Program changes difficult

By Dr. Laurel Jones
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The past year has seen multiple changes in legislation and other economic outcomes that have impacted enrollments at Cabrillo College. We have traversed through the restrictions imposed by the statewide “repeatability legislation.” We were successful in combating additional legislation that would have ended our ability to offer noncredit music ensemble classes. Additionally, we have increased the number of lifelong learning opportunities.

As our economy rebounded, many of Cabrillo’s former students found employment, thereby improving the fiscal health of the county and state. However, our declining enrollment has made it difficult to achieve the state-established enrollment target for which we are funded. For the past two years, Cabrillo has used one-time funds to continue offering classes that are part of our comprehensive college model. This is no longer a sustainable strategy, and we are now engaged in data-driven conversations about where we can reduce classes without discontinuing programs.

The discussions have centered around four criteria:

• Courses that show a pattern of low enrollment over the last few semesters
• Multiple sections that do not fill and could be combined into fewer sections
• Courses offered once per year that could be offered once every other year
• High cost courses not supported by significant external resources

One extremely difficult decision involves admitting dental hygiene students every other year, which addresses the last two criteria. Our dental hygiene program provides an excellent career option. Historically, the program has admitted 22 students per year and has graduated 16-20 of those students. The cost of one dental hygiene student (based solely on the program’s direct cost of instruction) is approximately $35,000 for the two-year program. The state reimburses the college at approximately $8,000 per program graduate.

As advocates for Cabrillo, support us by advocating at the state level for differential funding, which would reimburse all community colleges at a higher rate for our higher cost career technology programs. Visit the Community Updates section on Cabrillo’s website at www.cabrillo.edu and click on the ‘Differential Funding Advocacy Letter Template.’

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