The Academic Pork Barrel, 2010
Inside Hgher Ed

April 29, 2010
The continuing debate over whether to end the practice of Congressional earmarking is anything but academic for higher education.

Colleges, universities and other academic organizations received just shy of $2 billion in grants directed to them by individual members of Congress in the 2010 fiscal year, an *Inside Higher Ed* analysis shows.

A review of appropriations bills, Congressionally mandated disclosure forms and lawmakers' news releases revealed grants to 875 institutions, totaling $1,982,532,150. (That total may be incomplete; while required disclosure of earmarks has been strengthened under federal law, and many lawmakers like to boast about the money they bring home to their local colleges and other constituents, it is still difficult to follow the flow of money with perfect precision.) That's roughly one-eighth of the overall amount of $16.5 billion earmarked by Congress in 2010, according to an estimate by Citizens Against Government Waste.

A database of institutions and their earmarks, which is searchable by institution and agency and sortable alphabetically or by the total amount of directed grant funds an institution received, can be found here.

As seen in the summary table below, the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa led the way with $58.7 million in grants, followed by Mississippi State University, which had a total of $47.9 million in grants for it alone and another $7.2 million in earmarks shared with other institutions.

Earmarks are commonly derided as "pork barrel spending" because they are seen as attempts by legislators to keep their constituents happy (and voting for them). Many earmarks support important and valuable projects, but they are criticized because they bypass the peer review process designed to distribute federal funds to the most worthy priorities.

Among other highlights of our review of the data:

- The leading recipients of earmarks in academe resided, not surprisingly, in states represented by some of the most powerful people in Congress. Four Mississippi institutions -- Mississippi State University (No. 2), the University of Mississippi (No. 6), the University of Southern Mississippi (No. 12), and the University of Mississippi Medical Center (No. 25) were among the top 25 recipients of academic earmarks, due in large part to the fact that Sen. Thad Cochran, the state's senior senator, is the top Republican on the Senate Appropriations

Committee. Auburn University joined the University of Alabama among academe's top earmark beneficiaries thanks to Sen. Richard Shelby, and the University of Hawaii, West Virginia University and Marshall University scored big with the aid of their respective longtime patrons, Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) and Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W.V.).

- The Defense Department was by far the biggest provider of direct Congressional grants, allocating about $898 million, or 45 percent, of the total earmarks to higher education. The Energy Department was next with $211 million, followed by the Departments of Agriculture ($182.5 million), Health and Human Services ($132.5 million), and Education ($128 million).
- Community colleges received about $80 million of the roughly $2 billion in earmarks.
- The median grant size was $500,000.

Pork Barrel Pros and Cons

The arguments for and against earmarks -- federal monies that individual members of Congress specifically direct to entities of their choosing, usually constituents from their districts or states that have lobbied for the funds -- are well-rehearsed at this point.

Opponents criticize them from a range of perspectives: Federal deficit hawks deride them as fostering the waste of tax dollars and part of an endemic lobbying culture in Washington. When it comes to earmarks for research, which is where many grants to higher education are directed, science purists see them as a sometimes secretive circumvention of the traditional peer review processes, often resulting in failure to produce the best science.

Supporters argue that the earmarks level the playing field for less-prestigious institutions that are too often shut out of the sometimes clubby executive branch grant-making processes. And while many leading research universities have long shunned them, even they have begun playing the game in recent years.

Critics of earmarking regularly try to rein in the practice, usually to little or no avail. Democratic leaders in Congress toughened rules on disclosure of earmarks, requiring lawmakers to publish lists of their requests, among other steps. While such lists are easily found on some lawmakers' websites, some members of Congress are either not publishing them or making them impossible to find, based on this reporter's searches in recent weeks.

The last two months have seen a new round of gamesmanship on the earmarking issue in Congress. House Democrats announced last month that they would ban the awarding of directed grants to for-profit entities, saying that doing so would "ensure that earmarks go to their intended purposes and [help] prevent for-profits from masquerading as non-profits." (Rep. David Obey, the Wisconsin Democrat who heads the House

Appropriations Committee, also said the panel would establish an online “one-stop” link to all House lawmakers' earmark requests.)

House Republicans followed a day later with their own announcement of a self-imposed, one-year moratorium on earmarks -- though GOP colleagues in the Senate did not appear inclined to follow suit.

Many college and university leaders stand ready to defend the public value of the earmarks they receive, which are helpful any time but particularly important as other sources of funds erode in an economic downturn like the current one.

"Federal funding has played an essential role in allowing the University of Alabama to address critically needed teaching and research facilities at a time of unprecedented enrollment growth," Joe Benson, vice president for research at Alabama, said via e-mail. "A science and engineering corridor is currently under construction that will facilitate major collaborative science and engineering research, allowing UA researchers to address major problems and drive the economic development of the state and region. In addition, federal financial assistance supports research and outreach programs ranging from an Institute for Sustainable Energy to a project aimed at preparing the workforce of the future."

The more politically savvy among them don't seem particularly fearful that the maneuvering over the practice of earmarking is likely to result in its demise anytime soon.

Charles B. Reed, chancellor of the California State University System, was in *Inside Higher Ed*'s office last month after having visited with members of California's Congressional delegation to encourage them to renew some of his institutions' earmarks, which he said "have been really good for the country." Are you worried Congress might stop sending grants your way, he was asked?

"As long as elected officials can breathe," Reed said, "there will be earmarks."

Top Higher Education Recipients of Congressional Earmarks, 2010

Institution	**Total Earmark Amount (Unshared)**
University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa	$58,755,000

Mississippi State University	$47,919,000
Texas A&M University	$40,150,000
University of North Dakota	$39,660,000
North Dakota State University	$37,040,000
University of Mississippi	$33,655,000
University of Hawaii	$33,503,000
University of Massachusetts at Boston	$33,002,000
Utah State University	$27,190,000
New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology	$27,000,000
Louisiana State University	$26,650,000
University of Southern Mississippi	$22,590,000
West Virginia University	$21,920,000
University of Louisville	$20,150,000

University of Kentucky	$19,709,000
University of Nebraska at Lincoln	$18,560,000
Auburn University	$18,032,000
Iowa State University	$17,921,000
Missouri University of Science and Technology	$17,200,000
Marshall University	$16,230,000
University of Utah	$16,040,000
Montana State University	$15,545,000
Arkansas State University	$15,400,000
Kansas State University	$15,300,000
University of Mississippi Medical Center	$14,000,000

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* reporting

— Doug Lederman

What Adjunct Impact?
Inside Higher Ed

May 3, 2010
DENVER -- One of the more controversial topics in the debate over the use of adjuncts has been the question of whether they have a negative effect on the student educational experience. Several recent studies have suggested such an impact, angering many adjuncts. They have argued that any gaps are as likely to reflect gaps in resources (which faculty members get paid for office hours? Or even have offices? Or have manageable course loads?) In fairness to the authors of those studies, it should be noted that their research projects have noted such issues, but the findings have still stung many an adjunct.

On Sunday, research presented here at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association challenged those findings, and found no impact at all on student outcomes of having adjunct instructors. Notably, the research did find a correlation that might explain why people may associate adjuncts with less successful student outcomes. And the research also challenges some conventional wisdom about enrolling part time.

The study was based on tracking 1,424 people who enrolled as first-year community college students at Blue Ridge Community College, a rural institution in Virginia. Les Bolt, an associate professor of education at Appalachian State University, said that the study originated when he was approached by Hara Charlier, then a dean at Blue Ridge and now interim vice president of instruction there, about a complaint she was receiving from her full-time faculty members. They were concerned about adjunct hiring, and raised questions about whether the use of adjuncts was having a negative impact on student learning. Bolt and Charlier looked at the college's data and said that they didn't have any information to answer the question, so they set out to do so.

Bolt, who presented the findings here, said that the scholarly literature tends to fall into two strands. Some studies focus on the flexibility and cost savings that institutions achieve by using more adjuncts. Other studies focus on what has been portrayed as a negative learning impact on students of having adjuncts.

For their study, Bolt and Charlier looked at students who were considered to have "high exposure" to adjuncts (at least 75 percent of first semester courses taught by adjuncts) and "low exposure" (up to 25 percent of courses). About 30 percent of the students were in the low exposure group and about 41 percent were in the high exposure group.

Then Bolt and Charlier tracked student success over three years, looking at two measures of success: fall to fall retention, and program completion (either a degree or a certificate, depending on the student's program). They found absolutely no correlation between adjunct exposure and either of those measures. But they also analyzed other factors, and they found a negative correlation on both measures of success with a student starting in remedial courses. Bolt said in an interview that this could explain why some view having adjuncts as negatively affecting student outcomes. Many colleges rely on adjuncts for remedial instruction, he noted. So one who tracked only adjunct teaching and didn't factor in the success odds for remedial courses might associate problems with the instructor, and not with a kind of course that tends to have high failure rates, regardless of instructor.

Bolt said that the research will now be extended for another three years, and possibly to other community colleges. But he said that, based on the first three years of data, it was important to question findings of negative learning outcomes associated with adjunct teaching.

The study also found positive relationships between enrolling part time and student outcomes. This runs counter to the advice of many experts that students be encouraged to enroll full time. Bolt said that he has a theory -- not yet tested -- that the success rates of full-time students are lagging because of the increase in the number of recent high school graduates, many of whom don't yet know what they want from an education and "bomb out." In contrast, a larger share of those who start part time are older students with specific goals for their education.

— Scott Jaschik

After 'Compton Cookout' scandal, UCSD forges a more positive association with the city
LA Times

University leaders are visiting Compton High for discussions about race, working with teachers on joint science programs, and lining up scholarships for students to attend a summer program on campus.

By Larry Gordon, Times Staff Writer
May 3, 2010

High school students in Compton were upset in February when they heard that a group of UC San Diego students had mocked their hometown by holding a "Compton Cookout" party and inviting guests to come as "ghetto chicks" and gangsters.

"We weren't going to let them have the power to use our name. We weren't going to let it slide," recalled Compton High School senior Ernesto Villasenor, who will attend Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York in the fall.

Villasenor and other Compton High students sent an impassioned letter expressing their anger about the incident to UC San Diego, where it was read aloud by a Compton graduate at a campus protest. "This causes us to question how the attitudes of racism and mockery are perpetuated and condoned by a public university," the students wrote.

The letter launched a dialogue between very different worlds: the prestigious beachside university where blacks and Latinos make up about 15% of the student body, and the urban high school where last year 74% of students were Latino and 25% were black, and more than two-thirds were eligible for subsidized lunches.

From this tension, an academic alliance — and a measure of understanding — are emerging.

UC officials say they are trying to arrange scholarship funds to bring as many as 20 Compton High students to San Diego to attend the university's three-week summer program for teenagers. In addition, UCSD's Scripps Institution of Oceanography plans to work with Compton High science teachers to develop special classes for subsequent summers and the regular school year, with UC faculty expected to visit Compton and Compton students expected to tour Scripps labs. Both sides hope to create a pipeline of Compton students to UC San Diego.

"The names of Compton and UCSD have been linked by this horrible issue. So we've been given an opportunity to take a negative and make a positive," said Scripps Director Tony Haymet. Some financial and planning details remain to be worked out, but he said he is optimistic those will be solved.

An Australian-born physical chemist, Haymet has driven up to Compton twice in recent weeks to meet with students and faculty at the high school, once bringing along Subway sandwiches for the teachers. At first the Compton participants were wary, concerned that Haymet and UC were looking only to ease the bad publicity sparked by the Feb. 15 party and subsequent racially-charged incidents. But students say he is now seen as genuinely interested in boosting the number of minority students in the sciences at UC San Diego.

A number of Compton High students say they want to attend the summer program and hope one day to enroll full time at UC San Diego. Among them, junior Sofia Pereira said she wants to counter the impression that Compton teens are all gangbangers.

"I would like to represent us and say, 'Hey, Compton does have these people you may be describing but it's not made mainly of those people,' " she said.

Anthony Pittman, also a junior, said he plans to apply to UC San Diego, partly to help raise the number of African American students on the campus. "The Compton Cookout shouldn't be something that has to define us the rest of our lives," he said.

The controversial off-campus party and other incidents at the San Diego campus led to high-level apologies from university leaders, along with efforts to recruit more minority students without violating the state's ban on affirmative action.

Not everyone in Compton, however, is eager to embrace the UC school.

Omar Bravo, a junior, said he still feels insulted and unwanted. "I don't want to go to a university where I don't feel safe," he said.

The new partnership between the schools was forged with the help of a UCSD doctoral student with Compton roots and a Compton High teacher who is passionate about his students' being given a fair shake.

Michael Navarro, a Ph.D. candidate in biological oceanography from Long Beach, spent time in Compton as a youngster visiting relatives and later taught part time at a Compton elementary school. "For me, Compton means family, it means tradition," he said.

Navarro urged Haymet and others at Scripps to visit the high school and joined them for the first trip there. He said he wanted Compton teens to know "that the idiots who did the Compton Cookout are not representative of all the students at UCSD."

At Compton High, meanwhile, English and philosophy teacher Anthony Berryman helped organize a student group in the wake of the UC San Diego controversy. Named "CATCH17" (Compton Alliance To Confront Hate, and 17 for the age of most of its members), it brought African American and Latino students together in a common cause and triggered tough discussions about racial conflicts on their own campus, said Berryman.

"I don't want to call the Compton Cookout a blessing, but it was a conduit to allow us to address these things which were nearly impossible for kids of different backgrounds in Compton to talk about," said Berryman. In February, he and several other Compton High teachers attended the protest rally at UC San Diego.

The walls of Berryman's classroom are decorated with posters of Einstein, colleges, movies and rock groups. And on a plaque near the front door is an embossed copy of the letter the students sent to UC San Diego.

No matter how many participate in the UC summer program, Berryman said he was delighted that Compton students who felt angry and insulted a few months ago can now talk about the issues with such a prominent scientist as Haymet.

"The idea that they are actively working to change the reputation of our city and our school gives them pride and satisfaction," said Berryman. "And for me, that's the best thing that comes out of this Compton Cookout business."

At summer's end, Haymet said he wants to hold a barbecue for all involved and, politically incorrect though it may be, call it the real Compton Cookout. He said he wants Compton students to know that this will be more than a one-time shot. "We are in this for the long haul," he told them.

First Thoughts on "Frontline"
Inside Higher Ed

By Dean Dad May 5, 2010 4:41 am

Last night "Frontline" did a show on for-profit higher education.
It was a disappointing episode in many ways.

First, and most obviously, it created clear good guys and bad guys. Investor Michael Clifford was clearly intended to be the bad guy, mixing "money, management, and marketing" with a druggy past and a born-again Christianity that I couldn't quite square with his Del Mar beachfront home. (I don't know if the correspondent quite caught the New Testament overtones of Clifford's story of converting prostitutes into students, but it would have made for a fascinating conversation.) The mostly absent traditional colleges were supposed to be the good guys, though the only significant talking head I caught from a traditional college was LaGuardia's Gail Mellow. (For the record, I'm a fan of hers.) Although the show didn't mention it, Mellow is in a unique position to comment on for-profit higher ed. Fun internet exercise: go into your favorite maps program, and navigate a path from the main campus of LaGuardia to the New York City campus of DeVry. Go ahead. I'll wait.

Things that make you go hmm...

Second, the episode was terribly sloppy in what it attacked. It conflated 'online' with 'for-profit,' which is simply false. There are plenty of nonprofit colleges, both public and private, running online classes, and it isn't hard to find for-profits with classrooms. The former Phoenix exec who spoke dismissively of tenure was taken as shocking, even though tenure has been waning in traditional higher ed for the last forty years. A discussion of the connection between regional accreditation and financial aid eligibility led quickly to stories of financial aid fraud at a college that didn't have regional accreditation, leaving the viewer to wonder exactly what point was being made, if any.

Third, despite a glancing reference to a lack of measures of instructional quality across all of higher ed, it approvingly fell back on arguments from "ineffability." I guess that's all you have when you don't actually have evidence, but it really doesn't resemble an argument. Is the quality of instruction in, say, Business Management at a Phoenix better, worse, or similar to the quality of instruction in Business Management at Compass Direction State? I don't know how to answer that, and neither did the show. In the absence of an answer, it's hard to get terribly worked up either way.

But most fundamentally, it failed to get to the 'why.' Why are for-profits growing?

At a really basic level, the for-profits' advantage is that they put (more than) the entire cost of their operations on the students. That means that growth more than pays for itself. They don't have subsidy income, endowment income, or philanthropic income. It all comes directly from operations. The reason that their students consume a disproportionate amount of federal financial aid -- and they do -- is that unlike the private nonprofit colleges (whose tuition is often higher), there's no offsetting revenue stream.

The publics, on the other hand, set tuition deliberately lower than the cost of operations, using subsidies and (a little) philanthropy to make up the difference. When those subsidies lag, growth becomes a cost.

To recap: for the for-profits, growth more than pays for itself. For the publics, growth is a cost. Now which do you suppose will grow faster?

If you really want to change the equation, you have to do several things.

First, as the show clearly indicated, stop the outright sale of regional accreditations. Any transfer of ownership of a college should automatically trigger a new evaluation by the accreditor. That's just basic. I have to give the show credit on this one.

Second, adopt some of the reforms that the for-profits have shown clearly work. Drop the agrarian calendar as an absurd holdover from a bygone era. Help students navigate the financial aid process. Abandon the ridiculous "tenure or adjunct" model in favor of something closer to regular employment. And for the love of all that is holy and good, abandon the credit hour and go to outcomes-based measures. Until you do that, you'll be stuck in a productivity trap and its resultant cost spiral forever, by definition.

Third, set subsidy levels high enough -- and tie them closely enough to enrollment -- that growth will more than pay for itself for the publics. Until you do that, the various institutions will simply follow their own imperatives: for-profits will grow, and publics will cut.

When I refer to subsidy levels, I'm not referring to financial aid. Financial aid ties money to individual students, which is exactly the for-profit model. I'm talking about operating subsidies that go directly into institutional operating budgets. The more we shift costs from institutional budgets to students directly, the less will differentiate the two sectors. If you want the publics to add enough capacity to compete more effectively with the for-profits, you have to give the publics the resources directly. Given the choice between a college getting infusions of private capital and a college taking significant budget cuts, which would you choose?

I found myself agreeing quite a bit with Arne Duncan, who argued that the issue isn't some sort of moral purity about keeping education separate from money, but that it's really about the rules of the game. If you're serious about changing the game, change the rules. I just wouldn't expect that all of the changes will be on one side.

I'm curious to see how others reacted to the show. Wise and worldly watchers -- what did you make of it?

Medal of Valor winners to be honored

Daily Breeze

By Larry Altman Staff Writer

Posted: 05/04/2010 07:55:17 PM PDT

Manhattan Beach police officer who saved two women from drowning, a Gardena police officer who killed a robber in a crowded restaurant, and 10 Inglewood police officers who rushed inside a burning building to rescue senior citizens will be recognized Thursday for their bravery.

The officers will receive the highest awards for South Bay officers at the 2010 Medal of Valor luncheon in Torrance.

Hundreds of people are expected to attend the program sponsored by the South Bay Chambers of Commerce at the Torrance Marriott.

"It's very nice, very humbling," said Manhattan Beach police Sgt. Brian Brown, one of the honorees.

The program annually celebrates police officers and firefighters who risk their lives and show bravery, heroism or meritorious actions beyond the call of duty.

"I'm very proud," Inglewood police Officer Shea McCurdy said. "It's not everybody that gets a Medal of Valor. A lot of police officers do a lot of heroic things. It's definitely an honor to be recognized."

In addition, two firefighters and a police officer will receive Sustained Superiority Awards for career achievement.

Here are the Medal of Valor recipients honored for acts of bravery in 2009:

Brown, the Manhattan Beach police sergeant, rescued two 23-year-old women caught in a riptide.

He had just finished his workday Dec. 20, but was still in the office when he heard the radio call.

Brown and two detectives were first to arrive at the beach. A surfer told him two girls were clinging to the Manhattan Beach pier. He tried to help them, but the tide was too strong.

Brown said he commandeered the surfer's boogie board and fins, and ran into the water. One detective went onto the pier, and the other stayed on the beach shining their flashlights.

"The first girl was in the worst shape," Brown said. "She was bobbing up and down. She was maybe 20 yards from the end of the pier."

Brown put her on the boogie board and paddled more, finding the second woman.

The current was too strong to paddle in, so he headed north away from it. Lifeguards arrived to take over.

"I was freezing," Brown said. "I went back to the station and took a hot shower for about an hour."

Gardena police Detective Edgar Vargas heard screaming inside a restaurant and stopped a robbery in progress, shooting one of the criminals.

Vargas was with two friends at Norm's restaurant in Bellflower at 2 a.m. May 28 when he heard screaming.

Vargas looked through the frosted glass that separated his table from another part of the restaurant, saw shadows of someone being chased and heard someone say, "Give me the money."

Frantic customers were getting out of their seats and kneeling on the floor, covering their faces.

Two masked men wearing hooded sweat shirts were assaulting a female server. One robber held a 12- to 15-inch knife as he pushed and pulled a waitress toward the cash register.

Vargas slithered through the booths toward the register, pulling his gun and quietly identifying himself as a police officer to several patrons cowering on the floor.

Once Vargas reached the cash register, he closed in on one robber taking cash while holding the waitress and threatening her with the knife.

He identified himself. The robbers ran toward him.

Fearing for his life, Vargas shot the knife-wielding robber, killing him. The other robber ran, but was arrested a short time later.

Inglewood police Officers Shea McCurdy, David Trujillo-Dailey, Marvin Aguilar, Elias Alvarez, Cesar Jurado, Francisco Ruiz, Alejandro Cornejo, Roman Fernandez, Detective David Carrasquillo and Sgt. Tyrin Bailous ran into a burning senior housing complex to rescue more than 100 residents in a fire that killed one man.

An elderly resident in a wheelchair reported the fire shortly after noon on Feb. 21, 2009, at the seven-story building. He said he was unable to escape the flames.

McCurdy, Alvarez, and Trujillo-Dailey saw smoke billowing from a third-floor apartment when they arrived.

The officers raced up three flights of stairs, but faced 1,000-degree heat and flames.

"We saw the smoke coming out of the door so we kicked the door in," McCurdy said. "Unfortunately it was pretty well engulfed. The fire was starting to spread. We backed up a little bit and started evacuating everybody."

Bailous arrived at the scene, saw the fire and smoke rolling through the hallways and called for all available officers on duty to help evacuate the complex.

Aguilar, Jurado, Ruiz, Cornejo, Fernandez and Carrasquillo rushed inside even though they had no breathing equipment or fire-retardant clothing.

Although they were told by arriving firefighters to leave, each officer re-entered the building several times to rescue residents, some of whom had to be carried.

"Certain people couldn't walk very well," McCurdy said. "We just went floor by floor, clearing out all the people. ... Once we were sure that floor was clear, we'd run to the next one."

Jurado is receiving his second Medal of Valor. In 2003, he engaged in a shootout with at least four gang members who opened fire on a rival's funeral.

Following are the Sustained Superiority Award winners:

Redondo Beach police Officer Ken Greenleaf has worked for 25 years as a dog handler in the city, becoming a master trainer for patrol and narcotic dogs.

He will soon be training his fifth dog for the department.

Hermosa Beach firefighter Paul Hawkins, a 30-year-veteran, trains firefighters and paramedics and coordinates training hundreds of residents in cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Twice a year he travels to Loreto in Baja California, Mexico, to train paramedics.

Redondo Beach firefighter Clark Carney has served more than 22 years as a paramedic, and for the last 10 years as an instructor at the El Camino College Fire Academy.

Clark also has evaluated and mentored more than 10 paramedic trainees working in the county.

Tough Times For Nest Eggs
Inside Higher Ed

May 5, 2010
At a time when tenure track jobs are drying up and faculty pay is mostly stagnant, some fear the latest threat to the professoriate will actually be realized years from now. As budgets tighten in states across the country, a number of legislatures are re-evaluating the popular pension plans that have been a key benefit for faculty.

Pension cuts for future faculty have already been approved in Illinois, where recent legislation raised retirement ages and reduced the maximum payouts available to future program participants.

The de-professionalization of the faculty is what fundamentally worries me," said Cary Nelson, an English professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and national president of the American Association of University Professors. "It's part of the same move of relying on contingent faculty. It's one more way in which that system is put at risk."

Under Illinois's former system, faculty members at all public institutions and other state workers could retire between the ages of 55 to 62 with full benefits, provided they had worked at least 8 to 10 years, depending on their age. The new law will raise the eligible age for full benefits to 67 with 10 years of service. The change means new faculty retiring before reaching the age of 67 will see benefits reduced by 6 percent a year, according to the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, a bipartisan, nonprofit organization that studies public spending in Illinois

The changes in Illinois were designed to address a $77.8 billion unfunded pension liability, but critics charge these reforms won't do anything to fill that hole. The new law only reduces expenditures going forward; it doesn't necessarily eat into the debt already on the books.

While there's no question the changes will save money at some point, lawmakers approved the plan before a thorough actuarial analysis could be completed to calculate savings. Legislators have said they expect $100 billion in savings over the next few decades, but that "was just kind of a back of the envelope estimate," said Fred Giertz, a member of the State University Retirement System's Board of Trustees.

"It was just a lot of B.S. on their part," Giertz said of the estimates.

Absent a more thorough analysis, Giertz said he and other experts still can't definitively say what the difference in pension payouts would be for an employee under the old and new plans who had the same salaries and years of experience.

In New Jersey, college officials are similarly scrambling to figure out exactly how a recent change in pension benefits will affect them. Gov. Chris Christie signed into law a series of pension-cutting measures in late March, but a Rutgers University official said last week they're still digesting the details.

"We are in the process of working with the state to determine the specific impacts of this legislation on Rutgers University," said Greg Trevor, a spokesman for Rutgers.

To the extent that there is an impact, most Rutgers employees won't feel it. Of the approximately 10,000 employees at the university, only about 35 percent are in the Public Employees Retirement System, the state's plan. Most faculty at Rutgers are invested in a defined contribution plan, administered through TIAA-CREF and other carriers, called the Alternative Benefit Program.

What is known about the changes to Illinois's program is troubling, says Giertz, a professor of economics and member of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at Urbana-Champaign. The new plan also calculates cost of living adjustments on simple interest instead of compound interest. Moreover, benefits will be based on the average salary of the highest eight consecutive years, as opposed to four.

The highest wage earners will be most impacted by a new pensionable salary cap, which will be placed at $106,800, the same as the current cap on Social Security.

"It's going to make a big difference for highly compensated people, especially at universities," Giertz said.

And there's the rub. In the court of public opinion today, there's precious little sympathy for those at the top of the salary pyramid in any industry, and academe is no exception. Lawmakers opposing the status quo of pension plans frequently label them "Cadillac" plans, suggesting they are overly generous. While that's debatable, it is true that defined benefit plans in states like Illinois are designed to pay out a promised amount regardless of the performance of the stock market or the state of economy. Defined contribution plans, wherein employees and employers typically pay in a certain percentage of salary, are only as solvent as the market allows.

To participate in the plan, Illinois faculty forgo Social Security and pay 8 percent of their salary into the pension fund, and they would continue to do so under the new system. But it's still sometimes difficult to make the case that reducing the payouts for future employees is such a bad thing in the current economy. More than 3,500 state workers have annual pensions of more than $100,000, and the highest pension is $391,000 a year, according to National Taxpayers United of Illinois, a nonprofit tax watchdog.

The new law has also stirred up popular support through provisions that would curb abuses of the pension system. The law suspends the pension of any retiree who goes to work for another government agency, thereby curbing the controversial practice of "double-dipping."

Jane Wellman, executive director of the Delta Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity and Accountability, said the tough conversations about pension plans in public universities aren't going away any time soon. A number of benefit plans reduced retirement ages or increased benefits when market returns were good, and now the "chickens are coming home to roost," she said.

"If state funds are not going up --- and they are not – that means we're going to be charging students more just to pay for the benefit packages," Wellman said. "It's not sustainable. These are very expensive benefit programs. Just to keep the cost from going up further will require a lot more money."

The retirement programs are but a piece of the entitlements public institutions are struggling to retain, she added. Health care benefits may be even more vulnerable, because – unlike pension plans – universities have greater flexibility to change them for existing employees.

Universities with defined contribution plans have also been reducing benefits. About 13 percent of colleges reduced contributions to retirement plans last year by at least 0.5 percentage points, an AAUP survey found.

California Plans Under Scrutiny

Unsurprisingly, the crippled economy in California has generated renewed debate about whether the state can sustain its three largest pension programs, which cover the University of California, California State University and the California Community College systems.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has backed a controversial plan to rein in public pension plans, calling them "the single biggest threat to our fiscal health." Under the proposal, California State and community college employees, among others, would need to be 65 years old -- up from 55 -- to be eligible for benefits.

Under fire for years from fiscal watchdogs, California's pension plans received renewed attention last month when an independent study, conducted by graduate students at Stanford University, found a shortfall of more than a half-trillion dollars across the state's three biggest plans. The study has been criticized by many, including Jack Ehnes, chief executive officer of the California State Teachers' Retirement System (Calstrs), which covers the community college system. Ehnes recently told the Calstrs board that "most people would give [this study] a letter grade of 'F' for quality" but "since it bears the brand of Stanford, it clearly ripples out there quite a bit."

The report was also criticized by Joseph A. Dear, chief investment officer of the California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS), which covers California State Faculty. In a recent *San Francisco Chronicle* column, Dear conceded the program is only funded to cover about 60 percent of its liabilities as of now, but noted that CalPERS's investments have already recovered about $50 billion over the last year. When looked at over the span of a 20-year period

– including the past two years of the recession – average annual returns for the program are 7.9 percent, Dear said.

Jonathan Karpf, vice president for lecturers in the California Faculty Association, said the attacks on pension programs in his state amount to “scapegoating." The state's fiscal problems are vast, but criticizing a pension plan that has had strong returns over the long run doesn't make sense, Karpf said.

Under previously proposed ballot initiatives – none of which have garnered enough signatures to go before voters – new eligibility standards would have denied lecturers access to CalPERS, because they are not considered “full-time” employees. That would be a departure from the current system, which allows lecturers to accumulate enough teaching credits to enter the program.

“Nobody in their right mind will consider going into public higher education [if these initiatives pass],” said Karpf, who has been a lecturer of biological anthropology at San Jose State University since 1987. “What we’re going to see is a brain drain.”

The University of California, which has its own retirement program, is also grappling with how to address pension shortfalls. The university took the first steps to that end in mid-April, when it began paying 4 percent of each employee’s salary into the plan. Employees are also now steering a 2 percent contribution into the pool, instead of placing that money into personal investment plans as they had previously.

The University of California and its employees haven’t paid into the retirement plan for about 20 years, in large part because the economic booms that preceded the recession created a surplus in the pool. The university dipped into those funds to offer generous retirement incentives, however, and in the post-recession environment the fund looks quite different. The university’s unfunded post-retirement liability is $1.9 billion, and it’s expected to grow to $18 billion by 2013, according to the Commission on the Future of the University’s Funding Strategies Working Group.

Jim Chalfant, a member of the university’s Task Force on Investment and Retirement, said the retirement plan has been a source of concern for some time.

“The Academic Senate has been watching this for several years and saying we need to restart contributions,” said Chalfant, a professor in the Davis campus’s department of agricultural and resource economics.

It’s debatable, however, whether the university has acted quickly and forcefully enough to address longstanding concerns about the stability of the retirement pool. Wellman, of the Delta Cost Project, said it was notable that the University of California’s Commission on the Future didn’t even propose solutions to the pension problem in its first report, noting that a separate task force is investigating it. All other conversations about the university’s future, however, are moot if a projected $18 billion funding shortfall in the retirement plan isn’t dealt with, Wellman said.

“If they don’t take care of that problem, they don’t have a University of California,” she said. “And they are acting like this is an 'oh by the way.' ”

There have, however, been some concrete proposals put forward. In addition to a gradual ramping up of contributions, the Academic Senate has suggested the university issue bonds to cover the system’s state-funded employees, who comprise about one-third of the university’s workforce. In so doing, the theory goes, the sponsors of other university employees – supported by non-state sources, including auxiliary enterprises, the medical center and federal grants – would be compelled to cover their share as well.

The Senate’s plan is no doubt subject to criticism, since it essentially endorses borrowing more money to deal with deficits. On the other hand, the Senate has argued that servicing the debt will be less expensive than forgoing the contributions non-state sources would provide if the university borrowed to meet its pension obligations.

“I personally view this as at a minimum a short term solution that jump starts contributions from the other funding sources,” Chalfant said. “But it’s a fair point: You can’t borrow forever.”

— Jack Stripling

Voters in 4 Bay Area school districts OK taxes

Michael Cabanatuan, Chronicle Staff Writer

Wednesday, May 5, 2010 (SF Chronicle)

Voters in four Bay Area school districts decided to lend helping hands to their financially struggling schools by approving parcel taxes in special mail-ballot elections Tuesday.

The taxes passed in the Palo Alto Unified School District, Menlo Park City School District, Portola Valley Elementary School District and the Acalanes Union High School District in central Contra Costa County.

All four parcel tax measures required a two-thirds super-majority vote to win.

Support was strongest in Palo Alto, where voters approved Measure A with 79.4 percent voting yes and 20.6 percent voting no. It replaces an existing $493 per year parcel tax set to expire next year with a $589 annual tax that will last six years.

Portola Valley voters chose, with 77.6 percent voting yes and 22.4 percent voting no, to tax themselves $168 per parcel per year for four years. The Measure D tax comes on top of an existing $290 annual parcel tax, approved in 2004, that lasts for 10 years.

Voters in Menlo Park voted for Measure C, a $178 per parcel tax that will be in force for seven years. Residents of the district already pay a $565 annual parcel tax. The tax passed with 76.2 percent of voters in favor and 23.8 percent opposed.

The tightest race was in the Acalanes district, where 68.5 percent of voters approved Measure A, a tax of $112 per parcel that will be levied in addition to an existing tax of $189 per parcel. The new tax will last for five years.

Finalists named for chancellor spot at San José/Evergreen college district

Mercury News

By Lisa M. Krieger

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Posted: 05/10/2010

The San Jose/Evergreen Community College District has selected three finalists for chancellor of the district: David Wain Coon, president, Evergreen Valley College; Rita Cepeda, president, San Diego Mesa College; and Raul Rodriguez, president, San Joaquin Delta College.

A series of public forums to meet the candidates will be held Thursday, Monday and next Tuesday at the district's two community colleges, Evergreen Valley College and San Jose City College.

For details, go to www.sjeccd.edu/HTML/AboutUs/ChancellorPublicForums.html.

There has been turbulence in district leadership since former Chancellor Rosa Pérez announced last November that she was retiring due to ill health. At a time of scarce financial resources, there was an investigation into financial impropriety under her watch, summarized in a grand jury report for colleges in Santa Clara County.

Additionally, an investigation by the Mercury News and ABC-7 TV found evidence of spending for overseas travel, designed to recruit students, as well as a $1,700 desk, stays at luxury hotels, symphony tickets and expensive meals.

On Monday, the district's board of trustees announced that it appointed Doug Treadway as the new acting chancellor. He replaces Jeanine Hawk, who filled the position since the Pérez announcement. The new chancellor will start in July.

"Our district needs stability," said board President Balbir Dhillon, "and we have full confidence in Dr. Treadway's leadership while we conduct a search for a permanent chancellor."

Peralta may pay trustee for meeting she missed

Mercury News

By Matt Krupnick
Contra Costa Times
Posted: 05/10/2010

Leaders of the Peralta Community College District, which is heading into the new budget year with a $6.5 million deficit, will vote Tuesday whether to pay Trustee Marcie Hodge for a meeting she missed.

A resolution on the board of trustees' agenda would excuse Hodge for her absence at the April 27 meeting and would pay her as if she had attended. It was not clear how much she would receive, but state law allows Peralta to pay its trustees up to $400 per month.

The agenda item noted that California law allows the payment, but it cited a nonexistent Education Code statute. Hodge, board President Abel Guillen, Peralta spokesman Jeff Heyman and the four-college district's attorney, Thuy Nguyen, all did not respond to interview requests Monday.

A consultant brought in to clean up Peralta's messy finances has warned trustees that they will have to make drastic cuts in order to stay afloat next year.

The Bay Area News Group reported last year that Hodge had used her taxpayer-funded credit card to buy thousands of dollars' worth of clothing and other personal items. The board has since banned such purchases.

Rock' to the Rescue

The Beach Reporter

by Michael Hixon
(Updated: Wednesday, May 12, 2010 5:50 PM PDT)

From preschool to college, the arts have been hit hard on school campuses in recent years thanks largely to a bad economy. It's no different for the South Bay Youth Orchestra, which lost its major corporate sponsor earlier this year.

To make up for that blow, a six-band live benefit concert, "Rock the Cause," will take place at El Camino College in Torrance, Saturday, May 15, from 6 to 11 p.m. at the college's Marsee Auditorium where the orchestra performs twice a year. Comprising children and teens from the beach cities to Long Beach, the orchestra has 55 students and is run through the Community Education program at El Camino.

All proceeds from Saturday's concert will benefit the South Bay Youth Orchestra and will feature performances by Midnight Urge, Taylor Collins, The Vignatis, Missing Piece, The New Room and Mismatch. There will also be a raffle for an Epiphone Les Paul Standard guitar.

The orchestra was designed nearly 15 years ago in part as a venue for students who don't have access to an orchestra class at their school.

"A lot of the students are looking for a place to play and if their parents have them involved in playing with a string instrument, then this is one of the possibilities for them to join this orchestra," said artistic director Patrick Schulz, who is also El Camino's full-time music theory professor. "A lot of them are with us because they don't have options in their school. They might have band, of course, but not orchestra."

Musician Taylor Morrow, who will perform with Missing Piece, Mismatch and Taylor Collins, said he originally talked to Schulz about another concept.

"I originally approached Dr. Schulz with the possibility of setting up a show for Music Appreciation students to fulfill class requirements but the music didn't really qualify for that sort of thing," Morrow said. "He then asked me if we would be interested in a benefit show approach, and after a good deal of planning and setup, he managed to get this all together. We're hoping a show like this, with a new audience, will help us expand our notoriety and the general awareness of our music, and at the same time generate some much-needed funds for the SBYO."

Under the leadership of Schulz, the orchestra has a staff of teachers, conductors and performers that represent each family of instruments including Schulz (brass); Cosima Luther, conductor/string specialist; Amanda Schulz, manager/woodwind specialist; and Tonya Lee Jaynes, percussion specialist. The orchestra meets every Wednesday for rehearsals and will perform later this year on June 22 for its 22nd annual Family Concert as well as the Winter Concert Dec. 4.

The annual budget for the South Bay Youth Orchestra is $30,000, according to Schulz.

Through student fees, more than $16,500 is raised and another $5,000 comes from ticket sales from the two concerts. That leaves the organization roughly $9,000 to $10,000 short in funds for the year. It is also looking to foundations and/or grants to help decrease the shortfall of funds.

Schulz added there is little doubt about the benefit of music education.

“I strongly believe music should be a part of every child’s education,” Schulz said. “The absence of orchestral music programs in many local schools have resulted in a situation where students are not able to learn a string instrument or participate in an orchestral ensemble. Statistics show students who participate in orchestra or band have the lowest levels of current and lifelong alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. Music enhances brain activity and the process of learning. Students who involve themselves with music consistently earn higher GPAs and SAT scores. Studies have also found that students who make music a part of their life connect better with each other, and the resulting increase in self-esteem leads toward fewer fights, lower criminal activity and better overall citizenship within the community.”

“Rock the Cause” is expected to be a launching pad for a battle of the bands competition that Schulz hopes will take place next year and become an annual event.

Tickets for “Rock the Cause” are $12 and are available at the Marsee Auditorium ticket office, which is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and is located at 16007 Crenshaw Blvd. in Torrance. Tickets will also be available before the show beginning at 4 p.m.

Tickets can also be purchased by calling (310) 329-5345 or (800) 832-2787.

For more information, visit www.sbyorchestra.com.

Community Colleges' Unfunded Mandate
Inside Higher Ed

May 17, 2010
President Obama, foundation leaders and the heads of advocacy groups all agree that community colleges need to focus on more than access and drastically improve their generally low completion rates. By and large, these leaders believe that these institutions know, whether by research or common sense, just what to do – such as providing better academic advising, outreach to struggling students, financial aid to encourage full-time enrollment, smaller class sizes and so forth. So what's the holdup?

Community college presidents across the country argue there is a great disparity between what is being asked of their institutions as far as the "completion agenda" and their ability to actually accomplish its goals – mostly because of dwindling state and local resources.

Last month, at the annual convention of the American Association of Community Colleges, six of the sector's leading education and policy organizations signed what they deemed "a call to action" – a commitment to improve student completion rates by 50 percent over the next decade. The pledge appealed to the sense of responsibility that officials at these open-access institutions often feel toward their community: "With the 'completion agenda' as a national imperative, community colleges have an obligation to meet the challenge while holding firmly to traditional values of access, opportunity, and quality."

Upon hearing of the pledge at the convention, Ron Wright, chancellor of Delgado Community College, in New Orleans, had the same response as many of his colleagues.

"How in the world are we going to be able to do this without any new resources in the system?" said Wright, recollecting his first impression. "How are we going to do this in the face of all the pressure we already have from the legislatures and others to raise our completion rates with the limited resources we have now?"

Delgado has had its state appropriations cut by nearly $5.5 million already this fiscal year, and officials expect more cuts to come. Wright has had to make a number of institutional decisions over the past few months that he knows run counter to best practices and common knowledge of what improves student success, all in the name of basic survival. For instance, he has allowed the average size of a class at Delgado to balloon from around 20 students to more than 30.

"We've prided ourselves over the last 30 to 40 years for having reasonable class sizes so that teachers can know students and students can benefit from teachers," Wright said. "Now, we're filling classes with as many students as we possibly can."

Growing class sizes is just one of the difficult choices Wright has had to make in recent months. The belt-tightening has also made its impact on valuable student services.

“We know full well that we need to be ‘high-touch’ with students and have counselors and advisers for them to talk to in order to give them guidance and direction, especially because most of our students don’t have family members who’ve been to college,” Wright said. “But, despite this, we have to cut back on guidance and first-year experience programs and the like. We’ve had to let a number of people who were on contract for dedicated advising to students go; we had to let some of those contracts lapse.”

Hercules Pinkney, interim president of Montgomery College, in Maryland, is facing similar financial challenges. Like Wright, he believes in the purpose of the “completion agenda,” but he thinks its timing has made it more of a challenge.

“From the standpoint of what we should be about in this country, the timing [of the completion agenda] is right,” Pinkney said. “But, from the ability of the states and counties that support this initiative – which everybody knows is right and is what we should do – it's out of sync with reality. There may have to be a delay in terms of meeting these goals. Everything is in place except for the resources to get the job done, and we’re not asking for a lot of new resources right now.”

Though some budget reductions have been made at Montgomery, the extent of the cuts will not be known until funding from the county government – which makes up almost half of the college’s budget – is finalized in the next two weeks. If these cuts are approved, Pinkney is prepared to make a number of service reductions that he acknowledges will hurt students – again, for institutional preservation.

Among the possible cuts, fewer faculty members would be able to advise students in their concentrations. The financial aid office would close early one day a week to catch up on processing aid requests. Also, libraries and computer labs would have to noticeably reduce their service hours, despite increased usage.

This potential trimming is not something Pinkney takes lightly.

“Having to cut back on support services pains me,” Pinkney said. “If these students don’t have access to resources to help them figure out what’s going on in the classroom, you’re going to have more failures and less completion.”

James Middleton, president of Central Oregon Community College, also feels pressure to do more with less at his institution. Regional unemployment has stayed between 15 and 20 percent, the college’s enrollment has spiked by more than 80 percent in the past three years, and registration for the upcoming summer term is rising to unprecedented levels.

“Whenever a disaster strikes – whether flood, earthquake, tornado or tsunami of student need – first responders rise to the occasion,” wrote Middleton in an e-mail, using an analogy to make his point. “Damaged homes are replaced with tents, portable toilets are put in place, planting the spring garden is postponed, the breakfast dishes are left dirty. But such conditions cannot become the new norm. Community colleges have been the first responders to the personal and economic crises at hand. Community colleges have responded heroically but cannot fall into a 'new norm.' In a parallel metaphor, community colleges have acted like the paramedic, keeping the patient alive long enough to get to the hospital. But we must not pretend that the paramedic is the surgeon or the physical therapist who leverages long-term health."

Since Central Oregon receives only 14 percent of its revenue from state appropriations, Middleton said, his institution has been less impacted by larger state budget reductions. Still, challenges in living up to the "completion agenda" remain.

"Not only are the numbers higher, the student needs are more acute with financial and family challenges and an even higher proportion of academically underprepared students," Middleton wrote. "However, we cannot sustain five times the number of financial aid awardees, the vast expansion of advisees challenging our faculty advisers, the need for senior faculty to mentor part-timers in addition to their expanded teaching loads, and other short-term responses to the immediate needs."

Hearing the Cry

The architects of the "completion agenda," however, say they were conscious of the difficulties community colleges would face when their pledge was drafted. Economic realities aside, they argue the focus on completion is desperately needed in the sector, especially as a way to lobby the government.

"The timing is not ideal," said J. Noah Brown, president of the Association of Community College Trustees. "First of all, we were hoping we'd have the American Graduation Initiative – and we're still committed to getting that accomplished. We're not going to get from point A to point B without a supportive funding stream that would enable students to be successful. I recognize that colleges have to cut things and that their state and local funds are decreasing. That's why we want to create a funding stream that will get them to this goal."

Brown compared the "completion agenda" and the pledge his organization signed to President Obama's call for the United States to have the highest proportion of graduates in the world by 2020.

"It's not unlike President Obama's goal," Brown said. "It's a big goal. Can we necessarily get there completely? I don't know, but we need to have a serious discussion about what really matters and what's the purpose of education in this country and what more we can do to ensure that. You never achieve anything if you don't put out a goal. Whether you buy into this thing or not, we must, as a sector, do better in graduating students and ramping up the education talent we have in this country."

George Boggs, president of the American Association of Community Colleges, said he sympathizes with local officials who are befuddled by the disparity of what's being asked of them and what they're capable of doing. Still, he said they should plan to focus on completion for the long haul.

"It's going to be hard work," Boggs said. "I understand the circumstances they're going through. I understand how difficult the decisions they're making are. They're closing class sections and laying people off when they want to help students more, not less. But the 'completion agenda' is a long-term project. We're going to be working for quite a while to improve the success rates of our students."

— David Moltz

CSU fee hike hits summer students

By Laurel Rosenhall
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California State University students registering for summer classes are finding an extra fee on their bill, raising the cost for a full course load by about $1,000.

The extra summer fee means that on many campuses, a pair of undergraduate classes – say, in English, psychology or statistics – will cost 40 percent more to take this summer than they would in the fall or spring. And that's on top of the 32 percent fee increase CSU students absorbed in 2009.

"After already dealing with furlough days and budget cuts this semester, the last thing I wanted was additional fees for my summer session," said Sacramento State student Rosa Martinez, who has registered for two summer classes at a cost of more than $1,800.

University officials said they have few choices because the system's 23 campuses have been crippled by state budget cuts. If they didn't charge more for summer classes, officials said, CSU campuses wouldn't be able to offer them at all.

But lawyers at a San Francisco firm say the extra summer fee is illegal and are suing CSU on behalf of students. The case goes to court in Oakland on Tuesday.

With the extra fee – $80 per unit – CSU is allowing campuses to offer summer session as a "self-supported" program, where students pay the full freight, instead of a "state-supported" program that receives public subsidies.

"The state law is very clear that Cal State can't replace state-supported courses with self-supported courses, and that's exactly what they're doing for the upcoming summer session," said Anne N. Arkush, a lawyer with the Altshuler Berzon law firm that sued CSU.

The lawsuit includes four students who attend CSU campuses in the East Bay, Los Angeles, San Marcos and Stanislaus. Three of them planned to attend summer school but say they can't afford the extra fees. The fourth is concerned about CSU Stanislaus charging the higher self-support fees during a short winter session between the fall and spring semesters, according to the suit.

Typically, state-supported classes are those that lead to a degree, while self-supported classes are not offered for credit and instead are geared for people seeking job training or enrichment.

The case seeks a court order forbidding Cal State from charging the self-support fees for regular credit-bearing classes during summer and winter. Lawyers for the students are asking for a ruling that would apply to all CSU campuses, not just those named in the suit.

The university argues it has the right to switch summer classes to a self-supporting system – and to charge the associated fees – when the Legislature doesn't provide full funding. The state cut funding to CSU by $548 million, or 20 percent, for the current school year.

"Completely absent from (the legal) papers is any acknowledgment of California's unprecedented budget crisis, the resulting cuts to CSU's budget and the realities of how those reductions affect CSU's ability to provide access to its campuses year-round," the university argues in court papers.

"No law compels CSU to provide state-supported summer or winter sessions when the Legislature fails to provide sufficient funds to cover the costs of such classes."

It is only within the last decade that the university began offering state-supported classes in the summer. Before 2000, all CSU summer classes were of the self-supported variety. But that year, in anticipation of growing student enrollment, the Legislature decided CSU campuses should be used more efficiently and allocated funds for them to offer regular for-credit classes in the summer.

"Rather than build more buildings, we said why not use existing buildings during the one-third of the year we're not using them," said Steve Boilard, director of higher education for the Legislative Analyst's Office.

He said he's concerned now that the extra fees for summer classes will discourage students from attending. With campuses going dark over summer, fall and spring classes could get even more crowded.

"We're trying to create a cultural change where students see summer as a viable time to take courses," Boilard said. "Even disrupting that for a summer or two will make it harder for students to think they can count on taking classes in the summer."

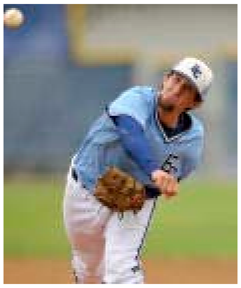
Martinez, the Sacramento State student, took two summer classes last year and is enrolled in two this year. She was surprised when she registered and found out she would have to pay almost twice as much as she did a year ago.

"My advice to any new students would be to get in and get out as quickly as possible, before things get worse," Martinez said. "From a student's perspective, I don't see any improvement in the near future."

El Camino punches ticket to state baseball championships

The Daily Breeze

By Matt Lopez, Correspondent
Posted: 05/16/2010 10:37:19 PM PDT



El Camino's Nick Turner pitched a complete game against Hancock... (Sean Hiller, Staff Photographer)

For El Camino College, the mission Sunday afternoon was rather simple.

With a win over Hancock, El Camino would advance to the California Community College Athletic Association Baseball State Championships in Fresno.

For a pitcher like Nick Turner, who hadn't started a game in 2 1/2 weeks, the stakes couldn't get much higher.

Turner took care of business, tossing a complete game and leading El Camino to a 3-1 victory over Hancock in the Super Regionals at El Camino.

El Camino (30-9) will play in its first state championship since 1951 next weekend at Fresno City College.

A former Palos Verdes High standout, Turner pitched ECC's third consecutive complete game in as many days, following dazzling performances by Andrew Pulido and Kyle Petter.

"We just haven't needed to go beyond our top two guys yet in the playoffs," El Camino coach Nate Fernley said. "But Nick is the kind of guy who will be ready when you call on him, and he came up so huge today."

Turner allowed just one earned run on five hits and two walks with eight strikeouts. His teammates rushed the mound and piled on top of him after getting the final out of the game.

"It's just incredible," Turner said immediately afterward, still trying to catch his breath. "It's the greatest feeling ever. This is the most fun I've had playing baseball."

Fernley said his team knew it would be in for a dogfight Sunday after its 19-5 drubbing of Hancock the previous day.

"We knew that our game with them on Saturday was an aberration," Fernley said. "There was no doubt in my mind that we were going to have to work for everything."

ECC didn't quite have the offensive outburst it had Saturday, and save for a big third inning, the Warriors bats actually were held in check by Hancock starter Jacob Valenzuela.

ECC scored all three of its runs in the third. Aaron DeGuire, Drew Rodela and Kyle Petter each had RBI singles to give ECC a three-run cushion.

ECC was held hitless the final five innings of the game, a rare offensive dip for the Warriors.

"Their guy was throwing some good pitches. Actually, he's usually their closer but they started him today," DeGuire said. "We were fortunate to get a few hits and have Nick out there pitching the excellent game he pitched."

Turner showed respect to the opposition.

"(Valenzuela) pitched a gem ... he was great and I know some of our guys were fooled at times," Turner said. "As a pitcher you feel for him, but we just had enough to get it done when we needed to."

Fernley said ECC would celebrate after the game, but quickly turn its focus to next weekend's state championships.

Petter said ECC will go to Fresno proudly representing the South Bay.

"Every time we put this Warriors jersey and hat on, we feel like we're representing the entire South Bay," Petter said. "We're going to go out there and bring home a title."

Huge Problem, Problematic 'Solution'
Inside Higher Ed

May 14, 2010
There is no dispute about just how bad things are for public higher education in Colorado. The governance structure has been weakened, and, like that of many states, Colorado's budget is a big-time mess. So nobody questions that *something* needed to be done, and fast, to get the state and its colleges through the next two years.

But the legislation on which lawmakers have settled (at the urging of the state's most visible public institution, the University of Colorado) strikes some college leaders in Colorado and leading experts on public higher education as flawed, with the potential to hurt students from low-income families and the public institutions -- community colleges and non-selective four-year universities -- that are likeliest to enroll such students.

The legislation, SB 10-003, would enable public colleges that choose to do so to ratchet up their tuition to make up for the expected loss of state funds, enroll more foreign students to help bolster their tuition dollars, and give the colleges significantly more flexibility on a range of fronts.

"This is a short-term attempt to deal with a budget situation," said Rico Munn, executive director of the Colorado Department of Higher Education. "We've got a long-term strategy group talking about where we want to go with Colorado [higher education], but an alternative to this situation is not readily available, short of finding revenue magically. We had to provide some flexibility to deal with what we have in front of us."

“This bill reflected broad consensus that something had to be done in Colorado immediately to preserve reasonable access to a viable public system of higher education," said David Longanecker, executive director of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and a longtime observer of Colorado higher education policy. "The problem, however, is that research demonstrates quite clearly that the solution adopted is wrongheaded and will place access for financially needy students and viability of less-well-heeled institutions at great risk.”

The Situation

How bad are things in Colorado? They may not be California-style bad -- yet -- but they appear to be heading in that direction. As is the case in many states, fiscal demands from Medicaid, prisons, unemployment insurance and other priorities are colliding and combing at a time of declining state revenues. Legal requirements prevent sizable cuts from elementary and secondary education, and anti-tax sentiment is fervent in the fairly conservative state. The confluence of events has been called a "budget tsunami."

State lawmakers approved an $18.2 billion budget last month that assumes tax revenues will rise to close a budget gap of more than $1 billion. If that doesn't happen, though, higher education could face a cut of $300 million -- about half the total amount that public colleges and universities are receiving this year. That would be on top of a $150 million cut in 2008-9, which was sustained (but largely offset with federal stimulus money) in the current 2009-10 fiscal year.

Higher education policy making in Colorado has been a mess of a different kind of late. The state's key body, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, has had four executive directors in six years, and the turnover has at times resulted in a vacuum that has led to scattershot policy making -- not the best climate for dealing with a crisis of this magnitude. (Munn took the reins of the agency about six months ago.)

So it's perhaps not surprising that the current legislation appeared to pop out of nowhere, with many college leaders in the state seeing it for the first time late last month, and following a breakneck path to passage (with some adjustments) over just three weeks. The measure awaits signing by Gov. Bill Ritter, but is expected to go into law largely unchanged.

The strongest proponent for it within higher education is Bruce Benson, president of the University of Colorado system. He explains his support for the legislation primarily by lavishing praise on its least controversial aspects: the significantly greater flexibility and freedom that campuses like his would gain from state oversight and approval in such areas as purchasing and capital construction.

Colorado's universities, particularly its more ambitious (and wealthier) institutions like Colorado's Boulder campus and Colorado State University, have sought such freedoms for years, and they are long overdue, Benson said. "Some of these state policies have put us in positions where we would get so bogged down," he said. The university has had to pull out of some potential consortium agreements that would have saved the state millions of dollars "because we were taking so long" to win approval, Benson said.

The state is willing to loosen some of its reins now in ways that it wasn't previously, of course, because it now has significantly less to offer all of its public institutions in terms of cash, given the disastrous financial situation. The deal that the legislation strikes is designed to give the public colleges and universities more freedom to raise their own money -- through tuition increases, primarily -- to replace the withdrawal of up to 50 percent of the operating funds they now receive from the state.

Under the plan, which is designed to last for five years, each institution would by November submit a plan for how it would deal with a 50 percent reduction in its current allocation of state funds. (The Colorado Commission on Higher Education would take those plans into consideration in framing its budget request for the 2011-12 fiscal year.) In exchange, individual universities would, beginning in 2011-12, be allowed to increase their tuition by up to 9 percent a year with no restrictions, but would need approval from the Colorado Commission on Higher Education to exceed that level.

Colleges would continue to be required to have at least two-thirds of their students be Coloradans, with one major exception: International students would no longer count as out-of-state students from an enrollment perspective under such a calculation, and the foreign-born could make up as much as 12 percent of a campus's students, up from the current 4 percent.

(Foreign students would, of course, continue to pay out-of-state tuition rates, so campuses that added significant numbers of international students could significantly increase their tuition revenue.)

Lastly, the state commission would no longer require institutions that stay under the 9 percent limit on tuition increases to ensure that they dedicate a portion of their revenues to need-based financial aid; instead, each campus would be responsible for ensuring that it provides sufficient financial aid to remain affordable.

Supporters of the legislation argue that, given the financial crisis, the tradeoff may be the best way to get through the short-term mess, giving public colleges needed (and long-desired) flexibility. Even an organization that has generally opposed Colorado's drift away from public funding of higher education and toward a high-tuition, high financial aid model offered its backing for the legislation this month.

"[W]e ... recognize that Colorado faces an unprecedented funding problem -- not just for higher education, but for all of state government -- which could bring the very real threat of program and service reductions or institutional closures," Frank Waterous, a senior policy analyst at the Bell Policy Center, testified last week. "Given these circumstances, we reluctantly view limited tuition flexibility as the lesser of two policy evils."

Disproportionate Impact

But while some say they recognize Colorado's dire situation, and acknowledge the need for extreme steps, several national experts on higher education policy strongly oppose the measure, citing what they perceive as two major flaws.

First, the legislation appears to set up a system in which each individual institution could see its state allocation cut by the same percentage (as much as 50 percent), which critics argue would disproportionately affect those colleges that are most dependent on state funds.

"At the institutions that serve the state's poorest students," such as Metropolitan State College of Denver and the Community College of Denver, "[general fund support] per student is more than 50 percent of the institutions' total funding," Aims McGuinness, an analyst at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, wrote in an e-mail about the legislation. At Colorado's exclusive Boulder campus, in turn, it is 19 percent. "This means that a 50 percent cut in general funds at Metro would be about a 25 percent in total funding; at CU Boulder, it would be only a 10 percent cut."

"It is absolutely essential that any cuts in [general funds] be addressed from a statewide perspective taking into consideration state priorities, differing levels of general fund funding, and different capacities to raise tuition," McGuinness wrote.

Munn said that the outside critics were misreading the legislation to mean that Colorado's public colleges would necessarily see comparably sized budget cuts if money is tight. The measure calls for the commission to review the institutions' plans for cuts and to make recommendations to legislators on how they should allocate whatever state funds are available. That process would allow the commission to account for differences in how state cuts would affect institutions differently, he said, and to protect the access institutions the critics worry about. "Higher education as a group might take a 10 percent cut, but that doesn't mean every institution takes a 10 percent cut," he said.

Perhaps, said Longanecker, but any process that gives the legislature the final say in allocating money directly to institutions, as the legislation would, is unlikely to treat poorer institutions equitably, given that the wealthier institutions also tend to have the stronger lobbying might.

'Seductive' Approach

The other major problem with the legislation, in the eyes of its critics, involves how the funding changes would intersect with the changes in financial aid policies. As written, the measure relies on institutions themselves, instead of the Colorado commission, to ensure that the colleges provide enough financial aid to meet the needs of students.

While it's a "very seductive policy" for colleges to say "give us tuition authority, we'll assure you that we protect the students," the approach has both philosophical and practical problems, said Longanecker of WICHE, who once headed Colorado's higher education commission. First, "institutions don't provide institution-based aid to the most needy students" -- they very quickly end up using merit-based financial aid to compete to attract higher-quality students, he said.

Second, the institutions that would bear the biggest cuts under the new legislation's financing structure are also generally those who would benefit least from the newfound tuition flexibility the measure would give colleges, and be most hamstrung by a requirement that they meet students' financial needs. A university like Boulder that charges relatively high tuition (and can now increase the number of full-paying students, with the change in how foreign students are counted) could relatively easily produce enough tuition revenue to offset a state funding cut, Longanecker said. And because it has comparatively few low-income students, and can raise significant dollars through fund raising and other means, the financial aid requirement would not be too onerous for it.

Given the fact that large proportions of its students come from lower-income backgrounds, Metro State would have to use a significant portion of whatever additional revenue it generated through a larger tuition increase to cover financial aid costs -- probably requiring it to cut into instructional funds to cover the difference if it faced a major cut in state funds, Longanecker said.

"The question for us is are you generating enough money with the incremental tuition increases to cover what you lose from the state," said Stephen M. Jordan, Metro State's president. "For us, it doesn't seem to work, and the damage is likely to be to things like our effort on our first-time freshman retention rate, which has gone from 58 percent to 68 percent in the four years I've been here. I don't see how we can raise tuition enough to hire full time-faculty or do the other things we've done to keep that rate going. It puts that whole thing in jeopardy."

Munn insists that the state commission has no intention of letting institutions diminish their commitment to low-income students or to college completion, and that it has many other accountability tools to keep colleges honest on those and other fronts. And the strategic planning committee appointed in December by Gov. Bill Ritter to study higher education, as well as the directive to the higher education commission to develop a new master plan for higher education, will ensure that college affordability and access remain high priorities, Munn said.

What the state needed, and what the new legislation represents, were additional tools to deal with the short-term prospect of continued economic trauma, he said.

"Nobody sees this as a solution. It's a short-term fix trying to address the significant budget issues we’re facing."

— Doug Lederman

State pension costs: pay now or pay more later

By Ed Mendel

If CalPERS can wait until next year to raise rates for more than 1,500 local government agencies, why impose a $600 million rate hike on the deficit-ridden state this year?

A number of questions may be asked after the CalPERS board, at the request of state Treasurer Bill Lockyer, voted last week to delay a decision on the state rate hike until next month.

Among other things, a big rate hike as the state struggles to close a $19 billion state general fund deficit might strengthen the case for pension reform. Each dollar spent on future pension costs could be used today to ease cuts in health, welfare and schools.

A problem for public pension funds, which get most of their money from investment earnings, is that they need rate hikes to recover losses in a down economy — a time when government sponsors are most likely to have deficits of their own.

The list of states enacting pension reforms, 16 in *a report issued* in February by the Pew Center on the States, has grown by nine in *a report issued this* month by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

"This is turning out to be a pivotal year in public pension policy, as states move to bring down escalating retirement costs that threaten their governments' stability," said a *story last week* on Stateline.org, a news site sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Public pensions are regarded as contracts that can't be cut. Among the cost-cutting reforms are increased employee contributions, lower benefits and later retirement ages for new hires, and reduced pension cost-of-living adjustments.

Schwarzenegger last year proposed lower benefits for new state hires. Senate Republican Leader Dennis Hollingsworth of Murrieta has a bill this year, SB 919, that would cut benefits for new hires and extend retirement ages.

One thing that emerges from the Pew report in February, "The Trillion Dollar Gap: Underfunded State Pension Systems and the Roads to Reform," is how California public pension systems differ from those in many states.

The legislatures in many states set the annual contribution that the state pays to the pension fund. In California, the California Public Employees Retirement System and most local retirement systems set the rate paid by government agencies.

Pension benefits in many states are set by the legislature. In California, most pension and other retirement benefits are set through contract negotiations with labor unions, with local CalPERS members choosing from options set by legislation.

The methods used to forecast future pension funding and spending obligations vary in California. A governor's commission two years ago urged the creation of a statewide panel, enacted by SB 1123, to be a clearinghouse for actuarial best practices.

In recent years the CalPERS actuarial policy used to determine the rates that must be paid by government employers has evolved, often amid proposals for cost-cutting reforms.

In March 2005, CalPERS adopted a policy intended to avoid rate shocks. One change extended the "smoothing" period for calculating investment gains and losses from three years to 15 years, well beyond the industry standard.

The new policy came as Schwarzenegger, readying his ill-fated "Year of Reform" initiatives for the November ballot that year, briefly backed a proposal to switch all new state and local government hires to 401(k)-style individual investment retirement plans.

Last June, the governor objected when CalPERS further loosened the policy adopted in 2005, reducing the rate shock from losses in the historic market crash by phasing in the increase over three years.

Schwarzenegger said that delaying a pension contribution increase would be "using our kids' money" to gamble that investment earnings in the future will grow faster than pension obligations.

"Our pension system needs reform," the governor said, "and without meaningful and sustainable pension reforms that reduce future costs, the state should decline to participate in any effort to shift more costs to our children."

The CalPERS board adopted the three-year phase in for local governments, but delayed action on the state rate. Several weeks later the governor introduced his proposal to cut pension benefits for new state hires.

Last December the CalPERS board adopted a policy for the state rate expected to result in a $200 million increase on July 1 from the current $3.3 billion payment. The Schwarzenegger administration had sought a $1.2 billion increase.

Opponents suggested that the administration was trying to boost support for a pension reform initiative aimed at the November ballot this year. The drive to gather signatures for the initiative failed, lacking financial support.

The additional funding sought by the Schwarzenegger administration would have boosted the CalPERS funding level to 80 percent, regarded by many as the acceptable minimum. The $200 million increase would leave the funding at 60 percent.

The new state budget the governor proposed in January for the fiscal year beginning July 1 did not pursue the funding conflict, assuming instead a $200 million increase in the state contribution to CalPERS.

When the actuaries recommended a $600 million increase last week, they cited investment losses, a CalPERS board desire for a higher funding level, and a new study showing members are living longer, earning more and retiring earlier.

A CalPERS committee unanimously approved the $600 million increase. But at a meeting of the full board the next day, Lockyer, a board member, proposed a delay until next month to study the impact on the pension fund of not raising the rate this year.

“An additional $600 million burden on a state budget that has a $20 billion deficit — it seems to me it’s imprudent on our part, particularly when we are talking about what might be funding year 31 of a long-term pension investment,” Lockyer said.

CalPERS funding is calculated over a 30-year period. The only “no” vote on Lockyer’s proposal for a delay came from an administration representative, Greg Beatty of the state Department of Personnel Administration.

The phased-in rate increase CalPERS approved last June for the more than 1,500 local governments does not begin until July 1 of next year, a year after the state increase and nearly three full years after the market crash in the fall of 2008.

The CalPERS actuaries are said to need the time to calculate the rates for the 2,000 local government retirement plans. The rates for the state and non-teaching school employees take less time.

Unlike CalPERS, the underfunded California State Teachers Retirement System lacks the power to set its own contribution rates. But the Legislature apparently sees no urgent need for a rate hike to replace CalSTRS losses.

The state has a massive debt for retiree health care promised current workers, about $50 billion over the next 30 years. But it sets aside virtually no money for future retiree health care, using pay-as-you-go funding, $1.4 billion next year.

The nonpartisan Legislative Analyst *said last week* that delaying a rate hike will cost taxpayer dollars, due to the lost opportunity to invest the increase. In effect, the state would be borrowing at the CalPERS assumed earning rate, 7.75 percent.

But the analyst said CalPERS may have overstated the rate increase by assuming payroll growth that will not happen because of furloughs. And much of the $600 million rate increase comes from special funds, not the deficit-ridden general fund.

“In any event, it is important for the Legislature to understand that the widely quoted CalPERS actuarial estimate of a $600 million state payment increase in 2010-11 is (1) going to be borne largely by funds outside of the general fund and (2) almost certainly not going to increase the already-identified general fund budget problem in 2010-11 by $600 million,” said the analyst.

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 24 May 10

College district rules leave Green Hive homeless

Daily Breeze

By Melissa Pamer, Staff Writer
Posted: 05/22/2010 12:25:50 PM PDT

Last spring, a couple of beach cities residents with a devotion to sustainable building and "green" practices were excitedly promoting their vision.

They planned to open a unique resource center for homeowners, city planners and commercial builders to get hands-on learning about eco-friendly design.

They called it The Green Hive.

Business partners Kris Kimble and Kim Robinson were thrilled that a top building official with the Los Angeles Community College District had embraced their project and set aside space for it in a 6,000-square-foot office across from LACCD headquarters downtown.

Kimble and Robinson signed up more than a dozen corporate sponsors, got funding for eight internships and built an extensive website (www.thegreenhive.com). They spent two years designing the future space, to the tune of more than $1 million in district money, according to LACCD officials.

The district's $6 billion "green" construction program, BuildLACCD, sent out promotional material mentioning the project. Kimble and Robinson brainstormed with Larry Eisenberg, the district's executive director of facilities planning and development, who had taken a fancy to The Green Hive.

"I was inspired by the possibilities and inspired by Larry. He was portrayed as a visionary. ... I was excited to be a part of that," said Robinson, a Manhattan Beach resident with a professional certification in architecture.

Then the district pulled the plug.

In April, Kimble and Robinson were told that the project could not move forward. They were stunned.

After spending more than two years and their own money creating The Green Hive, they face a shutdown of their business in a matter of weeks.

In an interview at their Hermosa Beach office last week, both were teary-eyed talking about their loss.

"We're out two years of our lives," Kimble said.

Eisenberg said he indeed had been enthusiastic about the project. But he had learned from an attorney for the college district that The Green Hive - even if it were considered an educational initiative - could not be funded by voter-approved bond money.

In addition, a for-profit business operating out of district space could be considered a gift of public funds, he said.

"We had been saying, Kris, we need a different business model. This thing is not going to work," Eisenberg said. "It's nothing about Green Hive. ... It was really about the nature of the legal issues. My hope is someone else picks them (up)."

Kimble insists that Eisenberg knew all along how The Green Hive planned to make money - from corporate sponsorships, product displays and rentals of the space. Room for corporate displays was built into early designs of the future space.

In April and earlier this month, Kimble took his frustration to the board of trustees. President Mona Field told him that the project had never been approved.

"That's a big old mess," Field said in an interview. "We have a guy who unfortunately was misled. I will say I think Larry or people working under Larry (are) responsible. They did not make clear that until the board votes, nothing is certain."

Now The Green Hive is left with five binders of correspondence between it and district officials. Among them is a 14-page contract - for which The Green Hive was paid $190,000 to design the downtown space - that is technically with a district contractor, though it's signed "on behalf of" Eisenberg.

A district attorney told Kimble's attorney that The Green Hive could not invoke a dispute resolution clause because the contract was not with LACCD.

"There is no contract," Eisenberg said.

Now Kimble and Robinson are hoping for a white knight to provide space for the resource center.

"We need to find a new home. Maybe some miracle will happen," Robinson said.

Meanwhile, Eisenberg said that only a small amount of the space at 811 Wilshire Blvd. was destined for The Green Hive, and the rest would go toward other district offices.

A greeting area for the district's personnel commission will be placed there, as will economic development offices and a showroom for furniture available for the district's nine colleges, Eisenberg said.

Robinson said she understands the legal reasons preventing The Green Hive from occupying the space, but notes it does not change the fact that the district spent a lot of money to design what will essentially become office space.

"They're going to say, gee, we screwed up, and we're putting a bunch of pencil-pushers in there," Robinson said.

DWP keeps bright idea dark

The Daily Breeze

By Melissa Pamer, Staff Writer
Posted: 05/22/2010 12:42:58 PM PDT

At Harbor College, large solar panels cover the parking area at the back of the campus. But a dispute with the DWP is keeping the power off. (Brad Graverson Staff Photographer)

For more than five months, a vast expanse of photovoltaic panels at Harbor College has sat soaking in the California sunshine, waiting to provide electricity to the Wilmington campus.

But they're not plugged in. And it is not clear when they will be.

That's because the Los Angeles Community College District is still sorting out how to pay the eye-popping $25 million price tag for the solar panels — and how to get the local utility to approve their use.

Work stopped just short of completion late last fall on Harbor College's solar farm, which a division of oil giant Chevron installed atop steel pillars above two campus parking lots.

The district's intention had been that Chevron Energy Solutions would own the solar equipment and sell the resulting power to the college district, using federal and state alternative energy incentives to bring down the cost. After six years, LACCD would have bought the equipment.

But district officials failed to get that arrangement approved by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. When DWP declared that a third party could not sell electricity to the college, Chevron wanted the district to pay its construction bills.

"The reality is this steel is in the ground. These projects are just sitting there," said interim Chancellor Tyree Wieder at a board of trustees meeting earlier this month. "If we finish them, they belong to Chevron."

It's a mess that district officials, lawyers and consultants have been working for months to clean up.

The conundrum represents a small portion of an ambitious, nearly $6 billion bond-funded construction campaign that college district officials have heavily promoted as the nation's largest "green" building effort. Branded as BuildLACCD, the campaign grew in 2006 to include a proposal for one of the biggest solar installations in the country.

Behind the grand plans, the nine-college district has encountered the proverbial devil among the details.

Right now, the question is: Where will the money come from for projects — at Harbor College and Pierce College in Woodland Hills — that are already built?

"That's the big screw-up," said Mona Field, president of the district's board of trustees. "I didn't know we were approving projects without having the money. ... It has turned into a bit of a mess, I must admit."

Citigroup lease brokered

For the past few weeks, the nine-campus community college district — the nation's largest — has been negotiating a complex deal to get a division of Citigroup to pay off Chevron.

The bank, which has already provided a short-term loan to pay most of what is owed Chevron, would lease the solar equipment back to the college district, which would eventually buy it.

Larry Eisenberg, the man some call the "visionary" behind BuildLACCD's green tinge, said he expects DWP to approve the lease and grant a state rebate to the project this coming week. (A spokeswoman for DWP said department officials had received the district's application but would could not comment on a customer account.)

Eisenberg, executive director of facilities planning and development, acknowledged the district had experienced some difficulty, but he said it was encountered while helping to pioneer a new kind of financing arrangement for solar installations.

"We're sort of learning as we're going. It would be nice if there had been a road map, but somebody had to go first," Eisenberg said. "In the process of going first, you wind up exploring a fair number of dead ends."

Inspector general sought

The twists and turns that took the district to those dead ends may soon be the subject of increased scrutiny as the board of trustees looks to tighten control over BuildLACCD.

Last week, trustees interviewed candidates for a new Office of the Inspector General, which will investigate claims of fraud and wrongdoing in the construction initiative. The position was approved in March, along with a new whistle blower program, after the board heard a report on misspending of bond funds.

With the passage of Propositions A, AA and Measure J in 2001, 2003 and 2008, respectively, the sprawling college district has seen the erection of much-needed educational facilities.

District officials have proudly promoted improvements to 9,400-student Harbor College — which had been derisively referred to as "Harbor High." The work is expected to total about $470 million.

The "green" direction in construction began in 2002, when board members voted to embrace sustainable building. They also set the goal of self-producing a quarter of the district's power needs.

After Eisenberg joined the district, he made a splash at a 2006 solar industry trade show by announcing plans to take the colleges "off the grid."

Photovoltaic panels were to be installed at each campus — enough to produce at least 1 megawatt of electricity, covering most of the schools' energy needs. A megawatt is enough to power about 1,000 homes.

Eisenberg said there was no funding plan at the time. The expectation was that savings would be found in college operating budgets, which allocate about $1 million per campus for energy costs, he said.

Now district officials say the trustees never approved the "off the grid" plan.

"I have a feeling this is a big problem," Field said. "The board never passed that policy. We never made that commitment."

Nonetheless, the board has repeatedly approved projects for solar installations at Harbor, which is set to produce more than 2 megawatts, and at Pierce College, Southwest College just east of Hawthorne, and East Los Angeles College.

Last year, Eisenberg told trustees that a combination of tax incentives and rebates would help leverage money that had been set aside from Measure J for energy projects.

But the details were unclear.

Chancellor: Details lacking

"For many people there has been a wait-and-see attitude about it — because the specifics had never been laid out," Chancellor Wieder said.

Board President Field said she remembers being told that officials would "piece together" the best deal possible.

She noted that board members have no staff to help analyze the multimillion-dollar projects before them, and said she had to trust district officials.

"I would say, in general, we vote on what's given to us. Occasionally we raise questions and usually we vote on the way that's recommended," Field said. "I am feeling concerned that things went on a tangent that was a little bit more than what was intended."

Matters have been complicated by shifting financing possibilities for solar projects.

As part of the stimulus package, the federal government last year extended an offer that would rebate 30 percent of the cost of solar installations — but only for businesses or homeowners, not for tax-exempt institutions like the community college district.

In December, the district learned it could secure the federal rebate by using a financing structure that Eisenberg said was similar to a mortgage — with Citigroup, in this case, acting as the lender.

At a May 12 meeting, the board of trustees gave Chancellor Wieder power to execute an agreement with Citigroup.

Now the district is awaiting DWP's final approval, along with a consultant's report showing how likely the federal government is to give the full rebate.

There is concern that the high cost of the project will raise eyebrows among federal officials. Costs have come down dramatically since the projects were approved, Eisenberg said.

"Maybe we overdid it. Maybe we didn't, I don't know," Field said. "Maybe in 10 years, everybody will be saying how brilliant we were."

Deal could save millions

If approved, the deal is expected to save the college district about $7 million for the projects at Harbor and Pierce colleges, which are both in DWP territory.

Eisenberg said DWP is supportive of the new financing plans. The utility would not agree to the earlier arrangement — in which Chevron owned the solar installation and the power it would produce — because it could not permit sale of electricity by a third party, Eisenberg said.

A section of the Los Angeles city charter governing DWP bars the sale of power by anyone other than the utility.

(That's not an issue at East L.A. and Southwest colleges because they are in Southern California Edison territory. Under state law, investor-owned utilities such as Edison are required to approve third-party agreements.)

Eisenberg said the college district had gone ahead with the projects believing officials could persuade DWP to support the deal with Chevron's ownership of the solar panels.

"We were really confident, but clearly there was a risk element there," he said.

Meanwhile, there's more money yet to be spent. Once financing is in place, the district will need to add a $500,000 electrical substation to Harbor College before all of the panels can be switched on.

That will take several months to build.

New president's priority

Marvin Martinez, the soon-to-be president of Harbor College and the current economic development director for the college district, said the delay is cause for concern. He has sat on a district energy committee that has overseen the solar projects.

"In hindsight, probably the deal working with DWP should have been developed much more ahead of time. What we have now is: The solar panels are there and we want to make sure DWP will help us with that and help develop an agreement," Martinez said. "When I'm there, no doubt, that will be one of my top priorities."

Outgoing Harbor College President Linda Spink has said she's argued for the district to use the bond funds and operate the solar panels itself — avoiding the conflict with DWP while losing the savings from the federal rebate.

Her operating budget would see a huge savings from reduced energy costs.

"Ultimately, it's the right thing to do for the environment," Spink said. "I just wish it would get resolved so we can turn the switch on."

CSUDH honors WWII internees

Daily Breeze

By Douglas Morino Staff Writer
Posted: 05/21/2010 07:43:16 PM PDT

In many ways, Louise Miyake Morita was a typical 20-year-old college student when war broke out in the Pacific.

When she wasn't working towards her business degree at California State University, Fresno, she helped out on the family ranch. She enjoyed playing piano and was among the top students in her class.

Then, in the winter of 1942, her life became anything but typical.

Morita and her family, along with more than 120,000 others of Japanese ancestry, were ordered by the federal government into interment camps spread across the country.

Morita was never able to earn her degree.

Like Morita, Terushi Naritoku was forced to leave Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, where he was studying agriculture, when his family boarded a train to an Arkansas internment camp.

A journey spanning nearly six decades came to a close Friday when Morita, 88, and Naritoku, 89, received honorary degrees from the California State University system, signaling the end of an education they never got the chance to complete.

The Nisei Honorary Degree Project, made possible by the passage of legislation in 2006 authored by Assemblyman Warren Furutani, D-Carson, calls for honorary diplomas to be awarded to Nisei - or second-generation Japanese Americans - who were enrolled in University of California, CSU and community college campuses when they were forced into internment camps during World War II.

"It's a teaching moment," Furutani said before graduation ceremonies Friday at California State University, Dominguez Hills, where the degrees where awarded. "It's about realizing the importance of learning from past mistakes so we don't repeat them again."

Family members of Morita and Naritoku, both longtime South Bay residents, said the honorary diplomas provide closure and a chance to live family history.

"They suffered in silence," said Donna Morita, explaining many of her mother's stories from the internment camps that she told for the first time once she learned she would receive an honorary degree.

"I didn't know how much the experience changed their lives and how it influenced me," she added.

In 1942, more than 2,500 Japanese American students were enrolled in California universities.

After the federal government passed executive order 9066 in February of that year, Morita, along with the rest of her family, was transferred from the fertile farm lands of central California to the barren swamps of southeast Arkansas.

For two years they lived in military barracks, sleeping in beds of straw. Life dragged on.

"We didn't have much to do," Morita said.

After returning from the camp, she eventually settled in Los Angeles, taking a job as a clerical worker. Each of her three children went on to earn college degrees.

"They were determined to make a better life for themselves and their children," Donna Morita said. "In order to get that better life, they believed in education."

Naritoku, whose father emigrated from Japan in the early 20th century, was a sophomore at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo when Japanese war planes attacked Pearl Harbor. His family was transferred to Santa Anita Race Track before relocating to a camp in Rohwer, Arkansas.

The camp was crowded, Naritoku remembered. It was surrounded by barbed wire fence and armed guards.

"The conditions there were horrible," said his son Wesley Naritoku. "There was no privacy; there was no running water in the bathrooms."

After leaving the camp, Naritoku eventually returned to the Los Angeles-area, where he worked for an orthodontist.

Each of his three children would go on to earn university degrees.

"He worked very hard to support his family so that they could pursue their dreams," Wesley Naritoku said. "He never talked about his experience. I think that the Nisei Diploma Project has, in a sense, provided closure for both his camp experience as well as his college experience."

Only six CSU campuses were open in 1942 - Fresno, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, San Luis Obispo and Pomona. Because of its location, Cal State Dominguez Hills was chosen as the award site for Morita and Naritoku.

University President Mildred Garcia said she believed the honorary degrees are long overdue.

"We are proud to hold the ceremony here," Garcia said. "This is about social justice and it's important that history be righted."

CSUDH to host interned WWII students

The Daily Breeze

From staff reports
Posted: 05/09/2010 09:28:06 PM PDT

☐ Campus to host interned WWII students

Carson. California State University, Dominguez Hills, has been selected as the host university in the greater Los Angeles region to honor former Japanese-American students who were removed from CSU campuses and incarcerated at wartime camps during World War II.

Louise Isako Miyake, who attended Fresno State in 1942 and now lives in the South Bay area, has been identified and will receive an honorary bachelor of humane letters degree on May 21 during a 7 p.m. commencement ceremony at the university.

A special reception will take place earlier in the week.

University officials would like help in locating others from the area who could participate in the special recognition.

The six CSU campuses where students attended in the 1940s that are granting the honorary degrees at 2010 commencement ceremonies are: Fresno, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, San Luis Obispo and Pomona, which had been a branch of San Luis Obispo.

Cal State Dominguez Hills will serve as the Los Angeles-area host.

To learn more the CSU Nisei Honorary Degree Project and the Cal State Dominguez Hills ceremony on May 21, visit

Editorial: San Mateo County Community College District deserves support; vote yes on Measure G

San Mateo Times Editorial

Posted: 05/24/2010 08:00:00 PM PDT

The San Mateo County Community College District needs Measure G to pass to retain vital programs and services for county residents in an era of severe budget constraints over which the district has no control.

Measure G, if approved by two-thirds of the electorate June 8, would accomplish that goal at a modest annual cost to property owners of $34. That works out to less than a dime a day. The Times recommends a yes vote.

The district, which traces its Peninsula roots all the way back to 1922, is an integral and invaluable community resource. It needs a steady infusion of cash because the state of California, which controls community college dollars, is in fiscal disarray. A devastating national recession, combined with a collapse in state property values, has wreaked havoc.

As Sacramento authorities continue to struggle with massive budget deficits, community colleges are feeling the pinch. But the state's network of two-year institutions should be maintained to provide an affordable educational safety valve during a period of extreme financial challenge — tuition for in-state students is just $26 per unit.

San Mateo County's three community colleges — Cañada College in Redwood City, Skyline College in San Bruno and the College of San Mateo — educate more than 40,000 people a year.

The district's operating budget this year is $108 million, down 8 percent from the previous year. Measure G, if approved, would restore about two-thirds of that. The money, which cannot be taken away by the state, would be used to preserve programs and services.

The Times believes Measure G makes good sense. The $34 tax, for four years, would not be an unbearable burden, and property owners 65 and older can opt out.

Balloting by mail has already begun. If the electorate gives Measure G a thumbs-up, it will be a first for California. None of the state's community college districts has a parcel tax today.

We believe it's time to change that. Vote yes on Measure G.

San Jose-based community college promises greater oversight after chancellor probe

Mercury News

By Lisa M. Krieger

Posted: 05/21/2010 07:02:54 PM PDT

Months after Chancellor Rosa Perez went on sick leave amid a financial scandal, the San Jose/Evergreen Community College District Board is tightening its oversight of campus administrators and will ask the county's district attorney to investigate whether Perez broke the law.

A long-awaited independent investigation of Perez by the law firm Meyers Nave, released Friday, concluded that the chancellor may have violated conflict-of-interest laws by buying a house and sharing bills with her partner, Bayinaah Jones, whom she supervised. It also found that Perez violated some district policies and that her travel — 39 domestic and international trips during a four-year period — was excessive and "not a cost-effective use of the District funds."

"We are taking responsibility for not seeing that all policies and procedures were enforced," said district board Trustee Ron Lind. "It will help us doing a better job going forward."

"We have learned from that mistake," said Lind. "We not only want a chancellor who is aligned with our values, but expected to follow the day-to-day policies and procedures."

The $160,000 review was prompted by a Mercury News and KGO-TV investigation in November that found that even as community colleges were being forced to cut classes and eliminate programs, Perez was engaged in questionable spending.

Perez, who is paid $293,000 a year, has been on paid sick leave since November and will retire in June, rather than return to work. Raised in a pueblo in El Salvador, she graduated from Stanford and ascended through the ranks of academic administration. She will receive a retirement package but will not receive a bonus because she did not work to the end of her contract. Jones also is on sick leave.

Efforts to reach Perez by telephone Friday were unsuccessful.

A civil grand jury report last fall arrived at similar conclusions but the district board rejected its recommendations, saying that on-the-job travel and conference costs were an appropriate expenditure of public funds.

Two additional investigations, including one from the state Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team, will be completed and released within the next several weeks.

Perez charged the district and its foundation for perks that included overnight stays at San Jose's luxury Fairmont Hotel, a tour of El Salvador, airfare to Scotland and membership in the Silicon Valley Capital Club. Perez also spent $23,442 in Measure G bond funds to buy and frame a Salvadorean painting, which is currently on display at Evergreen College. Jones, hired two months after Perez, joined her on many trips.

Budget cuts have forced the cancellation of classes and programs for low-income students and working parents. They come at a time of unprecedented demand because of unemployment and enrollment reduction at California's universities.

In releasing the findings, Lind said that "her values, and the values of the district, were aligned. She got us more involved in the community. She improved the lives of our students. So we were so focused on the good work she was doing that we didn't spend as much time on her receipts and travel."

"It's disappointing. She should be fired," said San Jose City College photography professor Ciaran MacGowan. Specifically, the investigation found:

- Perez was involved in decisions regarding the employment of Jones and failed to disclose
- to the board that the two had bought a house together in San Francisco and shared house expenses. Jones was qualified for each of the positions she held, they found. But Perez's conduct could result in a violation of state conflict-of-interest laws and so-called "common law" conflict-of-interest principals.
- The number of times that Jones accompanied Perez on domestic trips, paid through the Chancellor's budget, was excessive. Jones attended at least 24 conferences outside the Bay Area, 12 of which Perez also attended. Jones also traveled to 18 conferences within the Bay Area, at least three of which Perez also attended.
- Perez's travel was excessive and not a cost-effective use of the district funds. Encouraged to travel to promote the district and develop professionally, she made 39 trips during her four-year period.
- Perez did not reimburse the district for the cost of her son's airfare to Los Angeles, but she did reimburse the district for other personal expenses.
- Perez's purchase of home office supplies, tables at community social events, membership and meals at the Capital Club were all permitted by her employment contract. There was no limit on home office spending in her contract.
- Perez violated district policy by permitting an advance payment to an advertising agency for work that has yet to be completed.

The district is following the report's recommendation to change several policies and procedures, such as adopting more accurate accounting for expenses incurred during travel. It also will require that chancellors, presidents and administrators report any financial interests they share with those they supervise; chancellors receive board approval for travel outside the Bay Area; a district administrator oversee the chancellor's day-to-day expenditures, and that the chancellor's budget be more closely examined to determine how it is allocated and spent.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
To see the report, go to
www.sjeccd.edu/HTML/AboutUs/attachments/SJECCD_Investigative_Report.pdf

California's Deal With Kaplan
May 26, 2010
Last fall, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office announced what some perceived as a partial solution to the budget-related enrollment restrictions that threatened to disrupt the educational plans of many students. Under a memorandum of understanding with Kaplan University, students at certain community colleges would be able to take specific online courses – at a steep discount off the for-profit institution's normal tuition rates, though still paying significantly more than they would at their own college – with the assurance that the credits would transfer back to their home institutions, allowing them to stay on track to earn an associate degree.

Six months later, though it is unclear how many students have taken advantage of the option, critics view the deal as at best an "evil necessity" and at worst a dereliction by community college and state leaders of their responsibility to ensure a low-cost postsecondary education for state residents. Some also worry that Kaplan's marketing of the agreement gives prospective students the appearance of a state endorsement of the company in particular and for-profit education in general.

Kaplan's California Education Assistance Programs give associate-degree students at California community colleges with which Kaplan has an articulation agreement -- the program is being tested only at a limited number of institutions right now – a 42 percent tuition discount when they enroll in individual courses. Textbooks are included in the cost of tuition.

Still, this is not a cheap endeavor. A standard three-credit online course at Kaplan costs $1,113, and a discounted three-credit course there costs California students $645. By comparison, a three-credit course at a California community college costs a mere $78. Despite the cost, Kaplan officials believe they are helping the state's community colleges at a difficult time.

"Kaplan University recognized that California Community Colleges were facing unprecedented challenges and we knew there was an opportunity to help," Jaime Cocuy, vice president for Kaplan's Strategic Alliances Organization, wrote in an e-mail. "Offering single online courses provides students with an innovative opportunity to complete their education on time. It's a solution to a problem. We didn't come into this arrangement with any preconceived expectations. If we can help one student, that's good enough for us. However, offering single course options is not our primary mission. We came to an agreement with the Chancellor's Office that we thought would help students and focus on student success. Once students have an experience with Kaplan University, they might decide that what we're offering is the best option for them, in which case they may choose to attend Kaplan for their bachelor's degree. We are all about expanding access to higher education."

Scott Lay, president of the Community College League of California, a nonprofit advocacy group representing the state’s 72 local two-year-college districts, doubts that the single-course option at Kaplan will appeal to many of the state's community college students.

“Not many students are going to willingly pay [$645] for a class when they can pay $78,” Lay said. “There are some students who are saying, ‘What’s most important for me is getting a degree.’ For them, it may be a wise investment. But I imagine interest in this program will wane as enrollment demand declines over the next few years. Right now we're at the peak of California high school graduation and, with 2.3 million unemployed in the state, we hope we're at the peak of that as well."

Lay believes the deal is an unfortunate consequence of the state's disinvestment in public higher education in recent years. He noted that it was perceived as one of the few options -- though not an ideal one -- to keep the path to degree completion open for some students.

"I think the initial reaction was surprise because this was a unique [MOU] with the for-profit sector, a perceived competitor of community colleges," Lay said. "It's just a sign of the triage that's going on in California higher education. We're not always happy about the decisions we make in triage, but we want to make sure we keep people in higher education. If we don't think outside of the box, that might not always be possible. Even though it breaks the hearts of supporters of public education, we can't wait a decade until our budget situation remedies itself. This model may help some students."

Jane Patton, president of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges and a communications professor at Mission College, is less forgiving in her assessment of the Kaplan deal.

"I know [Chancellor Jack Scott's] heart was in the right place when he made this agreement, but we're just not convinced this is the right way to do it," Patton said. "The initial concern faculty had with the [memorandum of understanding] was that we were not consulted when it was written. A lot of [individual California community] colleges were approached by Kaplan before then and told them, 'No, thank you.' We would have been more than happy to let the chancellor know our concerns, but we weren't involved in the process, even though this is an academic matter and affects students and their ability to transfer."

Patton added that faculty representation had been a part of ratifying prior memorandums of understanding. For example, she noted that the Academic Senate vetted and ultimately approved an agreement with National University, a San Diego-based private nonprofit institution with branches throughout the state, a few years ago. In that case, she added that faculty were able to put in protections they thought necessary to ensure proper transferability of credit. With the Kaplan deal, Patton says, students may not be getting the transferability they think that they are getting.

"If a student takes five or so courses with Kaplan, they may be able to take these credits back to their community college but there's no telling whether a [California State University] will take it or not," said Patton, noting that a student may simply choose to forgo the stress of figuring out how to transfer these credits back to a public institution and go on to pursue a baccalaureate with Kaplan instead. "Articulation is a major concern here."

Terri Carbaugh, a spokeswoman for the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, argues that the MOU should assuage some of these transferability concerns. As the Chancellor's Office cannot prevent Kaplan from marketing itself to California community college students on a single-course basis, she believes the recent agreement gives Kaplan guidance on how it should go about this process for those who are interested in taking advantage of it.

“In the event students taking Single Courses wish to pursue their baccalaureate degree at a [California State University] or [University of California] institution, [Kaplan] will ensure articulation agreements are in place between [Kaplan] and the [California community college] that stipulate Single Courses provided by [Kaplan] will be accepted by a CSU or UC in lieu of the community college’s own transferable course,” the memorandum reads.

Carbaugh said it is incumbent on Kaplan to ensure that these articulation agreements exist and work as intended.

“I think it’s important to note that we don’t have oversight authority over Kaplan, or any private for-profit for that matter,” Carbaugh said. “In the same way that we have a dialogue with UC and CSU, we want to make sure we have a dialogue with Kaplan. We felt it better to work with them and try to educate those institutions on the value of transferability. Whether or not [transfer works] 100 percent [of the time] or [Kaplan] gets these transfer agreements, that’s up to them."

The California Legislature is currently considering a bill that would change how and which credits are transferable between the state’s community colleges and institutions within the California State University System. It is unclear whether this piece of legislation would ensure the seamless transferability of these Kaplan credits, and Lay and Patton are divided in their interpretation of it.

Unlike the California State System, however, the University of California system is not beholden to the Legislature on issues of credit transferability, and the faculties at each institution determine which courses they will and will not accept. As many University of California campuses still do not accept certain community college credits, it is likely that Kaplan credits would meet a similar fate.

“I’m hard pressed to see where we could modify this [MOU] to make it favorable to faculty,” Patton said. “I appreciate the chancellor trying to keep opportunities open, but we didn’t need to do this. There are other options out there. For instance, virtually every California community college offers courses online. If I’m in the Bay Area and I want to take a philosophy course and can’t get it at my college, then I bet there’s a college somewhere in the state where I can take it online.”

In spite of the criticism, Lay is encouraged by at least one portion of the agreement with Kaplan. The memorandum requires that Kaplan provide to the Chancellor’s Office “the current number of enrolled students and transfer students and their persistence rates for each transferring institution.” Garnering this data from a for-profit institution that does not often share it is a worthy outcome, Lay said.

“I think most people see this as an incentive from, at best, an evil necessity,” Lay said. “But, if you have to go down that road, then let’s see what we can get out of it. This will allow for better tracking of our students who are coming and going and taking classes at multiple institutions.”

This data will also give the Chancellor's Office the necessary information to judge the success of this agreement when the time comes to decide whether to renew it or not, Carbaugh said. To date, she said, the Chancellor's Office has not been able to track how many students transferred credits to and from Kaplan, but it was able to do so for various other for-profit institutions.

"Data shows us a 10 year increasing trend line of transfers to for-profit universities – from 6 to 12.9 percent," Carbaugh noted via e-mail. "This data shows low income, black, Hispanic and women are more likely to make this decision, even though it is an expensive option. … This is why the data portion of the [memorandum of understanding] is important to the Chancellor's Office. We are paying close attention to where our transfer students go -- public 4-year, private nonprofit 4-year, private for-profit, etc."

Carbaugh said that, in deciding whether to renew the deal in two years, the Chancellor's Office would also have to consider the perception among critics that this agreement amounts to an explicit endorsement of Kaplan.

"I appreciate the gist of what critics are saying, that the nature of the [memorandum of understanding] gives credibility to Kaplan," Carbaugh said. "By our partnering with them, there's an assumption that it's a good thing. We're sensitive to the fact that the perception exists. We're not trying to endorse one for-profit over another or the for-profits in general. It's possible we underestimated the extent to which this would be marketed by Kaplan. We can see it's being used as a marketing tool for them. But, the extent to which this agreement provides protection and assurance for students, the jury's still out. We'll just have to watch over a period of two years and see how it has served students."

Whether the agreement with the Chancellor's Office is renewed or not, Kaplan officials are optimistic about their institution's future in the Golden State.

"This is not a short term initiative," Cocuy wrote. "We've been serving California students for many years and have a long-term commitment to helping them meet their academic and career goals. Before the [memorandum of understanding], we had transfer agreements with 75 California community colleges. We'll continue to support these and other new relationships that focus on student success in California."

— David Moltz

L.A. college district agrees to lease part of former Van de Kamp site to city
LA Now

May 26, 2010

The Los Angeles Community College District agreed Wednesday to lease just under half of the renovated Van de Kamp bakery building to the city of Los Angeles to operate job training and placement classes and offices.

The decision came over raucous protest from the community group that fought to turn the historic Glassell Park building into a satellite campus of Los Angeles City College, a plan the district has said it had to abandon because of state budget cuts. Members of the Van de Kamp Coalition accused the seven trustees of making a backroom deal to get revenue from the city, which will pay $400,000 rent over four years.

"You have turned this site into a profit-seeking site," coalition member Laura Gutierrez said.

Trustees, who approved the lease on a 7-0 vote, said there was no way they could afford to run a satellite campus. "The district had to cut 6,000 classes this year," trustee Georgia Mercer said. "We could not predict the whole world economy could be so impacted."

Another building constructed as part of the $72-million project, funded with voter-approved bond money, was rented to a charter school last year. Part of the rent money will go to cover $150,000 in tenant improvements made to the Van de Kamp building to accommodate the city. The district's legal counsel ruled earlier that state law prohibited spending bond money on tenant improvements.

-- Gale Holland

The Report a College Didn't Want Read
Inside Higher Ed

May 27, 2010

A set of documents that a Wyoming community college tried to bar a local newspaper from publishing were made public Wednesday, and indicate that the college's president mishandled a response to the suicidal behaviors of a student while leading a 2008 class trip to Costa Rica.

Citing the student's rights under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, administrators at Laramie County Community College had, since April, been attempting to stop the *Wyoming Tribune Eagle* from obtaining -- and publishing a news story on – the internal report produced by the college's Care Team, a group of faculty and staff who help "individuals of concern" gain access to counseling and other support services.

Laramie County District Judge Peter G. Arnold issued a restraining order against the paper last week pending further examination of the case. The college said it worried about violating FERPA and losing access to federal funding, but after reviewing the case, the judge ruled the college's concerns were "purely speculative and not supported by any evidence before the court."

The college's public relations office all referred questions to Brenda Lyttle, chair of its board of trustees. Administrators and the board were resistant to releasing the report, she said, because it "dealt with a student and … we wanted a judge to make a decision about whether we could release it."

Based on written statements submitted by several students and the college's president, Darrel L. Hammon, and included with the report, the Care Team found that the student had "exhibited behaviors that required a trained professional that understands mental health disorders to manage the situation," it wrote in a letter to Hammon. On the first night of the trip, Hammon said in his account, the student "took more than her normal prescription and became, consequently, hyperactive." From then on, he asked another student, who had been trained as an emergency medical technician, to be the first student's "pharmacist" and ensure that she took the right dosage. Over the course of the trip, the same student repeatedly made suicidal statements, threatened to run into a forest and not return, and tried to buy a large knife at a gift shop.

College employees on the trip should have notified the Care Team and the college's director of counseling "from the onset of a crisis involving a student of concern, to provide immediate assistance and support," the letter said. The team, it continued, "needs to be utilized and therefore empowered by administration."

Though Hammon is not identified by name in the letter, the student statements and Hammon's own account point to his misconduct. In its Wednesday story, the *Tribune Eagle* said its reporting indicated that "the administrator in question was Hammon."

Instead of notifying the Care Team or seeking medical help in Costa Rica, college employees asked other students on the trip to keep tabs on the suicidal student. Students, the Care Team wrote, “felt pressure to assist” because of “the power differential that existed in the relationship between administration and student participants.”

Lyttle said she was “not in a position to comment” on whether Hammon or other administrators had properly handled the student’s suicidal behaviors. The board, she said, had not yet met to “discuss what’s in the report or if there’s any action we should take.”

The Care Team said the student should have been sent home after it was clear that she was suicidal, but suggested that, in future, the college take steps to prevent similar incidents, including a more thorough selection of chaperones and training for those chaperones.

Though the trip was for a biology class, it was led by Hammon, who holds a Ph.D. in English. One of his daughters, who the *Tribune Eagle* reported was not listed on the trip’s roster, was one of the chaperones

— Jennifer Epstein

FRANCO, WALKER TOP SCHOLAR-ATHLETES AT COMPTON

THE WAVE

By RON GUILD, Sports Editor
Story Published: May 28, 2010 at 12:03 PM PDT

Baseball players Alfredo Lopez and Glen Walker and women's soccer player Diana Franco came away with special recognition Thursday at the El Camino College Compton Center athletic department academic awards ceremony.

Lopez, the shortstop for the Tartars, made history as the program's first JC All-American in baseball. He batted .414 and was state in the state in stolen bases with 31. He was the Rawlings Big Stick Award winner as Southern Regional player of the year.

He has signed with NAIA school Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, but is also keeping an eye on the upcoming major league draft.

"He is one of the fastest guys in California, if not the fastest," Compton baseball coach Shannon Williams said.

The program, itself, made history by advancing to the regional playoffs for the first time in school history.

Walker, another of Williams players, was named Compton's male scholar-athlete of the year. A .432 hitter who is headed to Jackson State, Walker had a perfect 4.0 grade point average.

Franco, who has a 3.6, is the female scholar-athlete of the year. She is bound for Long Beach State.

Football player Robert Brown, a 3.6 student, received a $1,000 scholarship for his achievements. Men's soccer player Luis Paredes, who has a 3.8 GPA, also got a $1,000 scholarship.

Signings: Besides Walker, other Tartar baseball players moving on are catcher Keith Murakami to Stoney Brook in New York, Antonio Paraza, Lopez and Jose Madera to Vanguard university, Marcus Taylor to Texas College, Kamon Gardner to Prairie View, Micheal Jenks and Eric Miranda to La Verne, and Juve Reyes and Mario Madera Upper Iowa.

Other sophomores waiting on acceptances to universities are James Gonzalez, Manuel Meza, Jeremiah Hotchner and Miguel Beltran.

Community College's Scholarship Catches Grief

US News

May 28, 2010 04:33 PM ET | Jeff Greer

If the new laws in Arizona didn't do enough to make the immigration fire hotter, a new scholarship for illegal immigrants at a California community college will.

The scholarship to Santa Ana College is in memory of Tam Ngoc Tran, a former Santa Ana student and illegal immigrant who was killed in a car accident on May 15. Tran was on the path to U.S. citizenship and an ardent DREAM Act activist, pushing for legislation that would allow illegal immigrants to receive financial aid for college. Tran attended UCLA after studying at Santa Ana. The 27-year-old Californian was working on a doctorate at Brown University when she was killed.

The goal of the scholarship is to help a student on a path to citizenship, Sara Lundquist, vice president of student affairs at Santa Ana, tells the *Orange County Register*.

"Tam dedicated her time and energy advocating for children of undocumented immigrants who were brought into this country and grew up as Americans, but are not even permanent residents," Lundquist tells the *Register*.

Santa Ana College will match $2,500 in scholarship funds, and the school hopes others will add to the fund and make its impact even greater. Lundquist says the school wants to make it an annual scholarship. Requirements for the scholarship are a 3.0 or higher grade-point average and evidence of financial need, the report says.

"The award recipient should also be someone who will continue their education and go into a university after Santa Ana College," Lundquist said.

But the new scholarship has its fair share of opponents. Republican Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, who represents parts of Orange County, "blasted" the use of financial aid funds for illegal immigrants, the *Register* reports. Rohrabacher wrote a letter to Santa Ana President Erlina Martinez. While acknowledging the tragic death of Tran, Rohrabacher wrote that "channeling our scarce resources to illegal immigrants, even if they are students, is unforgivable at a time when so many of our citizens and legal residents are struggling to meet their own education needs."

Rohrabacher says the public financing of the scholarship is a direct "affront to law-abiding citizens [whose] tax dollars will foot the bill." According to the *Register*, the release announcing the scholarship says that the scholarship will be funded by the Santa Ana College Foundation, so no tax dollars or public money would be used. Either way, the topic is headed for some hot debate in the coming weeks and months.

New graduates find nursing job market a bitter pill

The Daily Breeze

By Melissa Evans Staff Writer
Posted: 06/01/2010

Lindsey Yuen figured if she could get into nursing school - and make it through - her job prospects for the future would be set.

In the midst of a reported nursing shortage, particularly in California with its strict patient-to-nurse ratios, nursing is the one career thought to be recession-proof. But recent graduates such as Yuen are finding that's not the case.

"I sent out about 80 resumes, and I made about 15 phone calls a day looking for a job," said Yuen, who graduated from California State University, Long Beach, in 2008. "I thought there were all these openings. ... It was discouraging. It took a lot more persistence than I imagined."

She eventually landed a job at Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center in Torrance, where she has worked for the last nine months. But she and others are finding it is not easy to find full-time work, even in a field of high demand.

Industry officials say this is indeed a strange and difficult time for nursing graduates. A confluence of factors - seasoned nurses postponing retirement, part-timers working more hours, elective surgeries being delayed and retention efforts by hospitals paying off - are frustrating new graduates.

For hospital administrators, this is a worrisome trend as well.

"Right now we're seeing a strange phenomenon, but there's no doubt that in two to four years, the tsunami of retirements is going to hit," said Kathy Harren, director of nursing at Little Company in Torrance. "When that happens, we will need these new nurses, and we need to make sure they are still in the field."

Nursing schools, hospitals and foundations are collaborating to get new graduates job experience and training during this recession-fueled lull so that skills don't lapse. They also hope these new nurses don't get frustrated and leave the field altogether - particularly those coming out of community colleges with associate degrees - which could dampen the state's efforts to build its nursing work force.

In 2006, California ranked last in the nation in the number of nurses per capita. Adding to the urgency, more than half of the state's 350,000-member nursing work force is expected to retire over the next decade.

Efforts to train new nurses, however, have slowly paid off. Since 2004, nursing schools have increased educational capacity by 53 percent, and in 2008 the largest class of graduates - a total of 9,580 nurses - entered the work force, according to the California Institute for Nursing and Health Care.

Yet 42 percent of last year's graduates still haven't found work, and 40 percent of this year's graduates will be unemployed as well, according to a survey conducted by the institute.

Even the most highly trained nursing school graduates, those with master's degrees, are having a difficult time finding work. Carol Massey, a former schoolteacher, went back to school for an advanced degree in nursing thinking these skills would be in high demand.

"It is frustrating," said Massey, who graduated this month from the nursing program at California State University, Dominguez Hills, in Carson. "There are such overwhelming numbers of nurses out there looking for work."

She recently applied at St. Jude Medical Center, and was told 1,400 others had applied for the position. Torrance Memorial Medical Center received 1,000 applications for 15 slots in its five-month residency program for new nurses that begins this summer, said Peggy Berwald, director of the program.

And, for the first time, the local hospital canceled its cohort of new training nurses in March because they didn't have enough job openings.

About two-thirds of hospitals around the state are hiring, but almost all reported overwhelming numbers of applicants for fewer numbers of open positions. In the last two years, the nursing vacancy rate at California hospitals has dipped from 7 percent to 4 percent, according to the nursing institute.

"The people who might have retired a few years ago are staying on, some past the age of 65," Berwald said. "We also see our per-diem workers start looking for permanent work, especially if they have a spouse out of work and need the benefits."

Torrance Memorial also has focused on retaining nurses by giving them extra support. As a result, first-year turnover slipped from 9 percent in 2008 to about 6 percent in 2009, officials said.

Clara Brisbin, also a spring graduate at CSU Dominguez Hills, recalls a public health event a few years ago where recruiters were offering incentives to come work for their facilities.

"It's not like that anymore," she said. "When I started, everyone was telling me I wouldn't have any problem getting a job. I've applied to several large hospitals and haven't gotten a response."

The new graduates said they went into nursing because they believed that caring for people would be a fulfilling career with high job security.

Before the current recession, they were right. California was forecast to have a shortage of about 116,000 nurses by 2020, due largely to the retirement of baby boomers, increased demand for health services and the state's strict requirement that no more than five patients be assigned to most nurses.

The California Employment Development Department has said the state's schools need to graduate roughly 9,900 nurses a year to replace those who are retiring.

Problem is, they aren't retiring - at least, not yet.

"It is physically tiring, but I see a lot of nurses working well into their 60s," said Margie Cambra, who has been in nursing for 26 years. "That encourages me to keep going. You have to love what you do in this profession."

At Little Company, where Cambra works, roughly 40 percent of the nursing staff is over the age of 50, which means new personnel will be in high demand in coming years.

"It's still a solid profession," Harren said. "We're just in the strangest phenomenon."

Little Company, CSU Dominguez Hills, El Camino College and Harbor College are among the groups working with the nursing institute to develop a new residency program to keep graduates in the work force and get them more training. The programs would be 12 to 18 weeks long, and would include acute specialty training, non-acute training and development of advanced skills.

Foundations have stepped up to provide funding for the collaboratives, which would be run out of nursing schools around the state. Thus far, five counties - including Los Angeles County - have begun the process of establishing these programs.

In the meantime, officials at nursing schools are doing what they can to encourage graduates.

"We're all in this together," said Carole Shea, director of the nursing program at CSU Dominguez Hills. "The real crux of the problem will come as we begin to see that all of this is going to reverse in a heartbeat. When that happens, there's going to be nobody in the program."

Riverside City College president resigns abruptly

By IMRAN GHORI
The Press-Enterprise

Riverside City College President Jan Muto announced her sudden departure Thursday after 16 months heading the nearly century-old campus.

Muto submitted her resignation, which takes effect Tuesday, to Riverside Community College District Chancellor Gregory Gray on Thursday, he said. In an e-mail that evening to faculty and staff she said it was time for her to make a "personal change."

"I really wanted to make it clear this was my decision," Muto said in a phone interview Friday.

She said her reasons were "strictly personal" and declined to elaborate.

Her announcement came two days after the district board of trustees held a special closed session meeting to discuss the possible dismissal of an employee. No decision was announced out of the two-hour discussion and no details were given about the position discussed.

Muto, who was packing up her belongings Friday, said no pressure was put on her to resign. Under the terms of her contract, she will remain on paid leave through December.

A former Kentucky community college educator with 25 years experience in higher education, Muto took over the RCC presidency in January 2009. She was selected after a national search during which the campus was without a permanent president for two years. Her appointment raised some objections from faculty and students who favored Linda Lacy, a longtime RCC educator who had served as interim president.

Muto is the second college president to resign abruptly in recent years and the fourth person to hold the job since 2005.

Gray declined to comment on how he and the board felt about Muto's performance.

He acknowledged "there has been a challenge with stable leadership at Riverside City College."

"A college presidency is a very difficult thing," Gray said. "Very qualified people can run into difficulty when there's not a good fit."

Gray will announce an interim president at Tuesday's board of trustees meeting and said he hopes a replacement will be appointed by January 2011. He said the interim president he plans to name is a former California community college chancellor and president.

A consulting agency will be hired to conduct a national search starting late summer or early fall, he said. Gray said the process will be a public one involving faculty, staff and students.

Muto led the 23,000-student college at a time when it had to eliminate more than 500 classes due to budget cuts.

"What's been remarkable is the institution's resilience to budget cuts and the ability of faculty and staff to make things work," she said.

Muto said she is proud of the college's achievements in performing arts and its plans to boost lower-income residents' enrollment that recently won a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.