

College calls to more students

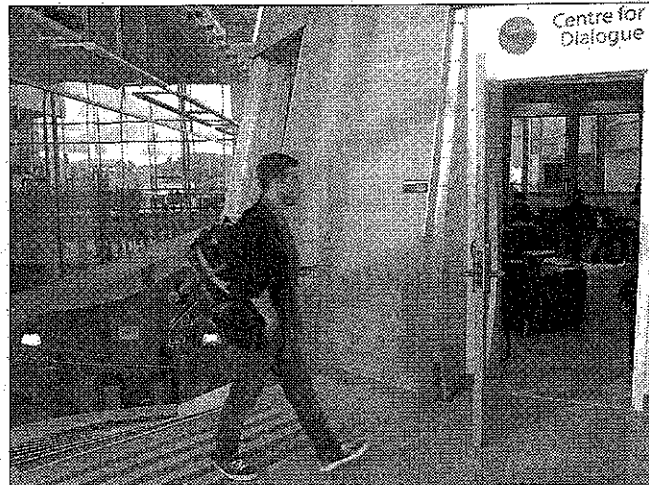
Special to The Daily Courier

PENTICTON — A 20 per cent growth in course registration at Okanagan College in Penticton has been driven by a slow economy and the desire for a career change, says the regional dean for the South Okanagan Similkameen.

Okanagan College continues to experience growing enrolments at each of its campuses and in many programs. January enrolment stats show roughly 5.7 per cent more students — 5,504 — at the college's campuses than in January 2009. That represents 298 more students from the 5,206 registered in 2009.

Donna Lomas said other reasons for the increasing enrolment in the South Okanagan include the college's adult basic education programs for those wanting to upgrade or enrol in prerequisite courses and in its health programs.

"We had a larger application pool for the licensed practical nursing program, and our home support resident care attendant program," she said.



GARY NYLANDER/The Daily Courier

A student walks to class at Okanagan College in Kelowna. New stats show ever increasing enrolment at all OK College campuses.

"Those are sort of geared toward sort of very specific careers, and so people who might have left the job market coming back are looking . . . for programs that will lead directly into specific jobs."

Okanagan College President Jim Hamilton said enrolment has exploded, growing by 48 per cent in four years. The largest increase was in Kelowna — 140 more students than

last January — while the largest percentage growth occurred in Vernon, with 15.6 per cent more students (or 717 compared to 620 last year).

In terms of course registrations, Penticton and Salmon Arm recorded the largest growth with 19.1 per cent and 17.4 per cent, respectively. Course registrations are up 10.8 per cent overall from the previous year.

Hamilton said, however, that high-

er student numbers aren't as important as the fact the college is able to provide a growing number of individuals with the training and education they want and need.

Enrolment continues to remain solid for pre-apprenticeship trades programs, but Lomas said not included in the numbers are new programs — including geothermal and HVAC — that are starting at the end of February.

"The trades programs are still very strong," she said. "One can argue that there's not as much building going on right now, but the reality is that will take off again."

OK College is offering many of the programs that will be featured at the new Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Building Technologies and Renewable Energy Conservation, slated to open in March 2011.

"We're starting that a year in advance so that we'll be in a position to move those programs over," said Lomas. "You don't want to be launching new programs and a new building all at the same time."