

Nursing, library take biggest cuts at SVC

By AARON BURKHALTER
Staff Writer

Skagit Valley College's nursing program has shrunk back to the size it was two years ago as the college works to fill a \$5.5 million budget deficit left by state cuts.

The college released a list of 57 positions affected by the cuts, which include reductions in hours, layoffs, retirements and vacancies. Forty positions were either layoffs or hour reductions.

Of those, seven positions came from the nursing program and eight from the school's library. In nursing, the school will accept 20 percent fewer students than it has over the past two years.

College President Gary Tollefson said the reductions reflect each department's slice of the overall budget. He said the library uses 2 percent of the school's budget and even after the staffing cutbacks will still have the same 2 percent share.

"We're down to things that really do matter," he said.

The nursing program lost a number of positions brought on over the past three years because of the high demand for training. Allied Health Education Director Rory Rochelle will lose his position July 1, along with three full-time nursing instructors.

Tollefson said the program is still substantial and will grow again as school finances improve.

"We've actually more than doubled the size of the nursing program in the last five years," Tollefson said. "It is our most expensive program. Much of the funding we've used to grow that much ... has come as a result of cobbling together one-time funds."

Rochelle said admission to the program is already competitive, and the bar for entry rises as the number of accepted students falls. The program has a 100-person waiting list and has closed the list to new applicants.

New students will have to compete for a limited number of spaces offered twice a year. The program used to accept five sections of 30 new students over two years; now it accepts four sections of 30 students. Six of those students will come from the waiting list.

Rochelle said last quarter 80 people applied for 30 spaces and were evaluated on their grade-point average in eight prerequisites. Rochelle said the lowest GPA among the 30 students who were accepted was 3.7 out of 4.0.

Tollefson said these cuts — which also include basic education faculty — limits the number of seats available in each class. Any student can enroll at the college for a two-year or transfer degree, but he or she will face extensive waiting lists.

Tollefson said the college already cut nonfaculty expenses and had to turn to faculty and programs that will have a greater impact on students.

He said he hopes to grow the school again as the economy rebounds.

"All of this will, in time, get better," Tollefson said. "I'm certain that resources will come back to us in the span of a few years."

Aaron Burkhalter can be reached at 360-416-2141 or aburkhalter@skagitpublishing.com. Follow him on Twitter at www.twitter.com/schools_svh.