Dental hygiene program at Cabrillo College to cap student admission

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APTO, Calif. - Major changes are coming to a nationally accredited dental hygiene program on the Central Coast. Cabrillo College in Aptos is putting a cap on how many students it will admit starting next fall.

College officials said because enrollment is declining, they don't have the money to keep the program running the same.

In fall 2015, dental hygiene students will be admitted into the program every two years, instead of every year. Program officials are concerned the change will make the waitlist to get in even longer.

The dental hygiene clinic at Cabrillo College provides about 3,000 patient services a year. Students from all over hope for a coveted spot in the highly acclaimed program.

"We are not eliminating the program, which is absolutely key. The program is being realigned to admit students once every two years so now year's intake has been eliminated and the following year 2015-16 we will admit our next class," said Jan Hasam, dean of Health, Athletics, Wellness and Kinesiology at Cabrillo College.

But student Monica Ibanez said without the first and second class being together, first-year students won't have mentors to learn from.

"It's just going to be very detrimental for the whole program and not having the whole experience like we do now is just going to be a big bummer," Ibanez said.

The college as a whole has seen a decline in enrollment. Officials looked at high-cost programs and determined the dental hygiene program is the most expensive.

"It's true. It's a hardship for us. We have tried as best we possibly can to try to find a solution before it came to this," Hasam said.

"We have about 46 students on our waitlist right now. If we do not take a class next summer those students then instead of having a year to two-year wait then they will have a two to three year wait," said Dr. Bridget Clark, program chair.

Dr. Clark said an even bigger impact comes for the community. Patients won't be seen for at least nine months because 10 faculty and staff would also lose their jobs.

"Since I've come I've really just enjoyed the thoroughness of what's been done here," said Marion Wahl, patient. "I'd be sad if they had to scale down. I think they should be scaling up."

A board meeting will be held at the Sesnon House at Cabrillo College at 8 p.m. on Monday.

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