

El Niño brings warm weather to Oregon



Michael Bonn Clackamas Print

Walther (left) and Josh Lokeno (right) rock shorts in middle of winter for basketball but not usually outside.

By Erik Andersen
the Clackamas Print

This winter seems to be unusually warm especially in comparison to last winter's arctic. The reason for this is due to a periodical but irregular event called El Niño. El Niño is the meteorologists and scientists gave to the shift in ocean temperatures. When El Niño occurs, typically every three to seven years, due to the easterly trade winds weakening, allowing warmer waters of the western Pacific to move eastward and eventually to the South American Coast. This event is catastrophic for Pacific South American countries like Panama where El Niño causes severe droughts that devastate their farming industry and cause fires to their forests. Further north here in Oregon, El Niño has a more tolerable effect on the climate. Where Oregon would have a steady flow of snow in the higher elevation areas such as Mt. Hood and lots of snow in the lower regions during the winter, in the El Niño years, there's a significant decrease in snow levels and snow pack as well as rainfall.

"We rely on snow pack runoff in the spring to fill our reservoirs," said Dave Elson from the National Weather Service Portland Weather Forecast Office.

Without the runoff from the melting snow pack melt to fill the reservoirs it puts a reduction in available water.

Although El Niño has some devastating effects on some

of the more southern regions here in Oregon, aside from some water shortages, the weather can typically be quite pleasant.

"We experience very nice dry weather when it should be our most stormy period of the year," said Dave Salesky, meteorologist for KATU News.

Countries on the eastern Pacific first started to see hints of El Niño late last summer with definitive evidence of its onset come October of 2009. Salesky mentions that in October the predictions of the severity of this El Niño was to be low to moderate but in fact ended up being the quite large.

Primarily, El Niño affects the West Coast, but evidence of its existence has been felt all over the nation as far as the Eastern seaboard.

"Disruptions in the typical weather pattern, as you've noticed in California to the south and also on the Eastern seaboard of the United States where that colder air has mixed with moisture that should typically go to the Pacific Northwest, is now going to the South and producing lots of snow in places that normally don't see cold winters like Dallas, Texas, and parts of Florida and Louisiana and of course the very heavy snow storms over the South Atlantic regions like Washington, DC, Atlanta, Baltimore, places like that," Salesky said.

It's uncertain how long El Niño will last but typically goes for several months. Either way, for the time being, it appears that this year's winter ended a bit early because of it and didn't really allow a clear winter to start.

TUITION: Costs rise

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Nina Willis, a Clackamas student said, "It makes sense, but I think the government should be adjusting its spending towards schools instead of special interest groups. I'm not too happy about it, but it makes sense. I'd rather pay more than to have less classes available."

State support has just barely budged. Enrollment has spiked, putting big pressure on the budget. Tuition is the one revenue source the school has some control over. Despite the changes, Clackamas is still below average for cost of attendance.

The total yearly costs for other community colleges in Oregon range from \$3,093 at Central Oregon, to \$4,095 Southwestern. The average cost is \$3,537. Clackamas sits currently at \$3,465, which is less than Chemeketa, Mt. Hood and Portland community colleges.

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Courtney Wilton
Vice President of College Services

One thing that CCC students have available to them that other schools don't have is the corridor of credits between 15 and 18. Which as of right now is \$1,080 plus \$75 for fees, which is fun-

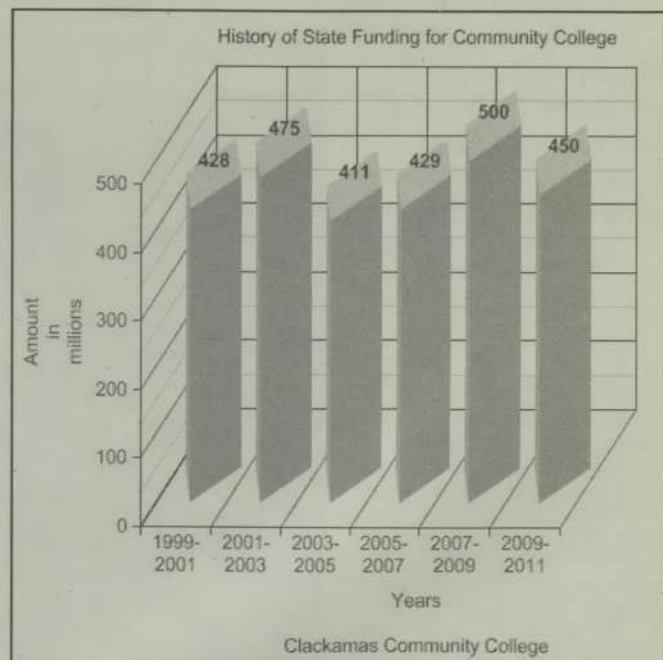


Chart by Brian Steele Clackamas Print

Graph of the funding for Oregon community colleges as shown over the past 10 years and the year to come.

damentally the same expenditure as only 15 credits. Put into retail terms, buy 15, get three free.

Clackamas has to reduce the budget involving, according to Wilton, "staff layoffs and the staff didn't do cost of living increases last year. So we're trying to manage that side of it as well so that's the balancing act we're trying to do."

When asked about possible increases of credits per class taken, Wilton indicated that it is conceivable that the credits will increase in the future. Credits have increased since 1999-00, from three credits to four credits per class in many classes.

What impacts enrollment more than anything is the economy.

"When times are tough, people go back to school," said Wilton.

Enrollment is up 20 percent after a 16 percent tuition increase.

"What can you do that's going to cause the least harm to the institution and the students as well? It's a challenge to know exactly where that line is, and it's not easy.

"I don't want people to think we are trying to be cavalier about it either and doing it just to do it, because we're not," said Wilton.

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