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SLCC to kick off test semester

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Salt Lake Community College opens a second, but compressed, fall semester next week in a move to accommodate more students in the face of surging college enrollments across the state.

Eight-week semesters are nothing new for community colleges, regarded as a crucial low-cost gateway to higher education. But SLCC's use of a short term on top of an ongoing semester is unusual, intended to help students who couldn't enroll at the start of the regular semester and arrive for classes better prepared, officials say.

Only students who registered by the first day of fall classes last August are eligible. While the experimental term will add 1,600 seats this fall, only 550 of them will be first-time SLCC students. The main motivation is creating more flexibility for all students, said SLCC's new provost Christopher Picard, an English professor who held a similar administrative post at College of DuPage outside Chicago. A week before the short semester starts, 93 percent of the new seats are spoken for.

"The short term works better for some working adults. It's easier to think in eight-week chunks than 15-week chunks," Picard said. In this compressed semester, the classes will be twice as long.

The added classes will feature 62 sections spread around SLCC's 13 locations, according to school spokesman Joy Tlou. These sections will cover high-demand, required introductory courses in core areas, the kind that often fill up early, eliminating less-prepared students.

Picard also expects the delayed start — seven weeks after regular fall classes usually start — will give students ample time to figure out what classes they need and be ready for them.

"Students who are more deliberate in their approach to education, get better counseling, tend to be more successful than those who are impulse buyers," he said.

The experimental semester will commence just days after the Board of Regents plan to release statewide enrollment figures, which are expected to document substantial gains for the third year in a row. Those numbers, based on "headcounts" taken during the third week of fall classes, should be available Wednesday or Thursday.

During the recent economic tailspin, enrollments soared at SLCC — to nearly 34,000 — as well as at Utah Valley University and the state's other "open-admissions" institutions, which have been forced to squeeze students onto their campuses despite deep budget cuts and space constraints.

This year, SLCC saw its largest summer enrollment ever, more than 13,000 students. While the college's fall headcount likely won't be anything near last year's 13 percent enrollment spike, it's still growing.

"We absorbed 3,500-plus new students over the course of the summer, the fall effort and this October

program,” Tlou said.

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Salt Lake Community College

SLCC will add 62 new course sections on Oct. 19, midway through the fall term. The move opens 1,600 seats at a time when college enrollment in Utah continues to climb. SLCC has the state’s largest student body, 34,000 and growing.

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