

OCC millage: Tuition costs to stay put if passed

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

This is the third installment of answers to readers' questions about Oakland Community College's March 16 one-mill property tax proposal.

Q. How can I vote by absentee voter (AV) ballot?

A. AV ballots applications are available now, both from your local school district and the college. The ballots must be returned to your local school district, not the college. Or you can go to your local school district's elections office and vote there.

By law you may vote by AV ballot if (1) you expect to be absent from the community during poll hours March 16, (2) you are physically unable to attend the polls, (3) your religious beliefs forbid activity that day, (4) you are an appointed election precinct inspector in another precinct, (5) you are age 60 or older, or (6) you are confined to jail, awaiting arraignment or trial.

Q. What will happen to tuition if the one-mill request passes?

A. Historically, tuition and fees have been a growing part of the budget — 21 percent in 1974-5 to nearly 38 percent currently. In fact, board dissatisfaction over the need to raise tuition helped fuel the millage request.

The board and administration have promised to hold the line on tuition for at least five years if the March 16 proposal is passed.

Q. The pool on the Orchard Ridge Campus that is much used by the public is shut down. When will it be repaired?

A. The pool was drained a few weeks ago after continual leaks were found. Any repair will be a major cost for the college. The pool is unavailable in the current budget.

Q. This illustrates a major point: OCC has neglected maintenance of facilities over the years because we've expanded educational programs," says a college spokesman.

"Now we need to restore 25- to 30-year-old facilities. We had done some repairs by issuing bonds, but we've reached the end of that source of revenue."

"College facilities are open 12

months of the year, 18 hours a day and seven days a week. They take more wear and tear than K-12 facilities."

To repeat from an earlier answer: The \$29 million in revenue from each of the first two years will be devoted almost half to major maintenance and half to new programs.

Q. What percentage of our high school graduates go on to OCC each year? What proportion come back in the summer from other colleges to take courses at OCC?

A. Public high schools in Oakland County last year graduated 9,420 students of whom 2,109 enrolled at OCC — 22.4 percent. The caller was from Novi, which graduated 244, of whom 49 enrolled at OCC, or 20.1 percent. Highest was Pontiac Central at 42.2 percent. West Bloomfield also was near the top — 31.1 graduates, 35 enrolled at OCC, or 27.3 percent.

Many high school graduates enroll in four-year universities, drop out and then enroll at OCC. Still

others go away to a university and take a summer course at OCC. The college is researching a further report at our request.

Q. Why are OCC tax dollars being used for remedial programs? Why not send those who are deficient back to the high school they came from?

A. Good question. There are several answers. New students take ASSET, a series of skill assessments. Counselors help them plan their course, and suggest remedial work when necessary. OCC's remedial programs bring a student up to speed for college-level work and have a thrust different from high school remedial work.

A student might be able to do college work in English and social studies but may not be up to date in math. It would be inconvenient for the student to take most courses on campus and then drive to a high school for the math work.

Many students enroll at OCC 20 or 25 years after leaving high school. Their high school may be in another county, another state — or even shut down. And it isn't the school's fault that math has been advanced so remarkably.

Some older students need to learn keyboarding for computer classes. For them, it's better to learn in an environment close to where they'll take their advanced classes.

Q. Why shouldn't businesses pay for the Business & Professional Institute?

A. Many companies pay to send employees to OCC for a few weeks — for example, foremen with shop skills learning supervision skills. The company pays for their instruction and puts them up in area hotels.

Some businesses have donated equipment — for example, the "virtual reality" design computers that don't require construction of a prototype. You've read about that in our news columns.

The BPI staff has secured state grants to help cover job training costs.

BPI is housed in a cramped, old house and has a staff of four — a director and three coordinators. "It's terribly understaffed," says the college spokesman. OCC would like to house BPI in larger, more businesslike quarters, expand the staff and attach class-

rooms to the offices for in-house training.

The short answer is that business tuitions, gifts and state grants cover incremental costs of teaching but don't cover everything.

Q. Has OCC tried using part-time faculty with expertise rather than full-time professors?

A. Yes, says Chancellor Patry Calkins. "In 1966 we had 320 full-time faculty; in 1972 we had 304; in 1985 we have 299 full-time faculty. We have a high proportion of adjunct faculty — 500 per semester. Now that's efficiency."

"In 1972 we had 41 administrators. Today we have 44 (with several times as many students)." Calkins said OCC has gone as far as it can hiring adjunct faculty, and needs to add more full-time, particularly in programs where instructors should keep office hours and advise students about careers.

Tim Richard will try to get answers on all general interest questions about the OCC election. Using Touch-Tone, call (313) 953-2047 ext. 1881.

Cellular tower risks discussed

Debra Rowe will discuss possible health risks from electromagnetic fields related to cellular towers and antennas at a meeting of the Council of Homeowner Associations of Farmington Hills at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 14, at the Hills branch of the

Community Library, 32737 W. 12 Mile, Farmington Hills.

Rowe is a professor of environmental systems technology at Oakland Community College. The meeting is open to the public.

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