NWACC Celebrates Consecutive Record Growth

Class sizes remain small as college enrolls more than 8,600 students

BENTONVILLE, Ark. (Sept. 6, 2011) – NorthWest Arkansas Community College has more students than ever before, topping the 8,600 enrollment mark for the fall 2011 semester, NWACC President Dr. Becky Paneitz announced today.

For each consecutive year since the college began classes in 1990, NWACC has added to its enrollment, beginning with 1,232 students the first year. The college expects to grow past 10,000 students by 2015.

NWACC officially had 8,648 students on Tuesday, the 11th day of classes for the semester, which is up from the 8,461 students NWACC had on the same day of the fall 2010 semester.

“Growth is good, but we are committed to a type of growth that leads to student success and keeps the needs of our students foremost in our mission,” Paneitz said. “We continue to see a manageable faculty-to-student ratio that makes the educational process personal for our students and prepares them to go on to meet their goals through education. This is always an exciting time for our college.”

NWACC boasts a 14:1 student-to-faculty ratio, allowing faculty members to maintain a personal level of teaching in the classroom. In fact, a recent survey of 2011 NWACC graduates showed 95 percent of the student agreed or strongly agreed that “the size of my classes has allowed me to interact with my classmates and professors.”

“We find that the smaller class sizes and the personal contact our students have with faculty is one of the keys to learning,” said Todd Kitchen, the college’s Vice President for Student Learning. “New and innovative learning programs will also help our students reach the ultimate goal of academic success and graduation.”

NWACC has implemented a number of new tutoring and student-success programs, including a Math Center for students to stop in for immediate math help, improvements to the college’s Writing Center and a new online tutoring program. The online tutoring program was created to allow students taking online courses to receive tutoring services comparable to what local students receive. The student can speak to and see the tutor using video conferencing software called ooVoo. The college also has strengthened retention initiatives by increasing the number of students receiving advising in person. Kitchen said of this year’s 8,655 enrolled students, more than 7,400 received such advising.

Among the college’s areas of studies, health professions showed some of the highest enrollment growth, a 13.3 percent increase in registrations. NWACC offers nursing, respiratory therapy, physical therapy assistant and paramedic degrees. Graduates of NWACC programs in the health professions have traditionally exceeded the state averages on professional licensing exams. NWACC’s passage
rate for first-time test takers was 94 percent for registered nurses in 2010 and 100 percent for paramedics and emergency medical technicians.

The college also enjoyed explosive growth in its culinary program. Enrollment almost doubled from 59 students in fall 2010 to 112 students this year.

NWACC’s growing programs mirror the job growth opportunities presented by the region’s leaders in a report issued earlier this year. The Greater Northwest Arkansas Development Strategy identified those two areas – health care and arts, entertainment and tourism – as among eight job clusters prime for growth.

Also, more students are enrolled in science and math courses than ever before, with a large majority of students taking courses that will ultimately lead to graduation. The college also has maintained its emphasis on accessibility, affordability and quality, Pancitz said.

NWACC was founded by voters in the Bentonville and Rogers Public School Districts on August 15, 1989, when they passed by a 65 percent margin a 3-mill property tax to support the new institution. NWACC opened its doors to 1,200 students in August 1990 and has in excess of 8,600 college credit students, making it one of the largest and fastest growing two-year colleges in Arkansas. An additional 8,000 students are served by through non-credit courses throughout Benton and Washington counties.

**NorthWest Arkansas Community College is a comprehensive, public two-year college that serves and strengthens the community through learning for living.** NWACC’s service area is defined by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education as Benton and Washington counties in extreme northwest Arkansas. The commitment of NWACC to life-long learning can be seen in the quality of instruction it offers, and the variety of programs it has designed to move students into the job market in a minimum amount of time, enrich people's lives, and prepare them to further their education. For more information, visit [www.nwacc.edu](http://www.nwacc.edu).