

Va. Community Colleges Dive Headfirst Into Remedial-Math Redesign
The Chronicle of Higher Education
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By Jennifer Gonzalez

Developmental education is the bane of community colleges. It costs institutions millions of dollars every year to educate students who come to their campuses unprepared for the rigors of college-level courses.

Nearly one-third of first-year college students require remedial education in reading, writing, or mathematics—and the percentages are even higher at most community colleges. The need to get those students up to speed immediately has emerged as a major obstacle to meeting President Obama's college-completion goals.

But what if a college system could drastically shorten the amount of time it took students to complete those courses and finally give them a fighting chance to progress to college-level work and even graduate?

The Virginia Community College system is poised to find out. Starting in 2012, it will adopt a new systemwide developmental-math curriculum that will allow students to focus only on those math concepts they haven't already mastered rather than taking a series of semester-long math courses.

That means students could move on to college-level courses in as little as a few months, or a year at the most. And the system is moving fast, too. While other community colleges have taken a similar approach to revamping developmental education, none have attempted to do it at the speed and scale of the Virginia system. The new curriculum will be adopted simultaneously at all of its 23 colleges, forgoing any formal pilot program—a usual requisite before an institution goes systemwide with a project.

The system's approach comes with some risk, says Robert G. Templin Jr., president of Northern Virginia Community College, but the "current methods are clearly not working." Half of all incoming students in the system need developmental education—and three-fourths of those students fail to graduate or transfer within four years.

It is statistics like those that add "urgency to make progress on this issue," Mr. Templin says.

Following its involvement in a national project to improve remedial education, Northern Virginia began offering the new math curriculum (along with its regular remedial math courses) this spring and summer, ahead of other colleges in the system. The college plans to offer only the new format starting in the fall.

The move may provide clues to its potential and whether the system made the right decision to forge ahead with such an ambitious project.

An Accelerated Change

The math redesign is part of a larger project by the system to fundamentally change how it does business. Warning of a "perfect storm," Glenn DuBois, the chancellor, began rethinking every aspect of the system's organization and operation in 2009. "I don't think it was smart for us to

just hunker down and wait until the seas cleared out and then act like everything was back to normal," he says.

The state's community colleges faced considerable pressure. Enrollment had soared, while state financial support had declined precipitously. The system would be taxed further as it embarked on a strategic plan to enroll more students, especially those from underserved populations; increase the number of students who graduated or transferred; and double the number of employers provided with training and services to 10,000 annually.

Increasing tuition and fees alone would not move the system toward its goals. It was clear, Mr. Templin says, that "we would run out of fuel before we got to our destination." Instead, Mr. DuBois wanted the system to become smarter in how it invested in people, talent, and technology, as well as do a better job of taking advantage of its size and resources.

Around that time, Teresa Ryerse Overton and Beverlee K. Drucker, two math instructors at Northern Virginia Community College, came back from a conference absolutely giddy with excitement.

They had spent a day absorbing material about a new way of teaching developmental math. Students concentrated on areas where they needed help, such as understanding fractions or solving polynomial equations. Rather than essentially reteaching a high-school curriculum, the focus was on preparing students quickly for college-level courses.

"We were just blown away," says Ms. Drucker, who teaches at the Woodbridge campus. "The whole process just made sense to us."

What they learned that day eventually contributed to the system's math redesign. Mr. DuBois had asked a large group of administrators, faculty, and staff (dubbed the Re-engineering Task Force) to devise solutions to the system's many challenges. He assembled the group because the "stakes were too high," and he didn't just want to "nibble around the edges" of the problem, he says.

When that group emerged with recommendations, in late 2010, not surprisingly redesigning developmental education earned a spot at the top of the list.

Too many students were spending time and money for courses that didn't even count toward a certificate or degree. One study by the college system found that only 16.4 percent of students sent to developmental-math classes ever managed to pass a college-level math course.

Recent high-school graduates are among the most vulnerable. They become frustrated when they learn they can't immediately enroll in credit-bearing classes, and they sometimes leave college even before taking a single course.

Institutions are equally affected. A recent report by the Community College Research Center put the annual cost of remediation at \$1.9-billion to \$2.3-billion at community colleges and \$500-million more at four-year colleges.

Shortening the time students spend in remedial-education courses has become a popular way to cut down on the financial and academic costs. There is growing recognition that the traditional semester-long course sequence used by many community colleges doesn't work, says Michael Lawrence Collins, associate vice president for postsecondary state policy at Jobs for the Future, a Boston-based nonprofit that studies education and work-force issues. It's inefficient to have

students take up to a year and a half in remediation when many need just pieces of what they're being taught.

Because of its newness, there isn't much research on the effectiveness of the modular approach being tried in Virginia, Mr. Collins says. "But it is certainly promising, because it attacks the question of time."

A Shift in Priority

The Virginia system is betting on that promise. Its colleges will soon replace their semester-long developmental-math courses with nine units, which can be taken as one-credit classes or Web-based lessons with variable credit hours that allow students to complete more than one unit in a self-paced computer lab and classroom.

The number of units that students are required to complete will depend on their placement-test scores and intended program of study. Students focused on the liberal arts will have to show competence in only five units, for example, mastering basic algebra concepts such as linear equations. Students who plan to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, math, or business administration must complete all nine units.

"We've thrown out the assumption that all students needs the same math curriculum," says Mr. DuBois.

Every college in the system is expected to offer developmental math in the new format starting in the spring of 2012. However, each college can choose whether it delivers the curriculum in person or via a classroom computer.

David French, an associate professor of mathematics at Tidewater Community College, is concerned about how the new format will be used there. A final decision has not been made, but he says the consensus among his colleagues is that courses should be lecture-based or perhaps lectures blended with online support.

Mr. French says lecturing allows him to slow down or speed up the material, but he worries that the new modules will be too constricting. "That is a big issue for me," he says.

Ms. Overton, an assistant professor at the Woodbridge campus, says that, anecdotally, students at Northern Virginia Community College seem to like the new structure. The college offers the units in an in-class, Web-based format that allows students to go at their own pace.

On a recent Monday, Rodney D. Wyrick, an adjunct math instructor at the college's Alexandria campus, acted more like an air-traffic controller as he managed the various needs of his students. He moved around the classroom instructing students, setting goals for them, and monitoring their work.

Although he has help from a tutor in the class, it's a lot to juggle, he says. Mr. Wyrick does like how the Web-based class allows him to peek at students' quizzes in real time and track their progress a lot faster than by sorting through homework and test papers himself. "It allows me to intervene even before they ask for help," he says.

Dahlia Choto, 25, who plans to transfer to George Mason University after earning her associate degree at Northern Virginia, likes how she can go at her own pace. In a traditional math class, she says, it's hard to catch up once you fall behind. Here, "it's OK to get it wrong," she says.

How students like Ms. Choto and others fare will determine the success and longevity of the redesign. And it may be a few years before the college system can gauge whether students are completing remedial courses any faster than before and if more of them are transferring to a four-year college or graduating with a degree.

There is one certainty. The Virginia Community College system is not the only one anticipating the outcome. Equally curious are researchers and other colleges searching for successful ideas. "There is a risk," Mr. Collins says, "but there is also power in being that bold."

Colleges Fight Google Ads That Reroute Prospective Students **The Chronicle of Higher Education**

July 31, 2011

by *Josh Keller*

A few weeks ago, when Jeff Harmon searched on Google for *North Arkansas College*, an ad appeared next to the results that offered information about the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith. Clicking on the ad took Mr. Harmon to collegesurfing.com, where he filled out a form that promised to send him material about Fort Smith.

Mr. Harmon isn't really a prospective student—he's Fort Smith's director of marketing and communications. If the Web site with the form had been truthful, his information would have been sent to his admissions team.

Instead, he said he received a call 20 minutes later from an Argosy University counselor asking him if he would consider enrolling in the for-profit college.

Sites like the one Mr. Harmon found mislead students by advertising for one college and steering them toward another. The shell game, typically played by companies that sell names of prospective students to for-profits, makes it critical for colleges to carefully monitor how they appear on search engines.

At a time when many students start their college search online, brand confusion can cost a college students and tarnish its online reputation. Some of the ads that promise information about unaffiliated colleges clearly violate Google's advertising policies, and some legal experts have argued that they could be construed as false advertising. But the ads are also hard to track and to stop.

How Deceptive College Search Ads Misdirect Students

Prospective students who search for one of dozens of colleges see ads from a Web site, EducationStart.org, falsely promising to connect them with an admissions department.

1 The search ad

A Google search for *antelope valley college*, a public two-year college in California, brings up an ad that promises to help students contact the admissions office.

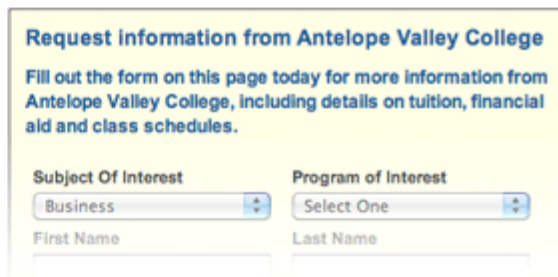
[Antelope Valley College](#) 

www.educationstart.org

Contact the admissions department directly and get info. Start now!

2 The form

After clicking on the ad, students can fill out a form to get information from Antelope Valley. But an Antelope Valley official says EducationStart.org has no relationship with the college and did not get permission to represent the admissions department.



Request information from Antelope Valley College

Fill out the form on this page today for more information from Antelope Valley College, including details on tuition, financial aid and class schedules.

Subject Of Interest: Business
Program of Interest: Select One
First Name: _____
Last Name: _____

3 The result

A submitted inquiry received no response from Antelope Valley. Instead, students who fill out the form are shown a Web page that suggests one of several for-profit colleges, including those shown at right.



Mr. Harmon called the ad he clicked on "fraudulent" and said he would ask his college system to send a cease-and-desist letter to the owner of CollegeSurfing, the CollegeBound Network. "It's a real shame they have to stoop that low to generate enough leads," he said.

'We Didn't Know'

Colleges spend hundreds of millions of dollars per year on search-engine advertising, and most of it is legitimate. But the search-engine marketing industry has always had a dark side, and lead-generation Web sites like CollegeBound are under constant pressure to find ways to deliver prospective students to their clients, which can pay \$25 or more per lead.

CollegeBound is no fly-by-night operation. It has been in business since 1988, claims to attract two million visitors per month, and is one of the top lead-generation firms in higher education. It maintains 14 directories of colleges—with names such as collegebound.net and advanced-degrees.com—that double as sources of leads.

Its founder and president, Luciano Rammairone, said the Fort Smith ad and dozens of similar ads were mistakes. "The truth is, we didn't know until you pointed it out," he said. The form that Mr. Harmon filled out should not have promised information from the college, but instead from "colleges in your area," Mr. Rammairone said, and it should not have used the college's logo without permission.

"There are some schools that are still live right now when they shouldn't be," he said. "We're auditing that today." He could not say how many such pages existed, but a search produced more than 100 pages that each promise information from a different college.

Mr. Rammairone said that "right now we're making them as compliant as we can. That's really the truth. We don't want to deceive anyone."

In response to questions, the owner of Argosy and the Art Institute chain, both of which received leads from the ads, said it had instructed CollegeBound to stop providing information about the colleges unless students request it. The parent company, Education Management Corporation, said in a statement that it had been told the practice was "due to incorrect coding within the vendor's lead response system" and had generated leads for other colleges as well.

"We do not condone, endorse, or tolerate any action that may be perceived as false advertising or misrepresentation to prospective students," the statement said. Use of any kind of "false lead" violates the contracts the corporation signs with lead-generation companies, it said.

Tiffin University placed an ad that showed up last week when users searched on Google for New River Community College, in Virginia. The ad says it leads to the "official site" of New River. But the link leads to a page encouraging students to sign up for IvyBridge College, Tiffin's online subsidiary.

"We understand how this can be misleading," Ronald M. Schumacher, Tiffin's vice president for enrollment management, wrote in an e-mailed response to questions about the ad. He said Tiffin was removing the words "official site" from ads that may feature the names of other colleges and had taken corrective measures to remove any potentially misleading ads.

The ad's wording was unintentional, Mr. Schumacher wrote. The title of the ad, "New River Community College," was generated automatically by Google on the basis of the search, while the words "official site" were originally meant to apply to IvyBridge. "Obviously that was not our intent, and that ad structure has been removed from our campaigns."

One lead-generation site, EducationStart, advertises with pages that promise visitors they will receive information from colleges like the University of California at Los Angeles. "Have the school contact you directly," says that ad. An ad showing a link to a page about Antelope Valley College says, "Contact the admissions department directly."

After filling out a form, visitors are told they match well with several for-profit colleges, including the University of Phoenix, that pay EducationStart for leads. (A University of Phoenix spokesman did not respond to a request for comment).

Representatives at five colleges mentioned in the ads, including Antelope Valley, say their institutions did not agree to receive inquiries from EducationStart or its parent company, Vantage Media. None of the officials who were contacted by *The Chronicle* had ever heard of the company.

"It is disturbing," said Frank Steen, chief information officer of Hunter College, in New York, which appeared in an EducationStart ad that showed up with the Google search phrase *cuny hunter*. "If somebody applies and something goes wrong with their application, they think badly of us."

A Vantage Media spokeswoman, Wendy Barbour, said the company verifies that all inquiries are, indeed, e-mailed to the admissions departments of each college. She said colleges that request to be removed from the Web site are removed immediately, and that students' information is only shared if they check a box to allow it.

But Ms. Barbour could not say whether all of the colleges the company was advertising for had ever agreed to accept leads from the company, and she conceded that for some colleges, Vantage's e-mails might not be "top of mind."

Taking Action

A code of ethics released last year by the Education Marketing Council, a coalition that includes both Vantage and CollegeBound, prohibits misleading advertising, saying it could discredit the industry. "No one should make offers or solicitations in the guise of one purpose when the intent is a different purpose regardless of the marketing channel used," the ethics code says.

But the code is voluntary and hard to police. (The lead developer of the guidelines, Greg O'Brien, is the chief executive of CollegeBound.) Lead-generation Web sites bid on proprietary, ever-changing lists of search terms, which makes tracking the ads an expensive job. Colleges must decide how, and whether, to respond to problematic search ads when they appear.

The Department of Education recently approved rules that limit the conditions under which colleges can pay Web sites for information about prospective students. Experts say those regulations, which took effect on July 1, may drive out some low-quality Web sites that provide leads but will not stop many abuses.

Some colleges report success sending cease-and-desist letters to advertisers. They can also report ads to Google, which does not allow Web sites to post search ads that name a U.S. or Canadian trademark, unless they primarily exist to provide information about or sell goods and services related to the trademark. Ads that use a trademark but link to a page that promotes a competing product are explicitly prohibited.

But some observers say Google, which did not respond to a request for comment, is unlikely to systematically rein in problematic search-engine advertising in higher education. "I think the Department of Education has done a better job cleaning up search results than Google has," said Jerry Slavonia, chief executive of Campus Explorer, an online directory of colleges.

Some college officials said they did not see reason to be overly concerned. Patricia M. Jasper, a senior campus counsel at UCLA, said that although officials there spend a considerable amount of time combatting inappropriate use of UCLA's name, it is unlikely that someone seeing the EducationStart ads would be confused.

"I doubt that the Web content of these particular sites would cause anyone to think these sites were official UCLA sites or that they had our endorsement," Mr. Jasper wrote in an e-mail. "And the presence of ads on the Internet is so ubiquitous now as to be unremarkable."

In particular, some officials said, Internet users are sensitive to the difference between information and advertising. Students probably won't enroll in the wrong college by mistake, said Jay Walterreit, director of public information and marketing at Alpena Community College in Michigan. And there are time constraints.

"We don't even have a Webmaster right now," Mr. Walterreit said. "It's impossible to think we're going to start policing every place that's going to feature information about us." Nevertheless,

Mr. Walterreit called the use of Alpena's logo in advertising by CollegeSurfing "misleading" and said he would contact a lawyer.

A college whose name has been used in vain can certainly suffer, added Mark J. Rosenberg, a lawyer at Sills, Cummis, & Gross whose clients include companies seeking to protect their trademarks in search advertising.

"With the Internet, people are lazy, and if they get to the wrong Web site, and it's good enough, they don't leave," he said. "They don't do another search to get to the right Web site, and that's where there's damage."

State asks California community colleges for salary data
The Sacramento Bee
August 3, 2011

State **Controller John Chiang** today asked California's 72 community college districts to submit information on employee pay to the database he is compiling of local government salaries.

"The California Community Colleges, the nation's largest higher education system serving more than 2.7 million students, has earned and must continue to earn the public's confidence that it provides education in a cost-efficient manner," says the letter by Chiang and **Jack Scott, chancellor of the state's community college system.**

"In this vein, we ask you, as well as your peers in each of the system's 72 districts, to work closely with the State Controller's Office to collect and deliver this (compensation) information for each of your employees, as well as the members of your board of trustees."

As The Bee reported in February, executive pay, perks and retirement benefits vary tremendously among the state's community college districts. Compensation for chancellors of the state's 15 largest community college districts ranges from \$228,000 in Ventura County to more than \$390,000 for Sacramento's Brice Harris. Car allowances range from zero to \$950 a month. Two Southern California chancellors receive housing allowances of at least \$2,000 a month, while most don't receive any at all.

But that information is only available by requesting it from 72 independent college districts. No one in state government can say how much the colleges spend on executive compensation because the state doesn't collect the information.

That will change if the districts cooperate with Chiang and Scott's request. Their letter says the colleges will receive reporting instructions in October 2011 and asks them to report the information by April 2012.

League of cities: Cut current worker pensions?

By Ed Mendel

HEALDSBURG — A new League of California Cities pension reform plan proposes a “detailed legal review” of whether pensions promised current workers can be reduced, a cost-cutting move widely believed to be prohibited by court rulings.

A look at the legality of reducing pensions that current workers earn in the future, while protecting pension amounts already earned through years of service, is similar to a recommendation from the watchdog Little Hoover Commission in February.

“Pension sustainability cannot be fully achieved without addressing the benefits of both current and future employees,” said the League of California Cities [plan issued late](#) last month and distributed at a pension workshop here last week.

As pension costs soar, particularly in local government where most spending is on personnel, savings from clearly legal changes (mainly higher pension contributions from workers and lower pensions for new hires) are said to fall short.

“What I’m hearing is that there is no good solution,” Healdsburg Mayor Tom Chambers said last week at a pension workshop after being briefed on current cost-cutting options by officials from the league of cities and CalPERS.

“Rates are going to continue to go up to a point where for every person working for the city you are paying for another one that’s not,” said the mayor of the city with 11,000 residents on the Russian River in the Sonoma County wine country.

“What suffers then is the level of services, and that’s what’s really disconcerting,” said the mayor. “I don’t know how you go forward with that.”

Bigger savings for government employers could come from reducing pensions that current workers earn in the future. It’s a cost-cutting option for the dwindling number of private-sector employers that offer pensions.

But for state and local government employers, many but not all believe that a series of court rulings mean pensions promised workers are, from the date of hire, “vested rights” under contract law that can only be cut if offset by a benefit of equal value.

The go-slow league of cities [plan begins with](#) five things that can be done by bargaining with unions, moves on to 15 things needed from the state and concludes with a third step that looks at cutting current worker pensions and a possible ballot measure.

The league of cities, spending \$3 million on each campaign, got voter approval of two ballot measures aimed at protecting local funds from state raids: Proposition 1A in 2004 received 84 percent of the vote, Proposition 22 last November received 61 percent.

The pension reform plan said the league should work with unions and the Legislature and the governor to restructure the California Public Employees Retirement System to protect the “fiscal integrity” of cities and retirees.

“This could include jointly sponsoring an initiative if legislative change is insufficient,” said the plan.

Among the proposals: Restructure the CalPERS board to include more independent public members, preferably with financial expertise, to represent taxpayers. The board is currently dominated by labor representatives.

A statement in the plan that “the benefits of both current and future employees” must be addressed is followed with this proposal:

“After a detailed legal review and to the extent permitted by federal and state law, a well-designed state constitutional amendment is needed for prospective retirement formula reductions and incremental retirement age increases for current employees to guarantee their already accrued earned benefits, while making the plan sustainable, affordable and market competitive on a going-forward basis. The amendment should also include a risk-managed PERS defined contribution plan for public agencies.”

One of the 27 recommendations in the plan would authorize CalPERS to offer the option of a “hybrid” combining a “defined contribution” or 401(k)-style individual investment plan with a lower pension.

An official of the league told the workshop last week there has been no state action on pension reform, despite Gov. Brown’s 12-point pension reform proposal and an attempt by Senate Republicans to get pension reform in a budget deal on tax votes.

“Many think if it’s going to happen it will have to be a statewide ballot initiative,” the regional public affairs manager for the League of California Cities, Nancy Bennett, told the workshop.

“Lot of talk again,” she said, “nothing for this upcoming ballot, and partly because it costs about \$3 million to run a successful campaign, and that’s a lot of money right now in the state’s economy.”

Bennett said polls this year by the Public Policy Institute of California and the Los Angeles Times show strong support for public pension reform.

“Who is going to spearhead this initiative campaign most likely is the big question,” she said.

A pension reform group led by Dan Pellissier is working on an initiative, not yet filed, that would cut the benefits of current state and local government workers by limiting employer contributions to their pensions and switch new hires to 401(k) plans.

A proposal by San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed, based on other court rulings, would use the declaration of a fiscal emergency and a local ballot measure to reduce pensions earned in the future by current workers in the two city-run plans.

San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders and others are proposing a local initiative that would switch new city hires to a 401(k)-style plan and attempt to cut current worker benefits by putting a five-year cap on pay counted toward pensions.



CalPERS chart showing Healdsburg rate history



CalPERS actuary Barbara Ware briefs Healdsburg City Council

The league of cities plan said near the end that “if the above reforms prove unfeasible or ineffective, consider a standard public employee pension system where one benefit level is offered to every employee” as an option to make CalPERS sustainable.

Critics say CalPERS-sponsored legislation, SB 400 in 1999, boosted Highway Patrol pensions by 50 percent, setting a new standard for local police and firefighter bargaining that resulted in “unsustainable” pensions.

At the workshop, CalPERS actuary Barbara Ware said Healdsburg pension costs jumped sharply after 2002 because of a change in CalPERS “assumptions” (apparently due in part to a stock market dip) and higher pensions for police and firefighters.

CalPERS previously had dropped Healdsburg’s rates to near zero, a contribution “holiday” during a stock market boom given to many of the system’s 2,000 local plans. Ware said future contribution holidays are unlikely under new policy.

Healdsburg boosted pensions for “miscellaneous” or non-safety employees in 1998 and again in 2007. Ware said the rates (35 percent of safety pay and 22 percent of miscellaneous pay) will continue to rise as major investment losses in 2008 are phased in.

Healdsburg pays the employee’s pension contribution, 7 to 9 percent of pay, and counts that as salary used to set pension amounts. Ware said the city has the option of ending that — even switching to have employees pay part of the employer contribution.

Generally, said Ware, “From CalPERS’ point of view, if we get the money we don’t care where you get it from.”

Reporter Ed Mendel covered the Capitol in Sacramento for nearly three decades, most recently for the San Diego Union-Tribune. More stories are at <http://calpensions.com/> Posted 15 Aug 11

Too few high school graduates ready for college?

Daily Breeze

By Rob Kuznia Staff Writer

Posted: 08/14/2011 07:03:14 AM PDT

At South High School in Torrance, two-thirds of the students have at least one parent with a bachelor's degree.

Yet only about one-third of the students go straight to a four-year university after graduation. What's more, officials estimate that fewer than half - perhaps 45 percent - earn a bachelor's degree after six years. And that's coming from the high school with the highest rate of college readiness of the four in the Torrance Unified School District.

When it comes to test scores in math and English, students in Torrance tend to fare comfortably above average. But their levels of college readiness are in need of a boost, school officials say. So administrators are gearing up to intensify a campaign to do just that.

Districtwide, about half of the graduates of North, South, West and Torrance high schools have taken all the necessary courses to qualify for entry in either of the state's major university systems, according to district officials who gave a presentation to the Torrance school board late last month. That's better than the state average of 35 percent, but far behind the 84 percent in Manhattan Beach or the 75 percent in Palos Verdes.

Of the roughly 50 percent of high school grads in Torrance who do finish with the necessary credits to apply to either the University of California or California State University systems, 40 to 50 percent of them are choosing to go to community college anyway, Torrance officials estimate.

The vast majority of those students go to El Camino near Torrance.

"I think the proximity of El Camino just keeps students and parents sometimes from looking a little bit further and a little bit broader," South High Principal Scott McDowell said. "They think 'UCLA, Berkeley, Long Beach or USC.' That's the breadth of their world. We want to broaden it."

Torrance's push to promote the benefits of a university degree coincides with a similar tidal shift occurring at the federal level. Ever since assuming power, the Obama administration has placed heavy emphasis on college preparedness, even while playing down the central goal of the No Child Left Behind Act: the call for 100 percent proficiency in math and English by 2014, which is widely criticized in the education world as unrealistic.

Last week, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan made it official, announcing that he would grant waivers for opting out of that portion of the Bush-era law to states that adopted higher standards, with an eye toward improving "college and career" readiness, among other things.

To be eligible for entrance to the UC and California State University systems, high school students in the Golden State must take the courses that satisfy all of what are known in education-speak as the "A-through-G requirements." For instance, students must take four years of college-preparatory English, at least three years of math and two years of a foreign language, to name a few. The CSU system requires a minimum of a C grade in every class; the UC system requires an average GPA of 3.0.

Beginning this fall, Torrance schools will implement some specific changes to better foster a "college-going culture," even as they make do with diminished resources after several consecutive years of punishing budget cuts.

For instance, at North High, students who disqualify themselves from UC or CSU eligibility by getting a D or F in a required class will be able to make up the course online. This means they could make up those credits from home. Also at North High, a counselor will be available every Monday at lunchtime for the express purpose of helping students apply for college.

At all the high schools, educators will try to dramatically increase the number of students taking the PSAT, which is a practice version of the SAT, a college-entrance exam.

The campaign will extend to the middle schools. For instance, all eight of them this year will have a college night for students and parents.

Across the district, counselors will inform parents about all manner of college good-to-knows, such as how to set up a 529 Plan, which is analogous to a 401(k) but amounts to a savings plan for college.

Mario Di Leva, executive director of the Torrance teachers union, said in this era of deep budget cuts, parents and students need to become more proactive participants in preparing for college.

"You can't show up to the first day of 12th grade and say, 'OK, what do I need to do?'" he said. "This starts in the middle schools."

Administrators have been careful to note that there is nothing wrong with attending El Camino. But they say recent reports on success rates for students in California's community colleges are worrisome. According to one recent study, 70 percent of the state's community college students fail to earn an associate degree or transfer to a four-year college within six years.

Meanwhile, of the Torrance students who do attend El Camino, too many are having to take classes that are not transferable to a UC or CSU school, said Tim Stowe, the senior director of secondary schools at Torrance Unified.

"We're not saying don't go to a community college," he said. "We're saying, if you go, go with a plan. Know which classes you need."

Every spring, El Camino-bound seniors take a placement test to determine what level of classes they qualify for upon entering. About 58 percent of them qualify for a UC/CSU transferable course in reading, 36 percent in writing and 13 percent in math. Stowe added that while he is not

satisfied with the numbers, they exceed by about a third the corresponding figures for non-Torrance graduates.

"We want them to be taking college-transfer classes," he said. "If they are not, I don't want to say they are wasting their time, but if they are not prepared for that then we haven't adequately taken care of the work we need to do."

Stowe said the dismal figure in math owes largely to how many students neglect the subject during their senior year. As an antidote, Torrance schools will encourage more students to take four years of math in high school.

Stowe cautioned that many of the statistics he used were estimates based on the best available information. For instance, there is currently no easy way to track the college completion rates of individual high school graduates, so he had to rely on overall averages provided by the colleges.

Also, some of the students who do not complete their A-through-G requirements can attend private schools such as the USC or Loyola Marymount University.

McDowell said the push to improve the rates isn't a new effort.

"We have been talking about this a long, long time," he said. "It is just creating an increased focus and making that increase more public."

Di Leva added that his own son, a high school junior, has many friends who have already written off college even though they are solid students.

"They've given up simply because it is so difficult to get in," he said.

The job of educators is to smooth that road as best they can, strapped budgets be damned, he said.

"We have to restore that sense of `This is important - we can do this against all odds,'" he said. "If we paint it as an impossible journey, it will become that. Make no mistake."

At a glance

Percentage of graduates in 2009-10 who have completed all the necessary courses to qualify for entry into either of the state's major university systems:

North High: 54.5 percent

South High: 59.3 percent

West High: 56.7 percent

Torrance High: 50.1 percent

TUSD: 53.3 percent

L.A. County: 40.1 percent

State: 35.3 percent

Design on a Dime

LA Times

More options for Web-based careers

It's now important for every business — small or large — to have a website. Many companies that have put off updating or reconfiguring their websites due to the recession have decided they can no longer wait to revamp their online presence.

As a result, the Web development and design industry is booming, and so is education that teaches people how to master those 21st century skills. A number of Southland schools now offer affordable Web developer/design certificate courses.

With so many options, selecting a course that's right for you can be difficult. Experts recommend that you start by deciding which courses meet your budget and educational and career expectations.

Santa Monica College

“Our Web design certificate is a comprehensive program geared for entry-level positions within the Web design community and consists of six affordable classes that can be taken at the student's convenience,” said Bill Lancaster, faculty leader for the Graphic Design Program at Santa Monica College. “Students look to acquire technical and creative Web design skills using industry-standard software such as Dreamweaver, Photoshop and Flash.”

Lancaster said the focus of his program is a curriculum that assists students in developing entry-level portfolios suitable for Web design and interface design positions. A minimum 37 units (at \$36 per unit) is needed for a Web design/development certificate.

Cal State Dominguez Hills

Anissa Thompson, who teaches Web/graphic design and development at Cal State Dominguez Hills, said that the school's certificate courses offer “a working Adobe Certified Expert and Web design professional who instructs by teaching not just the how, but the history, as well as the best practices for designing and building websites.”

According to Thompson, the school's classes are all hands-on, with students working in a state-of-the-art computer lab (with the option to bring your own laptop), utilizing the latest Web software. Instruction is well-paced and “techno-babble” is replaced with clear, concise explanations. In-class project time allows students to create works of their own design.

Catering to working professionals, Cal State Dominguez Hills offers Web development courses on a flexible weekend schedule, with Friday evening and Saturday courses available three times a year.

“The certificate program lays the foundation for a solid Web design and development skill set,” Thompson added. “Past students have been hired by such companies as Yahoo!, the city of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Public Library and design firms.” Five courses are required for a certificate, totaling approximately \$1,150.

El Camino College

Another low-cost alternative for prospective students is the Web design certificate program at El Camino College in Torrance, which includes classes in drawing fundamentals, two-dimensional design, advertising design, digital art, digital photography, multimedia design and motion graphics.

The El Camino program covers CSS, JavaScript, Flash and other cutting-edge digital tools. Students learn through hands-on applications. For instance, one assignment asks students to design a fully functional e-commerce website that includes advanced elements such as a shopping cart and payment system.

“I learned a lot through this program and especially through my internship,” said Sarah Leatherman, who recently received her certificate at El Camino and participated in a Web design internship in the college’s Public Relations and Marketing Department.

A total of 36 units (at \$36 per unit) are necessary for a certificate at El Camino. Leatherman is currently taking more classes there to advance her skills and career prospects.

Web design draws students with a wide variety of backgrounds. For example, at Santa Monica College the target demographic is “primarily graphic design students who want to expand their repertoire of skills,” Lancaster said.

Thompson said her students at Dominguez Hills run the gamut of ages, professions and prior experience. “I have had 13- to 14-year-olds, and I’ve had an 82-year-old student,” she said.

—Joe Yogerst
Custom Publishing Writer

Shifts in Politics and Policies Complicate College-Completion Agenda for States

The Chronicle of Higher Education

August 14, 2011

By Eric Kelderman

San Francisco

Meeting President Obama's goal of making the United States the nation with the highest proportion of college graduates by 2020 will be difficult for colleges but possible. The greater challenge for higher education might be keeping up with the nation's shifting political and economic landscape.

To reach the president's goal will require 3 percent to 4 percent annual growth in the number of degrees that colleges award, Travis J. Reindl, an expert in postsecondary education with the bipartisan National Governors Association, told attendees at the annual policy meeting of the State Higher Education Executive Officers here.

And despite early concerns that college officials thought there was too much emphasis on college completion by the Obama administration, there are signs that higher-education leaders are embracing the president's goal. One reason is that they have come to realize that their future financial support will rely heavily on their performance in getting students to complete their studies. A growing number of states have approved or are considering linking appropriations to higher education to degree and certificate completions.

"The discussion has changed dramatically," said Stan Jones, president of Complete College America, a nonprofit group that is helping 29 states to improve college-completion rates. A year ago, chancellors and college presidents were defensive about discussing their poor graduation rates, he said, but now many more are willing to acknowledge the problem and talk about broad solutions.

Loss of Higher-Education Agencies

Some states, however, lack coherent leadership and policies to move much beyond talk. A study to be released later this year looks at how college degree productivity is affected by higher-education policy in five states: Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Texas, and Washington. The study was conducted by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, with support from the nonprofit National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. The study, led by Joni E. Finney, director of the Institute for Research in Higher Education at Penn's Graduate School of Education, was highlighted during a session at the higher-education-executives meeting.

While researchers found a particular set of problems for each state considered in the study, a common theme was that in most cases there was little coordination among institutions, higher-education agencies, and elected officials.

Washington State, for example, has a well-developed master plan, but the Higher Education Coordinating Board was dismantled by the governor this year and institutions were given greater authority to set tuition. Without coordination, the researchers conclude, the number of baccalaureate degrees is unlikely to improve, and institutional financial aid is likely to decline.

That situation is similar to that of California, where Gov. Jerry Brown used a line-item veto to eliminate the state's Postsecondary Education Commission, raising concerns that more than 30 years of data on student performance could be lost.

The perception has been that those entities are ineffective, says Aims C. McGuinness Jr., a senior associate at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, a nonprofit consulting group. "But they're really just carrying out functions designed for a different time," he said. And without them, more politically powerful institutions, such as flagships, may gain even more power and wealth at the expense of two-year colleges, which already receive far less state money per student, he said.

That potential arose recently in Oregon and Wisconsin, where flagships proposed splitting away from state systems and oversight. In Ohio, the state's chancellor of higher education has recently proposed creating a class of "enterprise universities" that would be freed from much state regulation, though they would also have to forfeit a large share of their state appropriations and agree to a number of aspirational benchmarks that measure fiscal and academic stability.

Revenue Slowdown

At the heart of the policy problems is the rapid pace of political change across the country at a time of economic uncertainty. Growth in state revenue is expected to be much slower for the next decade than it has been in recent years.

More than half of the nation's governors were newly elected in 2010, along with some 2,000 new state legislators who are still learning about the complexities of higher education after less than a year in office, Mr. Reindl said.

"We have 29 new governors. We're still playing 'getting to know you' with some of them," he said.

And while the higher-education agendas of many of governors are still unclear, their budgeting philosophy is practically set in stone.

Governors want to know what they will get for every dollar they put into a program, Mr. Reindl said. And if higher-education leaders want a bigger portion of the state budget, they'd better be prepared to explain where the money should come from and how it will benefit the state, he said.

And a promise to raise the graduation rates at colleges won't be enough to answer the governors' questions. Colleges must do a better job of aligning their offerings with the needs of the state, including the kinds of degrees being earned and the areas of research that the institution is focusing on, said Mr. Reindl.

What most concerns Mr. Reindl and others, however, is the possibility that the divisive politics in the nation's capital will spill over to the states and distract lawmakers who have the goal of strengthening higher education.

Some of that has already begun in states like Indiana and Wisconsin, where proposals to undermine bargaining rights of state workers prompted Democratic state legislators to leave the statehouse in protest and to attempt to stall the legislation. And Minnesota's state government

was shut down for nearly three weeks when lawmakers failed to strike a bargain with the governor to balance the budget.

That sort of political dysfunction seems all the more likely in the coming year as the 2012 election season gets under way.

Post-Pork

Inside Higher Ed

August 16, 2011

When the easy pork runs out, institutions have to take a different approach if they want to bring home the bacon.

That's the lesson that institutions like West Virginia University and Mississippi State University are learning in the current political climate. The two institutions, like others in their states and many across the country, were longtime beneficiaries of well-placed lawmakers who secured research and infrastructure spending -- often called earmarks or "pork" projects -- outside the competitive process.

But all that has changed, as several powerful lawmakers who helped these institutions are no longer in Congress. These lawmakers came from both sides of the aisle and included party leaders and appropriations chairmen, such as the late West Virginia Senator Robert C. Byrd.

Byrd, the longest-serving senator in history and the top Democrat on the Senate's appropriations committee for 20 years, died in 2010; the longtime earmarkers remaining in Congress were practically stripped of the traditional means of directing funds to their home states when the House of Representatives voted to prohibit earmarks after Republicans took control of the chamber in the 2010 elections.

Now these institutions are hoping that the investments in their programs through earmarks -- which sometimes amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars over several decades -- have made their research enterprises strong enough to secure competitive grants. While some programs -- particularly in science and engineering -- are succeeding in their efforts, others see a dim future without earmarks because competitive or other funding is limited or because they cannot compete with better-established programs.

"Going back several years, one could probably say that this campus had been reliant on Congressionally directed funding as a reasonably predictable source of research funding," said Curt M. Peterson, vice president for research and economic development at West Virginia University. "But in the climate that we're in now -- that we have really been in for the last decade -- and looking forward, we clearly have to be more competitive."

The Earmark Debate

The debate over earmarks, particularly those for research, has existed for decades, and both sides' positions are well-established.

Earmarks -- direct Congressional orders for federal agencies to provide funds to support various projects -- circumvent the peer review process that many argue is designed to make sure the best research is supported. Critics say earmarking almost by definition results in worse science, whereas peer review rewards institutions and states that have invested for years in building up research universities so that they can compete.

In 2005, the Association of American Universities stated that "AAU institutions have a responsibility to support a strong research program based on merit and should refrain from seeking or accepting earmarks that put merit-reviewed funding at risk." A 2003 paper by A. Abigail Payne, a professor of economics at McMaster University, found that increases in earmarked research funding led to more scholarly articles but a decline in the quality of those articles as measured by citations, though that might be because earmarked projects are often for applied projects rather than pure research. Many critics also say that earmarks add to federal spending, and they have come under increased scrutiny as groups push to cut the national government's spending.

Proponents argue that earmarks can help level the playing field for less-prestigious institutions, often located in rural or resource-poor regions, which are too often shut out of what sometimes seems like a "clubby" competitive grant process. They argue that earmarked research dollars can help institutions develop the capacity to be more competitive in the future, strengthening competition.

Competitive research dollars are unevenly distributed and tend to be concentrated at certain institutions. States that are home to institutions with a long history of securing research funding, such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology or Stanford University, tend to receive more in peer-reviewed funds year after year.

When earmarks were stripped from the federal budgeting process, the argument was predominantly a fiscal one, despite the fact that earmarks made up less than 1 percent of the federal budget. Still, they meant a lot to some institutions: an analysis of the federal budget by Inside Higher Ed determined that colleges and universities received roughly \$2 billion in earmarks in 2010.

While most research universities have gotten earmarks over the years, most also did well on competitive grants. But at institutions such as West Virginia and Mississippi State, earmarks made up a large chunk of the research budget. "These smaller schools would have a greater percentage of their research budgets coming from earmarks, and thus this impact would be greater on them," said Patrick Clemins, director of the research and development budget and policy program for the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

While there has been significant exploration of who receives earmarks, there has been little investigation of whether they have helped stimulate competitive research success over the long term. Now that they are gone, several institutions are about to find out.

New Strengths in West Virginia

West Virginia University's history with earmarks is intertwined with the career of Senator Byrd. The university, as well as the other institutions in West Virginia, benefited greatly from Byrd's prominent placement in the Senate, particularly once Byrd came to chair the Senate Appropriations Committee in 1989. (He remained the top Democrat on the committee through 2009.)

During those years, the university received hundreds of millions of dollars in research and infrastructure programs for various programs, including the National Alternative Fuels Training Consortium, the Forensic Science Program, the National Small Flows Clearinghouse, the

Consortium for Fossil Fuels Liquefaction Science, and the Constructed Facilities Center. Some of these programs received annual funding that comprised the majority of their operating budgets, while others received money for new buildings or particular initiatives.

Between 2008 and 2010, West Virginia University received \$48 million in earmarked funding, according to LegiStorm, a website that tracks congressional earmarks.

Peterson, who has helped oversee West Virginia's research programs since 2005, said that he arrived at the university around the time that administrators recognized that Congressionally directed funding was likely on the chopping block and that the university would have to become more competitive in securing grants if it hoped to maintain its research capacity. His office instituted several reforms, such as offering workshops on writing competitive grants, providing grant-writing mentors for junior faculty members, and hiring a consultant to review proposals before they are submitted.

Since 2005, West Virginia has more than doubled the total amount of money it receives through competitive grants. That year, the university brought in \$14 million in competitive funding. In 2011, it brought in \$29 million.

While its competitive funding has grown, West Virginia still falls significantly short of the major research universities that bring in hundreds of millions of dollars a year in federal funding. A analysis by the National Science Foundation found that the University of Michigan system brought in about \$636 million in federal funding in 2009, though not all of that was competitive.

Some programs at West Virginia have been able to capitalize on earmarked dollars better than others. An obesity program at the university that received about \$3 million in earmarked research funding in 2003 and 2004 was recently awarded two grants totaling about \$12 million. He also pointed to the program in forensic science, a field he said offers little in the way of competitive funding, as another success story, noting that the program is one of the most popular undergraduate programs at the university and a point of pride for the university.

Peterson also mentioned the Constructed Facilities Center, run by Hota V.S. GangaRao, a professor of civil and environmental engineering. After millions of dollars in earmarks during Byrd's tenure that made up about 50 percent of the center's budget, the center is starting to see success at winning competitive grants, including a \$240,000 grant last year. GangaRao said his center was doing "reasonably well," but was definitely hurt by Byrd's death. He said the loss of earmarks has forced him to seek out new partnerships with state agencies and private businesses such as defense contractors to maintain the center's research. Without the earmarks, GangaRao said, the center has been forced to shift away from pure research to more applied research.

Peterson said the university has placed a significant emphasis on science and engineering areas to try to grow its research capacity, particularly four interdisciplinary areas where it believes it has the infrastructure to be competitive: energy and the environment, biomedicine, nanoscience, and biometrics and forensics. The university has some history of earmarks in all four areas. "We're not trying to be everything for everybody," he said. "We know we have to focus."

Barriers in Mississippi

Mississippi State's story is similar to West Virginia's, though the trend is less pronounced. The university, like many others in Mississippi, secured significant funding through several well-placed lawmakers, including Sen. Trent Lott, the former Republican leader in the Senate, and Sen. Thad Cochran, currently the top Republican on the appropriations committee (to name just two -- the state has a long history of earmarkers).

Because of its background as a land-grant institution, the university received many earmarks for agriculture research, including programs in aquaculture production and biomass research, and rural development, particularly in the delta region.

Mississippi State's research dollars have not had a constant upward trajectory like West Virginia's. Since 2006, the university's total sponsored research -- including competitive grants, earmarks, and other sources of research funding -- has fluctuated between a high of \$205 million in 2007 and a low of \$146 million in 2009. In 2011, the university secured \$156 million in research awards. Shaw said that while the loss of earmarks hasn't hurt the university's research engine, the numbers show that Mississippi State has not been as successful as West Virginia in growing its research capacity.

David Shaw, vice president for research and economic development, said there is definitely an emphasis on taking programs that did receive earmarks and making them competitive at winning grants. "There's always a mandate that these would not be forever initiatives," Shaw said. Typically, he said, it has taken programs at Mississippi State that have received significant Congressional support about two years before they start showing payoff in securing competitive research dollars or other forms of support.

Several of the earmarked programs he cited as success stories did not necessarily win competitive funds, but helped drive development in the local economy, such as the university's Center for Advanced Vehicular Systems and the Sustainable Energy Research Center.

But not all programs have been able to capitalize on their years of earmarks.

Craig S. Tucker runs the Thad Cochran National Warmwater Aquaculture Center, named after the state's senior Republican senator who now chairs the Senate appropriations committee. The center, which is a joint venture of several departments at Mississippi State and scientists from the USDA's Agricultural Research Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture, predominantly researches the production of catfish. Since 1979, the center has seen a steady stream of congressional money, and Tucker said it could be the longest continually-funded earmark in the country. Most years the earmark totaled about \$350,000, though some years it was as much as \$1.6 million. Between 1990 and 2003, Mississippi State received more than \$16 million for aquaculture research, much of it for the center.

Despite 30 years of earmarks, the center has not seen significant success at generating other revenue streams. With earmarks gone, it is struggling financially.

Tucker said there are not a lot of competitive research opportunities for much of what the program does. The catfish industry isn't large enough to support a lot of the original research in the way the corn industry supports university programs. If the center does focus solely on what it can secure grants for, it might end up abandoning part of its mission, Tucker said. The major

competitive grants awarded to the center revolve around genetics and microbiology, but there are few opportunities for money studying production and nutrition. When it does go after competitive grants to study major issues like diseases, the center has to compete with larger, more established animal production industries, such as poultry and cattle.

For several years, Tucker and other representatives of the center have been making the case for some level of federally directed funding might be necessary to continue certain programs. Competitive grant processes often focus on widely applicable ideas instead of what's important locally, he said. "If we have to rely on competitive grants, our program emphasis would likely shift dramatically away from doing work farmers want us to do," he said.

Future Funding

Several researchers said the era of earmarks that was so good to institutions like West Virginia and Mississippi State is likely over, and if earmarks do return, they will probably be less common and less valuable. Shaw and Paterson both said that the current climate will put pressure on institutions like theirs to find new sources of funding to maintain research productivity.

Both opponents and proponents said there will always be earmarking in one form or another. Citizens Against Government Waste, a group that campaigns against earmarks, said they have spotted directed projects in the current budget despite the moratorium, though lawmakers do not call them earmarks.

"Eventually they'll come back," Clemins said. "But I don't see any in the near future. You used to have a lot of institutions trying to defend earmarks. You don't see a lot of defense of earmarks anymore. People don't like them. They see it as waste and unfair. I don't see any public opinion changing any time soon."

— Kevin Kiley

Area STAR test scores show gains

Daily Breeze

By Rob Kuznia Staff Writer

Posted: 08/15/2011

When it comes to students' basic understanding of math and English, all boats are rising in the South Bay, with virtually every school district in the area posting incremental gains, according to a batch of test scores released Monday.

But areas of concern remain, most notably in the Centinela Valley high school district, where just 11.4 percent of the students at Leuzinger, Hawthorne and Lawndale high schools scored "proficient" or better in mathematics on tests designed to measure student mastery of the state-set standards.

In general, though, the majority of the South Bay's 13 school districts are exceeding statewide averages: nine area districts are posting above-average rates in English and 10 South Bay districts are above-average in mathematics.

Known as the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program, the figures released Monday are based mostly on performance on what is known as the California Standards Test, which students in grades two through 11 take every spring. Monday's scores are not to be confused with the better-known Academic Performance Index - or the API - which assigns a single score of 200 to 1,000 to every school. Those figures will be released on Aug. 31.

The steady improvement in the South Bay is a reflection of what is happening statewide, where the percentage of students making the grade in math and English has risen steadily every year since the introduction of the program nearly a decade ago. For instance, in 2003, little more than a third of California's students were on track in math; today, 50 percent score proficient or advanced. The rise of proficiency in English language arts has followed a similar trajectory: 35 percent proficient or better in 2003 to 54 percent now.

"The significant and sustained improvements we've seen for nine consecutive years prove how hard teachers, school employees, administrators and parents are working to help students achieve despite budget cuts that have affected our schools," state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson said in a statement. "Their heroic teamwork is paying off for California."

In the South Bay, little has changed in the way the school districts stack up, with public schools in Hermosa Beach, Manhattan Beach, Palos Verdes and El Segundo posting the highest rates of proficiency in both areas. In math, for instance, the figures were 89.3 percent, 81.5 percent, 78.3 percent and 69.5 percent, respectively.

The South Bay districts whose rates of proficiency most closely reflected statewide averages were the K-8 districts in Lawndale and Hawthorne, where the figures generally ranged from 50 to 60 percent.

The most impressive growth this year happened in the K-8 Wiseburn School District, which was already performing fairly well.

That school district in west Hawthorne saw its math proficiency jump 7 points, to 64.1 percent. The boost vaulted Wiseburn - composed of Dana Middle School as well as Anza, Burnett and Cabrillo elementary schools - past the Torrance Unified in mathematics. Wiseburn had already surpassed Torrance in English, meaning it now posts the sixth-highest proficiency rates in the South Bay in both subject areas - directly behind Redondo Beach.

In Torrance, the gains were modest: about 1 percentage point in both English and math, bringing the proficiency rates to 71 and 61 percent, respectively.

In the Los Angeles Unified School District, 44 percent of the students scored proficient in English and 43 percent in math during the 2010-11 school year. That's up slightly from the previous year, when when 41 percent tested proficient in English and 39 percent showed the same competency in math.

LAUSD officials noted that students managed to make gains despite some \$1.5 billion in cuts to the district's budget and a school calendar that was cut by a week.

"It seems counterintuitive to say that amidst terrible cuts, students at LAUSD are reaching their highest points of achievement ... but these results show the amazing hard work of our staff," Superintendent John Deasy said during a news conference at Reseda High School.

About 10 percent of LAUSD schools are in the South Bay and Harbor Area.

Posting the second best gains in the South Bay was the K-8 Lennox School District, which serves perhaps the poorest group of students in the region. Lennox's 5.5 percent climb in math has pushed the district's proficiency rate in that subject to 58 percent - comfortably above the statewide average of 50 percent. Its English proficiency also rose by an impressive 4 points, to 45 percent, though that remains 10 points behind the state average.

Joann Isken, the district's assistant superintendent of educational services, attributed the good news largely to a math program launched in the Lennox elementary schools four years ago that blends mathematics and verbal processing. For instance, after the teacher's daily lesson, math students in Lennox are required to form small groups, where they solve problems by talking to one another.

This fall, Lennox Middle School will offer its first-ever geometry class to a class of 30 advanced eighth-graders, 93 percent of whom scored proficient or better in math last spring.

"We are very excited about it," she said.

Also showing strong gains was the K-8 Lawndale School District, where both English and math proficiency rose by 4 points, to 55 and 60 percent, respectively.

Betsy Hamilton, the district's assistant superintendent of educational services, tied the success in part to how Lawndale is among the only districts in the region to avoid dreaded furlough days or layoffs.

She also credited a focus on daily assessments of how students are learning. For instance, elementary students might all receive a mini white board on which to scrawl answers, providing valuable feedback to teachers on whether to move on to the next concept. In the middle schools, students do the same thing, but with hand-held digital clickers.

"It's called shortening the feedback loop," Hamilton said. "The more direct specific feedback you get about your learners, the more effective the teaching process will be."

In the long-struggling Centinela Valley Union High School District, officials said good news is on the way: according to their preliminary calculations, large gains are in store for the district's API scores.

But Ben Wolf, the district's assistant superintendent of educational services, acknowledged that math scores there are in drastic need of improvement.

"That's going to be our focus this year, now that we've gotten our English Learner scores and English scores up," he said.

Centinela Valley's math proficiency rate of 11.4 percent represents a minor uptick from last year's 10.7 percent, but is still far below the statewide average of 50.3 percent.

But Wolf noted that it isn't fair to compare high school districts to K-12 or elementary districts for several reasons. For instance, high school students often are not as motivated as younger students on standardized tests.

Indeed, other area high schools also post woefully low rates of math proficiency.

In Centinela Valley, Hawthorne High struggled the most in math, with just 6.7 percent of the students testing proficient. But at Gardena High - which belongs to the Los Angeles Unified School District - the rate is even lower: 4.1 percent. At Inglewood High, part of the K-12 Inglewood Unified School District, the rate is 3.8 percent.

Extended filing period closes for Nov. 8 South Bay election candidates

Daily Breeze

By Melissa Pamer Staff Writer

Posted: 08/17/2011

With a few exceptions, it might be a bit of a snoozer of an election season this fall in the South Bay.

On Wednesday, the extended filing period closed for candidates seeking to run in Nov. 8 elections. The extra few days, required in races in which an incumbent did not file by an earlier deadline last week, drew just a handful more candidates - most of them in Hawthorne city elections.

Many school district elections will be canceled because no one but incumbents filed.

Once city and county clerks certify final lists of electoral hopefuls in coming days, it will become apparent what kind of political contests the South Bay will see in coming months. For now, it looks like hotly contested elections will be featured only in Hawthorne and Rancho Palos Verdes - and in the 15th City Council District in Los Angeles, where the filing period opens Monday to replace Janice Hahn.

The fields were set upon Friday's initial filing deadline in Rancho Palos Verdes and Hermosa Beach city elections and in the El Camino Community College District.

No one but incumbents filed to run in Rolling Hills Estates, as well as in the tiny Miraleste Recreation and Park District - so there will be no elections in either jurisdiction.

The same occurred in six South Bay school districts. Incumbents are set to retain their seats, unchallenged, on boards representing Hawthorne, Lawndale, Lennox, Manhattan Beach, Torrance and Wiseburn schools.

Here are some details for races where election filing was extended:

In Hawthorne, two City Council members and a political novice will challenge each other for the mayor's seat, which Larry Guidi is giving up after 18 years. Guidi is facing felony theft charges for allegedly taking a commercial food mixer from the city's school district.

Ginny Lambert, another veteran city politician, is vacating her seat on the City Council. She has been on the panel for 25 years but has recently experienced health problems.

The other position that voters will consider is now held by City Councilman Danny Juarez, who is giving up his spot to make a bid for mayor. Juarez will contend for the mayor's seat with fellow Councilman Alex Vargas and newcomer Dwan Fulwood.

The City Council race will be a tough competition as eight people have filed to fight for the two seats.

The candidates are: Holly Park Homeowners Association President Jose Gutierrez; retired aviation law attorney and city commissioner Olivia Valentine; the Rev. John Jefferson of Del Aire Baptist Church; Hawthorne school board members John Vargas and Nilo Michelin; Martin Offiah, a criminal justice teacher; and residents Frances Stiglich and William Schultz.

In Lomita, only the three newcomers who filed last week are in the field to replace two incumbents who are leaving their seats. Attorney James Thompson and Planning Commissioners Henry Sanchez Jr. and Mike Savidan will run. No additional candidates filed by Wednesday.

In El Segundo Unified, no additional candidates have this week joined the four that filed by last Friday to run for two board seats.

Facing off with incumbent Lisa Wilkin will be Stephen Cook, who listed his profession as an interactive art director; Jeanie Nishime, a vice president at El Camino College; and Laura Gabel, a community volunteer.

In the Hermosa City School District, it appears there will be no election. By late Wednesday, just two candidates - incumbent Lisa Claypoole and teacher Patti Ackerman - had filed for two open seats. City resident Trent R. Stamp had pulled papers, but hadn't filed as of just before the 5 p.m. deadline. He couldn't be reached Wednesday evening to confirm either way.

No additional candidates filed by Wednesday's extended deadline for the Palos Verdes Peninsula school board. With board President Dora de la Rosa running for election to the Rancho Palos Verdes City Council, the school board has only Larry Vanden Bos as an incumbent candidate.

He's being challenged by Erin LaMonte, a district employee who has run for the board before, and by Dianna Chooljian, a doctor from Palos Verdes Estates.

It appears that the Palos Verdes Library District will not have an election as only three candidates filed for three open seats on its board. Two incumbents declined to seek re-election.

Fran Wielen wants to keep her board seat, while Rolling Hills Estates resident Debby Stegura and Rancho Palos Verdes resident James Moore also have filed.

Staff writers Nick Green, Sandy Mazza and Rob Kuznia contributed to this article.

El Camino College Compton Center launches Career Advancement Academy

THE COMPTON BULLETIN, August 24, 2011

Training in machine tool technology/aerospace fastener manufacturing and welding to be offered this semester

Through a Career Advancement Academy, El Camino College Compton Center is providing students with the programs and training they need for careers in high-growth industries.

The academy offers programs in machine tool technology and aerospace fastener manufacturing and welding. Enrolling in one of these programs is a proactive first step for students wanting to gain valuable, marketable skills and set themselves up for successful, new careers.

To be eligible for the Career Advancement Academy programs, students must meet a few basic requirements. They must be between 18 and 30 years old, have not yet earned a college degree, and be able to work in the United States.

The academy is part of a statewide initiative designed to increase the access to higher education that leads to jobs. The program combines career technical education with basic skills in high-demand career areas in which new workers are needed immediately.

Funded by a \$662,700 grant from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, the Career Advancement Academy also has technical support from the Career Ladders Project.

The aerospace fastener industry is centered in Southern California. More than 10,000 Southern Californians are currently employed by local aerospace fasteners, manufacturers and distributors, but many of these veteran workers are due to retire. It is anticipated that numerous local employers will need to hire skilled students for entry-level positions over the next five years.

Students enrolled in either the machine tool technology/aerospace fastener manufacturing or welding programs benefit from a curriculum that combines a practical, technical education with classes designed to strengthen reading, writing, and mathematical skills.

The program includes career skills workshops covering topics like resume writing, interviewing, job retention, interpersonal skills relating to the workplace, industry-specific "green" classes, and total quality management.

Books and workplace safety boots are provided at no charge for those enrolled. The program culminates in an exclusive job fair with employers who are hiring.

For more information regarding ECC Compton Center's Career Advancement Academy and its programs call 310-900- 1600, ext. 2779.

Frustration level high on first day of classes at El Camino

The Daily Breeze

By Rob Kuznia Staff Writer

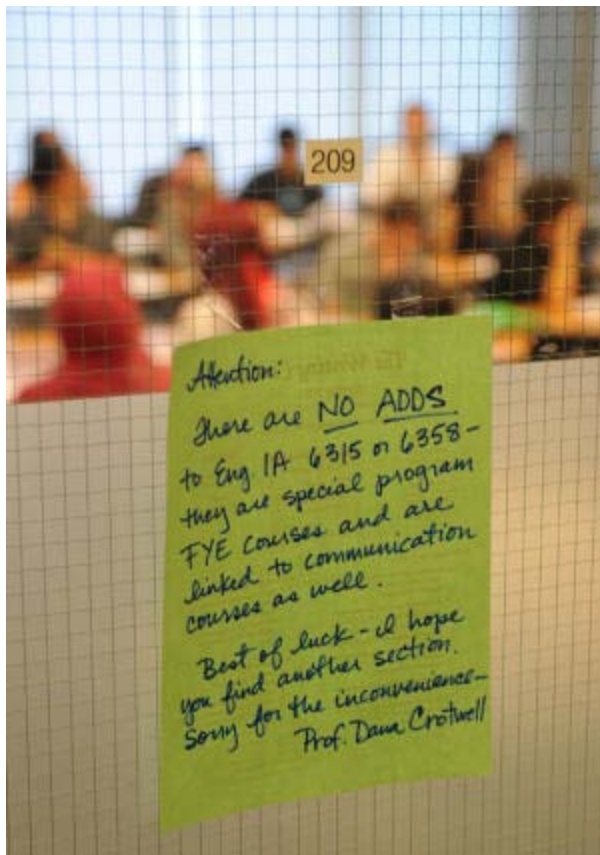
Posted: 08/30/2011



El Camino College got off to a busy start when fall classes began on Monday. (Brad Graverson / Staff Photographer)

Students streamed onto campus by the thousands for the first day of school Monday at El Camino College, where the frustration level was high because of gouging budget cuts that have made it more difficult to get into classes.

With the state budget crunch forcing the California community college system to chop \$400 million from this year's outlay - thereby eliminating some 5 percent of the available sections - state officials estimate that 670,000 students will be turned away because classes are full.



Many General Ed requirement classes were full up and adds were few. (Brad Graverson / Staff Photographer)

That's more than double the number of students who were out of luck last year. In 2008-09, no students were turned away, according to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. At the Torrance-area campus Monday, Wesley Duran was among the throngs of students waiting for classes to begin in the halls of the humanities building. Duran, sitting dejectedly on a bench, said he'd tried registering for classes shortly after graduating from Torrance High School in June. "Everything was full," said Duran, who wants to be a physical trainer. "It sucks." Like many students who didn't get into all their top-choice classes, Duran walked into a history class in hopes that there would be enough no-shows to make room for him. No such luck: the instructor politely asked him and a handful of others to leave.

Statewide and locally, the result of the budget cuts is a shrunken system. The number of students served in California community colleges has fallen to an estimated 2.5 million from nearly 2.8 million last year. At El Camino, the student population has dwindled in five years to around 24,000 from nearly 30,000 - even as demand for classes has risen.

Reflecting the malaise happening elsewhere, the waiting list at El Camino as of Monday had reached a record-high 31,000 names, up from 28,000 or 29,000 last year, officials said. (The number is not a reflection of how many students are on it, because one person can be wait-listed in multiple classes.) Just five years ago, there was no waiting list, said El Camino spokeswoman Ann Garten.

Meanwhile, registering for classes tends to be trickier for recent high school grads during tough economic times because returning students get a one-month jump on registration over new students, and seating is limited.

But that's about to change at El Camino, at least for students in the area. Starting in the spring semester, recent graduates of high schools in El Camino's area - Torrance, Hawthorne, Lawndale, El Segundo, Inglewood and the beach cities - will be allowed to register earlier than recent high school graduates from outside the area, Garten said.



The number of students enrolled at El Camino College hasn't risen drastically, but budget cuts mean fewer classes are available this year. (Brad Graverson / Staff Photographer)

In general, California's 112 community colleges are being streamlined to get students on track for four-year universities or vocational training. Courses that help achieve those pragmatic goals often have been spared over courses that were once popular for enhancing personal growth, such as dance and other classes in the fine arts.

Meanwhile, attending community college is getting more expensive. For this fall, tuition rose from \$26 a unit to \$36. With midyear cuts a distinct possibility, the cost could bump up to \$46 for spring quarter, said Paige Marlatt-Dorr, director of communications for the California Community Colleges system.

Back in the hallways of El Camino on Monday, the long wait lists frustrated Terry Ally, a parent of a recent Inglewood High School graduate who found that every class she tried to get into was full. Ally accompanied her to provide moral support, and was waiting on a bench as his daughter sat in on an English class in hopes she would be allowed to stay.

"They are killing these kids' dreams," he said of the politicians he believes are mishandling tax dollars. "(The students) want to be somebody. They're getting turned away."

Education Department Chases 'Pell Runners' Who Threaten Aid Program

The Chronicle of Higher Education

August 28, 2011

By Kelly Field

When a prospective student called her office 15 times in one day to ask when his federal aid would be disbursed, Laurie A. Wolf, executive dean of student services at Des Moines Area Community College, became suspicious.

"He'd say things like, 'I want my money,' or 'When can I get my money?'" she said. "Something didn't seem right."

She pulled his student-aid record and discovered that he had received aid from seven other colleges. When she requested transcripts, he vanished.

The student, she believes, was a "Pell runner," a scam artist who bounces from college to college, staying just long enough to receive a Pell Grant refund. Runners represent a small fraction of the 9.5 million students who received Pell Grants last year, but their numbers appear to be growing, particularly at community colleges, say financial-aid administrators and Educational Department officials. Their fraud costs taxpayers untold thousands and drives up colleges' default rates when the students take out loans as well.

"The word is out there that this is something you can do to exploit the aid programs," said David A. Bergeron, deputy assistant secretary for policy in the Office of Postsecondary Education. He said the Education Department takes the problem seriously and is working to identify those who are abusing the system.

"In the current budget situation, where every dollar is hard to come by, we're particularly concerned," he said.

The cost of the Pell program has doubled over the past three years, leaving lawmakers scrambling to find enough money for the grants. So far, appropriators have been able to preserve the program through cuts in other areas. But it remains vulnerable as Congress prepares to slash \$2.5-trillion from the federal deficit.

Colleges that suspect students of committing financial-aid fraud can report the cases to the Education Department's inspector general. Over the past two years, the number of colleges doing so has increased significantly, said Catherine Grant, a spokeswoman for the agency. Some aid administrators are asking the department for help in catching the runners.

But many student-aid advocates say the problem is being blown out of proportion. They argue that some fraud is inevitable in a \$34-billion government program and worry that drawing attention to it will undercut their efforts to shield the Pell program from budget cuts. In interviews, they used words like "outlier," "limited," and "minuscule" to describe the scope of the fraud.

"This to me was a blip, and then it got called something catchy," said Justin Draeger, president of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. "Now people are talking about it at our national conference."

What's in a Name?

The origins of the term "Pell runner" are a mystery. Several aid administrators said they first heard it at Nasfaa's annual conference in July, when Mr. Bergeron used it in an Education Department forum. Ms. Wolf attributed the phrase to Mark Kantrowitz, an oft-quoted expert on student aid, but he doesn't think he coined it.

The word "runner" implies illicit activity, Mr. Kantrowitz explained (think drug runners); it also refers to the carpets that line hallways, evoking the image of someone dragging out Pell receipt over a long period of time, he said.

For-profit colleges refer to such individuals as "stipend chasers," said Terry W. Hartle, senior vice president for government relations at the American Council on Education.

But Pell runners most often exploit community colleges, where tuition is low and the payoff is the highest. In the 2010-11 academic year, when the maximum Pell Grant was \$5,550, the average community college charged just \$2,713, according to the College Board. After tuition, a student who got the maximum award would get \$2,837 back for books and other expenses.

Pell runners pocket that money, flunk out, and then move on to the next college. They can repeat the process up to nine times before they exhaust their eligibility for Pell Grants.

Some runners will shop around for the colleges with the lowest tuition, to maximize their refunds. Many of the cheapest options are in the Southwest and West, where costs averaged just \$1,964 and \$1,594, respectively, last year.

Lee M. Carrillo, director of financial aid at Central New Mexico Community College, had his first encounter with Pell runners last fall, when colleagues in the enrollment office asked him to investigate a group of students who were calling every day to see when they would get their aid. He found that they were hopping from college to college, enrolling in online courses, and then failing out. The "ringleader" appeared to be a female student, who would call colleges pretending to be different applicants.

Suspecting fraud, he reported the individuals to the Education Department's inspector general and put a hold in their records to alert other colleges. He said colleagues at two colleges since hit by the scam had called to thank him for the warning.

"I put a stop to her and her little shenanigans," he said.

Inspector General Investigates

Fraud in the federal student-aid programs is nothing new, of course. As far back as the 1970s, members of Congress were worried that students were getting Pell Grants for noneducational purposes. During the 1972 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, an anecdote about a Pell Grant recipient who bought a "little red Corvette" became a cause célèbre among Republican lawmakers, said Mr. Hartle.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, hundreds of families and financial-aid consultants were found guilty of falsifying financial-aid applications to receive student aid and were forced to repay more than \$1.6-million to the federal government. The inspector general conducted an audit of the Pell Grant program, and the Senate held hearings on the fraud.

More recently, the boom in online learning has fueled an increase in sophisticated "fraud rings" exploiting low-cost institutions. In one of the highest-profile cases, a Phoenix woman and her associates recruited dozens of "straw students" to apply for aid, then skimmed off a portion for themselves. Sixty-four people were sentenced in the scheme, and the ringleader was sent to prison.

The Education Department's Ms. Grant said her office was investigating 74 fraud rings and has worked with the Office of Federal Student Aid since 2010 to identify risks to the student-aid programs. The inspector general is also conducting an audit to determine whether the department is doing enough to root out fraud in distance education.

Pell runners and fraud rings use similar techniques, but they differ in key ways. While the rings depend on straw students, or identity theft, to commit their crimes, Pell runners tend to operate independently and on their own behalf. They are also more likely to be transient, moving from college to college until they reach the 18-semester limit for receiving Pell Grants.

There are no official statistics on the number of Pell runners, and distinguishing between a scam artist and a serial student can be tricky. Mr. Kantrowitz estimated that up to 3 percent of Pell money goes to Pell runners, based on the share of students who get multiple grants but no degrees.

Catching the Runners

The percentages are higher at some of the nation's cheapest community colleges. Joe D. May, president of the Louisiana Community and Technical College system, said the proportion of money going to Pell runners at his colleges had gotten as high as 12 percent

when system leaders came up with a simple solution: raise tuition. In June the state Legislature passed a bill that will gradually double tuition at the state's technical colleges, from an average of \$1,000 a year to \$2,000.

It's a "controversial" solution, he said, "but we believed it was the right approach."

"We weren't trying to put an additional financial burden on students," Mr. May added. "We were trying to eliminate a loophole."

Officials of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators are asking the government for help in identifying Pell runners. They want the Education Department to flag students who have received aid from multiple institutions, to determine who merits a closer look. As of now, institutions must rely on students' self-reporting or check their claims against federal aid databases. Many colleges don't have the resources to follow up on every student.

Meanwhile, some colleges are taking steps to cut off aid to scammers sooner. Lansing Community College, which was a victim of an online fraud ring that was prosecuted by the inspector general, recently began evaluating students' academic progress each term rather than yearly, said Stephanie Bogard Trapp, director of financial aid. It has also started disbursing the grants in two installments, rather than upfront, she said. If an instructor reports a student as withdrawn by the midpoint of the term, the student won't get the second half of the grant.

In California, which has the country's least costly community colleges, multiple disbursements are common. But many of the colleges won't give students the second grant until after the state-set "census date," when faculty are required to report on attendance.

At Northern Virginia Community College, one of the nation's largest two-year colleges, administrators are starting some students with poor academic histories on academic warning status. If they fail to make academic progress during their first term, they are placed on suspension and become ineligible for the remainder of their Pell Grants, barring an appeal, said Joan A. Zanders, director of financial aid.

Ms. Zanders said aid administrators at community colleges need to be "more diligent than ever before" as they seek to provide access while protecting taxpayers from fraud and abuse.

Ultimately, though, the biggest loss may be to the runners, who are depriving themselves of a college education and trading thousands of dollars in additional lifetime earnings for a quick buck.

"It's a huge cost to them and to society, all so they can pocket a few thousand dollars," said Mr. May.