

Local

Cabrillo trustees pass 'hot potato' to new president

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There is a political hot potato waiting to be dropped on the lap of whoever takes over as the next Cabrillo College president.

Cabrillo's governing board last night rid itself for now of the controversial task of outlining job qualifications for the position of assistant dean of off-campus programs by tabling the issue and passing it on to the new president, who will be selected in late summer or early fall this year.

At issue is whether bilingual skills should be a "required" or simply a "desirable" qualification for the assistant dean position. The dean will be in charge of all off-campus programs. At present, the Watsonville Center, with a predominantly Hispanic enrollment, is the only off-campus facility, but Cabrillo officials plan to open a similar facility in the Scotts Valley area in a few years.

The controversy over the wording has been brewing for several months, with the teachers' and classified workers' unions and the Cabrillo Hispanic Advisory Council (CHAC) strongly in favor of requiring that candidates for the position be bilingual. They argue that since the majority of Cabrillo students in Watsonville are Hispanic and that Cabrillo is trying to attract more Hispanics from the South County area, it only makes sense that the new dean be bilingual.

The position is being temporarily filled by Doug Barr, who is not bilingual. Barr, who works for the school's student services department, administers the position along with his other duties. He is one of the candidates in the running for the dean position.

The majority of board members oppose the provision requiring bilingual skills, saying it limits the field of candidates and smacks of "reverse discrimination."

Last night's move puts the issue on the back burner until a permanent replacement is found for interim president Cliff Nichols. The new president will "set the direction" in which the matter will be handled, according to board member George Couch.

Couch said the board was "deeply divided" on the matter and the delay was seen as a way of easing tension on the board. He added the school may actually not have the money to pay for the position in any event.

"We did it (delayed the decision) to avoid a dispute about an issue that may not come about," he said. Couch, who supports making bilingual skills a requirement, said the

move was seen as "a small victory" for his side because the board majority would have voted to make bilingual skills "desirable" rather than mandatory.

Trustees actually voted 4-2 at last month's meeting to make bilingual skills for the position "desirable" but later rescinded the vote and agreed to take up the matter at last night's meeting. Couch and board president Nancy Matlock were in the minority, with John Boone, Bridie Franich, Davige Moore and Helen Palmer in three majority in the initial vote.

The vote last night to put off the decision until a new president is selected headed off another round of acrimonious debate. Faculty members, League of United Latin American Citizen representatives, and CHAC members were at the meeting ready to protest if the board had voted the same way it did at the last meeting.

There were also several black community leaders prepared to oppose making bilingual skills a requirement for the post because they believe it would limit the field for other minority candidates, including blacks.

Billy Glover, a Cabrillo administrator and candidate for the job, said mandating that the assistant dean be bilingual could be viewed as discriminatory.

"We have to be very careful of the messages we send to the community," he said. Glover, who is black, said he has heard black members in the community say that "Cabrillo doesn't hire blacks."

Glover, who has been at the college since 1978, said Cabrillo has not hired a full-time black teacher since 1972 and the school only has about four or five part-time black instructors now.

Glover did not think the goals of the black community were in opposition to those of organizations like CHAC. Shirley Castillo, president of the Watsonville chapter of LULAC, was not completely convinced.

"It would seem that ethnic and racial minorities are in opposition," Castillo said, adding that blacks and Hispanics "have always been allies."

But she said neither Glover nor any members of the black community contacted her or members of CHAC to discuss the matter of the assistant dean position.

Having blacks and Hispanics in what seems to be on opposite sides of the assistant dean issue was disturbing to Castillo.

"It's very surprising and very sad," she said.