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Hundreds sign up for the new Calbright College

College expects to easily meet its initial cap of 400 students.

On its opening day, nearly 700 people submitted applications to enroll in California's new online-only two-year institution — Calbright College.

The college was created to serve an entirely new adult and underemployed population of students who are working part-time jobs or stuck in positions that don't pay a living wage. The California Community College system described those potential students as "stranded workers," between the ages of 25 and 34. Despite that focus, any student can enroll in the college, which is free to students, since it is a community college.

The college's opening day generated a lot of interest. About 655 people had started an application, of which 324 potential students are in the process of enrolling, and 11 had already enrolled with educational plans and started the self-paced programs, as of 5 p.m. Tuesday, said Taylor Huckaby, the college's communications director.

Calbright is offering three online, competency-based programs that lead to industry certifications in cybersecurity, information technology and medical coding. Competency-based education requires students to show they've mastered a particular set of skills or competency, rather than complete a certain number of hours or achieve a grade to complete the courses. All of the programs are self-paced, allowing for progression through instruction on each student's own schedule. Each of the programs could take as little as 10 weeks to complete.

Because this is the community college system's first foray into an entirely online, competency-based institution, Calbright officials had said they would cap the first class of students at 400 people.

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But the college is still figuring out how the cutoff will work, Huckaby said, in an email.

"We need to have a few internal meetings to understand our capabilities," he said. "We don't want to put ourselves in a position that degrades the Calbright learner experience or spreads our faculty too thin."

The college has so far hired six part-time faculty contractors. They also posted job listings to hire six new full-time faculty instructors on the California Community Colleges job registry. This first group of students will help officials study their educational needs and online college experience. The college is expected to re-launch statewide without an enrollment cap in 2020.

"We'll be watching and guiding these learners closely as they begin their journey through Calbright and complete their industry-recognized certifications," Huckaby said. "In the coming weeks, we plan to hire software engineers and full-time faculty, as well as announce the first of our business partnerships."

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