

# BCC Literacy Programs Taking New Tack

BY SUSAN USHER

A cookbook of tried and tested recipes. A complete packet of information relating to a trip to New York City. A budget for a newlywed couple.

These are examples of the types of real-life student learning projects possible this year as Brunswick Community College joins other community colleges statewide in moving to a competency-based approach to adult literacy skills training.

Anita White, acting literacy programs director, said the change is expected to help boost both the number of local adults reached through literacy skills training and the number of students who stick with those programs.

"We're currently at the bottom of the barrel," she said. "We're tied for the lowest FTE production in literacy. We've just steadily gone down hill."

"We've graduated quite a few, but we just don't have the retention rate," she continued. "Unless we help people set goals and work toward them, we lose them."

With its emphasis on relating learning to the goals of each individual student, the new program is expected to make a difference for the better for students and BCC alike.

Like other community college programs, participation in literacy training classes is measured in FTEs—full-time equivalent students. The more FTEs, the more money the college receives the following year.

Last year BCC generated 14 FTEs in its ABE program and 17 in its GED preparation classes, tying with Tri-County Community College in Murphy for 58th out of 58 places.

"I hope a year from now we can see a big change in FTE," said Mrs. White, who is acting literacy programs director in the absence of Willie Fullwood. Fullwood is on temporary disability leave following repeated eye surgery, which kept him from the job during much of 1991.

Richmond Community College in Hamlet was among campuses to pioneer in use of CASAS among the state's community college campuses. After two years of using CASAS it moved from 34 FTEs to 99 FTEs. The student retention rate—the percent of students who stayed in class—increased from 27 percent to



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—Anita White,  
Acting Literacy Director  
On new CASAS training system

"One thing I was impressed with was the creativity of the facilitators," said Mrs. White.

"It's a totally different concept. There's no more of the teacher putting an assignment on the board for everybody to do. No more traditional classrooms."

"Once they realize they're not going to be in a regular class, that will encourage some students," she continued. "A lot of them dropped out of school because they failed in a traditional classroom."

For some instructors, CASAS will mean learning a new way of working with students, she said, while for others it will involve little change from what they're already doing.

Among the first students to participate in the CASAS program will be enrollees in the JOBS program administered by the Brunswick County Department of Social Services (DSS).

The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS) is part of a national overhaul of the welfare program. It includes job training and educational opportunities to help adult welfare recipients enter the local workforce. Childcare and transportation—two of the biggest obstacles faced by members of the target group in changing their lives—will be provided as needed.

"I think it's going to be a fantastic program," said Mrs. White, who is working with Ginger DeBerry of DSS in developing the educational program for JOBS participants.

Information on BCC's literacy programs is available from the college, 754-6900.

program will increase the odds of BCC getting a grant to fully implement the program on campus this fall.

For easier supervision, Mrs. White said she initially wants to establish "strictly CASAS" classes on the three BCC campuses at Leland, Supply and Southport.

CASAS is a non-profit organization which provides learner-centered materials for curriculum management, assessment and evaluation. The system is used extensively in ABE, ESL and other literacy, welfare reform and corrections programs.

It provides tools used to place students in programs, to diagnose their needs, monitor their progress and certify their mastery of functional basic skills. These include reading, math, listening and speaking skills, as well as critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills encountered by adults in everyday life and work.

Mrs. White sees several advantages to the approach. First of all, when students are evaluated for placement, they are identified as functioning not at first- or fourth-grade, but at a program level, such as ABE 1 or 2. This reduces the likelihood of an adult comparing their abilities or skills with those of a child.

"People are going to feel a whole lot better about themselves," she predicted.

Also, CASAS uses down-to-earth real life situations in teaching basic skills. The program is modified to meet each student's needs and students set their own pace of study.

All 58 of the state's community colleges are moving to CASAS, and Mrs. White has been selected as one of 10 individuals in the system to be developed as a CASA trainer to help implement the system statewide. She should complete certification requirements this summer.

67 percent.

"People are really working with it," said Mrs. White. "Hopefully, ours will look that good."

For Mrs. White, competency-based education is nothing new. She's used it for years in compensatory education. At BCC she directs the Brunswick Interagency Program (BIP), which serves the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled. Last year the program generated 72 FTEs for the college.

She has no doubts that a similar approach will prove both popular and successful with literacy students as well.

"I believe in it and I know we can make it work," she said.

This month Mrs. White will begin training the college's Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Development (GED) preparatory and English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors as facilitators. They will learn the use of materials produced by the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). By fall all literacy programs at BCC will be centered around CASAS.

In addition to training existing instructors, Mrs. White said she'd like to train a pool of individuals who are interested in and willing to teach literacy classes in the future, in anticipation of a rise in demand as would-be students learn about the program. The first 16-hour training session will be held Jan. 22 and 23, but additional sessions will be held on Saturdays to accommodate those who work during the day.

She's hoping her work with the

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## It's In The Mail

Carolina Power & Light Company's is mailing its annual safety calendar to residents within a 10-mile radius of its Brunswick nuclear plant. The theme of the 1992 calendar is protecting the environment, depicted in photographs that show the beauty of natural areas in the Carolinas. In addition, the calendar includes public safety information such as how the plant's public warning system operates, evacuation routes and shelter locations. An accompanying brochure that contains similar information can be kept in the glove compartment of a car.

## NEW HANOVER LIMITS SERVICE

### Brunswick Health Department Expects Increase In Clients

Brunswick County Health Director Michael Rhodes says it may be four months to a year before the department can tell the full impact of a decision by the New Hanover County Health Department to no longer serve out-of-county residents.

As of Jan. 1, the New Hanover department is no longer providing general clinic and immunization services to residents of other counties.

Previous immunization records will remain on file and will be released upon request of a patient or a patient's parent or legal guardian, according to a release from that department.

Rhodes said he was advised by New Hanover County Health Director Robert Parker that about 20 percent of its clinic patients had been from Brunswick County.

"That was a guesstimate on his part, based on discussions with his staff," said Rhodes. "He didn't have any numbers."

Rhodes said he isn't sure how many of those clinic patients will become clients of the Brunswick County Health Department.

"We're anticipating an increase, but we have no way to get a handle on it. We're just going to have to wait and see," said Rhodes. "I don't think all that have gone to New Hanover County will come to the Brunswick County Health Department."

"We feel probably that a lot of people who were going to the New Hanover Department are individuals who work in New Hanover County," the local director said. "Many of them may end up going to private physicians or clinics there. It may be easier to do that than to take off work to come to Bolivia."

Economic factors may play a part in their decision, as may expanded clinic hours at the local clinic, Rhodes suggested. "It's only been the last 24 months that the general clinic has been open daily instead of three days a week."

Immunizations are among the services that are available during general clinic hours, 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

He predicts the greatest increase may come in the child immunization program because of its local popularity, excellent service and significantly lower cost when compared to obtaining the shots at a private medical office. However, Rhodes said he won't know the impact on that program until July or August, since most immunizations are sought before the start of school.

Because of the timing of the New Hanover County decision, the local health department won't know the extent of impact before the 1992-93 budget request must be submitted in late winter or early spring to the county commissioners.

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