Block: Hello and welcome to ViewPoints, a production of SDSU NewsCenter. I'm Greg Block and today we'll be discussing SDSU's new admissions policies. In light of recent budget cuts to the CSU system, San Diego State recently announced changes in the way that we'll be admitting undergraduate and transfer students. These changes have some in the community concerned about what that means to access to local students; what it means to diversity on the campus; and what message it sends to students who now have to compete more for fewer spots available.

I'm joined today by Dr. Sandra Cook, assistant vice president of academic affairs and enrollment services; by Reggie Blaylock, director of SDSU's educational opportunities program; and by Scott Burns, associate vice president of financial operations at San Diego State.

Thanks for joining me. Let's jump right in. The first question, if you could just explain to us, Dr. Cook, what are these changes that we're making?

Cook: Well, as you know, we've had many challenges in the budget situation that's caused us to reduce enrollments and subsequently we've needed to make some changes in the enrollment policy just so we won't be overenrolled for 2010.

That being said, we want to reiterate that we haven't...we're not failing in our commitment to the local community. It's part of who San Diego State is and been here a long time. And so, in order to mitigate any of the effects that might have on our local students, we are going to look at awarding additional eligibility index points in the ranking system. So if a student from outside the area had the same ranking points as someone in -- the student in the area would have an advantage because they would get these extra points.

We've also said we are going to continue our Compact for Success, our successful Sweetwater Compact for Success and our similar program at Hoover High School and I'll let Reggie talk about the EOP's commitment to freshmen.

Blaylock: Dr. Cook brings up a good point. The campus is 113 years old. We've been serving students in this community -- serving this region for a long time. And the campus is committed to doing the same thing. I mean, I think what she's describing is the reality that all of the universities in California, their numbers are going to shrink.
The admissions at this campus and at other campuses we simply don't have the capacity based on the funding.

I'm always reminded when I talk with our students and with our parents that we want them to be frustrated, we want them to be outraged, but we want it directed properly to where we think it should go. That starts in Sacramento. We are left with the result of what's happening in our state. And so in EOP, this is our 40th anniversary. We've been serving students for a long time in this region.

We're almost 18 percent of new enrollment at the campus, but looking at the numbers just recently, in fact, last year our numbers compared to this fall in EOP specifically, the campus, of course, took 1,850 fewer students this fall. EOP took an additional 140 compared to last year. So our fall 2009 class is 1,171 students. Last year, we had just over 1,000. Whereas the campus numbers again are decreasing, we're seeing more students that are reaching for additional resources and we're bringing them in. We remain committed to serving the local area students as much as, what she's describing with the campus, we're going to continue to do just exactly what we've been doing.

We've, in fact, committed to a model what Dr. Cook is describing is a model that we've developed for EOP that would allow us to continue to serve our population of first-generation, low-income students and we're looking to increase the percentage of admits to this campus from this particular population. So, my message to our local area students, and to our local area teachers and our local area counselors, is we want you to continue to talk to students about applying to this campus and applying on time and moving through this process just as they have in the past. All of us are concerned about the reduced numbers for admissions at every campus.

I'm on conference calls every week talking about this all up and down the state about the concern about the capacity. We're talking about capacity issues. But, those are funding-related issues. It's not a philosophical issue about who is more important and who is...That's not what we're talking about in EOP because every kid that comes through our doors is important to us and we're in the opportunity business. So, we're going to do all that we can to make sure that we continue to serve our students and when they get here, they cannot just get thought the door, but they can become completers at this institution. That's really what we should be talking about, finishing, not just starting. That's important as well, but once they get here, what happens after that? I'm glad we're having the conversation.

Block: That's an important point. One of the things that some people are saying is out of fairness, shouldn't we be focusing on the local area students and not so much on...if we have to cut somewhere, shouldn't we be rejecting the out-of-area students? How would you respond to that? To that question?
Cook: Well, I think there's, you know, there's core values at the institution has that they want to make sure they maintain: your commitment to your local area; your commitment to diversity; this new process by which we admit by pre-major allows us to have the flexibility in this new way we can do enrollment to make sure that we're not bringing in students in programs that we don't have the resources for them to complete in. It gives us the ability to fine tune more how we do our admission and the desire for continuing the excellence that we've had, continuing to have improvement in graduation rates and retention rates' student success, as Reggie said. We don't want a revolving door, we want corridor to graduation.

All of the way the admission process is set up allows us the flexibility to decide which core values we're putting where in the formulas, so I think if nothing else, that people are concerned with, "How does it affect me? Is this going to be my kid not getting in?" or whatever. But, with limited resources we have to decide as an institution, using our core values, what is it that we're going to look like. And it's limited resources, it's very difficult, it's very painful and it's not good for the state and it's not good for the institution.

Blaylock: Interesting enough, we're not insensitive to the discussion, to the debate, to the concern about local area students having first priority versus students from just 20 miles up the 8-Freeway. Twenty miles up the 5--I mean, students from outside the area, which includes San Diego County students, Los Angeles, Fresno, Bakersfield, San Francisco, and as we move through the state, I think about these kids in 10th grade and 12th grade and these transfer students that have worked very hard to earn the opportunity to attend a campus like San Diego State.

This is clearly a very desirable campus for students from all over the campus, excuse me, from all over the state as well as all over the country and from other countries as well. So the issue about local area having a higher priority versus...for us, in many instances it's not this group versus that group. We're in the business of serving students -- deserving students that have worked hard to get here and if we all had our wishes, we would be serving ALL of those kids, but the reality is in California right now this has not been the priority. Education, whether it's K through 12, because they're experiencing some of this as well, community colleges, they're experiencing it as well and all the universities. We'd all like to be doing more if we had the resources. So, as much as I am sensitive to the local area counselors and teachers and parents and students that say, "We should be the first priority."

Every time you make that statement, it's at the expense of another deserving student of another deserving parent.
And so, what we could do is make the best decisions we can based on the limited resources we have to create as many opportunities as we can to serve all of these deserving students.

Block: Let’s take a step back and if we could -- you were talking about resources and limited resources and cut resources -- Scott, if you could paint the picture for us, what is going on at the state level and what's the outlook now and why are we making these decisions?

Burns: Well, in this fiscal year the CSU received a budget cut in state appropriation of $571 million. That was on top of a $77 million one-time cut in this fiscal year and on top of a $66 million permanent budget cut that we absorbed last year. Based on the magnitude of those dollars, we just cannot continue to serve the same number of students and provide the excellence and the quality of programs that we need to. So, given the magnitude of those changes, we need to cut enrollment significantly in order to keep providing this level of quality and service.

Block: So, how many students are we talking about that are being cut this year and the coming year?

Burns: In terms of head count for next year, this year and next year 4,600 students.

Block: And so what does that mean for number of local students that potentially will not get in? Or, do we know that yet?

Cook: We don't know that yet and I think that's causing a lot of fear and angst out in the community, because we don't know how many extra points we're going to give students. We don't know what, ah, you know, who's not going to be offered admission. In the past, there's always been a...CSU has gone on record as saying if you did this, this and this, you'll be admitted and those days are...those days are gone. And so the uncertainty of it is causing allot of anxiety. I don't think that we're going to know exactly how this is going to shake out until we have our applicant pool that closes on Nov. 30.

We've done some modeling on this year's pool, but we have no guarantees it's going to look like next year--next year's pool is going to look like that. And so, I think that just raises the anxiety level because we don't have those answers yet.

Blaylock: Now think about--think about the budget people, Greg, like Scott here who has tremendous experience at taking a dollar and understanding how to slice it and dice it and make it into something really magical here at this campus. But, without the resources--the limited resources and the reductions we continue to face here--these are the discussions that we're left to have.
And again, I'm just reminded that, you know, we want our parents and we want our listeners to really direct some of this concern and some of this frustration with our legislation—with our legislators so that we have legislation that supports education. Because, at some point, we are going to have to make some tough decisions between our priorities. They are either going to be having excellent prisons or excellent educational institutions.

We're going to have some bumps along our highways at the expense of kids going to school. At some level, all of this discussion cannot be reduced down to this level at each individual institution, because at some point it's just beyond our control. But, Dr. Cook really, I think, sort of spells it out really very well because at the end of the day right now, where we are in October, we have no idea of what our applicant pool is going to look like.

How nice would it be to know in October exactly what the pool looks like, but we're not there yet. And so, again I'm not insensitive to the concern from our local area students and our local area families about what this might mean. But, we have no idea, really of what the pool will look like once we have an applicant pool. Then we begin to figure out who actually is in here, and what does their prior experience look like at the high schools or at the community college. But until we actually have a pool, it's impossible to really begin to determine, well, local area students may need some additional points.

But, I also want to point--make this other point, which is that I don't want this conversation to be centered simply around all of our local area students needing additional points to get in this institution. Because the reality is we historically have excellent students from our local area that need no additional points or no additional consideration. There's a large pool of local area students that are highly competitive with students from anywhere in the world. And so, there's a smaller portion of local area students that a lot of this discussion is centering around. But, it's not the majority of local area students, and I just don't want that piece to get lost in some of this discussion, because some of our listeners, some of our viewers may think that local area students aren't competitive, and that's not the case.

Many of them, actually, are highly competitive and choose to attend San Diego State vs. other institutions that have made offers of admission to them as well.

Block: And that's a very good point. And, as to that, let's talk about the smaller group though that whatever we determine that cut line to be—what do we say to those students who two years ago would have gotten in and this year do not get in. What are their options?

Cook: You know, just looking at admission by program, it's...depending upon how you slice it and dice it there's different ways—there's different outcomes, and so I would, as you were talking about, Reggie, I would want us to go on record as
saying we don't want to discourage any student from applying here, because, we
don't have the answers to that. I think there's a perception in the community that
we're just going to rank everybody and take the highest ones and like lots and
lots and lots of our local students are going to be left with no options.

And because of all the preferences we're giving and the reality, I think, I think the impact isn't
going to be nearly what people are, you know, spinning. "Oh my God, it's doom
and gloom." So, I really want these students to apply for admission to San Diego
State because we're going to do everything we can to admit as many of them as
possible.

Burns: Within a given program, a local student with an equivalent qualification as an
out-of-area student would have more points.

Block: Same GPA, same SAT. You get more points?

Blaylock: Yeah. Not only do we want them to apply, we need them to apply. Historically,
if you look back over the last hundred years or so, the backbone of this
institution has been local area students. I don't anticipate that changing for the
next hundred years. So, we want our local area students to apply. We want them
to choose to come here. We want them to have very successful careers here.
And, we want them to stay in this region and become successful...Um, um
donating alums--donating alums! (laughter) "Generous," that's the word I was
looking for, generous alums.

That's been our history, and we're certainly not looking for that to change. In fact
President Weber's gone on record saying we're looking at our model for the last
10 years and we anticipate going forward, the campus will look very similar to
just what it has looked like over the past 10 years. So, again...Just smaller...Yes,
it will be smaller, but in the meantime, there's change, and particularly in light of
all the change that's going on around the country, you know, there is some alarm,
and there is some concern.

But, our interest and our goal is to make sure we're have really good
communication with our local area students and our schools. I was looking, in
fact, at some data this morning and this past year in EOP we had 164 local area
outreach events and activities in community colleges, high schools, middle
schools, elementary schools and community programs. We're going to be out in
schools and colleges, and community activities this fall and this spring doing all
we can to continue to get the message out to local area families that their
students are important. They're relevant in this institution and we're going to do
all we can to make sure they're successful once they get here to this campus.
That commitment is not changing.
Block: In your outreach, it's not just letting them know that we're here, but helping them, guiding them in how to apply; what they need to do; what those criteria are they need to meet; deadlines for example.

Cook: Financial aid applications...

Blaylock: Right, Greg, it's not just about walking them through the process and the deadlines, but it's really connecting students to the appropriate resources at the campus, whether it's their academic college or one of the departments that provides services and support; whether it's to our prospective student center to walk them through the process. We don't assume every student is at the same place at the same time.

We have students and families that are at all different points in places as they move through our processes. And so more than anything else, you take a large university like ours and you shrink it down to something manageable when you connect students and families to the appropriate resources--where they can connect with a person--and they begin to understand these processes and how these different departments come together for their benefit and for their success.

One student may need to understand the road map--their academic plan--we call it a road map. Another student may need to understand what are the financial aid deadlines and another student may need housing information, so different students are in different places in our processes and it's all about connecting them and not just connecting seniors or transfers but we have to get that eighth-grader connected.

We have to get the 10th grader connected, so they're planning and planning ahead, because this is a big investment of time and resources, and it's appropriate that they have time to plan. And that's a big part of what we do, and that's a big part of what we've done, and it's a big part of what we're going to continue to do, and we're going to do it well.

Burns: Can I jump in? I want to come back to a comment you made about we'll be what we've been, just a little smaller. I think it's important to say what we've been and would continue to offer is a diversity of experience or richness of experience for all of the kids that are going to be coming here, and we're still committed to that.

Blaylock: Yes, absolutely right. In fact, if I could go a step further and say, I'm thinking about what Scott said about the kids--we have a large population of non-traditional students as well; more mature adults that come back to finish their education and to get a graduate degree. This institution has served this region for a long time, in many different ways, and again, much of this discussion is centered around traditional age--high school students but we have a lot of students that come to the campus that are at very different points in their life...
experience and this is what we've done for a long time and I think we're all looking forward to continuing to serve this region at a very high level.

Block: And that actually leads...that's a good lead to my next question, which is transfer students, because these changes do affect transfer students from local community colleges. How does it affect the transfer students in the "TAG" that "Transfer Admissions Guarantee" and will they have to compete similarly with out-of-region students the way the undergrads will?

Cook: Well, one of the things I think that needs to be cleared up is that the TAG, which is the "Transfer Admission Guarantee", is the first admission priority. It seems to have taken on a life of its own that it's the only admission avenue, and that's just not the case. The transfer admission guarantee previously had all focused on just the local community college transfers and it required them to have at least 50 percent of their work from those local community colleges.

It became clear this year that if we kept the TAG in that form, we would be over-enrolled this year, so we started very early in the process with meeting with our colleagues in the community colleges. I work on a task force with the vice presidents, I sit on SDICCCA, which is the presidents of the community colleges and, you know, had discussions about whether we could even continue to have a guarantee weather we should change the...and we decided together that it should be 100 percent of your work from the local community colleges you know, all your requirements done, and that was, you know, agreed to as the highest admission priority because these students have no more lower division options, they need to go into the majors, move through whatever.

Next admission priority would be more like going back to the old TAG where you didn't have all your work there, but you had this big...you know, bigger majority of it, or you had everything but one course that's not articulated there, you know there's just...there's going to be some flexibility in the next tier, if we go to the next tier, and I believe we will go to the next tier, for those students who took a distance ed course at Palomar because they couldn't get it somewhere else but now this disqualifies them from the TAG because they have one course from somewhere else and their freaking out thinking, "That means I'll never get into San Diego State." It does not. It's kind of a survival of the fittest.

Those with the most requirements done and are ready to go into their major have the first priority, but then it kind of steps down from there. Until we see what the pool looks like, we won't know how far down in that ranking we will go.

Block: And what we've seen with that group to date is we're seeing issues where they didn't get their transcript in on time, again it comes back to deadlines, crossing all the "T"s" and dotting all the "I"s," and then so I think the message is probably the same that: make sure that you've done all the logistical work.
Cook: But what this means that I don't think we articulated for the transfer students is that all of our transfer admits this year, for 2010, will be local—one hundred percent of them.

Blaylock: Now that piece is a little bit different and that's a part of the message that we hope to get out as often as we can that given the small slots over all that we have for transfers, that we believe that the capacity will be filled by local area students--just given the sheer number of nine local area colleges, excuse me, seven of the service areas local colleges--thank you--that given the history that we've seen over the years, that we believe that capacity will be filled by the local area college students. So, transfer students from outside the area, we want to make sure we're getting the message out that it just doesn't seem reasonable that we going to have the capacity. Now, that's not too far different from this fall's class right now.

The new transfers that are in right now, I think we had...80 percent...80 percent of the transfers this year were from local area colleges. So, it's not a far stretch from where we are in terms of how our numbers have changed over the last several years. But, it's probably fair to say that it'll be a little bit different next year.

Block: I think my final question is, given the State of the State budget, and it doesn't look like it's getting better any time in the short term, are these changes permanent, temporary? What do we see in the long term?

Cook: I think that this model of how to do enrollment gives us the flexibility to do it a lot of different ways. We could do it the way we used to do it with this model. So, I don't see us going back to anything different.

I think because, again because we have so much flexibility, it gives us the tools that we need to form the class we need with our priorities and our preferences and our, again, core values. So, I think this is here to stay.

Blaylock: I think there's some assumptions also that the demand will continue to be maintained or rise that as long as we remain an attractive institution, and we see the numbers of students that are coming out of the local area high schools, local area community colleges and numbers of applications that we see from outside the area for both the institution and EOP as well you know that, as Dr. Cook is describing, it looks like historically as we look back in the past and towards the future, that this looks to be something--these are models that look to be in place for years to come.

Block: Anything anybody else would like to add to the discussion?

Blaylock: I would just say that, um...keep applying. Don't be discouraged, be encouraged. And the other thing I would say is you know, shoot for the very best grades. You
know some of the focus and some of the discussion that I hear when I talk with teachers have been about the CSU, the California State University's minimum admission eligibility well, we want our students to be shooting for the very best grades not looking at setting their sites at the minimum. And so, I'm always hoping that everyone that's listening, everyone around the table, not just this table, but whatever table...whatever school or college, that we're talking with students about shooting for the very best given themselves as many options, academically speaking, as absolute possible. And that's an important message because if the student is up here and not down here, then this conversation is...in terms of local area access...is really kind of moot.

And again, I don't want all of our local area students to be thrown into the box that...they're the ones who ask...all of them have to have some additional bonus points because that's not the case and it's never been the case historically here at this institution.

Cook: I agree with Reggie's message (laughter). Apply.

Block: Thanks for watching ViewPoints. This is a production of SDSU NewsCenter.