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Out-of-state colleges boost recruiting efforts in California

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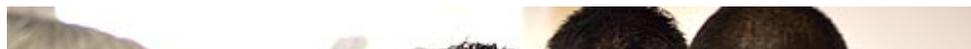
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Recruiter Dory Streett holds up a map of Europe as she explains Colby College's study abroad program to high school seniors Rigoberto Vargas, Julio Suastegui and Hector Rios, from left. Colby College, a small liberal-arts school in Maine, and several other small colleges held a mini-college fair last month at Los Angeles Trade-Technical College.

As the population of high school graduates declines nationwide, Midwest and East Coast colleges are hoping to attract California students to keep their enrollment numbers steady.

By Larry Gordon
November 29, 2008

Dory Streett didn't beat around the bush when she spoke to students recently at a high school near downtown Los Angeles about Colby College, a liberal arts school in Maine. It's 3,000 miles from home, there's snow for long stretches and its community of Waterville has only 16,000 residents.

"It's almost as far as you can get," the recruiter told a dozen seniors at Gertz-Ressler High School. The photos she showed of Colby's bucolic campus did seem a galaxy away to many of the mainly low-income students whose school sits beside the Santa Monica Freeway.

But Streett, who also emphasized Colby's small classes and generous financial aid, urged students to

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After a decade of campus-crowding growth, the size of the nation's high school graduating class has begun to decline with this year's seniors, and is projected to drop 4.5% by 2014. Then, modest growth is expected to resume.

The change, however, is uneven across the country, with the deepest dips -- up to 20% over the next few years -- forecast for New England and Upper Midwest states, home to numerous colleges.

Schools from those regions are boosting recruiting in California and other populous states, including Texas, Florida and Arizona, and looking for more students overseas, especially from China and India.

The population trend "certainly concerns schools in the Midwest and the Northeast. And it will force many . . . to start recruiting outside of their traditional regions," said Tony Pals, a spokesman for the National Assn. of Independent Colleges and Universities.

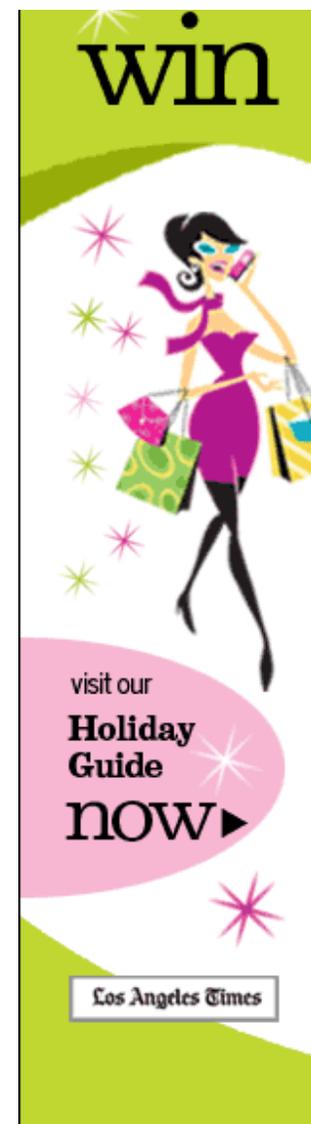
Another trend may further reduce the collegegoing population, experts say. A growing portion of U.S. high school graduates are Latinos, who traditionally have lower rates of college attendance than whites. Unless that changes, the drop in potential freshmen may be even steeper.

Uncertainty about the economy and families' abilities to pay also is forcing colleges, especially private ones, to scramble to make sure enough qualified students apply.

"Postsecondary institutions accustomed to filling entering classes with relative ease will likely face greater competition for fewer traditional-age students," declared an influential report, "Knocking at the College Door," released this year by the Western

consider a college outside Southern California: "It's for kids who want something different . . . who know they will be in urban areas most of their lives and want to try something different for four years."

It's a message heard more often in California these days, as East Coast and Midwest colleges face an anticipated drop in their local applicant pools and cast a wider net for prospective students.



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Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

Felema Yemane, a senior at Los Angeles' Pilgrim School, says she is nervous about applying to college but hopes the demographic decline will boost her chances.



"Just the fact that it's a little bit smaller gives us a little more chance," said Yemane, who is applying to private and public schools on the East Coast and in California.

Admissions officials say the change is unlikely to make it easier to get accepted by the most prestigious universities, such as Harvard and Princeton, which reject 90 percent of applicants. Nevertheless, those schools say they want to keep up their West Coast recruiting and let potential students know of the sweetened financial-aid deals wealthy colleges can offer.



"I think we are all very aware of the demographics and the changing nature of our applicant pool," said Janet Lavin Rapelye, dean of admissions at Princeton.

But for the next few years, students applying to colleges a notch below the top tier may find it a bit easier to land a spot.



Local high school counselors say they are hearing from more schools around the country that want to send representatives. "We are finding schools recruiting in California that we haven't seen in the past," said Helene Kunkel, a college advisor at Palisades Charter High School.

However, Kunkel said Southern Californians may not be attracted to those campuses if they are far away or lack a familiar brand name. "They do have an uphill battle with some of the kids here," she said.

Even so, this year for the first time, Central College in Iowa and Quinnipiac University in Connecticut are sending envoys to Southern California. Others, including Northeastern University in Boston and the Rochester Institute of Technology in upstate New York, have established California offices or placed full-time recruiters here.

Still others, including the University of Vermont, the University of Connecticut, Michigan's Kalamazoo College and Minnesota's College of St. Benedict-St. John's

University are coming more often and visiting more schools.

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