Access to higher education hampered locally, statewide and nationwide

Obstacles to Enrollment for Potential Cypress College Students

At Cypress College, like most colleges, we find each semester that some individuals apply to the college, but do not end up enrolling for classes. These individuals have a clear intent to attend the college, but they did not actually attend classes. In Spring 2005, Cypress College launched a study to learn more about the various factors that contribute to this pattern. Over 400 potential students responded to this email survey.

The study showed that potential students applied to Cypress College but did not enroll for a variety of reasons. Over 20% of respondents said they went to another college. Another 20% couldn’t get the class(es) they wanted. Approximately 15% of respondents said they did not enroll due to financial reasons, a change in work schedules or more responsibilities at work. Another 11% said an increase in family responsibilities was an obstacle. It is clear from the findings that our students are dealing with many different issues when deciding whether to pursue higher education.

That prospective students face financial constraints and cannot get classes they want is particularly troubling when looking at the issue of access to college. The opportunity for access to higher education is one of the hallmarks of the California Community College system. A high quality education that is affordable to all is what the System is based on. However, feedback from these prospective Cypress College students shows that this is not necessarily the case. Many can’t start due to financial constraints and many can’t pursue a higher education due to the inability of the college to offer more course offerings.

The survey results also show that nearly 87% of potential Cypress College students who did not enroll because of financial reasons still want to enroll at Cypress College in Fall 2005. Of those who didn’t enroll because they couldn’t get classes, 93% still want to enroll at Cypress College in Fall 2005.

The findings clearly show that demand for an education at Cypress College is present. However, many different obstacles including financial constraints and the inability to get classes hamper prospective students’ access to higher education.

Impacts of Student Fee Increase and Budget Changes on Enrollment and Financial Aid in the California Community Colleges

In April, the Chancellor’s Office presented to the California State Legislature, a report examining the effects of the fee increases and budget crises on the California Community College system during 2003-04.

Some of the findings include:

- A significant loss of over 180,000 first-time freshmen and returning students.
- A significant loss of older (age 30-49) students.
- Decreases in participation rates in all student ethnicities.
Between Spring 2002 and Fall 2003 the number of available course sections in the CCC system dropped by over 12,000 while class size rose from 27 to 29.

While the number of students decreased, the amount of financial aid awarded increased to over $1 billion in 2003-04.

The table below shows the changes in enrollment statewide and at Cypress College from Fall 2002 to Spring 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cypress College</th>
<th>Statewide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Headcount</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>14,720</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>14,559</td>
<td>-11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2003</td>
<td>12,963</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2004</td>
<td>12,874</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Cypress College Research Office
Chancellor’s Office, Management Information Services

A link to the full report can be found in the helpful links section of this newsletter.

Postsecondary Participation Rates by Sex and Race/Ethnicity: 1974-2003

Participation rates are always an important statistic when looking at access. A new publication from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) examines participation in postsecondary education among women and men and among different racial/ethnic groups, from 1974 to 2003. Participation rates are defined here as the proportion of 18 to 24 year olds who are enrolled in or have completed postsecondary education. Over this time period, the participation rates of young women and of young Whites outpaced that of their male and minority counterparts, so that by 2003 young women had a higher participation rate than young men (reversing the pattern in 1974). Meanwhile, the 1974 gaps in participation rates favoring young Whites and Hispanics grew larger. In 2003, the gender gaps in participation were not significantly different across racial/ethnic groups, nor were racial/ethnic gaps different across gender groups. Moreover, the 10 percentage point gender gap in 2003 was smaller than the racial/ethnic gaps between Whites and Blacks (15 percentage points) and between Whites and Hispanics (23 percentage points).

A link to the full report can be found below in the helpful links section of this newsletter.

Institutional Research serves Cypress College by providing sound, action-oriented research in order to support institutional assessment, decision-making, and strategic planning. The research office strives to provide consistent and accurate information that will help decision-makers to act on behalf of students and the community to foster student success and institutional effectiveness.