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Crowded Cal State U. Campuses Are Asked to Add Distance-Education Programs

BY DAN CARNEVALE

THE BOARD of the California State University System has approved a measure that would require the system's most crowded campuses to increase their enrollment capacity by using various tactics, including relying more on distance education.

Distance education is only part of the solution adopted by the California State Board of Trustees, said Ken Swisher, a spokesman for the system. Using campus space more efficiently—for instance, by scheduling more summer, night, and weekend courses—will probably accommodate even more students than online learning, he said.

A 1960 California law requires universi-

ties in the Cal State system to accept local applicants who are California residents in the top third of their high-school graduating classes. If the institutions begin to run out of room for students, state law requires them to develop strategies to prevent the campuses from filling up and having to tighten their admissions standards.

California State University is expecting a 30- to 40-percent enrollment increase over the next 10 years, Mr. Swisher said. Already, the campuses have grown by 40,000 students during the past five years, he said, to enroll a total of about 360,000.

William D. Campbell, a trustee who supported the measure, said the board's new policy should make it possible for institu-

tions to avoid turning away local students. He noted that San Diego State University reached full capacity in 1999 and began refusing admissions even to those who lived nearby.

YEAR-ROUND INSTRUCTION

Mr. Campbell said the board's new policy would mean that local students could attend classes at San Diego State, while others could take courses through distance education or at off-campus centers. "As long as we have the capacity statewide to accommodate all the students, we should do that," he said.

The plan adopted by the board also calls for year-round instruction and more effi-

cient use of existing space on and off the system's campuses.

The language of the board's policy is purposely left vague, so that individual institutions may decide for themselves how to achieve its ends. The system doesn't have any statistics to prove that distance education will let it serve more students, Mr. Swisher said. But administrators do know that many of their students are parents or have full-time jobs, which may lead them to use distance education.

The system already has some distance-education programs, in which 21,000 students participated during the 1997-98 academic year, the most recent year for which figures are available.

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