

Prayers land college district in legal dispute

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By LINDSEY BAGUIO

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

School trustees and administrators who oversee two south Orange County community colleges are being sued by a group of faculty and students who contend they routinely lead official prayers at school ceremonies.

The federal lawsuit was filed on Thursday by Americans United for Separation of Church and State on behalf of several faculty members and students.

Saddleback College professors Karla Westphal, Alannah Rosenberg, Margot Lovett, and Claire Cesareo-Silva are named as plaintiffs. Also included are Roy Bauer, a professor at Irvine Valley College, Ashley Mockett, a recent Saddleback College graduate, and two anonymous students at Saddleback College.

They are seeking for a court ruling that finds the district in violation of the First Amendment and an order that prohibits school prayers at events.

The suit names as defendants school trustees, the president of Saddleback College, Tod A. Burnett, and Raghu P. Mathur, the district's chancellor.

The district referred comments regarding the case to its attorney David Llewellyn, a visiting professor at Chapman University who specializes in constitutional and civil rights law.

"The tradition of opening public events with an invocation goes back to the founding of the country," said Llewellyn. "It's as old as the country and the district would like to continue with that tradition."

"It's an issue that deserves attention in court and we hope it's properly resolved."

One of the incidents outlined in the lawsuit cites a faculty training session in August 2009 in which administrators showed a video titled "God Bless the USA." The video shows religious images and ended with two pictures of military personnel carrying a flag-draped coffin. Superimposed on the image was the quote "Only two defining forces have ever offered to die for you. Jesus Christ and the American G.I. One died for your soul, the other died for your freedom."

Westphal, a math professor at Saddleback College, is the lead plaintiff in the case.

Westphal, who has been a professor at Saddleback College since 2001, said the frequency of public prayers at school events began in 2004 when a trustee led a prayer at the beginning of a scholarship ceremony.

Westphal wrote to trustees expressing her opposition to the public prayer.

A week later a prayer was said at the opening of commencement. She said she was so angry she can't remember what was said.

"The prayer does not belong, period. The content doesn't matter," Westphal said. "There is no way you can water it down to make it inoffensive... watering it down can make it offensive to people who are religious."

It was in that year that Westphal got in touch with Americans United and the American Civil Liberties Union.

"When the prayers initially started I hoped to get it settled without a lawsuit and that just didn't happen," Westphal said. "The suit is a culmination of a long process. I've been working with Americans United for a long time. They wrote letters to the board formally asking for the change. For me there wasn't any particular event. I've been ready for several years. It was a question of whether Americans United felt it was a good time to bring the case forward."

Redefining Access and Success Inside Higher Ed

December 4, 2009

College and university leaders are regularly criticized for making too little information available or presenting only the data that show them in the best light.

No such statement can be made about the leaders of 24 public college systems that on Thursday - as part of a two-year-old initiative aimed at boosting college completion and closing racial and socioeconomic gaps in enrollment and graduation -- released extensive data about their performance on those fronts.

The data collected by Education Trust and the National Association of System Heads, as part of the Access to Success initiative, represent a breakthrough of sorts, in that they suggest a path to improving on the existing federal graduation rate and other data that are widely acknowledged to be inadequate (that's the polite term). By including part-time students and those who transfer in and out of a system's member institutions, they nearly double the number of students covered by the existing federal graduation rate measure.

And by attaching to the systems' data an indicator of their students' low-income status -- by tagging those who are eligible to receive Pell Grants -- the Access to Success data make it possible, for the first time, to gauge how successful the college systems are at enrolling and graduating low-income students.

Because of those changes, the picture provided by the data is, as Chancellor Charles Reed of the California State University System said during a news conference about the initiative Thursday, "much more realistic" than what has previously been available.

The more realistic picture is not necessarily a pretty one, though. While each college system in the Education Trust initiative is assessed by comparing data on their students with those of their states' overall populations -- the individual systems' reports can be found here -- the report also examines them at the national level. And given that the 24 systems enroll 40 percent of the nation's four-year students and 20 percent of all undergraduates, the data provide a clear -- and in many ways "scary," said Kati Haycock, Education Trust's president -- picture of a country where low-income and minority students badly lag their peers in college enrollment and completion.

Those students enroll in and graduate from four-year programs at disproportionately lower rates than do other high school graduates in their respective states, and while low-income and minority students are overrepresented at two-year institutions compared to their proportions among high school graduates, they are underrepresented among students who finish two-year programs because so few transfer or earn a credential or degree.

The data show that "there is a lot of work ahead for these institutions," said Haycock. But while she and her group are often known as tough critics of educational leaders at both the secondary and postsecondary level, Haycock was effusive in praising the leaders of the 24 college systems

for voluntarily making these data public, committing their institutions to improving the figures -- and not abandoning the effort despite serious budget travails in most states. (In fact, the number of participating systems has grown from 19 when it was announced two years ago to 24 now, and two -- the University System of Ohio and the University of Wisconsin System -- joined just last summer, well after the economy had deteriorated.

"It's a pretty big deal that this many systems that educate this large fraction of America's undergraduates are willing to commit themselves to this set of goals, and willing to give the data over to the likes of us," she said in an interview. "And to take it on at a time when most are facing what can only be described as draconian budget cuts is daunting."

Ahead of the Pack

The Access to Success initiative was announced two years ago, in November 2007, well before President Obama, spurred by leading foundations, laid out his goal of restoring the United States to the top of the list of countries in the proportion of their citizens with a postsecondary education.

The point made by Access to Success, and its leaders and members, is that the country can't get there unless colleges and universities do better with low-income and minority students, whose share of the country's population is growing by the day, and who have historically been underrepresented -- and sometimes ill-served -- in higher education.

Some higher education leaders frame the issue -- as the Obama administration largely does -- as an economic matter. In Louisiana, said Sally Clausen, commissioner of higher education there, the white population is expected to grow at a 4-6 percent rate over the next several years, while the number of low-income and minority residents in the state will rise by 70 percent. "If all racial and ethnic groups, and people of low income, had the same educational attainment of other populations here, if all were equally entering and succeeding in higher education, the personal income of Louisiana's population would be \$10 billion higher," she said. So the state cannot afford not to achieve Access to Success's goal.

The issue is one of civil rights, too, said William E. (Brit) Kirwin, chancellor of the University System of Maryland, another Access to Success participant. (See full list of participating states at the bottom of the article.)

"A college education has become the passport to a meaningful job and a high quality of life," Kirwin said. "The current impact of poverty on the ability and opportunity to get a college degree is just devastating, and if this initiative isn't successful, we'll be relegating a large fraction of the population to a permanent state of poverty. That's not what our country stands for."

The first big challenge that Education Trust and the system heads' group faced after setting the goal of cutting the racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps in half was in defining, precisely, what those gaps are. The federal graduation rate and the data from which it is derived, which come from the IPEDS, are widely acknowledged to be flawed, most notably because they count only full-time, first-time freshmen at a time when they represent a shrinking fraction of students.

"It was pretty clear" to leaders of the initiative that "IPEDS and the data they typically report for that weren't sufficient," said Jennifer Engle, assistant director of higher education at Education Trust.

So they set about deciding what information they would need to collect to give a more accurate sense of how the institutions were faring, especially with low-income and minority students. The release of the baseline data Thursday represented two years of work in agreeing on definitions (what is a transfer student? how to define "low-income student?"), building the database, and collecting information from the systems.

(Some limitations remain, Engle acknowledged: While the "access" data cover all students who enrolled over the course of a year, the "success" numbers, for now, deal only with those students who enroll in the fall, and whether they graduated within six years, because some systems didn't have the broader information retroactively.)

Education Trust officials make clear that the point of the data collection (and what will be occasional publication of the information as it is updated) is to give each system a baseline from which to measure its own progress -- not to compare systems to one another.

So the Access to Success metric for "access," for instance, compares the proportion of one college system's freshman students who are Pell-eligible against the proportion of that state's high school graduates who are from low-income families, and identifies the gap.

Nationally, pulling together data from all the systems, the gap is 11 percent, with 30 percent of students at four-year institutions in the 24 systems being Pell eligible, compared to 41 percent of high school students in the states who are from low-income backgrounds. Similar gaps exist for minority students among both freshman and transfer students, as seen in the table below:

Enrollment Gaps for Low-Income and Minority Students

	% of Low-Income College Students	% of Low-Income High School Graduates	Gap for Low-Income Students	% of Underrepresented Minority Students in College	% Underrepresented Minorities, High School Graduates	Gap for Underrepresented Minority Students
Four-Year Freshmen	30%	41%	11 points	29%	36%	7 points
Four-Year Transfers	32	37	5 points	31	38	7 points

As is evident in the table, first-year students at two-year institutions are actually more likely to be minority and low-income students than one would anticipate based on their representation among high school students. That suggests that community colleges are serving their historical role as an "open door" to higher education, said Engle. But that promise fades when considering the data on students' success once at the institutions, said Haycock.

The data collected through Access to Success show that just 32 percent of all freshmen who enter community colleges transfer to a four-year institution or receive an associate degree or certificate within four years. And while low-income students perform at that same rate, underrepresented minority students fare worse -- just 24 percent do so.

"That doesn't exactly make you feel good about how things are going, especially with the current infatuation with community colleges" in federal policy, said Haycock.

The four-year "success" numbers are only somewhat better, according to the Access to Success data. Fifty-three percent of all freshmen in the 24 systems earned bachelor's degrees within six years, compared to 44 percent of underrepresented minority students and 45 percent of low-income students. Excluding low-income and minority students, the rate for other students was 57 percent.

The final Access to Success metric -- "access+success" -- aims to compare the systems' college graduation rates with the high school graduation rates in their states. Nationally, 26 percent of the students who graduated from the 24 systems within six years were Pell-eligible, while 41 percent of their states' 18- to 24-year-old high school graduates were from low income backgrounds, a 15 percent gap. Twenty-two percent of the four-year colleges' graduates were members of minority groups, meanwhile, compared to 35 percent of high school graduates, for a 13 percent gap.

As system leaders looked at their own performances, they saw positive as well as worrying signs. California State University, whose outreach efforts to low-income and minority students have been praised and copied, continues to enroll significantly smaller proportions of students from those groups than from other backgrounds, Reed acknowledged. But he said he was heartened by the fact that 84 percent of the university's transfer students come from the California Community Colleges, and that 66 percent of them graduate within six years.

What's Next

Now that they've published their baseline data, the systems -- and Access to Success's leaders -- know what they have to shoot at. The systems are at varying stages of figuring out their strategies for closing their achievement gaps, with Maryland and some campuses in the University of Louisiana System having already developed their plans, and some others doing so just now.

David Carter, who heads the Connecticut State University System, said its campuses had already seen significant progress from its "Building a Bridge" program, which, by improving reading and math readiness in local high schools, has sharply reduced the proportion of students who need developmental courses in those subjects when they get to the system's campuses.

As the individual systems are working on their plans, Education Trust and the system heads' organization are bringing in experts on such things as course redesign (an approach used heavily in Maryland) and project "delivery" (based on the work of Michael Barber in Britain) and helping them share their successes (and failures) with one another to better achieve their goals.

While the down economy could impair what the systems have to spend on these efforts, it also could propel them to be more creative, said Haycock.

"The challenge for these leaders is how to lean into this crisis and use it," she said, "as opposed to walking away from it."

— **Doug Lederman**

Report reveals wide gap in college achievement

The Washington Post

Broad disparity is seen for low-income and minority students

By Daniel de Vise

Friday, December 4, 2009

A new report, billed as one of the most comprehensive studies to date of how low-income and minority students fare in college, shows a wide gap in graduation rates at public four-year colleges nationwide and "alarming" disparities in success at community colleges.

The analysis, released Thursday, found that about 45 percent of low-income and underrepresented minority students entering as freshmen in 1999 had received bachelor's degrees six years later at the colleges studied, compared with 57 percent of other students.

Fewer than one-third of all freshmen entering two-year institutions nationwide attained completion -- either through a certificate, an associate's degree or transfer to a four-year college -- within four years, according to the research. The success rate was lower, 24 percent, for underrepresented minorities, identified as blacks, Latinos and Native Americans; it was higher, 38 percent, for other students.

Only 7 percent of minority students who entered community colleges received bachelor's degrees within 10 years.

The report provides a statistical starting point for 24 public higher-education systems that pledged two years ago to halve the achievement gap in college access and completion by 2015. Together, the systems represent two-fifths of all undergraduate students in four-year public colleges.

"This is not just research for research's sake," said Kati Haycock, president of the Education Trust, the District-based nonprofit group that prepared the report, "Charting a Necessary Path." "This is the base line for a very aggressive action initiative among a number of institutions that have said, 'We're going to make this better.' "

The Access to Success Initiative, announced in 2007, predates President Obama's American Graduation Initiative announced this year, which calls for the United States to regain the global lead in college degrees by 2020. Any progress charted by the 24 college and university systems, which include the University System of Maryland and state university systems in California and New York, will dovetail "very neatly" with the president's goal, said Haycock, whose organization advocates for disadvantaged students.

Within the University System of Maryland, the report found a 51 percent graduation rate among low-income students and a 46 percent rate among underrepresented minorities, compared with a graduation rate of about 64 percent for higher-income students and 67 percent for whites and Asians.

William E. Kirwan, chancellor of the Maryland system, said in a statement that closing the achievement gap "is not just a competitiveness issue for our nation, it is also the civil rights issue of our day."

One bright spot in the research was the Pell Grant, the federal program to help low-income students through college. The study found that Pell recipients at community colleges completed their studies at a rate of 32 percent, the same as other students. Pell students who transferred to four-year colleges also graduated at the same rate, 60 percent, as other students.

A bill pending in Congress would strengthen the Pell program by raising the maximum grant and tying the program to inflation for the first time.

The research released Thursday includes part-time students and transfer students, significant groups that aren't included in federal data on college completion, the report's authors said.

Halving the gap by 2015 would mean narrowing the disparity in six-year graduation rates from 12 percentage points to 6 and shrinking the gap in community college success from 14 points to seven.

"If these guys make the improvements they intend to make . . . it really changes the trajectory of higher education in this country," Haycock said.

California higher ed leaders call for more state funds

By SAMANTHA YOUNG (AP) – 1 day ago

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California's promise of an affordable higher education for its residents is being jeopardized by state budget cuts, the leaders of the state's college and university systems warned.

The cuts threaten to violate a half-century-old document known as the Master Plan for Higher Education that has made California's higher education system a model for the world.

In a rare joint appearance, the heads of the University of California, California State University and community college systems on Monday told lawmakers the education promise was in doubt because they don't have the money they need.

"You better increase the size of the pie because that's what the issue is all about," Jack Scott, chancellor of the state's 110 community colleges, told a joint legislative committee examining the state's master plan.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Legislature have cut spending at UC and CSU by 20 percent to help balance the state's budget amid the steep economic downturn. Community colleges received about 8 percent less funding in 2009-2010 fiscal year.

To deal with the cuts, the UC system, which has about 220,000 students, has raised student fees 15 percent since January, reduced freshman enrollment by 6 percent and forced most of its 180,000 employees to take furloughs and pay cuts up to 10 percent.

The university intends to raise fees by another 15 percent, a move that has triggered student protests at several campuses.

CSU, the nation's largest four-year university system with 450,000 students, plans to cut enrollment by 40,000 over the next two years. Nearly all 47,000 employees have agreed to take furloughs two days a month, and fees for in-state undergraduates increased by \$1,000 this year.

Meanwhile, the community college system, which last year served 2.89 million students, raised fees from \$20 to \$26 per credit and reduced the number of classes.

"I believe we can all agree our current system is in crisis, and we can all engage together to rescue it before it's too late," said Assemblyman Ira Ruskin, D-Redwood City.

All three education leaders said the challenge involves stabilizing funding from the state rather than making sweeping changes to the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, which serves as a model for access, affordability and academic excellence.

"The Master Plan is not broken," said CSU Chancellor Charles Reed. "The future of California is tied to education. More people need an education today than they did when the Master Plan was first envisioned."

Scott noted that California's colleges and universities accounted for 17 percent of state spending in 1965 compared to slightly more than 10 percent today.

Each system has asked the governor and lawmakers to increase their budgets next fiscal year to make up for the recent cuts. However, the state is already facing a nearly \$21 billion gap in its fiscal 2010-2011 budget during the next year and a half.

UC President Mark Yudof acknowledged it would be tough to get the additional \$913 million that his 10-campus system has requested.

"People say how can you be confident about that?" Yudof told reporters after the hearing. "Well, I'm not all that confident, but I feel if the president of the University of California doesn't in good faith articulate what we need then who is? That's my job."

Evergreen College Board backs off plans to lay off workers in wake of chancellor Perez investigation

MercuryNews.com

By Lisa M. Krieger

Posted: 12/08/2009

Facing about 200 angry college employees, the board of trustees of the San Jose/Evergreen Community College District backed off plans to lay off 85 workers and 21 managers, saying it would explore other strategies to fill a \$3.5 million dollar budget shortfall.

Employees said their jobs should not be sacrificed in light of allegations that outgoing Chancellor Rosa Perez charged the district and its foundation for lavish perks that included overnight stays at San Jose's luxury Fairmont Hotel, a tour of El Salvador and airfare to Scotland.

A November investigation by The Mercury News and KGO-TV found that in the four years since Perez took over the cash-strapped district, her salary has jumped 48 percent to \$293,000 a year, with a \$147,000 bonus to boot. Perez's partner, Bayinaah Jones, a district administrator hired two months after Perez, has seen her salary climb 35 percent.

The revelations came at a time when community colleges are being forced to cut classes and eliminate funding due to lack of money.

"When times are tight, workers have been mindful of every expense. It is hard to watch spending willy nilly when we could lose our jobs," said Allan Clark, state president of the California School Employees, the union representing the workers. The board said they had hired an investigator to review questions about Perez' spending. Perez recently announced she would be retiring for health reasons.

"The board is committed to clear everything up," said Board Member Balbir Dhillon.

The board warned however that the district would have to erase all financial reserves unless cuts were made. They will meet again to discuss the issue.

Faculty member Ciaran MacGowan said, "The faculty are disenchanted. These allegations are tearing us apart. Who's going to do the investigation? Who will you hire to investigate yourself because you're part of the problem."

At Tuesday's meeting, the Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Association, located adjacent to the campus, urged a complete external and independent audit of the allegations.

"These allegations add to a general mistrust of existing policies and procedures surrounding the governance of the College District," according to a letter to the Board written by Association president Randi Kinman.

Kinman asked the Board to initiate the process through the Santa Clara Civil Grand Jury, the Santa Clara District Attorney, the State Attorney General or the State Chancellor of Community Colleges.

Also at the meeting, Vice Chancellor Jeanine Hawk was named acting chancellor.

Foothill-De Anza picks Arizona college president as new chancellor

MercuryNews.com

By Diana Samuels

Daily News Staff Writer

Posted: 12/08/2009

Foothill-De Anza's new chancellor will be Linda Thor, currently the president of an Arizona college that specializes in online courses and distance learning, the community college district's board of trustees announced this week.

Thor, 59, will start Feb. 16, replacing former chancellor Martha Kanter, who left in June to become Under Secretary of Education in the Obama administration.

Thor has been president of Rio Salado College in Phoenix, Ariz., since 1990. Rio Salado serves more than 60,000 students — compared to 44,000 students at Foothill-DeAnza Community College District — and bills itself as a "college without walls." The college offers many online programs, as well as customized degrees for businesses and government agencies, and courses for high school students.

"Although the college doesn't maintain a traditional campus, we really provide all of the same kinds of services to the community that Foothill-De Anza does," Thor said.

Thor worked in a more traditional community college setting prior to Rio Salado. She was with the Los Angeles Community College District for 16 years, including a stint as president of West Los Angeles College in Culver City from 1986 to 1990. She grew up in Los Angeles and holds a doctorate in education from Pepperdine University.

Foothill-De Anza conducted a nationwide search for the new chancellor, naming Thor and Brian King, president of Cabrillo College in Aptos, as its finalists in November. King said in late November he would drop out of the running because he and his wife didn't want to leave Santa Cruz County.

The community college district's board of trustees announced Monday it had selected Thor to be chancellor.

"Passion is what we look for in any college leader," Foothill-De Anza Board President Betsy Bechtel said in a statement. "Linda Thor's driving passion is student success, and that is evident in every conversation with her."

Thor's salary will be \$260,000 per year, with a contract running through June 2012.

She said she will be traveling to the Bay Area frequently over the next couple of months before moving here with her husband, Robert Hunt, who is retired from working in the Social Security

Administration. She has two grown children who both work in the community college system in Arizona.

Foothill-De Anza has "such a wonderful reputation, it has such a strong foundation," Thor said. "My challenge is to continue the legacy of previous chancellors."

No one hurt in college classroom shooting in Va.

By NAFEESA SYEED (AP) – 10 hours ago

WOODBIDGE, Va. — In a scene reminiscent of other school shootings, a Northern Virginia Community College teacher spotted a weapon and ducked to avoid gunfire. Students ran from the classroom building while others barricaded themselves inside, piling desks in front of doors.

This time, though, no one was hurt.

Police said Jason Michael Hamilton, 20, opened fire in a classroom Tuesday with a high-powered rifle, but did not hit anyone and surrendered peacefully in a hallway. He was later charged with attempted murder and discharging a firearm in a school zone and was being held without bond.

A neighbor described Hamilton as a loner who lived in his family's basement in an affluent new subdivision near the school in Woodbridge, about 25 miles south of Washington, D.C. Two police cars were outside his home and wouldn't let reporters close.

Whether Hamilton had hired an attorney was not immediately clear; neither was a motive for the shooting.

Prince William County Police spokeswoman Kim Chinn said the unidentified teacher ducked when the student opened fire.

"When she saw the gun, she hit the floor," Chinn said.

In a classroom nearby, biology professor Miriam St. Clair said she heard a loud noise.

"It sounded like a desk fell over and we heard another loud pop, we knew it was a gunshot," said St. Clair, of McLean, Va.

When St. Clair looked out the window, she saw students fleeing. The professor told her students to get inside the classroom and they piled about 20 desks against a door that didn't have a lock. About 2 1/2 hours later, a SWAT team came and told them it was safe.

"We were very frightened," said St. Clair, 58.

Police spokeswoman Sharon Richardson said officers responded about 2:40 p.m. to an "active shooter" following reports of a gunman in the main administration building.

The college enacted its emergency lockdown and later issued a statement saying all Woodbridge classes were canceled. Some students, faculty and staff were sent to a nearby high school.

All classrooms are in one building and the students were in lockdown until about 5:30 p.m. Swat teams went into each classroom during the lockdown, said Chinn, who didn't know how many students were inside or how many shots were fired.

One of the suspect's neighbors said Hamilton's parents moved to the subdivision about three years ago and he sometimes saw the suspect jogging alone, or with his mother.

"He's always by himself, he's always isolated," said Daren Edwards, 38.

Another One Bites the Dust

December 9, 2009

Of all the projects to build international online universities, U21 Global might have been the most ambitious. Universitas 21, the international consortium of highly reputed research universities that opened U21 Global in 2001, predicted the program would enroll 500,000 students and be netting \$325 million annually by 2011.

But the program has been fraught with financial losses over its eight-year run, and currently enrolls only 5,000 students. A number of affiliated universities have walked away, including four in the last two years.

Now U21 Global is reassessing its educational goals. The University of Melbourne, the program's top university partner, this week said it would stop putting money into the program, which broke even for the first time this year. The university will retain the \$15 million in equity it has already invested, but Universitas 21 will relinquish its controlling interest in the underachieving project to the Manipal Group, an Indian firm that deals in education as well as health care, manufacturing, and financial services.

Manipal plans to shift U21 Global's focus from master's degrees to "corporate education," Ian Marshman, Melbourne's vice principal and a U21 Global board member, has said.

Melbourne spokeswoman Christina Buckridge described corporate education as "short, non-award courses, sometimes tailored to a big corporate's particular needs." She said U21 Global is already providing such instruction for firms on several continents, and that "it is a successful direction."

Melbourne's announcement comes a week after the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, a British-based think tank, released a report including U21 Global among a number of failed attempts by high-profile institutions to build profitable online degree programs -- notably the University of Illinois Global Campus, which was marked for closure last spring.

So how did the project go from its original goal of half a million online students and nine-figure profit margins with backing from 18 internationally recognized universities to being turned over to a private company in India as a vehicle for corporate training and communications?

The Observatory's report lays out several theories. One, offered by a professor at one of the universities that recently withdrew from the project, is that U21 Global has failed to ensure that its degree programs would be widely respected by putting curricular quality control not in the hands of its affiliated higher-learning institutions but a "quasi-independent" oversight body called U21 Pedagogica.

“Students who buy the products have no guarantee that their qualification will be recognized internationally,” the report quotes Jane Kelsey, a professor of law at the University of Auckland, as saying. “Courseware design is contracted out, not necessarily to academics from shareholding universities. There is no commitment to collegial governance, participation by the student body, or academic freedom.”

Kelsey’s complaints about the apparent lack of faculty involvement in U21’s quality assurance model echo the concerns expressed by University of Illinois professors as they fought the Global Campus’s use of adjuncts to teach their courses. The Observatory report notes that several North American universities -- New York University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Toronto -- chose not to affiliate themselves with U21 Global for similar reasons.

Philip Altbach, director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College and an expert on global educational consortia, said that while he lacks specific knowledge of the U21 program, he imagines it would be difficult to craft course-design and governance models that satisfy the conventions and standards of many different countries. “Putting together programs across different campuses in different countries -- with different educational traditions, different ways of measuring credits, different ideas about standards -- all of these things are not so easy to put together,” Altbach told *Inside Higher Ed*.

U21 Global may also have erred in setting its price substantially higher than the fees at brick-and-mortar institutions in China, one of its primary targets, the report says. According to a 2005 article by Judith Walker of the University of British Columbia, which was still affiliated with the program at the time, it cost a student in China \$7,000 to enroll in a U21 Global program, while the sticker price for equivalent programs at Chinese universities averaged only \$2,000.

The Asian market is coveted by many distance education programs -- but many have already tried to court it and failed, says the Observatory, citing a 2004 article by Simon Marginson, a professor of higher education at Australia’s Monash University. “For most students in Asia, an online degree accessed from home is a less attractive form of cross-border education than a degree acquired in a foreign nation or from a foreign institution offering programs in the student’s own country,” the report says. It added that Asian students are often turned off by the fact that online education offers fewer networking and language-learning opportunities.

Molly Chin, a spokeswoman for U21 Global, said the project may have simply set unrealistic goals. “U21 Global was established back at the height of the dot-com boom and had ambitious revenue aspirations as did many technology ventures established at that time,” Chin said in an e-mail to *Inside Higher Ed*. “We have since revised our business expectations in light of changing circumstances, including in particular the more recent global financial crisis.”

— Steve Kolowich

Financial Affairs: In Gauging Their Economic Impact, Colleges Should Be Careful What They Measure

The Chronicle of Higher Education

December 13, 2009

By Goldie Blumenstyk

Colleges have never been very good at demonstrating how their education programs prepare their graduates for jobs, or how their research might create new jobs.

That's partly because the connection is not so easy to quantify—and partly because many of the people who run colleges and who teach there are still a tad uncomfortable thinking of themselves as cogs in America's work-force-training and economic-development machine.

But with high unemployment levels still dominating the nation's political and business discourse—even President Obama, at this month's White House jobs summit, exhorted American universities to better prepare workers for the jobs of today and tomorrow—college leaders are realizing that they need to do more to measure and document their impact on the economy as well as actually help it along.

A lot of this recent measuring activity is voluntary, although no doubt it's inspired by a hearty dose of political realism.

Perhaps the most far-reaching of these efforts is the ambitious project being developed by two leading community-college organizations and the College Board to come up with measures of two-year colleges' effectiveness in academic and economic-development realms. With an expected \$12-billion infusion from the feds over the next decade, the colleges realize that they need to show they are worthy of the money or are serious about becoming so. (For more on this project, listen to my recent podcast with the leader of the community-college system in Louisiana.)

Then there's the study for a proposed "Institutional Economic Engagement Index" by the Association of University Technology Managers. The association, whose members manage academic inventions, has been eager to find ways to assess technology transfer with metrics that don't focus so much on royalty revenues.

A third project is the large-scale effort by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities to establish a consensus on the kind of data that colleges should collect to best measure their impact on job creation. Dennis Hoffman, an economist at Arizona State University and a leader in this project, says it is necessary because "the way that universities measure their value is suspect."

Failing to measure the right things also can lead to false expectations and unintended consequences.

I was reminded of the pitfalls of using the wrong measures at a recent conference in Washington on university start-up companies. Colleges love to tout the volume of their start-ups, based on academic research, as a measure of economic-development success. But venture capitalists at the conference said the innovations they are most likely to invest in are the ones that improve productivity and build wealth, not necessarily the ones that create jobs. (After all, innovation just as often eliminates jobs as it creates them.)

Pam York, attending from the University of Iowa, where she is executive director of the Research Foundation, says that lesson is one she's trying to press at home.

For universities, "the focus needs to change from creating jobs to creating an environment" where companies and people will want to be, she says. That's not only realistic but also mindful of the broader mission of the university as something bigger than a jobs engine.

It also fits well with the nuanced approach that the land-grant universities are taking with their project, aiming to measure such factors as how a college can affect the level of local wages and can contribute to social benefits such as levels of civic activism. It's "very defensible" for public colleges to seek public support for their contribution to the social and economic good, says Arizona State's Mr. Hoffman, but "we've got to prove it."

Costs Justified?

In a different context, suspicion is playing a role in another set of discussions about colleges and jobs—a series of negotiations over rules that will govern how for-profit colleges take part in federal student-aid programs. Federal regulators are questioning whether the amounts the colleges charge students for job-oriented degrees and certificates (for which many students go into debt) can be justified by the higher salaries they can command once they graduate. The Education Department is considering policies that would deny federal student aid for college

programs for which the cost can't be justified, although it's not clear what the final rules will look like when they come out next year.

The for-profit colleges aren't happy with the proposals—some officials decry them as an intrusive government attempt at price controls. But it's hard to argue with the essential logic: If a college's stated purpose is to prepare students for careers that will change their lives for the better, it should be expected to provide some assurances that the students will end up with gainful employment.

For students at traditional colleges, where the stated mission is typically broader, the social contract is far more multifaceted than job readiness. But as labor economists like Georgetown University's Anthony Carnevale contend, ever since it became clear in the early 1980s that the changing economy would continue to reward people who have college degrees with better-paying jobs, for many students and their parents the chief purpose of college has become employability.

If college didn't help people get jobs, Mr. Carnevale says, society would view a higher education as "about as important as opera and Shakespeare."

Traditional colleges themselves have embraced the "wage premium" argument in their bid for more money and public support.

It's easy to imagine where that might lead, particularly when lawmakers and the public are already demanding greater accountability for rising costs and lackluster graduation rates. If colleges aren't thoughtful about the expectations they set with their measuring sticks, how long before those "gainful employment" expectations extend to all sectors of higher education? And at what cost to the other values inherent in a college education?

Startup launches communications tech

North Bay Business Journal

By Lorelee Stevens, Business Journal Staff Reporter

December 14th, 2009

SRJC, Petaluma's Utelogy cooperating on video management software

SANTA ROSA – Santa Rosa Junior College is saving tens of thousands of dollars by rolling out technology developed by Petaluma startup Utelogy with lots of input from JC Media Services leaders.

For the last couple of years, Frank Pellkofer, former CEO of Integrated Network Communications in Santa Rosa, and his partner Scott McGarrigle have been working to simplify the JC's classroom media.

“Frank came to tour the Doyle Library multipurpose rooms after taking a course” at the Cisco Training Center from Professor Michael McKeever, said Russ Bowden, JC Media Services director. “It was a fortunate meeting.”

Intrigued by the complexity of the video equipment in the library, Mr. Pellkofer proposed unifying the controls into one integrated software system. Mr. Bowden saw the possibility of extending that simplified control to the classrooms.

The JC's main campus and four remote locations have about 285 classrooms with some sort of video system, 180 with projector systems.

“Video is the new chalkboard. Nearly everyone uses it,” said Mr. Bowden. “We had tried to rig up a central control for projectors, screens, VCRs and PCs, but you still had to go from device to device, and manufacturers all have different controls. It was challenging, sometimes overwhelming for many of our teachers.”

Debuted in the Doyle Library and first rolled out at the Petaluma campus, the unified software control was an immediate success among teachers.

“I've heard, ‘This is easy,’ from a number of real technophobes,” said Mr. Bowden. “The best thing is its consistency, from brand to brand, system to system, classroom to classroom.”

However, even the least technologically challenged teacher occasionally hits the wrong button, or a device freezes up on its own. Then tech help is needed right away, and Mr. Bowden was dispatching technicians to classrooms from Petaluma to the airport, answering SOS calls.

Utology responded with a live video help desk. Using cloud architecture, technicians take over operation of the classroom systems until the problem has been identified and fixed.

“The technicians can be employees of the client, or we’ll provide them ourselves,” said Mr. Pellkofer. “It’s a huge time and money saver.”

This fall the Utology software, complete with live help desk, was rolled out in 30 more classrooms.

Mr. Bowden estimates the systems have already saved the JC \$200,000 in capital expense and labor costs.

Utology has four beta sites now, including El Camino College in Los Angeles, the Sonoma County Office of Emergency Services and video solutions provider GlowPoint.

GlowPoint has branded the Utology software as its own in solutions it provides to a major sports network for remote monitoring of sports events and several un-named financial institutions for video banking.

Self-funded by the partners, four-employee Utology is open to investment funding to take its product to market.

“The technology has many possible applications. We’d like to be licensing it to 10 colleges in 2010,” said Mr. Pellkofer.

As the company grows to include a team of development engineers, technicians and sales teams, it could be an excellent job provider.

“We’d certainly like to put as many talented engineers and technicians to work as we possibly can,” he said.

For more information, visit www.utology.com.

Ex-Mt. San Jacinto College police chief faces felony charges

LA Times

Prosecutors say that from 2005 through 2008, Kevin Harold Segawa allegedly received kickbacks from a towing company operator.

By Baxter Holmes

December 3, 2009

A former community college police chief in Riverside who allegedly stole ice cream from a push cart vendor he arrested, surrendered Wednesday to multiple felony charges relating to a towing company kickback scheme.

Kevin Harold Segawa, 39, former police chief at Mt. San Jacinto College, surrendered to authorities after the Riverside County district attorney's office filed 10 criminal charges against the former lawman Wednesday. The charges culminated a 13-month investigation and included eight felony counts for crimes such as bribery, perjury and misappropriation of public funds.

Prosecutors say that from 2005 through 2008, Segawa received various benefits from a deal with Morgan Allen McComas, owner of Pirot's Towing in San Jacinto.

During that period, Segawa's department towed about 1,200 vehicles. Roughly 85% of that business was funneled to Pirot's, and the company earned between \$200,000 and \$500,000, prosecutors say. In return, Segawa allegedly received kickbacks in the form of a used motorcycle, used tire rims, tires, racetrack tickets and free repairs.

McComas surrendered to authorities Wednesday, after he was charged with one count of trying to bribe a public officer and two counts of aiding in the misappropriation of public funds.

"This is like out of 1920s L.A. or something, out of a movie or something," Riverside County Dist. Atty. Rod Pacheco said of the alleged scheme.

Segawa also faces a misdemeanor count of failing to file an arrest citation in connection with a 2008 incident in which he improperly seized ice cream from a street vendor.

According to prosecutors, Segawa arrested an illegal immigrant who was selling ice cream from a cart off campus. Segawa seized the cart and the ice cream, then turned the man over to immigration officers, who deported him.

Segawa took the ice cream to his home and gave what he couldn't fit in his refrigerator to his neighbor.

"This is the police chief, for God sakes," Pacheco said. "Not only does he get bribed and steer towing to his partner in crime, but on top of it, he's stealing ice cream from a street vendor and getting the guy deported."

Segawa was placed on paid administrative leave in July, and an interim police chief has replaced him.

The college responded in a prepared statement. "We take this matter seriously and will take the appropriate action based on the law and district policy," wrote Irma Ramos, vice president of human resources at the college.

Several former police officers under Segawa have filed suit alleging corruption in his department.

McComas and Segawa are both being held on \$25,000 bail.

Ask My Readers: Getting Out of Dodge Inside Higher Ed

By Dean Dad

December 14, 2009 9:28 pm

A longtime correspondent writes:

Something that may spark some responses from your readers.

One of the things about our campus culture that gets to me now and then is the “It’s OK if you’re not on campus all that much” attitude of many of the full-time faculty. Historically, this has been an institutional thing. When I interviewed for my job here — in 1987 — the chief academic officer told me that we tried to schedule classes so that the faculty only needed to be on campus two days a week. I was stunned into silence.

It’s not quite that bad now, but the attitude persists. I recently served on an appeals committee which had to deal with a situation in which a faculty member did not receive notice of something because he had left campus for the winter break immediately following his last final exam (on a Thursday; the final exam period did not end until Saturday and grades were due on Monday — and can be submitted electronically). After the break, the campus re-opened on the first Monday in January, for late registration, and so on. He did not return until the following Saturday, for a department meeting, which is when he received the notice. And which he received after the response date had passed.

His position is that expecting him to be around after his last final, or before the last possible moment before classes resumed, is unreasonable. That, therefore, he was not really notified. And, therefore, that the penalty he incurred from not responding should be invalid. Implicitly, his department also seems to take the position that he bears no responsibility for this.

My curiosity is aroused. Does anyone else work in a place in which this sort of culture exists? Is tolerated? If so, how do you work around it?

With variations, I've seen this enough times not to be shocked by it. Disappointed, yes, but not shocked. (And you get away with having department meetings on a Saturday? I'm impressed!)

This actually isn't the worst I've seen. At a school that had a designated final exam period, during which classes were not held and final exams were supposed to be given, I saw a dispiriting number of professors give their own finals the week before so they could get out of Dodge on the first day of exam period. It came to light when a student came by to complain about having three final exams on the same day, during a week when she shouldn't have had any. She was right.

At that time, final grades still had to be submitted on paper. The secretary in Academic Affairs mentioned in passing that she usually got about a dozen professors' final grades before exam period started. And those were just the ones brazen enough to hand them in.

In the case of my correspondent, it looks like the professor in question is reading every angle to his own advantage, then trying to claim the moral high ground. I don't think he's actually breaking any rules, but I wouldn't cut him much slack, either. At most colleges now, you don't have to travel to campus physically to get your email. If he really couldn't be bothered to check his email for a month, I'd have a hard time with the "but I wasn't notified!" argument.

As a cultural issue, though, this is maddeningly hard to address. If you don't have a formal attendance system for faculty -- and heaven knows I don't want to work anywhere that does -- then proving non-attendance becomes a nasty surveillance issue. The savvier faculty will eschew final exams altogether in the name of final projects or papers, then claim academic freedom if challenged. (To be fair, it's entirely possible to give final papers or projects without violating the spirit of exam week. I'm just saying that those who like to maximize their breaks often resort to this method. The honest ones will often use the designated exam time to return the papers or projects.) There's also the inconvenient fact that many students prefer the earlier end, too, so relying on student reports will tell you only a small fraction of what's going on.

At Proprietary U, one of the more civilized traditions involved free bagels and coffee for faculty during finals. One room was set aside as an impromptu lounge, and we could blow off steam there between rounds of grading. It was a small thing, but it helped, and it made the whole enterprise a bit less lonely. Food has a way of softening some rough edges.

I'm curious to hear from my wise and worldly readers. Have you seen an effective way to prevent people jumping the gun on the end of the semester?

Dan Walters California politicians bewail rising burden of debt

By Dan Walters
dwalters@sacbee.com

Published: Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2009 - 12:00 am | Page 3A

Capitol politicians bemoaning the size and cost of the state's bonded debt is something like drunkards arguing over hangover remedies.

Members of the Assembly Budget Committee, most of whom voted for tens of billions of dollars in new bonds, including \$11-plus billion in new water bonds, convened Monday to worry publicly about how the debts will be repaid from a state budget awash in red ink.

"We need to figure out how much borrowing we can realistically and sustainably afford," committee chair Noreen Evans said, terming bond costs "the Pac-Man eating up the general fund." Evans was one of the few Assembly members to vote against the water bonds.

Servicing outstanding general obligation bonds now costs the state more than \$6 billion a year – almost exactly the size of the current fiscal year's deficit – and costs are expected to balloon as more authorized, but unissued, bonds hit the market.

Treasurer Bill Lockyer and the Legislature's budget analyst, Mac Taylor, told legislators that they expect bond service to hit 10 percent of state spending in a few years, twice the level that most authorities deem prudent. And Lockyer noted that California, which has the nation's lowest credit rating because of its persistent budget deficits, pays higher interest rates than many Third World countries.

That's not only a fiscal problem but a political one. It's dawned on groups dependent on the state budget – especially government worker unions – that a dollar spent on bond service is a dollar that's not available to them. Thus, liberal lawmakers who support more debt to finance more spending are running afoul of liberal groups who want to spend very limited state dollars elsewhere – which is why some unions may oppose the water bonds.

California has \$83.5 billion in "outstanding long-term debt," Lockyer told the committee, mostly general obligation bonds. The cost of servicing that debt has increased 143 percent in the last decade, while general fund revenue is up just 22 percent.

One big push came in 2006 when Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, seeking re-election, persuaded the Legislature and voters to approve nearly \$40 billion in new public works bonds. But only a third of those bonds (and another \$5 billion placed on the ballot via initiative) have been sold, a big chunk of the nearly \$50 billion in as-yet-unsold bonds still to be peddled – if they can be peddled.

"There's quite an appetite for new projects but I haven't figured out yet how we'll pay for them," said Lockyer, who's become a debt critic and believes the state needs a "master plan" for financing future infrastructure. He said California's reputation for financial irresponsibility has damaged its ability to borrow and, "It's going to make it harder and harder."

So we have another crisis born of political expediency – and another indication that California's governance has become utterly dysfunctional.

HBCU Chiefs Address Grad Rates Inside Higher Ed

December 15, 2009

Under renewed scrutiny about lackluster graduation rates, a group of historically black college presidents is pushing for new assessment tools they say will better capture student outcomes.

While details remain sparse, a report to be published Wednesday by the Thurgood Marshall College Fund suggests that the six-year graduation rate as measured by federal data should be replaced with a new model. Echoing complaints often registered by community college leaders, the report, “Making the Grade: Improving Degree Attainment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs),” argues that federal data fail to capture the successes of transfer students and part-time students who often attend the institutions. Moreover, the data fail to account for the fact that many HBCU students face additional barriers to success, including lower socioeconomic status and the need for remediation, the report notes.

HBCUs have a history of serving underserved and nontraditional students, which places the institutions at a disadvantage when compared to other colleges under the six-year graduation rate standard, according to Mary Sias, president of Kentucky State University and a co-author of the report.

“You’re not comparing apples to apples,” Sias said on a conference call Monday. “If you gave me the same students, I would be able to do as well or better than the other universities that are majority-serving institutions.”

Nonetheless, the six-year graduation rate has emerged as the federal standard for comparing very different institutions. And when viewed through that lens, HBCUs often don’t appear to be doing well. When the Associated Press analyzed the six-year graduation rates of 83 four-year HBCUs earlier this year, it found that just 37 percent of black students finished within six years. While HBCUs have long touted their special role in educating African Americans, the report noted that the collective graduation rate for black students at HBCUs is actually 4 percentage points lower than the national college graduation rate for black students.

The Thurgood Marshall College Fund report does not introduce a new metric for assessment, but it suggests that any new yardstick should find a way to factor in the percentage of Pell Grant eligible students attending an institution, while also accounting for lower incoming standardized test scores that may indicate barriers to graduation.

“I don’t think a six year graduation rate is really giving us the full picture,” said Marybeth Gasman, an associate professor of higher education at the University of Pennsylvania and a co-author of the report.

Indeed, the current metrics do not illustrate that HBCUs often do a comparatively good job serving students of modest means, even though majority serving institutions have higher

graduation rates overall, Gasman said. Take Alcorn State University, a historically black institution in Mississippi where 79 percent of students are Pell Grant eligible and the median SAT score is 910. While it's true that Alcorn's graduation rate of 43 percent is 10 percentage points lower than that of the University of Mississippi, it's also true that just 24 percent of Ole Miss students are Pell eligible and that the median SAT score there is 1,065 -- 155 points higher. By failing to account for the differences in the students these institutions serve, federal data give an incomplete picture, Gasman said.

Some of the data that Gasman and others would like to see more widely used is collected already by the Education Trust and the National Association of System Heads, whose Access to Success Initiative illustrates the successes -- and failures -- college systems have in graduating and enrolling low-income students.

The push from HBCU presidents for different assessment tools comes at a time when some express concern about the future of these institutions. Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour's recent call to merge the state's three public historically black colleges, for instance, was viewed by many as a threat to the state's HBCUs.

Asked about perceived threats to the future of HBCUs, Sias stressed their important role in higher education.

"I don't even consider that we need to put historically black colleges by the side of the road," she said. "They are needed, and needed more than ever."

Other co-authors to the report included Dwayne Ashley, president of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund; Ronald Mason, president of Jackson State University; and George Wright, president of Prairie View A&M University.

— **Jack Stripling**

Bad data, unfounded fears fueled pension crisis

The Orange County Register

December 20, 2009 1:57 PM

By TONY SAAVEDRA and BRIAN JOSEPH

It is widely considered one of the worst financial decisions in the state's history – a toxin spreading through the budget books of cities and counties across California.

Like lemmings jumping off a cliff, local governments copied the Legislature's 1999 decision to increase tax-guaranteed pensions for public safety workers and other public employees. And now those governments are straining under the weight of the liberal pensions, a problem made worse by the recessionary downturn in tax revenues.

Some other states are also wrestling with retirement costs. But California is the only one that allows nearly all public safety workers to retire at age 50 with 90 percent of their salaries.

The Register found that decisions to expand public safety pensions were backed by bad financial assumptions, pushed by self-serving administrators and buoyed by unproven arguments that the generous retirements were needed to keep police and firefighters on the payroll.

"The attitude was, 'Hey, we have a ton of money, let's give it away,'" said Marcia Fritz, president of the Foundation for Fiscal Responsibility, a pension reform group in Sacramento. "There weren't a lot of deep thinkers there."

Public safety advocates insist that financial concerns are overblown and the money is well spent.

"What are you going to pay ... so you can sleep safely at night?" asked Ron Cottingham, president of the Police Officers' Research Association of California.

A lot, as it turns out.

In the ten years since the pension increase was adopted, payouts by the California Public Employees' Retirement System have more than doubled, to \$10.8 billion, while resources fell from an actuarial surplus of \$32.8 billion to an actuarial unfunded liability of \$35 billion in 2008.

CalPERS prefers a different number for its unfunded liability – \$30.3 billion – a calculation that includes the market value of its assets. The state Legislative Analyst has criticized CalPers for using conflicting figures – obscuring the true cost of the pensions.

Former legislators say they were assured by CalPERS in 1999 that the state's share of the liberalized pensions would reach \$300 million at most. According to CalPERS most recent numbers, the pensions are now costing the state \$3 billion a year.

Municipalities are not doing much better.

The Orange County Employees' Retirement System paid out \$410.4 million for pensions in 2008, compared to \$139.6 million in 1999. Meanwhile, OCERS' unfunded liability rose to \$3.1 billion, from \$85 million in 1999.

With so many police officers and other public employees cashing in on the new pensions, local governments have been forced to take out loans, raid reserves, cut budgets for other necessities – or worse.

- The city of Vallejo filed for Chapter 9 bankruptcy in May 2008, crushed by the weight of employee salaries, pensions and overtime. The city is working on a new spending plan they hope will guide it out of bankruptcy.

- Buena Park, facing pension costs of \$6.7 million this year, borrowed \$17 million to bring down its yearly payments to the state retirement system.

- The tiny city of La Palma, faced with pension costs of \$1 million out of a \$9 million general fund, dug deep into its reserves and pulled out \$3.8 million to bring down its yearly payments.

- In the tourist town of Santa Cruz, pensions contributed to a \$9 million budget gap this year. Officials said they would have to lay off city employees or cut pay 5 to 10 percent.

"The pensions are not sustainable long term," said Santa Cruz finance director Jack Dilles.

BAD FINANCIAL ASSUMPTIONS

How did California get into the pension mess? Experts say it was one part good intentions, one part bad luck, and one part public safety lobbying gone awry.

The good intentions: The pensions were "attaboys" intended to reward public employees with tough and dangerous jobs.

The lobbying: Public safety supporters argued the generous pensions were needed to keep good officers and firefighters from going elsewhere.

The bad luck: The recession dried up investments that were supposed to cover the cost of the new retirements.

In at least one case, in the city of Orange, council members were guided in their discussions by a city manager who had served earlier as the fire chief and stood to collect a pension of \$162,312 a year under the new formula.

Former Councilman Mike Alvarez said the city manager, David Rudat, never disclosed during the discussions that he stood to benefit.

"He should have excused himself," Alvarez said. "I'm surprised the city attorney didn't say there's a potential conflict here."

Rudat, now retired, explained that although he "orchestrated" the information that reached the council, he made sure not to advise them on how to vote.

Now council members say Orange could become insolvent if something isn't done. The city is expecting its pension costs to soar to \$23 million in three years from \$13 million. The city's annual general fund budget is \$87.5 million.

"If we don't start addressing this, the music is going to stop," said Councilman Denis Bilodeau. "And it's not just us. Everybody is in the same boat."

But PORAC spokesman Cottingham said public safety pensions have unfairly taken the brunt of the public's frustration with the economy.

"What did the police and firefighters do to cause the slump in the housing market?" he said. "What did police and firefighters do to cause the recession? But how quickly do they get blamed for it because of the pensions they receive."

Added Wayne Quint, president of the Association of Orange County Sheriff's Deputies, "The biggest myth about (the pensions) is that powerful police unions tied up public officials and their money."

STATE TROOPERS WERE FIRST

Former state Senator Deborah Ortiz makes no apologies for bringing SB 400 to the floor on the last day of the legislative session, Sept. 10, 1999. The bill was originally written to increase the cost-of-living benefits for survivors of teachers and other employees. It morphed into a law raising the pension formulas for all state employees and public safety workers.

Ortiz, D-Sacramento, said in an interview that the statute was considered just another employee contract negotiated between then-governor Gray Davis' staff and labor unions. She said legislators typically ratified the agreements without discussion.

"Trust me, if there had been concerns, there would have been debate, and it wasn't because they didn't have time to debate," Ortiz said.

As usual, the bill was approved, allowing CHP troopers to collect nearly their entire salaries at age 50, with 30 years of service.

The League of California Cities, one of the most vocal groups in state politics, stood silent on the pensions.

"That is the worst mistake we have ever made," said Dwight Stenbakken, deputy executive director. "The effects of that (pension) bill have been so profound in terms of twisting our retirement system."

By August 24, 2000, a follow-up bill by then-Assemblyman Lou Correa, D-Santa Ana, gave municipal governments such as Orange County authority to boost their pensions.

In the fall of 2001 – just a few weeks after terrorists steered jet planes into skyscrapers -- the Orange County sheriff's union and then-Sheriff Mike Carona lobbied for the pension increase. Carona told supervisors it would be tough to attract good people and retain others without the "3 at 50" pension formula.

Former chief financial officer Gary Burton remembered the sheriff's union going to each member of the board of supervisors, saying that the increased pensions would not cost the county because of large reserves in the fund.

Burton said he carried a different message to the board members: "Guys, there's no such thing as a free lunch. This thing is going to cost you money."

The financial warnings, however, hit a wall of patriotism, said former supervisor Charles Smith.

"At the time, the first responders were the darlings of the American people, and they took advantage of that," Smith said.

Earlier this month, Orange County's chief financial officer predicted that the county will end up spending 84 percent of its law enforcement payroll on pensions by 2014, up from 50 percent this year.

Local government officials interviewed by The Register said they were misled by public safety lobbying and representations by the \$200-billion California Public Employees' Retirement System that it would cover the costs of the pension increases with surplus funds and investments.

Former Buena Park Councilman Steve Berry, who spent 12 years on the panel, said he regrets voting for the pension increase, but he fell victim to the argument that all the good police officers would leave.

"There was no quantifying, no study, just hearsay that was being handed out," Berry said. "They threw out a lot of information that was unsubstantiated."

In the San Bernardino County city of Montclair, Mayor Paul Eaton said he was confused by the financial data.

"It was (a matter of) not understanding what the heck we were doing," said Eaton. "We did it and said, 'Whoa, what just happened?'"

Montclair, a city of 38,000, agreed in March 2005 to reduce the pensions for new police and fire employees.

In Vallejo, Mayor Osby Davis said the council got in over its head trying to satisfy the labor unions.

"We were robbing from Peter to pay Paul, and then Peter went broke and there was no one to rob," Davis said.

REJECTION AND REFORM

Not every California municipality agreed to the pension increase

In Los Angeles County, officials refused to liberalize the pensions with no real repercussions. There was no exodus to other departments that offered the benefit, no problems in recruiting.

"We don't lose a lot of (people)," said Los Angeles County Sheriff's Sgt. Tracy Palmer, with the department's personnel administration bureau. "And I've never heard of (pensions) as a reason for leaving."

In fact, police recruiters in Orange County and elsewhere say that most of the new hires are so young, they are barely thinking about retirement, if at all.

"There's always been a difficulty recruiting qualified police officers, but pensions have nothing to do with it," said George Wright, head of the criminal justice department at Santa Ana College, which is part of the district that runs the Orange County Sheriff's Academy.

With municipalities waking up to the consequences of the pensions, many are trying to change the system.

Sixteen cities in San Diego County are looking at lowering pensions for new hires. New public safety workers would get 60 percent of their salaries at age 50 – versus 90 percent under current law. General workers would have to wait until age 60 for their 60 percent. The plan is being scrutinized throughout the state.

Meanwhile, the Foundation for Fiscal Responsibility is working on an initiative to reduce retirement plans for new workers.

And Orange County, which got hit with \$1 billion in budget cuts this year, is attempting to take back the public safety pensions and promote new, less-expensive formulas.

In February 2008, the county sued the deputy sheriff's union in a landmark effort to erase the expensive "3 at 50" formula for police. The county argued that the pension plan violated state law because retired public safety employees were paid extra compensation for work they had already done. The county also argued that the plan was illegal because it spent general fund money without voter approval.

A trial court judge has rejected the county's arguments – which even pension reformers say are a long-shot. After spending \$1.9 million in legal fees, the county is reaching deeper into its pocket and taking its fight to appellate court.

Meanwhile, Orange County created a two-tier pension formula for non-public safety employees. Under the plan, existing employees can keep their old benefits or choose a hybrid plan that mixes a reduced pension with a defined contribution component, similar to a 401 (k). New employees also will get to choose between the two options.

It is unclear just how much the plan will save and how many employees will sign up for it. Like the lawsuit, the new plan is being watched statewide.

According to Orange County Supervisor John Moorlach, there are few other options.

"There's always the Vallejo strategy," he said.

*Staff writer **Jennifer Muir** contributed to this report.*

Boosting Math Standards InsideHigherEd.com

December 21, 2009

Aiming to improve student proficiency and achievement in mathematics, multiple systems of higher education have recently raised either their minimum standards for admission or their benchmarks for enrollment in credit-bearing courses in the subject.

The University System of Maryland made such a revision to its undergraduate admissions policy two weeks ago, when its Board of Regents approved a measure requiring that entering students take four mathematics courses in high school instead of the previously required three: algebra I, geometry and algebra II. The policy revision also requires that students take a mathematics course in the senior year of high school, even if they have already completed algebra II. These advanced students must take a course at or above the level of algebra II, potentially exposing them to calculus-based courses but preventing them from taking lower-level statistics or discrete math courses.

William E. (Brit) Kirwan, chancellor of the system, said that numerous research studies have shown that high school students who do not take mathematics in their senior year perform at a lower at a significantly lower level in college mathematics and are more likely to need remediation. Though there was undisputed agreement among the board members that the number of required mathematics courses should be increased, Kirwan noted that some board members expressed concern about the requirement that a course be taken in the senior year.

“Several board members asked, ‘What if you have a prodigy who takes Calculus early in high school and has completed all of the math offerings before his or her senior year?’ ” Kirwan said. “In that case, I noted that the overall admissions process allows admissions officers to make a certain number of exceptions to the minimum standards. This would be a rare circumstance, of course, but we’ll have the flexibility to recognize and address it.”

Maryland’s undergraduate admissions policy stipulates that its institutions may admit, as up to 15 percent of their entering freshman class, “students who do not meet the minimum qualifications ... but who show potential for success in postsecondary education.” The advanced student in Kirwan’s example would have to apply for an exemption to seek admission to a college in the system.

About 30 percent of incoming students to the Maryland system require remediation in mathematics, Kirwan estimated. Once the new admissions standards go into effect -- which they will for students entering ninth grade in 2011 -- and those affected by it reach college, he predicts that only about 15 percent of the system’s incoming students will need remediation in mathematics.

Kirwan anticipated that these changes will lessen demand on community colleges to teach remedial coursework, as students better prepared in mathematics begin to enter the system. He

said, however, that he suspects that the changes could create capacity issues for the state's high schools, especially if they are not offering enough sections of mathematics to help their students meet these new standards.

"Our high school completion standards and the minimum standards for admission to our system are not one and the same," Kirwan explained. "But, our standards do tend to drive high school completion standards. I'd like to see them more evenly matched."

Kirwan speculated that a number of institutions around the country would make similar changes to their admissions policies as a result of the Common Core Standards Initiative, a project of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association that aims to better align high school and college curriculums so that more students leave K-12 ready to do college-level work. Given that many incoming college students are often ill prepared in mathematics, he said it should come as no surprise that many institutions are considering admissions changes regarding the subject.

"I think is going to be a national trend eventually," Kirwan said. "It's the right thing to do, if we want America to be more competitive."

Major changes are also afoot in Kentucky, where the state's higher education coordinating body recently raised the threshold students must achieve on a standardized test to place into credit-bearing mathematics courses.

Next fall, all students must earn at least a 19 on their ACT in mathematics to enroll in a credit-bearing course, up from the current cut score of 18. The change was made after a statewide developmental education task force reported that experts had noted that the state's current cut scores were "too low, especially in mathematics." In addition to raising the cut score, the panel also recommended that the state develop common placement exams beyond that of the initial ACT score "to identify the specific level and areas of underpreparation for an individual student."

This change to the cut score will increase the demand for remedial mathematics courses around the state. With the current cut score of 18, 30 percent of the students who entered the state's institutions in 2006 required math remediation. With the new cut score of 19, that figure would rise to 38 percent, based on the same 2006 entering cohort.

Sue Cain, coordinator of developmental education and the college readiness initiative for the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, said a number of four-year institutions in the state are considering raising their admissions standards so that they will not have to offer remedial courses. In Kentucky, she noted, each public institution must provide remedial coursework to any students it chooses to admit. Practically, this means all but the state's two research institutions -- the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville -- offer numerous remedial options for their students because their admissions standards allow for students who need remediation.

Cain noted that the state's institutions have been experimenting with offering "accelerated" remedial courses, lasting anywhere between six and eight weeks, that speed students to credit-bearing courses sooner, making them more likely to succeed. Still, in some circumstances, a number of these four-year students may choose to take remedial coursework at a nearby community college to save money.

By next fall, Cain explained, all of the state's high schools will have "transitional" mathematics courses in which students would be taking a state-designed placement test that would trump a low ACT score if passed. She noted that the state's work to define "college readiness" at all of its high schools, like the move to increase minimum admissions standards in Maryland, was also inspired by the Common Core Standards Initiative.

A newly minted state law, calling for more accountability in the state's K-12 and higher education institutions, set some ambitious goals that Cain and others hope the recent change to the cut score and the "transitional" high school mathematics courses will help them meet. It calls for the state "to reduce college remediation rates by at least 50% by 2014 from the 2010 rates and increase the college completion rates of students enrolled in one or more remedial classes by three percent annually from 2009-2014."

"I've worked my entire life to work myself out of a job," Cain quipped. "And I know that there are many people, like me, who are trying to work themselves out of the developmental education business. The attitude of cooperation, collaboration and partnership has put us ahead of many states here in Kentucky."

Though its plans are still in the early stages of development, the City University of New York system is also eyeing changes to its method of determining whether a student is prepared for college-level mathematics. There are currently three ways that a student can test into credit-bearing mathematics courses: a satisfactory SAT score or COMPASS score or having passed one of the two New York State's Regents Examinations offered in the subject. The state is currently introducing a third Regents Examination in mathematics.

Alexandra Logue, executive vice chancellor at CUNY, noted that the system is considering requiring students to pass two Regents Examinations in mathematics instead of one. The other options for testing into credit-bearing courses would remain the same.

— **David Moltz**