

Jan. 31, 2002

SF Chronicle

D4 2002 5036E1

More entering CSU need help to stay

Proficiency in English, math falls

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The California State University system, engaged in an effort to reduce the number of students enrolling who need remedial work, fell short of its goals for 2001.

According to figures released yesterday to the CSU Board of Trustees at a meeting in Long Beach, 53.83 percent of freshman arrived proficient in math or English in fall 2001.

The figures dipped from the previous year, a full point in math and almost the same in English. Only 38 percent of the students entering in 2001 were proficient in both subjects.

Trustee Ralph Pesqueira said he was disappointed with the figures and that having to offer students remedial classes strains the university and the faculty.

"I don't think we are paying our teachers to be teaching high school subjects," he said.

But by another measure, CSU efforts to improve their students' skills is working. CSU students who fail the mandatory proficiency exam taken in 12th grade must take remedial courses during their first 15 months of college, either at a CSU campus or community college. If they don't, they are out of the system until they have completed the courses at a community college.

CSU officials said yesterday that systemwide, 6.7 percent of the 2000 freshman class was kicked out after those students did not show they can do college-level math and English by the end of their first year.

But 81 percent of the freshmen enrolled in fall 2000 needing remediation satisfied the requirement before their sophomore year. That was a jump up from the 78 percent of 1999 freshman who gained proficiency their first year.

San Francisco State's figures mirrored the system figures, rising from 78 percent to 81 percent — although it booted 211 students this year, versus 199 last year.

David Spence, executive vice chancellor and chief academic officer for CSU, said the only stu-

dents who were forced to leave were those who made no efforts to complete the remedial courses.

In 1996, after seeing its 22 campuses flooded with ill-prepared freshmen, the CSU Board of Trustees called for the system to increase the percentage of entering students who are proficient in math to 58 percent and in English to 67 percent in 2001.

By 2004, the trustees want to see those figures rise to 74 percent in math and 78 percent in English. The eventual goal is to raise the proficiency level of incoming students in both subjects from the 32 percent level of 1998 to 90 percent in 2007.

Spence said that much of the problem lies with reading. Students are not reading critically, and there is no direct instruction in reading in high school, he said.

He said CSU is now working to address the problem by providing tutoring and mentoring for high school students and working with their teachers to improve instruction in both English and math.

"The message is, we need to stay the course. I really believe that in two to three years we will start to see more results," Spence said. "I believe we can make these goals in 2004 or come very close."

CSU has to admit students who are in the top one-third of their high school classes and have at least a B average.

At San Francisco State, more students arrived in 2001 needing remediation than the year before, with only 44.6 percent proficient in math and 58.35 in English, compared with 46.16 percent and 60.21 percent respectively.

"My job is watching students go through this one by one to help them get through this," said Karen Kingsbury, director of the office of Orientation and Retention at SF State, which was created in 2000 to address the problem. "We want to keep them, and everybody is working together to ensure that."

The full report can be found at
www.calstate.edu/PAnews/remedia02.shtml

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