Overcrowded and Underfunded

New York's public university systems, and beleaguered students, are an extreme example of national trends

By Jon Marcus

New York

Just uptown from the epicenter of the world's economic crisis, Borough of Manhattan Community College is a symbol of how the financial cataclysm that began a few blocks away on Wall Street has battered public higher education in America.

It's crowded. Very, very crowded. Every seat is taken in every classroom you can see. Some of those seats are in the aisles. There are lines outside the computer labs. Lines snake through the food court. There are particularly long lines at the financial-aid office.

With a central campus built to handle 8,000 students, Borough of Manhattan is straining to contain some 21,700, part of a 12 percent enrollment increase at the six community colleges of the City University of New York and an eight percent jump at CUNY systemwide, including in its 11 senior colleges. Enrollment at CUNY's upstate counterpart, the 64-campus State University of New York, hit an unprecedented 439,523 this fall. At CUNY, there are more than 259,000 students, surpassing the previous record set in 1974, when it was free.

And free, it isn't. Already the seventh highest in the nation, New York's community college tuition rose again this year to help fill ever-worsening multibillion-dollar state revenue shortfalls that also have resulted from the deep recession. Tuition at the four-year SUNY schools spiked by double digits. More price hikes are likely. This at a time when nearly two thirds of CUNY's community college students come from families earning less than $30,000 a year. Many are so poor there's a program to help them register for food stamps. One city council member said the tuition increase would force at least one in five to drop out.

But there are plenty more waiting to take their places. Helping fuel the enrollment surge at CUNY and SUNY has been a record number of applicants from outside the state—applicants, officials say, who have given up on even more expensive private universities, and for whom a public university is still a comparative bargain.

Good thing, too, since the public universities are taking on so many students largely because they need the money from tuition that each student brings in. Plus, although the subsidy is dropping, CUNY and SUNY still

continued on page 19

Turning Students Away

The plight of Florida's community colleges suggests the depth of the state's financial crisis

By Robert A. Jones

Miami

Florida's Educators have predicted an Armageddon here almost as frequently as weathermen predict hurricanes. Each time the state whacked the higher education budget, the predictions of doom grew more dire. But no one expected disaster to strike quite so dramatically as it did on a hot summer's night here in Miami, at the state's flagship community college.

The night of June 17, 2009 already has become something of a legend at Miami Dade College, with virtually all the administrators and students able to tell their own stories of the evening's horrors. It was the night when burgeoning demand for education ran headlong into shrunken supply.

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In Memory

William Trombley with his wife Audrey in 1999.

William Trombley

Senior Editor of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

and

Founding Editor of National CrossTalk

1929–2009
EDITORIAL

Core Principles

In this recession, the highest priority should be placed on college access and affordability

The current recession is unique in its severity and impact. But the responses of most states, and colleges and universities, have thus far followed the patterns of earlier recessions. For the states, the standard recessional repertoire is severe cuts in higher education funding, approval or acquiescence in steep tuition increases accompanied by unwillingness or inability to assert public priorities for the use of increasingly scarce public dollars.

Most colleges and universities have relied as much as possible on tuition to fill gaping budgetary holes, along with caps and reductions of enrollments, and short-term measures such as hiring freezes, furloughs, and across-the-board cuts. Examples of each of these scenarios can be found in the state profiles in this edition of National CrossTalk.

Recessions certainly create dislocations, but they also surface and exacerbate existing problems. The findings of a decade of Measuring Up state and national higher education report cards, international educational comparisons, and several assessments undertaken at the behest of national foundations, converge on similar conclusions: Prior to the onset of this recession, American higher education was underperforming and was being outperformed by other nations; the U.S. was floundering in improvement of college access and rates of completion, in college affordability and in the educational attainment of young adults. In short, institutional and public policy strategies that explicitly or implicitly seek restoration of the status quo ante, even if successful, would only restore to a mediocre level of performance—and one that falls short of meeting the needs of American society for educational and economic opportunity, equity and economic competitiveness.

Earlier this year, in collaboration with several of the nation’s leading policy experts in higher education, the National Center proposed a set of principles and recommendations to guide policymakers in this period of economic dislocation. Governors, legislatures, governing boards, and campus and system leaders are responsible for setting explicit priorities, and we recommend that in this recession the highest priority should be placed on college access and affordability.

At a time when many states look to the 2010 legislative sessions, and yet another round of budgetary pain, these recommendations take on renewed urgency, beginning with their core principles:

• Establish undergraduate access and affordability as the highest priority for state higher education policy and support.
• Protect access. All eligible students seeking to enroll in two- and four-year public institutions should be accommodated by institutions that can meet their needs.
• Preserve the educational safety net by prioritizing enrollment capacity and affordable tuition at broad access institutions serving students from low- and middle-income families.

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Patrick M. Callan

not micromanage the process, but insist on accountability for resource use and performance from governing boards and institutional leaders.

• Use one-time revenues, including federal stimulus funds, to protect access and affordability and to leverage improvements in productivity, efficiency and quality. Avoid using one-time revenues in ways that defer productivity improvements or create long-term dependencies that may exacerbate future financial problems.


—Patrick M. Callan

Visit our website, www.highereducation.org, for a new National Center report: “States, Schools, and Colleges: Policies to Improve Student Readiness for College and Strengthen Coordination Between Schools and Colleges.”

The authors examine what has been tried and learned about state policy leadership in bridging the divide between K–12 schools and postsecondary education. Part I offers a national perspective, with chapters by Michael W. Kirst and Michael D. Usdan, Erin J. Walsh, and David S. Spence. Part II, by Nancy B. Shulock, describes and analyzes state P–16 and P–20 councils.
Fifteen mid-career professionals have been selected by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education as Program Associates for 2009-10. They include faculty members, administrators, legislative staff members and postsecondary education specialists. They will attend three formal meetings during the academic year and also will work with National Center staff members on a variety of projects.

The goal of the program, financially supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation for Education, is to engage emerging leaders in the examination of critical higher education policy issues.

**New Center Associates**

![Jennifer Engle](image1)
Jennifer Engle
Assistant Director, Higher Education
Education Trust

![Warren von Eschenbach](image2)
Warren von Eschenbach
Chief of Staff and Director, Higher Education Committee
Texas State Senator Judith Zaffirini

![Brock Grubb](image3)
Brock Grubb
Program Analyst, Post Secondary Success
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

![Anne Hickey](image4)
Anne Hickey
Associate Director, Government Relations
American Council on Education

![Su Jin Jez](image5)
Su Jin Jez
Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Administration
California State University, Sacramento

![Cassius Johnson](image6)
Cassius Johnson
Director, National and Federal Policy Jobs for the Future

![Ioanna Kohler](image7)
Ioanna Kohler
Director of Policy Programs
French-American Foundation, NYC

![Neil Matkin](image8)
Neil Matkin
President
San Jacinto College, Central Campus

![Eric Ness](image9)
Eric Ness
Assistant Professor, Institute of Higher Education
University of Georgia

![Chris Rasmussen](image10)
Chris Rasmussen
Vice President for Research and Policy Analysis
Midwestern Higher Education Compact

![Zakiya Smith](image11)
Zakiya Smith
Confidential Assistant
Office of the Deputy Undersecretary

![Jeff Stanley](image12)
Jeff Stanley
Associate Vice President
State Higher Education Executive Officers

![Monty Sullivan](image13)
Monty Sullivan
Executive Vice President
Louisiana Community and Technical College System

![David Tandberg](image14)
David Tandberg
Special Assistant at Pennsylvania Department of Education
Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education

![Dawn Wallace](image15)
Dawn Wallace
Policy Advisor for Education for the Arizona House Majority
Arizona House of Representatives

**National Center’s Policy Studies Group**

Effective this fall, The National Center’s policy studies is housed at the University of Pennsylvania’s Institute for Research on Higher Education, which is directed by Joni Finney, vice president of the National Center and professor of practice at Penn. Laura Perna, associate professor of higher education at Penn, has been appointed the National Center’s director of policy studies. Michael Armijo, Awilda Rodriguez and Jamey Rorison have been appointed research associates. In 2009 and 2010 the policy studies group will conduct intensive studies of five states to identify factors that account for higher education performance.
Pennsylvania reduces state aid amid relentless record enrollments in fall 2009.

**By Kay Mills**

**UNIVERSITY PARK, PENNSYLVANIA**

The National Recession decreased state revenues around the country, but colleges and universities in Pennsylvania faced added drama this fall. The governor and legislators spent more than three months wrestling with closing a $3.2 billion deficit, so educators had to start the school year without knowing how much the state would be contributing to their operations. Finally, on October 9, Governor Ed Rendell signed a $27.8 billion budget, which includes $2.6 billion in federal stimulus money. Even with that federal money included, the state will spend $524 million less this year than last.

Exasperated by the negotiations at one point, Joe Forrester, president of the Community College of Beaver County, said that “this is like watching a dog on roller skates. You don’t know where it’s going, but no matter where it goes, the outcome isn’t going to be good.”

The budget outcome underscores a trend that President Graham Spanier of Penn State has been talking about for at least five years, that is, “the privatization of American public higher education.” And Angelo Armenti Jr., president of California University of Pennsylvania, said his school is being “privatized without a plan.” Pennsylvania’s community colleges are also caught in the state’s financial squeeze, with less opportunity for raising private funds. For example, Forrester, immediate past president of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges, has seen his own school’s state support diminish from 33 percent of its budget to 28 percent in the last five years.

Under the budget, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education’s 14 universities, of which California University is one, are receiving almost $465.2 million, plus slightly more than $58.1 million in federal stimulus funds, for a total of $503.4 million. That compares with a total of $538.1 million last year. The state’s 14 community colleges share an appropriation of $214.2 million, plus $21.5 million in federal stimulus money, a reduction of 0.21 percent. Both sectors had plus $21.5 million in federal stimulus money, an appropriation of $214.2 million, plus $21.5 million in federal stimulus money, a reduction of 0.21 percent. Both sectors had...
California also set up a public-private partnership to raise $125 million to build new suite-style residence halls to house those students, adding almost 2,300 beds.

Cutting energy costs was another issue. “No one was thinking green then, except for money,” Armenti said. In addition to using better controls to heat buildings classroom, California put in geothermal piping to heat its new dormitories. The system for the first three cost $1 million, but it paid for itself in two and a half years. The same payback occurred for the next three dormitories, so the university is now saving $800,000 a year in electricity costs.

California boosted its enrollment by 45 percent in the last ten years to 8,519 students (7,478 full-time equivalent) last academic year. Overall, the 14 schools in the state system grew by 18.5 percent in that period, and this fall the system set its eighth straight enrollment record, 116,935 students.

A big reason behind California University’s enrollment increase, Armenti said, is that it got into online learning early. “The economics of Internet education are that when the world is in your catchment area, you can easily fill all of your classes,” he added. Twenty-two percent of California’s student registrations are online.

“We are obviously not going to compete with the giants in the field,” Armenti added, but the school offers niche programs, those with promise in terms of demand and with little competition from other schools. These include sports management, legal studies and exercise science. Global Online also offers certification programs for principals as well as a master of science in nursing administration.

“The investment you have to make in this area is considerable,” Armenti said. That includes $1 million for high quality service programs on financial aid and customer relations. “You still have to assuage the doubts of the public about this new kind of education,” he added.

“In no way are these correspondence courses,” said John R. Cencich, interim dean of California University’s School of Graduate Studies and Research. “We have video and audio in them, animations, and quality control.” Faculty members are taught how to set up the courses and obtain fast technical help. Cencich said the staff makes sure the courses are user-friendly; content is peer reviewed.

California is also working in emerging fields such as robotics. In cooperation with Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, California has a $3.4 million grant from the Defense Department to develop public school curricula to help hook students on science through robotics. California also launched its own robotics curriculum this fall, leading toward an associate’s degree in robotics engineering technology, and then a bachelor’s degree in computer science (a combination of mechanical and electronic engineering technology).

These are not Star Wars or Terminator robots, explained Anthony F. Rodi, director of California University’s National Center for Robotics Engineering Technology Education. “Robotics is used in many ways, such as embedded robotics when you start your car, or medical robotics,” he said. “A surgeon in the United States can operate on a patient in India.” Robotics can also be used to “keep people away from the dull, dangerous, dirty work and repetitive movement that leads to injury.”

Michael F. Amrhein, the center’s assistant director, added that these courses teach a different way of thinking. “We don’t go into the details of what the robots are doing. The classes teach skill sets, such as presentation and project management, that can be used in different industries.

Like the state universities, community colleges are also seeing enrollment increases this fall, a common occurrence when the economy turns sour. The Community College of Beaver County, for example, had a ten percent credit-hour enrollment increase during the summer session, a trend that continued this fall, giving the school its highest fall enrollment ever.

Community colleges have no direct taxing power, so they depend on county government or local school districts for part of their support. And Joe Forrester, the college president, congratulated Beaver County commissioners for twice increasing taxes to support the college. “Both times in election years.” Under the act establishing the colleges, they are supposed to receive one-third of their support from the state, one-third from local government, and one-third from tuition.

“In theory, that’s great, but it’s never the reality,” Forrester said. “Fifty percent of our revenue comes from students.” On top of tuition of $89.50 per credit hour, his students pay a general student fee of $11 per credit hour, and a technology fee of $11 per credit hour.

Trying to hold costs down, Forrester said that his school did the standard things like cutting the amount of paper used. “But we also took a hard look at the class schedule” and pledged to reduce it by seven percent.

“We ended up canceling 53 sections,” said Judy Garbinski, provost and vice president for academic affairs. “Community colleges have to make cuts affected all departments, with the exception of allied health professions. In making the cuts, Garbinski said, there was an attempt to remain mindful that 80 percent of the college’s 2,400 (full-time equivalent) students work, and that it was necessary to consider the times they could be on campus.

Student aid was affected as well because the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) provided no grants during the budget impasse. Students often use that money for transportation or housing, and they did not get the money they had been counting on at the beginning of the fall semester, Garbinski said. Penn State credit students with the amount they would have received had the budget passed, costing the school $25 million.

About ten to 12 percent of the Beaver County college’s students are defined as academically “at risk,” and they need extra services, said Jan Kaminski, dean of academic support services. Many take developmental mathematics and require tutoring and counseling. “We track them down and entice them with these special programs, but when you get them, you have to give them that added push,” Kaminski said. “Just because that door is open doesn’t mean it stays open. It won’t stay open without those support services.”

The state also provides aid to some of its private colleges and universities, some of which existed before any public universities opened, said Don Francis, president of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania. These private universities award 50 percent of the degrees in the state, Francis said. “There is a very robust state grant program” for students at the independent institutions, he said, because the state considers it healthy to support them. It can contribute less to the overall education at private institutions “because we have more private dollars.”

In addition to PHEAA grants for students at private colleges such as Penn, the state provides some support for medical and veterinary education and other specialized programs, as well as institutional assistance grants to reward institutions for enrolling low-and moderate-income students.

Public institutions are not necessarily happy about that state support. “This is a state where everybody gets a slice of the pie,” said Joe Forrester. “But this produces inequities, because community colleges enroll so many low- and moderate-income students.”

Penn State’s Spanier said that “private education has always been key” in the northeast, pointing out that many American universities have large private, church-related institutions. They were, by and large, the only universities until the Morrill Act of 1862 created land-grant colleges such as Penn State, with the original aim of teaching agriculture and engineering.

Penn State is open. It won’t stay open without those support services and without the students. “What will happen eventually as tuition has to rise?” Erickson asked. “Students at flagship public institutions all over the country are going to be coming from families of high-income status, making it difficult to attract a diverse student body. We won’t be able to serve as an engine of social change as institutions like Penn State, Michigan State and Illinois have done for decades,” he said.

“That aspect really concerns me a lot,” Erickson added. “There is so much that we could be doing for the commonwealth,” Erickson said. “We want students to have an experience in an institution that’s like the world they’ll live in.” It is an experience he fears they will no longer have.◆

Kay Mills is the author of “This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer” and four other books.
Behind the Eight Ball
Illinois resorts to budgetary sleight-of-hand and one-time fixes to maintain higher education funding

By Susan C. Thomson

The ILLINOIS GENERAL Assembly ran overtime in 2009, as usual, against an unusual political and economic backdrop. The regular session began in January with the impeachment and removal from office of Governor Rod Blagojevich, arrested on federal charges that he tried to sell President Barack Obama’s vacant U.S. Senate seat. With that task completed, legislators got down to wrangling over the state’s yawning budget deficit, variously estimated at $9 billion to $13 billion and dwarfed only by the fiscal shortfalls in California and New York.

When the legislative dust cleared in July after a special session, however, Illinois public higher education appeared none the worse off for the state’s sorry finances and the bleakest U.S. economy in decades. For operations in the fiscal year that began July 1, the state’s 12 public universities were allMargin the bleakest U.S. economy in decades. For operations in the fiscal year that began July 1, the state’s 12 public universities were all

As state expenses have outrun revenue year after year, Illinois’ system of higher education has become an increasingly discretionary state budget item.

over the state’s yawning budget deficit, variously estimated at $9 billion to $13 billion and dwarfed only by the fiscal shortfalls in California and New York.

When the legislative dust cleared in July after a special session, however, Illinois public higher education appeared none the worse off for the state’s sorry finances and the bleakest U.S. economy in decades. For operations in the fiscal year that began July 1, the state’s 12 public universities were allotted the same $1.4 billion as in 2008, and its 48 community colleges were budgeted for a 0.7 percent boost—to a total of $358.2 million.

Yet it would take more than a one-year breather from a streak of annual state cuts to allay college and university leaders’ lingering sense of falling ever farther behind the financial eight ball. Moreover, they found more to fear than cheer in a sleight-of-hand budget that relied on one-time fixes and threatened to push the state—and, along with it, its public universities and community colleges—into an even deeper fiscal hole next year.

W. Randall Kangas, assistant vice president for planning and budgeting at the University of Illinois, sees no immediate relief in sight from his school’s “huge financial pressures.” He summed them up: rising utility costs, escalating salary demands of top faculty and, symbolized by his water-stained office ceiling, “hundreds of millions” in deferred campus maintenance.

At Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago (which is, by virtue of an enrollment that is more than a quarter Latino, the state’s only federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution), President Sharon K. Hahs said she was briefly relieved that the state kept university funding at the same level as last year. But, she added, “Level funding is never a good deal if you want to move forward and do things.” So much, then, for the university’s plans to catch up on technology and deferred maintenance, build its core of tenure-track faculty, and to allay college and university leaders’ lingering sense of falling ever farther behind the financial eight ball. Moreover, they found more to fear than cheer in a sleight-of-hand budget that relied on one-time fixes and threatened to push the state—and, along with it, its public universities and community colleges—into an even deeper fiscal hole next year.

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Northeastern has presented a 50 percent cut to ISAC—most of it money that would have gone to the commission’s signature Monetary Award Program (MAP) grants for the state’s lowest-income college students. Every year ISAC gives out about 90 percent of its state appropriation in these grants, made on a sliding scale that considers a student’s financial need and tuition cost. The awards are available to Illinois resident undergraduates for tuition and fees at any Illinois college or university—two- or four-year, public or private. In 2008, for instance, the money went to students at about 150 schools—including all 12 of Illinois’ public universities, all 48 of its community colleges, almost all of its 96 private colleges and universities, and a handful of proprietary schools.

For students depending on the grants, the timing of ISAC’s budget cut was doubly devastating. First, it came in a brutal recession year that swamped the agency with a record number of aid applications, prompting it to suspend approvals in mid-May, ten weeks earlier than previously. Second, the ax fell after ISAC had notified successful applicants of their MAP awards for academic year 2009-10, all based on the assumption that state funding would continue as usual.

Reduced to half rations, ISAC cut this year’s grantees’ awards in half by canceling their second-semester payments—the only action that was possible at the time, according to Andrew Davis, the commission’s executive director. This action meant that, come January 2010, for the first time in the commission’s 32-year history, their cupboard would be bare. And about 138,000 approved recipients would have to make up for the cash they had been banking on to see them through the year.

Miguel Loeza, a junior and the vice president of student government at Northeastern, said she’d planned—a bachelor’s degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago, a career as a surgical nurse, a chance to “make a difference in the lives of others”—suddenly seemed “very uncertain.”

Danielle Sterczek, a freshman at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, had qualified for the maximum annual MAP grant of $4,968 and hadn’t planned to work during her first college year. “But now I’m going to have to,” she lamented. Officials were quick to tally the potential costs to the universities and colleges in lost students and tuition revenue.

John Peters, president of Northern Illinois University and “convener” of an in-
formal group of his public-university peers, envisioned MAP students statewide regis-
tering but not being able to pay their bills, applying for loans but being denied, and about a third of them dropping out never to return.

But with most of their budgets already stretched, there was little, if anything, his or most other schools could do to cushion the blow for students and save their own enrollments from the consequences.

Kangas calculated that on University of Illinois’ three campuses together—Urbana-
Champaign, Chicago and Springfield—spring semester MAP grants would have added up to somewhere between $25 mil-
lion and $30 million, money that students would not be getting, money the university could not easily afford to make up to them.

With 73,000 students on those three campuses, the University of Illinois is by far the state’s largest university. As such, it had not just more money but more students at risk of losing MAP aid (roughly 13,000 of its total of $50,000 undergraduates).

The threat also hit home hard at DePaul University, with 25,000 students on two main campuses and four small satellites in the Chicago area. The state’s largest private uni-
versity or college, DePaul had more MAP grants and dollars at stake than any other, with one-third of its 14,000 undergraduates in line for second-semester awards totaling an estimated $10 million.

Those numbers are a function not just of the university’s size but also of what Rev.
Dennis Holtschneider, president, proudly says is its high proportion of low-income, first-generation and underrepresented-mi-
nority students, the kinds his Vincentian or-
der had most in mind when founding DePaul in 1889.

“We have always had our focus on peo-
ple at the edge of society who need our help to move forward,” Holtschneider said, add-
ing that MAP grants are critical to the un-
iversity’s ability to continue its mission of keeping college affordable and accessible for the neediest students.

ISAC left the task of notifying MAP awardees about their endangered grants to the colleges and universities, many of which wanted to do so until the state’s budget deal was sealed in July, and all hope for reprieve seemed lost.

This timing of the notices meant that, as

As hundreds of students rallied near the capitol, the legislature voted to give Governor Quinn the authority to spend the $205 million needed to restore the current year’s Monetary Award Program grants.

hoped, was a last chance to pressure the leg-
islature into restoring the second-semester Money grant. In preparation, they began meeting with politicians and speaking out publicly. Peters said the MAP cut made him “angrier and more alarmed” than anything in his ten years as president of Northern Illinois.

An organized offensive began, with ISAC spreading the word, especially among students, who responded by holding rallies, distributing flyers, circulating petitions, and writing letters to legislators and newspaper editors decrying the cut.

In an online website and a series of spe-
cial hearings around the state, ISAC col-
clected testimony from hard-pressed MAP recipi-
ents. Financially struggling single parents, children of single or unemployed par-
ets, students maxed out on loans, students already working more than the usual job in order to afford college, students who said their grants were all that stood between them and having to quit school were among the hundreds weighing in to the legislature.

The campaign enlisted a key ally in Governor Pat Quinn, the former lieuten-
ant governor who automatically succeeded the dis-
graced Blagojevich. Quinn held MAP-pro town halls at several campuses. No opposition surfaced.

Amidst a blizzard of news headlines and favorable editor-
torials, the MAP quest reached its high

Ed Maloney, chairman of the Illinois State Senate’s higher education committee, says that authorizing the governor to spend $205 million to sustain the Monetary Award Program grants “was a band-aid, there’s no question about it.”

pitches in Springfield on October 15, the veto session’s second day. As hundreds of students rallied near the capitol, the House and the Senate overwhelmingly voted Quinn’s veto down to spend the $205 million needed to make the current year’s grants whole. The senator who cast the single nega-
tive vote complained to the Chicago Tribune that Quinn could have avoided the uproar altogether by tapping funds at his disposal all along. Senator Ed Maloney, chair-
man of the Senate Higher Education Committee, agreed that Quinn could have gone ahead “without all that fanfare,” but that “for some reason he wanted ap-
proval from the General As-
sembly.”

On October 18, the governor signed the MAP measure into law, saying he would borrow the mil-
lion plus surpluses from other state accounts. In the run-up to the veto session, legislators had sparred over how best to offset the addi-
tional MAP cost, Democrats fa-
voring a dollar-a-pack cigarette tax, Republicans proposing a similar tax, sales tax amnesty. The session ended without the subject of a fund-

ing source ever coming up.

““This was a band-aid, there’s no ques-
tion about it,” Maloney commented. “Now we have to find a sustainable source of in-
come for funding MAP.” Without one, Holtschneider saw the program as remain-
ing in a “precarious place,” vulnerable to possible efforts to restrict it by tightening eli-
gibility requirements.

Davis, on the other hand, sensed that the fuss had left lawmakers “strongly in-
dined” to support MAP in the future. “The General Assembly, right to left, top to bot-

As a symptom of, and momentary diversion from, the larger, longer-running fiscal woes plaguing Illinois and, by extension, its public higher educa-
tion system. As state expenses have outrun revenue year after year, that system has be-
come an increasingly discretionary state budget item, resulting in a 17.2 percent drop in state support since 2002, according to the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

Students have borne the brunt in tuition levels that have been growing at rates ex-
ceding inflation, even by double-digit per-
centages in some cases. Inflation-free times proved no antidote to tuition increases, as only six community colleges stood pat on tu-
ition and fees together for this year, but the other 42 raised them, from 2.3 to 12.2 per-
cent. In tuition alone, the public universities imposed increases of between 2.6 percent and 11.4 percent for full-time, state-resident undergraduates.

Under the state’s novel “Truth in Tuition” law, in effect since 2004, the universi-
ties’ new rates apply each year only to en-
tering students, and are locked in for them for their next four years. Except for those who have overstayd certain time limits,
Tuition Policy Debate
Washington’s public higher education costs continue to shift from the state to the student

By Kathy Witkowsky
OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON STATE Senator Derek Kilmer’s daughter is only three, but already he’s taught the pre-schooler some harsh realities about higher education.

“Why does daddy go to work?” he’ll ask. Her response: “To pay for college.” The 35-year-old Kilmer, a Princeton graduate who chairs the Senate Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee, is fond of reminding people that he’s quite possibly the only member of the legislature who is still paying off his student loans.

“And how are you going to pay for college?” Kilmer will follow up. “With scholarships,” his daughter Sophie will answer, as he’s been coached.

The exchange makes for a great “party trick,” as Kilmer calls it, and nearly always gets a laugh. But it underscores the deep concerns of the Democrat from Gig Harbor, who readily acknowledges that the state of higher education in Washington is no laughing matter. The state’s six public baccalaureate institutions lost up to a quarter of their per-student funding at public baccalaureate institutions is well below the national average, its six-year graduation rate for first-time freshmen enrolled at those institutions was more than 66 percent—the nation’s third highest. Washington’s overall graduation rate of 63 percent also compares favorably with other states. But, partly due to limited capacity and selectivity at the upper-division levels, Washington’s overall college participation rate is substantially below the national average: Only 29 percent of 18-to-24-year-olds are enrolled in college. (The national average is 34 percent.)

A 2008 master plan approved by the legislature called for improving overall degree production by 40 percent within a decade, including increasing the number of undergraduate and graduate degrees awarded annually by 33,600. Since the economy has tanked, that timeline has been extended to 2030, and the number has been modified downward to 20,700 (11,400 more bachelor’s degrees and 9,300 more graduate degrees). But there is no additional money available to help the institutions achieve those ambitious goals.

Following the latest round of cuts, tuition revenues now exceed state appropriations at four of Washington’s six public baccalaureate institutions.

University of Washington President Mark Emmert called it a crossing of the Rubicon. Terry Teale, executive director of the Council of Presidents, agreed. “We have really seen a radical shift in the way that we are funded. That worries us in terms of what public means anymore,” Teale said.

The trend has intensified both the discussion about the appropriate role of the state in supporting higher education and the ongoing debate over tuition policy. It also has administrators and higher education advocates trying to figure out better ways to plead their case to lawmakers, who will have to make more cuts when they meet again in January.

Democratic Governor Chris Gregoire has long been a staunch supporter of higher education, and worked diligently to protect it during the last legislative session. The governor will continue to do so, said Leslie Goldstein, executive policy advisor to the governor, because she understands that higher education is key to economic recovery. “The governor is completely passionately committed to higher education.”

Goldstein said, “We are in crisis management right now. When we get through the crisis, we will go back to improving both access and quality in higher education.”

Yet the state is hamstrung by its tax structure and spending obligations. Because it has no income tax, Washington relies heavily on revenues from sales tax and from a business and occupation tax, both of which drop when consumer spending decreases, as it has during this economic downturn.

Meanwhile, at least half of the state’s revenues are obligated to K–12 education and other expenses. That leaves higher education as the largest single area of the discretionary budget, and historically it has been the first place lawmakers turn for cuts when times are tough, said Ann Daley, executive director of the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board.

“Higher education in general is the easiest place to cut,” Daley said. And higher education is at a disadvantage, because lawmakers know it can generate some of its own revenues through tuition. “Over time, that’s resulted in higher ed getting less and less of the state pie,” said Daley, a longtime veteran of state politics, who held her same position at the Higher Education Coordinating Board from 1989 to 1993.

In spring 2009, the trend accelerated. Faced with a projected $9 billion shortfall for the 2009-11 biennium, the legislature cut $550 million in appropriations—about 17 percent—for all of higher education, including the community and technical colleges. Factoring in increases for state financial aid programs, the reduction comes out to 14 percent—still one of the largest percentage reductions in any sector of the state’s budget. (By comparison, K–12 was cut by ten percent; health and human services by about 11 percent.)

Higher education administrators said they sympathize with both the governor, whom they see as an ally, and the legislature. “I don’t think anyone is holding anything against the legislature, that’s for sure,” said Jane Sherman, vice provost for academic policy and evaluation at Washington State University. Sherman lives and works in the state capital of Olympia, where she often deals with lawmakers. “You could practically see some of these people nearly in tears about what they were doing to higher ed,” she said.

Still, the frustration within higher education circles is palpable. “Universities can’t just be turned off like a faucet, and then turned back on when times are a little better,” Western Washington University President Bruce Shepard told the Senate Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee in October. “Productive capacity is built over decades, and if we let it go it will take decades to build it back.”

In an attempt to soften the blow, lawmakers approved a measure allowing the public baccalaureate institutions to increase resident undergraduate tuition by up to 14 percent annually for this biennium. All of them have done so, bringing tuition to $7,100 this year at WSU and UW, and $4,900 at the state’s other four-year public institutions (not including activity or technology fees, which are an additional $450 to $600). Prior to this year, annual tuition increases had been limited to a maximum of seven percent; that constraint remains in place for community and technical colleges.

But the tuition increases have not kept students away. Preliminary, unofficial data showed enrollment is up at each of the state’s six baccalaureate institutions—even at UW, which reduced the size of its freshman class by 300 students, or six percent—and total enrollment at all of them is up 3.2 percent over last year, to a record 105,000 (full-time equivalent). Administrators say that is in part due to increased retention,
Washington's four-year institutions are eliminating nearly 1,550 positions. “It is a messy business,” says Doug Wadden, executive vice provost at the University of Washington.

brunt of the cuts in vacant positions, and hired only about 20 new faculty members, compared to 200 in a normal year. “A lot of good programs right now are being hurt in this process,” said Doug Wadden, executive vice provost of academic affairs and planning. “It is a messy business, because you’re not doing it necessarily for academic purposes. You’re doing it for budgetary purposes.”

The cuts were equally painful at WSU, the state’s land-grant institution. But there the administration was somewhat ahead of the curve, thanks to an internal analysis of its programs that had largely been completed when the economy took a nosedive. The Academic Affairs Prioritization Program, known as A2P2, was begun in 2007, in an attempt to focus and strengthen the university. Through A2P2, the university had identified its lowest priority programs, ranking them based on demand and enrollment. Still, “the budget reduction process was extremely stressful,” said WSU Provost Warwick Bayly.

After an exhaustive process that included more than a dozen public forums, the administration eliminated 950 courses this fall, about 18 percent of the university’s total offerings. Among the casualties: the departments of theater and dance, community and rural sociology, and the German major.

The economic crisis also prompted the president of WSU, Elson Floyd, to volunteer $10,000, bringing it down to $625,000. (Floyd’s counterpart at UW, Mark Emmert, whose annual compensation package is more than $500,000, made a similar gesture, turning down a raise this year.) In addition, Floyd and other high-level administrators have agreed to contribute five percent of their base salaries to WSU scholarship funds, a move that is expected to raise about $300,000. Those actions haven’t gone unnoticed, said Derick En’wezoh, president of the Associated Students of Washington State University. “I think students are very appreciative of President Floyd’s commitment to this university,” said En’wezoh, who described Floyd as “a general who fights alongside his troops.”

That’s small comfort to Melissa Johnson, 22, a senior from Camano Island, who said she relies heavily on financial aid. The legislature provided an additional $8 million in financial aid for the 25 percent of students who receive direct state aid, and it also required institutions to dedicate seven percent of the additional revenue raised by tuition increases to financial aid this year. (The Evergreen State College went well beyond that, devoting 20 percent.) But Johnson, who is majoring in psychology and human development, said she did not receive any new financial aid. “It’s a real mess,” she said. “You’re not doing it necessarily for academic purposes. You’re doing it for budgetary purposes.”

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said Democratic Representative Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney, who sits on the House Ways and Means Committee and is a former chair of the House Higher Education Committee. Kenney firmly opposes giving greater tuition-setting autonomy to UW. “We’d end up having a 30-elite school,” she said. The solution, according to Kenney, lies in finding new sources of revenue. “We need tax reform in our state, which everyone talks about but no one does anything about,” she said.

But given the current economic climate, the chances of tax reform are slim, certainly in the near term. So for now, higher education advocates say that the institutions must do a better job of making their case to get a bigger piece of the current pie. “In the past, I don’t think we’ve organized the story in a way that has connected the dots,” said Terry Teale, of the Council of Presidents, who has been organizing a public relations campaign in advance of the upcoming legislative session.

One lawmaker who has yet to be won over is Republican Representative Glenn Anderson, the ranking minority member of the House Higher Education Committee. The cost management of the institutions is atrocious. And there’s a culture of coming to Olympia and bullshitting us about the money, said Anderson, who vigorously opposed the tuition increases. “If you’re going to ask more from a public that’s under (economic) stress, then you should be offering reforms that justify whatever you’re asking from the customer.”

Anderson believes the economic situation is such that it might merit closing one of the institutions. “It’s a legitimate alternative,” he said.

State Senator Derek Kilmer prefers a different approach. He’s in favor of developing performance agreements for each institution that would tie funding to outcomes. “We need to do a better job collectively of not just holding higher education institutions accountable but holding the legislature accountable, too,” he said.

When it comes to lobbying the legislature, the baccalaureate institutions do not enjoy nearly the political sway that the community and technical colleges do. That’s partly because the 34 community and technical colleges are all represented by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and therefore speak in a unified voice. They also have a distinct geographical and numerical advantage, pointed out Chris Reykdal, the board’s deputy executive director of finance. “Our colleges are all over our state,” said Reykdal. “And every legislator has at least one college that overlaps their legislative district.”

Even so, the community and technical colleges did not dodge the latest round of budget cuts. They took a 10.7 percent reduction in state funds that was partly offset by a seven percent tuition increase. The end result was an average 7.6 percent reduction in funding. At the same time, enrollment is up 9.5 percent over last year, to a record high of 161,000 full-time equivalent students, about 60 percent of the state’s total higher education enrollment. Like the four-year institutions, the community and technical colleges have reduced their staffs. So far, there have been 230 layoff offers, with another 90 projected. They have also eliminated low-enrollment programs and courses, and have increased class sizes, which are up by an average of 23 percent this year. Already, the effects are being felt: Colleges are reporting waitlists in many programs, especially in allied health, said Reykdal. Some students take other classes while they wait; others simply go away. “There is definitely more demand than we can accommodate,” Reykdal said.

Currently, some 13,000 community college graduates transfer each year to a public institution, another 3,000 to a private one. But as enrollment increases, the community colleges expect to see a bottleneck at the junior level, because the public baccalaureate institutions will not be able to handle all the students who want to transfer in.

Reykdal believes that a more cohesive message needs to be coming from all sectors of higher education. “The entire education pipeline has to be healthy,” he said. “I hope we will band together and continue to talk about ourselves as the economic engine of the state.”

Kathy Witosky is a freelance reporter in Missoula, Montana.
Calamity in California
State's battered budget leads to huge fee increases and less access to public universities

By Jon Marcus

Carved from the rust-colored Palomar Mountains along the coast of the churning Pacific, the University of California at San Diego seems as close to paradise as any public higher education institution is likely to look.

A racial and ethnic rainbow of students stroll beneath clear blue skies wearing T-shirts and flip-flops in the 80-degree heat. The student newspaper prints the surf report on page one. Butterflies flit around the eucalyptus trees while hundreds gather on a manicured athletics field for the Chancellor's Challenge, a 5K road race.

The race has been organized to raise money for scholarships to help the poorest students afford the quickly escalating cost of attending this university, whose price increase almost ten percent this fall and will soon rise again by nearly a third.

In all, this event will generate about $200,000, an inconsequential amount compared to the $2.6 billion in cuts and added costs suffered by this and California's other public universities since the start of this recession, which came on top of a 40 percent inflation-adjusted drop in state support since the early 1990s.

"What I see in California and around the rest of the country is an emerging catastrophe," said California State University system Chancellor Charles Reed.

The Golden State has stumbled from higher-education success story to poster child for the crisis at American public universities. Its university system—by far the nation's biggest, divided into 110 community colleges, the 23 campuses of the California State University, and the ten University of California campuses—has traditionally also been among the best, including as it does UCLA and UC San Diego, both ranked among the nation's top 20 research universities and flagship UC Berkeley, consistently named the best public university in America. Faculty at all the UC schools combined have won 55 Nobel prizes.

But huge and continuing population growth of about 30 percent since 1980, corporate tax cuts, a largely dysfunctional state government, an enormous increase in spending on prisons, and overdependence on income tax, capital gains and sales taxes—exactly the revenue streams most affected by recession—have combined to leave California with a staggering $26 billion shortfall this year in revenues for public services.

The result has looked like something out of a Hollywood disaster movie. State buildings were put up for sale, health care services were cut for the poor, office equipment was auctioned off on eBay to raise money, parks and beaches were closed or left unsupervised, and departments had to resort to issuing creditors IOUs.

State allocations to California universities and colleges were slashed by up to one-fifth, with $690 million cut from the community colleges, $584 million from the Cal State system, and $813 million from the University of California—creating, as the university figures it, a $1.1 billion hole, when increases in utility costs, health benefits and overenrollment are taken into account. This even after California's share of federal stimulus funding was applied against the leak—funding that will eventually run out.

"Higher education is in a competition it has never been in before," Reed said in his office in Long Beach, counting the many problems on his fingers. "It's in that competition with healthcare, with the burden of Medicare and Medicaid have put on states." But mostly it's in competition with prisons, he said, in a folksy manner that evoked the years he spent in Tallahassee overseeing Florida's now equally troubled public university system.

"Somewhere in the mid to late '80s," Reed said, "legislatures all around the country...began to try to figure out how they could 'out-crime' each other. They didn't look at the consequences and the outcome of these severe penalties for nonviolent crimes." An inmate in a California prison, Reed said, costs the state five times as much as a student at a state university. "It's nuts," he concluded. Yet when the state legislature passed a bill that would have released 34,000 prisoners, the Assembly balked.

Most of the 180,000 faculty and staff at the University of California are being forced to take unpaid furloughs of from 11 to 26 days, depending on their salaries. At Cal State, faculty are being furloughed for about two days a month. "To call people profoundly demoralized is to be kind," said Lillian Taiz, president of the California Faculty Association. "Those who can leave are leaving."

Recruitment of new faculty has skidded to a halt. At Berkeley, which typically hires 100 new professors, only ten positions will be filled this year. At UCLA, the number of courses was reduced by 165 this fall, or ten percent. Average class size there has soared to 60. UC Irvine has halted admission to its doctoral program in education, UC Davis has eliminated 44 humanities and cultural studies courses and its liver-transplant program, and UC Santa Cruz has canceled courses with fewer than 100 students and deferred planned majors in earth sciences and environmental sciences. San Francisco State University has cut 354 courses, turning the first day of the fall semester into a chaotic free for all, with students "crashing" courses that were well beyond capacity and begging faculty to let them in. Some said they were giving up and quitting school, unable to enroll in the required courses they needed to eventually earn a degree.

In fact, in spite of the increased demand, California's universities and colleges are intentionally shrinking their enrollments.

The overburdened community colleges, flooded with a record 2.9 million students this fall, nonetheless reduced course offerings by 20 percent. That's 600 classes in the San Diego Community College district, for example, which told some 18,000 students—more than most American community colleges enroll—to come back in the spring.

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dent, compared to an inflation-adjusted $13,860 in 1990, University of California President Mark Yudof has said.

In a state whose celebrated 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education guaranteed tuition-free access, California’s public universities have responded by increasing educational fees (in an Orwellian twist, it’s still not called tuition) by 127 percent since 2001 at the University of California, even before November’s increase, and by 161 percent at Cal State—11 percent and 13 percent per year, respectively. That’s far above any increase in inflation or household income.

Meanwhile, financial aid to students provided under the Cal Grant program was mostly shielded from the budget cuts, which is a relief to students, after Governor Schwarzenegger in the spring proposed eliminating the program entirely. With the increased fees and stagnant economy, there appears to be plenty of need: The number of recipients of Cal Grants has exploded by 68 percent since 2000, from 179,860 to 301,972.

“We’re losing sight of what a public higher education means—something that’s affordable and accessible to everyone,” said Utsav Gupta, student body president and a neuroscience major at UC San Diego. “Students are looking at the system and wondering, why are we taking the brunt of this?”

The state has already slipped dramatically in the proportion of its population with a bachelor's degree, falling from first among the 15 largest states in 1981 to 14th. It is now 49th in the share of its population over the age of 24 that has graduated from even high school, and 46th in the proportion of 19-year-olds enrolled in college. Even in better times, only about 106,000 of those nearly three million community college students were managing to successfully transfer to a UC or Cal State school, or even to private or out-of-state universities.

More than 300 University of California faculty have warned Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger—himself the product of a California community college—that the latest cuts will imperil not only the universities’ prestige, but also the state’s economy. Public universities produce 75 percent of all the bachelor’s degrees in California. And if current trends continue, according to the Public Policy Institute of California, the increasingly knowledge-based economy will face a shortfall of a million educated workers by 2025. “I just don’t think that people understand how awful that is—economists, the tax base, the crime rate, everything,” said Shulock.

And there is little sign that things will turn around. Another $7 billion state budget shortfall is projected for next year. Other areas, including primary education, have been promised first dibs on the money when revenues pick up again. In an October memo to campus business administrators, Cal State’s chief financial officer wrote ominously: “It is incredible to think we are in this position in the middle of a recession and the margins will be insufficient. It will be necessary to change radically business processes and service delivery systems so that personnel costs and other expenditures can be reduced significantly on an ongoing basis.” Yet the university system has done little to defend the universities, higher education interests are feuding among themselves.

The share of the state budget that goes to higher education has been cut nearly in half since the 1980s, while the proportion spent on prisons has tripled.

UC San Diego Chancellor Marvy Anne Fox (center) at the annual “Chancellor’s Challenge” 5K run, a fundraiser for scholarships to help low-income students, surrounded by current scholarship recipients.

In spite of increased demand, California’s universities and colleges are intentionally shrinking their enrollments.
Reed said the blame game starts in Sacramento, where the politicians who cut state financial support are fully aware that the universities can, and likely will, pass the burden on to students. “Legislators know that,” he said. “They’re going to criticize me and Mark (Yudof) and other leaders for raising tuition, but they know we can do this. So there is the shift to fund higher education, from a public good that government needs to pay for, to a private good that individuals will have to pay for themselves.”

As for the labor unions, Reed thinks they have a limited perspective. “They’re very in- sular,” he said. “In California the labor unions seem to think there’s a golden goose that’s going to fly over Sacramento and drop money. Guess what? There isn’t any money in Sacramento.” Taiz disagrees. “California is still the eighth largest economy in the world,” she said. “It’s not true that there’s no money here. It’s true that people don’t want to tax the money that is here.”

Some faculty also have attacked the ill- timed expansion of the UC system with the addition of a new campus in Merced in 2005, a time when resources already were becoming thinly stretched. In a letter to Yudof, 23 department chairs at UC San Diego called for the Merced campus to be closed. The system, they said, should “drop the pretense that all campuses are equal.”

Recruitment of new faculty has skidded to a halt. At Berkeley, which typically hires 100 new professors, only ten positions will be filled this year.

The meaning of the moment was not continued next page

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souls to add new sections to courses when extra demand appeared. Once the allotted sections were filled, the courses would be closed. This distinction was crucial because sections constituted the currency of the community college system, and adding sections allows colleges to expand with demand and maintain their open-to-all policy.

The warnings came even as demand for education and retraining was mushrooming throughout southern Florida, much of it pushed by the economic crisis. The new education seekers included recently laid-off workers, former soldiers on the GI Bill, students whose families could no longer afford higher-priced institutions, and the sons and daughters of recent immigrants.

Throughout the summer they enrolled at the college, and when the midnight hour struck on June 17, a huge horde of students and other seekers included recently laid-off workers, former soldiers on the GI Bill, students whose families could no longer afford higher-priced institutions, and the sons and daughters of recent immigrants.

Florida has never been generous to higher education and, among the states, currently ranks near the bottom in funding for public colleges and universities.

lost on Beltran. Miami Dade, once open to all, was now closing its doors through random selection. Somewhere a computer was choosing who would gain entry to the registration process and who would not. In effect, the computer was choosing who would have access to education.

In the days that followed, administrators that followed, administrators attempted to mitigate the damage by hand- processing registration for many of those who had been shut out. Still, the damage was done. Beltran estimates that some 30,000 students at Miami Dade failed to get courses they needed to stay on a grad school track. Some 5,000 students got no courses at all.

And the agony did not end there. Cutbacks in the financial aid and advise...
FLORIDA from preceding page

century. Padrón, 64 years old, makes a habit of greeting visitors himself in the anteroom and escorting them to the inner sanctum. His manner is almost old-world in its courtliness, and he speaks in a soft cadence. But the words contain a barely controlled anger.

“In all this time,” Padrón said, referring to the breakdown and difficulties of the autumn, “I have not had one phone call from a legislator saying they were sorry. To them, it’s like nothing has happened.”

The legislators in Tallahassee are much on the minds of Padrón and his compatriots here. For three years the lawmakers have relentlessly slashed college and university budgets. At Miami Dade, the retreat of state funding has come in several forms and can only be appreciated in its totality.

Since 2007, budget reductions for the college have amounted to 18 percent, or some $35.2 million, while enrollment steadily increased. This year the cuts were mitigated somewhat by the arrival of $13.6 million in federal stimulus money.

Those direct funding reductions came on top of the withdrawal of $27 million in scholarship matching funds, forcing the college to compensate by drawing down other accounts.

And the cruelest cut of all came from the state’s peculiar funding system for community colleges, which allocates money according to the previous three years’ average enrollment. When demand grows at the colleges, as it usually does, campuses find themselves teaching students for whom they are not reimbursed by the state.

At Miami Dade, those figures are startling. This year it has 35,000 unfunded students, equivalent to the entire undergraduate population of the University of Florida. The annual bill for those students comes to $39 million.

“The system has collapsed here,” said Padrón. “We can’t hire faculty to teach students, and our buildings are deteriorating and breaking down. Thousands and thousands of students have been turned away, which has never happened in our history. If we are forced to keep rejecting these students, I fear we are headed for some kind of social breakdown.

You simply can’t deprive people of a way upward.”

Padrón looked out his window which reveals part of the downtown campus. Referring to presidents at other state colleges, he said, “Many of my colleagues won’t dare say these things because, frankly, they are afraid of losing their jobs. I understand that. But someone has to say it so we can begin to try and reverse the tide.”

By all accounts, reversing the tide will be a major challenge. Florida has never been generous to higher education and, among the states, currently ranks near the bottom in funding for public colleges and universities.

Moreover, the economic crisis struck famously hard here. More than most states, Florida rode the housing boom to prosperity during the early years of the decade and now is reaping the whirlwind. Its foreclosure rate ranks among the highest in the nation, and in the past two years its annual tax receipts have dropped by more than $12 billion.

Across the state, scenes of the cataclysm litter the landscape. Here in Miami whole clusters of candy-colored condo high-rises stand empty, almost as if they had been struck by a neutron bomb. In Coral Gables the fronts of closed stores have been covered by perky scenes of affluent shoppers, as if to disguise the failure. The state is losing population for the first time in a century.

Florida’s problems are compounded by its near total reliance on the sales tax for revenue. One of the most tax phobic regions of the country, Florida has no income tax, meaning its recovery will await a resurgence in consumer spending. Thus far, it has not appeared. The latest available figures show sales tax revenue lagging behind last year’s levels, which were already anemic.

As legislators found themselves forced to choose between higher education and other needs such as prisons and Medicaid, higher education has lost. “When you have the state losing billions in revenues, legislators are going to gravitate first to the essentials,” said Patrick Dallet, a recently retired senior analyst for the legislature. “And higher education is not regarded as an essential.”

The pain has been shared up and down the food chain. State funding of the university system was chopped by $451 million, or 22 percent, over the last two years, while enrollment at the 11 campuses declined slightly to 256,000 students. In addition, the state’s highly popular Bright Futures scholarship program was curtailed.

Some relief for the universities has come in the form of $161 million in federal stimulus funds. In addition, the Florida Board of Governors capped freshman enrollment at 2007 levels and, after several years of tortured negotiations with lawmakers, it won approval of 15 percent annual hikes in tuition. The hikes will continue until Florida’s traditionally low tuition reaches the national average for public institutions.

None of those measures has relieved the gloom. At a town hall meeting at Florida State University over the summer, President T.K. Wetherell opened the conclave by quoting Winston Churchill. “It takes a master craftsman years to build a mansion, but only a matter of hours to burn it down.”

He told the gathering, “That’s where we are today with Florida State.”

Wetherell likened the universities’ plight to that of the nation after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The changes, he said, are permanent. “We are not going back to the way things were two or three years ago,” he said. A few weeks later Wetherell announced a withering series of cutbacks at his university: the “suspension” of the Geology de-
Additionally, the community colleges are charged with educating those students most in need of it: the vast and growing population of minority and underprivileged young people. This group has lagged badly in education and accounts for much of America's fall from grace in terms of higher education's leadership outcome. The nation is to recover that leadership, the community colleges must do the heavy lifting.

A profile of students at Miami Dade offers clues of this distinction. According to the college, 75 percent of its freshmen arrive needing remedial classes in reading or math; nearly two-thirds come from families classified as low-income or poverty-level by the federal government; most are the first generation of college goers in their families.

“The plight of the community colleges is always something that annoyed me,” said Robert Atwell, a former president of the American Council on Education who now resides in Sarasota, Florida. “They receive far less in funding than the four-year institutions, and yet they are so important. Several times (at the council) I tried to get something that would re-balance the funding disparity, but the idea failed. The community colleges have never been able to muster the political clout of the universities.

If anything, the disparity between the universities and community colleges has gotten worse. Last year the freshman class at the University of Florida sported an average SAT score of 1293, and at Florida State it was 1261, numbers that rival some top private universities. In the face of this competition, minority enrollment has been falling at both institutions.

Meanwhile, the state’s per-student funding for universities now stands at $11,519, or roughly four times the $2,659 for community colleges. And while university enrollment here has remained flat since the recession hit, community college enrollment has exploded. This year alone it grew 20 percent, according to the Association of Florida Community Colleges.

Rodolfo Padrón, a former community college administrator who now heads a non-profit in Washington, D.C. and serves on the Miami Dade board in the 1990s. “He and the college are that important to the community.”

Padrón has made his mistakes, and his style of top-down management produced a short-lived faculty revolt in the late 1990s. But today he is largely lionized and given credit for instilling the college’s administration with a sense of fervor for its mission. Rolando Montoya, the college provost, described the administration as operating “something like an apostolate.”

“I don’t want to exaggerate, but people come to work here every day with the goal of helping those who don’t have much,” said Montoya in his office next to Padrón’s. “To me, even our bureaucratic fights are interesting in that way. People don’t fight for salaries or travel or perquisites. They fight for classroom space or new desks, tools that can help the students. It becomes a passion, and it’s contagious.”

But the fact is, Miami Dade is still going broke. And the prospects for a rescue from Tallahassee appear bleak.

Robert A. Jones is a former reporter and columnist for the Los Angeles Times.
A Societal Imperative
Changing the way we think about community colleges
By Pamela Burdman

RECENTLY while browsing the aisles of my local Barnes and Noble, I noticed something that I had never seen. On a display of books about education was a propped-up copy of “The Community College Guide: The Essential Reference From Application to Graduation.” As I have spent most of my time and energy in the last several years focused on community college student success, the blue-and-white paperback seemed to be staring straight at me.

The guide, written by two faculty members at Bronx Community College, includes chapters such as “The application process in 20 documents or less,” “ESL and remediation: not just for beginners,” “Overcoming procrastination,” and “Transferring to a four-year school.”

I felt some ambivalence upon perusing the book: On the one hand, I learned that becoming the subject of a college guide could push two-year colleges into a competitive and rankings-driven four-year mold, away from their core mission of providing opportunity for students who traditionally are not served, or not well-served, by four-year institutions—part-time students, low-income students and adult students, for example. On the other hand, the topics did seem relevant and the content accurate. Why shouldn’t students considering two-year colleges have some guidance in their decisions? The book seemed to be tangible evidence that community colleges are being recognized for their central role in educating Americans.

For too long, two-year colleges have not just been the stepchild of our higher education system, but often an afterthought within the entire education pipeline. This fact is one of the premises of “The Community College Guide.” “We, of course, have known about this unheralded treasure for years,” wrote the authors. “To tell the truth, we’ve also been frustrated by the bad rap community college has received for so long. Too many haven’t recognized these schools as serious institutions of learning, and even more have simply ignored community colleges altogether.”

This neglect has in fact had a cruel impact on educational opportunity for our least advantaged students. Until recently, a myopic focus on four-year universities has been common among policymakers, journalists and researchers, making it hard to see the real needs of community colleges and their students. Knowing that students may be more likely to earn bachelor’s degrees if they start at four-year institutions, many advocates have pushed for steering students away from community colleges and toward four-year universities.

Programs abound to help promising disadvantaged students to enroll in four-year colleges and earn scholarships for their education. Too often policy discussions about college access end up obsessed with admissions standards at elite public institutions—even as policymakers neglect the needs of two-year colleges and their students by funding them poorly or limiting access, for example. Financial aid opportunities for community college students generally remain slim—even though these students often have greater need than university students.

It is important to ensure that disadvantaged students are not shut out of elite institutions. But a sole focus on four-year universities never constituted a strategy for raising education access, for example. Financial aid opportunities for community college students generally remain slim—even though these students often have greater need than university students.

For too long, two-year colleges have been not just the stepchild of our higher education system, but often an afterthought. Yet, I have noticed that some in the community college world have resisted the new attention that is coming to community colleges. Suddenly, in social situations, I observe a new curiosity about them. Friends, after seeing a spot on the evening news or a New York Times article, are praising me for focusing on these unsung institutions. Reporters are peppering me with questions. Community colleges are cropping up in newspaper headlines, magazine spreads, legislative proposals, even a new television sitcom, Community, on NBC.

The new attention is not a mere accident. Rather, it results from a confluence of forces. In particular, the current economic crisis and job loss have stimulated thinking about how states and regions can re-train workers to prepare them for new industries. As in the case of past recessions, the downturn is bringing more students to colleges’ doors. But this time, the recession’s severity and the intense focus on job creation have cast a brighter spotlight on this traditional workforce preparation role of our community colleges.

At the same time, the rising cost of universities is making community college attractive to more students. And even before the recession sent students pouring into community colleges, the cresting of the “baby boomlet” was having its influence. Some large public university systems that once relied on high school seniors to fill seats had begun getting creative about ways of keeping enrollment up, including through attracting more transfer students.

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Pamela Burdman

UNTIL recently, a myopic focus on four-year universities has made it hard to see the real needs of community colleges and their students.

For this reason, I celebrate the new attention that is coming to community colleges. Suddenly, in social situations, I observe a new curiosity about them. Friends, after seeing a spot on the evening news or a New York Times article, are praising me for focusing on these unsung institutions. Reporters are peppering me with questions. Community colleges are cropping up in newspaper headlines, magazine spreads, legislative proposals, even a new television sitcom, Community, on NBC.

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tural incentives. It is true that not every community college student intends to complete a program. Focusing solely on numbers of completions can obscure other issues, such as quality of learning or racial and ethnic gaps. Prioritizing completion rates could present a threat to access if colleges pursue them by excluding poorly prepared students. It is important to consider such admonitions about the completion goal in order to ensure that any new strategies are well designed to support increased learning, not just to churn out more degrees or curtail access. But none is an argument against efforts to ensure that more community college students can succeed.

I am increasingly encouraged, however, by the growing number of community college leaders who, while recognizing these cautionary notes, are determined to ensure that the scrutiny yields benefits for their colleges and, most importantly, their students. Being ignored condemned them and their students to a fate even worse than scrutiny. Scrutiny isn’t easy, but it offers an opportunity for discovery and change.

Instead of attacking those who point out areas for improvement, these wise community college leaders are taking up the challenge, working with their colleagues to move beyond ambivalence and defensiveness. Instead of focusing narrowly on seeking more money before any reforms are made, these leaders are pursuing a both/and approach. They are vigorously making the case for more resources while not waiting for those resources to be fully delivered. They are starting the hard job of orienting their institutions to provide better opportunities. This is not easy, because even before the current budget crisis that has hit most of the country, community colleges in many states were underfunded. But these forward-looking leaders are realizing that the underfunding cannot justify waiting to do better by students.

“The unmistakable fact is that we must improve our public higher education system in fundamental ways,” wrote Eloy Oakley, president of Long Beach City College, to all 140-some of his fellow presidents and chancellors in California. Oakley was writing in response to a research study on transfer, exhorting his colleagues to take its lessons seriously, rather than dismiss the message as a “red herring.”

“As a former Hispanic transfer student, I empathize with the students…and the barriers they must overcome,” Oakley wrote. “We must recognize that to date we have not been successful in providing ‘real’ opportunities for our underrepresented populations as well as our economically disadvantaged Californians. I do not suggest that my assertion is your fault, but I do suggest that we have a responsibility to improve it. The state of California must make a greater investment in our efforts. However, it is also true that we should not wait for others to change, and [should] do everything we can to make our system more navigable, focused on successful completion, and consistent across all of our 110 colleges. We should also continue to work with our K–12 and other higher education partners to create clear pathways for our students. This is a true systemic problem that affects thousands of students every year, regardless of the state of the economy.”

As a participant in the California Benchmarking Project with the University of California’s Center for Urban Education, Long Beach City College began several years ago analyzing its student outcomes data, looking especially at equity gaps. In particular, they focused on barriers faced by students looking to transfer to four-year universities, and how the college’s transfer center could better assist them. Even though the results weren’t perfect, the college’s leadership had the courage to be transparent about them, sharing them with their trustees and in several published reports.

Sanford “Sandy” Shugart, president of Valencia Community College in Florida, also exemplifies the new generation of student-success-minded leaders. His college began the hard work of improving completion rates long before it was that cool, and even before joining the Achieving the Dream initiative. At a community college conference last year, after about a decade of such work, Shugart revealed data showing that his institution had simultaneously improved student success rates while narrowing gaps. As of last year, Valencia eliminated achievement gaps in five of the six courses the college had targeted. Fall to spring retention hit 86 percent, and was even higher for African American students.

Shugart confessed that even he was surprised. “I have been a secret skeptic,” Shugart told the audience at the conference. “Deep down inside, I had doubts that we could move the needle. Now I’ve got hope like I’ve never had before that the vision of equity can be achieved in the American community college movement.”

What was refreshing and insightful about Shugart’s approach is that he did not just run through a litany of “best practices”—though Valencia has adopted many practices with evidence of effectiveness. The real key to Valencia’s success? “We changed the way we think,” Shugart said. “Everything else is details after that. Our job now is not to find out who’s college material and who’s not. Now everything raises a question: I wonder what the right conditions are for this person’s learning. The college is what the students experience. Nothing more and nothing less. It’s not the catalog, it’s not the buildings, it’s not the curriculum, it’s not the bud-

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**Breaking the Affordability Barrier**

How much of the college access problem is attributable to lack of information about financial aid?

By Bridget Terry Long

ALTHOUGH there have been substantial increases in college enrollment over the last several decades, access continues to be a serious problem for some groups. According to the U.S. census, among high school graduates in 2004, approximately 43 percent who came from families earning less than $30,000 immediately entered a postsecondary institution. In contrast, 75 percent of students from families who made more than $50,000 did so. Rightly so, the barriers most often highlighted by researchers, practitioners, and policymakers as impediments to college entry are costs or affordability and academic preparation.

However, another important culprit that has been increasingly getting attention is information. How much of the college access problem is attributable to lack of information? If students are unaware of the financial resources available to them or the best way to prepare academically, the aforementioned barriers of cost and academic preparation will be made worse by misperceptions, further limiting students.

Unfortunately, research demonstrates that students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, have very little understanding of college tuition levels, financial aid opportunities, and how to navigate the admissions process. The lack of information among low-income students has important implications for attempts to address the college affordability barrier. For decades, high tuition prices have prompted the federal government, as well as many states and colleges, to create need-based financial aid programs designed to help defray costs for low-income students. However, the existence of a financial aid program alone is not always enough to enable the enrollment of low-income students: the visibility and design of the program also matters.

A recent review of the research on financial aid programs by Susan Dynarski and David Deming underscores the fact that simple and transparent programs appear to be most effective. Similar results have been found in the examinations of other social welfare programs. To reach those in need, particularly among groups who have traditionally lacked good, accurate college information, aid programs must be well-publicized and relatively easy to understand and apply for.

Sadly, that is not how our financial aid system is currently designed. The key issue is that the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the gatekeeper to all federal aid and most state and institutional resources, is long and cumbersome. The 2008 FAFSA was eight pages long and contained more than 100 questions. To answer three of these questions, appli-continued next page

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**Prioritizing completion rates could present a threat to access if colleges pursue them by excluding poorly prepared students.**

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**Results of a field experiment suggest that direct help with the application process, and providing better information, could be effective ways to improve college access.**

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As a senior project director at WestEd, Pamela Burdman leads research and outreach projects focused on improving postsecondary readiness and attainment. She previously served as a Hewlett Foundation program officer and as a higher education reporter.
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cants had to complete three additional worksheets with nearly 40 additional questions. As shown in work by Susan Dynarski and Judy Scott-Clayton, the FAFSA is four times longer than the simplest tax return (i.e., IRS Form 1040EZ), and longer than IRS Form 1040. Moreover, the likelihood of submitting a FAFSA increased by 39 percent for high school seniors who would have been eligible for aid failed to even apply. That estimate does not include the likely millions of individuals who did not enroll in college because they did not know about the aid they were eligible to receive.

Many have long acknowledged the problems with the current FAFSA. Several reports by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance and the federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education highlight how the FAFSA serves as a barrier. However, a key question has been whether the form should be simplified to help students navigate it. Moreover, will making such changes really improve the outcomes of students? Are lack of information and too much complexity really the underlying problems? Several years ago, working with Eric Bettinger, Philip Oreopoulos, and Lisa Sanbonmatsu, I embarked on a project to investigate these issues.

The goal of our project was to target students who are likely to have little information about financial aid and college costs, and who may have difficulty navigating the financial aid process. To provide assistance to such families, we worked with H&R Block, an accounting firm that provides tax assistance to primarily low- and moderate-income families.

Working with 156 offices in Ohio and North Carolina during the 2008 tax season (January to April), we screened for clients who had family incomes of less than $45,000 and a family member between the ages of 17 and 30 who did not already have a bachelor’s degree. After the clients completed their taxes as they normally would, our software checked for eligibility, and among those meeting the criteria, the H&R Block tax professional asked them (and their legal parent or guardian, if necessary) to complete a Statement of Informed Consent. Once consent was secured, we randomly assigned individuals to one of three groups.

Group One received assistance with the FAFSA and personalized aid eligibility information. This entailed first pre-populating the FAFSA using the tax return just completed in the office. Then, we designed a streamlined interview protocol that asked the remaining FAFSA questions. These questions included information about parental educational, educational goals, and the number of children in the household currently attending college, and other forms of income such as child support. The software then computed the amount of financial aid the client was eligible to receive from the federal and state governments, and it explained these numbers in simple language, along with information about tuition costs at four local colleges. The tax professional then offered to submit the FAFSA to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) for them.

Group Two also received personalized aid eligibility estimates, which were calculated based on the tax return just submitted, and local tuition cost information. However, while the family was encouraged to complete the FAFSA form, no help was given.

For Group Three, we provided a booklet that had very simple information about the importance of college and the financial aid process. This booklet was put into the groups randomly, and on average their characteristics and motivations are the same, and comparing their outcomes gives us evidence on the effects of simplifying the FAFSA and giving personalized aid information.

The year following the experiment, we tracked the progress of participants using data from the DOE and the National Student Clearinghouse, a national database with college enrollment information.

Although we are not the first to propose simplifying the financial aid process by using tax data, we are the first to do a large-scale test of whether the model is viable and whether such interventions would affect student outcomes. However, it is first worth emphasizing that the implementation of the existence of a financial aid program alone is not always enough to enable the enrollment of low-income students; the visibility and design of the program also matters.

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get $2,675 from the state for every full-time equivalent community college student they sign up. Like public universities in many states, SUNY is increasing tuition and tuition to compensate for falling state support.

What’s happening in public higher education in New York, whose dual public university systems are the nation’s second and third largest (after the California State University system), is an extreme example of what’s happening to public higher education all over America. Public universities are among the first to be cut when government revenues get tight, making state allocations and tuition unpredictable and inconsistent, and shutting out poor and, increasingly, middle-class students who don’t meet income cutoffs for financial aid.

New York tends not to raise tuition when revenues are steady, because that would trigger a dog-chasing-its-tail increase in the cost of its self-adjusting state financial aid program. But when times get tough, tuition rises sharply anyway—28 percent in 1995, another 28 percent in 2003, yet another 15 percent this year. Funding for public higher education in New York “is like a drunken sailor lurching from lamppost to lamppost,” one insider said. “The state waits till things get really bad. Then, when no one can afford it, it raises the price.”

There are other ways that problems in New York mirror those in other states—albeit, as with so many things, what happens in New York seems that much more dramatic. At a time of dwindling resources, some SUNY campuses are chafing to expand and add attention-grabbing research, while CUNY plans a research center that hoped to dodge the blame for inevitable cuts and cost increases in a state where, by spring 2009, revenues were down an almost inconceivable 36 percent from the previous year. They could have taken all of the proceeds from tuition if they’d wanted to—and, in the past, they have.

New York’s tuition increases are nothing less than a tax on students, critics say. “We call it the SUNY tax,” said Maria Davila, a 21-year-old senior majoring in political science at SUNY New Paltz, a crowding area of chain-link fences circling construction sites, where dorm rooms built for two are now housing three students apiece, after 200 more freshmen than expected showed up last fall.

Almost none of the money actually goes to higher education. “Forget the millionaires,” editorialized the New York Daily News. “The people who have been sucker-punched the hardest under New York’s bloated, irresponsible budget are the families whose children are enrolled in the state universities.” And while the cost of attending CUNY and SUNY might be higher, what students get for their money are courses that are harder to get into, cuts in programs, and services that have vanished or are thinly stretched under the weight of surging enrollment. CUNY has half as many faculty as it did in the 1970s, the last time enrollment was this high. SUNY has cut staff, imposed hiring freezes, and increased its reliance on adjuncts.

“Classes are packed. You’re shut out. You have to wait up at night and pray for somebody to drop,” said Jermaine Morris, 23, a student at Borough of Manhattan Community College who has been working for three and a half years toward an associate’s degree that should have taken two. “I was supposed to graduate last semester, but couldn’t get the classes I needed.” Morris hopes to eventually transfer to a CUNY senior college to get a degree in civil engineering, but he started at the community college because it was comparatively cheaper. So much cheaper that, while Morris can’t wait to get out, some students say they plan to stick around even after getting their associate’s degrees, in order to pile up more transfer credits at community college rates, only worsening the crowding.

The competition is getting tougher, too. Last year, as a joke, someone at private New York University posted a phony flyer suggesting students transfer to CUNY to save money. It’s no longer a joke. The number of applicants to CUNY from the New York City suburbs jumped by nearly 20 percent this year, and from outside New York State by 12 percent, evidence that families are now picking “financial safety schools”—more often than not, public universities—based not on their children’s likelihood of getting in, but on their ability to pay.

SUNY saw a 20 percent jump this year in applicants from out of state. Officials speculate that these are students who might once have gone to Ithaca or Fordham, but whose families can’t swing private university tuition. SAT scores and high school grade point averages of entering students rose significantly this fall. At SUNY Stony Brook, the average SAT score of the middle 50 percent of applicants was 20 percent higher this year than last. At New Paltz, near the storied town of Woodstock, the entering grade point average has climbed from 85 to 92, and the average SAT score from 1100 to 1160 in the past decade. “We used to be an artsy, hippie school, but now it’s all really smart, collegiate, stuffy people who are majoring in economics,” Davila said. “The people who are gone are the ones who didn’t get very good grades in high school and couldn’t afford to hire SAT tutors.”

It’s not just Stony Brook and New Paltz. SUNY campuses are “getting smarter kids, and kids with more means,” said Michael Trunzo, the system’s vice chancellor for government relations. “It’s a pocketbook issue.” They are threatening to squeeze out others for whom public universities like CUNY and SUNY, with their legacies of serving ethnic and racial minorities and urban and rural families, were set up to serve.

“The schools are pleased that they’ve been able to—quote, unquote—raise standards,” said Deborah Glick, a graduate of CUNY’s Queens College who chairs the New York General Assembly’s higher education committee. “But who gets left out are people who are more marginal, those who have had some additional struggles. Then they raise tuition. For some students, a few hundred dollars is the difference between making it and not making it,” says Deborah Glick, a graduate of CUNY’s Queens College who chairs the General Assembly’s higher education committee. “But who gets left out are people who are more marginal, those who have had some additional struggles. Then they raise tuition. For some students, a few hundred dollars is the difference between making it and not making it.”

In fact, even before the most recent cuts, state aid per student to SUNY fell by five percent, and to CUNY by 14 percent, when adjusted for inflation, according to the independent Fiscal Policy Institute. Since 1991, the proportion of the SUNY budget underwritten by the state has fallen from more than 42 percent to less than 33 percent. “That’s not a smart economic strategy, and it’s not good stewardship of two of the country’s great systems of public higher education,” said David Kallick, a senior fellow at the institute.

Then again, SUNY, for its part, had no official stewardship at all for two years. That’s how long it went without a chancellor before the appointment of Nancy Zimpher, former president of the University of Cincinnati, who took office on June 1. And it shows the importance to public higher education of something else: leadership. During its time without it, SUNY suffered $200 million in state cuts. The chaos was exacerbated continued next page
by the resignation of Governor Eliot Spitzer, a higher education booster, after revelations that he had patronized prostitutes. Spitzer was not around to implement the recommendations of a commission on higher education he had named, the first in New York in more than 30 years, that called for 2,000 new full-time faculty and billions of dollars in new investment. He wasn’t there to follow through on his plan to establish a $4 billion endowment fund for CUNY and SUNY either. (He had held a conference call with university administrators about the proposal just a day before the scandal broke.)

Spitzer’s successor, David Paterson, by contrast, has been too busy reacting to the budget crisis to advocate for higher education, or much of anything else.

Zimpher told one campus audience. “They see national and international recognition for their work. But the greatest pathway to national and international recognition is to serve your state.”

It was an important declaration. Like the other SUNY campuses, CUNY also plans its own new center to house research in hot, grant-generating fields including photonics, nanotechnology and neuroscience—something not all of its science faculty necessarily support. “One of the concerns the science faculty has voiced to me is that the resources will follow that center, and the already crowded and cramped labs in a college campus in, let’s say, Queens, that those conditions will become even worse as the resources get diverted,” said Barbara Bowen, head of the SUNY faculty union.

Jay Hershenson, CUNY’s senior vice chancellor for university relations, responded, “The quality of a university, at the end of the day, is a function of the quality of its faculty. And you must have excellent faculty to have great opportunities for research. A great university must have great research.”

What it also must have, most involved agree, is a more regular system of tuition increases and decreases. “New York allocates funds for construction over a five-year period. Why can’t we do that with tuition?” Zimpher asked. One proposal would tie future increases to the higher education price index. Another would let schools make “modest” and “predictable” annual tuition increases on their own—something that now requires legislative action—and charge tuition that could vary by program and by campus. CUNY, too, seeks more predictable tuition hikes, in part because it is assumed that this is something New York’s beleaguered students would support.

But upstate at Hudson Valley Community College, which is part of the SUNY system, that does not yet appear to be the case. At this campus in the northwestern New York town of Troy, a one-time steel town a fifth of whose residents live below the poverty line, the crowding manifests itself outside the walls, where there is a sea of cars. Cars spill over from the parking lots, jump curbs, block sidewalks, and sprawl across the grass.

Just days earlier, President Barack Obama spoke at this school about his goal of restoring the country to first in the world in the proportion of college graduates by 2020.

On the walls here, too, among the notices about the pep band and the Frisbee club, are posters about how to apply for federal student aid. Those who do go to college, said Bowen, “have the constant experience of having to fight to get their education. It takes a heroic effort when you have to line up for everything, squeeze into a class, hope you can get time with your professor. That’s a betrayal of students who have been led to believe that college is an opportunity for them. The experience of college should not be every day having to fight for a seat in class.”

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