

# Clark College gROWS to meet high demand

## Weak economy fuels need for services

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A struggling economy has pushed Clark College enrollment to record levels.

Makes sense, given Vancouver's home-grown community college was founded during the Great Depression, in October 1933.

Enrollment in autumn 2009 surged nearly 24 percent above that of fall 2008, to a head count of 16,330 students: more than 10,000 full-time students, based on a 15-credit per-quarter load.

Included were a record 1,600 area high school students who earned Running Start college credits.

Across the U.S., community colleges became a critical resource for students who seek hands-on job training and professional certification for new careers, besides a traditional path to higher education degrees.

Clark was no exception, its classrooms, hallways and parking lots jam-packed as never before as Clark County's unemployment rate spiked to become the state's highest.

Fortunately, September also brought the opening of Clark's long-awaited east Vancouver satellite campus, on East Mill Plain Boulevard near 192nd Avenue.

The Clark Center at Columbia Tech Center fast became home to more than 1,400 students taking courses of all types, equivalent to about 500 full-time students. That

eased some of the crunch at the main campus.

Miles away on a Salmon Creek hilltop, Clark's first satellite campus continues a positive partnership with Washington State University Vancouver.

The Clark Center at the WSUV campus serves hundreds of Clark students and houses its popular nursing program. With WSUV's upper-division courses, the two schools have teamed to make a stay-at-home, four-year college track possible.

Clark continues to scout another north county location for a future branch campus.

Plans also call for completion of a \$30 million building on the western edge of Clark's main campus by 2013. It would house state-of-the-art labs and teaching space to serve growing needs in the science, technology, engineering and math fields.

Already, Clark serves hundreds of students in its Town Plaza center, in Vancouver's McLoughlin Heights neighborhood. Town Plaza is geared for specialized job training, Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language.

Town Plaza also is home to a Pathways Learning Center that extends resources to students and customers of other workforce agencies there. Aid comes from a \$188,000 state Opportunity Grant designed to help cover costs of tuition, books and supplies for low-income students who enter



STEVEN LANE/Columbian files

The new Clark College Columbia Tech Center classroom building opened in the fall in east Vancouver.

high-demand careers. The grant has served hundreds of Clark students in recent years. More information is available on the college Web site: [http://www.clark.edu/admissions\\_fin\\_aid/fin\\_aid/opp\\_grant.php](http://www.clark.edu/admissions_fin_aid/fin_aid/opp_grant.php).

Basic skills classes are taught elsewhere off-campus, including local high schools, Vancouver's Open House Ministries, St. John's Catholic Church, WorkSource in Stevenson and WorkSource Columbia Gorge in White Salmon.

### Options grow

Clark's highly regarded health care programs include nursing, medical radiography and dental hygiene. Three quarters each year, 48 nursing students begin a two-year degree track.

The college honored its first medical radiography graduates in March 2009. Applicants are admitted to the program once every two years, with 20 slots

available. Clark's dental hygiene program has thrived, with every graduate since 1970 passing their national board exam on the first try.

A new, Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training program will soon assist GED or ESL students who get specialized job training for welding and early childhood education professions. I-BEST classes offer extra academic support for those in high-demand job training. I-BEST now helps students earning certification as nursing assistants or office assistants.

Further enhancing student options, Clark has signed co-admissions agreements with WSUV, Portland State University, Marylhurst University and Concordia University. The teamwork means hassle-free registration and service for transfer students. Some can reserve upper-division slots while they use advising, library and other resources of either school.

Clark has close ties with Eastern Washington University. Students here can earn EWU bachelor's and master's degrees in social work and technology, and a dental hygiene bachelor's degree, with instruction from visiting EWU faculty.

Online tutorials, telecourses, discussion board messages and hybrid blend of classroom and alternative instruction helps students fit courses around work or family responsibilities. It's believed half of Clark students now receive at least some course materials online in one or more of their classes.

Clark has actively embraced Web-based "e-Learning." In fall 2009, more than 2,300 students took at least one e-Learning class; 583 students took classes online exclusively.

That translates to about 1 in 12 full-time equivalent students at Clark. The college offers 576 credits through online and hybrid classes.