

New president predicts

Innovation can cure declining enrollment blues

By TIM RICHARD

Community college enrollments may level off and even dip in the next five years as the falling birth rate continues to affect the college-bound population.

But Oakland Community College President Robert Roelofs is looking to a batch of new vocational-technical programs to attract new students.

And despite financial growings from many governments, Roelofs sees only modest tuition increases ahead and doubts a property tax increase is necessary, although some elected trustees would like to try for one.

Roelofs is completing his first year as president of OCC, with its four campuses and 20,000 students, and he was asked what direction he sees the two-year college taking in the next five years.

"I DON'T THINK, despite some cries of agony, that the state is short-changing anyone or they're suffering," said Roelofs.

"This year our state appropriation is up 9 percent," he said, "and we expect future appropriations" to increase at 6-8 percent a year.

Oakland County's healthy growth in property assessments won't be entirely translated into higher college property taxes because of the Headlee tax limitation amendment. But Roelofs expects a growth of 7.6

percent this year, 8 percent next year, and easing to a 7 percent rate thereafter.

OCC didn't raise tuition and fees for three years. This year's \$2 a credit hour hike (to \$16.50) appeared "traumatic," in Roelofs's words.

His plan is to increase tuition \$1 at a time, approximately every other year. That would put increases in the 6 percent or under range.

A FEW TRUSTEES, notably Earl Anderson, would prefer to ask voters for an increase in OCC's operating tax rate, currently a relatively low one mill.

Roelofs is less optimistic. He was president of Macomb Community College before coming to Oakland, and recalls highly favorable public opinion polls which showed a millage hike could pass.

"We went to the polls and lost 2-1," he said.

Neighboring Schoolcraft College has asked voters for increases of a half-mill to a mill four times in the last three years and never was able to get more than 42 percent support, no matter what campaign techniques it tried.

DECLINING NUMBERS of younger students is another tricky problem.

"The community colleges in Michigan have had some decline in full-time equated students in the last few

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years. The peak was in 1976," he said. "The head count has gone up, but the credit hours have gone down."

"The decline is not sharp or dramatic as in the K-12 system. It's true we're picking up older students. The average age is around 28."

"We might experience more of a decline in the future, for two reasons. One, the real dip in the birth rate isn't hit yet. Two, the adult student takes one or two courses," rather than a full 15-hour load.

He warns community colleges not to be deceived by average ages. "One student at age 46 plus three students at 22 may give you an average of 28," he said, but the truth is that young students are still important. "We have to be very alert to the possibility of a decline in enrollment."

Nevertheless, OCC is projecting a slight increase in credit hours over the next five years — from 334,000 in 1980-81 to 339,000 in 1984-85, accord-

ing to W.H. Nikkel, vice president for planning and facilities.

OCC IS increasing its career offerings.

"One of the prime reasons students give for attending college," said Betty Setz, director of research administration, "is to acquire employment skills." Even persons with degrees from four-year colleges are attending community colleges for such skills.

The new programs, said Roelofs, are in three general categories:

- Vocational-technical — aviation maintenance, alternative energy technology (solar power; conversion to coal), electronic micro-processors, fluid power (hydraulics), engineering graphics, welding and metal fabrication, machine tool technology, metallurgical science technology, and architectural and construction technology.

- Allied health — sonography (diagnostic testing with ultrasound),



ROBERT ROELOFS
New programs at OCC

cardiopulmonary technology, radiation therapy, medical record technology, and hearing science technology.

- Human protective services — police science, security training, correction training, and fire science.

Most will be two-year programs, combining technical courses with basic academics. Others will be one-year certificate courses with only the technical courses, Roelofs said.

THIS FALL alone, Dr. Setz added, OCC added six career programs — automobile servicing, diesel truck

and heavy equipment technology (the GMC people in Pontiac were delighted at that), medical records transcriptionist, practical nurse education, word processing and text editing, and a revised real estate program.

Mail registrations, Roelofs said, appear to be running 10 percent ahead of last year. But whether it means more students or a way of beating gasoline prices remains to be seen.

How does OCC decide there is a market for its courses and jobs for its graduates?

"It starts with normal contacts of counselors talking to students," Roelofs said. "The teaching faculty and administrators are in contact with industry, hospitals, police departments. The placement officers have their contacts."

"Once we get a clue, we look around to see who we have who would be skilled to develop the program. We form an advisory committee weighted with people in the community. They put together the courses that are necessary. The academic senate and curriculum committee look it over."

SOME \$35 MILLION in construction will be going on at OCC over the next five years, said Vice President Nikkel.

Southfield will get a \$3.5 million facility.

County strong-arms road board

In two overwhelming votes, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners asked the Michigan Legislature for a stronger hand over the three-man road commission which the county board now appoints.

The board gave 19-4 approval to a resolution opposing House Bill 4746, which would permit the election of the road commission if voters endorsed the concept.

The Oakland board declared the bill "could result in the county board of commissioners losing their existing authority to appoint road commissioners, and in counties with high density population area, this legislation could result in all commissioners being elected from one section of a county."

The four negative votes were from scattered Democratic commissioners. One, Hubert Price of Pontiac, argued there would be "greater accountability if we elected them. My experience is that we appoint them and see them again when they're up for reappointment."

But Robert Gorsline, R-Milford, chairman of the general government committee, countered that "there is a possibility of elected road commissioners' being lost on the ballot." Counties

already elect five to six administrators, most on party-line votes.

The second resolution, adopted by a 20-2 vote, favored reducing the six-year terms of road commissioners, contending, "the reduced term should result in making road commissioners more responsive to the needs of the citizens and their elected representatives." There was no debate on the second resolution.

THE STRUCTURE of the road commission is a major political issue in many Michigan counties. Although a handful of road commissions are elected, most of the 83 road units are appointed by the elected county boards of commissioners.

In some counties, road commissions have larger budgets than county general government, controlling such areas as parks, public works and airports. The argument for electing the board members has been focused on greater accountability to the public.

The arguments for continuing to appoint them are that the road commissions are single-purpose agencies and the Michigan ballot is already overcrowded with names the voters don't know.

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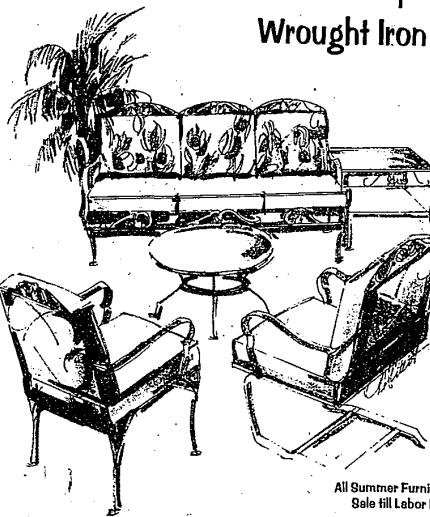
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