



First, Clark students crack checkbooks



Photos by STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Students arrive at Clark College on Monday for the fall term. Top: Burk Jones, 31, gets his student I.D. photo taken. He walks or uses C-Tran to avoid parking hassles. Below: Mike Kofford, 20, who works 60 to 70 hours a week to afford school, spends \$323.25 on books.

Millions of dollars change hands for tuition, fees, books, student aid

By HOWARD BUCK
Columbian staff writer

It was crowded and chaotic at Clark College on Monday. Quite expected on the first day of fall term, when returning and brand-new students mob the Vancouver community college.

But now, there's more of everything. More students — a record 15,005 part-time or full-time students, head counts show — up 23 percent from a year ago. Which means long lines at the bookstore, and at registration and financial aid counters.

There's more tuition to pay, a 7 percent hike approved by state legislators. Student technology fees also went up. And



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textbook prices just keep climbing.

First-day parking? Don't even ask.

"It's frustrating, because I left my house early. I got here at 8:20, and I missed my first class at 9," said George Martinez.

Commuting from Salmon Creek, the second-year business student, 28, circled around and around for a spot, but came up empty for at least an hour, he said. He did catch his math teacher to see that he wasn't dropped from class for his no-show.

"I don't know what time I'm coming tomorrow morning. I'll try a different strategy," he said with a smile.

At least Clark's new satellite campus at east Vancouver's Columbia Tech Center, which also opened Monday, siphoned off some traffic.

School officials said about 1,200 students have enrolled for general and specialized courses there, besting initial estimates.

Back at the main campus, Martinez waited outside Gaiser Hall when a fire alarm scattered hundreds of students and staff, about 11 a.m. A smoke detector in a women's restroom tripped the alarm, but no sign of a fire was found, officials said.

Taking it all in stride was Mike Kofford, 20, of Vancouver. He resumed his place in the bookstore line with his roommate and schoolmate, Kacey LeFrancq, 18.

It helps that politeness seems to prevail, Kofford has found.

"Every year it's like this — maniacal," he said. "After a while, everyone figures out where they're going."

Costs escalate

Kofford was unfazed when he couldn't use his mother's bank card at the register without her signature. He turned to LeFrancq to borrow her card.

"Do you have enough in your account?" he asked first.

Counting tuition, books and fees, starting the fall quarter set the pair back \$1,400 to \$1,500 each, they said.

"I have two jobs just to pay for this all," said Kofford, pursuing a transfer degree on the path to a fashion merchandising career.

He said he splits 60 to 70 hours per week between Vancouver's Nordstrom store and managing a Jamba Juice shop in Tualatin, Ore., 20 miles south.

Kofford said his tuition spike was "noticeable" but something he can handle.

His textbook tab is more vexing. Monday's charge, tacked onto LeFrancq's card, was \$323.25.

The two showed off a \$130 trigonometry book and \$140 textbook-workbook combo for an online math course, plus a used biology textbook — priced at \$93.45.

There is more financial aid available now to offset the pinch for many students.

By Monday, Clark had processed more than \$4.3 million in federal Pell Grants for eligible students, helped to disburse \$1.2 million in Washington state need grants and doled out another \$353,000 in direct scholarships.

Combined student aid for the fall term has topped \$8.3 million, officials said.

'Never too old'

Padding Clark's enrollment surge is a record number of high school students taking Running Start courses to earn free college credit. There are 1,609 reported, the highest count in Washington, Clark officials said.

Of course, many more of the students who lined up on Monday are career-shifters or job-seekers looking to acquire new skills.

Mercedes Berberian, 34, plans to switch her banking career from management to accounting on behalf of her son, 9, and her 1-year-old daughter.

"That way, I can work sometimes from home," she said. Her boy kids her about going to college, "but I say, 'No, it's never too old.'" she said. "I'm happy to be here."

Same for Burk Jones, 31, close to finishing an Associate of Arts degree in horticulture while he works for a landscape firm.

Monday found Jones stopping in to pick up his financial aid check. He posed for his fall-quarter I.D. photo, which helps earn him a sharp discount on his C-Tran bus pass.

"That's how I roll," he said with a laugh. Entering his fifth year of classes, he said, "I know the ropes."

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