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Southern Vermont College welcomes its largest incoming class

By Patrick McArdle
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BENNINGTON — Southern Vermont College welcomed its largest ever incoming class Friday with new students moving into their dormitory rooms before becoming part of what is planned to be a new tradition at the college.

Karen Gross, president of Southern Vermont College, said there would be about 240 new students on the campus for the fall semester, about 175 of them first-year students.

“(New students) were here this morning. We opened, actually at 8 (a.m.) but people were here at 7, ready to move in, ready to make SVC their home, so this is very exciting for us,” she said.

The independent college, located in Bennington, started a new tradition this year by presenting a green tassel which Gross said was expected to send a message to students of “the hope and expectation that you don’t just come to college (but also) that you graduate college.”

“The goal is to give someone a tassel now that they can hold as a symbol of where they’re going,” she said.

The tassels given to the students on Friday are planned to be the same tassel they’ll wear at commencement. Gross said students will be asked to give the tassel to a family member to hold until graduation day arrives.

Michael Goodwin, director of counseling services and assistant dean of students, said the first day when students return was like a holiday for people at the college.

“For a lot of us working in higher education, this is our New Year’s. To me, this is New Year’s Eve. This is the celebration of getting ready, gearing up ... to start college,” he said

New students were greeted by volunteers like Corey Higgins, a nursing major from South Glens Falls, N.Y., entering her junior year, who wanted to make the experience special.

“When I was a freshman, I was extremely nervous. I only remember one person from my orientation group. ... I want to bring something memorable for the freshmen so that on their day of graduation, they will still look and think, ‘Remember that day in orientation and we met, we did this, I learned this about this one person,’” she said.

Katherine Grayson, of Kent, Conn., who was moving in on Friday, said she was drawn to Southern Vermont College by the cost of tuition, its location and the views from the campus and even though she said Bennington was much bigger than her hometown.

Danielle Healis, on the other hand, is coming to the college from San Diego, Calif.

“You only get to college once. It’s two years of your life and actually coming out here is completely different than California so I’m excited for the experience,” she said.

Coming from Brooklyn, Robert Blyden, who will major in business, expressed a similar sentiment.

“I thought it was time for me to make a big, drastic change and try it out in the complete opposite of where I live. (Bennington is) a small rural town and it’ll be a new experience. I’m sure if I can master this and I do good in a good city, there’s nothing, really, I can’t accomplish in the middle,” he said.