

# News

## Okanagan College students endure growing pains

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Summer's over

and students are back at their desks at Okanagan College's Penticton campus. But the campus

they're starting the year in will look much different by the time programs start finishing up in the spring.

"It's going to be an incredibly busy fall," said Donna Lomas, regional dean for the

South Okanagan.

She's referring to the construction work getting underway on the campus — building an 8,500 square metre expansion to the campus, with the rather lengthy title of Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Building Technologies and Renewable Energy Conservation.

The expansion was announced this spring, and it's on the fast track with a planned completion date of March 2011. Summer, Lomas said, was a mad scramble to get a new parking lot prepared and portables moved to make room for the construction.

"We've had a good start to the semester but now the actual project will be starting to take hold on the campus," she said. "I was very up front with students at orientation that there's going to be some inconvenience. That's part of the price we have to all pay in terms of getting this new building."

Lomas said the college has contingency plans to help deal with the noise and pounding as best they

can, but expects there will be growing pains through the construction process though she thinks even that could be a learning experience for everyone on campus.

"It going to be a huge opportunity for Penticton and the South Okanagan Similkameen," she said. "The fact that it will be built quickly is a really good thing and the benefits when it's completed will be phenomenal."

Enrolment at the campus isn't suffering from the construction process, however. Though the final figures are yet to come in, Lomas said their student population is on the rise.

"We are definitely going to be up," she said, adding that academic programs look very strong this year as well as adult basic education.

"It's is a very good sign because it means that people are coming in with very specific goals," she said. "They're getting their prerequisites and are looking at future plans."

Health programs are another area that is getting

a lot of interest, with home support and practical nursing showing solid enrolment figures.

"We are experiencing a lot of very positive growth and so far we have been able to accommodate it," said Lomas. "We had a real surge in applications in August this year."

Though it hasn't affected college enrolment yet, Lomas said she's also aware of the declining enrolment at the grade school level.

"We're very conscious of the fact that in many school districts, the enrolment is dropping but we're also taking steps to appeal to as broad an audience as possible," she said, explaining that the college builds programs that not only appeal to the local student population and are in demand by employers, but also ones that will attract students of all ages to the region.

"It is lifelong learning. The average age on this campus, depending on the program, could be anywhere from 23-26 and even higher in some cases."