

RCCC bustling with students

Rowan-Cabarrus Community College enrollment booms as older job-seekers join youths looking for frugal education.

By Gail Smith-Arrants
Special Correspondent

Rowan-Cabarrus Community College is coping with the highest fall semester enrollment in its 46-year history, a growth spurt fueled by the economic recession.

About 7,000 students are now enrolled at RCCC, about 1,130 more than last fall. That's close to a 20 percent increase.

The number of students taking full-time course loads has jumped nearly 26 percent, to 2,895 students.

Unemployed residents of Cabarrus and Rowan counties are seeking retraining for new careers, and families are saving money by choosing two-year instead of four-year colleges, said RCCC spokesman Jeff Lowrance.

"What we're hearing is that the recession has left some families unable to send their college-age child to a four-year school," Lowrance said. "To get a two-year degree for about \$5,000 for books, tuitions and fees, that's quite a value. That makes a lot of sense for a lot of families right now."

The college expects another surge in September and October, as 300 more students start classes in the JobsNOW program.

JobsNOW, a statewide initiative, trains workers in six months or less so they can re-enter the job market quickly in high-demand areas, such as welding and pharmacy technology. Those enrolled also will receive Career Readiness Certification, which shows they have mastered basic skills that will make them more attractive to U.S. employers.

RCCC has received \$350,000 in federal stimulus money to develop JobsNOW training programs and pay instructors.

"We feel real good about being able to offer these programs and help folks get back into the workforce," Lowrance said. "It's a nice example of the federal stimulus money being put to work in our communities."

The huge wave of students on RCCC campuses means adapting to crowded conditions. Gaye McConnell, vice president for student services, said the college had to add class sections and make some classes larger than usual.

The school has worked hard to accommodate as many students as possible, she said.

“We had some math classes up around 30 to 35 students. That's large for a community college,” said Lowrance.

At the South Campus in Kannapolis, parking lots fill up about 8 in the morning, he said, and empty spaces don't appear until the afternoon.

Business may not slow in spring, as it often does. This past spring, the college had 900 more students than in fall 2008; summer enrollment was up 50 percent over last year.

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