The San Diego Union-Tribune - Editorial

Painful but necessary

Critics of SDSU's plan to resolve budget woes don't have a case

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Every branch of state government has been forced into painful decisions because of plunging revenue. The California State University system saw its state funding cut by nearly half, from $3 billion in 2007-08 to $1.6 billion this fiscal year.

For San Diego State University, one of the largest CSU campuses, that translates into a $50 million budget cut. President Stephen Weber recently unveiled a plan to make up for this shortfall while maximizing the use of available funds. Its key elements:

- Reducing enrollment 10.8 percent.
- Ending the policy of admitting every qualified applicant from south of state Route 56 and Imperial County — SDSU's “service area” — but continuing to give special preference to high school seniors from this area by guaranteeing they are at least 37 percent of incoming freshmen. That represents the average percentage seen over the last 11 years, but is considerably lower than the 54 percent seen the past two years.
- Requiring freshmen from outside the service area to live in residence halls to help SDSU cover the debt service costs of dormitory construction.

At a recent meeting with the Union-Tribune editorial board (See Q&A, page B5), Weber described the changes as akin to “triage” and acknowledged that dropping the admission guarantee for seniors in SDSU's service area would disrupt the plans of many students. The number of local freshmen admitted to SDSU could go down by as many as 1,000 next fall.

But Weber noted that the seniors who will be denied admission under this policy still will have a clear, accessible path to SDSU enrollment. That's because of the university's “transfer admission guarantee” to local community college graduates who complete general education course work and earn a grade-point average of at least 2.4 or the GPA required for their intended major.

And Webber said the old policy wasn't necessarily the best use of public funds by noting that recent service area freshmen have been much less likely to graduate within six years than freshmen from out of the area.

We find these to be strong, persuasive arguments. Others don't. We invite these critics to offer their plan for saving $50 million while using remaining funds wisely.
As for those who somehow think Weber's plan has racist overtones, every local high school graduate of any color or ethnicity can win admission to SDSU by going to a local community college and graduating with a C-plus/B-minus average. Beyond that, SDSU has a consistently impressive history of helping disadvantaged students from local schools.

Alas, this isn't good enough for grandstanding Assemblyman Marty Block, D-San Diego. He says it may be time to have the Legislature step in to set SDSU straight.

Thanks for the comic relief, Marty. As San Diegans know, the Legislature creates problems — it rarely fixes them.