

Local

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Cabrillo sidesteps on bilingual skills; LULAC vows to fight

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The Cabrillo College governing board did a quick sidestep at their meeting last night.

First, they voted 4-2 against a resolution that would have made bilingual skills a requirement for applicants who are seeking the position of assistant dean of off-campus services.

Then, a few moments later, they changed their minds and tabled the matter until they could find out if requiring applicants to be bilingual would violate state or federal laws.

The issue of whether to make bilingual skills "required" or "desirable" as a qualification has become a hot potato for college officials. They have been under pressure from campus faculty and staff organizations and the teachers' and classified workers' unions to make bilingual skills a requirement.

The Cabrillo Hispanic Advisory Council, an organization of mostly Hispanic administrators, has led the push. At last night's meeting, CHAC president Francisco Ponce told board members the head of off-campus services should be bilingual, because that person would be working primarily at the Watsonville Center, which has a predominantly Hispanic student population.

Ponce has been lobbying for support from Watsonville leaders, such as Mayor Todd McFarren and members of the League of United Latin American Citizens.

He said there was a consensus among leaders in Watsonville that the head of the Center should be bilingual.

Ponce reminded the board that Cabrillo College's long-range plans include increasing outreach efforts in Watsonville.

"We have an opportunity for Cabrillo to make a statement," he said. "I think it is imperative that this position require bilingual skills."

Shirley Castillo, president of the Watsonville chapter of LULAC, echoed Ponce's comment, saying, "I think you have an opportunity to show that you are culturally sensitive, especially to the Latino community in Watsonville."

Board members George Couch and Nancy Matlock strongly agreed. They said Cabrillo should widen its scope to include as many people in Watsonville as possible.

"Outreach is very a important part of this job," Matlock said. "It's hard to reach out if you don't have

the skills to reach out."

But other board members had a different point of view on the matter. While they agreed that it would be helpful for the dean to be bilingual, they felt it was not necessary. They were also in agreement that making bilingual skills a requirement could limit the num-

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— board member Nancy

Matlock

ber of applicants qualified for the job.

"I believe affirmative action should be inclusive, not exclusive," said board member Helen Palmer. She added that requiring bilingual skills could also lower the quality of pool of applicants.

Board members John Boone, Bridie Franich and David Moore were in agreement with Palmer. But Boone went a little farther and added that requiring applicants be bilingual could make the college guilty of reverse discrimination.

The idea did not sit well with Castillo and Ponce, who gasped at the mention of reverse discrimination.

The board then voted down the proposal 4-2, with Moore, Palmer, Franich and Boone voting against the measure and Couch and Matlock voting for it. Board member David Weiss was not present at the meeting.

After the vote, board student representative Matthew Dennis made a motion to postpone final action on the matter until college officials could look into the legal ramifications of requiring applicants to be bilingual. The motion passed unanimously.

The move kept the debate alive, but Castillo said she saw the compromise as a delay tactic.

As Castillo was leaving the board meeting room, she said to herself, "This means war." She said LULAC would step up efforts to garner more support from the community to put pressure on the administration.

The board will take up the matter at its meeting next month. Cabrillo College hopes to fill the position by the fall. Currently, Doug Barr is acting dean of off-campus services. Barr, who is not bilingual, also works for student services.