

Student spike

Clark College enrollment vs. 2008:
(figures through June 19)

Summer 2009 registration:

UP 37%

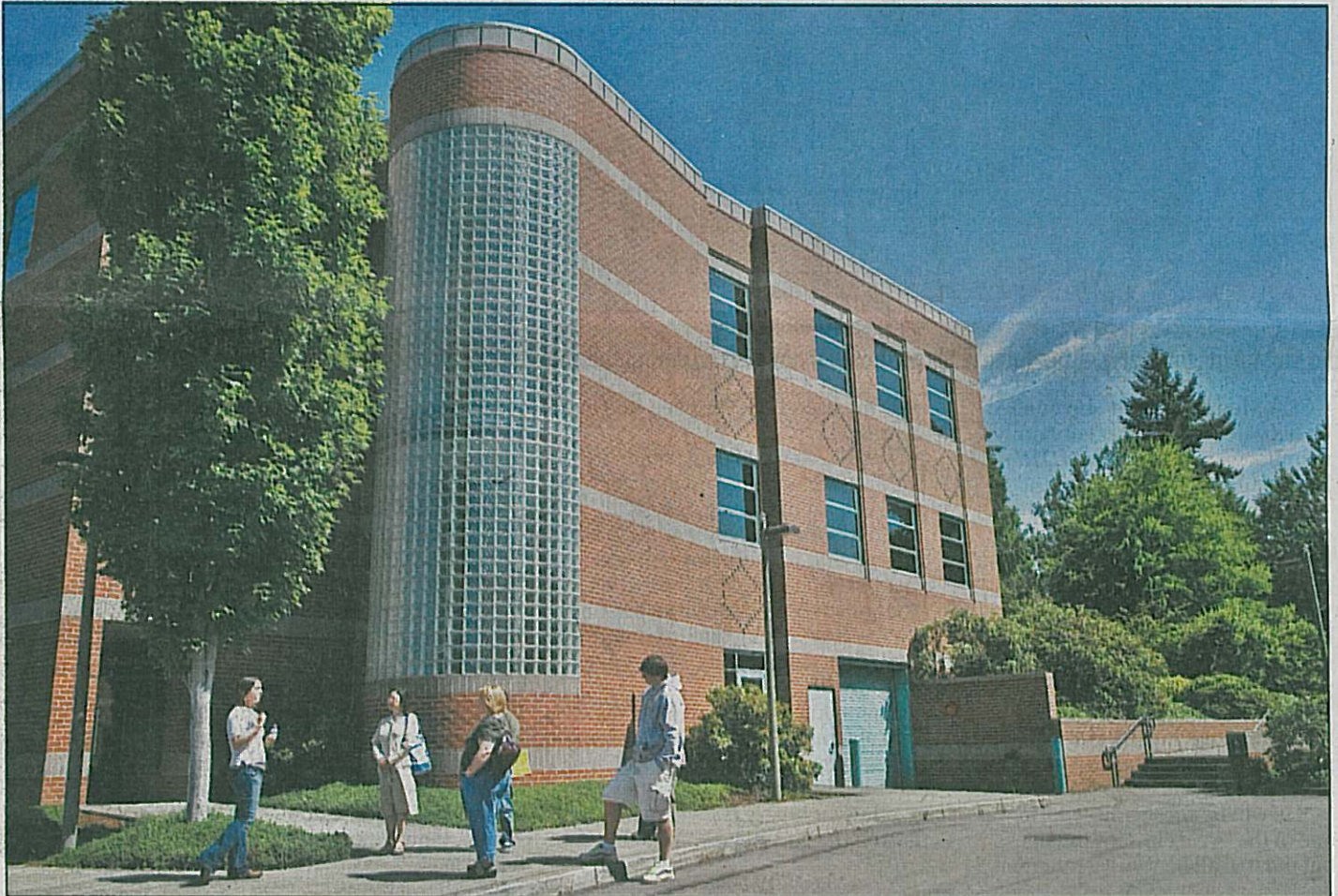
Early fall 2009 registration:

UP 57-58%

Running Start, for 2009-10:

UP 63%

Enrollment swells at Clark College



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Clark College student ambassador, Anne Baghdanov, left, leads a campus tour for prospective students on Tuesday. Registration for summer and autumn terms has soared, and Clark has added dozens more class sections and instructors. The building in the background is Scarpelli Hall.

New teachers, class sections added to meet demand

By **HOWARD BUCK**
Columbian staff writer

A campus tour for incoming Clark College students on Tuesday settled Lori Bentien's mind.

She joined four other newcomers for an hourlong orientation: Middle-aged career changers, layoff victims, a couple of young guys fresh out of high school.

"I was kind of deciding whether to do this, today," said Bentien, 44, of Washougal. The longtime hairdresser said the poor economy has wrecked the coloring business. "And it made me decide, 'Yes.'"

She'll have plenty of company during Clark's summer term that begins Monday, and again this fall term.

"We're just seeing a dramatic increase. It's just humongous. It's probably the highest we've ever had."

Alex Montoya

CLARK COLLEGE DEAN OF ENROLLMENT SERVICES

Enrollment at the Vancouver college is soaring to unmatched levels, driven by Clark County's unemployment rate and high school students eager to rack up cheap college credits.

Through last Friday, summer enrollment is up nearly 37 percent from one year ago.

And early fall enrollment, calculated daily, is 57 percent to 58 percent above the June 2008 pace. That owes entirely to continuing students — new registrations for autumn term don't start until August.

"We're just seeing a dramatic increase. It's just humongous," said Alex Montoya, dean of enrollment services. "It's probably the highest we've ever had. I'm not sure when it's going to peak," he said.

That likely will occur when Clark County's unemployment rate flattens. But at around 13 percent, the jobless rate is pushing ever more adults to snare college credits or job training to rebuild their

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careers.

So it is for Bentien, following 25 licensed years in hair care.

"I've pretty much done everything you could do" in the business, said Bentien, who even ran her own shop. "But, I realize it's a dead-end." She's taking a hard look at nursing work, she said.

Joining her Tuesday were two former Hewlett-Packard printer plant employees, now jobless.

"Going back to school is exciting," said Sandy Petta, 59, who is pondering medical billing and collections for stable work. Berneredita Ines, 55, is poised to study baking in Clark's culinary arts program.

"I want to have some fun," Ines said.

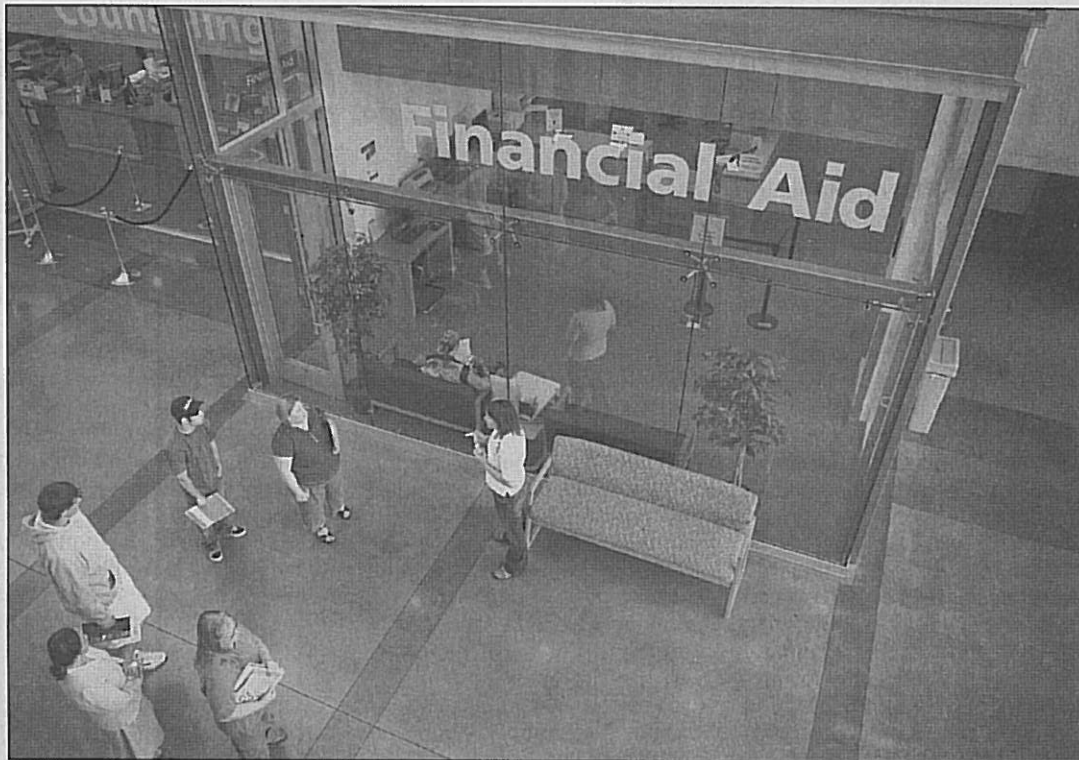
Increased options

Soon, it might not be so fun hunting for campus parking.

The new Clark Center at Columbia Tech Center, which should serve about 400 full-time equivalent students (those taking 15 or more credits) in east Vancouver, will help. So should online courses and Clark's new bundling of classes for individuals, including a compressed "A.A. degree in two days (a week)" plan.

To meet the stampede, Clark already has hired more than 50 new part-time, adjunct instructors and added class sections at a frenetic pace.

There are 71 new class sections for the 10-week summer season, and 119 more sections for the fall term. Business technology courses lead the summer push, while 56 new sections for social services or fine arts classes are due in autumn.



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Clark College student ambassador Anne Baghdanov, right, leads a tour of Gaiser Hall on Tuesday.

More "early bird" classes will begin at 7 or 8 a.m. Others will meet at unusual late-afternoon or evening time slots, as school officials juggle logistics.

Running Start

Increased enrollment is across the board, and owes to much more than just displaced workers.

Student counts in Adult Basic Education courses climbed 15 percent this spring, 31 percent in English as a Second Language studies.

The Running Start program that lets high school students earn tuition-free college credits at Clark will swell to 1,225 students, a one-year increase of 475. That's a 63 percent jump, as families try to skirt legislator-approved tuition hikes of 7 percent at Washington's two-

year colleges (including Clark) and 14 percent at its four-year universities.

"We just pray. We're putting them everywhere," quipped Rassoul Dastmozd, Clark vice president of instruction, when asked about Running Start placement.

Clark will team with Vancouver Public Schools to offer four "College in High School" English courses at Fort Vancouver and Skyview high schools this school year. As many as 60 students could enroll, each paying a class fee but not full tuition, Dastmozd said.

'Soft money'

The student tsunami has pumped up Clark's tuition revenue and helped the school avoid new staffing or other budget cuts this spring, offi-

cial say.

But that demand, now pegged at 9,573 full-time equivalent students for fall term, outpaces per-student state funding limits.

Clark leaders know the short-term tuition infusion won't last indefinitely. They're bracing for cutbacks when enrollment starts to erode, they say.

"It's all soft money," President Bob Knight reminded school trustees last week. That's why Clark isn't rushing to hire more permanent employees, he said.

Meantime, trends only point higher. Dastmozd will huddle staff in late July to figure whether to plan for nearly 11,000 FTEs, which would be an all-time high, if registrations continue to surge.

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