

Enrollment booms at St. Charles Community College

High demand has some students camping out for classes

By Kalen Ponche

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Enrollment at St. Charles Community College grew by more than 5 percent this spring over last spring continuing three years of growth.

This spring, 7,584 students were enrolled at the college. The increases are even more rapid in the fall semester, when enrollment is typically higher. During the past three years, enrollment has jumped from about 7,000 in fall 2007 to nearly 8,000 in fall 2010.

As more students have enrolled, the competition to get into classes has increased. With 85 percent of students planning to transfer to four-year schools, general education classes fill up quickly.

"Growth in that range always poses challenges just from a physical space perspective," said Michael Banks, vice president for academic and student affairs. "We're getting pretty close to kind of filling those classrooms up at prime times."

But without money to hire new faculty or space available on the campus, the college has not been able to add many more classes. As a rule, the college tries to keep classes small, with 19 or fewer students per faculty member. Nursing courses and science classes that involve lab work are in high demand.

"We are out of space to add additional classes in those areas," he said.

The school has been able to add more occupational health classes that train people to be certified nursing assistants, pharmacy technicians and medical technicians to keep up with demand in those areas.

Right before the spring semester began, some students waited overnight for a chance



Roy Sykes photo -- Hundreds of St. Charles Community College students lined the halls of the administration building Jan. 13 to nab last-minute spots in spring semester classes.

to register for classes that were already full. Students who failed to pay their student fees by Jan. 11 were dropped from classes, which created openings for students who showed up Jan. 13 to register in person.

Hundreds of students lined the hallways the night before, hoping to get into closed classes. Miranda Dee was first in line. She arrived at 6 p.m. Jan. 12 with a pillow for a chance to get in to a microbiology course she needed for her nursing program. She spent the whole night giving directions to other students who were looking for the end of the line.

"I need a biology class, and I've tried to get into it before but it's always been closed," she said.

Nontraditional students - those who are older than 22 - waited beside typical college-age students to register for classes. The number of nontraditional students has grown each semester since the fall of 2007 to about 3,000 students this spring, or 40 percent of the student population.

George Loveless, 41, waited in the lobby, hoping to get into a biology and botany class. Loveless decided to enroll in classes that would prepare him for pharmacy school. After a string of jobs including being a mortgage broker, Loveless was looking for a more stable career.

"There's a huge demand for pharmacists," he said.

ENROLLMENT AT ST. CHARLES COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Total number of students

Spring 2010: 7,584

Spring 2009: 7,201

Spring 2008: 6,698