

New BTC chief settles in

Technical college president pleased with 'strategic goals'

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THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM — New students at Bellingham Technical College won't be the only new faces on campus when classes start this morning.

The school year also starts with a new president: Thomas C. Eckert.

The Washington native comes to Bellingham from Nicolet Area Technical College in northern Wisconsin, where he was the vice president of college services.

Eckert, 54, was in Wisconsin for about nine years and thinks he'll run into similar obstacles in Bellingham as he did there.

"The challenges facing technical colleges are pretty universal," he said. "The situation between state of Washington challenges and Wisconsin (challenges) are not that dissimilar — trying to do good work without the funds to do that good work."

Bellingham Technical College's board of trustees chose Eckert as the new president in the spring. The college's former president, Gerald Pumphrey, resigned in June 2006 to take the president role at South Puget Sound Community College. Former president Desmond McArdle acted as interim president for the 2006-07 school year while the board of trustees looked for a replacement.

Eckert, who will make a \$160,000 annual salary, didn't start his new position until right after Labor Day, due to prior commitments. He plans to hold a board retreat later this month to discuss the future of the college, but he doesn't envision making drastic changes.

"What we have in place in Bellingham is good strategic goals that the whole campus helped develop and I don't want to throw that out," he said.

In general, his first impressions of Bellingham and the Bellingham Technical College campus have been positive and he feels welcomed by everyone.



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Bellingham Technical College President Thomas C. Eckert, center, listens during a meeting on Monday.

"My impression of campus ... is it has an extremely competent and hard-working staff," he said. "The staff here truly cares about the students and is dedicated to success, and I don't say those things lightly."

In addition to a new president, students will see a new electro-mechanical program and a larger focus on math. The college also recently received some grant money to fund additional seats in high-demand work-force programs, such as electronics, and to offer more financial help to select students.