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ECC awards more one-year certificates

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Elgin Community College is one of the fastest growing community colleges in the country.

So it should come as little surprise, perhaps, that the college awards more one-year certificates than almost any other institution in Illinois.

ECC ranked third in the state in granting one-year certificates, according to a recent survey by "Community College Week."

One-year certificates allow graduates to show employers they are proficient in a particular skill; they generally are not viewed as equivalent to two-year degrees.

The survey also ranked ECC 50th nationwide for one-year certificates.

Both those rankings are up from last year, when ECC was fifth in Illinois and 61st in the nation. The new survey is based on data from the 2009-10 academic year, when 924 students earned one-year certificates.

"This new ranking demonstrates the growing need of our community for workforce training," ECC President David Sam said in a statement. "The fact that we are currently expanding and enhancing our facilities to meet today's educational demands means we will be prepared to help even more students succeed."

The college is in the midst of a voter-approved, \$178 million expansion that includes a new academic library, a Health Careers Center and a state-of-the-art Multipurpose Classroom Building.

The college is growing on all fronts; "Community College Week" named ECC the fastest-growing community college in Illinois last year and the 13th fastest in the country.

Phil Garber, executive director of planning and institutional effectiveness, said the awarding of more certificates is partly a product of ECC's enrollment growth.

"I think it is correlated," Garber said. He added, "It does follow along with a lot of the interventions we've been piloting."

ECC is one of five community colleges in Illinois that participate in the Achieving a Dream initiative, which works to improve student success, particularly among low-income and minority populations.

According to ECC, the number of one-year certificates awarded rose by 27 percent from 2005 to 2010. During the 2010-11 school year, 1,012 students earned degrees at ECC; more than 1,140 earned certificates.