Candlelight vigil held to protest enrollment reductions
By DAVID STEFFEN, Staff Writer
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CALEXICO — Tiny dancing flames illuminated the entrance of San Diego State University, Imperial Valley campus, in Calexico here Wednesday night during a candlelight vigil protesting enrollment reductions.

“It’s because I either stay here, or I have to go somewhere outside the Imperial Valley, and I’d rather stay here and help my community as much as I can,” said Southwest High School senior Tanya Pimentel, who applied for SDSU-IV admission.

SDSU-IV Dean Stephen Roeder said mandates from California State University Chancellor Charles Reed and SDSU President Stephen Weber reduce enrollment at SDSU-IV by 11.6 percent due to the state budget crisis. That amounts to 110 full- and part-time students for the 2010-2011 school year at the SDSU-IV campus, he said.

“The issue we have is they’re requiring us to reduce the number of students we can enroll,” Roeder said.

The candlelight vigil is an important demonstration of community action, he said.

“I’m grateful for the support for our campus you see here because it shows this is an important issue for the Imperial Valley,” he said.

About 40 students and faculty members gathered outside the campus entrance at Seventh and Heber streets. Some held up posters and candles to passing motorists.

Faculty encouraged students to sign petitions and open letters to President Barack Obama, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, as well as Reed and Weber.

Juanita Salas from Rep. Bob Filner’s office spoke to the group and read a statement from Filner “deploring” the enrollment cuts in Imperial County.

Vivian Perez is an SDSU Master’s in Public Affairs student who commutes to San Diego three times weekly for class. She urged students to fight the reductions.

“We are Latinos — 76 percent Latino in this community,” she said. “We’re strong. We have potential. Our kids are intelligent. We are intelligent. Don’t be afraid. Come forward.”
SDSU-IV freshman recruiter Norma Aguilar spoke as an SDSU-IV alumnus. She said the campus helped her succeed.

“We have a jewel on this campus, and we need to fight for it,” she said.

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Southwest High School senior Tanya Pimentel, who applied for admission at SDSU-IV, holds a sign toward passing motorists in front of SDSU-IV.