Concerns raised about freshman program changes

BY SARAH HORNE

Imperial Valley Press Staff Writer

4:04 AM PST, November 14, 2010

CALEXICO — San Diego State University-Imperial Valley transitioning Associate Dean Michael Sabath said unless there was a guarantee students get into the classes they need, SDSU-IV wouldn’t agree to the changes to its Freshman Scholars Program.

That was his response to one of the main concerns voiced at a meeting Thursday afternoon for concerned community members who fear the Calexico campuses’ freshman program is in peril as officials talk with Imperial Valley College officials about blending the program between campuses.

SDSU-IV freshman Alya Hurych said most of her friends at Imperial Valley College can’t get the classes they need. One, she said, only got one class out of six he applied for.

There’s also concern about removing the isolation aspect of the program.

“A lot of times the scholars are not ready to be put into a mass of people,” Hildy Carrillo, a member of the Dean’s Advisory Board, said.

Carrillo said there’s a fear that with a program expansion, students would be treated like everyone else. The reward wouldn’t be the same so students would get fed up, she said.

And a big part of the scholars’ unique identity is their prestige.

“When I tell people in the Valley my daughter is in the Freshman Scholars Program, it’s like better than going to Cal Berkeley; that’s how much people think of the program,” Sandra Teran said.

Another concern is that the program would be another 2+2 program.

“What they’re developing has all the right adjectives,” Roger Dunn, SDSU-IV’s associate dean until August and first director of freshman program, said. “Except based on this plan they are talking about terminating the Freshman Scholars Program. They’re saying they’re not going to eliminate the program, they’re going to expand it, which is a key part of the pitch, but the way they’re going to do that is route it through Imperial Valley College.”

Dunn also said the program has added student life to the Calexico campus.

“I’ve been here 30 years and before the Freshman Scholars Program student life was not well developed,” he said. “Now that we have people who have been here one, two, four years with a sense of identity we have a much more lively, engaged student government and student activities are better planned.”
Patricia Aguilar, an SDSU-IV alumnus, agreed. “When I transferred to San Diego State campus life was dead,” she said. “Now I have seen student life come to life, blossom because of the Freshman Scholars Program.”

Some of the proposed changes in what SDSU-IV Dean David Pearson says is the “chiseled in styrofoam” concept are:

Expanding the program to 100 students: “Working with Imperial Valley College to develop a larger cohort from the community college to San Diego State — getting these students and developing an educational path that would have the same supportive elements,” Pearson said.

However, there is some disagreement as to whether there are that many candidates. “It’s a very small group that has all the work done that needs to get done,” Dunn said. “There don’t appear to be hundreds of them or even a hundred of them.”

He said 65 students has been about the maximum number of applicants.

It would be a dual enrollment program, Sabath said, meaning students would take classes on the SDSU-IV campus and at IVC.

Pearson said this could be mutually beneficial as far as using each other’s resources, but also a point students and parents expressed concern about at the meeting. “Isn’t the whole point being able to tell people I attend San Diego State? It would mean more telling people this if you are actually taking classes at San Diego State,” Hurych said.

Copyright © 2010, Imperial Valley Press