

RCCC enrollment increases

Officials: Sour economy spurs boost in numbers

GAIL SMITH-ARRANTS

When the economy is down, enrollment goes up at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, school officials said Monday.

Because of higher enrollment, the financial outlook for 2008-09 is looking better, Chief Financial Officer Robert Keeney told RCCC trustees.

"We'll be a little better off for next year," Keeney said.

For the current year, the college had to cut costs and some faculty to meet the budget, which fell about \$600,000 short because of a decrease in state funding. Enrollment the previous year had slipped slightly; state funding is based on the previous year's enrollment.

This year, enrollment has been up 8 percent over last year with more than 20,700 mostly part-time students. Keeney cautioned that it doesn't mean the college will have money to spare.

"We're not talking about 20 new positions," he said. But the college should have enough funding for current positions, and if people retire, the college should be able to replace them, Keeney said.

Making sure the school has enough facilities to handle enrollment will continue to be a challenge, he said. RCCC has a longstanding problem of providing services -- such as learning resource centers -- that must be duplicated at all of the college's campuses, Keeney said.

Jerry Chandler, vice president of administration and human resources, outlined a long-range facilities plan identifying the need for 13 projects on both the north and south campuses.

Last September, the state asked each community college to single out several projects, in case the state launches a statewide bond referendum for construction projects.

The four projects RCCC is recommending:

- Renovation of facilities on the north campus after Building 400 is built. Estimated cost: \$5.2 million.
- Public safety facility at a site mutually convenient for emergency service providers in Rowan and Cabarrus. Estimated cost: \$15.3 million (will include 25 acres).
- Multi-purpose classroom on the south campus. Estimated cost: \$7.3 million.
- Allied Health and Science building on the north campus. Estimated cost: \$20.8 million.

Longtime President Richard Brownell, who has served the college for more than 30 years, attended his last trustees meeting. He completed an historical booklet of the creation of the college, which dates back to 1961.

"I'll certainly continue to love this college" as well as friends there, he said, his voice shaking.

The trustees and the state are evaluating finalists to replace Brownell, but it's not known when the new president will be announced.

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