



The Microcosm Effect

By Jonathan Lightman

By all accounts, this past March 29, was a day like any other. President Obama defended American engagement in Libya while potential Republican opponent Tim Pawlenty branded him “timid.” A popular fruit and gift company, Harry & David, filed for bankruptcy, unable to function with its crippling debt. Anaheim approved \$75 million in bonds to lure the Sacramento Kings, a seemingly surefire move which ultimately backfired (at least for one year).

While Sacramentans were saddened by the prospect of losing their only major league sports team, March 29th held a deeper significance in the Capitol. Jerry Brown announced that budget talks with legislative Republican leaders had broken down, eliminating the prospects for a June special election on tax extensions. *Fiscal Armageddon* could now be a reality despite the Governor’s promise to continue negotiating for a compromise.

Community colleges were more than a bit spooked by the news; the fear was palatable and unrelenting.

Following decades of swimming in political backwaters, community colleges had recently hit their stride. In contrast to yesteryear's "junior college" moniker, a kind of "less than" institution, community colleges were recognized as fundamental, popular, and yes, even *cool*. Proposition 92, the community college initiative, although unsuccessful, demonstrated the capacity of the institutions' increasing political power. Like other rising political movements, it sometimes takes several attempts to reach victory, but getting off the ground represented the most critical step.

The lingering recession combined with the collapse of the budget talks, however, threatened to reverse hard-fought gains. With student demand at an all-time high, state lawmakers were liable to shut the doors. Rationing access to education would become the discussion *de rigueur*.

These were not unfounded fears. Earlier in March, the Legislature approved SB 69 and SB 70, the mid-year budget and education trailer bills, respectively. SB 69 slashed another \$290 million out of the colleges' already hemorrhaged budget while its companion measure raised student fees from \$26 to \$36 per unit (38% increase). The March budget reductions addressed only half the State's shortfall; there was still another \$13.5 billion hole to plug.

At the request of Senate Budget Committee Chair Mark Leno (D - San Francisco), the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) prepared a series of recommendations for an "all-cuts" scenario should budget talks collapse. On top of the earlier \$290 million reduction, the LAO contemplated another \$680 million cut for the colleges with student fees rising to \$66 per unit.

Additional proposals included establishing a 90-unit cap on each student's taxpayer-subsidized credits, reducing funding for credit basic skills to the level of non-credit basic skills, eliminating state subsidies for intercollegiate athletics and repetition-for-credit physical education and fine arts classes, and zeroing funding for non-credit physical education and fine arts.

Shock value aside, the LAO's recommendations were merely continuations on a theme already transpiring on campuses across California. Overall FTE had already shrunk from 2.9 million to 2.7 million with students desperate for any strategy to both secure and afford their courses. According to a recent survey by the Pearson Institute, almost one in three California Community College students experienced difficulty enrolling in courses during the fall 2010 semester, compared to one in six community college students in the rest of the country.

At the time of this writing, the colleges, like other public services, were possibly saved by an unanticipated windfall of \$6.6 billion in annualized revenues. Unemployment remains high, however, and there is still no compromise on a tax package.

Rising above the trenches, California lawmakers continue to ignore the painfully obvious. While spending hours *ad nauseum* deliberating tax policy (chasing after the illusory Texas miracle), there's scant discussion of the economic and social costs of disinvestment. It's been two years since the Public Policy Institute of California declared that this state will face a critical shortage of almost one million college-educated workers by 2025, and one year since the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce noted that by 2018, 61% of all jobs in California (12 million) will require some postsecondary training beyond high school.

On a global scale, we laud California's ranking of being the world's eighth largest economy, just behind Italy, still ahead of Brazil and Spain. Yet, we completely fail to plan our strategy for remaining globally competitive. According to the *2010 Global Year in Review*:

Other countries such as Brazil, China, and India - and most countries in the developing world - experiencing rapid population growth coupled with growing participation rates struggle to accommodate ever increasing numbers of qualified students into higher education with limited government resources. Moreover, many of these countries are intensifying their efforts to expand participation especially among previously marginalized groups of students. In Brazil, the REUNI investment [program] is aimed at doubling the number of students in public institution in four years. China, which has 29 million full-time tertiary students in 2010, plans to increase its university gross [enrollment] rate from 24 percent to 40 percent in the next 10

years (though a substantial portion of this will come from a shrinking of the university-age population rather than an expansion of places) and India, with about 14 million students at present, plans to increase the [enrollment] rate from 12 to 30 percent by 2020.

Responding to the Crisis: Pathway to Selectivity?

In the decentralized world of community colleges, it's never surprising to hear a multitude of opinions on literally any topic. Today's reality sees colleges shedding course sections left, right, and center. Lower-division transfer courses, CTE, and basic skills are supposed to remain in; everything else, gone. Translating policy directives to the campus level is never so easy or clean, but the empirical and anecdotal evidence across districts reflect a streamlined, more focused system.

While students struggle to enroll and survive in our truncated institutions, policy discussions portend more dramatic changes ahead. Should community colleges continue to serve the educationally needy, those unlikely to succeed, persist, or transfer? What about those unable to afford the increasing costs? Here's where points of divergence are becoming increasingly apparent in the Legislature and within the System itself.

Continuing years of starvation budgets, combined with unremitting criticism by foundation-supported policy papers, have caused a rethinking of who community colleges should educate. As Phil Smith, At-Large Representative for the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, observes, "we are getting more selective, like it or not. [There] is a push to focus only on students who are succeeding."

The move toward elitism isn't confined to any one sector of campus or political life. As Cosumnes River College Disabled Students Programs & Services Counselor Scott Hamilton so aptly described to the respective Assembly and Budget Subcommittees on Education Finance, a quiet exodus of students with disabilities from the colleges is taking place because essential services simply aren't available. There is nary a peep on how to bring them back.

Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOPS) Association President Will Bruce concurs, while emphasizing that each campus is different: “We at EOPS hear comments directed at our students, like, *‘those students are taking places in our classrooms and they’re not prepared for college.’*” He adds a disturbing refrain, that the community colleges are favoring the haves over the have-nots.

While discussions are continuing on such issues as repeatability, student fees, course offerings to seniors and other non-traditional students, remediation, decategorization of essential student services and priority registration, the cataclysmic shift in our students is occurring right before us.

Public policies in many sectors of government, not just education, are favoring the strong over the weak, the privileged over the needy. As Robert Reich recently noted in an article about the long-term unemployed, “You’d think the American public would be demanding government action: a new WPA [Works Progress Administration] for the long-term unemployed, a second stimulus to make up for the shortfall in purchasing power, stronger safety nets. But we’re not hearing much clamor for any of this. One reason is that those who remain unemployed have little or no political clout. . . . There’s no National Association of Unemployed People with a platoon of Washington lobbyists and a war chest of potential campaign contributions to get the attention of politicians.”

It should come as no surprise to the community colleges that as the recession lingers, legislator attention has shifted away from the eclectic discussions of affordability, assistance to first-generation college students, instruction in basic skills, or assistance for students with disabilities. These students represent the have-nots, those with a voice but little clout. The policy focus is squarely on completion and transfer. Period. End of discussion.

SB 1143 [(Liu) of 2010] and AB 515 (Brownley)/ Dividing the System from Within

It feels like *déjà vu* all over again.

For the past two years, at the very time when community colleges should be uniformly focused on budget advocacy, our attention has been diverted to fight a bill which has divided parties within the community colleges.

In an initial version, last year’s SB 1143 would have financially punished community colleges for not attaining sufficient levels of student completion. Unprecedented in scope, SB 1143 would have threatened the one segment of higher education designed to assist needy students. The bill was later amended to allow colleges to compete with one another for base apportionments, with those demonstrating higher levels of success reaping the rewards. Due to intense lobbying by FACCC and others, SB 1143 was held in the Senate, pending a promise by the author to convert the bill into a study examining different models of student success (which ultimately became law).

This year’s AB 515 makes SB 1143 look like a walk in the park in terms of its diversionary impact and level of internal divisiveness. AB 515 would allow districts to establish a parallel layer of credit courses, labeled “extension,” with the full cost of instruction passed onto students. All major faculty and student organizations oppose the measure, as well as a few districts, arguing that it turns the whole framework of community colleges upside-down: providing access to the haves at the expense of the have-nots.

Following weeks of intense lobbying, the Assembly initially rejected AB 515 in its first floor vote. Two days later, the Assembly reversed course with the bill receiving 42 votes, one above the minimum threshold necessary for advancement to the Senate. Although the measure passed with bipartisan support, the strength of the second vote rested predominately upon a number of Republican lawmakers who switched from a position of “abstain” to “support.”

While a few faculty members, and at least one local academic senate, have sided with the bill’s sponsors, Santa Monica College and the College of the Canyons, the overwhelming faculty sentiment is opposition at the highest order. Faculty leaders argue that temporary allure of increased access for students with means can too easily translate to the permanent condition of exclusive access for only those students. As such, it’s not a gamble that faculty or students are willing to make.

Reflective of the Big Picture

It’s axiomatic that California’s long-term recovery is tied to national and global economic improvement. This aside, California is undergoing its own demographic shift, an understanding of which significantly helps clarify the current battles both within and about community colleges.

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Two sets of data were released last month, the national census and a major academic study, entitled, *A Portrait of California*, both of which shine a light on the state's demographic, social, and economic trends.

According to the Census, for the first time since 1850, California's growth has slowed—now only 10%—to the point where it will not gain a new congressional seat. Together with the crisis in sub-prime lending, this slowing of population growth has led to a major, perhaps chronic, weakening of housing prices. Within a few years, moreover, the state's growing Latino population will surpass an aging white population to become its largest ethnic group.

The *Portrait* speaks of five Californias, with the top one percent living in “Shangri-Las” in and around Silicon Valley and portions of Southern California. They're followed by 18% in a “metro-coastal enclave,” 38% in “Main Street California,” and another 38% percent in “struggling California.” The final “forsaken five percent” live in central Los Angeles or rural areas.

Far beyond our understanding of Democrats vs Republicans, Los Angeles vs San Francisco, or city/suburban dwellers vs farmers, this demographic information suggests that the conflicts within California are far more complex than what meets the eye.

There are also minimally five types of Californias represented in the community college student body, ranging from high school drop-out to welfare-to-work mother to unemployed millionaire needing a skills update. They don't need to live anywhere in particular to be in the upper, middle, or lower tier. While the colleges are accustomed to serving all students—a veritable bridge of social mobility between

the tiers—economic realities have caused lawmakers to ask us to think differently.

Under the perennial guise of *restructure, reconfigure, and reform*, the colleges are being pushed in a direction far different than what the Master Plan envisioned. The new focus centers on the Californias with power, or at least on those who have the potential to one day gain it. The others . . . well . . . there are no good answers, besides sorry and good luck.

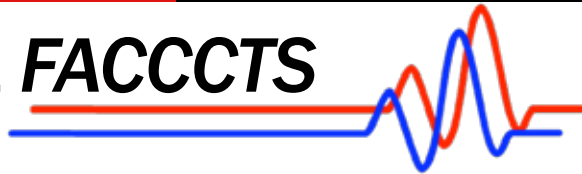
Deprofessionalization of faculty, selectivity in admissions, and choking off student access reflect much more than partisan wrangling. It's a microcosm of the real-world struggle between the Californias. Policymakers who, in their own lives, have risen above the lower tiers, whether Republican or Democrat, have asked the colleges to prioritize the higher levels.

While FACCC is rock-solid in its advocacy for the colleges as a vehicle for educational attainment for all Californias and Californians, it is but one voice in a large decentralized system. Divisions over how to carve up shrinking resources in the wake of unprecedented demand reflect the demographic tensions across the state.

Complex problems lack simple solutions, and there's no easy way to quickly lift those from the “forsaken California.” There is, however, a definite way, to make sure the problems remain the same or worsen, and that's to shut the doors of opportunity for all who seek them. As we close out the legislative session, we need to make matters better, not worse. The only way to do so is with a strategy to help all Californians, not just those with clout.



Fast *FACCCTS*



Changes at CoFO (Council of Faculty Organizations)

Each month, leaders of the five faculty organizations with dedicated seats on the Chancellor's Consultation Council convene to discuss important concerns. Those organizations include FACCC, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC), Community College Council/California Federation of Teachers, Community College Association/California Teachers Association and the California Community College Independents.

Two of the five organizations will have new leaders next year, FACCC and the ASCCC. FACCC wishes to congratulate its President, John McDowell, and to Jane Patton, outgoing President of the ASCCC, for their outstanding work. Congratulations are also extended to incoming FACCC President Dennis Frisch and new ASCCC President Michelle Pilati for assuming these important leadership roles.