

Running Start limits funded course options

Changes in the popular program may force students to pay or drop classes

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The state-wide Running Start program is beginning new practices to limit the number of courses students can take that will be funded by the state.

Running State is a state program that allows high-school students to earn college credit at local community colleges.

A decreased cap on the number of college credits the program will fund and a limit on the amount of combined high school and college courses that will be funded are being implemented.

The state will fund up to 15 credits per student per quarter at the local community college, which is down from 18 credits. The student will need to pay tuition for every credit more than 15.

The number of combined, funded courses a student can take has also changed.

The program will fund each student's credits equal up to a 1.2 full-time equivalent student load. A combined course load of high school and college credits will be used to calculate the credit load.

For example, a student taking 15 credits at community college would be eligible to take only one class at high school to have all their classes funded by Running Start. If enrolled full-time at high school, a student could take only three credits through Running Start.

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— Linda Calvert, associate director of Running Start at Clark College

Students who wish to take more than the combined full-time cap must pay for the tuition of the remaining credits.

The changes were approved by the Washington state legislature.

"The idea is to save money for the state," said Linda Calvert, associate director of the program at Clark College.

Clark had 1,516 Running Start students enrolled in spring quarter 2011, which included 101 from Camas

School District and 45 from Washougal School District.

Clark, which has the largest Running Start program in the state, was informed of the changes in late July and the staff have been trying to get the information to students.

"People are frustrated that they did not know this information until now," Calvert said. "We really don't know how this is going to affect our Running Start enrollment."

Many students have been

calling in with questions and concerns, Calvert said.

"I hate it when I talk to students who have had to make difficult decisions — to leave the program or pay tuition," she said.

Some students have been forced to withdraw from the program because they could not afford to pay for tuition.

Running Start students are not eligible for financial aid. Tuition costs \$101 per credit at Clark.

The new changes are not ideal, Calvert said, but the state is in a tight economic situation.

"I can understand the thinking behind it," she said. "Times are tough. But it is unfortunate."

Coordinators are still trying to figure out exactly how the changes will affect Running Start students at Clark.

"We're hoping to have some of the wrinkles out by winter quarter," Calvert said.

Students already registered for fall quarter will have their schedules reevaluated.

Running Start students can use the new Running Start enrollment verification form to learn what combinations of classes will be funded.

The form is available through Clark College at www.clark.edu/running_start.

The form must be filled out, reviewed by a high school counselor and submitted to the Clark College Running Start office by Friday.

Students and parents who have questions or concerns should contact Clark's Running Start office at 992-2366.