

By [Kathy Chaffin](#)

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State budget cuts have Rowan-Cabarrus Community College officials "doing much more with a little more," according to Robert Keeney, vice president and chief financial officer.

Enrollment is up 25 percent this year, Keeney said. Combine that with last year's 13 percent increase, he said, "and it's up about 40 percent over the past two years."

Keeney said the increased enrollment meant a small increase in state funds for the community college. "So on the one hand, we're getting from 3 to 5 percent more funds," he said. "On the other hand, we're having to do 40 percent more with that."

It's not unusual for community college enrollment to increase when the economy gets bad. "But I've never seen anything like this," he said. "To have serious pressure on the state budget at the same time we have a 25 percent enrollment increase, it's just unprecedented."

Even when Pillowtex closed in 2003 and workers were offered tuition assistance, Keeney said the increase in enrollment wasn't as high as it is this year. "There was something like an 18 percent increase."

This year's \$62.6 million budget sounds like more than it is, he said, because \$7 million is earmarked for a new continuing education classroom building at the North Campus in Salisbury. Keeney said the proposed Building 400, which will be about 30,000 square feet in size, has been planned for several years.

"It sure would be nice if it was open," he said. "We've needed some more space on the North Campus for years."

Rowan-Cabarrus has to return about 7 percent of the \$31.5 million originally allocated by the state because there wasn't enough money in the budget to cover it. "We knew pretty much what was coming," Keeney said, "although things were changing right up until the week before they adopted the budget."

The resulting \$29.4 million reflected a cut in the state's appropriation for each full-time student.

Cabarrus County also cut its funding by a little less than 3 percent last year and again this year. Rowan County's appropriation remained the same.

Keeney said the money for equipment took a big hit in this year's budget. "We don't have the carryover funds that we would normally have to buy equipment this year," he said.

Though it varies from year to year, Keeney said the community college usually has several thousand dollars to spend on equipment. "We're trying to go out and raise money in the community to replace some of that," he said.

Rowan-Cabarrus officials are asking foundations and businesses for donations. "A number have already come forward with some money," Keeney said. Duke Energy, for example, recently donated \$250,000 for

equipment for the Rowan-Cabarrus research building planned for the N.C. Research Campus in Kannapolis.

Typically, the community college replaces equipment about every 10 years. Obviously, some equipment such as computers has to be replaced more frequently, he said, while some can be used for more than 10 years.

Rowan-Cabarrus implemented a reorganization last spring which resulted in the loss of more than 20 positions. "Most of that was administrative," Keeney said.

The increase in students also means faculty is teaching larger groups. "Everybody's just doing a little more," he said.

Financial aid is up 30 percent, he said. "That in itself is an economic stimulus because most of that money goes back into the local economy."

Keeney said there are several reasons community college enrollment increases during a bad economy. Some are displaced workers taking advantage of programs offering assistance with tuition.

"We also have a number of students who had planned to go to a four-year college," he said, "who are just in a situation where they can't do that now. Of course, they can automatically transfer to any of the N.C. University System schools."

Others enroll at the community college as an emotional response to the recession. People who have been looking for a better job get worried when the economy gets worse, he said. They're like, "I've known for a while I need to go back and get some more education, and now I better do it."

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