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As early registration for fall classes ends today, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College is expecting its highest enrollment.

"Today, we have almost 5,100 students who have registered early," said Gaye McConnell, RCCC vice president for student services, on Thursday. "Typically, 11 percent will not finalize registration. We think we'll have more than 6,000 students."

And there will still be two days of late registration on both campuses in Concord and Salisbury on Aug. 11 and 12, though McConnell said many classes are already full.

The estimate for this fall's enrollment is 3 percent higher than last fall's.

The community college was already anticipating this increase after the spring 2009 semester had 900 more students enroll, compared to last year, said Jeff Lowrance, college relations director for RCCC.

The amount of students in the summer semester increased by more than 50 percent, compared to last year.

RCCC has attributed the rise in enrollment to the economy.

"It's predominately driven by changes in the economy, downsizing with Philip Morris and the rise in unemployment, which puts more people in retraining," McConnell said.

The community college has also noticed more of the 18- to 22-year-olds choosing to attend RCCC instead of a four-year school. Lowrance said many parents have been out of work or lost investments to pay for tuition, and the community college is less expensive.

"They are choosing to stay home and save dollars," McConnell said. "We are becoming more of their first choice, and not their second choice in the way of education."

To address the rising enrollment numbers, the community college is offering more online courses and increasing class sections, if necessary.

"If we have to, we will add sections, but (the class) would have to have a significant number of students wanting to (enroll)," Lowrance said.

He added that rising enrollment numbers are not limited to one area. All programs across the board are experiencing higher amounts of enrollment.

Another way the community college is addressing the increased need is by offering "JobsNOW 12-in-6" programs in September and October.

"Those are designed for folks out of work now and looking to get retrained quickly," Lowrance said. "They are condensed and intense for training of six months or less."

The 13 certificate programs are administrative professional; air conditioning, heating and refrigeration; basic supervision; biotechnology; brick masonry; customer service; electronics engineering; light construction/carpentry; nurse aide; pharmacy technician; small business office management; welding technology; and wiring and national electric code.

For more information about JobsNOW, call 704-216-7201.

For more information about RCCC class registration, call 704-216-3593 or 704-216-3637.