Cabrillo College revives popular wine program

School enrollment dips, despite adding classes
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POSTED: 04/08/2014 00:08:59 PM PDT  |  UPDATED: 4 MONTHS AGO

Aptos—> For the second year in a row, Cabrillo College has more seats than students to fill them.

Though official enrollment numbers won’t be available until summer, the college will not be able to equal last year’s numbers if classes aren’t filled, said Kathleen Welch, vice president of instruction. Classes are less than 90 percent full, she said.

“We’ve got the seats. We’ve got the space,” Welch said.

Budget cuts in 2008 forced the college start cutting classes, pushing enrollment down. Until 2012, when increased state funding allowed more course offerings, Cabrillo’s classes were full and students had difficulty getting in, Welch said. The college continued to add classes in Fall 2013, particularly in math, science and distance education.

Among the programs revived this fall was a popular wine program, which used to turn away students each semester. The nine-class rotation, started in 2000 as part of Cabrillo’s culinary arts and hospitality program, was among several suspended in 2011 due to budget cuts.

Isabel O’Connor, dean of human arts and social sciences, said what prompted the wine program’s revival was pressure from local employers at advisory board meetings.

“We kept hearing they want graduates who can not just serve the food but also recommend wine to the client and understand the pairings,” O’Connor said.

The two introductory wine classes offered this fall were 95 percent full. This spring the program’s three classes, which includes a California wines elective, are 75 percent full, O’Connor said.

Sue Slater, Cabrillo College instructor who leads the wine program, said potential students were unaware the program has returned.

She’s planning for six more classes and certificate and associate degree programs within the next few years. This summer, the college will offer a French sparkling wine and champagne class, which she said she expects to fill.

The program meets a local need for affordable, quality wine education, Slater said. Students learn not only how to taste, but also how to grow grapes and make wine.

“Many people have taken this class on an ‘Oh, this might be interesting’ level, and they’ve taken it to ‘I’m quitting my day job’,” Slater said.

Scott Ebersole has taken seven Cabrillo wine classes since 2005, and said the program has changed his life. Along with eight classmates, he started a co-op in 2009 that produces 22 barrels of wine per year.

“It’s definitely a labor of love,” said Ebersole, who said he moved to Corralitos last year to be closer to five other co-op members, one of whom planted a 2-acre vineyard in 2010. The group plans to have wines available for sale next year, he said.

Cabrillo’s wine program makes the community more vibrant, said Ebersole, a pilot.

“Aside from meeting a great group of friends, honestly it’s kept me in Santa Cruz,” he said.

What: Seats available in all classes, including “French wine and champagne” and new math and science courses

When: Registration begins April 14, classes start June 9

Where: 6500 Soquel Drive in Aptos and 318 Union St. in Watsonville

Cost: $46 per unit for California residents, $346 for out-of-state

Details: Visit www.cabrillo.edu or call 831-479-6201