Schools Offer Options To Lebanon College Students

By Nora Doyle-Burr
Valley News Staff Writer
Friday, August 29, 2014
(Published in print: Friday, August 29, 2014)

Lebanon — In the wake of Lebanon College’s announcement last week that it would be canceling fall classes and moving toward closing the school, other area schools have begun scrambling to attract the college’s former pupils.

Lebanon College President Ron Biron said once word got out that the school wouldn’t be holding classes this fall, “almost every institution in New Hampshire, Vermont and upstate New York” reached out to him, offering assistance.

The college held a meeting for students seeking an alternative way to complete their education on Thursday night.

“We’re trying to make (things) as easy as possible for our students,” Biron said.

He met with officials from River Valley Community College on Monday and invited them to campus for Thursday night’s meeting.

Susan Henderson, assistant for strategic initiatives to the president at River Valley, told students gathered in a Lebanon College lecture hall that — should they choose to transfer to River Valley — they would be treated as a “special cohort.”

Though River Valley does not typically accept credits from Lebanon College, they will do so if students enroll between now and January of 2015, said Henderson. The school will also waive an application fee, she said.

River Valley’s Director of Admissions Chuck Kusselow had applications at the ready for students interested in signing up for classes before they start on Tuesday. He noted that the school has several programs that overlap with Lebanon, including criminal justice, early childhood education, business and allied health.

The cost to attend River Valley is $200 per credit for New Hampshire residents and $300 per credit for students from elsewhere in New England.

Kusselow said the Claremont campus — 20 miles from Lebanon College — is “not that far away,” but added that he would like River Valley to take over the Lebanon College buildings.

“I would love to see us come up here,” he said. “Without Lebanon College, we would be the (logical) fit.”

Henderson said that the “vision is to hopefully be up here,” but “budget considerations” will play a role in the decision. She said the best case scenario would be for a developer to purchase the building and then lease it to River Valley.

In the meantime, she said, many general education classes can be accessed online, while others function as hybrids — an online class together with an on-campus lab, for example.

She said that Gov. Maggie Hassan’s signing of House Bill 650 on Wednesday is slated to smooth the way for a bus route between Claremont and Lebanon and might make commuting to campus easier for students.

“That’s coming,” she said.

Until then, she suggested students consider carpooling.
Early childhood education student Brenda Walker, 56, of Grafton, said she was “excited” about the opportunity to continue her course work at River Valley.

“I want to get a job,” she said.

Walker said she had received an associates degree in business from Lebanon College in 1998. She described the school as a “pillar in the community,” but said she was optimistic about her future at River Valley. She was enthusiastic about the prospect of the Claremont school taking over the Lebanon building.

“That would be awesome,” she said.

Robert Craig Baum, Lebanon College’s dean of academics, said he was struggling to process the “still shocking news.” He wondered, “how will River Valley serve residents of Lebanon?”

He said the challenge for any small college is to strike a balance between liberal arts and programs such as allied health with better job placement rates.

Though River Valley does have comparable programs in several areas, it is lacking one in the area of radiography. Henderson said there are plans in the works for River Valley to take over Lebanon College’s radiography program, but it will take “time to work the magic.”

She anticipated radiography classes starting next fall, but said they would know more by the end of October.

Radiography student Vinnie DiBernardo, 35, of Lebanon, holds a bachelor’s degree in Spanish from the University of Vermont, but after working in medical offices, he said he has found a passion for science. He now works a part-time job to allow him to take classes.

He ruled out a program at the New Hampshire Technical Institute in Concord, the next nearest place to study radiography, due to the distance.

In order to pursue his studies, he said he was willing to consider an alternative path such as nursing. He completed an application at the meeting Thursday with an eye toward the licensed nursing assistant program.

Parent Terrie Patch, of Brandon, Vt., had driven an hour and a half to the information session with her daughter, a radiography student.

“It doesn’t look like it’s going to work for us,” said Patch.

An additional change for Lebanon College students who opt to transfer to River Valley will be an increase in class sizes. Henderson said River Valley classes commonly have 10-12 students per class, with a maximum of 20. At the meeting, students said they had not had classes that big while at Lebanon.

Henderson estimated 6 students had completed applications following the meeting Thursday night, while others had taken them home to think about it.

Across the Connecticut River at the Community College of Vermont in Wilder, Coordinator of Academic Services Marianne Shaughnessy said they have registered eight or nine Lebanon College students in programs such as early childhood education, medical assisting, allied health and human services.

Students were able to apply, be accepted and enrolled in classes within a couple of days and students with financial aid were able to get it transferred to CCV, she said. CCV in-state tuition is $239 a credit and the rate for the New Hampshire students is $359 per credit.

“We have been quietly registering panicked Lebanon students since last week when they were first hit with the news of the college’s closing,” wrote Shaughnessy in an email.
Nora Doyle-Burr can be reached at ndoyleburr@vnews.com or 603-727-3213.