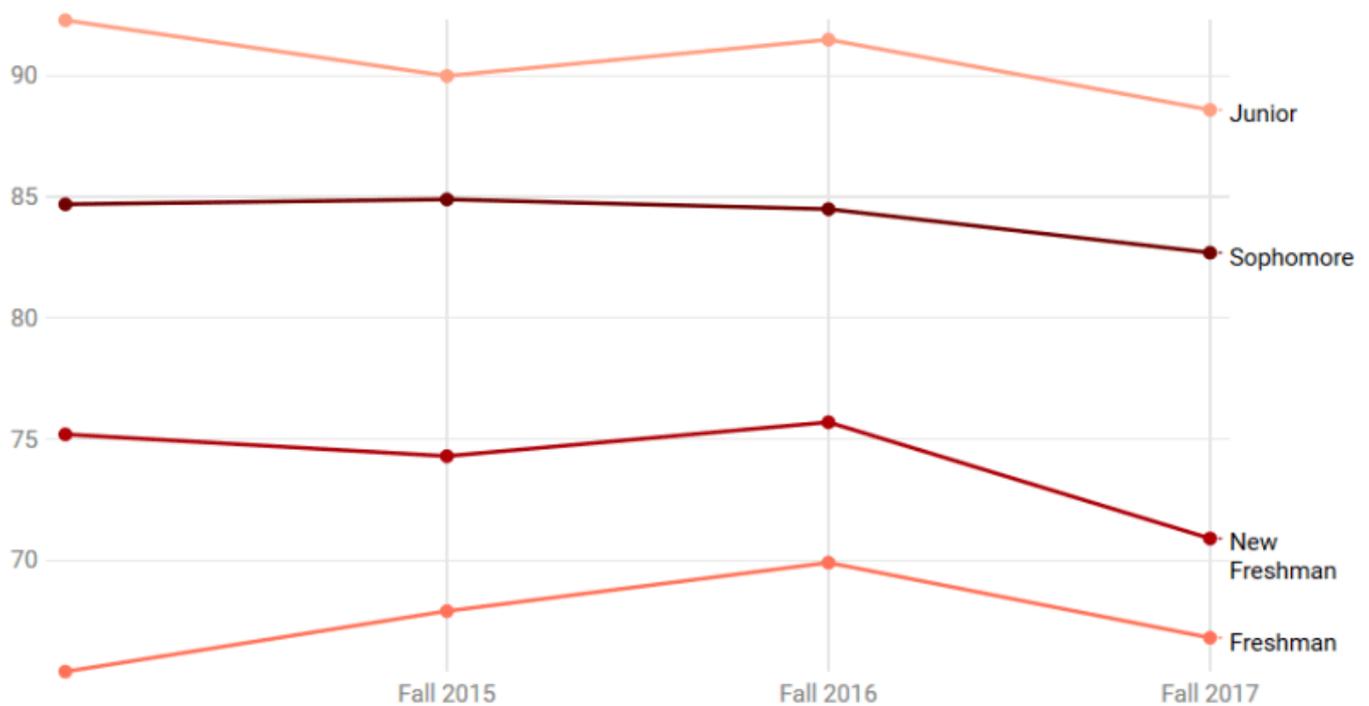


Chart: Jeremy Moser • Source: [Radford University](#)

The data offered in the Radford Factbook only shows retention numbers up to Fall 2017 due to the fact that we will not know how many students from Fall 2018 remained enrolled at Radford until later in 2019. It also only shows the data as far back as 1996.

[Student retention](#) is down at all levels from where it was for Fall 2015 by mostly insignificant amounts. However, the new freshmen retention rate for Fall 2017 is significant, as the 1.5 percent increase in 2016 was undone by a 3.4 percent decrease which is the lowest retention rate in at least 20 years, at 70.9 percent for Fall-to-Fall Retention. This figure is considerably lower than the other lowest recorded rate, 73.3 percent, in 1999.

Looking into the new freshmen retention rates for a single semester, [Fall-to-Spring Retention](#) from Radford University's Fact Book shows that there has been a significant retention increase of 5 percent going from 85.7 percent in Fall 2017 to 90.7 percent in Fall 2018, which it has not been this high since Fall 2010.

President Hemphill hosted [the inaugural Retention Summit](#), Jan. 17, 2019, which was a day-long Summit that included active participation from 125 students, faculty, and staff to discuss ways in which the University can enhance retention efforts at all levels of the campus.

Radford University Relations states, "The Retention Summit Final Report is slated for release this coming week and includes observations regarding the current state of retention and recommendations regarding the future state of retention. It is anticipated that the report will be released Tuesday afternoon [April 23, 2019] with distribution to all students, faculty, and staff."

## Strategic Plan

Adopted in 2018, Dr. Hemphill's [five-year strategic](#) plan titled "Embracing the Tradition and Envisioning the Future" broke down the university's goals into six categories and listed specific goals for each.

Each goal in the "Strategic Enrollment Growth" category looks to increase different student enrollment statistics by three percent each year through the 2023-2024 academic year.

One significant goal in the "Academic Excellence and Research" category is to "garner recognition for signature academic programs in health sciences, healthcare, and human services across the lifespan." The strategic plan lists the University's merger with the Jefferson College of Health Sciences is a large step towards achieving this goal.

## RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATE PROJECTIONS

Year	Retention Rate	Graduation Rate
2016-2017	75.7%	55.2%
2017-2018	77%	59.3%
2018-2019	78.6%	59.8%
2019-2020	80.2%	60.3%
2020-2021	81.8%	60.8%
2021-2022	83.4%	61.3%
2022-2023	85%	62%

Source: Student Success and Retention Plan, 2017

The importance of student engagement and success appears to be a common theme throughout the five-year strategic plan seemingly in both direct and indirect ways. [The strategic plan](#), in its entirety, and [The Retention and Student Success Plan](#) referenced in the strategic plan can both be found on Radford's website.

Photo Credit: (Hailey Scherer | The Tartan)