

What Will Your Community College Look Like in the Future?

By Chris Bailey, Lower Columbia College President

Each summer, we at Lower Columbia College (LCC) look ahead and work on our strategic planning and visioning. This being our 85th year, it is particularly appropriate to think about what the future might bring. I thought I would share some of the current trends and some possibilities with you this month.

Greater Access to Education. There seems to be a growing understanding of the need for a degree or credential beyond high school to obtain the skills necessary for the modern workforce. As a result, greater state funding has occurred for students wanting to earn a college degree or credential. Moreover, LCC has greatly increased its available scholarships for students, topping \$400,000 annually. LCC is working with the local school districts to promote the idea of “graduation plus” to address the fact that about one-half of local students are not pursuing a college degree or credential.

Better Alignment with K-12. LCC is working with all the local school districts to make sure our requirements and programs align so students have the shortest pathway to a college credential or degree. LCC and the local schools are working to maximize dual credit opportunities such as College in the High School and Running Start. This year, approximately 100 students graduated high school while simultaneously earning Associates degrees at LCC!

More Internationalization. LCC is intentionally growing its international program. The program has grown from just two students in 2011. There are 32 international students anticipated for this fall. The goal is to eventually reach 70-100 international students. A vibrant international program brings world-view and diversity to our campus. International students also bring revenue to the college and to the community.

More On-Line and Hybrid Offerings. With LCC’s average student age being 30, many of our students are “time and place bound” and need convenient options for educational delivery. As a result, LCC is intentionally growing its on-line and hybrid options for the adult learner and for those who prefer on-line learning. This is also true in the corporate training division of the college.

LCC Becomes a World-Class Skills Center. Perhaps the most exciting addition in the near future will be a new 55,000 square foot, state-of-the-art vocational building. This building, projected to be about 5 years out, will house our welding, machining, manufacturing, preparation for

apprenticeship and transitional studies programs, among others. Our goal is to become a major, world-class, skills center, serving the local high schools, industry and the unions. We plan to work on getting the best available equipment and simulators incorporated into the building with industry input.

LCC Offers More Four-Year Degrees (and Beyond). In 2013, LCC created The Lower Columbia Regional University Center. At that time, five baccalaureate level degrees were being offered. Currently, there are 64 baccalaureate, Master's and doctoral programs housed through the center (mostly fully on-line). About a decade ago, the State of Washington permitted community colleges to offer Bachelor of Applied Science, four-year degrees. This fall, Lower Columbia College will offer its first LCC four-year degree, a Bachelor of Applied Science, Teacher Education, with a cohort of approximately 24 students. We anticipate LCC will grow its own additional baccalaureate degrees to meet area demands.

A Partner in the Development of the Downtown and the Region. At LCC, we view our mission to be very broad. We seek to transform lives and the community through education, economic development activities and partnerships. We are also a cultural center for the region. One thing I have wanted to see is a physical tie-in, through streetscape, and a pedestrian friendly pathway that connects the campus to downtown Longview. Currently, 15th Avenue serves as a barrier to that connection. Whether it be a sky-bridge or soft pedestrian crossing, that connection will aid local businesses and college students alike and tie our three wonderful theater venues and local art galleries together. The presence of a boutique hotel in the downtown corridor would also benefit the retail core and the college.

Higher Completion Rates and Placement Rates. LCC is working hard to make college completion and proper placement of graduates into the local workforce its top priorities. We have purchased and added core technologies to make our communication with students better to help them on their journey through the educational system. This technology will allow for better advising and for greater availability of key resources for our students. Finally, we hope to establish even better relationships with area employers so we can meet the demand for highly trained, skilled employees with our students.

Thanks for allowing me to share some ways the college can add potential benefit to the community. I am LCC Proud!