Daily Breeze

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From staff reports
Posted: 01/04/2009

El Camino College students Lyn Watanabe and Laura Bellamy will host a photography exhibit this month at the C&D's Welcome Cafe and Gallery, 1808 S. Pacific Coast Highway, Redondo Beach. An opening reception will be held Friday from 6 to 8 p.m.

The works will be featured in an art collective titled "Diversionary: three women/mixed media voices," which includes traditional film and digital photography. Information: 310-660-3406.

The Chronicle for Higher Education

From the issue dated January 9, 2009

Colleges Protect Workers and Cut Elsewhere

By GOLDIE BLUMENSTYK

Most colleges have steered through the first jolts of the recession without resorting to layoffs, cutting employee benefits, or imposing across-the-board freezes on hiring. But the economic pain is afflicting campuses in many other ways, according to the findings from a new survey of chief business officers conducted last month by *The Chronicle and* Moody's Investors Service.

Slightly more than one in 10 colleges had laid off employees, and another 26 percent were considering doing so, survey responses from more than 200 public and private four-year colleges showed.

While few institutions have imposed total freezes on hiring faculty members (5 percent) or staff members (7 percent), more than 40 percent said they had imposed partial freezes on faculty hiring, and nearly 60 percent had done so for other staff positions. (See tables, Page A14.)

The survey results suggest that colleges are taking pains to avoid reducing the benefits of current employees — only about 6 percent said they had reduced benefits, and 18 percent of the remaining ones were considering such a step. But more than one-third of all respondents said they had already frozen salaries or delayed increases, and more than half of the rest said they expected to.

Roger Goodman, a Moody's senior analyst for higher education, said he was struck by the proportions of those considering hiring freezes or pay cuts. Colleges are "taking a cautious approach to planning," he said, which seems appropriate.

Unlike other sectors of the economy, such as restaurants and retail, "which have already seen sharp declines in their revenues," he noted, colleges probably won't begin to feel the full impact of the downturn until the fall, when they enroll their next incoming classes.

"It's good that they have time to plan," said Mr. Goodman. "But it also means that the stakes for getting it wrong are much higher." Colleges need to realize that if they plan their expenses on the basis of a certain level of enrollment but fail to meet it, they must "live with it for four years."

The survey, which institutions answered anonymously, was sent to nearly 900 public and private nonprofit institutions, including those that Moody's follows for its bond-rating service and about 300 others with budgets of $20-million or more.

While the survey is not fully representative of higher education, the results suggest that colleges on the whole haven't been cutting jobs as extensively as have employers in other industries. For example, a survey in December of 117 companies across a variety of industries by Watson Wyatt

& Company, a human-resources-consulting company, found that almost two in five companies had already made layoffs, and that nearly one in five planned to do so in the next 12 months.

Still, as Mr. Goodman noted, for a sector like higher education, which has been in a largely expansive mode for two decades, even the need for broad hiring freezes and spending cuts "is a substantial change" in culture.

Differing Pressure Points

The sources of financial pressure for private colleges are different than those for public institutions, and the survey responses reflect that.

For example, 60 percent of the public-college respondents said they had made midyear budget cuts in areas unrelated to compensation, while only 43 percent of the private-college respondents had made similar midyear cuts. For many of those public institutions, the cuts were likely to have been imposed as part of statewide mandates.

Private colleges, meanwhile, are feeling the reverberations of the financial squeeze brought on by job losses and the credit crunch, which are making it more difficult for some families to afford tuition bills. Nearly a quarter of all private-college respondents said they expected their retention rates from the fall to the spring semester to be slightly or substantially worse than last year's. By contrast, 13 percent of respondents at public colleges, which tend to be less expensive, said they expected unusual declines in retention.

A vast majority of private-college respondents, 83 percent, said they planned to keep their tuition increases for next year lower than the average of the past three years, a sign of concern about scaring off cost-conscious families. But nearly half of all public institutions said they expected their tuition increase to be higher than the average of the past three years, presumably to make up for revenue they will lose because of cuts in state support.

Colleges' other major source of revenue, private donations, is also under stress. Nearly 60 percent of all colleges said were already seeing a decline in their annual giving totals to date, though less than 30 percent said they planned to lower their overall annual giving goals. (See related story, Page A16.)

Preserving Continuity

At some colleges, moves to insulate personnel from cuts have been deliberate. "We don't want to poison the environment and make the employees pay the price of the economy," said Philip A. Hawkey, executive vice president at the University of La Verne. The private institution, which has several locations in California, has not reduced pay or benefits but is considering a range of changes including voluntary furloughs, larger teaching loads, and consolidation of departments and administrative functions.

Mr. Hawkey was one of 10 chief financial officers who identified himself and his institution when answering the survey and agreed to be interviewed by *The Chronicle.*

A smaller institution, the College of Saint Rose, in Albany, N.Y., said it is trying to avoid layoffs because many of its departments are run by one or two people and "there is a need for continuity," said Marcus F. Buckley, vice president for finance and administration. The college has delayed planned renovations on its library and the last phase of a renovation of Albertus Hall, a key academic building.

Half of all respondents to the survey said they had or were planning to postpone or cancel building projects. Among the private colleges, 48 percent said yes to that question; among the public colleges, the proportion was 58 percent, which may indicate that their projects, like their overall budgets, may be subject to statewide cuts.

The University of Missouri system, expecting such cuts — perhaps as deep as 25 percent in the next fiscal year — has already imposed a freeze on hiring for all but the most crucial faculty and staff positions, said Natalie Krawitz, vice president for finance and administration.

The four-campus system is weighing a range of other options, including furloughs, consolidating academic programs, increasing faculty workloads, and adjusting class schedules to make fuller use of campus facilities.

Ms. Krawitz said the additional measures would be painful because the institutions still have not recovered from recession-related cuts imposed early this decade. "We were on a plan to get back to 2001 funding by 2010," she said.

Even officials in states that have not been hit as hard by the recession, like Oregon, are worried. Public colleges there have not made any layoffs, said Jay D. Kenton, vice chancellor for finance and administration in the Oregon University System, and they are slated to receive increases from the state in the next biennial budget. But that could change as the economy chills. "We're waiting for the other shoe to drop," he said.

'Full Steam Ahead'

Not all of the survey responses were negative. Gary L. Carter, chief financial officer of Union University, in Jackson, Tenn., said he expected no need to freeze hiring or cut spending. "Our retention for the spring looks as good as it's ever been," he said. The institution, which saw 60 percent of its student housing destroyed in a tornado in February, managed to rebuild all of it by the start of the fall semester and is in the process of expanding to a location near Nashville. The new housing and the college's relatively low cost — tuition, room, and board amount to about $26,000 a year — makes it appealing to many families, he said.

And then there was this, from Donald Aungst, chief financial officer at Upper Iowa University, who sent an even more optimistic message with his survey responses: "We do not plan to defer our expansion plans. We intend to charge full steam ahead."

Mr. Aungst was completing the survey from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, he added, where he and a delegation from the college were working to cement academic alliances and create new ones.

The university, he wrote, was not considering any of the cutbacks or retrenchments mentioned in the survey: "We believe global students will need a UIU education even more during these tough times, and we plan to answer the call."

Jeffrey Brainard contributed to this article.

The Chronicle of Higher Education

College 2.0: A Wired Way to Rate Professors—and to Connect Teachers

By JEFFREY R. YOUNG

January 8, 2009

Who is the most wired teacher at your college?

The folks at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County know the answer on their campus: Gerald Canfield, an associate professor of information systems. He came out on top in the campus's latest rankings of “most active instructors” using the university’s course-management system.

Just about every college has such a system these days, designed to track assignments and manage online class discussions. But the Maryland campus is perhaps the first to publish campuswide usage statistics.

Mr. Canfield amassed 12,927 “hits” on Blackboard, the course-management system used by the university, during the fall semester. That’s 1,000 more than the nearest competitor, and double the average at the university.

Administrators are not suggesting that the professors who lead the rankings are any better at teaching than those lower on the list. But they may be better with technology. The data let those who are not so tech-savvy find more expert colleagues and trade tips, says John Fritz, the administrator who manages Blackboard at the university and who dreamed up the hit-tracker software.

“Faculty learn best from other faculty,” said Mr. Fritz. Although the university runs workshops on how to use Blackboard, many professors are reluctant, or too busy, to sit through training sessions. Most would prefer to ask a colleague down the hall for help, said Mr. Fritz. “Half of my job is referrals—I’m kind of a broker.”

He publishes reports about the hit-tracking software's findings on a university Web site and in a newsletter sent to all faculty members each semester.

Bragging Rights

Many college leaders have been trying for years to get professors to try technological tools to jazz up their teaching. But the independent ethos of the college environment has made it difficult to spread new teaching practices among more-reluctant professors. Colleges have tried various carrots: Some give professors fancy new office computers in exchange for attending training sessions. Others give grants to professors who experiment with technology.

The genius of Mr. Fritz's "Blackboard Reports" is that it gives professors who top the list (and those who top department-by-department breakdowns) bragging rights—and a quantifiable measure they can put on a résumé.

Katherine Morris, an instructor in social work at the university who is the most active user in her department, says she will "definitely" mention the statistic if she applies for another teaching position, as proof that she is using the latest tools in the classroom.

"I really see that this is where education is going," she said. When she talked about the rankings with colleagues at a recent lunch meeting, "everyone wanted to know where they were ranked." The public nature of the rankings has already motivated some professors to do more with online tools than they have in the past, she said.

Mr. Fritz initially worried that professors, especially those at the bottom of the list, would protest the new rankings. So before the project began, he gathered a committee of about a dozen faculty members to advise him (or talk him out of it). "I said, does anyone have any problems with this?" None did. Besides, he only publishes the top 50 in any category—so there is no list of "least-active users."

Measuring Teaching

The reports at Maryland remind us that as professors put material online, they are leaving far more of a trace than traditional lecturers ever did. In the old days, once a class ended, the chalkboard was quickly erased by the next group, and the scrawlings were gone forever. Now professors are converting their yellowing lecture notes to text on course-management systems, or posting videos of their lecture performances for students to watch later for review.

All of those materials are preserved on college servers. And such data could easily be used to evaluate the quality of the teaching going on behind closed classroom doors, though the University of Maryland-Baltimore County has no plans to do that.

Though the idea of using technology to rank activity is new to teaching, it has long been a staple of academic research.

For decades, scientists have tracked the number of times their articles are cited by others, and such citation indexes have been important for career advancement.

Teaching has had no similar metric—except, of course, for student evaluations. But many people consider those evaluations imperfect measures because students may rate most favorably those professors who are more generous with their grading rather than those who challenge them.

So in an era when colleges are under more pressure than ever to be accountable for their costs and quality, the question arises: Will colleges begin to use technology to help them measure teaching? And should they?

Surprising Connections

Mr. Canfield said he was not surprised that he topped the list of most-active users at Maryland-Baltimore County because he teaches all of his courses online.

But the "Blackboard Reports" have produced some surprises, said Mr. Fritz—including calling his attention to professors in traditional classrooms who use more technology than he might have realized otherwise.

One example is Lili Cui, a lecturer in physics. She posts lecture notes and practice quizzes, and gives extra credit for participation in the course's chat room. She said she spends at least 30 minutes every day reading the discussions and answering questions that crop up there. Students consistently rate her highly on evaluations, praising her responsiveness.

Mr. Fritz's department now spends more time talking with Ms. Cui. It recently worked with her as she experimented with a classroom response system that let her conduct quizzes in class and have the results instantly displayed on a screen.

The reports have helped him know which professors are interested in doing more, he said, even if they have not come forward asking for help

"What it at least gives me is some sort of barometer for distinguishing between all 1,300 courses," he said.

The Maryland college plans to share the software it developed to create the reports with other colleges. And perhaps it is just one way colleges will tap into new classroom technologies to rate their professors.

College 2.0 explores how new technologies are changing colleges. Please send ideas to jeff.young@chronicle.com

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Los Angeles Wave

Hopefuls begin to line up for Inglewood elections

By OLU ALEMORU, Staff Writer 08.JAN.09

INGLEWOOD — A former City Council candidate and the daughter of Inglewood's mayor are among 23 potential candidates who have taken out nomination papers for municipal elections this spring.

On April 7, two of the four seats on the City Council and three school board seats will be at stake. These include the First and Second District council seats currently held by Councilman Danny Tabor and Councilwoman Judy Dunlap; and the Inglewood Unified School District board seats now occupied by board members Arnold Butler, Trina Williams and Alice Grigsby.

As of Monday, Grigsby was the lone incumbent who had not requested nomination papers. She did not return a call by press time

According to the city clerk's office, filing closes Jan. 15.

George Dotson, a retired businessman and current chairman of the Inglewood Planning Commission, is a potential candidate for the First District seat he lost to Tabor in 2007.

Renee F. Dorn, an enrollment liaison manager at El Camino College, is a potential candidate for school board seat three.

Contra Costa Times

Search halted for Long Beach man who fell off ship

The Coast Guard called off a search Friday night for a cruise ship employee whom witnesses say fell overboard off the Florida coast.

By Pamela Hale-Burns, Staff Writer
Posted: 01/03/2009

The Coast Guard called off a search Friday night for a cruise ship employee whom witnesses say fell overboard off the Florida coast.

Workers on the Carnival Sensation reported that Antonio Matabang, 26, and identified as a Long Beach resident by a friend and former Carnival co-worker, fell overboard early Thursday.

Matabang's hometown is Artesia, according to his MySpace page, which says he graduated from Artesia High School and attended Cypress College, El Camino College and Cerritos College.

According to Carnival, Matabang was a member of the ship's entertainment staff.

"He sang while dancers danced in the background," said his friend, who asked to remain anonymous.

According to the friend, Matabang had only joined Carnival in the summer of 2008.

Reports from WFTV, a television station in Orlando, say Matabang may have been standing on a railing posing for a photo. Passengers and crew members threw him a life vest, but couldn't see if he was able to grab it.

News services contributed to this report.

Daily Breeze

Teacher layoffs eyed at LAUSD

By George B. Sanchez, Staff Writer
Posted: 01/05/2009 10:47:26 PM PST

Eyeing an ever-widening budget gap, Los Angeles Unified School District officials said Monday that they could soon send nearly 3,000 nonpermanent teachers notices warning of imminent layoffs.

While it has become standard policy in recent years for the district to send layoff notices as a precautionary measure, teachers union officials and administrators fear this is the first time since the widespread layoffs of the mid-1990s that teachers could actually lose their jobs.

"This is not a favored option, but under the current fiscal crisis, we have to consider it," said Vivian Ekchian, the LAUSD's interim chief human resources officer.

Unlike permanent teachers, who must be notified in March if they will not have a job in the upcoming school year, nonpermanent teachers - those who have worked for two years or fewer - must be given only two weeks' notice before they are fired.

Still, Superintendent Ramon Cortines said the notifications do not guarantee that teachers will lose their jobs.

"I'm just being very cautious," Cortines said.

The district will first look at 2,290 nonpermanent teachers who have the least seniority and who teach elementary school and secondary school English and math, according to a report prepared for the board. Potential layoffs would also target interns and provisional teachers, who have not passed their final exams in the subjects they teach.

United Teachers Los Angeles spokeswoman Marla Eby said the notices could just be protocol, but warned that in the current economic environment, they must be taken very seriously.

"This is the beginning," Eby said, noting that regular teachers will also likely get similar notices within two months.

The school board will consider the matter at its first meeting of the year Jan. 13. District officials say the layoffs can be avoided if money can be found from the state. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger sent a proposed budget deal to lawmakers last week that seeks to close a nearly $15 billion gap. Unless lawmakers can agree on a plan, state finance officials say, state coffers could be out of cash by February.

If the LAUSD board votes to send the notices and layoffs are made, union leaders say, it will almost certainly bring about bigger class sizes and threaten the steady improvements made in recent years in reducing the dropout rate and improving standardized test scores.

Based on an average cost per teacher of $60,000, including salary and benefits, laying off 2,290 teachers would save the district more than $137 million over a full year, said Megan Reilly, the LAUSD's chief financial officer. But because the cuts would be midyear, she explained, the savings would be no more than $68.5 million and possibly as low as a quarter of the yearly figure, or $34.2 million.

The cuts would be part of an estimated $400 million the district will likely have to trim soon as it enters the midway point of the 2008-09 school year. They come on top of $472 million the district slashed from the 2008-09 budget before the start of the current school year.

Also, at least $200 million in cuts is expected for the 2009-10 school year. So far, the state budget crisis has halted funding for district art programs. The number of meals for poor students will likely be slashed from 100 million to 55 million annually, and limits on classroom sizes for first through third grades could grow from 20 to 37.

While the 2,290 positions targeted represent a fraction of the district's 37,000 teachers, they represent more than one-third of the district's 5,700 nonpermanent teachers.

UTLA President A.J. Duffy said the cuts would hurt gains in graduation rates and achievement on state and federal standardized tests. Before the district lays off teachers, he said, the district should cut its use of outside consultants and shed bureaucrats at district headquarters.

The Chronicle for Higher Education

From the issue dated January 9, 2009

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By GOLDIE BLUMENSTYK

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Unlike other sectors of the economy, such as restaurants and retail, "which have already seen sharp declines in their revenues," he noted, colleges probably won't begin to feel the full impact of the downturn until the fall, when they enroll their next incoming classes.

"It's good that they have time to plan," said Mr. Goodman. "But it also means that the stakes for getting it wrong are much higher." Colleges need to realize that if they plan their expenses on the basis of a certain level of enrollment but fail to meet it, they must "live with it for four years."

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Differing Pressure Points

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For example, 60 percent of the public-college respondents said they had made midyear budget cuts in areas unrelated to compensation, while only 43 percent of the private-college respondents had made similar midyear cuts. For many of those public institutions, the cuts were likely to have been imposed as part of statewide mandates.

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'Full Steam Ahead'

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Jeffrey Brainard contributed to this article.

State to shut down first and third Fridays each month

By Kevin Yamamura
kyamamura@sacbee.com
Published: Friday, Jan. 09, 2009

California will close most state offices on the first and third Fridays each month starting in February, shutting DMV outlets and state parks while reducing state worker pay to help survive a massive budget problem, according to a state Department of Personnel Administration memo.

Only offices deemed critical, such as state hospitals and prisons, will remain open under Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's twice monthly furlough plan. Employees at those state operations will still be required to take two days off each month at different times.

The uniform measure is intended to make the furlough plan more manageable for the state and save money on utilities at state buildings. Unless the state grants waivers to DMV or State Parks, vacationers will face shorter weekend camping trips and drivers will have two fewer days each month to take tests or register their vehicles.

"Certainly shutting down state services for two days a month will have an effect, but we are faced with few options to keep the state solvent," said Schwarzenegger spokesman Aaron McLear. "The governor does not want to make these cuts in state programs, he does not want to raise taxes, but we have a responsibility to lead this state through a financial crisis."

The first shutdown would take place Feb. 6, and state workers are expected to stay home that day unless told otherwise. Agency secretaries plan to send memos to employees this afternoon explaining how the changes will be implemented.

"One reason to do first and third Fridays was so we could obtain cost savings by also shutting down facilities," McLear said. "We asked agency secretaries for input beforehand, and the consensus was to do it on Fridays. Typically state government is not as active on Fridays. And we felt that since we are giving workers a day off without pay, to soften that blow we felt it was fair to give them a three-day weekend."

Schwarzenegger on Friday sent lawmakers his formal proposal for tackling a $40 billion budget deficit through June 2010. The plan includes a temporary 1.5-cent sales tax hike, spending cuts and borrowing, among other solutions.

The governor last month told 238,000 state workers that he had signed an executive order mandating that they take two unpaid days off each month starting in February because the budget crisis "requires sacrifices from everyone." He also said that the least senior one-fifth of the state workforce would be at risk of layoff or transfer.

The governor's order does not affect parts of state government over which he has no authority, including the Legislature, the judicial branch, and the University of California and California State University systems.

The monthly two-day furlough represents nearly a 10 percent cut in wages. Managers and other non-union employees will receive a 10-percent salary reduction. The furloughs will have no impact on benefits, according to a Department of Personnel Administration memo.

The state will save an estimated $1.3 billion over 17 months under the furlough plan. The move could have a significant impact on the Sacramento region, where the state employs 73,536 workers in Sacramento County alone, including 63,818 full time.

Democratic lawmakers oppose the furlough proposal and believe the governor should negotiate such decisions with labor unions, but it is unlikely that they will be able to stop the furloughs through the legislative process. They are trying to block Schwarzenegger from installing further cuts to state worker pay, such as canceling two holidays and eliminating overtime pay on the remaining holidays.

Labor unions have taken up the fight in court. A Sacramento Superior Court judge on Friday scheduled a hearing on their challenge for Jan. 29, eight days before the first furlough is scheduled to begin.

The Daily Breeze

El Camino to revisit Fallo case

By Nguyen Huy Vu, Staff Writer
Posted: 01/09/2009

Thomas Fallo will stay on as president of El Camino College for now, but some board members said they want to consider alternative plans in case any unexpected leadership changes emerge in the future.

Fallo was a finalist for the top spot at MiraCosta College in Oceanside, but officials there selected another candidate just before the Christmas holiday.

Some at El Camino criticized the administrator for trying to leverage a salary hike during a slumping economy, but board members insist that's simply not the case.

MiraCosta's newly appointed president, Francisco Rodriguez, will earn a $256,208 base salary when he takes the helm in March.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office reports Fallo had a base salary of $268,840 in 2007.

Fallo is out of the country and could not be reached for comment.

Board member Ray Gen said he and his colleagues were caught off guard when Fallo announced he was considering the MiraCosta job because they had renewed his contract in the summer.

El Camino officials responded by holding special meetings to evaluate Fallo's performance and discuss whether to try to keep him in case he was chosen by MiraCosta.

The board meets Jan. 20, but it is unclear if and when board members will revisit Fallo's evaluation.

"If you want my perspective, we dodged a bullet," Gen said.

"Selfishly speaking, I'm very glad because he's an able administrator and we're glad to keep him. It's a win for us."

But Gen said one of the board's goals this year is to develop a contingency plan with administrators, faculty, and the community if Fallo or any other top administrators leave in the future.

"Be it later on this year or 10 years from now, when we look for a president or something, we need to plan for the eventuality," he said. "It shouldn't overtake us by surprise."

El Camino officials said Fallo first notified board members about the candidacy during a Nov. 17 meeting and told them MiraCosta said he could see a pay hike of up to $72,000 if selected for the post.

Board member William Beverly said he believes the school approached him because Fallo is regarded as one of the better college administrators in the state.

Fallo is widely credited with keeping the campus afloat during bad economic times and was at the helm when El Camino took over the ailing former Compton College as a satellite campus.

"Look at the timing," Beverly said. "If this had come up while he was negotiating his contract, one might be suspect. But it came 100 percent after the ink was dry.

"So I don't think it was a way to get more money out of it because he hadn't asked for more money before that."

Fallo also was courted by the Ventura County Community College District in 2004 and the board responded by giving him a 14 percent base salary jump, from $174,653 to $199,000, and a 5 percent annual pay hike on top of yearly cost-of-living increases.

Beverly said now that the MiraCosta episode is over, the board has two choices: either be prepared to offer Fallo a larger package in case of another recruitment, or make plans for a future without him.

"All I can say is this experience should cause some discussion among the board on how we are going to best protect the district in the future," Beverly said. "That could mean retaining a president or being prepared to find a new one."

Business Calendar

Daily Breeze

Staff Writer
Posted: 01/09/2009 09:15:46 PM PST

MONDAY

Small Business Development Center is offering a free orientation for business owners interested in bidding on Caltrans projects and other transportation-related work from 3 to 5 p.m. at El Camino College Business Training Center, 13430 Hawthorne Blvd., Hawthorne. To register: 310-973-3177.

Child-care funds go unused in county

Press-Telegram

By Melissa Evans Staff Writer
Posted: 01/10/2009 10:30:00 PM PST

Figuring out the bureaucratic rules for state funding could be a full-time job in itself, say child-care workers who serve low-income families.

"Every year the rules change," said Sandy De Mos, director of the child development center at El Camino College, which relies on California grants for one of its preschool programs. "Every year we need more office time to make sure everything is right."

Providers who serve low-income families are increasingly eschewing money from the California Department of Education, either because they don't know that their clients would be eligible, or they don't want to bother with the paperwork.

Local leaders, led by Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, are hoping to make it easier for thousands of child-care providers to access public money so that low-income parents can work or go to school during the day.

"There are these rules that are sometimes very strict in terms of what type of care they provide," said David Sommers, spokesman for Knabe, who represents portions of the South Bay. "The type of care they pay for doesn't always match what type of care that is actually needed."

A recent study by the county's Office of Child Care found that from 2005 to 2008, eligible county providers didn't use about $1.6 million in state funds from the Department of Education's Child Development Division.

At the same time, roughly 50,000 low-income children remained on a county waiting list for care.

In 2008 alone, only 11,000 infants received child care from county providers, while 116,000 would have qualified for state subsidies, according to county figures.

"It's so frustrating because that money is going back to the state, and we need it here," said Kathy Malaske-Samu, director of the county's Office of Child Care. "That mismatch is driving us crazy."

The Board of Supervisors last week approved a motion by Knabe that requires members of a county commission on child care to look at why this money isn't being used and bring back solutions to help the 11,000-plus private and public providers of child care who could serve low-income residents.

One of the goals is to bring together officials who work in public safety, probation, welfare, social services, health services and other departments that might interact with low-income families who qualify, Malaske-Samu said.

Part of the problem, however, lies with California regulations, those involved say. The state has very specific rules about which children it will fund. There is more money, for example, for 3- and 4-year-olds, but a big need exists for infant care, providers say.

El Camino College runs a state preschool for the older toddlers, but it lasts only half a day. De Mos said parents who qualify have to jump through tedious hoops to prove they are disadvantaged, including providing birth certificates and detailed financial documentation showing they fall below 75 percent of the federal poverty level.

"I know that the state has investigated providers and found some fraud, but it makes it difficult for those of us who mind our p's and q's," she said.

The child-care commission will bring back ideas to the Board of Supervisors in the next few months, Sommers said.

In the meantime, Knabe said, there is a concern that if the county doesn't act quickly to solve the problem, providers will lose the money for good because of the state's fiscal crisis.

"The fact that we are sending even a single dollar back to the state is unacceptable," he said.

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8 arrested as 30 officers break up 'the brawl at Del Amo mall'

Daily Breeze, By Andrea Woodhouse, Staff Writer
Posted: 01/11/2009 02:26:58 PM PST

Mallgoers were evacuated Saturday evening from the entertainment wing of the Del Amo Fashion Center in Torrance. A police helicopter and police units from Torrance, El Segundo, Gardena and Redondo Beach responded. (Patrick T Fallon/For The Daily Breeze)

A fight between two women at Torrance's Del Amo Fashion Center escalated into a brawl that resulted in eight arrests, minor injuries to six people -- including two police officers -- and the evacuation of the mall's popular outdoor promenade, authorities said Sunday.

At least 30 police officers from agencies throughout the South Bay responded to the melee Saturday night, some using Taser guns to subdue a fighting group of at least seven people. Police moved about 500 patrons from the mall's lifestyle wing to an adjacent parking lot, Torrance police Lt. Lloyd DeGonia said.

Torrance police officers working at the mall responded to a call around 9:15 p.m. from Del Amo security personnel needing assistance to stop a fight in the courtyard outside the AMC theaters on the second floor of the mall's outdoor promenade, he said.

The fight broke out between two women, who were punching and kicking each other for an unknown reason, and a handful of other people joined in the brawl as bystanders gathered around to watch, DeGonia said.

Immediately upon police intervention, the crowd turned on the officers, punching one in the nose and leaving the other with minor knee injuries, he said.

"They got jumped by the other people who were with the people who were fighting," DeGonia said.

The officers requested assistance, drawing at least a dozen other Torrance police officers to the scene, as well as officers from neighboring Gardena, Hawthorne, El Segundo, Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach, Redondo Beach and El Camino College, DeGonia said.

Fearing that the large crowd would escalate the incident, officers decided to evacuate mall patrons to a parking lot across the street from the promenade, he said.

"The decision was to clear the lifestyle center," DeGonia said. "Basically, we got all the people out into the parking lot. As movies were ending, more people were coming out, and we pushed everyone back into the parking lot."

Officers arrested the seven people involved in the fight, as well as another person who would not leave the scene, he said.

The two officers and four suspects were treated for minor injuries at nearby Torrance Memorial Medical Center, DeGonia added.

No weapons were used in the incident, and police did not find any in possession of the suspects.

Authorities have not yet released the names of the suspects. DeGonia said they were male and female, ranging in age from 16 to 20. Police do not believe they are gang members.

DeGonia said the suspects were Los Angeles County residents but did not live in the South Bay.

The suspects were booked on suspicion of assaulting a police officer, as well as interfering with an investigation, he said.

DeGonia did not know when the group would be arraigned.

Del Amo Fashion Center executives released a statement about the incident Sunday, expressing gratitude that it resulted in no major injuries.

"We are cooperating fully with local police officials to ensure the situation is handled appropriately, and will continue to do so in order to take the necessary steps in preventing further incidents of this kind," it stated.

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Book Drop University Presses Report Fall in Sales

By JENNIFER HOWARD

How badly has the recession hit university presses? In a new survey, 62 of those presses report, collectively, that net sales were down more than 9 percent in the period July 1 through December 31, 2008, compared with the same period in 2007.

Those presses represent about two-thirds of the United States-based members of the Association of American University Presses, which conducted the survey and released the results to its membership on Friday.

University presses vary widely in size, in the mix of books they publish, and in their finances. The association's survey does not suggest how the economy has affected specific presses or subject areas. But it does bear out, in a general way, some of the dismal speculation heard lately in publishing circles.

And it does provide an interesting counterpoint to the peril facing Utah State University Press, which is threatened by closure not because of flagging sales but because of budget woes in Utah (*The Chronicle,* January 20). So far, no other university presses have reported that they may have to shut their doors—yet.

"What I'm seeing is what we've been hearing anecdotally all fall, which is that sales are off, sales are down," Peter J. Givler, the association's executive director, told *The Chronicle.* "What this does is give us some data to look at." He added that his group would probably conduct surveys regularly from now on, perhaps every quarter, so that member presses know where they stand relative to the overall trends.

'Everybody's Down'

The six months covered in the new survey made up the first half of the 2009 fiscal year, so the numbers for that period give a sense of where the presses stand halfway through the annual financial cycle. Having such data in hand, Mr. Givler said, allows press officials "to go to their administrations and say, 'Look, it isn't just me.'"

Respondents to the survey were sorted into four groups according to their net book-sales revenue: up to $1.5-million, from $1.5-million to $3-million, $3-million to $6-million, and over $6-million. The survey asked for net dollar-sales figures as well as net unit-sales numbers.

Taken together, the presses reported a drop of 9.7 percent in net dollar sales and a 9.5 percent drop in net unit sales.

"Just across the board, everybody's down, both in dollars and units," Mr. Givler said.

The results varied quite a bit from group to group. In the smallest revenue category, represented by 21 presses, net dollar sales fell 6.6 percent, and net unit sales dropped 9.4 percent. In the $3-million to $6-million revenue group, with 18 presses responding, net unit sales showed a 12.6-percent decline, the steepest in the survey. Among large presses, six of which took part, net unit sales fell less sharply—7.4 percent—although the decline in dollar sales was a little more than the survey average.

The survey also included space for respondents to share anonymous comments, which hint at what individual presses are experiencing. The comments are for members only, Mr. Givler said, but they give evidence that the downturn has not affected all presses equally. Many reported high rates of returns—books coming back from retailers and wholesalers—but some said the year so far had not been as bad as they had feared.

One way to look at the survey's results: The news could have been worse. "What I was hearing was that October and November sales dropped off a cliff, and that December sales did kick back up," Mr. Givler said.

January also tends to be a month when presses get a bounce from spring course-adoption sales, which could help reverse the overall downward trend.

Still, Mr. Givler said, "I think it's going to be a grim year."

Christian university mired in debt and troubles

Friday, January 16, 2009

Vanguard University is millions in debt and risks losing vital accreditation.

By MARLA JO FISHER

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

COSTA MESA -- Vanguard University of Southern California is $42 million in debt, has no permanent president and is threatened with loss of its accreditation, according to interviews and public records.

Vanguard, a 2,171-student university repeatedly named one of the West's best Christian colleges, has been on a building boom in recent years as it works to upgrade its campus and programs.

But all that now could be in jeopardy, as campus officials seek to cope with problems identified by an accreditation team that visited the campus in September.

"There are a number of very serious issues they need to address – finances and leadership being among them," said Ralph Wolff, president of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

The association's accreditation is crucial to a university's survival. Students need a WASC seal of approval to transfer credits to other schools and to have degrees recognized by graduate and other schools and potential employers.

Accreditation at risk

"We want to make sure the institution is sustainable and students are able to complete their programs and there are sufficient funds to address areas of needed improvements," Wolff said.

The accrediting commission will review Vanguard's status Feb. 18-20 in Alameda.

No one contacted at Vanguard agreed to talk by deadline about what is going on at the university or the measures the campus is taking to deal with its troubles.

Jessica Mireles, campus vice president for enrollment and marketing, said in a written statement that officials are reviewing the accreditation report. She declined to provide a public copy.

"In regards to our debt, we have a high debt load and that is a financial challenge which we have been working on," Mireles said in her statement. "The university is meeting its budget goals and like most other colleges across the nation is being very conservative with its enrollment projections and revenue forecasts."

Deeply in debt

The school has repeatedly been recognized for its academic quality by publications like the Princeton Review and U.S. News & World Report.

Vanguard's most recent income tax return, filed June 30, 2007, which as a nonprofit is a public record, shows the campus reported annual revenues of $53.3 million and expenses of $52.7 million, with net assets of $6.7 million.

However, the school's balance sheet also shows mortgages of $31.5 million against the estimated value of $53.7 million for its 40-acre campus and buildings. After accounting for other debts and assets, total school debt stands at about $42 million.

Vanguard was founded in 1920 as the Southern California Bible College based in Los Angeles. It later moved to Pasadena and then to Costa Mesa in 1950, where it became Orange County's first four-year college.

It became a full university and changed its name in 1999.

Affiliated with the Assemblies of God church, most of Vanguard's undergraduate students live on campus, where they're expected to adhere to an evangelical Christian lifestyle that includes refraining from smoking or drinking.

Leadership challenges

Wolff said a six-member accreditation team went to the campus in September as part of a scheduled routine inspection. After the team's report was filed, Vanguard officials went up to commission offices in Alameda to plead their case, but were told they must wait for the commission to consider the matter in February

In October, the college's former president, Murray Dempster, was promoted to a new post as chancellor and promptly went on sabbatical with no public explanation.

A brief article in the campus magazine about the leadership changes said that "Dr. Dempster's role as university chancellor begins with a board-approved sabbatical" but does not elaborate.

The campus temporarily rehired the former president, Wayne Kraiss, as acting president.

What's next

Although loss of accreditation is rare, it can happen.

When Compton College lost its accreditation a few years ago, the campus was forced to become a branch of El Camino College in Torrance.

The federal Department of Education would also look at loss of WASC approval to see if it should pull student loan and grant programs from the school.

If accreditation were removed during the Feb. 18 meeting, "that would be a worst-case scenario," Wolff said. "It would only be based on very serious findings."

Actions against a school are discussed behind closed doors. School officials have a chance to state their case and a variety of outcomes could emerge, including removal of accreditation, probation, a fine or penalty or other actions.
"I wouldn't want to prejudge the situation and say it's a foregone conclusion," Wolff said. "The university has a set of issues it needs to address, including student learning and outcomes. We had a very direct conversation with them and explored some options. The commission will keep an open mind and work with them. I can't say what the action will be."

College chancellor up for 18 percent raise

By Matt Krupnick

Contra Costa Times

January 21, 2009

Concerned about losing their well-liked chancellor, board members in the Contra Costa Community College District will vote next week whether to give her an 18 percent raise.

Helen Benjamin, who has been widely complimented for steadying what was a turbulent district, would see her salary go to $247,000 from just less than $209,000. She took the reins of the three-college district in 2005.

Although the decision comes amid uncertain budget times, board members and others said the district must keep Benjamin from fleeing to greener pastures. Benjamin's salary is lower than that of nearly every other Bay Area chancellor, according to figures from the state chancellor's office.

"Our chancellor is well-known and well-wooed," said board member Tony Gordon. "I know the headhunters are out there and busy."

The proposed pay increase includes two separate actions: a 10 percent raise retroactive to July 1 last year and a new 42 month contract that raises Benjamin's salary again. Both actions will be considered by the board next Wednesday.

Leadership retention has been a problem for the state's 110 community colleges. With few experienced chancellors and presidents available, seasoned administrators have been heavily recruited.

In the two-college Chabot-Las Positas district, Chancellor Joel Kinnamon was paid a base salary of $230,000 last year. Chancellor Elihu Harris in the four-campus Peralta district was paid $240,000.

Benjamin, the former president of Contra Costa College in San Pablo, has been credited with strengthening the district's once-troubled finances and improving morale among instructors and other employees.

Unlike in the California State University system, where the faculty has sharply criticized administrative salaries, Contra Costa's faculty union head said Tuesday that instructors understand the need to hang on to effective leaders. Instructors in the district like Benjamin, said Jeffrey Michels, president of United Faculty.

But Michels also noted that most Contra Costa employees are underpaid.

"It would be nice if we could all keep pace" with Benjamin's pay increase, he said. "That's a nice pace."
College districts generally prefer to keep their chancellors rather than go through an expensive and time-consuming search, said Scott Lay, president of the Community College League of California, which represents administrators.

"If you look at the dollar amount compared to the cost of a search, it could be worth it" to give Benjamin a raise, Lay said. "Politically, it can be a tough thing to do during bad economic times. But she's been a tenacious supporter of that district."

Board members said they were not aware of any other firm job offers for Benjamin, who was in Washington, D.C., for the presidential inauguration Tuesday. The new contract could help fend off competing suitors, said Sheila Grilli, the board president.

"We know other people are looking at her," she said. "It may not look politically correct, but in these bad times, we have to pay her what she's worth."

The Chronicle of Higher Education

Community College Enrollments Are Up, but Institutions Struggle to Pay for Them

January 23, 2008

By STEVEN BUSHONG

On January 8, a record 803 people streamed through the doors of Mitchell Community College, in Statesville, N.C., to enroll for the spring semester — a 17-percent increase in turnout over last year. But some of those students may find there are not enough chairs.

North Carolina sets financing for each community college based on its previous year's enrollment numbers. So this semester, Mitchell will enroll hundreds of students it lacks the money to support, and it may have to turn away some who seek classes that are already full.

"That's when it becomes very frustrating," says Dan Manning, dean of student services, "when you look across the desk at the face and eyes of someone, and you can't help them because there is no money left in the pot."

The downturn in the economy has coincided with enrollment increases at many community colleges. Meanwhile, several states have trimmed — or even chopped — appropriations for higher education. Florida, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and Tennessee have each cut financing for 2009 by at least 5 percent, according to data compiled by the Center for the Study of Education Policy, at Illinois State University. Alabama and South Carolina have reduced allocations by more than 10 percent.

So far the hardest-hit institutions are those in states with a diminished manufacturing economy or a burst housing bubble, says George R. Boggs, president and chief executive of the American Association of Community Colleges.

Community-college officials have seen this pattern before: History holds that when the economy declines, college enrollments rise. But what worries many officials is that this recession may be long and deep. The ominous signs include a recent report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which found that unemployment has reached a 16-year high.

"This is not a short-term problem," says Aims C. McGuinness Jr., a senior associate with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, a nonprofit consulting group that advises states and public-college systems. "This is a time for having a clear mission and making strategic choices."

Tough Decisions

The economy has already forced many institutions to do just that. In Maine, a $2.9-million dip in state financing led the community-college system there to lay off 12 employees, freeze 14 vacant positions, and reduce expenses for student labor. Meanwhile the system has about 600 more applicants than it did at the same time last year, a 20-percent increase.

"What you literally have is thousands of people queuing up to come, and you don't have the resources to add more faculty," says John Fitzsimmons, president of the Maine Community College system. "We have stretched our system very, very thin."

In Connecticut, community-college enrollments have increased by about 13 percent over last spring, while the state has cut its financing by 3 percent. Mary Anne Cox, the system's assistant chancellor, says the colleges have tapped a contingency fund to meet their immediate needs. The institutions have also reduced expenditures, frozen positions, and postponed discretionary purchases. "We've taken measures to reduce our budget so we can continue to serve students who come to us," she says.

The growing pains are less severe at Ivy Tech Community College, in Indiana. The institution has doubled its enrollment over the last 10 years, leading the state to invest more heavily in the multicampus institution. In turn, that allowed Ivy Tech to build more facilities and hire more faculty members.

This semester, the college plans to enroll 12 percent more students than it did last spring. Ivy Tech's president, Thomas J. Snyder, attributes the rising applications, in part, to a growing demand for more-skilled workers, and the increased competition for spots at four-year colleges.

"What we don't know is if this increase in enrollment would mitigate if not for" the recession, he says.

Recently Ivy Tech installed new computer software to better manage students and classes. It has also expanded its online courses.

Still, after the college absorbed a 1-percent cut in financing this year, Mr. Snyder expects further budget cuts, which would limit his resources. "The most important thing is to protect the faculty and staff," he says. "We want to add faculty when we need it."

'What Do They Need?'

Tough times are good times for community colleges to re-evaluate their priorities, says Byron N. McClenney, who has served at the top post of several community colleges during the last three decades. He believes institutions can best weather the recession by determining which offerings and services are the most crucial.

"Who's walking off the buses and subways and walking through our front doors, and what do they need?" says Mr. McClenney, a senior lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin's College of Education.

Community colleges, he believes, must do all they can to preserve high-demand courses. In other words, introductory English courses might stay while philosophy goes.

Mr. McClenney also says that when institutions must cut faculty and staff, they should consider each position carefully and avoid across-the-board reductions.

But how should colleges make decisions about priorities? In large public meetings, says Mr. McClenney.

"Fear emerges when times are tough," he says. "People worry about losing their sections; they worry about their jobs; they worry about being able to teach their favorite courses. So you have to involve them."

Looking to the Government

In Connecticut, where the threat of further cuts also looms, administrators are meeting with state legislators to explain why community colleges are so important — and to ask for budgetary mercy. In those meetings, Ms. Cox and her associates have described the effect of enrollment increases on campuses. They have also made a pitch that community colleges are essential to the state's work force.

"There are many things that are worthwhile but don't show a return on that investment," says Ms. Cox. "Higher education is one of the few public services that does have a very good rate of return."

That is exactly the message colleges should espouse to legislators, says Jack Scott, the new chancellor of California Community Colleges and a former state legislator. "We are the one sector of higher education that puts people to work more quickly," he says.

Some community-college officials hope that President-elect Barack Obama's $800-billion economic-stimulus plan may bring their institutions more resources. Carl E. Haynes, president of Tompkins Cortland Community College, in New York, says his institution plans to build nine new classrooms and upgrade the campus's electrical wiring — a $3.6-million project. He knows that stimulus funds could, perhaps, cover some or all of that cost.

"We're hopeful for that," Mr. Haynes says. "But the challenge for me is operating my college, and that won't help me operate it."

Community College Gives Free Tuition To Unemployed

CBS2, Chicago, IL
January 21, 2009

Oakton Community College announced last week it will be offering free tuition to local residents who have lost their full-time job.

Five select career programs are available tuition free to residents who lost their full-time job in the last year, according to an Oakton Community College release. The programs include computer diagnostics, project management, marketing, manufacturing and pharmaceutical preparation.

"Waiving tuition for these programs is one way for Oakton to immediately and meaningfully assist those whose lives have been disrupted by the economic downturn," Oakton President Margaret B. Lee said. "We hope to help people whose finances are strained by a missing paycheck quickly return to work in job areas where there is growth."

To qualify, students must live within Oakton Community College District 535 and have become unemployed from a full-time job since Jan. 1, 2008, the release said. Participants must provide a current Wage Information Sheet and complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

Textbook purchases and other fees may apply, the release said. Classes begin the week of Feb. 16.

LA Times

Community college students to get hefty bus & rail discounts

January 18, 2009

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced a plan to give deep discounts on bus and rail fares for every full-time student enrolled in the Los Angeles Community College District.

Full-time students at any of the district's nine campuses will be eligible for a six-month Metropolitan Transportation Authority TAP card, which costs just $15, Villaraigosa and college officials said.

That's a bargain compared with the $36 per month that students normally pay the MTA. What's equally surprising is that the cost of the program will be covered by the college district's school construction program –- Measures A and AA, which were passed by voters and are designed to pay for the repair and replacement of campus facilities.

The district can use the bond funds to pay for transit subsidies because they serve as environmental mitigation at campuses where new parking lots are being ripped up or replaced, said Diana Ho, the college's traffic consultant. "For each of these colleges, construction is taking up space that could be used for parking," she said.

District officials said they also are trying to reduce traffic and help students weather difficult economic times. Under the plan, the college district will purchase 27,000 TAP cards at a price of $43.21 per card, reselling them to students at the cheaper price, Ho said. The cost to the college system over a full year will be roughly $2.4 million, according to a district representative.

-- David Zahniser

Metro pass price cut for community college students

Daily News Wire Service
Contra Costa Times
January 16, 2009

LOS ANGELES -- Community college students in the Los Angeles area can purchase a six-month pass for Metro bus and rail lines at a reduced price of $15, transportation officials announced.

The reusable Metro TAP cards, which are valid from Jan. 1 through June 30, are available to Los Angeles Community College District school students registered for at least 12 units. A regular transportation pass costs $36 a month.

The district committed $1 million to offset the transit costs for more than 30,000 students.

Eligible students must be taking classes at the Los Angeles, Trade Technical, Southwest, Pierce, Valley, Mission, East Los Angeles, Harbor or West Los Angeles college campuses.

The passes may be used on Metro bus and rail lines seven days a week.

More Women on College Boards

By Scott Jaschik
Inside Higher Ed
January 21, 2009

While higher education worries about undergraduate student bodies lacking a good ratio of men, that's not a problem in college board rooms, which remain dominated by men.

But a new national survey of four-year colleges and universities finds slow but steady progress in the representation of women on college boards. Between 1981 and 2007, the percentage of trustees who are women increased to 31 percent from 20 percent.

The percentage of female board chairs during that time increased to 18 percent from 10 percent.

The study was conducted for the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities and analysis was released by the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute. A paper on the research — by Ronald G. Ehrenberg, director of the center, and Joyce B. Main, a Ph.D. student at Cornell — notes that future research will explore whether there is a link between the share of female trustees and efforts by colleges to recruit and retain greater numbers of female faculty members.

Female trustees — especially in powerful roles on boards — were once relatively rare. A report on female trustees at the University of Pennsylvania notes that when Judith Rodin became Penn's first female president in 1994, she was only the ninth woman to serve on the board's Executive Committee — and Penn was chartered in 1755. At many colleges and universities, board chairs who are women are the first to hold that role, and it is considered notable enough to issue a press release. Adrian College and Johns Hopkins Universities are among the institutions that have only recently named a woman as board chair.

The Cornell paper on the data notes that much of the research about corporate boards and gender suggests that women tend to have an impact, not when there are only one or two female board members, but when there is some critical mass. The research found that the share of boards with at least three female members rose to 90 percent from 60 percent over the years studied. The number of boards with at least five female members rose to 60 percent from 40 percent.

In terms of gender representation on boards, the study did not find notable differences between public and private institutions. Comparing bachelor's, master's and doctoral institutions, the study found increases in female representation on boards across the sectors. However, the proportion of female trustees is lowest at doctoral institutions.

State trustee wields authority over SCC board

Henry has final say in quest to fix college's finances

By Sarah Rohrs
Vallejo Times-Herald
January 17, 2009

FAIRFIELD - As a recovery plan gets under way for Solano Community College, the governing board will retain its powers but will be expected to follow the advice of its newly hired state trustee.

Solano College's status and finances are in "grave jeopardy," and the college faces major challenges in implementing a recovery plan, state trustee Thomas Henry said Thursday. The task will be harder if not all parties are in alignment, he said.

An independent audit by Henry cited board micro-management and leadership concerns over time as problems.

The role of Henry, CEO of Education Management and Assistance Corp., differs from that of former State Administrator Richard Damelio, who led Vallejo City Unified School District out of bankruptcy. In Vallejo's case, the board was stripped of all its powers while Damelio was given broad sway to enact fiscal, operations and academic remedies.

In Solano College's case, the board retains its authority, but trustees will be expected to follow Henry's advice on various issues ranging from governance and fiscal matters to community relations and accreditation.

Not following Henry's advice could have consequences. The state could give the special trustee more power or take greater intervention, officials said.

But Ron Owens, spokesman for the California Community College Chancellor's Office, said officials don't expect such a scenario to unfold. The trustee and the board are expected to work collaboratively and take whatever steps are necessary to resolve any disputes, Owens said.

"There's an expectation the trustee and board would come to an agreement. If there is an impasse, the chancellor's office would become more involved," Owens said.

The board could terminate its agreement with Henry with 30 days' written notice. Another state trustee would be brought in to replace him should that occur, Henry said.

Board president A. Marie Young of Vallejo said Friday that trustees are behind Henry, will follow his advice, and work as a team. "He's part of the recovery plan," Young said. "He knows what we need to do and how to do it."

Trustee Denis Honeychurch of Fairfield said Thursday he supports Henry. "We have confidence in him, and hope the rest of the board does, too. I'm confident we'll get through this," he said.

Trustee Pam Keith of Vallejo said board members are taking the threats to the college seriously, are committed to making things right, and will follow Henry's direction. "I have a lot of faith in Mr. Henry. He's going to do right by us and help guide us through the morass we're in," Keith said.

The board had its first opportunity to follow Henry's advice Thursday as it voted 6-1 to return Interim Superintendent President Lisa Waits to her prior post as vice president of student services until a new interim superintendent is hired.

Under the plan, Waits will stay in the top spot while Henry searches for another interim superintendent. Both Waits and Henry stressed Thursday that Waits had not been pushed to leave the top spot earlier than expected.

Trustee Phil McCaffrey of Fairfield cast the lone dissenting vote. Friday, he said he did so because he believed Waits was doing an excellent job as superintendent, and the college has had too many interim presidents.

McCaffrey stressed his Thursday vote is no indication he will vote against any other of Henry's recommendations, and added he's optimistic about the college's recovery. "I think we've got a good team. We just need to get things in order and move forward," he said.

Trustees Rosemary Thurston and James McClaffey could not immediately be reached for comment.

Stumbling to recovery SCC board lurches ahead

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The road to recovery is often rocky, and Solano Community College trustees appear to have done their share of stumbling on it in recent days. But now that the governing board has hired a knowledgeable guide, there is hope that the district can get back on sound footing.

The district is dealing with a multitude of issues. Its finances are out of order, at a time when it is facing almost certain cuts in state funding. Bond money that was supposed to be used only for approved projects have been mixed into the general fund and will have to be restored.

It is also under pressure from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, which warned SCC a year ago that it was in danger of losing its accreditation. Again, the problems are related to school management, not -- fortunately -- the quality of education students are receiving in the classroom.

It took months for the board to come together and take the first step toward recovery, which was to hire an outside consultant to help identify the specific problems.

This week, the board hired that same consultant to help solve those problems.

Thomas Henry, CEO of Education Management and Assistance Corp., will advise the board for up to 18 months. Recommended by the California Community Colleges Chancellor, Mr. Henry has twice served as a state-appointed trustee for California community colleges facing accreditation issues. More important, he helped those colleges get back on track.

On his first day on the job at Solano, he was on hand to hear interim Superintendent-President Lisa Wait's State of the College address and to answer questions.

He pointed out that many of Solano's issues are not unique, but rather systemic problems that community colleges throughout the state are struggling with. Specifically, he said, the state has not done a good job of nurturing leadership, so there is no one to step in when experienced people leave.

Solano College has experienced this problem. Since Stan Arterberry left the superintendent-president's office in 2002, after eight years at the helm, the college has had four permanent and interim superintendent-presidents.

That turnover was among the criticisms raised by the accreditation committee. So it was almost unfathomable that just days before President Waits was to plead on Solano's behalf before the accreditation board, the president of the college governing board would ask her to step down.

It remains unclear exactly why board President A. Marie Young of Vallejo carried that message. Other board members have denied requesting a resignation, but have declined to say what they directed Ms. Young to discuss with President Waits.

Initially, the interim president has declined to quit and instead has pushed forward on the needed reforms. But the incident would seem to be indicative of at least one of the other issues the accreditation committee raised: a dysfunctional governing board.

Mr. Henry would seem to have his work cut out for him.

On Thursday, he said that one of the things he can offer Solano College is "a definition of recovery," adding, "Once you define recovery and everybody's in agreement on it, it's pretty hard not to recover."

Here's hoping he's right.

Articulation Isn't Enough

January 26, 2009

Inside Higher Ed

SEATTLE — Community college students are no more likely to transfer to four-year institutions in states where there are articulation agreements designed to ease such transfers than they are in states without them, according to a new study. But having more tenured faculty members at community colleges does make a difference.

The research appears to challenge conventional wisdom that these agreements — adopted with fanfare in a growing number of states — are key to encouraging such transfers. And Betheny Gross, the researcher who presented the findings Friday at the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, said she was surprised by the results, too.

Many in the audience said that they were surprised as well, at least initially. But as discussion continued, many in states with articulation agreements expressed doubts about their effectiveness. This doesn't mean Gross or those in the audience oppose articulation agreements. Rather, a consensus seemed to emerge at the session that they are "necessary but not sufficient" to encourage transfer, as one administrator suggested.

Articulation agreements spell out how community college students can earn credit at four-year institutions. These pacts followed years of complaints from community colleges and their students that those with two years of credits at community colleges would find themselves unable to transfer some of their credits. Four-year institutions would sometimes respond that the transfer students seemed unaware of degree requirements – although many advocates for two-year institutions have long believed that snobbery played a role in these decisions, with four-year institutions assuming unfairly that community colleges lacked sufficient rigor.

The result of these mismatches in expectations was a situation in which many community college students hoping to finish a bachelor's degree in two years at a four-year institution found themselves taking longer (and paying more). Under articulation agreements, the theory goes, four-year institutions commit to awarding credit if transfer students take certain courses and fulfill certain requirements pre-transfer.

Gross – an analyst at the Center on Reinventing Public Education of the University of Washington at Bothell – analyzed national data for students who entered community colleges from high school. She acknowledged that this is just one subset of community college students, but said that these students were particularly likely to transfer later. (Dan Goldhaber, also of the center, was co-author of the work, which was supported by the Lumina Foundation for Education.)

The initial hypothesis was that some parts of articulation agreements may be more important than others. So the researchers analyzed data for students in states with different kinds of articulation agreements to see whether particular provisions mattered more. There were “hints,” Gross said, that certain factors may make a greater difference. There were very slight positive associations – although below the level of statistical significance – for students being more likely to transfer if they live in states where articulation agreements provide for automatic transfer of credits when an associate degree has been completed, or for common course numbering in two-year and four-year institutions.

Among members of racial and ethnic groups, Gross did find that having statewide articulation agreements increases the likelihood – well beyond statistical significance – of Latino students transferring. But that is the only group with such an impact.

While the study did not find the expected impact for articulation agreements, it did find another characteristic that matters: the percentage of tenured faculty members. For every 10 percent increase in the share of tenured faculty members at a community college, students were 4 percent more likely to transfer to a four-year institution. Many community colleges rely on non-tenure track instructors for much of the teaching, and Gross said the finding suggested that there are educational benefits for not doing so. But she also said she realized that community colleges and states – facing a severe budget outlook right now – may not be likely to act based on this finding.

Several in the audience linked the faculty role to the way articulation agreements may or may not have the desired impact.

“It’s all about advising,” said one community college administrator who tracks the transfer success of students at his institution. For students who get good advising, articulation agreements work, because someone will guide them to take the courses that will transfer. But there are far too few people doing academic advising at his and other colleges, he said. Faculty members may or may not understand the articulation agreements, and students don’t. “We aren’t getting the information out,” he said.

A four-year college official said that he had expected his state’s articulation agreement to have a big impact and that officials were surprised when one didn’t materialize. “We saw a much smaller group of transfers until we initiated a series of steps – we got our advisers meeting regularly with their advisers. We got our faculty meeting their faculty. When they sat down, we saw a clear bump in the number of transfers we were getting from the community colleges with which we shared a campus,” he said.

Several people said that articulation agreements that focus on transfer of credits alone may end up frustrating would-be transfers. If the agreements don’t assure students admission to majors (which may be competitive) or completion of certain general education requirements, the credits transferred may not seem like much of a gain to the student. “Getting accepted means you get to eat lunch in a different place,” said one person.

Issues of geography also come into play. Several cited states where community colleges serve diverse populations in urban areas and the four-year institutions that would be academically good matches for them are in rural locales. The best articulation agreements around may make little difference, audience members said. One said that in states like this, a better state policy may be to encourage more four-year institutions to set up branch campuses at community colleges or in urban areas.

Even as educators in the audience found themselves agreeing with the finding that articulation agreements may not be the cure-all for which some hope, they also said that they were needed. Articulation agreements force discussions and require four-year institutions to at the very least justify why credit isn't being awarded — opening the door to policy shifts by two-year and four-year institutions to ease transfer.

"You don't know the problem areas if you don't have an agreement," said one audience member. Another said the agreements "are a buffer against institutional error, especially by flagships."

— Scott Jaschik

Dan Walters Pension fund setbacks will hit taxpayers hard

The Sacramento Bee

By Dan Walters

Published: Monday, Jan. 26, 2009 | Page 3A

There is an unfortunate parallel between the ups and downs of the state budget and the condition of both state and local public employee pension funds.

When the economy is humming and revenue is pouring into the state treasury, pension fund investments often rack up big gains. And just as revenue windfalls induce politicians to raise spending or cut taxes with little thought to the long-term consequences, retirement fund gains often result in fattening pension benefits.

When the economy sours, as it has been doing lately, it not only slashes revenue for state and local governments but adversely affects pension fund earnings, and already-strapped state and local governments must increase payments to maintain benefits.

That double-whammy is hitting California now. Not only is the state budget awash in red ink, facing multibillion-dollar deficits, but local governments are feeling the pinch, and pension funds, having seen big investment losses, are telling governments to prepare for sharp increases in contributions next year.

The California Public Employees' Retirement System, which covers state workers and many local government employees, has lost nearly a third of its value, thanks to stock market reverses and real estate losses, including a billion-dollar haircut in one land investment. The University of California's independent pension fund has also been clobbered, as well as the California State Teachers' Retirement System and many locally managed public pension funds.

The bite has been much deeper than it otherwise would be because during the last decade, state and local politicians – responding to pressure from powerful public worker unions – sweetened pension benefits markedly.

The San Jose Mercury News reported, for instance, that San Jose's pension costs for police and fire personnel have grown by 167 percent since 2000, thanks to much-improved benefits, twice as much as costs for civilian city workers.

About 10 years ago, the state boosted its police and fire pension benefits to as much as 90 percent of salary on CalPERS' assurances that it could do so without incurring new costs to taxpayers. Most local governments followed suit. Now, the higher benefits and lower investment earnings are hitting everyone hard.

The governor's new budget contains an extra $95 million to shore up the University of California pension system. Journalist Ed Mendel, writing on his Web site Calpensions.com, says a "smoothing" policy adopted by CalPERS a few years ago will soften its bite somewhat, but when it hits next year, it still could boost taxpayer costs by roughly a quarter unless there's a big rebound in the stock market.

One wonders how long taxpayers, many of whom are seeing reductions in their incomes and watching their 401(k) pension funds wither, will tolerate new taxes or reductions in other spending to prop up public pensions that are much more generous than their own.

Property tax revenue plummets with home values

Carolyn Said, Chronicle Staff Writer

Sunday, January 25, 2009

California could pay the price for the foreclosure crisis for years to come, thanks to Proposition 13, the 1978 voter initiative that caps property taxes.

As banks feverishly dump foreclosed homes at cut-rate prices, and as neighboring homes change hands at similar bargain-basement rates, those amounts are enshrined as the new basis for determining property tax until the homes are sold again. Under Prop. 13, that basis can rise a maximum of just 2 percent a year, even if the home is worth significantly more. The consequence is likely to be a revenue crunch for the public services funded by property tax revenues.

"This is going to have a long-term impact on the state budget and on local budgets," said Jean Ross, executive director of the nonpartisan California Budget Project in Sacramento. "It means that even after the economy recovers, state and local government budgets will not recover fully."

Gus Kramer, Contra Costa assessor, puts it in stark terms.

"It's going to be an absolute economic disaster in Contra Costa County and surrounding areas," he said. "Everyone thinks this is like the last recession with values going down and that when they come back there will be a resurgence - but it's not going to be like that. It will be years before (the tax roll) recovers because all these people are selling (distressed) homes, banks are selling at deep discounts, values are going down from 50 percent to 75 percent. The people buying them will hold onto them for five, six, seven years. The tax base is not going to recover anytime soon."

Here's an example: A four-bedroom home in Antioch sold for $700,000 in 2005. Annual property taxes were $7,000, or 1 percent of the purchase price. If the home goes into foreclosure and sells for $400,000, a common scenario in a county where values have plummeted, the new tax would be $4,000 - or $3,000 less.

Consider that almost 250,000 homes in California were repossessed by lenders last year, according to ForeclosureRadar.com, and you get a sense of the mega dollars lost to the cities, counties, K-12 schools, community colleges and special districts that rely on property tax revenue.

$377 million bite

Loans on those properties amount to $107.8 billion, ForeclosureRadar said. Assume the loans roughly equaled the previous purchase prices, and make a conservative estimate that the foreclosed properties got resold for 35 percent less than those previous prices. That means $37.7 billion in property values has been wiped out - which amounts to a $377 million bite out of annual property taxes that will persist until the properties are resold.

In the 31 years since Prop. 13 was enacted, property tax revenue has increased every year - until now.

During the real estate boom, property taxes soared as homes changed hands at ever-increasing prices. But in the current fiscal year, property tax collections around the state are falling short of projections, although they are up slightly or unchanged in many counties. Current property taxes are based on homes' assessed value as of Jan. 1, 2008. Since then, values have plunged more, which will be reflected in the bills to be paid starting in November. Those taxes will be based on homes' values as of Jan. 1 this year.

"With property taxes, it's a slow-motion reaction," said Marianne O'Malley, an analyst in the California Legislative Analyst's Office.

A forecast from consulting firm Beacon Economics predicts that property tax revenue in the state will fall 6.1 percent in the next fiscal year, which runs from July 1 to June 30, 2010. The following year will see a 3.6 percent decline, followed by a more modest 0.8 percent drop, it predicts. Only in 2012-13 will property tax revenues rise again and then only by 1 percent, Beacon projects.

Even when homes do not change hands, their property taxes can fall. Proposition 8, approved in 1978 as an amendment to Prop. 13, allows for assessed values to decline when market values fall. With prices plunging around the state, hundreds of thousands of property owners will pay lower property taxes in coming months. But as values recover, Prop. 8 allows the assessed values to rise back to the previous amount.

Property taxes are divvied up according to complex formulas that vary for each municipality. The basic 1 percent tax is split among K-12 schools, community colleges, counties, towns and special districts. On top of that, many areas have additional, voter-approved assessments for bonds and special districts.

State has to cover shortfall

A drop in property tax revenue wallops the state, because it is obligated to make up any significant loss to the schools. The Legislative Analyst's Office projects the state will have to pony up almost $1.5 billion to K-14 schools over the next three years to compensate for declining property taxes. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has already said the state will have to make up $430 million this year for school funding because property taxes have lagged projections.

"That $430 million in essence will get built into every year going forward," Ross said. "More school costs will shift onto the state."

Unlike schools, counties and communities have no backstop when property tax revenue falls short.

"Property tax is the bread and butter of our discretionary revenues - it's how counties provide libraries, sheriff's patrols, maintain the jails, district attorneys, prosecution, all the countywide services are funded through the property tax," said Paul McIntosh, executive director of the California State Association of Counties, the advocacy group for the state's 58 counties. "When you see a decline in that, without a decline in demand for those services, it will have a tremendous impact."

Prop. 13 means "there is going to be a long-term hangover from this for quite some time," McIntosh said. "You're resetting the (valuation) bar low; it will take quite a while for those properties to turn over and those values to grow back to what they were just a few years ago."

Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson thinks the cash crunch may be what it takes for voters to reconsider how government services are funded - including Prop. 13, long considered an untouchable "third rail" of California politics.

"Maybe we need to revisit not just Prop. 13 but our entire funding formula for local government," he said. "As bad as it gets, that's when it forces people to think and to move outside their comfort level and outside the box to address the crisis. Maybe we need to revisit these antiquated ways in which we deal with revenue streams to local government. At some point, it's going to take an initiative, and it would have to be one from the people. It took an initiative for Prop. 13, and it's going to take one again."

Who gets property taxes?

Each county and town has its own formula for allocating property taxes. Here is how the basic 1% tax is divvied up in Contra Costa County. On top of the 1%, many areas have voter-approved additional assessments for bonds and special districts.

-- Schools (K-12 and community colleges) - 48%

-- Special districts - 19%

-- County - 13%

-- Redevelopment agencies - 12%

-- Cities - 8%

Source: Contra Costa County

Under Proposition 13, real estate is reappraised only when ownership changes hands or new construction is completed. Otherwise, property assessments cannot be increased by more than 2% annually, based on the California Consumer Price Index. The tax rate is 1% plus any voter-approved bonds, fees or special charges.

Anticipating Stimulus Money for Campus Projects, Colleges Get 'Shovel Ready'

The Chronicle of Higher Education

January 30, 2009

By SCOTT CARLSON

In almost the same breath in his inauguration speech last week, President Obama touted green technology and his desire for higher education to make changes to meet America's evolving needs.

"We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories," he said. "And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age."

Mr. Obama was probably referring to a curricular transformation, in getting colleges to teach about new technologies, including green ones, to prepare students for emerging industries. But he might as well have been talking about the campuses themselves — their buildings and energy systems, which at many colleges are outdated, inefficient, even crumbling.

Help for those colleges may be on the way in the $825-billion stimulus package being pressed by Congressional leaders. The bill that House Democrats introduced this month includes $7-billion for higher-education modernization, renovation, and repair that could kick-start projects like upgrading heating and cooling systems, fixing roofs, and doing asbestos abatement. On many campuses, especially among state colleges, renovation projects like those are stalled as government officials and higher-education administrators have been spooked by the unsteady economy and have had to absorb budget cuts.

Preferences Specified

The billions of dollars in the bill before Congress would be distributed through the Department of Energy and through state higher-education agencies, in the form of grants and loans. Of the $7-billion, at least $2.5-billion would go toward energy-efficiency projects certified by programs like Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED. (The legislation also includes $500-million for training in green jobs.)

In awarding the money to institutions, the bill's language specifies, state higher-education agencies should give preference to colleges that serve large numbers of minority students, have been hit by a natural disaster, or are planning energy-efficiency projects. The money should not go to new construction, sports facilities, or facilities used for religious worship or divinity schools.

The language or the amounts in the bill could change as Congress debates the stimulus measure, which legislators are expected to make final within the next few weeks. For now, colleges are preparing lists of projects that are "shovel ready," should the money roll down from Washington. The bill includes "use it or lose it" requirements: At least half of the money would have to be spent within a year of the measure's being enacted, and the rest within two years.

All signals are that the measure, including the money for college renovations, will be pushed through and passed, says James L. Elder, director of the Campaign for Environmental Literacy, who lobbied for the inclusion of funds for college-sustainability programs.

At one point, he and other advocates of sustainability asked for much more. In mid-December, Michael M. Crow, president of Arizona State University, sent a letter to Mr. Obama's transition team on behalf of the signatories of the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment.

The group asked for $12-billion in loans and $12-billion in grants for renovation projects at schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions. Through surveys of college-renovation projects, supporters of the climate commitment had found some $40-billion in energy-efficiency projects in higher education that could begin within six months, the letter said.

No Shortage of Projects

Even though scores of potential renovation projects are out there, spending several billion dollars takes a lot of planning and preparation, Mr. Elder says, and colleges should start now. "They could easily have a proposal deadline 60 days from now. They should be getting ready."

W. Richard Merriman, Jr., president of Southwestern College, in Kansas, says his facilities-management team has identified an array of projects the college could take on with enough money. They range from building wind turbines to replacing drafty windows.

Mr. Merriman believes that he has some advantages in vying for the money. The college is small, and a provision in the bill says some of the funds should go to less-wealthy colleges. Southwestern has also been trying to establish programs in green energy, and some of the money in the bill has to go to innovative energy programs that can be used for education.

Jane Oates, executive director of New Jersey's Commission on Higher Education, the state's coordinating board, recently asked each college in the state to provide details of its two most important shovel-ready projects.

"We just want a list ready so that we have an idea of what hurdles the schools have going in," she said, adding that the projects on the list were "all over the map." State officials might use information about the colleges' priorities, she said, to try to make sure that as many of the projects as possible would qualify for aid from the federal stimulus bill.

The need in New Jersey is great, she said. "I don't think we'll have any problem spending it."

Whither Accreditation?

insidehighered.com

January 28, 2009

WASHINGTON — Over the last two years, the U.S. system of higher education accreditation survived what Stanley O. Ikenberry characterized Tuesday as only the latest in a string of “near-death experiences,” in which criticism of the industry’s self-regulation mechanism escalated to the point that its fundamental nature seemed in doubt. Ikenberry, president emeritus of the University of Illinois, former president of the American Council on Education, and one of higher education’s silver-haired eminences, was among the 200 or so accrediting and college officials who gathered here this week for the Council for Higher Education Accreditation’s annual meeting. And while Ikenberry, now a Regent professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, cited the history of threats in part to show that accreditation is resilient, he — like most of the speakers — argued that higher education leaders should seize this moment to make changes designed to ensure that they continue to control their own destiny.

“I don’t sense that we’re in a state of crisis,” Ikenberry said, noting as several other speakers did that Congress, in renewing the Higher Education Act last summer, had staved off changes proposed by the Bush administration in the the structure and federal oversight of accreditation, designed to more fully shift its purpose from a mechanism for institutional self-improvement to a way of assuring quality control in higher education.

“But it is precisely when you’re not [in crisis] that you need to think about change and how to position yourself for the future.... We came through that reasonably well, but also with a wakeup call that before we have to move through another reauthorization, we should be thinking carefully about the question of where we take accreditation.”

Those questions — does higher education’s system of peer review need to change, and how? — are at the core of the accreditation council’s CHEA Initiative, and Tuesday’s conversation was designed to stimulate ideas about how college leaders and accrediting officials might, on their own, alter the accreditation system, both to improve it and, not unimportantly, to ward off future efforts by politicians and others from outside higher education to impose potentially more severe and less thoughtful changes.

“There is every reason to believe that these issues will be on the agenda” of the Obama administration just as they were of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, said Judith S. Eaton, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

Ikenberry laid out several ways in which he believed accreditation needed to change to both maintain its utility as a voluntary peer review system and to reassure policy makers that higher education is worthy of taxpayers’ investments in it. Foremost among them was the role of accreditors in continuing to prod colleges to measure the learning outcomes of students, which is also the goal of two new organizations that Ikenberry and other college leaders announced at last week’s meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

The most provocative vision for changing accreditation put forward at Tuesday's meeting came from Robert C. Dickeson, president emeritus of the University of Northern Colorado. Dickeson's presentation was loaded with irony, in some ways; a position paper he wrote in 2006 as a consultant to Margaret Spellings's Commission on the Future of Higher Education was harshly critical of the current system of accreditation (calling it rife with conflicts of interest and decidedly lacking in transparency) and suggested replacing the regional accrediting agencies with a "national accreditation foundation" that would establish national standards for colleges to meet.

Dickeson's presentation Tuesday acknowledged that there remained legitimate criticisms of accreditation's rigor and agility, noting that many colleges and accrediting agencies still lacked good information about student learning outcomes "40 years after the assessment movement began in higher education."

But Dickeson's primary message this time around was that last year's Higher Education Act renewal amounted to the "most intrusive" incursion by the government in the affairs of colleges "in the history of higher education," given the reams of new regulatory requirements on matters large and small. Given that unwanted intervention, he said, "It should be clear to the accreditation and higher education communities that a new model for quality assurance is needed, if for no other reason than to forestall future federal intrusion that may have even more deleterious effects."

His paper thoughtfully laid out several alternatives to the current system, including replacing it with a mechanism similar to the Federal Accounting Standards Board. But Dickeson ultimately recommended that the Council for Higher Education Accreditation seek a Congressional charter that would strengthen its hand as the central coordinator of accreditation and that a foundation be created to raise money to finance the system (which is now largely paid for by institutional dues).

"The nation is in danger of losing the value of an independent higher education system, replacing it instead with a government bureau bent on the three Rs of rules, regulations and reports," Dickeson said. "What is required is a recalibration that balances institutional interests with public interests. Such a balance can best be obtained by strengthening the accreditation recognition system, preserving the values that matter, and doing so through a thoughtful but aggressive initiative that charters independent accreditation coordination as a national value."

Audience members were intrigued by Dickeson's idea but had numerous questions, many of them skeptical. Michael B. Goldstein, a Washington higher education lawyer, described the prospect of a Congressional charter as a double-edged sword, since "one thing we've all learned ... is the capacity of Congress to end up doing and saying things that none of us intended it to have it do." A Congressional charter would give lawmakers the ability to change that charter to reflect the whims of the moment, arguably giving Congress *more* direct say over accreditation than it has now, Goldstein said.

Some also questioned the likelihood that the federal government, having shown increased willingness to regulate higher education and increased impatience with colleges for ratcheting up tuition, would be willing to relinquish to a newly chartered CHEA the power to recognize accrediting agencies — recognition that in turn bestows on colleges accredited by those agencies the stamp of approval to award federal financial aid. Is there any chance that Congress would cede that authority to a higher education entity? Dickeson was asked.

“Somebody needs to assert the authority of higher education quality,” Dickeson answered. “If not this group, who?”

— Doug Lederman