

Expecting to Thrive



DR. BRUCE E. WHITAKER
President of the College

Editor's Note—The following article, by Gordon Borrell, Virginian-Pilot Staff Writer, appeared in the Monday, October 8, 1979, edition of The Virginian-Pilot, Norfolk, Va.

As academicians predict a tumultuous decade ahead for the small, private colleges, administrators at Chowan College have had to sit back and take a long, hard look at what the 80s have in store for them.

And what they see is good.

Chowan College, a two-year Baptist school with an enrollment of about 1,100, for the last half of this decade has been engaged in some long range planning that the administrators expect will pull them through. Moreover, some believe the junior college will, spite gloomy predictions and thrive in the 80s.

"We're prepared for a struggle," explained Dr. Bruce E. Whitaker, president of the college. "But we have the mechanism in line that will make us work like fire to keep us on track if we start going downhill".

Part of that "mechanism" is an aggressive student recruiting program that Whitaker and others hope will keep Chowan enrollment at or above 1,000. And with the nations student-age population predicted to decline by about 25 percent by 1990, that may prove an arduous feat.

"There are a lot of hooks in the ocean right now," said Dean of Students R. Clayton Lewis, who recently returned from a four-day recruiting trip to South Carolina.

"There's no doubt we will be working with greater competition," he said. "The only way some college will be able to survive is if a greater percent of the population goes to college."

To combat the anticipated decline, Chowan College in the last three years has increased mailing to prospective student in East Coast states as well as those overseas. Significant drives are also underway in retention of

Chowan freshman (about 10 percent currently do not return to complete a second year).

This year the admissions office for the first time hired a full-time recruiter to work parts of Pennsylvania and New York during the fall recruiting period.

We are trying to prove to these students from the very beginning of their inquiry that they will receive individual attention at Chowan College," Lewis said. "My associates in other four-year institutions can't do that, and that's what I think will make the difference for us."

Also as part of the school's planning effort, Chowan has established an ad hoc committee to oversee and keep pace with admissions trends. The number of full-time recruiters now totals three.

The prospect of declining enrollment has been intensely fought by Chowan planners for a simple reason: about 90 percent of the school budget comes from tuition. A significant drop in enrollment, Whitaker said, may have to mean the pairings of some education programs and a cut in faculty.

But there are yet other built in wheels that will turn if the the Baptist school cannot avert the lull in enrollment.

Recently, Chowan was given a half million dollars by an anonymous donor to help complete its \$2.5 million gym and physical education center. Though it was the largest donation ever recieved by the school, ten and sometimes hundreds of thousands have steadily flowed into the school for the last two decade.

Most of the contributions made during the last 20 years have been used to build the school's large modern physical plant—an expansion scheduled to end when the gymnasium

nasium opens its doors early next year. And when it does, the funnels of funds will move to other areas.

"Right now we're entering into a new era of fund raising," said Bobby Cross. "We are entering a period when we can begin to concentrate on building our strength fiancially to meet with inflation; with the competition for students and with rapid changes in fields of study."

To add to Chowan's financial well-being, the Baptist State Convention, the school's sponsoring organization, will increase its annual allotment to the college to more than \$500,000 by 1980. Chowan recieved \$302,000 from the convention in 1978 and \$425,000 this year.

"We're going to be campaigning just as much as we ever have," said Whitaker. "A student right now can go to Chowan for less than he can go to some other college. If we can build up our Annual Giving Fund and our General Endowment, we'll be able to smooth through rapid inflation and perhaps keep our tution competitively low."

We want to stay within the the range of 1,000 to 1,100 students," he continued. "I'm not going to say we're ruined if we're under that. If we go to 850 or 900 students, we may find that we have to pare programs and cut faculty and maintenance in the mid 1980s. We will be continually revamping our long-range planning and remaining solvent so we can survive.

"Right now, however, with what we see in the near future, I think it is a guarded optimism that characterizes the sentiment at Chowan College."