LOCAL ECONOMY

Cabrillo enrollment drops 8 percent

Cabrillo College’s fall enrollment is down 7.6 percent compared to last year’s, continuing a three-year trend largely due to a recovering economy, say campus officials.

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APTOS » Cabrillo College’s fall enrollment is down 7.6 percent compared to last year’s, continuing a three-year trend largely due to a recovering economy, say campus officials.

Students still have four weeks to add classes, so enrollment numbers won’t be final until mid-September. Meanwhile, the campus is adding more classes in an attempt to narrow the gap, said Kathleen Welch, vice president of instruction.

“We’re headed in the right direction,” said Welch, who said three weeks ago, fall enrollment was down 10 percent. The economy is the driving factor in community college enrollment, she said.

“Recessions bring students. Jobs return, (we) lose students,” Welch said. Welch said she expects the enrollment gap to be at around 5 percent by Sept. 2, the first day of classes. The campus is adding public safety and criminal justice classes she expects to boost numbers.

Official enrollment has dropped between 2 to 4 percent each year since 2011, according to Cabrillo’s enrollment tracker, available at tinyurl.com/cabtrack.

Another contributing factor to the drop is state legislation, effective last fall, limiting the number of times students may repeat classes. Part of the Student Success Act, changes intended to speed students through community college, students are only allowed to take the same course three times.

Last fall, Cabrillo had 780 students who were no longer able to repeat a course, mostly in the arts, according to Terrence Willet, planning, research and knowledge systems director. While those students represent roughly 5 percent of Cabrillo’s approximately 14,000 students, some elected to take other classes instead.

“The actual hit in enrollment (due to repeatability rules), it’s probably 1 to 2 percent,” said Willet. “That’s a pretty good estimate, but it’s a tough number to pin down exactly.”

As far as enrollment’s impact to revenue, Willet said the campus will have a better idea by spring semester, when the campus changes how it manages faculty workloads and devotes more resources to student recruitment. If these changes can generate strong numbers, Willet said he expects a healthy budget moving forward.

“This fall we may be a little under, but we have some changes afoot for spring,” Willet said. “If the next summer is even better, we might still be OK and not have to discuss any cuts.”