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Work-study program at Cabrillo struggles with cash confusion

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Cabrillo College work-study students are breathing a little easier after a false alarm from school officials last week that their funding might run out before the end of the semester.

But following a budget review, Manuel Osorio, dean of student services, announced that the work-study program is solvent and will not run out of money this semester. Students, he said, don't need to panic about their funds being cut after all.

Work-study eligibility is awarded to students as part of their financial aid package. It is the students' responsibility to find employment.

Rumors started flying after the estimated 106 students learned the program's expenditures were running higher than anticipated and that Osorio had ordered a budget review. He also contacted campus departments where work-study students were employed and called for a hiring freeze until the review was completed.

Financial aid officials, Osorio said, "over-award" work-study allocations each year because a large portion of students who qualify decide not to participate in the program. This year, Cabrillo was allocated about \$113,000 in federal work-study funding.

This year, however, program enrollment was higher than anticipated, Osorio said, and in January, financial aid staff notified Osorio that expenditures were also running higher than expected and at the current level, work-study funding could run out before the program ends on June 3.

It was at this point that Osorio ordered the review and hiring freeze, starting the rumor-mill churning.

Osorio said he regrets the decision to inform the department heads and not the students.

"In retrospect, I should have sent out memos to both the supervisors and the students," he said.

After the review, Osorio sent letters to work-study students to reassure them that the program's funding was sound. But he also requested that they keep their work hours to a minimum.

One of the main reasons behind the over-award policy, Osorio said, is to ensure that all work-study funding gets used. Surplus funds at the end of the current school year are withheld the following year. During the 1990-91 term, the school under-spent by being "overly conservative," Osorio said. But the move cost the school funding the following year.

Under the work-study program, students earn \$5 an hour and may work a maximum of 19 hours a week, Osorio said. Most students average about 15 hours a week.

Of the 106 work-study students, only one works off campus, at a non-profit organization that contracts with Cabrillo to participate in the program. Employers in the community pay 40 percent of the students' salary, with the rest from work-study funds.

On campus, the program covers 80 percent of the salary, with the college making up the rest. However, in the last two years, federal officials have waived the 20 percent contribution and now pays for 100 percent of the students' salaries for on-campus jobs.