

STATE OF THE COLLEGE

'Reinventing' of Clark to continue, Branch says



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Wayne Branch
CLARK COLLEGE
PRESIDENT

By **HOWARD BUCK**
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Clark College will continue to aggressively expand private partnerships to train workers, open additional degree pathways and reshape its campus culture in search of a little more "funk" in 2006, President Wayne Branch pledged.

Branch delivered an hourlong State of the College Address to faculty, trustees and community leaders in Gaiser Hall on the Vancouver campus. He cited major advances the past 12 months and pledged to stay the course in "reinventing" the two-year school, serving more than 11,500 students.

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lives in Southwest Washington and beyond," Branch said. "How we do so depends not just on our limited resources, but more than ever, on gaining additional resources."

"Resources" translates into revenue streams, aside from problematic state funding. And Branch has pushed hard for new work force training programs that meet local employer demands while attracting new tuition and private sponsor dollars.

The number of businesses served by Clark's customized training programs grew tenfold from 2004 to 2005, he said. A vivid example of unmet demand that offers tantalizing

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possibilities are the 800 persons who inquired about a new medical radiography program, bankrolled in part by Legacy Health Systems and other local health care providers, he said. The new training will begin this spring with 16 students enrolled.

Employers appear to give Clark's teaching and training models high marks: Of 150 employers answering a recent survey, 94 percent were either satisfied or very satisfied with Clark students they had hired. "That's a phenomenal rate that links the competencies we're teaching to the skills employers need," Branch said.

Plans for 'triangle'

Essential to Clark's plans to expand high-demand training will be a new technology building, envisioned for the so-called "triangle property" across Fort Vancouver Way from Gaiser Hall, near the newly vacated county health department office. Winning state construction funding will be a top lobbying priority during next year's Washington legislative session.

Meantime, Clark College will continue to broaden local access to college degrees by forging new partnerships with four-year universities, Branch said. It did so in 2005, signing new co-admissions agreements with Marylhurst University and Portland State University. Similar ties to Washington State University Vancouver continue to deepen. Branch also announced new steps toward bringing social work and technology degree programs run by Eastern Washington University to the Clark campus.

Clark College Foundation funds available for student scholarships grew 5 percent in 2005 and are projected to rise another 13 percent this year, Branch said. The school's financial aid office assisted 6 percent more students in 2005

than the previous year, he said.

Defends leadership

Not all of Branch's moves have met universal approval, he noted. He downplayed specific complaints over his management style, namely keeping other policymakers in the dark at times.

He cited a recent clean audit by the state of Washington and said he has moved to improve the "transparency" of his management.

He said his budgeting decisions better adhered to Clark's long-range plans, despite short-term misgivings carried by some people.

"Institutional budgeting was married to strategic planning. Go figure," he said.

In his third year at the Clark College helm, Branch will soon undergo an extensive job review by Clark's board of trustees, assisted by a hired consultant group. The evaluation is expected to be completed by June.

The president also plans to press ahead with efforts to foster more innovation and diversity on the campus. He said a new IDEA Center might open by autumn, its focus on faculty and staff member training and idea-sharing. The college will focus on communication, technology and critical thinking skills it wants all students to obtain, beyond their field of study. And faculty union head and psychology professor Miles Jackson has agreed to head up a new task force on learning and innovation.

Branch noted that more than 90 percent of Clark's faculty is white. Nearly 75 percent of campus employees are age 40 or older. Helping to attract a younger, dynamic "creative class" and boost Vancouver's so-called "funk factor" to stimulate regional social and economic growth will require more diversity, he said, calling a younger profile "a critical need."

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