



THEMES in the NEWS

IDEA's weekly commentary on education news

Week of April 11-15, 2011

"I Can Barely Afford to Be Here"

by UCLA IDEA



California's community colleges, the University of California and the California State University systems are looking at \$1.4 billion in state funding cuts. The universities are raising tuition, cutting courses, and limiting enrollment. Further, the federal government plans to cut \$500 million from Pell grants, which are designed to help low-income students gain a college education.

Poor students are deciding their futures based on what they can afford, not on the college opportunities that would serve them the best. For some this means not going to college at all. Others choose the least expensive local options. According to IDEA's latest Educational Opportunity Report, 78 percent of principals saw diminished college choices for high school graduates; for example, they may select lower-cost two-year colleges instead of going directly to a four-year college that has accepted them. "It's just sad that they took care of their business and there's just no way for them to go on to a four year," a Solano County principal said.

The pressure on the Cal State system is particularly troubling. With 23 campuses enrolling diverse students, it is the largest provider of bachelor's degrees in California. It is sometimes called the "People's University" because it serves such large numbers of low-income students, minorities and first-generation college goers.

Students are coping with rising tuition, more expensive textbooks, fewer class offerings, and less guidance. They are changing fields of study or ditching plans to attend graduate school because they can't afford it or because programs have been eliminated.

UCLA's Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles reports difficult prospects for students attending the state college system in the middle of the recession. According to the Civil Rights Project report, the Cal State system graduates twice as many Latinos as the UC and more than three times as many black students. In "Squeezed from All Sides," researchers found that students at Cal State Northridge are receiving less financial help from parents. Students are having hours cut from jobs, are being laid off, and are helping to support parents or siblings. "I cannot get the classes I need. I don't have enough time to do homework because I have to work. These kinds of problems make me agitated, depressed, and confused," one student said.

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This week, more than 12,000 students and faculty across all campuses participated in a day of marches, demonstrations and sit-ins. Dubbed "The Day of Class Action," the protests were organized by the California Faculty Association to call attention to the dire effects of disinvestment in higher education.

"We are well aware of the budget issues our state faces, but too many Californians have already lost their homes and their jobs; we will not let California lose its public universities," said Lillian Taiz, president of the association. "We cannot cut back on training our state's future workforce and then expect our economy to thrive."

Joe Sanders, a freshman from Cal State Long Beach, said, "These cuts are going to affect me for a long time. Between tuition, the costs of student housing and textbooks, I can barely afford to be here. And I'm especially worried about what's going to happen next year and whether I'll be able to get all my classes."

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