



Cal State college chief outlines technology-focused agenda

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Chancellor Timothy White says he expects the system's 23 campuses to "lower their ivory towers" and embrace innovation.

California State University chief Timothy White envisions a college experience where a student can explore ancient Mayan ruins without ever leaving Orange County, or where a student can spend a year on the Mayan peninsula while she virtually attends all of her classes at Cal State Fullerton.

Although technology is merely on the cusp of such breakthroughs, White said the Cal State system's 23 campuses are positioned to embrace and experiment with such innovation now.

White, who took over as chancellor of the nation's largest university system in December, explained his ambitious, technology-focused vision during a speech Wednesday to the Orange County Forum current-affairs organization. About 125 people attended the lunchtime discussion at the Hilton Irvine hotel opposite John Wayne Airport.

"We're picturing the way in which technology will expand our ability to make CSU better than it is today," White said. "We want to stay relevant and meaningful."

The talk, titled "Innovation in the New Ecology of Higher Education," was presented to Orange County business, civic and community leaders and a group of invited high school and college students.

White said that as a first step, he's been working with Cal State campuses to "lower the ivory towers" so the system can be more responsive to the changing needs of California and its workforce.

This fall, the Cal State system began allowing students for the first time to take about 30 online classes offered by other Cal State campuses for credit at the student's home institution, with no red tape, White said.

These courses and others are radically reinventing how the university delivers instruction, he added. “It sounds pretty simple, but it’s a change in the way CSU is going about doing its business,” White said. White also said he “endorses” holding a discussion to allow California’s community colleges to begin granting four-year degrees.

Cal State and other colleges in the past have dismissed this plan outright, expressing concern about duplication of programs and competition for students. But community college officials in Sacramento are weighing the issue again and will present a detailed analysis early next year.

“I endorse the conversation,” White told the audience. “I just want to make sure we have a product that works.”

The vision outlined by White comes as Gov. Jerry Brown has put increasing pressure on Cal State and the University of California to innovate faster and move students more quickly through. Earlier this year, Brown offered Cal State and UC \$20 million extra if they promised the funds would go toward expanding online course offerings.

In his speech Wednesday, White acknowledged the practical restraints on the Cal State system.

From 2010 to 2012, Cal State was forced to deny admission to 250,000 “fully eligible” students because of funding constraints, White said. Cal State Fullerton alone turned away 25,000 eligible students over this time period, plus an additional 18,000 this year, he said. Eligible students are those who met Cal State’s minimum cutoffs for GPA and SAT scores.

Also, Cal State schools must send about a third of their students to remedial classes, White said. Although he acknowledged the system was spending \$20 million to \$30 million on remedial education, White dismissed an audience suggestion that perhaps these students should be forced to go back to community college.

“When we send a student to a community college, chances are we’re giving them a sentence where they’re never going to come back,” White said.