

Enrollment declines at BMCC

By JESSICA POLLARD
STAFF WRITER

An enrollment rise had administrators at Blue Mountain Community College feeling hopeful before the start of the term, but that increase has since been replaced with a decline.

"Things looked pretty good in late July," BMCC President Dennis Bailey-Fougner said in a recent report. "By September, new enrollments had completely dropped off."

The reason for the drop is uncertain as of now, according to interim Vice President of Student Affairs Bruce Clemetsen.

"We can't put our finger on what happened," he said.

For two weeks in late summer, enrollment sat at a notable high, he said. In late August, there was a 5% increase in full-time equivalent enrollment.

But into the final week of fall term at BMCC, the headcount stood at 2,356 students compared with 2,750 students at the same time a year ago.

The headcount, which represents the number of students taking classes, has increased a bit since then, but full-time equivalent enrollment — which indicates how many hours of classes are being taken — remains down 6% from a year ago.

"I can say we've noticed the declines in the amount of students enrolling in early college credits,"



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

After touting improved enrollment prior to fall term, Blue Mountain Community College ended up experiencing a 6% drop in full-time equivalent enrollment since this time last year. BMCC attributed the positive early numbers to students who began, but may not have finished, the enrollment process. BMCC is looking into what factors may be responsible for the overall drop.

Clemetsen added.

In response, the community college has been making calls to degree-seeking students to ensure they'll register for winter term. Clemetsen added some students might initially register for classes but not follow through on the whole process.

Registration for winter term

closes on Jan. 10, according to the school's website.

"There are a number of students that might wait to see what their grades from the fall term are, and then they'll register," Clemetsen said.

Some of those students may have their tuition funded by a third party, like a relative or employer,

and funds may be contingent on satisfactory grades.

The college is also strategizing ways to increase full-time equivalency by encouraging students already registered to take on more credits.

And while the drop hits campus, there's a 24% spike in full-time equivalent enrollment for

GED classes from last year, Clemetsen said.

"I know the folks involved in that program have really been getting out there to help people register," he said. "That's a plus."

This November, unemployment in Oregon fell below 4% for the first time since the late 1970s, according to the Oregon Department of Employment and has held historical lows for the past three years.

But with that comes a decline in the number of people interested in signing up for community college, Clemetsen said, which can affect the total headcount of students each year.

"At the same time, students can find employment which may reduce how many credits they're taking," he added.

Keeping full-time equivalent up doesn't just mean filling the hallways with people excited to learn. It matters financially, too.

According to recent documents, tuition makes up about 28% of BMCC's funding resources this school year.

State funding is affected too. This year, the school identified a projected 3% decrease in state funding, in part due to full-time enrollment numbers, from the last three years compared to the state average.

"What we're trying to watch is if we're above the growth or shrinkage rate statewide," Clemetsen said. "We're not too far away from the average."

Hermiston City Hall remains closed after fire

By JESSICA POLLARD
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston City Hall will be closed to the public through the end of January, following a Dec. 17 furnace fire that left the Northeast Second Street building with smoke damage throughout the building and fire damage to the HVAC system.

Until cleanup is complete, according to a press release from the city, most staff will be housed in the Hermiston Building Department, 215 E. Gladys Ave., across the street from the city hall building. Phone calls will be rerouted to employees' new locations.

"As we have had the



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Fire engines sit at the ready last week while firefighters check out the interior of Hermiston City Hall. City officials say the building will be closed through the end of January because of smoke damage.

ability to do a more extensive look in to the damage, it has become clear that the cleanup and repairs will not be as simple as originally planned," Mark Morgan, assistant city manager, said in a statement. "We're deal-

ing with how to retro-fit repairs to building-wide systems in to a concrete structure that was built over 50 years ago."

City hall staff evacuated the building Dec. 17 after there were numerous

reports of smoke coming from the vents inside. Crews from Umatilla County Fire District 1 remained on scene for at least two hours that day, according to Fire Marshall Scott Goff, for an "unknown failure in one of the heating appliances."

Goff added a fire was contained within a heating unit in the building, and the

resulting smoke caused the majority of the issues that are keeping city hall closed.

"The fire department did a really good job of getting to city hall quickly and knocking out the fire," Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith said. "We're all thankful for their response."

The furnace dates back

to the building's construction in 1965, according to the press release. It will need to be replaced.

Water, sewer and garbage bills can be paid online at hermiston.or.us, and in-person payments for Hermiston Energy Services can be made at the Umatilla Electric Cooperative, 750 W. Elm Ave.

During this special time of year encourage your loved ones who have served in the military to make an appointment with their local Veterans Service Representative to review their federal and state benefits. They may be entitled to VA Health care, Compensation, Pension, Education or Home loan benefits.

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