

College kids return in greater numbers

Classes look better as job market slows

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As classes begin today at the University of California at Berkeley, freshman Lisa Higuera has more to do than buy books and find her classrooms — she needs to change her hair color from the Stanford red she unwittingly dyed at this summer.

Sporting any red, she learned at an assembly for new students, could make her a target at Cal football games. Her hair would be hard to hide.

"It was blue before. I'll probably get it blue again to keep on the safe side," said Higuera, a 17-year-old from Los Angeles.

As the academic year gets under way this week, colleges and universities around the Bay Area are opening their doors to their

new and returning students, who are arriving in slightly higher numbers than last year.

Last fall, the hot market for jobs and the tight market for housing combined to keep many potential students away — but with the economy slumping, education looks more attractive. And while finding housing isn't a snap, the crunch has eased as failed dot-commers move along.

"When the economy is good, people take jobs and don't go to school," said Sonoma State University spokeswoman Susan Kashack said. "Once the economy starts to get shaky, people start thinking, 'Maybe I should go back to school and update my skills.'"

Sonoma State extended its registration deadline to August 31 to

College enrollment is up

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allow people displaced from the high technology bust to enroll, Kashack said. So far, enrollment is up more than 2 percent.

San Jose State seems to have a slight increase too, although Lee Dorosz, associate vice president for undergraduate studies said the impact of a slowing economy usually takes a few years to hit the four-year institutions because the newly unemployed often start at community colleges.

And in fact, full-time enrollment in the Peralta Community College District is up 4 percent, the largest increase since the fall of 1996. Some of that may be due to the economy — and some may be the result of several initiatives begun over the past year.

In orientation sessions at Sonoma State, students were treated to sessions presented by personalities from MTV's Real World and Road Rules shows, who talked about safe sex and conflict resolution. Berkeley students could attend sessions on the history of their school's student protests. San Francisco State students could opt for tours of San Francisco.

And UC Berkeley professor Seth Roberts believes he may have

found a solution for students seeking to avoiding the dreaded "freshman fifteen" — take his class.

New students often put on weight their first year away from home — and according to talk around campuses, the magic number is 15 pounds. Roberts' new freshman seminar "Weight Control" will give students an overview of losing, gaining and maintaining weight and attempt to debunk the myths of weight loss.

For those who don't take his class, Roberts — a 5-foot 11-inch professor of psychology who dropped from about 200 pounds to 160 pounds in the past year with special diets he devised in self-experiments — was willing to share one of his insights into the cause of the traditional freshman weight gain.

"I have a funny feeling it is the pizza," he said.

As UC Berkeley freshman Claudia Hernandez, 18, munched a huge chicken sandwich that she got for free at a new-student fair, she said it will be hard to stay away from the fattening food offered in the dorm dining hall.

"I've never been much of a weight worrier. But now I am scared because my mom is not here to watch what I eat," she said.



KENDRA LUCK / The Chronicle

Freshman Stephen Tanaka, 17, with help from his mom, Ann Tanaka, moved in at UC Berkeley last week.

Since Berkeley is still putting three students in dorm rooms built for two — and adding more such rooms this year — students are well advised to watch their weight.

"My bed is so close to the ceiling that I hit my head in the morning," said UC Berkeley freshman Linda Domjan, 18. "And I need more space for my

clothing, definitely."

The campus is building an additional 1,000 housing beds in the next few years, but Berkeley Chancellor Robert Berdahl conceded that the campus will continue to struggle with finding enough housing as its enrollment grows by an expected additional 4,000 students by 2010.

At most campuses, however,

the housing situation is far from the horror of the last few years, when students slept in cars, lived in motels and crashed on friends' floors for weeks.

"We really encourage people to tell us if they have real trouble. We have been known to put people up on our sofa, and we haven't been seeing that," said Becky White, assistant director of Cal

Rentals in the Department of Housing and Dining.

White said the number of listings from private landlords are on the rise, and rents are slowly coming down. Between June and August, the average rent of a studio apartment fell from \$1,002 to \$948.

She may yet have a few people taking her up on that night-on-the-couch offer, however.

While students hardened by the competition of past years feel the market easing, it still has some panicked.

"To a newcomer, it is still going to seem like it is quite challenging," White said.

At San Francisco State, students dropped out last year because they couldn't find housing after a residence hall that served 640 students was closed because toxic mold was found growing in the walls. The opening of a new 760-student apartment building this year has brought some relief.

Senior Ann Yoder, 26, who was commuting to campus from her parents' home in Walnut Creek, now shares an apartment on campus with one roommate in the new Village at Centennial Square.

"It is nice to just roll out of bed right before class," she said.

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