

Board Oks Disputed Program

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By Charity Lindsey

VICTORVILLE – Responding to the urging of students and faculty after they initially rejected the program, the Victor Valley College Board of Trustees unanimously approved \$36,900 in funding for an online student orientation program.

The trustees initially rejected funding for the program in May on a 3-2 vote, even though the money would have come entirely from a state grant and not from VVC's budget.

The initial price tag on the program to be developed by Cynosure New Media Inc., a custom software communications company in San Diego area, was \$48,510. After a significant amount of debate, more than Board President Joseph W. Brady said he's ever seen on a topic, and a \$12,000 reduction, the agreement passed 5-0.

Not everyone favored the agreement, however.

VVC Webmaster Justin Gatewood voiced his opposition since the first agreement was proposed, essentially telling the Board that the orientation was a project that could be done entirely in-house and did not require a large budget to outsource the work.

In a presentation before the board approved the contract, Gatewood listed issues with the contractor that he believes makes them undeserving of the job, including incompatibility with iOS without the use of a workaround and consistent server application error responses he discovered in viewing their other online orientations.

Cynosure's orientation program has been implemented at community colleges throughout California, including Barstow Community College and San Bernardino Valley College, and is a program aimed to be completely online and student-guided.

While Gatewood agreed with the eight students from the VVC Associated Student Body Council who spoke at the Aug. 11 board meeting in support of the program that the current orientation certainly needs updating, he suggested that a better solution would be a program that "works on all devices natively" and is developed in-house to allow "full control over updates."

The program was entirely funded through a \$1.2 million grant from the Student Success and Support Program that must be spent by Dec. 31. Any unused funds will be returned to the state.

According to Arthur Lopez, the dean of student services and the chair of SSSP, the purpose of the SSSP grant is to increase student access and success through providing

core matriculation services, which include five initiatives: orientation assessment, counseling, advising and education planning.

Lopez said that he began the processes of vetting through the appropriate committees at the college in November of last year. Given that one of SSSP's five initiatives of increasing student access and success through the provision of core matriculation services is orientation, he encouraged the Board to approve the program.

Gatewood, however, said that the grant could be used for "bigger and better things" if the agreement with Cynosure were not approved.

Board member Brandon Wood said that the discussion at the last board meeting should have occurred earlier, and called it "nonsense" that "a potentially positive thing has been going on for months."

"This ship has sailed" wood said. "To come in and object tonight is too late."

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