

# Shrinking enrollment

## Higher fees are only partly to blame for loss of students at community colleges

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Enrollment at Cabrillo College this semester has declined by nearly 11 percent, the second time this year it has seen a double-digit drop.

As of Friday, the last day of late registration, 12,217 students were attending Cabrillo. Last fall that figure was 13,695.

Cabrillo is not alone in experiencing a drop in enrollment. Many

community colleges throughout the state are reporting the same.

Channing Wong, research analyst for the office of the California Community Colleges, said preliminary figures of a statewide survey indicate enrollment is down between 9 and 10 percent. The survey, which includes 28 of the state's 107 community colleges across the state, will be completed next week.

Wong said the range in enroll-

ments vary from remaining flat to drops of more than 20 percent. Enrollment at Gavilan Community College in Gilroy dropped 10 percent. San Jose City College's enrollment, however, actually picked up from last fall. Officials there report an increase of about 1 percent.

While an 11 percent decrease at Cabrillo may sound like a lot, try 25 percent. That's how much enrollment dropped this fall at neigh-

boring Monterey Peninsula College.

The biggest reason for the decrease has to do with the departure of hundreds of personnel from Fort Ord, said Vera Coleman, admissions and records office manager at Monterey Peninsula.

Last fall, for example, there were more than 50 classes offered at its Fort Ord campus. This fall, only three classes are being held

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there. The school had originally scheduled seven classes, but there were only enough students to fill three.

School officials had actually anticipated a 30 percent drop, said Coleman.

"So we're actually up," said Coleman, laughing.

Hartnell College in Salinas reports a 12 percent decrease from last fall, said Ignacio Pando, vice president of student services.

Pando said there are a few reasons for the drop, two of which have to do with fees.

Fees went up last spring from \$6 per unit to \$10 and a fee cap was removed. Students with bachelor's degrees saw their fees soar from \$6 per unit to \$50 per unit that semester. This fall, fees again increased to \$13 per unit for un-

dergraduate students; fees for those holding degrees — called differential fee — remain the same.

But during the summer when the state was drafting its budget, community colleges were set to get a fee hike, but no one knew just how high they would go. This unknown factor discouraged and may have frightened away those thinking of attending community colleges, Pando said.

"We all got caught up in all this hysteria about fee increases," Pando said.

Hartnell's starting date for classes may have also contributed to its enrollment decline, Pando said. This year they started on Aug. 16, a time when many youngsters are still working at their summer jobs, Pando said. Hartnell is considering a later start date for next year, Pando said.

Hartnell could have increased its enrollment, Pando said, if it had used a public relations cam-

paign to attract more students.

"We didn't do a good enough job of tooting our horn," Pando said.

Cabrillo did launch an ad campaign this year. The ads compared fees at Cabrillo with those of University of California and California State University fees. It cost Cabrillo between \$12,000 to \$15,000 to advertise in local newspapers and radio and for direct mailing.

During the last spring semester Cabrillo had an enrollment decrease of more than 12 percent. That was the first semester the \$10 fee and the differential fee went into effect.

Enrollment at Cabrillo's Watsonville satellite campus — the Watsonville Center — went up this semester for the third straight year. There are 695 students attending classes at the Watsonville Center. Last fall there were 687 students in attendance, and in fall 1991 enrollment stood at 661.

Next spring, the Watsonville

Center is expected to move into the old post office building, where it will have more than 10,000 square feet of space. The Center is now at La Manzana Shopping Center, where it rents about 4,500 square feet of space.

This semester also saw the biggest percentage of minority students at Cabrillo, about 25 percent. Latino students made up 16.7 percent of this fall's enrollment.

Last spring Latino students accounted for 15.5 percent. Last fall that figure was 14.9 percent, and in the fall 1991 that figure was 13.7.

The decrease in enrollment could spell trouble for community colleges, because funding — in part — is based on previous year enrollment figures. Colleges get about \$3,000 per student.

But for some time Cabrillo's enrollment has been about 1,000 over its funding cap, meaning that the state has not funded the college for those 1,000 students.