

Chancellor paints dim picture of state community colleges

By Kathryn Reed

Community college enrollment is declining, but it has nothing to do with demand decreasing.

California Community Colleges Chancellor Jack Scott spoke with the media Wednesday, outlining his predictions for the future of the 112 two-year schools "which is the largest system of higher education in the country.

After a peak enrollment of 2.89 million students in 2008-09 and three consecutive years of increases, the system is on track to post a 1 percent decline for the 2009-10 school year. It's expected to go down even more in the 2010-11 school year.



Jack Scott

This comes at a time when California high school graduates are at record levels, with the class of 2010 predicted to be larger than last year's.

"Really, we have the perfect storm in terms of enrollment," Scott said.

The problem is the 8 percent cut by the state this fiscal year, or \$520 million, means colleges have to cut courses. This comes at a time when workers want to be retrained and

more high school students need community colleges because the University of California and California State University systems have placed caps on the number of students they will take.

“Right now we are estimating we will educate 200,000 student for which we will receive no re-numeration from the state. This is not something we can continue to do,” Scott said.

He said some colleges have reported 50 percent of their students unable to enroll in the classes they need because not enough sections are offered to meet the demand.

Lake Tahoe Community College budgeted 65 unfunded students for this year. The local board was told Tuesday that number so far is really 236. LTCC’s enrollment is bucking the state trend, with it up 7.3 percent to 4,673 students.

LTCC cut 48 classes from this winter quarter compared to the previous year and will eliminate 64 in spring quarter.

“We need to plan for a small amount of unfunded growth,” Susan Middleton, LTCC dean of student services, told the board.

The chancellor’s office and others in Sacramento want to make sure the two-year schools focus on their mission “preparing students to transfer to a four-year college, basic skills and career technology.

When *Lake Tahoe News* asked Scott if this decree means taking the “community” out of community college in places like Lake Tahoe that have a robust student population that likes to take recreation oriented classes, the chancellor said, “it’s a matter of priorities.”

Scott said English and history need to come before aerobics.

LTCC is one of many colleges planning to tweak summer school offerings as a way to cut expenses. It’s likely multiple

sections of a subject will not be offered and class sizes will increase.

“I would imagine during the summer months some colleges will close buildings that are not used in the summer months,” Scott said.

Scott is in a unique position of leading this education system because he is a former college president as well as past member of the state Assembly and Senate.

Still, he is less than optimistic about what will happen if the state continues to cut higher education.

“This divestiture from higher education in California won’t meet future work force needs,” Scott said. “I read a report by the Public Policy Institute that estimated by 2025 we will have 1 million fewer college graduates than what the economy needs.”

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has proposed an increase in funding for community colleges that would add \$126 million to the bottom line, which equates to 60,000 students. But what the May budget revise will look like remains to be seen.