Cabrillo starts accelerated medical assistant program

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APTOS — Students enrolled in a new medical assistant program at Cabrillo College won't have to fight to get the classes they need, and they'll be able to enter the workforce in just two years, thanks to a two-year, grant-funded program.

Cabrillo is using the $350,000 grant to redesign the medical assistant program so students can complete it more quickly, all while learning skills local employers say they look for when hiring medical assistants, according to Pamela Sanborn, the department's program chairwoman.

As part of that grant, the “Medical Assistant Learning Community” pilot program will begin at the Aptos campus Feb. 8, the first day of spring semester. With the first block of courses centered around learning essential math and English skills.

“Everything in the first semester is contextualized, so students are not just taking an English class, they’re learning how to write in charts, and they’ll be learning essential math skills that they’ll need to be medical assistants,” Sanborn said.

In the existing, open-enrollment model, space is so tight that it can take up to 13 semesters for some students to receive their certifications, according to Sanborn.

But with the new program, students enroll in blocks of pre-arranged courses — 12.5 units are required for the first semester — and move through them together as a single group. And “for all the semesters they’re enrolled in the cohort, the block of classes they need to take is reserved for them, so students are essentially guaranteed spots,” Sanborn said.

About half of the 30 available spots for the spring semester are still open, and an orientation is scheduled for Jan. 25.

The all-day classes will be held at the Allied Health facility, which houses the college's health-related programs, as well as the Stroke & Disability Learning Center.

The grant actually started last year, but administrators spent the fall semester developing the pilot program, Sanborn said. Three cohorts are expected to move through it through spring 2013.

At that time, the grant will end, she said, and the medical assistant program will have been redesigned based on feedback from students.

Meanwhile, when Cabrillo's governing board meets Monday, members will discuss a 28 percent fee increase, from $36 to $46 per unit, that will begin in the summer. The hike results from $102 million in budget cuts to the state's 112 community colleges.