

Lynnette Zelezny and Frank R. Lamas: Admission standards rising, but mission won't change

By Lynnette Zelezny and Frank R. Lamas



Fresno State expects 20,000 freshmen applicants in fall 2016 but will have space for only 3,200.

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Fresno State is strategically rethinking the way students are admitted to the university. As part of that effort, we are dealing with a clear and indisputable fact: Fresno State is becoming the university of choice for an increasing number of students from the San Joaquin Valley and beyond.

We are seeing a remarkable demand for admission to Fresno State. Consider these numbers: We're seeing a 6% average yearly increase in applications. We expect to have more than 20,000 applications for admission for fall 2016 — up from 16,100 in fall 2012.

The pattern is similar for applications from transfer students from community colleges. For fall 2015/spring 2016, projections are close to 8,500 applications, up from 5,502 in fall 2012/spring 2013.

This is a tremendous endorsement of our high-quality academic programs and initiatives as well as the leadership of President Joseph Castro, and we're delighted about the strong interest in academics at Fresno State.

But our success also presents us with a challenge. We are receiving far more applications from qualified students than we can enroll given the funding that is decided by Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature. Of the 20,000 freshmen applicants, we can only admit 3,200 because of funding limitations. Our admissions target is 1,700 out of 8,500

applicants for community college transfers.

The increasing number of applications, combined with higher retention rates among our current students, are placing significant strains on our resources to help students succeed and accommodate new students.

We continue to work with our CSU colleagues and higher education partners to advocate for additional funding to enroll additional students. We are also working smarter, so the funds we have go as far as possible in serving priority needs. But for now, we can only plan with the limited resources that are currently available to us.

That means that we need to re-examine our student enrollment practices at Fresno State and how we ensure that students who are admitted succeed and graduate. To that end, we are seeking permission from the Office of the Chancellor to modify our enrollment plan to implement impaction for all first-time freshmen and new upper-division transfers, and use a variety of tools with adjusted admission criteria to manage enrollment beginning in 2016.

It is important to be clear that, if we move forward with impaction, we expect the adjustments to have a minimal impact on our entering freshmen. We will continue to give priority consideration to local freshmen and the community college transfer community. While admission standards for these students will rise, students from outside our region will be required to meet even higher admission standards. Our plan will not close the door to students outside our region.

Any changes would mainly apply to students who are borderline eligible for admittance to Fresno State. Some of those students may be directed to community colleges before being accepted into Fresno State. At Fresno State, studies have shown that transfers from a community college have a higher chance of graduating with a bachelor's degree. Our outreach and advising services staff will be working closely with high school and community college counselors to make sure students understand the admission requirements and the best path forward for them.

It also is important to note that our intention is *not* to change our essential mission of access at Fresno State or to change our diverse demographic profile as a Hispanic Serving Institution and an Asian American, American Indian and Pacific Islanders Serving Institution. The majority of our students will continue to be first generation and come from lower-income households. We remain committed to being inclusive of all backgrounds and perspectives and offering every student an equal chance for a quality education.

We also continue to seek public input on this issue. Please visit our website at www.fresnostate.edu/impaction to let us know your thoughts.

Our highest priority at Fresno State is student success. We have a responsibility to make sure that students coming to our university are prepared to succeed, and that we provide them with the support and resources they need once they enroll.

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