



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

**Students participate in classwork during an anatomy and physiology lab Jan. 14, 2022, at Blue Mountain Community College in Hermiston.**

**BMCC**

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more comfortable with taking classes online,” Contreas said.

**Fighting declining enrollment**

BMCC President Mark Browning said enrollment at the college is down 5%, year to year, and getting students to return to classes is one of the big challenges.

The school recently held sessions in which administrators have heard from students, past and present, about their attendance. The meetings included students who dropped out or changed their academic plans due to the coronavirus pandemic.

“There is a lot of uncertainty,” he said.

The student body is conflicted, he said, with some students wanting in-person classes and others preferring distance learning. He said he has heard from students who are concerned about COVID-19 exposure and others who need attention they can only get from face-to-face instruction.

Many other students, Browning said, are expressing they do not know what to do and are fearful of committing to academic programs. Rather, they are sitting out school until they can develop their career intentions.

“Traditionally in years past, especially in community colleges, we’ve been able to serve that role in which students can explore different career options,” he said. “And we still serve that, but it’s different under COVID.”

Browning explained the pandemic has made students unsure of what they want to do with their lives.

But the community college president also stated there are other reasons why enrollment at the school is down — namely, the economy. Right now, he said, the economy is good, and this is something that typically lowers college enrollment.

“We have one of the hottest economies anyone has ever seen,” he said.

This being the case, workers are not inclined to return to school for further retraining or study, according to Browning.

To bring back students, BMCC is doing things that many other schools are doing, Browning said.

Students may take asynchronous online classes, in which they download content and complete their studies on a flexible schedule. There also are synchronous online classes in which students all join classes at the same time. Other classes combine these options.

“We are much more fragmented in the way we are approaching delivery, but that’s what the student/consumer is asking for,” Browning said. “They want that flexibility.”

There still are actions the BMCC president would like to do to entice prospective students. For instance, he said, he would like to create new course programs for students and would like to do more to make the internet accessible to people in the area.

Browning said he hopes to find even more ways to encourage students to return to his school. In the meantime, he said, he will continue promoting the school’s efforts. As more students become aware of Blue Mountain’s wide range of class options, he said, they should be interested to enroll.

**Rockfall closes Highway 730 east of Umatilla**

Hermiston Herald

A rockfall and an unstable slope closed U.S. Highway 730 on the Washington side of the border Jan. 19. The incident closed the highway in both directions between the Oregon state line and Wallula Junction (13 miles south of Pasco). The Washington State

Department of Transportation did not have an estimated time for reopening.

For updated conditions in Oregon, check TripCheck.com or call 511/800-977-6368. Outside Oregon, call 503-588-2941. For Washington Department of Transportation updates, visit wsdot.com/travel/real-time/map.

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