More than ever seek financial aid

By TODD GUILD

Thousands of students poured onto Cabrillo College's two campuses Monday morning facing a rough budget, fewer available classes and a growing need for financial aid.

According to Director of Marketing and Communications Kirsten Fabos, 7,463 students have applied for financial aid so far this year, up more than 1,100 from last year.

Fabos pointed to the bleak financial picture coming from the state, which has had a devastating office of education statewide, forcing educators to trim budgets and slash programs from elementary school to college level.

"Over the last three years, we've lost 10 percent of our state funding," she said. "This translates to 300 fewer course sections.

While Cabrillo College officials have attempted to keep their scalps away from "core" classes and those required for transfer to four-year universities, fewer courses are being spared, Fabos said.

Most classes are full, with many students winning spots in the more popular classes, she said.

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Students head off to class on the first day of the fall semester at Cabrillo College in Aptos Monday.

COLLEGE

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In the wake of an economic crisis that has driven statewide unemployment up to 12.3 percent, more people are returning to community colleges to boost their job skills and train for new careers. Additionally, with the University of California and the California State University systems accepting fewer students, students who normally would have gone to a four-year university are instead starting out at community colleges, Fabos said.

According to Paige Marlett-Dorr, director of communications with the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, an estimated 140,000 students were turned away last year because classes were full. Another 10,000 were turned away because they could not get into the classes they needed to go on to a four-year college.

Finding financial assistance could get easier for some students this fall because the Cabrillo College Foundation raised a record $85.5 million.

"The money, which came from 4,700 donors, is a record for the college, said Cabrillo Foundation executive director Melissa Silverson.

"It's remarkable that the community is supporting us generously," she said. "I've been here for 12 years and this is the best year we've ever had. It's especially nice in these hard economic times.

A large part of the money will go to the Academy for Collegiate Excellence, a 14-week program that offers classes ranging from computers to literacy to career planning, and is designed especially for low-income students, Silverson said.

Students check out their class schedules at the Cabrillo College Watsonville Center.

About $1 million will be used for general scholarships, she added.

Monday also marked the first day of classes in the college's new 57,000-square-foot Health and Wellness Complex, which now houses the whole of its popular health services programs.

The college also replaced its aging lab equipment, including purchasing new imaging machines for the Radiologic Technology Department, 16 dental hygiene stations, five X-ray stations and a bevy of other high-tech equipment.

I went over there this morning, and everybody seems to be grinning from ear to ear," President of Student Services Dennis Bailey Fougner said.

After seeing record growth over the past three years, enrollment topped out this year at about 6,500, which neatly matches last year's numbers, Fabos said.

Bailey-Fougner spent the morning out on the Aptos campus, greeting students and answering questions.

"It's a nice," he said, "it's good to see the students coming back, and there's a lot of really good energy.

While Bailey-Fougner said that many students were waiting in line hoping to get into closed classes, the problem was not as bad as last year, when hopeful students filled seats and were sitting on the floor.

Andrew Rodriguez of Watsonville, who graduated from Watsonville High School in 1999, said he was returning to Cabrillo's College Monday for his third year in the school's dental program.

"They have a great program and the schedule is varied enough that I can fit classes in, even at night," he said. "It's working out real well for me.

Anthony Banuelos, who said he moved to Santa Cruz County last month, sat in on his first art class Monday.

"I'm pretty excited," he said. "I heard about Cabrillo from my friends. Everyone says it's a great college. I just live down the street so it's easy.

Mirah Ersam of Aptos, who is still enrolled in a local charter high school, said she found time in her schedule to take a beginning art class at the Cabrillo College Watsonville Center.

"They had plenty of class choicess and I was able to fit this one in with my regular classes," she said.