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ANOTHER RECORD

TCC enrollment soars 20 percent

By Denise Watson Batts
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NORFOLK

Even Tidewater Community College President Deborah DiCroce was shocked by Monday's news: Her school's fall enrollment is up more than 20 percent over this time last year.

The school is forecasting that the final growth figure, calculated later in the semester, will be in the 15 to 18 percent range, with a head count

surpassing 30,000; last fall's was more than 26,000. Classes begin Thursday.

The president said it isn't unusual that community college enrollment goes north when the economy goes south.

However, "I have not seen anything like this," said DiCroce, who came to lead TCC in 1998 and has seen record enrollment each year. "There's no way that it is not a result of the

on the rise

The fall semester count is forecast to exceed 30,000 when final numbers are calculated. The recession, higher demand for training and career programs, and students looking to save money are cited as factors in the rise.

See TCC, PAGE 4

TCC | *At all four campuses, enrollment is up in all tracked categories*

Continued from Page 1

economy.”

When it comes to full-time equivalent students, which is defined as a student taking 15 hours a semester, those figures are 25 percent ahead of forecasts. TCC had projected about 6 percent growth in full-time equivalent students.

The principal driver is people signing up for shorter-term career and technical programs or students looking for a cheaper way to begin their four-year degrees. DiCroce listed other contributing factors: the military taking advantage of the post-9/11 GI Bill and the national focus President Barack Obama turned on community colleges last month when he proposed a \$12 billion initiative

for the schools. DiCroce said she also believes people are taking TCC more seriously.

About 46 percent of all South Hampton Roads residents who were enrolled as undergraduates in a Virginia college or university last fall were TCC students, DiCroce said.

The enrollment figures are up across all four campuses and in all categories – full- and part-time students, female and male, minority and white, older returning adults and traditional-age students.

About 25 percent of the college’s growth is in the 18-24 age range, lowering the average age of a TCC student to 27 from 29 in 1998.

TCC is adding more classes and hiring adjuncts to handle the load.

■ “I have not seen anything like this. There’s no way that it is not a result of the economy.”

Deborah DiCroce, Tidewater Community College president

“We’re committed to responding to that demand,” DiCroce said. “We want to be part of the solution. ... A strong, skilled, educated work force is a critical component of the solution.”

Denise Watson Batts, (757) 446-2504, denise.batts@pilotonline.com



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Deborah DiCroce, center, came to lead TCC in 1998 and has seen record enrollment each year since.