

State of the College 2024



Clark College President Dr. Karin Edwards delivered the annual State of the College address on February 14 in a packed Gaiser Student Center. The event originally was scheduled for January but was postponed due to a week of snow and ice. The space was filled with faculty, staff, students, members of the college's board of trustees, Clark College Foundation staff and board members and community supporters.

Emma Sturm, president of the Associated Students of Clark College (ASCC) kicked off the event and gave a report on increased student participation in college clubs and ASCC's efforts to increase student engagement in campus activities.

"It's working!" Emma said. "More than 200 students participated in our 'Barbie' movie night."



ASCC President Emma Sturm opens the State of the College with a State of the Students address.

Ray's story

Student and veteran Ray Jackson shared his Clark journey. After completing his U.S. Navy service, Ray enrolled at Clark in 2010, but he dropped out due to mental health issues, later diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. After working various jobs, he realized he needed more skills to be successful. His vocational and rehabilitation counselor at the Veterans Administration suggested he return to Clark College.

So, in 2019, a decade after he'd started at Clark, Ray returned to Clark and earned an AAT degree in Machining Technology in June 2021, but realized he didn't want to work in a machine shop with loud noises.

Ray didn't give up. He leaned into his interest in IT and earned his CompTIA A+ IT certification, an entry-level IT credential, which propelled him to return to Clark and earn an associate in applied technology degree in Network Technology

in December 2023. Ray wanted to go further still. He returned to Clark yet again winter term 2024–this time to pursue a bachelor of applied science degree in Cybersecurity.

Along Ray’s journey, he navigated college studies and parenthood with the help of several Clark College student support services, including the Veterans Center of Excellence, Disability Support Services, Advising Services, Financial Aid, Penguin Pantry, Counseling and Health Center, Child and Family Studies, and more. Ray thanked a long list of Clark programs, departments, and people for helping him be successful.



Ray Jackson with his Veterans Center of Excellence and Advising staff supporters. *Left to right:* Megan Anderson, Donna Larson, Ray Jackson, Eli Gonzalez-Roman, April Cannon, James Powers, and Monica Patton.

Accomplishments and looking ahead

During her speech, President Edwards announced that the college’s equity-centered strategic plan was approved by the college’s board of trustees last fall and provides a framework for all the college does. The new strategic plan is centered on students—to educate, empower, and elevate them to achieve

their personal and professional goals. It also underscores a commitment to student success, empowerment, and equity.

Community partnerships and philanthropy are essential for supporting student and college needs. President Edwards expressed gratitude for the ongoing support of Clark College Foundation and the community. Notably, a \$1 million gift from the Cowlitz Indian Tribe will launch the Clark College Innovation Fund that will address pressing needs and drive innovation. Clark College Foundation has awarded more than \$85 million over the past 50 years. This year alone, the foundation has awarded \$2 million that directly assists more than 550 students.

In addition, Clark has disbursed \$24.5 million in **financial aid** from other funding sources, including state and federal grants and loans and community scholarships.

Recently, the college was awarded a \$2.2 million Title III Strengthening Institutions grant from the U.S. Department of Education primarily for increasing student completion rates.

The college budget and its financial sources focus on supporting Clark College's commitment to provide affordable education. Clark offers more than 100 degrees and certificates in over 70 programs, including 5 bachelor of applied science degrees. The annual tuition is \$4,907 for 45 credits (during 3 terms). And 70% of Clark students transfer to four-year universities.

Enrollment has increased by more than 10% this academic year compared to the 2022-23 academic year. Approximately 8,683 students enrolled during the Fall and Winter terms, translating to 5,932 full-time equivalent students. Increased enrollment is expected to impact the budget positively, reducing the need to use the fund balance as the college had to do in previous years during and immediately following the pandemic.



The Clark College Board of Trustees take a selfie with Dr. Edwards before the address. *Left to right:* Chair Cristhian Canseco Juarez, Vice Chair Denise Gideon, Jeanne Bennett, Dr. Karin Edwards, Marilee Scarbrough, and Suzanne Donaldson.

New programs, degrees, and expansion of academic offerings are driven by community needs and workforce demands. The college will add a Civil Engineering Technology and Construction Management program, a Food Service Operations certificate, and a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science degree that was recently approved on February 1.

The programs under development include:

- **Clean Energy Technician program** that will expand the college's existing Mechatronic Technology and Automotive Technology programs to meet high-demand jobs.
- **Surgical Technician program** will be the first in Southwest Washington. Pending final approval in May, graduates of the two-year program will earn an Associate of Applied Technology (AAT) degree in Surgical Technology.

Additionally, **the Advanced Manufacturing Center** is currently under construction at the college's Ridgefield location at Boschma Farms. Scheduled to open in fall 2025, this center will serve up to 1,200 students per term.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives remain top priorities at Clark College. Achievements include increased diversity in hiring and ongoing professional development initiatives. In addition, the college organizes The Northwest Regional Equity Conference, now in its fifth year. The conference plays a pivotal role in promoting equitable experiences for historically underrepresented students and employees.

Looking ahead, reflecting on the college's achievements, President Edwards expressed gratitude for the collaborative efforts of faculty, staff, and the community. As Clark College looks toward the future, she said it remains committed to student success, expanding program offerings, and strengthening community partnerships. Clark College continues to be a beacon of opportunity and excellence in the region.



Dr. Edwards said, “In a prior State of the College address, I drew inspiration from Michelle Obama’s memoir *Becoming* to frame our work here at the college. In her book, the former first lady emphasizes that *becoming* is an ongoing journey, not a fixed destination. I share her belief that maintaining the status quo leads to stagnation, and meaningful change requires breaking out of familiar patterns. She also said that ‘it is possible to have our feet planted in reality but pointed in the direction of progress. We may live in the world as it is, but we can still work to create the world as it should be.’”

She said, “Today, I want to recognize our ongoing journey of *becoming* a beacon of hope, opportunities, and transformation rooted in social justice while providing excellent and equitable education.”

Dr. Edwards added, “This journey hasn’t been without its challenges, including the ongoing effects of a global pandemic, declines in nationwide enrollment, and two years of substantial resource reductions, all while expanding services to meet the evolving needs of our students.”

Then people gathered around for coffee, tea, and delicious heart-shaped cookies made by students in the Professional Baking and Pastry Arts program especially for the State of the College address on Valentine's Day.



Dr. Edwards stands with Baking and Pastry Arts students holding a tray of cookies. The address was held on Valentine's Day, so the guests were treated to heart-shaped cookies and coffee. *Photo: Clark College/Maureen Chan-Hefflin*

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

View more photos from the event on our Flickr Page.