

# Ventura College adding services after years of cuts, president says

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**POSTED:** 4:37 PM, Oct 10, 2014

**UPDATED:** 4:49 PM, Oct 10, 2014

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VENTURA, Calif. - Now that it's no longer cutting its budget, Ventura College has started adding services to help students transfer to four-year universities or launch careers, President Greg Gillespie said Friday in a state-of-the-college address.

"Students need to learn not only what they learn in the classroom, but also how to navigate college," said Gillespie, who became president of Ventura College a year ago.

Gillespie spoke Friday at the Crowne Plaza Ventura Beach Hotel. About 80 people attended the event, a fundraiser for the Ventura College Foundation, which provides tuition breaks and scholarships for students.

After years of recession-driven cuts, the state increased funding this year for community colleges. The Ventura County Community College District, which includes Ventura College, received an additional \$3.6 million in state funding this fiscal year to expand student services.

This year, Ventura College offered a one-week freshman orientation for the first time, said Gillespie, who attended community college himself. Orientation is especially important when about 60 percent of Ventura College students are the first in their families to go to college, he said.

The college also is adding a veterans center, which will have its grand opening on Veterans Day, he said.

These services aim to remove barriers students may face in getting a college education, including financial and personal hurdles, said Patrick Jefferson, executive vice president of student learning and the first in his family to attend college.

"We will have the attitude that every student is valuable and every student will be successful, whether they like it or not," Jefferson said.

That effort includes asking people in the community to serve as mentors, he said.

"We need people to talk with students, " Jefferson said. "Sometimes they just need someone who will say, 'You can do it.' "

Speakers also included students who talked about their college experiences. Beth Shephard reluctantly decided to go to Ventura College when she didn't get into any of the four-year universities she hoped to attend. On Friday, she said it's one of the best decisions she's ever made.

Shephard went on from Ventura College to UC Berkeley and is now working at the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging. She hopes to earn her master's degree in city planning.

"I got a lot of the guidance I needed to get out on my own," she said of Ventura College. "It was a perfect in-between for growing up."

Community college also allowed her to graduate debt-free, Shephard said.

"It's an excellent alternative to going away," she said. "It gives you more financial freedom."

Denise Baylor is funding two scholarships through the college foundation. Baylor went to Ventura College after her mother told her she had to either get a job or go to college. Eventually she earned her bachelor's degree in liberal studies.

Baylor doesn't have children of her own, but she wants to help others get an education, she said.

"These young people need some help, and not just financial help," she said. "They need someone to talk with them about life in general."

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