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Lieutenant governor tours IVCC

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Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon visited Illinois Valley Community College on Tuesday promoting the state's initiative to have 60 percent of working-age adults hold college degrees or certificates by 2025.

Simon, who Gov. Pat Quinn assigned to lead education reform efforts, is touring all 48 Illinois community colleges this fall. She has been meeting with students, faculty and staff at campuses to learn what community colleges are doing to increase graduation and completion rates and how the state might be able to help.

"It's really fun," Simon said. "We ask nosy questions and get a sense of what's going on."

IVCC administration officials met with Simon briefly to highlight the colleges successes such as its partnerships with local hospitals that support its flagship health education program, apprenticeship programs that lead to degrees and the recent openings of the Ottawa campus.

Afterwards, Simon met with dozens of faculty and students for a question and answer session that afforded her an opportunity to explain the motivation behind the Complete College Tour.

"We want to have a more educated workforce that can compete in this global economy," she said.

Simon said she was impressed with IVCC's efforts to create opportunities for high school juniors and seniors to attain college credit considering many high school seniors only need to attend school for half a day to attain the necessary credits for graduation.

"I go around and I see four years of high school is a bit much," she said. "I think the line between senior year in high school and freshman year in college should be more blurred.

"Senior year should be more challenging for seniors and we're not doing a good job of that," she said.

Simon also heard concerns about how performance-based funding may affect higher education opportunities for academically at-risk students with disabilities, issues involving financial aid availability for students, and the importance of not ignoring humanities and social sciences in the state's education initiative.

After the question and answer session, Simon personally took contact information from IVCC disability services coordinator Tina Hardy to further discuss issues involving at-risk students with disabilities.

"It's important for people to learn that college is not meant for the high school valedictorian and that there is a lot of value in it," she said. "It's part of all of our responsibility to talk about the value of a college education."