

local news

▼ EDUCATION

Enrolment numbers still healthy

Active job market is causing some B.C. post-secondary institutions a decline in enrolment, but that's not the case yet in the Okanagan.

BY ADRIAN NIEOCZYM
EDUCATION REPORTER

While student enrolment at colleges and universities across the province are down, Kelowna's post-secondary institutions seem to be bucking the trend.

At Okanagan College, "it's too early to say if the final numbers will be up or down," said Allan Coyle, the college's director of public affairs.

"But I'd be surprised if it was lower."

Coyle said one change this year is that students are making the decision to register for college later than in past years. "Students are applying and enrolling a little later this summer. Certainly we're seeing the numbers accelerate."

By the college's mid-September stable enrolment date last year, 4,763 students were registered.

But with many programs not starting until later in the fall or in the winter, "over the course of the year, we'll edu-

cate a lot more students than that," said Coyle. He estimated almost 7,000 students attended Okanagan College last year.

Meanwhile, at UBC Okanagan, deputy vice-chancellor Doug Owram said he expects enrolment in September to be about 13 per cent higher than last September's 4,100 students.

"That is in the face of a high school population that is down and we're very pleased with that," said Owram.

With B.C.'s aging population and falling birth rate, it is predicted the number of high school students in the province will continue to shrink, reducing the pool of people who go on to post-secondary education.

Owram said UBCO's smaller campus size, when compared to UBC Vancouver and Simon Fraser University, as well as its location in the Okanagan Valley, makes it an attractive place for prospective students.

And while Owram expects about half of UBCO's students will always come from the Okanagan Valley itself, "we're continuing to attract a number of students from outside the valley," he said.

"To me, it's always very important to be able to pull students from elsewhere," he added. "Students that are moving

across the country to come to you, it says that you must be doing something right, a kind of market test for you."

UBCO and Okanagan College's enrolment success is not being mirrored in the rest of the province. The strength of the B.C. economy is keeping many potential students from choosing post-secondary education, at least for the moment.

"People can come out of Grade 12 and get an instant job and it might not pay well in the long-term but in the short-term it's tempting," said Owram.

He said university enrollments usually drop when the economy is strong and increase when things turn and young people can no longer find lucrative employment. "So I expect you'll see volatility in the provincial system for the next three or four years, until the economy shifts."

And while enrolment is up, Owram said UBCO will not meet its enrollment target of 7,500 students by the 2009/10 school year. The target was set by the province when UBC took over the Okanagan University College campus.

"We'll still maintain our target," he said. "It just might take us a year or two longer."

anieoczym@kelownacapnews.com