

East Los Angeles College summer school turns away many students
By Carla Rivera, Los Angeles Times
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First day of school at the only L.A. Community College campus offering a full menu of summer courses left many students stranded as classes quickly filled up. Thousands of students descended on East Los Angeles College on Monday for the first day of summer session, but many of them walked away disappointed. Classroom spots were a hot commodity, and many students didn't get one.

State funding cuts have forced many of California's public colleges to severely reduce or cancel summer programs. Nowhere is the pressure felt more than in the state's 112 community colleges, where overall enrollment and course offerings have plummeted to their lowest level in 15 years.

In the huge Los Angeles Community College District, East L.A. is the only one of nine campuses offering a full slate of courses — about 329 — and that is a reduction of about 30% from previous years. The campus this year gave priority registration to continuing East L.A. students but expected hundreds, if not thousands, of other students to try to enroll.

About 13,351 spots were available in all, and 13,000 of them had been filled before Monday, officials said.

The result: scenes like that in math instructor Myung Yun's classroom, where about 90 students showed up at 7:20 a.m. to add the class that was already at its capacity of 45.

They included students like Gao Xin, an electrical engineering major who needed the course to transfer to a four-year university. Yun decided to hold a lottery for 10 more students, but Xin didn't win a spot.

Xin said he now will probably have to wait another year to transfer.

"And tuition keeps going up, so by wasting time now I'm going to have to pay more in the future," said Xin, 25.

[Cal State Long Beach](#) student Joe Martinez needed a calculus class to maintain standing in his electrical engineering major. He had hoped to take the course at a community college because he doesn't have the money for the much steeper state university summer fees.

"I passed all my prerequisite math courses and just needed the calculus," said Martinez, 18, who will be a sophomore at the Long Beach campus. "I guess I did all of that for nothing."

Tiffany Hee is a math teacher at Alliance Huntington Park College-Ready Academy High School, who hoped to take the calculus class as a refresher because she has been asked to teach Advanced Placement calculus at her school next year.

She offered to act as an unpaid teaching assistant in Yun's class if he allowed more students in, to no avail.

"I saw the class in the schedule and it was early in the morning, so I didn't expect 80 other people trying to get in; it's kind of a shock," said Hee, a Cal State L.A. graduate who has been teaching for a year. "I still have to teach the class, regardless, so if I can't get in, I'll study on my own."

For teacher Yun, the throng of students was not unexpected. For two months he has been flooded with emails from students begging to be let in. But too large a class would hamper instruction, he said.

"I want to keep them all, but it's not fair to all," Yun said. "We need more money. We're suffering."

About 40 of the students later met with Richard Moyer, vice president for academic affairs, to vent their frustration over not being accommodated.

"This is a budget crisis, not something that we at this college have any control over," Moyer told them.

In answer to a student's question, Moyer said he was fearful that if Gov. [Jerry Brown's](#) proposed tax initiative fails on the November ballot, the campus may not be able to offer any classes next summer.

"There is a huge demand of students and they want to accelerate their education," Moyer said. "We think of ourselves as a year-round school, but financial pressures are making us put more focus on fall and spring schedules, and it's setting students back."

Dan Walters: California now has a half-budget

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So does California have a new state budget, or not?

It has about a half-a-budget, or perhaps more accurately, a half-baked budget.

The Legislature passed a budget bill last Friday, thus meeting the constitutional deadline and also preserving lawmakers' salaries, along with a handful of minor "trailer bills" to implement its provisions.

However, the budget bill also requires Gov. Jerry Brown's signature, and he has until June 27 to sign or, as he did last year, veto it.

There's also a flock of other trailer bills still pending, including those that involve Brown's dispute with his fellow Democrats in the Legislature over health and welfare services.

The Democrats would spend roughly a billion dollars more on those services than Brown insists he wants, covering the extra spending by slashing the budget's emergency reserve in half and adopting some rosy revenue assumptions.

Whether the intraparty conflict is genuine, or is merely a bit of political theater to portray Brown as being tough with the voting public's bucks, is at least debatable.

Certainly, the governor has been trying mightily to create an image of frugality to persuade voters to pass his sales and income tax hike next November.

Speaking of which, Brown has about three weeks until the deadline for his tax measure to qualify for the ballot and there's at least a small doubt that the signature-sampling now under way will be successful.

If it isn't, all bets are off.

At the moment, therefore, the state has just enough of a budget for legislators to keep their paychecks flowing, but not enough of one to actually function when the 2012-13 fiscal year begins July 1.

How it turns out is anyone's guess.

Having publicly drawn a line in the sand on maintaining health and welfare benefits for the young, the poor, the aged and the disabled, the Legislature's Democratic leadership could hardly acquiesce to Brown's demands for major and permanent reductions without looking weak.

However, the Legislature's public approval rating is already at rock bottom, so its leaders might be willing to take a dive if it would boost Brown's chances of winning the tax election.

Were they to cave, though, the programs' recipients and advocates, including unionized [service providers](#), would probably march on the Capitol.

The flip side, of course, is that were Brown to retreat on the safety net cuts, he would be pilloried by opponents of new taxes as talking a good game on fiscal responsibility but not walking the talk.

There's always the possibility, or maybe a probability, of some deal that would save face by postponing the conflict until another day.

The only certainties are that the Democrats own whatever budget decisions are made, for better or worse, and that they can't wait forever to make them.

THE ROAD TO ACCREDITATION—El Camino College Compton Center continues push despite setback

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Note: This is the third and final article in a series on El Camino Compton Center's accreditation effort.

COMPTON—It has been six years since the Accreditation Commission for Community and Junior Colleges revoked Compton Community College's accreditation. At the time it was estimated that it would take six to 10 years to earn it back.

There are fallacies in that estimation that shed new light on the timeframe and the procedure necessary for the only college located in the city of Compton to become accredited as a separate learning institution again.

Understanding the past

When the college had its accreditation revoked because of financial mismanagement by the Compton Community College District Board of Trustees it was \$200,000 short of its payroll and it was on the brink of closure. The only thing that kept the campus open was an agreement entered into by the Compton district and the El Camino Community College District. The details were defined in Assembly Bill 318, which was passed for the specific purpose of providing a way to keep an accredited college open to serve students in the Compton district.

In addition to the granting of a loan from the state, the bill specified that the college would be an adjunct facility of El Camino Community College. As such, El Camino was charged with the responsibility of earning accreditation from the ACCJC.

The Compton Community College District continues to operate, focusing on the district's financial status and conducting its business. However, the board members are not empowered to vote on issues facing the district. That responsibility has gone to a special trustee appointed by the state chancellor of education. Thomas Henry currently holds that position.

But Compton Community College no longer exists. It is now El Camino Community College Compton Center.

Herein lies the basis for misunderstandings that have plagued the accreditation effort from the beginning.

Rumors of hijacking

Members of the Compton community were astounded and outraged to find their college being run by another district. Rumors of a takeover were rampant. Those within the education community were concerned that the Compton district was charged with running its business, yet had no vote at board meetings. Board members were not even allowed seats on the dais.

There were suspicions that El Camino was in the process of appropriating the college, that commercial interests were plotting to close it down and develop the land, either as a residential development, a shopping center — or even a prison.

Members of the Compton Board of Trustees were hostile toward the special trustee and the administration of El Camino Community College.

At the same time, the ACCJC demanded that all of the signage of the college be changed to reflect its new status as part of El Camino College. To members of the Concerned Citizens of Compton and the community-at-large, this was further proof that their suspicions were correct and that Compton's college was systematically being taken away from the community.

The controversial appointment of Special Trustee Dr. Genethia Hudley-Hayes added fuel to the fire. A pull-no-punches personality, she repeatedly offended members of the Concerned Citizens with blistering statements about the Compton Board of Trustees and the district in general .

When Hudley-Hayes fired Dr. Lawrence Cox, the popular and trusted president and CEO of the college, an outraged community of supporters of the college wrote to Chancellor Jack Scott and Gov. Jerry Brown, expressing their belief that the special trustee was destroying the college and the board and demanding action.

The matter was resolved unexpectedly when Hudley-Hayes submitted a consultant laden budget that El Camino College President Dr. Thomas Fallo refused to approve. AB318 specified that El Camino could pull out of the partnership with Compton if he could not approve the district's budget.

“This was the most critical situation we had been in since the accreditation was revoked,” Special Trustee Thomas Henry told The Bulletin in an exclusive interview. “Once again we were on the verge of closing the college down. Contrary to what a lot of people believed, there was no other college willing to replace El Camino in the partnership. If El Camino had pulled out of the partnership it would have continued to serve the students, but from its campus in Torrance. Our primary concern, as it had been in 2006 when accreditation was revoked, was to keep the college open in the community. It still remains my primary focus.”

A new direction

Henry replaced Hudley-Hayes. A veteran of accreditation efforts in community colleges throughout the state, Henry was adept at handling situations involved with the process, but he had limitations.

“To my knowledge, no other community college in the nation had ever had its accreditation revoked,” Henry said. “This was strange territory. We didn’t have a template or precedent to follow. We had to figure it out as we went along. For the first three years, we were getting our sea legs. Mistakes were made, but never for underhanded purposes. It’s true that the Compton board was in a difficult position, being told that their participation was critical to the accreditation process yet they were prevented from official action.”

Both Fallo and Henry agreed on a basic premise: That the first order of business was to build an administration team that could work together, not only to take each step in the process, but to figure out a method for doing so.

“I think we now have what we need, with the appointment of Dr. Keith Curry as interim CEO of the Compton Center,” said Fallo, also in an exclusive interview with The Bulletin.

“Mr. Henry is a team builder and his skills in navigating delicate situations is well known in the education community. Dr. Curry has been an enthusiastic communicator and has reached out to every group in the city to keep them abreast of the status of the accreditation effort. The Compton Board of Trustees has responded well to Mr. Henry’s approach to managing the district. The bottom line is that the strife we saw at the beginning seems to have gone and there is a new spirit of cooperation among everyone involved in the effort.”

The cooperation of the Compton board is especially critical to accreditation. “One of the requirements is that the board demonstrate the ability to achieve financial solvency and sustain it over a period of time,” Henry said. “The Fiscal Crisis Management and Assistance Team is following the board’s actions closely. While it’s true that the board does not make the crucial decisions, it is extremely important for it to show professional and capable conduct and to demonstrate a spirit of cooperation with the El Camino administration. In order to show sustainability, the board needs to submit its financial reports on time and they must stand up to audits by FCMAT.”

The effort goes off track

Hudley-Hayes was the first to announce that the district had not satisfied that requirement because it had submitted its reports late and riddled with questionable figures, and that the accreditation effort was “back where it started.” Community members and college

supporters, already suspicious and disappointed with the extended time frame for accreditation, were discouraged to learn that, despite six years of concentrated effort, accreditation was still nearly 10 years away.

Two entities are involved with accreditation of the El Camino College Compton Center. The ACCJC requires that the college meet its own criteria in all areas of operation. Members of the panel tour the college regularly and submit reports whether those criteria are being met.

Once all criteria are being met on a continuing basis, El Camino College can apply for eligibility status, and once eligibility is granted, the next step is a provisional accreditation.

FCMAT is responsible for ensuring that the Compton Board of Trustees manages its business effectively and maintains financial solvency. The team relies on a lengthy report done in 2006 detailing shortcomings in each area of operation, assigning a numerical value to reflect progress in subsequent reports.

“Just the reports alone stretch the time frame,” said Henry. “We also have to create and submit reports, which also takes considerable time. Then there is time between reports for us to improve in areas as needed. So it is not a quick process by any means.”

There is one aspect of the ACCJC’s actions Henry is certain of. “The ACCJC is using the same set of standards it uses for all colleges seeking accreditation,” he said. “The circumstances under which Compton’s accreditation was revoked have no bearing on the process. Areas for improvement are defined on the basis of the current status in each report. ACCJC looks at educational operations — quality education, student learning, student services, whether students receive an education that will properly support their goals.”

FCMAT, however is a different story. “FCMAT’s responsibility is financial management,” Henry said. “Its reports center around the financial functions of the college and the board. The ACCJC gives great weight to the FCMAT reports.”

The path to success

While neither Henry nor Fallo is able to predict how long accreditation is likely to take — it could be anywhere from six more years to 10 — both agree that progress is now being made. They credit the cooperative spirit between the board of trustees, Henry, Fallo and Curry for ushering in a new day in the journey toward accreditation.

But a recent meeting of the board of trustees showed some cause for concern. At the meeting, held on May 16, Henry announced his choice for the new trustee area map, required by the state as part of the Voting Rights Act of 2001.

Some members of the board disagreed with the option chosen by Henry. The option they wanted would change the trustee areas least, despite the fact that the district is being sued for violation of the Voting Rights Act in its then-current trustee area map.

Not only was there adamant disagreement. Profanity was used, and one member resigned and walked out of the meeting.

Worse yet, FCMAT was there to witness it all. While Henry, Curry and Fallo have engaged in damage control, all are concerned that the actions at the meeting reflected a failure to perform professionally or in the best interest of the college.

“If we are going to earn accreditation, we have to show that we can function in a professional and cooperative manner,” said Fallo. “We’ll get nowhere if we don’t. The first years of the partnership have been a learning experience. There has never been a situation like this and there is no sample upon which we can base our plan of action. It isn’t that we achieved nothing during those years. We achieved a great deal. We put together a team of people who are all on the same page and who will work creatively and aggressively to get the job done. We also have learned our way around the accreditation process, and we know where we’re going now. That’s a lot of progress.”

As to the word on the street, things may be calming down. “I think most of the community realizes that the college is a remote campus of El Camino College,” said Henry. “I think they understand that this isn’t a simple matter of ‘earning back’ its accreditation. It’s not correct to say the college ‘lost’ its accreditation. It’s accreditation was revoked. That’s an important distinction. And it’s El Camino that has to get its remote campus accredited as a separate entity.”

“I hope that the community is beginning to understand this,” said Fallo. “Running the college and seeking accreditation must be done by us. And we are committed to the effort. But the financial solvency of the Compton Community College District directly affects the status of El Camino in the eyes of the ACCJC. It is important that we accomplish accreditation without jeopardizing our operation.”

But the question remains — How much longer? There is no clear cut answer. “It all depends on the length of time it takes to clear up all the deficiencies and get the reports done,” said Henry. “I’d say the longest period of time will be getting eligibility status. There are many areas along the way that could take longer or could end up taking less time than we estimate.”

The important thing is that the effort remains ongoing and that El Camino stays in the partnership. Beyond that, there is the daily function common to all colleges everywhere.

“My position remains the same,” said Henry. “I want to keep the doors open. And I want to provide the students in the Compton Community College District with the best

education and training we can give them. I truly believe everything else will fall into place if we continue down the path we are on now.”