

Despite crisis, Redlands Community College defends raises

NewsOK

BY RANDY ELLIS

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EL RENO — The president and five vice presidents of Redlands Community College were granted pay raises ranging from 16.8 to 22 percent about a year before they announced furloughs and layoffs would be needed to cope with a financial crisis, records show.

Redlands President Larry Devane's annual pay was raised almost \$23,000 to \$157,416 in July 2008, records show.

The pay of four vice presidents was raised nearly \$13,500 to \$85,007, while the pay of the fifth vice president was raised more than \$14,000 to \$78,506.

Devane said the raises were granted during the final year of a four-year, campus-wide salary improvement plan. Other Redlands employees got their raises first, he said.

The plan was designed to bring the salaries of Redlands employees up to the average of their counterparts at rural Oklahoma community colleges, he said.

"Each of the groups was looked at. The faculty was looked at first. Then we looked at staff and came on up," Devane said.

Earlier raises to faculty, support staff and professional staff averaged 3 to 5 percent, he said.

Devane defended the granting of larger raises to administrators, saying there was a bigger gap between their old salaries and the salaries of their peers.

A few of the previous raises granted to other employees also were large, he said, recalling one was as high as 39 percent.

In June, university officials announced that about 65 percent of Redlands employees would be required to take eight unpaid furlough days this fiscal year — beginning in July — because of financial problems there.

The furloughs apply to all full-time, state-funded positions, including the president and vice presidents. As a result, they will receive about 3 percent less pay this fiscal year.

In addition, the positions of four full-time workers and 12 part-time employees were eliminated. None of those were faculty, Devane said.

Redlands' financial crunch is due to the recession, a decision not to raise tuition, a loss of two major grants, accreditation costs, and increases in other costs such as insurance, Devane said.

Cards and costs

An examination of Redlands' financial records by *The Oklahoman* reveal the institution's debit card purchases increased more than 137 percent last fiscal year — from about \$286,500 in 2008 to more than \$680,000 in 2009.

That doesn't mean college employees were spending more money, said Karen Boucher, vice president for finance and campus services at Redlands.

State officials are encouraging state agencies and higher education institutions to make increasing use of debit cards rather than writing checks, Boucher said.

"Checks are more expensive because of the labor and transaction fees," she said. "We've been in it a couple years. We went in it very slowly the first year with our people to make sure we had the internal controls ... then we just jumped into it. The method of spending went up, not the expenses."

Similarly, Boucher insists the public should not be concerned by state financial reports showing that Redlands' miscellaneous administrative expenditures nearly doubled last fiscal year, from about \$1.57 million in fiscal year 2008 to more than \$3.13 million in 2009.

The category deals with money spent on operations, not money spent for the benefit of administrators, she said.

Redlands opened a student housing project called Cougar Crossing two years ago and occupancy increased dramatically last year, she said.

Redlands manages and maintains the 160-student complex, which was financed and built by the Redlands Community College Foundation, Boucher said.

Rent money from students that flows through the community college to the foundation shows up as miscellaneous administrative expenditures on state financial records, Boucher said.

Programs questioned

Some critics question whether Redlands officials put the institution in a financial pinch nearly four years ago when they paid \$1.2 million to buy the Royse horse ranch for Redlands' equine and agricultural programs. It costs a lot to run a horse ranch, not to mention the annual debt service cost of nearly \$70,000, they reason. Redlands averages about 30 students taking equine classes a semester.

Devane said Redlands had hoped to cover most of the purchase cost with grant money, but had to take out a substantial bank loan when most agricultural grant money dried up after Hurricane Katrina.

Still, Devane thinks the purchase has been a good investment. Horses are one of the top five industries in Oklahoma and Redlands wants to capitalize on that, he said.

Agriculture is one of Redlands' fastest growing programs and this should assist that growth, he said.

What Should Colleges Teach? Part 3

New York Times

September 7, 2009

I write a third column on the teaching of writing in colleges and universities because three important questions posed by a large number of posters remain unanswered: (1) Isn't the mastery of forms something that should be taught in high school or earlier? (2) Isn't extensive reading the key to learning how to write? (3) What would a composition course based on the method I urge look like?

Questions (1) and (2) can be answered briefly. Question (3) is, as they say, a work in progress.

By all the evidence, high schools and middle schools are not teaching writing skills in an effective way, if they are teaching them at all. The exception seems to be Catholic schools. More than a few commentators remembered with a mixture of fondness and pain the instruction they received at the hands of severe nuns. And I have found that those students in my classes who do have a grasp of the craft of writing are graduates of parochial schools. (I note parenthetically that in many archdioceses such schools are being closed, not a good omen for those who prize writing.)

I cannot see, however, why a failure of secondary education relieves college teachers of a responsibility to make up the deficit. Quite the reverse. It is because our students come to us unable to write clean English sentences that we are obligated to supply what they did not receive from their previous teachers. No doubt this obligation constitutes a burden on an already overworked labor force, but (and this is one of those times a cliché can acquire renewed force), somebody has to do it.

The question of the relationship of reading and learning to write is more complicated. Classical rhetoricians preached the virtue of imitation; students were presented with sentences from the work of great authors and asked to reproduce their form with a different content. I like this exercise because its emphasis is so obviously formal.

But what about just doing a lot of reading and hoping that by passing your eyes over many pages you will learn how to write through osmosis? I'm not so sure. If to wide reading were added daily dinner-table discussions of the sophistication and wit found in many 18th and 19th century novels, I might be more sanguine. And if your experience with words were also to include training in public speaking and debate (itself a matter of becoming practiced in forms), I might say, O.K., you probably don't need a form-based composition course. Unfortunately, however, reading is not the favorite pastime of today's youth and debate societies don't have the cachet they once did; so my insistence that a narrowly focused writing course be required for everyone stands.

How does one teach such a course? What texts can one use? How does one effect the passage from sentences to larger prose units? "How do you determine whether and in what ways [this]

approach improves . . . students' writing," asks James Gee. My answers to these questions are provisional. I'm still trying to work them out.

I have reached some conclusions. First, you must clear your mind of the orthodoxies that have taken hold in the composition world. The main orthodoxy is nicely encapsulated in this resolution adopted in 1974 by the Conference on College Composition and Communication: "We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language — the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style."

Of course, as a matter of law students have the right to any dialect they choose to deploy (although in some small cities where the "English Only" movement has succeeded in the ballot box, linguistic rights have been curtailed). The issue is whether students accorded this right will prosper in a society where norms of speech and writing are enforced not by law but by institutional decorums. If you're about to be fired because your memos reflect your "own identity and style," citing the CCC resolution is not going to do you any good.

Behind the resolution is a theoretical argument. Linguistic forms, it is said, are not God-given; they are the conventional products of social/cultural habit and therefore none of them is naturally superior or uniquely "correct." It follows (according to this argument) that any claim of correctness is political, a matter of power not of right. "If we teach standardized, handbook grammar as if it is the only 'correct' form of grammar, we are teaching in cooperation with a discriminatory power system" (Patricia A. Dunn and Kenneth Lindblom, English Journal, January, 2003).

Statements like this one issue from the mistake of importing a sociological/political analysis of a craft into the teaching of it. It may be true that the standard language is an instrument of power and a device for protecting the status quo, but that very truth is a reason for teaching it to students who are being prepared for entry into the world as it now is rather than the world as it might be in some utopian imagination — all dialects equal, all habit of speech and writing equally rewarded.

You're not going to be able to change the world if you are not equipped with the tools that speak to its present condition. You don't strike a blow against a power structure by making yourself vulnerable to its prejudices. Even as an exercise in political strategy, "having conversations with students about linguistic systems and democratic values" (V.F. Kinloch, "Revisiting the Promise of Students' Right to Their Own Language," CCC 57:1, September 2005) strikes me as an unlikely lever for bringing about change; as a strategy for teaching writing, it is a disaster.

And if students infected with the facile egalitarianism of soft multiculturalism declare, "I have a right to my own language," reply, "Yes, you do, and I am not here to take that language from you; I'm here to teach you another one." (Who could object to learning a second language?) And then get on with it.

Of course, I still haven't explained how you get on with it. Not by consulting Strunk and White's "The Elements of Style," a book cited favorably by more than a few posters. I wouldn't go as far as Randy Burgess does when he calls the famous little book "the worst," but I would say that it is unhelpful because its prescriptions presuppose the knowledge most of our students don't have.

What good is it to be told, “Do not join independent clauses with a comma,” if you don’t have the slightest idea of what a clause is (and isn’t), never mind an “independent” one? And even if a beginning student were provided with the definition of a clause, the definition itself would hang in mid-air like a random piece of knowledge. It would be like being given a definition of a drop-kick in the absence of any understanding of the game in which it could be deployed.

You have to start with a simple but deep understanding of the game, which for my purposes is the game of writing sentences. So it makes sense to begin with the question, What is a sentence anyway? My answer has two parts: (1) A sentence is an organization of items in the world. (2) A sentence is a structure of logical relationships.

The second part tells you what kind of organization a sentence is, a logical one, and in order to pinpoint what the components of that logic are, I put a simple sentence on the table, something like “John hit the ball” or “Jane likes cake.” I spend an entire week on sentences like these (which are easily comprehended by students of any background), asking students to generate them, getting them to see the structure of relationships that makes them all the same on a formal level, getting them to see that the motor of meaning production is form, not content.

Once they see that — and it is an indispensable lesson — they are ready to explore, generate and practice with the other forms that organize the world’s items in increasingly complicated ways. Basically, there is only one thing to be learned, that a sentence is a structure of logical relationships; everything else follows.

I have devised a number of exercises designed to reinforce and extend the basic insight. These include (1) asking students to make a sentence out of a random list of words, and then explain what they did; (2) asking students to turn a three-word sentence like “Jane likes cake” into a 100-word sentence without losing control of the basic structure and then explain, word-by-word, clause-by-clause, what they did; (3) asking students to replace the nonsense words in the first stanza of Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” with ordinary English words in a way that makes coherent (if silly) sense, and then explain what they did, and how they knew what kind of word to put into each “slot.” (The answer is that even in the absence of sense or content, the stanza’s formal structure tells them what to do and what not to do.)

Notice that the exercises always come in two parts. In the first part students are asked to do something they can do easily. In the second part they are asked to analyze their own performance. The second part is the hard one; it requires students to raise to a level of analytical conscience the operations they must perform if they are to write sentences that hang together.

In the final exercise, about which I’ve written before in this space, the class is divided into groups of four or five and each group is asked to create its own language — complete with a lexicon, and a grammar capable of conveying the distinctions (of number, tense, mood, etc.) conveyed by English grammatical forms. At the end of the semester each group presents a text in its language and teaches the class how to translate it into English, and how to translate English sentences into sentences in the new language, to which the group always gives a name and about which it is always fiercely proprietary.

To my knowledge, there are no textbooks that teach this method — Stephen reports, “until you described it . . . I had never heard of such a course at any college” — although, in some respects, Francis Christensen’s “generative rhetoric” of sentences, now considered outmoded, comes close.

What I do is supplement the exercises described above with a standard grammar text filled with the usual terminology, a terminology that will not seem impenetrable and hostile to students who have been learning how language works at a level these texts assume but do not explicate. My current favorites are Geraldine Woods’ “English Grammar for Dummies” and Martha Kolln’s “Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choice, Rhetorical Effects.” I like the first because its examples are so fanciful (“Lochness loves my singing”) that there is no danger of becoming interested in their content. I like the second because of Kolln’s emphasis on how grammatical choices fulfill and/or disappoint reader expectations.

I have also assigned J.L. Austin’s “How to Do Things With Words,” Richard Lanham’s “A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms” and Lynne Truss’s “Eats, Shoots & Leaves,” and I have flirted with using the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* and parts of *Quintilian* and *Seneca*, if only to show students how old the formal teaching of writing is.

My course is entirely sentence-centered except for one exercise, when I put a sentence on the board — usually something incredibly boring like, “The first year of college presents many challenges” — and ask each student in turn to add a sentence while taking care to look backward to the narrative that has already been developed and forward to the sentences yet to be written by his or her colleagues.

At the end of the semester, I used to send my students into the class taught by Cathy Birkenstein and Gerald Graff, whose excellent book “They Say / I Say” introduces students to the forms of argument in a spirit entirely compatible with my focus on the forms of sentences. (We have taught in each others’ classes.)

As to the question of whether this method improves writing, I can only cite local successes in my classes and the anecdotal reports of former students who have employed it in their own classes. I take heart from veteran composition teachers like Lynn Sams, who says that after many years of experimentation, she has concluded that “the ability to analyze sentences, to understand how the parts work together to convey desired meaning, emphasis, and effect is . . . central to the writing process.” (“How to Teach Grammar, Analytical Thinking and Writing; A Method that Works.” *English Journal*, January, 2003). Amen.

The Message: Your Money Can Keep Our Students Enrolled

The Chronicle of Higher Education

By Beckie Supiano

For \$200, you can pay for one University of Maryland student's orientation fees. A thousand dollars will buy textbooks for a year, and \$8,000 will cover in-state tuition and fees at the flagship campus in College Park. Those suggested gifts, along with videos of students who rely on aid, are featured on a colorful Web site designed for the university's "Keep Me Maryland" campaign.

The effort is a catchy twist on something many colleges are trying to do: raise money for immediate student-aid needs. "The economy has compelled a number of institutions to emphasize financial aid much more prominently," says Rae M. Goldsmith, vice president for advancement resources at the Council for Advancement and Support of Education.

Several other colleges, including Ohio State and Syracuse Universities, started campaigns that stress urgency, talk about the importance of even small gifts for students, and heavily use the institutions' Web sites.

The "Keep Me Maryland" campaign grew out of a presentation Sarah J. Bauder, director of student financial aid, gave to the University of Maryland College Park Foundation's Board of Trustees in February explaining that many students needed additional financial aid. One trustee ran with the idea of raising money to help students, the slogan was coined, and the effort began shortly thereafter.

At Maryland, appeals of financial-aid awards are up about 50 percent above this time last year, Ms. Bauder says. An extra \$500 or \$1,000 is often enough to tide over a student on the brink of leaving for financial reasons, she says. Maryland's financial-aid staff reviews appeals and forwards the most extreme cases to Ms. Bauder. When other campus officials or faculty members know a student is struggling, those cases go to her directly. The challenge, Ms. Bauder says, is determining "how much do I have to give the student to keep them here, and not one dollar more?"

There simply isn't enough money to go around, and she has to use it wisely.

So far, "Keep Me Maryland" has raised about \$260,000, which is being distributed by the financial-aid office as it comes in. The university has not set an end date or a goal for the campaign yet.

This fall, Maryland didn't meet the impossible objective of keeping every student, but Ms. Bauder is still pleased with the results. As of the first day of the semester, on Monday, only 34 of the 1,471 students who appealed their financial-aid awards did not come to campus, and 18 of those would have been new freshmen.

Fund-raising efforts like "Keep Me Maryland" help meet a real need, but they can also have other advantages from a fund-raising standpoint. Young alumni are often skeptical that their small contribution can make a difference, says Brodie Remington, vice president for university relations at College Park. But about 600 people who graduated in the last 10 years have contributed to this campaign, which he sees as a positive sign. And the university plans to go after young alumni and current students to participate more this fall. One idea is to give student donors raffle tickets that enter them to win the prize of watching a football game from a private box with a small group of students—and with appearances by university celebrities like coaches and successful alumni.

The university considered the possibility that a campaign that essentially says the institution may lose students because of money might cause a backlash, but Mr. Remington says that hasn't happened. It helps, he says, that the university hasn't raised tuition lately.

Emphasis on Urgency

Ohio State University, which also has held tuition steady, can make the same point in its fund-raising endeavor for students.

The university has taken a slightly different approach in its "Students First, Students Now" campaign. Its goal is to raise \$100-million over two years. The campaign is featured prominently on the institution's home page, and uses video stories of students who receive aid to personalize the effort.

So far, Ohio State has raised about \$27-million for the campaign, which began in January. Unlike Maryland, Ohio State is taking many donations in the form of endowments. The university didn't want to put any restrictions on the kinds of gifts people could give, says Peter B.

Weiler, senior vice president for development and president of the Ohio State University Foundation. But like Maryland, Ohio State is pushing the urgency of its campaign.

And urgency is a good fund-raising strategy. The Council for Advancement and Support of Education has been hearing from its members that their donors are more interested in giving to support financial aid now, Ms. Goldsmith says. It's the same mentality that leads people to give to the Red Cross after a disaster.

Syracuse University had a rapid-response campaign that ran from December 4 to the end of January to help students stay enrolled for the spring semester last year. That campaign, called "Syracuse Responds," but nicknamed "Keep 'Em 'Cuse," brought in just over \$1-million and helped 426 students. The goal had initially been \$2-million, but that was based on early projections rather than detailed research, says Brian C. Sischo, vice president for development. He sees the money it brought in as a success.

Response From Younger Donors

"What made it a bit unique was the turnaround time," Mr. Sischo says. The university knew students had only a short window to make their plans for the spring. Because of the short time frame, the campaign was conducted almost entirely online, though one print piece was sent out right before the holidays. About 20 percent of the donors were alumni who graduated within the last 10 years, Mr. Sischo says. In comparison, only 3.8 percent of alumni donors to the university's annual fund in fiscal year 2009 graduated in the last 10 years.

This kind of campaign worked well for Syracuse at the time, Mr. Sischo says. Donors are less likely to give to the endowment when it has suffered losses, and less likely to want to make a long-term commitment in an environment in which their own finances could change, so an immediate campaign is appealing.

The financial-aid office sent a letter to Syracuse students, and faculty and staff members, asking them to refer students who were struggling financially. That way, students who were too embarrassed to ask for help could still get it, says Youlonda Copeland-Morgan, associate vice president for enrollment, and director of student aid and scholarships. If a student was referred by another party and already had financial aid, the office might look at the student's file and decide to award more money without even discussing it with the student. If the student did not already get financial aid, the office would make contact to get the needed documentation.

Ms. Copeland-Morgan kept track of the 426 students who received the additional money. She found that 85 percent returned to campus and 12 percent graduated. Most of the others have gone on leave for something like study abroad. Two or three students have not returned, she says, but for personal rather than financial reasons.

In the months since the campaign, the financial-aid office has been helped by additional federal money, as the maximum federal Pell Grant increased and the university got extra federal work-study money from the economic-stimulus package. The university also raised its financial-aid budget about 12 percent this year.

But the university still is getting a lot of financial-aid appeals, and Ms. Copeland-Morgan doesn't expect that to end anytime soon. "It wasn't like we solved the total problem," she says, "but we were able to make a significant contribution to keep many of the students in school."

One downside of fund raising to meet an urgent need? You can't turn around and do it again. That would be like pulling the wool over donors' eyes, Mr. Sischo says. But the development office is looking at other ways it can raise money to support need-based aid going forward, he says.

Ms. Bauder, in Maryland's financial aid office, is optimistic that "Keep Me Maryland" will do more than help students afford to stay in college through tough times. She hopes it will refocus attention on raising money for need-based aid even after the economy recovers.

Budget cuts leave ECC with fewer classes for more students

Dailybreeze.com

By Douglas Morino Staff Writer

Posted: 09/03/2009

"Class is Full, Do Not Disturb" signs hung on doors at El Camino College this week.

But Marty Diaz wasn't bothered. The 20-year-old spent a portion of his first day back at school leaning against a concrete wall as a steady flow of students streamed by. With a schedule of classes in one hand and a pen in another, he considered his next move.

"Classes have been crowded," Diaz, an architecture major, said Tuesday. "It's been difficult trying to get a full schedule, and I still need another class to add."

The El Segundo High school graduate isn't alone. With historic funding cuts hitting the state's public school system, El Camino College will be forced to educate more students with less resources this semester. About 12 percent of class sections have been cut for the fall semester.

"We're offering less classes but we still have about the same amount of students as last year," said English professor Pete Marcoux. "So you're seeing classrooms with not enough desks and chairs. I see a lot of students roaming the halls, just desperate to get a class. There is lot at stake for these kids, and it really puts a lot of pressure on them."

As more students look to community colleges to pursue their goals of higher education, the system is getting hit with unprecedented budget cuts. A report released Monday by the California Postsecondary Education Commission projects California's two-year college system will reach 2 million students by 2019 - an increase of 10 percent. The report comes as California community colleges grapple with an eight percent cut in state funding.

After slashing \$5 million from the school's general fund, El Camino officials capped enrollment at about 26,000 students, a 4 percent increase over the previous year.

"Parents and students called us in late August asking how to sign up for the fall semester," community relations director Ann Garten said. "All we could tell them was to register earlier."

Even as state-imposed cuts loomed, the school was still able to hire additional teachers, but in fewer numbers than in previous years. During the past four years, about 300 part time instructors have been hired at the two-year college near Torrance. This year, 30 part-time and 11 full-time faculty members were hired.

"We're trying to be more efficient, but we're restricted with the funding we're getting," Garten said. "Some students will have to stay in school longer."

To cope with California's historic budget deficit, lawmakers have slashed \$6.1 billion from the state's K-14 public education system.

To help offset that cut, fees at California community colleges increased from \$20 to \$26 a unit this year.

"The whole state is in economic trouble," said President Thomas Fallo as he strolled through campus on a muggy, overcast afternoon. "And it's really is unfair to the students. Every class section was filled on the first day of school."

The school has received 60 percent - about \$5 million - less funding from the state for student services, forcing El Camino to pick up the tab for disabled students programs, counseling services and four-year college transfer assistance.

"We've been forced to cut back and restrict services, but the students are adapting," Fallo said.

One of those students was Nicole Furetta.

The 18-year-old said she arrived at school hoping to add several classes at the last minute, but was greeted with classrooms packed full of students looking to do the same.

"I've only been able to get two of the classes I need," Furetta said as she sat with friends at a table outside the students services center. "I've had to completely re-do my schedule."

Furetta said she tried to add a psychology class - along with 30 of her peers.

"The teacher just told all of us to come back later," Furetta explained. "Now, I'll have to add three P.E. classes, just to get a full schedule."

Erica Nichols spent a portion of her first day of college tucked away on a staircase, looking over a class schedule.

"It's frustrating. Sitting in the back of the room, not knowing if you'll get in the class can be stressful," the 17-year-old Inglewood High graduate said.

And if she can't get the classes she needs this semester?

"I guess I can always try again in January," she said.

The Price of Wage Concessions

InsideHigherEd.com

September 10, 2009

Faculty at Rutgers University may have saved their jobs and their budgets last week. But in this year of furloughs and salary freezes, professors at the New Jersey state university believe they got more than vague pledges to minimize job cuts.

Members of the university's chapters of the American Association of University Professors-American Federation of Teachers (AAUP-AFT) voted in polling that ended Friday to accept delays in scheduled pay raises in exchange for promises that the institution would hold off on layoffs and other cost-cutting moves.

In all, the agreement will shave \$23.6 million off Rutgers' projected expenses for the next two years and protect 270 full-time employees and 450 part-time lecturers from losing their jobs. The university system's annual budget totals \$2 billion, but only a small fraction of that amount represents flexible spending that could even be considered for cuts.

Philip Furmanski, executive vice president for academic affairs, described the agreement as an instance in which "everybody sacrificed" to prevent layoffs, program cuts and across-the-board increases in teaching loads. The university also would have curtailed searches for new faculty hires, cut back on the availability of sabbaticals and reduced the number of sections being offered for some courses.

"This was a way for the university community to come together to address the same financial challenges that virtually every other university in the country faces," he said. "We're not out of the woods by any means but this is definitely something that will help us get through this very difficult period."

Rutgers AAUP-AFT represents 2,500 faculty members and 1,700 teaching and graduate assistants at the New Jersey state university's campuses in New Brunswick/Piscataway, Newark and Camden. Patrick Nowlan, the union's executive director, said he was "happy to reach an agreement before the start of the semester" and "satisfied it didn't ask for greater sacrifices from our members."

The Rutgers agreement comes as many academic unions face pressure to accept wage concessions without, they fear, getting substantial concessions from their employers in return. The AAUP's Collective Bargaining Congress Executive Committee issued a resolution in August urging chapters facing pay freezes to "work to embed in any plan conditions that protect current instructional capacity, provide faculty a greater role in resource allocation, and that reverse the trends ... which undercut our ability to serve students and society."

Under the agreement, faculty pay raises that were scheduled to take effect on July 1 as part of the union's 2007-11 contract will instead be phased in January and July of next year. Raises expected in the middle of next year under the contract will instead take effect in two parts during

2011. But the lower-paid members of the union -- teaching assistants, graduate students and part-time lecturers -- will still get the pay raises provided for them by the contract.

Negotiations between the union's leaders and university officials began soon after Gov. Jon Corzine introduced his state budget plan in March and finally reached a point of mutual consensus in mid-August. The agreement then went to members, who had until September 4 to vote for or against it. AAUP-AFT's leaders and members were, Nowlan said, "frustrated it took as long as it did to reach this agreement."

He said the union's greatest concern is that university administrators were "less than forthcoming about their financial situation" and that members don't see "proof that some of these structural changes to the contract were necessary." The agreement establishes a new University Committee on Budget and Finance to oversee Rutgers' spending of federal stimulus funds and the savings that came from the AAUP-AFT's agreement. The panel will be chaired by Richard L. McCormick, the university's president, but will include several union members. According to the agreement, the group will meet at least once a semester and issue an annual report each June that will be public and used by university's administrators and Board of Governors in formulating the next year's budget.

Cary Nelson, national president of the AAUP, said the Rutgers agreement is the best effort he's seen at recession era give-and-take between an institution and its faculty union. "The union got some of what it needed and the university got what it needed," he said. "This is how it's supposed to work in an ideal world of negotiations."

He added: "Rather than just sending a message to the faculty that this is what is going to happen to them, the university was willing to engage in talks and help reach an agreement that was favorable to both sides."

Nelson pointed to the 23,000-member California Faculty Association's July agreement with the state's university system as another instance where union members and their institutions worked out an agreement that left both sides with a little bit of what they wanted. The union agreed to accept furloughs that will amount to pay cuts of 4 to 10 percent during the 2009-10 academic year "in the hope of protecting jobs, their own and those of others," he said. But the California deal came with anger over what union members said was Chancellor Reed's unwillingness to guarantee that the furlough would save any single job or course. (Only 4 percent of those who voted on the deal said they had confidence in Reed's leadership, while 79% had "no confidence.")

While the agreement leaves Rutgers AAUP-AFT members largely unscathed, other unions including the Union of Rutgers Administrators-AFT (URA-AFT) and two AFSCME locals representing university employees are still at the bargaining table and face more onerous cuts.

The URA-AFT represents 1,900 administrative employees. Lucye Millerand, its president, said she has been negotiating with Rutgers for more than two months, since "at the very beginning of July we were unilaterally notified that [the university] was not planning to pay any of our raises beginning with that month's first paycheck."

She said the URA-AFT “had no discussion” with the university about a delay in the raises before it went into effect. The union has filed a grievance that is on its way to arbitration and continues to negotiate with university officials.

Furmanski said he could not comment on the negotiations, other than to say that Rutgers is “in discussions with all of the other unions at the university” to agree to conditions like those accepted by the faculty.

The URA-AFT hopes for an agreement similar to the AAUP-AFT’s. “Our members, I believe, are receptive to the idea of holding back raises to preserve jobs,” Millerand said. “But we still have members who are getting layoffs notices and then 30 days later they’re gone.”

Nowlan and the AAUP-AFT support the administrative employees’ union’s efforts. “We sense the university is trying to ask for even more from these staff locals,” he said, and “that’s really discouraging because most staff make less than members of the faculty.”

Millerand said her union would also be open to striking a deal like those agreed upon earlier this year by other state unions that include unpaid furloughs. “At least then we get a few days off where we don’t have to pay for child care ... and can maybe clean our gutters instead of paying someone to do that.”

Otherwise, she said, "if necessary, we'll protest."

— **Jennifer Epstein**

Washington Whirlwind InsideHigherEd.com

September 10, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Health care is dominating the headlines and consuming most of the oxygen in federal politics these days, and that's likely to remain the case through the fall as President Obama and Congress work to pass legislation to reform the American medical system.

But as lawmakers returned to work this week after their August recess, a flurry of news developments Wednesday served as a reminder that higher education issues remain a top priority for the administration and its Democratic allies on Capitol Hill.

Among the developments:

- The Education Department on Wednesday announced that it would create two committees of college officials, consumer groups and others to propose new federal regulations governing foreign schools and issues related to the "integrity" of the student financial aid programs.
- Sen. Tom Harkin, an Iowa Democrat known for his strong support of the National Institutes of Health, will replace the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy as chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. The way was cleared for Harkin when Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) said he would remain as head of the Senate's banking committee.
- Vice President Joe Biden brought his White House Task Force on the Middle Class (and two Cabinet secretaries) to Syracuse University for a forum on college affordability, in a conversation that featured some tough talk about college tuition and lots of love for community colleges. In conjunction with the meeting, the White House also released three reports, on financial aid simplification, 529 savings plans, and the major barriers to a college education.

The flurry of activity comes as the centerpiece of this year's higher education legislative landscape -- a measure to carry out the Obama administration's plan to remake the federal loan programs and use the savings to bolster Pell Grants and two-year colleges -- remains, like most other things in Washington, hostage to health care.

The White House is obviously hoping that President Obama's primetime speech last night gets the contentious debate about reforming the health system back on track. What happens there is not incidental to the student aid legislation, because the fate of the two measures are intertwined. That's because Congress is virtually certain to consider the higher education bill, which the House passed in July, through the process known as "budget reconciliation," in which Congress, using a restrictive set of voting rules, considers legislation that materially affects federal mandatory programs, like Medicare and student loans.

Administration officials would prefer to pass health care legislation through normal channels with bipartisan support, and considering it through budget reconciliation would be a fallback only if Democrats fail to get Republican backing and must ram it through Congress without any.

Congress can consider only one reconciliation bill in any single session, and lawmakers, in May's fiscal 2010 budget resolution, set an October 15 deadline for the drafting of a reconciliation measure for this year. So there is unlikely to be much visible movement in the Senate to craft its version of the student aid legislation until the health care legislative picture becomes clearer.

One thing that did become clearer Wednesday is who will be leading the Senate's work on the bill. Kennedy had been ailing for nearly a year before his death last month, but his staff had continued to work with Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), whom Kennedy had asked to fill in for him, on education issues. Dodd had seniority on the health and education committee, but he decided Wednesday to stick with his current post as head of the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee rather than take over the HELP panel.

Harkin was next in line, but it was unclear whether he would give up his chairmanship of the Agriculture Committee considered so important to his Great Plains home state. But the opportunity to get into the thick of deliberations over health care proved too strong a draw. "This is an opportunity to lead the charge on health care, on education and on making sure that working families get a better share of the dollar and to help do something to strengthen the pensions and retirement systems in this country,"

Harkin told Radio Iowa, "all issues I care very deeply about and affect every Iowan and every American, so I look forward to working on those issues."

Harkin is considered a friend of higher education, and is seen as a strong backer of two-year institutions, particularly, pushing during the economic stimulus bill, for instance, for community colleges to get a set share of facilities funds. But as head of the Senate spending subcommittee that allocates annual funds for education, health and labor programs, he generally tends to favor biomedical research and other health programs over education when faced with a choice of where to direct extra funds. Harkin, who has been heavily influenced by the experiences of his brother, who is deaf, played a key role in passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act and the creation of the NIH's National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.

New Round of Rule Making

The Education Department's announcement Wednesday that it would set up two panels to negotiate new federal regulations governing issues related to program integrity and foreign institutions offered a few more details about what the department hoped to explore than did May's preliminary announcement. That announcement sparked concerns from a small number of for-profit college officials and analysts that the Education Department was planning to significantly ramp up its scrutiny of such institutions, because several of the issues department officials said they planned to examine -- notably rules related to incentives paid to recruiters

based on enrollments -- are particularly acute in the for-profit sector. Department officials strongly challenged that speculation, saying they cared about the quality and student experience at institutions of all types, and had no special targets in mind.

Wednesday's announcement provided an expanded list of (tersely worded) topics that the department wants the still-to-be-nominated-and-chosen members of the "program integrity" committee to weigh, and at least one of them could inspire those looking for signs of peril to believe that the department has it in for for-profit colleges: "Misrepresentation of information provided to students and prospective students." While certainly any college, two-year or four-year, nonprofit or for-, could be accused of misleading students about their job prospects or other aspects of their educations, this is the sort of accusation that is often made when students sue for-profit colleges, and in sometimes highly publicized exposés about the sector.

Another area of scrutiny newly identified by the department is the "ability to benefit" test that a student without a degree from an American high school must pass to qualify for federal financial aid. While plenty of students at community colleges and other nonprofit institutions fall into that category, so too do many at for-profit colleges.

Mark Kantrowitz, publisher of Finaid.org and an expert on federal financial aid, said that as he looked at the issues the department plans to explore, he doesn't "get the sense that the department has painted a target on the for-profits," since most of them were either "identified by Office of Inspector General audits" or arose "as a consequence of the Higher Education Opportunity Act" passed last year. Several of the issues, like those related to satisfactory academic progress and "monitoring grade point averages," flow from Congress's decision to allow students to receive two Pell Grants in a single year, he said.

"The department's focus really seems to be on improving the efficiency of the programs," he said.

College and the Middle Class

As department officials unveiled their next regulatory steps, the agency's leader, Education Secretary Arne Duncan, joined Vice President Biden, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and others at a town hall meeting on college affordability at Syracuse. Unlike many such recent meetings on health care, this one was decidedly good humored, despite its underlying premise that college is unaffordable for too many students and families.

"I'm one of the poorest men in the Senate, and there's one reason for that: college," said Biden, who recounted the various colleges and graduate schools he's put his children through. "I had debt, and my children were left in debt, tens of thousands of dollars in debt."

Despite critical rhetoric like that, the discussion among the many college presidents and other officials in the audience at Syracuse's Schine Student Center was largely upbeat because the Obama administration has decided that the country must invest in higher education to secure its future -- in the form of tens of billions of dollars in the economic recovery package, and

promises of tens of billions of dollars more in the aforementioned student aid legislation. "We got our brains beat out" for the heavy spending on education in the stimulus package, Biden said. "But we don't want to just get out of this great recession. We want to come out having built a new platform for the 21st century so we can compete in the world."

What's not clear, though, is whether the administration and/or Congress will use the promise of additional funds to compel the kind of change in colleges' operations that most experts believe is necessary to make the industry viable for the future, and to meet the president's goal of getting millions more Americans out of college with credentials.

Nancy Zimpher, the new chancellor of the State University of New York system, insisted that higher education leaders are getting it -- if not because of pressure from policy makers, then because of economic necessity. Colleges are operating dual enrollment programs so that some students are "getting their associate degrees and their high school diplomas on the same day," she said, expanding their online offerings to help placebound students earn degrees. "A market driven mentality has not escaped us," Zimpher said.

As befits a man who, as he put it, "sleep[s] with a woman every night" who has spent her professional life teaching at community colleges, Biden led what could only be called cheerleading for two-year institutions as a (if not the) solution to the country's college affordability and access problems. "This is really their day in the sun," Duncan said of community colleges. "They are increasingly being seen as the valued jewel in higher education."

In addition to the pep talks, administration officials also made a bit of news at the Syracuse event. Duncan endorsed federal legislation that would shield from taxation the value of any student loans forgiven for a borrower through the government's income-based or income-contingent repayment options. In a letter to Rep. Sander Levin (D-Mich.), who sponsored the legislation, Duncan said the administration would support the measure if its \$100 million annual price tag, once fully phased in, is paid for.

The White House also released three studies in conjunction with the middle class task force's town hall meeting. One, produced by the Treasury Department at the direction of Biden's task force, analyzes the advantages and problems of Section 529 college savings and prepaid tuition programs, and makes a set of recommendations for improving them. The report notes that the programs are of little use to low-income families, but suggests that rather than trying to change that, the administration focus on making them as useful as possible for the middle class, and let grant and loan programs help the financially needy.

The chief recommendations for making the programs more effective and cost efficient: imposing a national cap on how much any one recipient of the college benefits can receive (rather than having state-by-state caps that allow people to sock money away for a family member in multiple states) and strengthening competition among states by eliminating policies in states' programs that discount fees for home-state residents.

— **Doug Lederman**

Ask the Administrator: Activity Hour

InsideHigherEd.com

By Dean Dad

September 13, 2009 8:17 pm

A new correspondent writes:

We just learned that our administration wants our spring schedule revised (campus-wide) to include a break from 12:00 - 1:30 every MWF. For those of us in the lab sciences that run classes in two and three hour blocks, this is certainly cause for some hair pulling. We are having trouble finding a way to accommodate the break. We haven't been given a reason for the schedule change other than it would allow all faculty to be available at the same time for committee meetings and such. I would like to know if other schools have a similar break in the class schedule. What length of break and how many times a week?

Also, I feel like this will actually decrease enrollment although the administrative message this year has been "increased enrollment, we want increased enrollment". My lab classes will be pushed from 2-4 to 3:30-5:30. What student can and will take a class that runs until 5:30, particularly on a Friday afternoon? We have a female majority student body and a significant portion are women with family responsibilities. A very informal poll of my classes leads me to believe that no student (out of a sampling of ~100) would take the class in that time slot. Am I just so unaccustomed to this idea that my initial (knee-jerk) reaction of "oh no!" is wrong and that this could be a good thing? Insight, advice, and anecdotal evidence of success would be great!

I did a piece on this a few years ago, but think it may be worth revisiting.

Activity hours, or "college hours," serve two major purposes. They allow student groups to meet, since students won't have classes during those times. For commuter campuses in particular, this is a very big deal, though I imagine it matters somewhat less for residential campuses. And they allow faculty committees to meet, since the major logistical obstacle has been neutralized. (That's especially true at cc's, since faculty here generally have more classes than they do elsewhere.)

I've never known a college to hold 'college hour' completely inviolate. Enrollment pressures, lab/studio classes, and offsite obligations (nursing clinicals, say) each exert pressure, especially at prime time. Holding college hours outside of prime time can reduce their cost, but it also reduces their effectiveness. How many students (or faculty, for that matter) will stick around for a 3:00 meeting on Friday afternoon?

Whether activity hours are worthwhile depends on your evaluation of the activities they make possible. At the Snooty Liberal Arts College I attended, all classes ended by 4:00. That allowed for athletics until about 7:00, followed by meetings and free time. At a

commuter college, things just don't work that way. Making extracurriculars available to cc students requires acknowledging the fact that most of them will be on campus only when they have classes, so sandwiching activities between classes is the only way to make large-scale participation realistic.

The folks who study graduation rates routinely report that students who get involved in campus activities graduate at much higher rates than those who don't. To what extent that's a function of self-selection, I don't know, but common sense suggests that self-selection and a positive effect aren't mutually exclusive.

As far as faculty and administrative meetings go, I'll just note that the alternative to faculty participation in governance is faculty non-participation in governance. Participation requires meetings. It just does.

Wise and worldly readers, I'll ask the same question I asked in 2006. Has your college found a reasonably elegant way to handle activity hour?

Textbook costs will drop 5 percent at West Valley College

mercurynews.com

By Brian Babcock

Saratoga News

Posted: 09/16/2009

West Valley College students are facing fee increases and a tumultuous job market once they graduate. But there's at least a little relief on the way as textbook prices will be rolled back by 5 percent beginning in June.

The West Valley-Mission Community college board of trustees voted 6-1 to reduce prices at a board meeting in August. Trustee Chris Stampolis cast the only dissenting vote.

The board decided against implementing the reduction immediately since it would be unfair to those students who had already purchased their books for the fall semester.

The reduction in prices was part of a contract renewal with Barnes and Noble, which runs the district's bookstores. When the contract renewal was coming up for a vote a couple of months ago, board member Chad Walsh said he asked for a continuance so the district could look into reducing textbook costs.

Walsh, along with chancellor John Hendrickson and district staff, combed through the contract in hopes of finding a way to reduce costs without hurting the district, he said. The district has already faced budget cuts this year.

Textbook prices are marked up for a variety of reasons, including covering operation costs and expenses. It was decided that a 5 percent reduction in costs could be done if the district was willing not to be reimbursed by Barnes and Noble for some of the rent of the bookstore buildings at both campuses.

Walsh, who promised students during his campaign last year that he would drop textbook prices, said the reduction was a triumph but more needs to be done.

"This is by no means the end game," said Walsh. "We're at first-and-10, but we have a long way to go to get to the end zone."

Walsh said he expects that the board of trustees will create an ad-hoc committee that will look at the broader problem of the cost of textbooks.

Mark-ups are only one issue, he said. Other issues can be pointed back at publishers that are continually printing new editions of textbooks, Walsh said.

"For example, algebra has been around for a long time, so I'm not sure that much has changed with it," he said. "However, teaching strategies improve, so there are changes there."

As the board looks at alternative ways to reduce the cost of textbooks, Walsh said the members will have to work together to accomplish the task.

"Everything we do is a team effort," Walsh said. "We made a big step forward."

Colleges Face Swine-Flu Challenge as Number of Sick Students Surges

Chronicle of Higher Ed

September 16, 2009

By Katherine Mangan

Fraternity and sorority recruitment had just wrapped up and classes were about to start when the first wave of coughing and sniffing students reached Washington State University's health center.

Over the next few weeks, more than 2,600 students either walked in or called, complaining of fevers, body aches, nausea, and other flu symptoms. No one knows how many of those students actually had the H1N1 virus, commonly known as swine flu, because health officials nationally have concluded that routine testing is too expensive, time-consuming, and generally unnecessary when so many people are ill with a virus that can usually be treated like the typical seasonal flu.

Still, because of the early start of its academic year and the large number of sick students, Washington State found itself at "ground zero" of reporting on the swine-flu pandemic, President Elson S. Floyd ruefully noted last week on the university's Web site.

Although college officials around the country were expecting an early and rough flu season, the fact that it hit so many campuses while students were still unpacking has complicated the start of the academic year.

Campuses like Washington State's are struggling to isolate sick students, many of them freshmen, in residence halls where roommates and shared bathrooms are generally the rule.

Residence halls are full on the main campus, in Pullman, because of a record enrollment of 19,500 students.

There and at other colleges that do not have the luxury of setting up isolation wards, "flu buddies" are delivering meals to sick friends, who are being instructed to stay in their dorm rooms or apartments and wear masks when their roommates are around.

Vending machines dispense hand sanitizers as well as candy bars, social events are being rescheduled outdoors, and everywhere students turn they see posters exhorting them to wash their hands, cough into their sleeves, and resist the urge to sip from a friend's drink.

Across the country, relatively few faculty and staff members have fallen ill so far, partly because adults older than 52 may have been exposed to a virus that gives them some protection against swine flu. Still, there have been scattered reports of canceled class sessions, rescheduled exams, and a shift toward advising students via e-mail rather than face to face.

Professors have also been advised to relax attendance policies and make more work available online for students who are too sick to attend class.

'Pretty Stressful'

Because of the attention paid to swine flu by the news media, along with what some observers consider exaggerated predictions by President Obama's science advisers last month that the flu could kill as many as 90,000 people this year, college administrators like Mr. Floyd have had to spend time reassuring worried parents, even in the absence of a health crisis.

"Our experience runs counter to an image that was fixed in the public mind this spring, when initial reports of swine flu cases from Mexico seemed to point to a much more dangerous virus," he wrote in his Web-site column last week.

In fact, the number of new cases at Washington State seems to have dropped since the beginning of the semester. Most have been relatively mild, and students have recovered in three to five days.

For some students, however, the flu packs a bigger punch.

Matthew O'Dore, a freshman at Washington State, came down with the flu on August 22 after several days of socializing during fraternity recruitment. Even though he had heard about the flu, he admits that he brushed aside warnings and participated in games, like beer pong, that involve drinking from communal cups of beer.

"I figured if I got it, it was no big deal, but it was 10 times worse than I thought it would be," he says. "I had every possible symptom—coughing, throwing up, achy muscles and joints. I could barely walk. My mom was freaking out because I was too tired to call her back and didn't feel

like talking. She finally called the building director to check up on me and make sure I wasn't dead."

After he woke up one morning shaking uncontrollably, his teeth chattering, a friend took him to the campus health center. By then his temperature was 103 degrees and he was severely dehydrated. After three liters of intravenous fluids and a day on the antiviral drug Tamiflu, he felt better. That's when he realized how far behind he was in his studies.

"I missed the entire week, and I have a lot of work to make up," he says, "so it's pretty stressful."

Counting Coughs

Most colleges across the country have stopped testing students for H1N1 and instead are tracking the number of students with flulike symptoms. Because more than 90 percent of the flu cases being reported to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now are H1N1, campus officials are generally treating all cases as if they were.

Students generally are not being given prescription flu medications unless their cases are serious, because the limited supplies of the drug are being reserved for elderly and other high-risk patients.

Washington State has cut down on the number of sick students crowding into its health center by distributing electronic questionnaires that allow students to assess, by themselves, the likelihood that they have the flu.

Unless their symptoms are severe, "we tell people to stay hunkered down in their rooms, push the fluids, and take it easy," says Eleanor Finger, director of residence life. Students are also being told not to attend class until at least 24 hours after they have had no fever without taking fever-reducing medication.

Ms. Finger followed those instructions herself when she came down with the flu this month.

A student group called the Cougar Health Awareness Team has been combing the Washington State campus, handing out more than 2,000 free kits containing tissues, pain killers, throat lozenges, hand sanitizers, sport drinks, and self-care tips.

Sick students are instructed to call the residence-life office every day to report how they're doing. If they don't call, a residence-hall supervisor checks on them.

College health authorities estimate that 95 percent of campuses have to rely on students to "self isolate" in their residence halls, and they say that many students are not doing that. "There have been clinical surges of massive proportions at certain schools and selective reports of noncompliance with self-isolation rules," says James C. Turner, president of the American College Health Association. "Some students say they're feeling OK and they're going to class."

At Washington State and other campuses nationwide, the flu has been particularly rough on freshmen. Many arrived early for campus orientation or fraternity or sorority recruitment and immediately jumped into a swirl of social activities.

"These students were right in the transition to college and hadn't met a lot of people when they got sick," Ms. Finger says.

Not All Cases Mild

Nationally the number of suspected swine-flu cases continues to surge. The college-health association issues weekly bulletins based on data from colleges that are voluntarily reporting cases of "influenza-like illness." Last week, a total of 6,432 new cases were documented on 253 campuses, representing around three million students. That is up from just under 5,000 new cases the week before. Eighty-three percent of the colleges reported cases, compared with 72 percent the previous week. Since the reporting began, on August 22, a total of 13,434 cases have been reported and 27 students have been hospitalized.

While most cases have been relatively mild, a small number of cases have been severe. As with any flu outbreak, the illness can even be fatal.

Last week officials at Cornell University, where more than 600 suspected cases have been documented so far, reported that a 20-year-old student had died of complications from the H1N1 virus. On September 5, an 18-year-old freshman at Troy University, in Alabama, died after receiving a flu diagnosis. It was not clear whether those students had underlying medical problems.

Rates of the disease were highest in the Southeast and Midwest, according to the survey, which does not include data from several states, including Washington.

The University of Georgia has seen 619 suspected or confirmed cases among its 34,000 students. A spokeswoman for the campus health center says six of its approximately 200 staff members

have been out either with the flu themselves or caring for family members with flu. She is unaware of any widespread illness among faculty and staff members.

Mr. Turner, of the college-health association, says reassuring parents remains an important part of campus health-officials' jobs this fall.

"We are getting a lot of calls from parents who are panicking unnecessarily because of the intense media coverage, much of which is overblown," says Mr. Turner, who is also director of the University of Virginia's department of student health.

Parents want to know why their children are not being tested for the flu or given flu medication, why they can't have private rooms, why there aren't enough hand sanitizers on the campus, he says.

The next big challenge he and his colleagues face is vaccinating tens of thousands of students for both seasonal and swine flu ahead of the next wave of cases. The first swine-flu vaccines are expected to arrive on campuses next month.

No confirmed cases of swine flu at Largo college

Pandemic team in place as officials anticipate rise in illness

Gazette.net

September 17, 2009

by Liz Skalski | Staff Writer

The Prince George's Community College student body has been largely unaffected by the H1N1 virus, or swine flu — for now.

Since Sept. 1, five students and three staff members have visited the health center with swine flu symptoms — fever, coughing, a sore throat, body aches, chills and fatigue — said Pamela Thomas, the Largo college's nurse and coordinator of the health education center. Five of the eight people have probable cases of swine flu, but no cases have been confirmed.

"We know it's coming; it's probably already here," Thomas said.

Ready to tackle the H1N1 virus, the college has a pandemic team in place composed of about nine people from different departments, said Angela Anderson, interim dean of the division of health services.

The team is developing guidelines to present to the college's administration for determining how many students and staff would need to be sick before closing the college, she said.

The college enrolls more than 40,000 students but has no dormitories, which eliminates close-quartered living that allows the flu to spread quickly.

At nearby University of Maryland, College Park, which has dorms and about 37,000 students, 250 students had reported having swine flu-like symptoms as of last week.

At Prince George's Community College, students and staff with fevers have been asked to stay off-campus for 24 hours after their fever breaks, and those on campus with flu symptoms have been encouraged to visit the health center and their primary care physician.

"We're telling students, faculty, staff that if they're experiencing flu-like symptoms not to come to campus," Anderson said.

Fliers are posted in classrooms and across campus with information about the differences between the seasonal flu and swine flu and how to identify the symptoms, Anderson said. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are being installed in highly populated areas of the campus, such

as computer labs, and the facilities department wipes down doorknobs and handrails at least four times a day.

The school also is reinforcing the importance of hand washing, because the flu is spread through coughing or sneezing.

Faculty members are asked to note high levels of student absenteeism and forward those numbers to the dean of the division so the college can look for trends, Anderson said. Professors should have backup plans for classroom instruction in case they get sick.

Sandra Dunnington, the college's vice president for academic affairs and a member of the pandemic team, said that professors are being asked to select a buddy who knows their class material and could teach their class in their absence.

Dunnington said that in the event of an outbreak, the goal is for students' education to be as uninterrupted as possible.

The college is working with its information technology department to allow students to complete class work online, in the event that classes are canceled, Thomas said.

Karen Black, a spokeswoman for the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, said 99 percent of the circulating flu viruses in the state are the 2009 strain of the H1N1 virus.

On average, the department has seen the seasonal strains of the flu arrive in the state in late November or December over the past three years, Black said.

E-mail Liz Skalski at eskalski@gazette.net.

Prince George's Community College is offering seasonal flu vaccine shots to students, staff and the general public Oct. 6 and Oct. 19 in the Health Education Center in Bladen Hall, Room 132, at 301 Largo Road in Largo.

Flu shots are \$20.

Call 301-322-0845.

House Passes Student Aid Bill

September 18, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The House of Representatives on Thursday approved sweeping legislation to overhaul the student loan programs and redirect tens of billions of dollars to student aid and other education programs, brushing aside Republican opposition and handing President Obama a significant legislative victory. The House's approval of the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2009, which had been a foregone conclusion for months, shifts the action to the Senate, where the outcome is slightly less predictable.

The student aid bill, a top domestic priority for the Obama administration, would cease all lending from the bank-based Family Federal Education Loan Program and use the savings the government derives from lending more cheaply for a wide array of purposes, only some of which, to the dismay of some college officials, are in higher education. Among other things, the legislation would:

- Provide \$40 billion over 10 years to increase the maximum Pell Grant to \$5,550 and ensure that it would increase annually by the rise in the Consumer Price Index plus 1 percent.
- Greatly expand and alter the criteria for the Perkins Loan Program.
- Pour \$10 billion into community colleges in support of President Obama's American Graduation Initiative, designed to produce 5 million more two-year college graduates by 2020.
- Spend \$8 billion over 10 years to strengthen early childhood education.
- Create a College Access and Completion Fund that would give grants to states and institutions with innovative approaches to increasing college going and graduation.
- Provide \$4.1 billion to modernize and repair school and college facilities, including those damaged by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
- Make the interest rates on federal student loans variable beginning in 2012, when they are set to rise back to 6.8 percent.
- Simplify the federal financial aid form.

“This legislation provides students and families with the single largest investment in federal student aid ever and makes landmark investments to improve education for students of all ages -- and all without costing taxpayers a dime,” Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee and author of the bill, said in a news release about the bill's passage. “Today the House made a clear choice to stop funneling vital taxpayer dollars through board rooms and start sending them directly to dorm rooms. This vote was a historic triumph for America’s students, families and taxpayers – and will ensure that their interests never again take a backseat to lenders and big banks.”

President Obama cheered the bill's passage. "Today, the House delivered a historic set of reforms to the financial aid system that will offer relief to students and families," he said in a statement issued by the White House. "This bill will end the billions upon billions of dollars in unwarranted subsidies that we hand out to banks and financial institutions, and will use that money to guarantee access to low-cost loans, and strengthen Pell Grants and Perkins Loans that

make college more affordable. This bill also follows through on our plan to shore up our community college system, simplifies the complicated financial aid forms to make it easier for students to apply for and get the help they need, and will strengthen standards and improve outcomes in early learning programs."

Lenders opposed to the White House's plan to end lending through the FFEL program (which they say will eliminate jobs and competition) had long since abandoned any hope of stopping the House from ramming the Democratic-sponsored bill through, and while Democrats called support for the bill "bipartisan," it garnered just five Republican votes in the 253 to 171 tally in favor.

Republican leaders derided the legislation as a federal takeover of the student loan industry (at a time, many of them argued, when the Obama administration is calling for competition and choice in health care) and complained that despite the legislation's title, little about the bill reflected fiscal responsibility. "Today's vote was about expanding the size and scope of the federal government through tens of billions of dollars in new entitlement spending and the elimination of choice, competition, and the innovation of the private sector," said Rep. John Kline (R-Minn.), senior Republican on the Education and Labor Committee. "This job killing legislation is rife with hidden costs that will be passed on to future generations."

Before passing the legislation, the House rejected a series of Republican amendments, including one that would have continued to let lenders make student loans while a commission studied viable ways of continuing a role for the private sector in student lending.

With House passage, attention turns to the typically more bipartisan Senate, where supporters of the guaranteed loan program believe they have a better shot of some compromise that gives them a meaningful role in student lending going forward (they are hopeful that Sen. Ben Nelson, the Democrat from Nebraska, which is home to the major lender Nelnet, will fight for them to save jobs in his state).

Lenders won't be the only ones looking for help from the Senate; supporters of private colleges, many of which are unhappy about some of the administration's proposals (including the dependence on states to distribute much of the college access and community college money, and the proposed changes in the Perkins Loan Program) are also hoping they'll get an airing in Congress's senior chamber.

Chapman president: Make courses tougher ocregister.com

September 22, 2009

posted by Gary Robbins, science writer-editor

Chapman University President Jim Doti asked his faculty to make their classes tougher after alumni said in a survey that they wished that some of their course work had been more challenging.

“I encouraged them to be mindful of the fact that, year by year, it might not seem like students are very different, but when you look at longer periods of time you realize you’re looking at night and day,” Doti said in a phone interview. “We’re attracting students who are better prepared and they expect rigorous classes.”

Doti’s plea, made at a faculty retreat in August, was first reported on Monday by Daniel Langhorne, a reporter for The Panther, a campus newspaper.

Chapman regularly surveys its alumni on various matters. Graduates are asked such things as how challenging they considered their classes to be. The university uses a sliding scale of 1 to 5, with 5 representing the upper range of toughness. Students who graduated in 2007 placed the toughness level at 3.90, which was down from 3.98 in 2001.

Doti said such seemingly small changes can be meaningful, and that he read survey comments in which alumni specifically said they wished that some of their classes had been more challenging.

“The survey also showed that the quality of our faculty is higher than it’s ever been,” said Doti, an economist. “But I felt that I should bring it to their attention that some alumni felt this way.”

In the mid-1990s, Chapman accepted about 75 percent of its applicants and was known as a “safety school” for students who might not get into the college of their choice. The campus now accepts about 50 percent of its applicants, and US News and World Report says the university is among the most selective school of its kind in the western part of the country. The magazine’s latest rankings place Chapman 9th best among comparable Master’s-level schools in the West. (Chapman also awards law degrees.)

When asked how Chapman can respond to the concern of alumni, Doti said faculty could do such things as “assign more papers and expect better work in those papers.” In areas like economics, a teacher might “go from general questions about how the Federal Reserve works to asking how the fed would react in a specific setting if certain things happened. The students would have to do a lot more digging for information.”

Doti emphasized that he praised the quality of his faculty at the retreat. But he added, “I am expecting more of faculty. The students are up for a greater challenge.”

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The Last Stop

InsideHigherEd.com

September 23, 2009

This week, many students in the San Francisco Bay Area who have either been priced or blocked out of other institutions have their hopes pinned on Foothill and De Anza Colleges, two of the last community colleges in California to finalize their enrollment and start classes.

The two colleges, which make up a district that is one of the few in the state to operate on the quarter system, began their academic year Monday, three weeks after many of their sister institutions. Now, amidst severe state budget cuts and overcrowding issues that have crippled enrollment at both the state's two- and four-year institutions, Foothill and De Anza face the unique challenge of being the veritable last stop for many students seeking the courses they need to continue their education.

Jeff Schinske, a biology professor at De Anza, knew the suburban San Jose campus would be crowded on Monday, as countless students on waitlists tried to will their way into already jam-packed sections. Still, he could not imagine the circus that awaited him at the college when he set out from home that morning.

"The entire environment is quite chaotic," Schinske said Monday afternoon. "I haven't seen it like this in all my time here. ... At 10 o'clock in the morning, all the streets in front of campus were packed with traffic. Even with my staff permit, I was unable to find a parking spot, so I ended up parking a mile off campus in a residential neighborhood. I think that's kind of an appropriate prelude for what it's going to be like around here this week."

Even before classes started, more than 13,000 students were on waiting lists at De Anza – a college that served about 19,000 students last fall – mostly for English and mathematics courses required for graduation and transfer. Long waiting lists for essential classes are a fact of life this term, despite moves by De Anza's administration to shift sections from low-demand to high-demand courses.

Peter Aguilar, a De Anza student with hopes of transferring to nearby San Jose State University to study business, is one of the unlucky students on a waiting list for the one class he needs to transfer. In his previous two years at the college, he said, he has never had trouble getting into any classes.

"I needed to get into this English class and, wouldn't you know it, I was 40 people deep on the waiting list and couldn't get in," said Aguilar, who is nearing the limit on the number of credits he can carry over to San Jose State. "I'm not going to continue taking silly courses that won't carry over. I mean, I'm working to pay for school, and time is money for me. I can try to take some undergraduate courses instead of the courses I need now, but I'm going [Tuesday] to try to get into another section of English. I have to do this, or I'm S.O.L."

At Foothill, located farther north near Palo Alto, the waiting lists are not as long, but the situation for many of its students is just as dire. More than 2,800 students are on lists at the college, which served more than 13,000 students last fall. In the highest demand are English and biology classes, the latter which serve as gateway courses for students entering crowded nursing or allied health programs.

In addition to students like Aguilar, who need credits to transfer, international students are among the most vulnerable at Foothill, said Judy Miner, the college's president.

“One interesting phenomenon we’ve seen is that transfers from Foothill are coming back to us for classes,” Miner said. “Some of the international students who graduated from Foothill and are attending San Jose State have not been able to get the full load over there required by immigration law. Some counselors and major advisers there, at the other [University of California] and [California State University] schools, are telling these students to piece together a full-time schedule with some classes here at Foothill. They’re saying things like, ‘I know you’re a business major, but how about taking this biology class?’ ”

Strategic Scheduling

As Foothill and De Anza had to trim down on their offerings this fall because of a major cut in state funding, administrators from both institutions had to make calculated scheduling changes to shift the remaining sections from low-demand to high-demand courses.

Brian Murphy, president at De Anza, said section cancellations have been less discipline-specific and more focused on certain class times, such as early morning sections, that are less well attended than others. He noted that 5 percent of the college’s sections have been cut for this fall, winter and spring quarters. That equates to 100 sections each quarter.

“We’re trying to keep the shifting of the remaining sections within departments,” Murphy said. “So, for instance, we’re not cutting the arts to bolster mathematics. It’s much more surgical than that. For example, we had six sections of a third-level accounting class in which five were entirely full. The sixth course only had a few students, so we cut that sixth course and made that section an introductory accounting course, a class we have [that has] a waiting list with over 180 students.”

Over at Foothill, where budget cuts also forced a 5 percent reduction in the number of sections, the rearranging did eliminate some disciplines. Miner said that, for instance, the college has had to cut German and Italian and will cut French next year to make room for sections in other high-demand areas. Among languages, Spanish is expected to benefit from the shifts; the college's mathematics offerings have also increased 15 percent as a result of the section trading.

“In these shifts, I feel most badly for those students who really need to continue in a series of courses,” Miner said. “For example, I taught you the first quarter of Italian, but I can’t give you the second. I worry about those students for whom there’s so much more lost than just

enrollment in a class. Still, this is driven partly by economics and the commitment we have to provide programming so that students can be successful. I wouldn't say there's anything determinative in picking a favorite, such as here's where I'd pick this class over that class. But, we can't escape our commitment to basic skills."

In addition to language cuts, a number of the college's "adaptive learning" and "disabled service" classes – primarily extension courses for the elderly in the community – have been trimmed so that their sections can be shifted to more high-demand courses. Not everyone is happy with these cuts, although some critics in the state have argued that shedding these programs can make community colleges leaner and more effective.

"I don't think the college is better or more efficient without these programs," said Katie Townsend-Merino, vice president of instructional and institutional research at Foothill. "It's just narrowed our focus. I know you can't make everyone happy here, but it makes me sad to see these lifelong learning opportunities disappear. It really feels as if the state has let go of its commitment to continuing education."

Politicizing the Situation

Aside from simply saying "I'm sorry" to the thousands of students who have been locked out of classes at Foothill and De Anza because of state budget cuts, administrators at both institutions are also trying to stir them to political action.

De Anza sent out a [letter to students](#) last week explaining the difficulties they would face registering for classes and the rationale for the section cuts amidst such high demand. Most indicative of the environment in California, however, is the fact that the letter also lists the names and contact information for local government officials, state legislators and even Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

"We're in this together," reads the letter from Murphy. "You might want to contact the Governor, legislative leadership and your representatives about your efforts to get the education you deserve. It always helps them to hear from real people grappling with real issues, like you."

Though Murphy defended his call for students to become politically active, others at De Anza are not so sure this is the best move.

"I don't think it does that much good because, for example, if it's going to take another year for you to become a nurse, it's of little comfort to say, 'Go protest at the state capitol,'" said Schinske, noting he will not actively tell his students to contact legislators and other government officials. "If I'm going to give them advice, I'll help them in other ways, like telling them to be knowledgeable about offerings at other schools. They're not some pawn in a political game. They're a student, who may be a year back in their education because of this."

Some students also echoed a similar sentiment.

“It’s so easy to say, ‘I’m sorry, but anyway here’s who you can take your issue to,’ ” Aguilar said. “That’s kind of a pass-the-buck mentality. Me, I’m just stuck in the middle here, and there’s not much I can do.”

— **David Moltz**

State Directors of Community Colleges See Bleak Financial Times Ahead

The Chronicle of Higher Education

September 24, 2009

By Jennifer Gonzalez

State directors of community colleges in half of the states expect to face midyear reductions in their state appropriations, according to survey results being released on Thursday of members of the National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges.

The community-college directors also expressed concern in the survey about potential shortfalls in their budgets for the next fiscal year, when money from the federal economic-stimulus bill will be gone in many states. The survey was conducted by the Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama. Data were collected from July 5 through August 12.

Thirty-two of the 49 state directors of community colleges surveyed said the stimulus money was not used for one-time expenditures and investments. Directors in most states said the money was used instead to backfill shortfalls in state revenue.

Even though there is unease about the long-term financial picture for community colleges, the authors of the report, "Funding and Access Issues in Public Higher Education: A Community College Perspective," said the federal stimulus money was used for the purpose for which it was intended.

"Intervention by the Obama administration clearly prevented a bad situation from becoming much, much worse," said Stephen G. Katsinas, a professor of higher education and director of the Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama. Mr. Katsinas, along with Terrence A. Tollefson, professor emeritus in the department of educational leadership and policy analysis at East Tennessee State University, conducted the survey.

George R. Boggs, president of the American Association of Community Colleges, said the survey results point to the need for community colleges to do better long-range planning.

"Those who will succeed best will have built up rainy-day funds," he said. "If colleges don't have flexibility, they will have to reduce course offerings and make other painful cuts."

Directors of community colleges in every state but South Dakota participated in the survey. That state accounts for only 0.3 percent of the nation's community-college enrollment.

Among the survey's key findings:

- The directors predicted that tuition at community colleges will rise at more than double the rate of inflation for the 2009-10 fiscal year.
- In a period of all-time record enrollments, the directors predicted that state operating-budget support for community colleges will decline by 1 percent in this fiscal year.
- By a margin of 3 to 1, directors said high unemployment is straining the capacity of their community colleges to retrain workers for new jobs.
- Three of four directors in states with spending formulas for community colleges said their states did not fully finance the formulas in the 2008-9 fiscal year.

Budget Drivers

The survey results highlight the struggles community colleges faced in the recession as their enrollments surged and their budgets were cut. One common response to the crunch has been to raise tuition.

The average tuition increase the directors predicted at their colleges for the 2009-10 fiscal year was five percent.

When asked about key budget drivers in their states for 2008-9, the directors most often cited the recession. Medicaid, spending on elementary and secondary education, and the federal stimulus money were in a virtual three-way tie for second place. The directors ranked even spending on prisons above higher education as a key budget driver.

Those state budget priorities speak to the "severe competition public education faces, and may indicate a major public-relations challenge higher education and community colleges face to promote the cause of access," Mr. Katsinas said.

As in previous survey reports, directors said they expected rural community colleges to face the greatest fiscal strain. But for the first time since the survey began in 2003, more than half of respondents said they believe their urban community colleges will face significant fiscal strain as well.

"This is a clear sign of the severity of the recession," Mr. Katsinas said.

Of the six key community-college functions identified in the survey, the directors reported that five have been weakened over the last two years. Those include general education and transfer-oriented functions; vocational, occupational, and technical education; noncredit community services; developmental education; and the fine and cultural arts.

Only noncredit federal work-force training programs have been strengthened, according to the directors surveyed.

The directors predicted that two of the functions would continue to weaken over this fiscal year: general education and transfer; and vocational-, occupational-, and technical-education programs. The latter function is especially significant because the role community colleges play in providing that training is critical to helping states prepare workers for high-wage jobs in high-demand areas such as allied-health fields and nursing, and engineering technology.

"If state operating budgets are cut as predicted, it may be difficult for community colleges to change their program mix to help America's work force retool from recession," the report's authors conclude.

As with last year's survey, state-based student aid (both need-based and merit-based) continues to lag behind tuition increases. By a 2-to-1 margin, survey respondents said they disagreed that state spending on aid programs is keeping pace with tuition increases.

Concerns About Meeting Student Demand

On other fronts, the survey examined capacity issues at two-year colleges.

Half of the respondents said their community colleges have the capacity to meet current and projected demands of high-school graduates, but 16 said their two-year institutions did not. Those who said their colleges lacked capacity included directors in states with fast-growing Hispanic populations such as California and Nevada.

Massachusetts is among the states that doubt they can keep up with the demand, according to the survey. But at Bunker Hill Community College, in Boston, the state's largest two-year institution, college officials are making the necessary adjustments to deal with the high enrollment. The community college had projected a 7-percent enrollment increase for this fall. But, to date, enrollment is up by 17 percent over last year, reaching almost 11,000 students, the highest ever for the community college.

To respond to the high student demand, the college added 108 class sections to the fall schedule over the summer. After an emergency meeting in early September, 40 more classes were added.

And, in a first for Bunker Hill, officials created midnight classes. Colleen A. Roach, executive director of communications and marketing at Bunker Hill, said there are plans for more midnight classes for spring semester. She said the college has every expectation that enrollment will continue to increase and wants to be prepared.

Unprecedented Demand, Dwindling Funding

InsideHigerEd.com

September 24, 2009

Given the difficulties of the recession, the state of community college systems could be better, but it also could be a lot worse, an annual survey of state directors of community college systems finds.

The Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama released a report Thursday based on the responses from state community college officials in 48 states to an extensive set of questions about changes in state funding, the impact of federal stimulus dollars and plans for the future. (An explanatory presentation with more charts and graphs breaking down the data was also released.)

Though many states have finally been giving community colleges their due, both in terms of public attention and -- sometimes -- funding, the report finds that this did not help many of them avoid cuts when times got tight last fiscal year. Seventy-one percent of states made midyear cuts to community colleges, compared to the 74 and 75 percent that made cuts to regional and flagship universities, respectively. States whose community colleges aren't locally funded were more likely to hit those institutions with midyear budget cuts than were states whose community colleges receive local funding

Nearly all state community college directors (45 of the 48) reported that they either “agree” or “strongly agree” that the recession, which produced a decline in their states' revenue, “was by far the top budget driver in last year’s budget process.” Top competitors for state tax dollars, as identified in the survey, were K-12 education and Medicaid.

Last year, 39 state directors responded that they used federal stimulus funds “for the purpose for which they were intended, to backfill revenue shortfalls in state tax revenues” and “not for one-time innovations or investments.” Most of the community college directors -- 37 -- agreed that stimulus funds “were distributed fairly” between their institutions and four-year institutions.

Still, there are lingering concerns about what will happen in fiscal year 2011-12 and beyond, when these federal stimulus dollars disappear. Nearly 80 percent of the respondents expressed some level of concern about this.

“The ARRA stimulus finds helped with one-time costs to bridge the system down to a lower funding level anticipated in FY2010,” wrote one respondent in Minnesota. “The state is currently projecting a deficit of \$4.5 billion for the 2012-2013 fiscal biennium.”

Concerns about the future aside, predictions from state directors about the current fiscal year are also grim. Although state support for all sectors of public higher education is expected to decline in 2009-10, “the predicted average state operating budget decline of 1 percent for community

colleges is larger than any other postsecondary sector, despite record enrollments.” By comparison, regional universities expect to see a cut of 0.85 percent, and flagships will see a cut of 0.1 percent.

In addition to these early cuts for 2009-10, 34 state directors responded that the likelihood was either “high” or “very high” that they would experience further cuts in the middle of the current year.

For their part in using tuition to raise money to cover budget shortfalls, community college state directors noted that they expect their tuition rates “to rise at more than double the rate of inflation.” The projected Higher Education Price Index for this fiscal year 2009-10 is 2.3 percent; however, community colleges in 46 states will raise their tuition by an average of 5 percent. For states raising tuition, similar increases are projected for regional and flagship universities. Although hardly desirable, such hikes are seen as a matter of necessity for most community college directors.

“For the third year in a row, the FY2009-2010 budget years will be a combination of strong enrollment increases, reduced college operating budgets, and significant tuition increases,” wrote one respondent in Florida. “The state does not have the revenue to fund these enrollment increases, but expects us to do our best to accommodate student growth. The [stimulus] money has helped to some degree, but it is likely that our state economy will not be able to replace the loss of those funds after the 2010 fiscal year. The capacity of our colleges to expand job training programs beyond current levels has been diminished by these factors.”

Regarding President Obama’s goal that the United States regain the number one spot in adult baccalaureate degree attainment by 2020, 43 state directors “strongly believe” that increasing community college capacity is crucial to its accomplishment. Still, 46 reported that they desperately need funding for new construction and renovation projections. A majority of these respondents indicated that they would like to see the federal government offer funding specifically for these facilities needs.

Not all of the news from the report is foreboding, however. Forty-one state directors “predict raising Pell Grants to \$5,350 next year significantly helps low income students access community colleges.” Another majority, 35, also predict that “making Pell Grants an entitlement” -- as the Obama administration has proposed, though Congress is falling short of that goal in current drafts of its legislation -- “will help community colleges reach talented, disadvantaged individuals.”

Steve Katsinas, the report's co-author and director of the Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama, told *Inside Higher Ed* that he thought it was clear from the responses of state community college directors that they appreciated the steps the federal government has taken to provide sufficient need-based aid to keep their institutions a viable option for low-income students. Still, he acknowledges that there are great challenges ahead.

“The funding situation is more of a challenge now than it’s ever been,” Katsinas said. “Public higher education will face a rough year next year as well, not that we didn’t know that already. But, this report shows it all from the perspective of state community college officials. From them, it’s clear that while community colleges have received record publicity at the national level, it has not produced more state funding.”

— **David Moltz**

A battle for San Pedro man's heart and mind

The Daily Breeze

By Douglas Morino Staff Writer

Posted: 09/26/2009



Johnny Torres, 31, started his first day as a UCLA student on Thursday. (Steve McCrank Staff Photographer)

Johnny Torres began his journey to a university classroom on a scorching summer day in the far reaches of Afghanistan.

A specialist in the Army Rangers assigned to a transport convoy, Torres remembers passing a young boy - no older than 10 - filling holes in the ground left by blasts from improvised explosive devices. The temperature climbed to 120 degrees and the sun was relentless, he remembered.

"That kid found a reason to get up, every day, and push himself to do his job," Torres said of the boy, who was missing a leg. "It opened my eyes."

Torres, 31, has never forgotten that image. And on Thursday it was with him as he began his first day of classes at UCLA, capping a journey from the streets of San Pedro to the mountains of Afghanistan, the classrooms of El Camino College and, finally, the halls of UCLA.

Born to an unemployed mother in San Pedro, Torres' childhood became a flash of brief stays in battered women's shelters and church convents across Los Angeles and Long Beach. His father was rarely around. After time, the family - Torres is the middle of five children - established a home in the Rancho San Pedro public housing project, under the shadow of shipping cranes and within earshot of fog horns and the Pacific Ocean.

His childhood memories are plagued by images of violence and isolation.

His mother referred to him as an "idiot," telling him he wouldn't amount to much. His father, when he was around, used the kitchen stove to cook crack cocaine and sold his product from the front porch.

Torres didn't know it at the time, but those images of his father would spark an interest in chemistry and physics that lasts to this day.

"I came from a really bad, abusive family," Torres said. "We were certainly unorthodox."

As a kid, Torres ran with gangs and sold cocaine. Initially, he found little success in school; in the 10th grade he was expelled from San Pedro High School for fighting a teacher, and he fared no better during a stint at Banning High School. Attempts at independent study programs and home schooling were met with similar success.

"It reached a point where nobody wanted to take me," he said. "And I couldn't blame them."

With his options nearly out, Torres began spending time at Toberman Neighborhood Center in San Pedro, soon becoming a counselor and working in a gang prevention program. His life began to change.

"The kids appreciated him because he didn't pass judgment," said Howard Uller, who directed the center for 30 years before retiring in 2004. "He began to understand the great equalizer in life is education. Getting good grades was his ticket to getting out of his environment."

Torres enrolled at Harbor College with a group of friends, and a semester of work gave him his first taste of academic success: Despite failing a class, he earned four C's.

"That was all I needed for motivation," he said.

But after a year at Harbor College, his job prospects were limited. Torres signed up for the military after earning his General Educational Development certificate at a Long Beach adult school.

"It seemed like my life had come to a choice of either joining the military or going to jail," he said.

Torres enlisted in the Army as a 21-year-old and, compared with life at home, the military was easy. He soon began to excel. Torres received physical fitness awards and emerged as a leader, eventually joining the Second Ranger Battalion based in Washington state.

He went on to serve three tours of duty as a member of an elite squadron in Afghanistan.

"I was able to burn all the negative energy I had from my childhood," Torres said of life in the military. "The place exhausted me; I had no more energy to be mad."

Serving on the front lines, Torres fended off gunfire and saw some of his closest friends die in battle.

But he emerged from the military with motivation and a clear focus, ready to tackle his next assignment: college.

With little more than limited reading skills and money from the post-9-11 GI Bill, he enrolled at El Camino College, taking courses in remedial English and basic arithmetic.

"He came here with so many challenges to face, but didn't let that discourage him," said El Camino counselor Sue Oda Omori, who helped Torres develop an academic plan to one day transfer to a university. "He not only had the challenge of coming here at a basic, basic skill level but he was also the first in his family to go to college, so he had little understanding of the whole college system.

"He didn't have any role models, but he had a lot of perseverance," she added.

Torres soon began to exceed even his own expectations. Report cards with C grades became history. And over time, math and science became strong points.

"I was solving physics problems without having a concept of calculus," he said, remembering his own surprise as he quickly grasped challenging subject material. "At that point, I fell in love with academics."

But struggles in his personal life continued. In an instant, Torres lost his best friend, Javier, with whom he had joined the military, to suicide. Then his grandfather, Robert, whom Torres considered a father figure, passed away.

"They were major setbacks," Torres said of the deaths. He contemplated dropping out of school and fought off his own thoughts of suicide. His desire for success, however, became too much to ignore.

"I've lost so many people in my life," he said. "In a way, it made me more appreciative of what I have."

Forty-eight classes and 24 A grades later, Torres received two degrees from El Camino and turned his attention to a four-year university, and beyond.

"Why don't I just keep going?" Torres remembered asking himself. "Who knows where I'll end up?"

Thursday was the first day of the fall semester at UCLA and, for the first time in months, the campus was alive. The temperature climbed as students hurried to classes and television news crews descended on the school to cover budget protests. Armed with a backpack and laptop, Torres walked through campus and took a look around.

"It's been a long trip," he said. "I feel like I finally reached the promised land."

At UCLA, Torres will be seeking degrees in biophysics, cognitive science, and working for a minor in biomedical research. He'll use \$10,000 in scholarships to supplement his income as a

dockworker in San Pedro. He spends much of his free time tutoring kids and hopes to complete medical school and become a doctor.

His goal, he said, is to help develop prosthetics for war casualties.

"I've done everything I could to learn from my past experiences," Torres said. "I've learned that, no matter what, there is always a way to succeed. I found that way."



Johnny Torres, an LAUSD dropout, found serving in the Army in Afghanistan changed his life.

In California, a Teachable Crisis

The Chronicle of Higher Education

September 29, 2009

By Christopher Newfield

When California's Legislature blew holes in the budgets of the University of California and California State University this year, one bit of good news resulted: The holes were so big that they showed above the waterline, where we all could see them and marvel at their size.

Newspaper articles finally declared that such extensive cuts in state support undermined educational quality. They were the first major budget reductions widely viewed as reducing the value and appeal of the universities' degrees. The reaction suggests that, at long last, the state, as well as the country, can have a realistic discussion about how to support large-scale public higher education.

The numbers themselves are the worst in modern higher-education history. To use the University of California as an example, the governor's Department of Finance allocated \$3.2-billion in September 2008. Then, in a series of confusing revisions, it cut \$814-million from the 2008-9 budget when the fiscal year was almost over and threw all of the university's federal stimulus money into the hole that created—resulting in a net loss of 5 percent. Then it cut an additional \$637-million for 2009-10—leaving university's state general-fund budget down 25 percent for 2008-10.

One-time savage cuts could be borne, were they short-term and applied to a financially healthy system. Neither of those conditions holds. Before the latest round of such cuts, the University of California had not yet healed from the previous round (2002-5), which had in turn blocked a complete recovery from the round before (1991-94). Coming into 2008-9, the university had already lost 40 percent of its state general funds, corrected for inflation and enrollments, since 1990. The new cuts mean that it has now lost close to two-thirds of that support. Nor is there a sense that those cuts mark the end of the bloodletting. University administrators say next year's budget could be as bad or worse, a prediction supported by Department of Finance reports that show an accelerating decline in state tax receipts.

Over all, California's political leaders are Herbert Hooverizing a struggling economy, taking money out when they should be putting it in, furloughing and laying off workers in transportation, medical services, and all levels of education when they should be hiring. The state has an unemployment rate nearly as high as Michigan's, a bond rating worse than Louisiana's, and no plan to use any aspect of the public sector to propel a turnaround.

Higher education is taking a particular beating. Together the University of California, California State, and California's community-college system will be forced to turn away close to 300,000 students this year, at a time when there are no jobs for them. In 2004 the state already stood at just 46th in its share of 19-year-olds enrolled in college; the crash in college-continuation rates must have set a national record, as the state plunged from fifth in 1996 to 47th. The 2009 report from which those rankings come is aptly called "California at the Edge of a Cliff"—but California has already fallen off.

Most commentators blame a dysfunctional political system for the disaster, and there is plenty of blame to spread between politicians and voters. But two other factors need much more attention than they have received. The first is higher-education leaders' destructive adherence to a broken model of financial support, one that misleads the public. The second is their failure—and that of higher education as a whole—to articulate a great social mission for universities, one that would justify the support they have needed all along.

On the first point, university leadership has for years stuck with what can be called the "dominant private partner" model. The idea is that private support—philanthropic dollars, industry alliances, extramural grants—is the true measure of a university's quality. The private presence has an aura of higher status, vision, and efficiency, while public funds are a baseline—dumb money that works best when leveraged by the smarter private kind. The premise, until this year's catastrophic cuts, is that slashing public money won't hurt quality; the truly important activities can shift their sources of support to the private sector, and instruction can be paid for with higher tuition.

Like other academic leaders, those at the University of California trumpeted its private fund raising, which tripled from 1990 to 2005, and its research grants, which doubled during the same period. On Web sites, in reports, and in news releases, fund raising and research came to be associated with entrepreneurial value creation—even though such private money would have mattered far less were it not able to leverage the much larger volume of state appropriations. Major donors and sponsoring companies were lavishly celebrated, while millions of taxpayers who had been paying, often for decades, for high-quality education never got to be the heroes of

the systems' success stories. No one heard about their dollars doing the humble yet glorious work of forming minds and workers, citizens and selves.

Academic leaders did not explain every day in every way how much public money matters to the university's core activities. They did not highlight that the campuses got only 20 percent of their gross revenues from private sources, combined with overhead from extramural grants. They did not explain that as much as 98 percent of philanthropic contributions to the university are limited to the projects the donors want. They did not describe how sponsored research pays for specific research, and that indirect-cost funds do not fully cover actual indirect costs. The silence on the irreplaceability of public appropriations is a key reason that universities like California's have now lost most of that support.

The failure of the current financing model becomes particularly clear when it comes to tuition. Were the University of California to make up for its \$814-million in cuts with tuition increases, it would need to raise tuition from around \$8,000 to more than \$15,000 in one year. Getting back to the level of support it had in 2001 would require raising fees to more than \$23,000. The university has not and should not make up its shortfall entirely with fees, but those numbers show just how much the vanished public support has cost students who want the kind of quality available as recently as 2001.

Today the university combines tuition increases, program cuts, and, this year, employee pay cuts to fill that unfillable gap of public funds. Previous tuition increases—7 to 10 percent, year in, year out—have convinced voters that the university doesn't need more public money. Yet because the increases never truly make up for lost public support—more like one-third of it—state cuts have led, even before this year, to a reduction of programs and quality. Reductions of program quality, in turn, reduce the state's incentive to invest, students' incentive to pay more, and federal agencies' incentive to sponsor. The university, now unable to ask for a billion dollars back from the state or to ask students for doubled tuition payments, has resorted to experimentation on the margins: more nonresident students, higher nonresident tuition, higher fees for engineering and business majors. But such efforts do not ease the need for cutting and squeezing, even as they further alienate tuition payers and the Legislature.

The term that a top official at the university has used to describe the situation is "death spiral." For that spiral to stop, the model of financial support must change. That model must include a clearly justified public-support component, which will require changing the public mood. And to change the public mood, the university must reinvent its social mission.

The first step for university leaders is to tell the public the truth: The current model has failed to support the university's full potential for helping advance society. They must link dollar figures to specific institutional capacities. Students can pay \$10,000 and get a degree diluted from the 2001 standard, a kind of "UC Lite." They can pay \$15,000 for a 2007-level degree and \$23,000 for a 2001-level degree. Or officials can keep tuition under \$10,000 and get back to 2001 quality by rebuilding public trust that will help restore state appropriations.

The second step is to explain why more public support is better for the state than higher tuition. The simple reason is that it will produce many more socially and culturally adept citizens. California's "master plan" institutions were just about the best thing ever invented in the world history of higher education. They offered access to the highest-quality education—not just for the top 1 percent, as in the Ivies—but for the top 12 percent via the University of California, for the top 33 percent via Cal State, and for everyone via the community-college system, with ready transfers among the segments. The dream was the deepest, fullest capabilities for everyone—and for a while, reality was on the road to matching it.

The third step: University officials must explain the humble yet extraordinary activities for which at public universities only public money pays. Everyone says knowledge economies require unprecedented powers of invention, vision, communication, and an understanding of other cultures and complex natural systems. Those capacities arise from the details of directed learning: math problems corrected, errors patiently explained, novel but unformed ideas elaborated through one-on-one conversation, intellectual goals and personal destinies developed class after class, office hour after office hour—with the kind of nurturing attentiveness that makes no one any money, but without which society doesn't move forward. The public needs to learn that government cuts fall the hardest on those unsung activities, all of which are crucial for fixing our underperforming states.

The processes by which selves and minds are created are sociable, interactive, complicated, and unprofitable: They lose money by their very nature yet contribute enormous value to society. They were necessary for an 80-percent-white California during the 1950s and 1960s, when the state's higher-education structure was built, and they are necessary for the minority-majority California we have today. The job now is to reinvent public financial support as a collaborative state and national process. That is the best, if not the only, way to get California and its kindred floundering states moving forward again.

Christopher Newfield is a professor of English at the University of California at Santa Barbara and author of "Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class" (Harvard University Press, 2008).

Court Teacher refusing training can be fired

SFGate.com

Bob Egelko, Chronicle Staff Writer

Wednesday, September 30, 2009

Veteran schoolteachers who refuse training that qualifies them to instruct students who speak only limited English can be fired, a state appeals court ruled Tuesday.

A San Joaquin County school district that ordered all its teachers to take language training was within its authority to begin dismissal proceedings against a tenured high school music teacher who defied the requirement, said the Third District Court of Appeal in Sacramento.

The teacher, Theresa Messick of Ripon High School, is considering an appeal to the state Supreme Court, her lawyer said.

The ruling is the first to address districts' authority under a recent state law that requires teachers to get special training to work in classes that include students not fluent in English - about one-fifth of California's total enrollment. The law also requires schools to make all their programs available to those students.

Such training is now included in education for all new teachers, but many who were credentialed before 2003 aren't certified to teach English learners, said Diana Halpenny, lawyer for the California School Boards Association. She said those are mostly longtime instructors with tenure, who can be fired only for serious misconduct or demonstrated unfitness for service.

Messick's lawyer, Thomas Driscoll, said the certification requirement was pointless in her case because "no English learner had ever attempted to sign up for her classes." He said fewer than 3 percent of Ripon High's students are limited-English speakers.

The Ripon Unified School District required language training for all instructors starting in 2005. Messick, who Driscoll said has been at the high school since about 1980, was the only teacher who refused.

In court, Driscoll argued that Messick was protected from firing by a law that bars schools from cutting the pay of tenured teachers who fail to comply with new requirements. But the appeals court said the law "applies only to salaries, not to termination."

Even if no limited-English-speaking student has yet tried to sign up for Messick's class, "the Legislature has recognized that the number of (English learner) students in the state is increasing," and has authorized districts to require teacher training, Justice George Nicholson said in the 3-0 ruling.

The ruling can be read at links.sfgate.com/ZIGF.

Forward Into the Cloud

InsideHigherEd.com

September 30, 2009

While a number of colleges and universities devote resources to keep campus e-mail grounded on their own servers, they are finding it difficult to coax students out of the cloud.

Students are increasingly arriving at college already managing multiple e-mail addresses with “cloud”-based e-mail services -- such as Gmail and Hotmail -- which are hosted remotely by third-party companies. These students are often reluctant to use the e-mail client provided to them by their institution.

“We did a survey several years ago, and the overwhelming majority of incoming students said they had between three and four e-mail accounts,” said Beth Ann Bergsmark, director for academic information technology services at Georgetown University.

In order to keep things simple, many students set up their institutional accounts to automatically forward mail to one of their existing, cloud-based mailboxes. Students prefer not to check multiple mailboxes if they don’t have to, said Geoff Nathan, faculty liaison to computing and information technology at Wayne State University. When he asked his students recently why the majority of them auto-forwarded their e-mails to an outside account, they cited features often unavailable on campus accounts, such as texting, video chatting, and virtually unlimited storage space.

Greg Jackson, vice president of policy and analysis at Educause, said that institutions that still maintain on-site e-mail services report that about half of all students have their e-mails forwarded to independent addresses.

This has sparked a discussion campus IT circles and left a number of institutions to examine their e-mail policies: Should colleges allow students to have their campus e-mails auto-forwarded to an outside account?

Thousands of colleges worldwide have attempted to roll with the trend by outsourcing e-mail to cloud providers such as Google through its free Google Apps for Education. And while shedding the burden of running its own e-mail client can serve as a windfall for colleges looking to save cash wherever they can, campus officials often fret about putting private correspondence under the control of third-party providers.

To wit: Earlier this month, a software bug in Google Apps caused a number of e-mail messages to be sent to the wrong mailboxes at several colleges that use the service. Other routine problems -- such as last Thursday’s widespread Gmail outage -- highlight the helplessness of campus IT departments to ensure the reliability of their own e-mail systems. (Of course, colleges that have

not outsourced their e-mail also run into such problems, and can't rely on Google's massive troubleshooting resources.)

Campuses that have stuck with internal e-mail systems, often to avoid a loss of control, are undermined by students who forward e-mails to outside accounts. Certain information that gets sent on an internal server, such as grades, might be protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, which generally bars colleges from releasing educational information about students without permission, said Thomas Iverson, systems technology supervisor at Iowa's Mercy College of Health Sciences (in the case of Mercy and other medical colleges, e-mails might also contain patient data protected under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act). Mercy currently does not allow auto-forwarding, although Iverson said it is weighing a policy revision as it tries to grow its distance education programs.

If sensitive information sent from a university source were to be compromised after being auto-forwarded to a student's private account, the university would probably not be liable for violating FERPA, said Tracy Mitrano, an information science scholar and director of IT policy at Cornell University. Nor would Google, said Jeff Keltner, business development manager for Google Apps for Education. If a student chooses to have information forwarded to some other e-mail address, Keltner said, "then the protection of that data is bound exclusively by the user agreements on that individual e-mail account ... there is no relationship between Google and the university."

But with most legally protected information being exchanged via more secure channels, compromised e-mail data is not the most immediate concern for professors and administrators. The first priority is making sure messages get to their recipients. "If it's an official communication, I want to make sure it gets to the correct address," said Terence P. Ma, chief information officer at Touro University Nevada.

Auto-forwarding to cloud-based e-mail services can foil universities in this respect. If students are using a service that has not been specially tailored to accept e-mail blasts from specific addresses, official announcements sent by university administrators can get caught in spam filters. Furthermore, if a message fails to arrive at its destination, there is no guarantee that the third-party service will notify the sender of the failure. "There's the age-old anecdote where students say they have not received an e-mail," said Iverson. Auto-forwarding, he said, increases the potential "points of failure."

Even institutions that have outsourced e-mail to cloud-based providers are finding that students still set up university accounts to forward to their own address. While some providers allow campus IT officials to shut off the auto-forwarding function on the university side, systems such as Gmail allow users to pull messages into their independent accounts from the other end, according to Bliss Bailey, executive director of information technology at Auburn University. "The fact is that students are able to reach into their email accounts using [Web protocols] IMAP or POP; they can essentially forward the e-mail on their own," said Bailey. "The technology has outstripped our ability to police that policy."

Some colleges, whether they have outsourced or not, have attempted to encourage students to use their “dot-edu” accounts by requiring them to send official, university-related correspondence from those addresses, and telling them that they, the students, are responsible for any e-mails they miss due to a problem with the forwarding process or their outside provider’s data. However, campus IT officials acknowledged that it is virtually impossible to make students adhere to forwarding policies. “It’s the whole lead-a-horse-to-water saying,” said Iverson.

Cloudy Forecast

By outsourcing to the same cloud-based services that students are using already, officials say, higher education institutions can at least make using the “dot-edu” system more appealing to students. “They come in expecting a [certain] consumer experience, because they’ve been there for so many years,” said Bergsmark, of Georgetown. Georgetown switched to Google Apps for Education’s Gmail interface two months ago, and Bergsmark said early feedback has been positive. “It put them back in that consumer position that they were used to,” she said.

With more and more colleges and universities opting for cloud-based providers, there is a general feeling that on-site e-mail systems -- along with many other services -- are on the way out. “Under the current system, particularly with the Google and Microsoft offerings being free of charge, this is an obvious place where you can cut expenses,” said Ma, of Touro. “I don’t see how universities can sustain [in-house e-mail systems], looking at overall cost and cost/benefit ratio.”

Some officials acknowledge that colleges that choose outsourcing now could find themselves in a bind if the more popular cloud-based brands ever decide to start charging for their services.

But others simply worry about ceding too much to outside companies -- particularly something as information-rich and mission-critical as e-mail. “Some universities have decided that they trust Google or Microsoft,” said Nathan of Wayne State, which still uses an on-site system. “Others have said ‘nope’ -- maybe they trust them, but not with their lives, not with their data.”

— **Steve Kolowich**

Met's retiree health plan: too big to last?

Calpensions.com

By Ed Mendel

A giant Southern California water agency's controversial plan to increase pension benefits also would take a "groundbreaking" step toward paying for future retiree health care — an estimated \$118 billion problem for state and local governments.

New hires at the Metropolitan Water District, a consortium of 26 cities and water districts serving 19 million people in six Southern California counties, would contribute 8 percent of their after-tax pay to a retiree health fund.

An independent actuary, John Bartel, told the "Met" board at a workshop yesterday (Sept. 29) that he agreed with a *staff analysis* that the increased pension benefits would be offset by other cuts, producing savings during the proposed five-year labor contract.

Bartel said that whether savings would continue after the contract expires depends on two main "risks:" whether new contracts continue to control pay and require that new hires make an 8 percent contribution to the retiree health fund.

"The one area I am probably most worried about is that 8 percent post-tax contribution for retiree health care," Bartel told the board. "I will tell you it is a bit groundbreaking.

"There are not very many agencies around the state that have negotiated to have employees pay a portion of a retiree health benefit," he said.

Bartel said it's uncertain whether the 8 percent contribution would continue, particularly "if you look down the road and it continues to be unique" among government agencies in California.

A salty response came from Ed Little of the West Basin Municipal Water District headquartered in Carson.

"If we give back the 8 percent you ought to be kicked in the butt," Little told his fellow board members. "We don't need to do that. If you aren't going to vote for this because you are afraid we are going to give it back, you shouldn't be here."

Most state and local government agencies in California provide health care for their retirees and, in many cases, the spouses and the dependents of the retirees. The benefit became common several decades ago when health care was relatively cheap.

But health care costs have soared in recent years. Many government agencies have lowered retirement ages to 50 and 55, and people now tend to live longer than they did in the past.

Government pensions are “prefunded” with annual employer and employee contributions that create investment funds, which has been producing about 75 percent of the revenue for the California Public Employees Retirement System.

But there has been little prefunding for retiree health care. Most government agencies are pay-as-you-go, setting aside no money for the health care promised their workers when they retire, passing the bill to future generations.

The Met currently pays \$12 million a year for retiree health care. The state currently pays \$1.36 billion a year for the health care of its retired workers, the equivalent of 7.6 percent of payroll.

An obscure agency, the Governmental Accounting Standards Board, put the spotlight on the huge debt for retiree health care five years ago by directing government agencies to calculate and report their unfunded liability.

A governor’s pension commission issued a report last year with the first estimate of the unfunded liability for state and local government retiree health care in California — at least \$118 billion over the next 30 years, \$48 billion owed by the state.

Some local governments have begun prefunding retiree health care. A retiree health care fund created by CalPERS two years ago to manage contributions from local agencies had \$584 million at the end of last year.

In June of last year, San Francisco voters approved a measure that requires new city employees to contribute 2 percent of their pay to a new retiree health care fund, matched by 1 percent from their employer.

San Jose has taken a bigger step. General city employees contribute 4.65 percent of their pay to a retiree health fund, matched by 5.25 percent from the city. Police contribute 3.78 percent, matched by 4.19 percent from the city.

Labor negotiators for the California Highway Patrol have agreed to what would, if approved by members, be the *first prefunding of the state* retiree health debt — from 1 to 3 percent of expected CHP pay, with a state match beginning in 2012.

Fully prefunding retiree health care is costly. At the Met, the 8 percent employee contribution is expected to yield about \$20 million in 15 years. About \$30 million a year is needed to stop the growth in the unfunded liability, now an estimated \$400 million.

The Met is one of the government agencies providing live video of board meetings over the Internet, archived for on-demand viewing later.

(The California State Teachers Retirement System plans live Internet audio of board meetings, with video recordings available later at the CalSTRS building in West Sacramento. CalPERS does not have live or recorded board coverage.)

The Met workshop yesterday came after the board postponed a vote on the tentative labor contract. The plan to increase the pension formula from 2 percent of final pay for each year served at age 55 to 2.5 percent at 55 drew heated criticism.

San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders said in a letter to the Met that a pension increase costing \$70 million over several decades will drive up costs for ratepayers, who already face a double-digit percentage increase in their bills.

Others said a pension increase is ill-timed because the Met's pension fund lost \$400 million in the stock market crash last fall, requiring a big increase in the Met's annual payments to the fund in the years ahead.

Larry Dick of the Municipal Water District of Orange County told the board his district may have been regarded as "the most successful stealth agency in the county," ignored by ratepayers and others.

"We have had more attention paid to this (pension) discussion than any rate discussion we have had during my service on the board," said Dick.

Bill Robinson of the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District said negotiations, kept secret by bargaining rules until several weeks ago, would be better served by public debate.

"Could we perhaps as an outcome of this meeting let the public know, and perhaps even the Los Angeles Times can find the story?" Robinson said. "It's a common story in Orange County and San Diego County."

Rhonda Hilyer, a Met consultant, mentioned the possibility of a legal challenge from labor groups if the board rejects the proposed contract. She said board members were informed of progress during talks and a committee approved the pact.

"There is a lot at stake here," Hilyer told the board, "and I don't think I would want to be in your shoes necessarily to have to make these decisions."

A spokesman said the Met board may vote on the tentative labor contract on Oct. 13.

Reporter Ed Mendel covered the Capitol in Sacramento for nearly three decades, most recently for the San Diego Union-Tribune. More stories are at <http://calpensions.com/> Posted 30 Sep 09

What Works for the Needy InsideHigerEd.com

September 30, 2009

When it comes to policies that help the needy attend college, simplicity rules, and financial aid programs seem to be more effective when they link money to academic performance and/or support services for students.

Those are the key findings of a paper, "Into College, Out of Poverty? Policies to Increase the Postsecondary Attainment of the Poor," published this week by the National Bureau of Economic Research. The paper, by written David Deming of Harvard University and Susan Dynarski of the University of Michigan, was supported by the Robin Hood Foundation as part of its forthcoming book, *Targeting Investments in Children: Fighting Poverty When Resources are Limited* (University of Chicago Press).

The scholars' paper does not present any new data; it instead reviews 17 studies by other scholars on a range of federal, state and philanthropic programs and policies that aim in one way or another to reduce what needy students must spend on college to try to increase their access to college -- and, increasingly, to keep them enrolled. The list of programs is long: Pell Grants, subsidized loans, tax incentives and veterans' benefits at the federal level (as well as the Upward Bound college prep program), tuition subsidies and need- and merit-based grant programs at the state level, and foundation programs like the Gates Millennium Scholars.

Deming and Dynarski examined the programs to try to gauge which are most effective, dollar for dollar, at increasing college going and persistence. They draw attention to some comparatively little known programs -- underscoring the "very encouraging" results in student retention, for instance, produced through MDRC's "Opening Doors" project, which provided small grants and significant services at community colleges in Louisiana, New York and Ohio.

But the authors' most intriguing conclusions are probably the ones they draw about the country's most highly visible programs: federal Pell Grants and state initiatives like Georgia's HOPE Scholarship program. While Pell Grants are narrowly targeted at the scholars' chosen goal -- drawing low-income students into higher education who would not otherwise have gone at all -- they fall short of their promise because they require so much paperwork (especially on the part of applicants who are often intimidated by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid). "If targeted students are deterred by administrative hurdles, these programs will not work as well as intended," the authors write.

Many advocates for low-income students have criticized Georgia's merit-based HOPE program (which has no income cutoff and goes to students with high high-school grade point averages) because its funds have gone disproportionately to students from higher up on the income scale. But the program's simplicity -- potential recipients know that they can get free tuition at any

public college in the state if they get a 3.0 in high school -- makes it highly effective in getting low-income students into college, even if it means that large numbers of students who are not in the target population of needy students also benefit.

"In sum, the best evidence for effective financial aid on educational attainment comes from simple, broad-based programs," the authors write. If enough students from low-income families enter college because of HOPE and programs like it, they argue -- a threshold that they say previous studies show the programs clearly pass -- it appears that "a simple, broad-based aid program can increase social welfare."

The authors go out of their way to say that they do not mean to imply that Pell is not effective -- only that it is far less effective than it could be, and that the changes Congress and the Obama administration are considering to simplify both the process for applying for federal aid and the criteria the government uses to award the grants would strengthen it significantly. "We try to focus on what can be done pretty simply to improve the program," Deming said in an interview.

Donald E. Heller, director of Pennsylvania State University's Center for the Study of Higher Education and another financial aid researcher, said he did not read the study as suggesting that the Georgia program is better or more effective than Pell. But he did say he thought the paper's authors "missed the boat" by failing to point out that HOPE's effectiveness as a tool to help the poor get a higher education could be greatly enhanced if it added a financial need component.

"They say that the reason that HOPE has such a large impact is because it is very transparent," Heller said. "But I'm surprised they didn't say that if you did something that was as simple to understand, but was based on need, it would have an even bigger impact" from a social welfare standpoint.

"Just imagine if you took the \$460 million a year Georgia spends and said something equivalent, like 'If you're from income below \$x, you will go to college for free,' " Heller said. "You would get some kind of multiplier if the state put it in need-based aid instead."

— **Doug Lederman**