



Wednesday, December 3, 2008

2-year colleges' stature growing

By Drew Houff
The Winchester Star

MIDDLETOWN — More than a third of Virginia graduates who earned bachelor's degrees in 2008 started or supplemented their higher education at a state community college.

According to a recent joint report compiled by the Virginia Community College System's Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness and the Herndon-based National Student Clearinghouse, about 36 percent of bachelor's degree recipients at one of the state's public or private four-year colleges or universities had attended a two-year community college.

The community college system is comprised of 23 community colleges on 40 campuses throughout Virginia.

Lord Fairfax Community College — with campuses in Middletown and Warrenton and a learning center in Luray — serves 5,866 full- and part-time students from Winchester and Frederick, Clarke, Warren, Shenandoah, Fauquier, Page, and Rappahannock counties.

The study showed that 27 percent of college graduates in Virginia this year had earned an associate's degree from Lord Fairfax or another of the state's community colleges before earning a bachelor's degree.

Also, 57 percent of the graduates followed what is called "swirl" enrollment, in which they moved back and forth or co-enrolled at one of Virginia's community colleges while attending a four-year institution.

"In today's world, the road to a bachelor's degree for many students will be through the community college," VCCS Chancellor Glenn DuBois said in a press release issued by his office.

He said that path through community colleges can come in many forms, including dual enrollment by high school students and people who take summer courses to earn college credits.

"Community colleges play a vital role for many students, helping to ensure they have the foundation they need to succeed in college classes," Monty Sullivan, vice chancellor for academic services and research for the VCCS, said in the press release. "This is a niche only we can fill. Virginia's community colleges took those students to where they needed to be in order to be successful in higher education."

According to the study, 59 percent of the students in the study were women.

The study was based on 28,222 students identified by the National Student Clearinghouse as having received a bachelor's degree from a four-year Virginia public or private institution between Sept. 1, 2007, and Aug. 31, 2008.

Efforts to obtain a comment about the numbers in relation to LFCC's enrollment were unsuccessful Tuesday.

... www.lfcc.edu
www.vccs.edu

— Contact Drew Houff at
dhouff@winchesterstar.com