Las Positas College needs more revenue to meet student needs

Las Positas College, the Tri-Valley's award-winning community college, is a shining star among California universities and state colleges that accept hundreds of its graduates each year, but there could be trouble ahead.

Kevin Walther, a doctorate-degreed administrator who became president of the school last year, told the Rotary Club of Pleasanton last week that enrollment, which peaked at 10,045 students just two years ago, has dropped to 8,760 because of shrinking state funding. Course offerings also have been trimmed, from 927 courses offered in 2009 to 793 today. The "fill rate," which determines how many can be in a classroom, is already at 95% with some teachers volunteering to take on more students than they are contractually obligated to handle. Since 2010, cuts in state funding have cost LPC about 5,500 seats per semester and more than 13,300 seats for the 2011-2012 school year.

Through the Measure B bond measure, LPC received enough funds to build facilities and upgrade infrastructure to meet rising enrollment. This included a new state-of-the-art science complex nearing completion, a student services building and special campus pathways to ease the burden of students with physical disabilities. Measure B funds also allowed the college to install solar panels that now generate more than half of the electricity needed to power the campus. This has not only reduced the college’s carbon footprint, but it also has saved millions of dollars that are being used to serve students.

But Sacramento, not school administrators, determines how many students can attend the state’s community college system, and that number is shrinking across California. The Las Positas College Foundation has helped and other fundraising efforts, including LPC’s joint venture with the city of Livermore to sponsor an Independence Day picnic and fireworks show on the campus, provide needed financial help. But it’s the millions of dollars in state aid that keep LPC and other community colleges afloat and those funds are withering.

Walther said that LPC’s budget will stay about the same in 2013 if Gov. Jerry Brown’s Proposition 30 tax measure is approved on Nov. 6. Without those additional funds, LPC will likely be faced with a $5.2 million mid-year budget cut. The LPC/Chabot College board of trustees has also placed Measure I on the Nov. 6 ballot, which is a $28 per parcel tax that would provide $5.6 million per year to both LPC and Chabot. Measure I requires a two-thirds vote to pass; Measure 30 can pass with a simple majority vote.

Walther is urging voters to approve both Prop. 30 and Measure I.

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