

KNIGHT GUIDANCE

Clark College president knows how to create stability under difficult circumstances

Before Bob Knight took over as Clark College's interim president in 2006, many people justifiably wondered if the school even had a rudder, let alone a firm hand on one. Guidance at the college had been wobbly, at best, and more often tumultuous, not to mention costly. The college had to pay Wayne Branch \$195,000 when he was fired in 2006 after three years as president. Branch's predecessor, Tana Hasart, was terminated in 2002 at a cost of \$184,000 after almost four years at the helm.

Clark's rudder finally was grasped during Knight's year as interim president, and in the next three years the former Vancouver Barracks commander proved that you don't have to be an icon of higher education to run a college. You "just" have to possess management skills, positive leadership traits and a willingness to delegate decision-making to people you trust on a large and growing college campus.

So it was no surprise when college trustees unanimously extended Knight's contract recently. They had no doubt who was steering the ship and how good the navigation has been. Knight clearly has earned another three years at the post, through 2013, and his willingness to do so with no increase in pay (trustees gave him three more vacation days) shows he understands the budget crunch. Unlike Branch and Hasart, Knight has a six-month salary buyout in his contract, not a one-year buyout.

Turmoil suppression has not been Knight's only accomplishment at Clark College. He also has supervised — in a collaborative and nondictatorial spirit — numerous areas of growth. Enrollment has soared to a record 14,000 students during an economic catastrophe that accentuates the

importance of community colleges. Second careers are being eagerly launched in numerous fields of study as laid-off workers battle the Great Recession.

Clark also is growing in terms of classroom space and accessibility. The new \$30 million classroom building in east Vancouver at 18700 S.E. Mill Plain Blvd. makes higher education more convenient for hundreds of students. On the main campus, a new science, technology, engineering and math-

ematics building is planned. College officials also hope to open a campus in north Clark County.

Knight knows his work is far from over. Many of his challenges are only intensifying. Tuition is increas-

ing statewide by double digits over a couple of years, although not enough to suppress the rapid enrollment growth. The Legislature has forced higher education to make sacrifices during the recession, and according to Howard Buck's story in the Sunday Columbian, a new round of 4 to 7 percent cutbacks is expected soon. "It is a very stressful time for the college," board of trustees chairman Jack Burkman said. "We want to continue (Knight's) great work. ... He's managing the college in very tough economic times and during a dramatic growth in enrollment. And we're still meeting students' needs."

In the sports world, they say the best referee is the one you never notice, the one who lets the stars occupy the spotlight. We're not saying Knight is that obscure, but he has shown a desire to let students and instructors assume star-performer status. That's the best strategy in public education; an administrator should expedite and facilitate the learning and the teaching. Bob Knight probably will never be known as a giant of pedagogy, but he knows how to implement a guidance system, even in the roughest waters.

Agree? Disagree?

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