



NC Community Colleges
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Dr. R. Scott Ralls, President

PRESS RELEASE

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NC Community Colleges Experiencing Unprecedented Growth

RALEIGH - Based on preliminary data for the fall semester, NC Community Colleges are educating and training more than 20,000 additional full-time students than they did in the 2008-09 academic year. The 58 community colleges are funded for only 216,500 full-time students but have welcomed at least 236,500 since the beginning of this semester, NC Community College System President Scott Ralls told the State Board of Community Colleges today in Fayetteville.

This growth represents a 14 percent increase in curriculum programs, those resulting in a degree, certificate or diploma, with a total of 9 percent growth across all programs. Fifty-seven of the 58 colleges experienced growth, with some colleges experiencing increases over 20 percent. Mayland Community College had flat enrollment growth.

"Our colleges are being squeezed between unprecedented enrollment numbers and continued budget reductions and reversions," said Dr. Ralls. "We can only put so many seats in a classroom, and we can only add so many faculty with limited dollars. Our colleges are forced to cut off enrollment in certain courses and programs, but we continue our mission of welcoming those North Carolinians seeking education and training, even if we can't immediately put them in the specific class or program they want."

Community college enrollment and economic conditions share a counter-cyclical relationship: when the economy hits a downturn, enrollment numbers jump. This is true in North Carolina and throughout the nation as evidenced by enrollment spikes during the last recession in 2001-2003. As expected, the "great recession" is driving the skyrocketing enrollment that started last academic year and continues into this fall. In 2008-09, NC community colleges served a total of 860,000 students including full-time, part-time, curriculum degree as well as continuing education enrollees. This represents 100,000 more students than a decade ago with 30 percent of the growth, or 30,000, coming in last year.

Difficult economic times are also being reflected in the number of requests for financial aid. In 2008-09, more than 89,000 community college students received a federal Pell Grant. For the fall semester, 128,000 financial aid applications have been filed, representing a 32 percent increase over last year and a 54 percent increase over the last two years.

How are colleges handling the squeeze between demand and resources? A recent survey by the NC Community College System showed that most are increasing class size and faculty workloads, limiting faculty and staff travel and deferring equipment purchases.

"We are working to offer as many flexible options for our students as possible such as short-term training and more online courses," said Dr. Ralls. "But we have to face the reality that we can't continue to respond to every individual need when we are stuck between the hard rocks of high enrollment and dwindling resources."

The State Board of Community Colleges is meeting at Fayetteville Technical Community College today and Thursday for its annual planning retreat. The Board will hold its regular business meeting Friday morning beginning at 9 a.m., also at Fayetteville Tech.

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