

The Ole COMMUNITY College Try

DESPITE UNEVEN LEGISLATIVE FUNDING AND MOUNTING STUDENT COUNTS, THE REGION'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE CONTINUING TO DELIVER NEEDED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES. WHAT'S THE LATEST IN THE CLASSROOM AND ON THE HORIZON?

by Kevin Fritz

JASON ELLISON KNEW what he wanted. He knew his goal of getting a good job in his field hinged on finding a college that excelled in graphic design, had teachers eager to teach and a reputation for helping students turn a college degree into a career.

Today, Ellison is one of 4,189 graduates who proudly accepted their degrees in May during the 38th annual commencement exercises at Valencia Community College. Because of Valencia's commitment to placement and internships, Ellison was already putting his skills to work at a creative agency in Orlando before graduation day had even arrived.

Overall, during its 40-year history, Valencia has helped more than 78,000 students attain a college degree. Sound like a lot? It is. Valencia is the largest awarder of two-year A.A. and A.S. degrees in the country.

Up the road, Seminole Community College awarded 1,372 A.A. and A.S. degrees in 2006-2007, the second largest number of degrees ever earned by students at the burgeoning center for higher learning. Last year, SCC was the 24th largest producer of A.A. degrees among community colleges nationwide.

The same tale can be told again and again at community colleges in Central Florida: Enrollment is strong, and degrees are being earned at an ever-growing pace. Regardless of recent budget cuts, such as Gov.

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Charlie Crist's line-item-veto reduction that eliminated a proposed 5 percent tuition increase and his construction vetoes, which will delay other projects, new programs and initiatives continue

to be launched throughout the area's community college system .

In turn, the community colleges are proving that they're indeed all about community, as well as partnerships.

AN ECONOMIC TRAINING CENTER

Nearly one of three graduates of Seminole County's public high schools is now enrolling at SCC, compared to 20 percent five years ago. And those

students will have a lot more to work with as SCC expands its horizons even further into the community.

"We are the economic training center for the county, changing lives one at a time," says E. Ann McGee, Ph.D., president of SCC. "The business community gets it. It's all about partnerships."

She points to examples such as SCC's Automotive Facility that opened last year at the Sanford/Lake Mary campus. The center offers degrees, certificates and on-the-job training for tomorrow's technicians, thanks to a \$3 million gift from the Central Florida Auto Dealers Association.

McGee believes the partnerships become even more crucial in the face of legislative cutbacks. She cites, for example, the January 2008 expected opening of SCC's new health-focused campus in Altamonte Springs, funded by hospital and private resources, along with help from the state. The new campus will feature a state-of-the-art health training center as well as full campus services.

SCC currently boasts a student body of more than 29,000 at five campuses, including the Altamonte campus.

McGee says Gov. Crist's tuition veto will hurt somewhat because of all the new initiatives at SCC. Yet, there's a silver lining. She explains that community colleges have been trying to reduce the amount tuition plays in their overall budgets. Currently, SCC and Valencia students are paying one-third or more; each college would like to get that number down to one-quarter.

"The veto has allowed a window of opportunity to open up," says McGee. She hopes the veto will halt future tuition increases, which would end up putting too much burden on students.

Despite funding issues, SCC will soon open the doors to a \$30 million facility being built



in conjunction with the University of Central Florida on its Sanford/Lake Mary campus. SCC doesn't offer bachelor's degrees, although it currently offers seven UCF baccalaureate programs. The new facility will give UCF



Lake-Sumter awarded 26 percent more degrees in 2006-2007 than in 2005-2006.

dedicated space and allow SCC to expand the bachelor's programs to 20.

Notably, instead of offering four-year degrees, SCC, Valencia, Lake-Sumter Community College and Brevard Community College made a deal with UCF last year, called "Direct-Connect," which ensures their graduates guaranteed admission to UCF. McGee contends the agreement is important because UCF now accepts only roughly 45 percent of SCC's applicants. Through the "2+2 Program," graduates of Florida community colleges have for years been guaranteed admission to a Florida four-year institution, but not necessarily to the school of their choice. Now, however, if they want to go to UCF, they can go to UCF.

In its most progressive initiative to date, SCC opens the much-heralded Center for Economic Development this month in Heathrow, which will act as a

"training engine for the community," according to McGee. This one-stop shop for existing and potential businesses will be shared with the Seminole County Economic Development Office, Seminole Chamber of Commerce, SCCorporate College and Florida High Tech Corridor Council. The \$20 million center was funded by the state, and the land was donated by Ron Pizzuti, CEO and chairman of The Pizzuti Cos.

ACCOMMODATING STUDENT GROWTH

Valencia President Sanford Shugart, Ph.D., likes to live by the motto that the state of North Carolina adopted back in 1893: *Esse Quam Videri*, "To Be, Rather Than to Seem."

With those words continually reminding him of his mission, Shugart says he's fully focused on doing what's best for his students.

He believes in the community college concept. That is, community colleges are teaching and learning centers, while universities tend to put more emphasis on faculty. He notes that Valencia, like SCC, doesn't offer its own bachelor degrees as some community colleges are starting to do.



FOCUS ON | HIGHER EDUCATION

“On the whole, I don’t think it is a good decision,” says Shugart. “We don’t want to go that way.”

But as UCF matured to a new level, he realized that if Valencia were not going to start offering four-year degrees, there had to be a viable solution. The “Direct-Connect” program idea became a perfect fit.

Shugart explains that with demand and UCF’s recent notoriety, the university has raised standards and is accepting fewer local applicants. “We have a problem with local access to bachelor’s degrees,” he says. “That’s bad for the community.”

In response, Valencia offers UCF bachelor’s degrees and is building a new joint facility with UCF that will increase the number of degrees awarded by both institutions. Shugart notes that Gov. Crist’s veto had an impact on construction funding, although the facility is still expected to open by spring 2009.

Valencia also suffered other budget cuts this year. Construction of the Allied Health and Laboratory Science Center on Valencia’s West

Campus has been delayed, pending receipt of new funding. The center is projected to offer programs in biology, chemistry, radiology, diagnostics and dental hygiene; a public clinic; and professional degrees in those fields.

Long range, Shugart sees an increasing demand for services to freshmen. He says more students are graduating from high school and more are aspiring to go to college. In many cases, he says, these are good students with nowhere to go because they can’t get into one of the “big” universities. Valencia’s full-time equivalent enrollment, which is the student count used for state funding purposes, was up 3 percent last fall; 5 percent in the spring; and 8 percent this summer, compared to the same periods of time the preceding year. Enrollment for 2007-2008 is expected to be more than 44,500 students, spread among the four main campuses and two centers.

Not coincidentally, Valencia already has plans for two new campuses, one in southeast Orlando (Moss Park), the other in southwest Orlando (Horizon’s West).



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HOME COOKING

At Daytona Beach Community College, the most notable matter receiving attention — besides a 50th-anniversary celebration in November — is this month’s opening of the Mori Hosseini Center, a hands-on hospitality and culinary arts training facility.

The 65,000-square-foot facility houses all of DBCC’s hospitality programs and includes teaching kitchens, high-tech classrooms for instruction in sales and marketing, areas for front office and concierge services training, and the popular student-run restaurant, Café 101. It’s also the new home of the Southeast Museum of Photography.



“The hospitality program is a direct community benefit,” says spokesperson Glyn Johnston. “[Since hospitality is its largest industry, Daytona Beach] offers students a tremendous opportunity ... to receive good-paying jobs — quality jobs.”

More community enrichment through education is coming via DBCC’s bachelor of applied science degree in supervision and management. Recently, the Florida Legislature granted community colleges authorization to offer bachelor’s degrees in certain areas. While colleges such as Valencia and SCC opted not to participate, nine community colleges have taken advantage to date, including DBCC.

According to Johnston, DBCC’s move came in response to the business community in Volusia and Flagler counties, which expressed the need for DBCC to provide bachelor’s-level education in supervisory and managerial skills.

MORE WITH LESS ... AGAIN

While enrollment is down from its 2003-2004 peak of 7,400, Lake-Sumter, founded in 1999, still boasts a healthy student body of approximately

6,400. It also awarded 26 percent more degrees (537) in 2006-2007 than in 2005 -2006. The institution has three campuses, in Leesburg, South Lake (Clermont) and Sumterville (Sumter), and offers more than 30 degrees, certificates and diploma programs. The South Lake Campus is shared with South Lake Hospital.

According to LSCC President Charles Mojock, Ph.D., a proposed 53,000-square-foot library on the South Lake Campus will benefit not only LSCC, but also UCF students and the community. It is slated to open in late 2008. LSCC will also build a 2,000-seat performing arts center on its Leesburg Campus.

“The loss of the tuition increase [due to Gov. Crist’s veto] will make for a very tight year,” says Mojock. “We rely on tuition to help offset costs of increased enrollment. So, if we do have an increase, as we expect, it will be harder to hire additional faculty to offer classes to meet student demand.”

HEALTHY OPTIONS

Brevard Community College consists of four physical campuses, in Cocoa, Melbourne, Palm Bay and Titusville. And more than 25 percent of

its students are enrolled in its Health Sciences Campus, which operates across the district.

According to the BCC Web site, the Health Sciences Campus provides state-of-the-art classrooms and clinical laboratory facilities. Coursework within the Health Sciences Campus can lead to either an A.S. degree or a Postsecondary Vocational Certificate. Through the campus’s Institute for Continuing Education, community continuing education is offered, covering a wide array of health-related topics.

In addition, BCC’s Aerospace Program offers two degrees in aerospace technology, preparing students for entry-level jobs in the aerospace industry.

Meanwhile, the Clark Maxwell, Jr. Lifelong Learning Center, a cooperative effort of BCC and UCF, is the first such joint-use facility for two colleges in the state. This instructional and service facility contributes to the goal of providing area residents with an opportunity to realize maximum personal potential and attain career goals while remaining in Brevard County.

