Meningitis bill passes committee

By Bob Purvis
LEGISLATIVE CORRESPONDENT

PHOENIX — A bill criticized by UA health officials as costly and ineffective, as well as pandering to special interests, drew sharp opposition from state lawmakers yesterday, but managed to pass committee by a single vote.

The bill mandates that state universities distribute information on the risks associated with meningococcal disease, or bacterial meningitis, and the effectiveness and availability of vaccines for the disease. The universities already distribute information on meningitis.

Student key witness in bishop case

By Jessica Lee
STAFF WRITER

When Kellie Gonzalez came across a man lying in the middle of a Phoenix street on the night of June 14, 2003, she had no idea it would affect her entire first year in college.

Gonzalez, a pre-physiological sciences freshman, was a witness in the trial Tuesday that convicted Bishop Thomas J. O’Brien of leaving the scene of a fatal hit-and-run. O’Brien was head of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix, a position he no longer holds.

Although she did not see pedestrian Jim Reed get hit in the accident, Gonzalez was the first person on the scene and immediately went to help.

“Jim Reed was bleeding really badly. They stayed the rest of the time with me,” Gonzalez said.

After the initial shock of the accident, the second scariest part came.

“Interestingly, there’s not much student demand for the program. Do you want to work with blood samples?” Provost George Davis asked recently.

Only a last-minute reprieve can keep medical technology from losing its funding. About 140 technologists work in the medical technology program, which is on the chopping block. The program works hard to find cures for serious medical conditions through the interpretation of patient data.

It’s a basic economics lesson: There’s no such thing as a free lunch.

And that lesson is the new UA mantra as student leaders tell their peers, “If you want your college experience to be all it can be, pay up.”

It’s a mentality that’s in stark contrast to how student leaders approached the idea of tuition and fees just a few years ago, Dean of Students Melissa Vito said.

“We’re at a point where students are realizing there is a potential for more things to be happening,” she said. “Student leaders are scrambling for support and are now going to the students.”

Change began last year when student leaders made a dramatic shift in their tuition request. After years of fighting for zero percent tuition hikes, then-ASUA President Peter Likins’ proposal for tuition hikes, only $100 less than President Peter Likins’ proposal this year, was passed while Gonzalez was completely passed.

Almost immediately, O’Brien was convicted yesterday.

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As of last year, somewhere between 30 percent and 60 percent of Tucson’s medical technologists had graduated from the UA. But top UA administrators put the program on the chopping block last year, saying it doesn’t fit with the university’s research mission and isn’t attracting enough students.

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