

Auto mechanics program may end

By JAMIE STEELE
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Lack of enrollment and excessive expenses could mean the end of the automotive mechanics and automotive technology degree programs at Western Piedmont Community College.

"We're trying right now to work something out with the public schools," said Jim Richardson, WPCC president. "It's been too expensive for us to have this program, due in part to the low enrollment."

Richardson said WPCC would like to share its auto mechanics facilities with the county schools.

"It would be much more cost-effective to share the facilities and the instructional staff with the other schools," he said. "Western Piedmont could use the facilities for its students at night, and the schools could use them during the day."

Larry Clark, dean of planning and research, said the issue of discontinuing the programs arised when Shirley Smith, automotive coordinator, announced his February retirement.

"Smith's retiring this month, on top of the declining enrollments in this program, has forced us to consider using the facilities for other programs that are currently growing," Clark said.

He added that the new two-year civil engineering program needed extra space.

Richardson said because mechanics has become "so high-tech," the automotive mechanics program, if continued, would have to be converted from a one-year to a two-year program.

"We've found that it's way too much for the students to learn all in one year," he said.

He said the college would work "closely" with the high schools, in order that the program not repeat any courses students may have previously taken.

He added the college would continue to work with area mechanics to assure that what the students learned would be useful to future employers.

Richardson said the program would continue until the end of the academic year, which ends in June.

"From that point on, we'll begin to see some changes," he said. "After June, we may close the program down for a year to reorganize it."

Carlos Hicks, school superintendent, mentioned the issue of the schools using WPCC's auto mechanics facility at the Board of Education meeting Monday night.

He placed the issue on the board's information agenda and said it would be addressed at a later date after the WPCC Board of Trustees had met.