

# Clark College enrollment continues to surge

Total head count near 15,000; full-timers just shy of 10,000

By HOWARD BUCK  
*Columbian staff writer*

The registrar's office and financial aid workers know it.

So do instructors, students and each school employee who must navigate jammed corridors. The same goes for passing motorists and neighboring residents who battle the traffic.

Clark College kicked off a new term last week. And, to no one's surprise, enrollment just keeps soaring.

The count through Thursday shows 14,844 students enrolled for a course in the Spring term — with a whopping 9,861 enrolled on a full-time basis, taking 15 credit hours or more.

The nearly 10,000 full-timers represent nearly a 20 percent gain from spring 2009.

Which followed a 21 percent jump from Spring 2008, after a mere 2 percent increase the

## By the numbers:

### ■ 45 percent:

Increase in Clark full-time students, Spring term 2008 to Spring term 2010

### ■ 5 percent:

Increase in full-time students, Spring term 2006 to Spring term 2008

### ■ 14.5 percent:

Increase in student tuition rates, 2008-09 school year to 2010-11.

prior year.

Rampant growth since 2007 illustrates the sickly economy in Southwest Washington, where

official unemployment rates hover near 15 percent. Any new hiring has yet to blunt the wave of layoffs that put thousands of

adults, young or not, in a mind to retool careers and boost skills with more education.

Rassoul Dastmozd, Clark's vice president of instruction, said the boom isn't likely to change soon.

"As long as the economy is bottoming out, people go for education. And that's the best advice I can give them," Dastmozd said.

Problem is, the Vancouver-Portland area continues to add new residents lured by quality of life, he said. Which means a modest economic rebound may

produce "pretty much a jobless recovery" given the increased competition for those positions that do come open, he warned.

Meanwhile, each quarter seems to bring a new record high for Clark.

Head counts for the Fall 2009, Winter 2010 and new Spring 2010 terms (each measured on the quarter's fourth day): 14,650, 14,692 and 14,844 students, respectively.

Within each term, full-time

# College:

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counts fluctuate. For the first time, Clark cracked the 10,000 mark to close the quarter just ended, officials said. They estimate 9,950 full-time students will finish the new spring quarter.

The 76-year-old college has coped by adding dozens of general education classes where demand is greatest, while weeding out some low-enrollment course sections, Dastmozd said.

**Helping greatly:** Almost \$1.5 million of federal stimulus money, backing about 200 new student slots in professional certification programs such as optometry, dental, physical therapy and cardiology assistant programs, he said.

New classroom space at the first-year Clark College at Columbia Tech Center "has been a savior for us," Dastmozd said. About 10 percent of Clark students are taking E-Learning (online) courses, further easing the strain on classroom capacity.

Yet problems persist. E-Learning classes cost Clark a bit more to staff, due to lower student-to-instructor ratios. Washington state supports only about 6,900 FTEs with direct funding, well short of actual enrollment. To get by, "We're living off students' tuition," Dastmozd said — namely, tuition rates that jumped 7 percent last autumn and will again in September.

Even so, Clark will leave out

its welcome mat.

"There are backlogs... but we're doing the best we can not to turn anyone away," Dastmozd said. "We can't just close the door on our constituency, because we are a college of our community."

He couldn't help but add, "I'm pleased to say that we're one of the few entities in town that haven't laid anyone off."

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