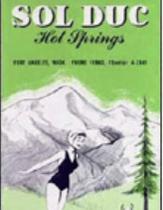




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## Clark College (Vancouver, Washington)

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On October 2, 1933, in the depths of the Great Depression, six young instructors opened the doors of a rented (\$25 a month) former downtown Vancouver boarding house and 25 students entered Vancouver Junior College -- only the fifth such school in the state. By the 2008-2009 school year, when Clark College would celebrate its 75th anniversary, it would enroll nearly 13,000 students, making it third largest of the state's 29 community colleges. But in 1933, visionary school instructors and civic boosters, along with their counterparts in the four other small Washington towns with junior colleges, were ahead of the political curve. State lawmakers didn't offer much help until 1941 when they passed the Junior College Act under which the state aids in financing these schools. And it would be another 20 years before lawmakers truly cleared the way for a substantial increase in the number of junior colleges.

### Clark Junior College

In Vancouver, an association of local business and civic leaders technically "owned" the school, which six weeks after its opening changed its name to Clark Junior College. It was the fifth junior college in the state, after Centralia (1925), Skagit Valley (1926), Yakima Valley (1928), and Grays Harbor (1930). (Everett Junior College opened in 1915, but closed in 1923 and would reopen in 1941.)

Much of the public was unfamiliar with junior colleges and, apparently, skeptical about the value of such institutions, which promised college-credit courses for freshman- and sophomore-level courses. As if to combat such skepticism, in the summer of 1933 John W. Todd, the general manager of Vancouver Junior College, told *The Vancouver Evening Columbian*, "Only high class instructors will be engaged and everything we teach will have the sanction of the University of Washington."

The same newspaper reported on September 18 that two Vancouver Junior College instructors, Ralph Hanna (1908-1944) and Robert Oliver (1909-2000), who was also the first dean, had returned from the University of Washington where the UW registrar "sent his assurances to prospective students of the junior college that not a one of them who does satisfactory work need fear that he will lose an hour of college credit." A Professor Cole, head of the UW's accrediting committee, was quoted, "One might think that we would be glad to get all of the students we could at the University of Washington. As a matter of fact, we are glad to see the lower division students enroll in junior colleges."

### First Years

The initial six-person faculty was a versatile bunch, teaching business administration, psychology, social sciences, drama, art, English, history, math, and foreign languages. Tuition that first year was \$45 a quarter, or \$110 for the entire school year if paid in advance. It was slightly more in

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Clark College campus, Vancouver, Washington, ca. 2008  
Courtesy Clark College



Robert Knight, President, Clark College,  
Vancouver Washington, ca. 2008  
Courtesy Clark College

fine arts and business administration.

But times were tough and financing expansion and improvements required outside help. In June 1934, as Clark Junior College's first academic year was winding down, *The Vancouver Evening Columbian* reported that the Clark Junior College Association voted to raise \$500 "by individual subscriptions to complete the college's first year of work ... . The money ... will be used to pay remaining bills, to print the catalog for next year, and to equip a chemistry laboratory."

The association had 35 members, including business and civic leaders of the town and at least one clergyman, who was its chairman. As it turned out, \$500 wasn't nearly enough. In September the school announced a fundraising drive to secure \$5,000 to buy books, chairs, blackboards, laboratory equipment, etc. In promoting the fundraising effort, *The Vancouver Evening Columbian* said in a headline, "Why Clark Junior College Wants Your Support in Raising \$5,000" (September 10, 1934, p. 1).

### **Washington's Junior Colleges**

By 1946, a total of nine junior colleges were operating in Washington and one more would join the lineup. Those five post-Clark Junior Colleges were in Longview (1934), Wenatchee (1939), Everett (1941), Bremerton (1946), and Pasco (1955.)

In 1961, the state's philosophy toward junior colleges and the notion that higher education needed to be more accessible took a dramatic upturn. The restriction against having a junior college in the same county as a four-year school was rescinded and "junior colleges" were now designated "community colleges."

During the next 10 years, the number of community colleges in the state increased from 10 to 27. Two more have been added to the system since 1970, bringing the total to 29. In 1963 and 1965 the legislature made other changes in the community college system, separating these colleges from their local school districts and establishing community college districts with their own boards of trustees.

### **Clark College Today**

In Vancouver, that former boarding house served as home to Clark Junior College for four years and eventually would become a restaurant, a function it still serves. Clark has had five subsequent sites in Vancouver. In 1958 it moved onto its present 101-acre, park-like campus just east of Interstate 5, a few blocks from downtown.

The school continues to grow. A branch campus is to open in 2009 amid high-tech industries in east Clark County and expansion of three buildings on the main campus was completed in 2008.

Clark has a substantial vocational-technical component on the main campus and offers classes in adult basic education, English as a second language, and customized job-skills training at a former shopping center in town. The school has a co-admissions agreement with Washington State University's Vancouver branch and offers instruction in nursing and other subjects at the WSU Vancouver campus. In addition to its close working relationship with WSU Vancouver, Clark has co-admission agreements with Concordia, Marylhurst, and Portland State universities and offers its own bachelor's degrees in technology, dental hygiene, and social work. Graduate students can earn a master's degree in social work from Eastern Washington University at Clark College.

Robert Oliver, one of the faculty members who greeted that first class at Vancouver Junior College, was both English instructor and dean -- the first of 10 campus leaders, not counting interim and acting presidents. Robert K. Knight, president since 2007, is the school's 10th.

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By Gregg Herrington, September 03, 2008

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