NWACC Enrollment Tops 8,400

College’s Student Population Second Highest among Two-Year Colleges

BENTONVILLE, Ark. (September 5, 2012) – NorthWest Arkansas Community College enrolled more than 8,400 students for the fall semester, NWACC officials announced today.

NWACC had an unofficial count of 8,418 students enrolled on Tuesday, the 11th day of classes for the semester. That figure is down 230 students (or 2.66 percent) from the 8,648 unofficial enrollment count for NWACC on the 11th day in the fall of 2011. The official count provided to the state Department of Higher Education in 2011 was 8,528. That figure does not include students who may be auditing a class or who are enrolled in “late start” classes that begin after the start of the traditional 16-week term.

The unofficial student semester credit hours count for fall 2012 is 77,745, down from 80,059 in fall 2011, a decrease of 2,314 credit hours or 2.89 percent.

NWACC’s enrollment remains the second largest of any two-year college in Arkansas. Pulaski Tech has the highest enrollment.

Some NWACC statistics are on the rise. The number of area high school students enrolled concurrently at NWACC while still attending high school rose from 734 in fall 2011 to 764 this year, according to Dr. Diana Johnson, NWACC’s executive director of high school relations. Concurrent enrollment, or “dual enrollment,” allows students to earn college credit while completing their high school requirements on campus or through NWACC’s Early College Experience Program.

The College had set a goal of 1 percent enrollment growth for the 2012-13 academic year. Dr. Todd Kitchen, vice president of learner support services, said officials have been monitoring enrollment throughout the summer and knew that the figure for 2012 would be close to that of 2011 or down slightly. It’s difficult to predict the numbers precisely because of all of the variables in play, he said. For example, changes were made recently in the federal Pell Grant program, which provides
need-based grants to low-income undergraduate students and certain post-baccalaureate students. The maximum number of semesters a student can receive the grant was reduced from 16 semesters to 12 semesters. There were 80 students enrolled in NWACC summer classes who were affected by the change and did not return for the fall semester.

Also, NWACC had a record number of graduates in May – more than 1,100. “We’re excited about that level of learner success, and it speaks volumes about the community college helping meet the educational needs of our region,” Kitchen said. “Still, that graduation figure is roughly 400 students less than the entire class of entering freshmen in fall 2011 when we enrolled 1,504. While we are graduating record numbers, our pool of potential students is not as large as in years past. I think with this fall’s enrollment numbers, all of those factors are coming into play.”

Kitchen said that the learner support team continues its emphasis on helping students who are enrolled at NWACC succeed. In recent years, NWACC has implemented or improved several tutoring and student-success programs, including adding an online tutoring program to help online learners receive tutoring services comparable to what local students received. The college also has strengthened retention initiatives by increasing the number of students receiving advising in person. The team also has established an Early Enrollment Intervention Group to identify ways to aid learners early in the process before they start to struggle academically.

The college also has implemented Starfish, a software program that helps administrators, faculty and students communicate with one another and share resources that will help the learners be successful. “For example, if student Joe Smith is having trouble preparing papers for his composition class, his instructor can guide Joe to the Writing Center and other resources so that he can get the help he needs when he needs it,” Kitchen said.

“Dr. Kitchen and his staff are to be commended for their efforts and all of these initiatives to help serve our students,” said Dr. Becky Paneitz, NWACC president. “Every student is important to us, and we remain focused on helping them to succeed with their academic and professional goals.”

Enrollment figures released today mean that the college will be looking carefully at the 2013 fiscal budget.

“Obviously, we are disappointed that the total number of SSCH (student semester credit hours) are below our projections, but it is a reality we must address head on,” Paneitz said. “This certainly has an impact on our budgeted revenues for the 2012-13 fiscal year, especially when we know that more than 50 percent of the college’s revenues is generated through tuition and fees. Some tough decisions will have to be made, but we want to make certain that our decisions do not impact our students and their opportunities for educational success.”

Paneitz said administrators will be looking at potential cost savings carefully. A variety of actions will be considered, such as delaying the filling of full-time positions already budgeted, but currently vacant; looking at further cuts in travel and professional development; delaying for a period of 90 to 120 days the filling of part-time, extra help positions already budgeted; delaying some scheduled maintenance; and considering a four-day work schedule for the summer of 2013. Brevard Community College in Florida implemented a four-day work week in fiscal year 2007-08 and saved almost $268,000 in reduced energy costs.
Paneitz said she and other college officials also will continue to try to expand the revenue base for the college through private philanthropy. “It’s a reality for all public higher education institutions that the funding from the state does not meet all of a college’s needs, and private donations become that much more important in providing a quality and affordable education to our students,” she said. “We have set a specific goal of increasing the scholarship endowment by $500,000 to allow those who need a little extra help in making their dream of attending college a reality.”

Alex Vasquez, chairman of the NWACC Board of Trustees, said, “While we are disappointed that more students are not able to take advantage of the college’s offerings, we did anticipate that enrollment numbers would be a challenge in light of the economy and tough times that many are experiencing. The Board and the College administration have planned conservatively to deal with the impact this will have on the college, and the College administration will be implementing several cost-cutting measures.”

NorthWest Arkansas Community College is a smart choice for students wanting to pursue quality higher education. As an accredited institution through the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, NWACC is a public two-year institution that serves and strengthens its surrounding communities in Benton and Washington counties by helping our students maximize their potential and exceed expectations. With state-of-the-art facilities, NWACC provides excellent academic instruction and workforce training needed to succeed, offering personalized attention from highly respected faculty, staff, and administrators. For more information, visit www.nwacc.edu.