



*Week of May 7-11, 2012*

## **Students Stuck between a Rock and No Place**

by UCLA IDEA

Higher education opportunities for California's 99 percent continue to slide. In the news this week we learn (again!) that college tuition is becoming unaffordable, that college participation is declining—especially for African American students—and that local school districts are reconsidering their graduation requirements in order to spend more time on remediation.

California's high school graduates are less likely than in the past to attend one of the state's public four-year universities, even if they met eligibility requirements. A new study by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) attributes the decline to the state's billion-dollar budget gaps.

In "Defunding Higher Education," PPIC's Hans Johnson documents a decade-long drop in state funding for public higher education. California's contribution to higher education in 2010-11 was \$1.6 billion less than 10 years earlier. During this period, higher education's slice of the state revenue pie declined by 9 percent while that going to corrections and rehabilitation grew by 26 percent. This shift in state fiscal priorities flies in the face of public sentiment. In PPIC's 2011 poll, 68 percent of Californians opposed cuts to higher education, while 62 percent supported cuts to prisons and corrections.

The PPIC report shows that declining state investment in higher education has had severe consequences on higher education quality and access. The University of California, California State University and California Community Colleges have cut programs and classes, increased class sizes, looked to out-of-state applicants and capped enrollment. But, most wrenching of all, they have increased tuition.

UCs and CSUs lead the nation in increased tuition—more than tripling what students paid in the last decade, and the UC regents may consider yet another 6-percent tuition increase for fall. According to the PPIC report, "if current trends in tuition increases persist, UC will become the most expensive public higher education system in the country within the next five years."

The CSUs are grappling with similar budget constraints that translate into hardships for California students. About a dozen students across the campuses have gone on a hunger strike to protest rising tuitions. "The reason we chose a hunger strike is we've exhausted pretty much every institutional channel and no one's listening to us," said Donnie Bessom, a Cal State Long Beach grad student.

According to the PPIC report, the hikes affect current students as well as deter many college-eligible *and* accepted students from enrolling.

UC and CSU enrollment has declined by more than one-fifth in the last five years, and the sharpest

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declines came from African American students. The report found that the majority of accepted students were opting for cheaper community colleges, private and out-of-state schools. About 10 percent did not enroll in any college.

As budget cuts to higher education make college less accessible and more competitive for eligible high school graduates, cuts to k-12 create new challenges for students working toward their high school degrees. This week in Los Angeles, the school board reconsidered graduation requirements in light of goals for increasing college access amidst cutbacks to tutorial supports, counseling services and summer school. The compromise resolution that ultimately passed should ensure all students access to a college-preparatory curriculum. Yet, the district likely will need more funding to provide the conditions necessary to promote higher graduation and college eligibility rates.

Johnson of PPIC said that what is striking about the budgetary threats to college access is that California needs more, not fewer, college graduates in order to sustain its economy. PPIC projects that by 2025, 40 percent of California's jobs will require a bachelor's degree and many more will necessitate some higher education. Current trends would leave California with a shortage of 1 million college graduates. This shortfall will only be met if California shifts its priorities and directs substantial investment toward the public education system.

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