

**COMMENTARY:
COMMUNITY COLLEGE BUDGET CUTS AFFECT US ALL**

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Budget cuts at community colleges mean different things to different people. For some it means the loss of a job. For others, it will mean less access to the classes they seek. For all, it means opportunities lost.

More than half the students involved in higher education in the United States at any given time are taking classes in the California community college system. With 2.9 million students each year, it is the greatest provider of low cost educational services in the world.

For \$11 a unit (about the cost of three cappuccinos at Starbucks, two or three packages of cigarettes or one movie with popcorn and a soda) students can have access to technical training or a two year degree that will open doors to them – doors that will be slammed shut without that training/degree.

The California State University (CSU) system and the University of California (UC) system have both resorted to increasing tuition and fees to students to deal with the state budget cuts. They have the authority to do that – and do it quickly.

Before the first round of budget cuts were even on the way to the printer, CSU had raised its fees by \$72 a semester for a full-time student. While still a value at about \$2,000 a year, this increase will drive more students than ever to community colleges. The same holds true with UCs where fees went up \$135 to \$3,680 a year.

Those looking for technical training for careers that don't require a college degree are also going to feel the pinch. Even if community college fees are raised to \$24 a unit as some have suggested (which will by law take an act of the California legislature) they will still remain a bargain compared to the \$300 a unit that private colleges and training centers frequently charge.

So who loses? We all do.

If you are a student, the availability of classes will probably be diminished. They won't be available at the times you need to fit around your work or childcare schedule.

If you're the parents of a college student paying the bills, your pocketbook will feel the pinch. At the community college level, that pinch will come some time later this year when the legislature will probably more than double fees.

If you're one of the people whose lives will be dramatically impacted by the loss of a job, we can only hope that other jobs will be available. The sense of accomplishment that comes from serving the needs of some of the most deserving students in the world may not be there for you but hopefully a new job will come your way soon.

"But it won't affect me" you say – "because I don't even know a community college student." You're wrong.

Those community college students that you don't know are your future. They are the doctors who will treat you, the nurses who will assist them and the auto mechanics who will keep your car running. They are the future generation who will pay taxes and support the Social Security system. They will keep the California economy growing and prosperous.

Without an education, they are the minimum-skilled workers who will barely make enough to get by. They won't buy your goods and services. They won't be prepared to provide the services you need. They won't pay into a tax system that supports the disabled and the needy and the school systems that provide an education for the future. We all lose when education loses.

So what can I do, you say. You can contact your state legislators and let them know that community college education is a priority – that budget cuts of over 10 percent are not acceptable. You can also consider supporting scholarships for community college students – whether personally or through your service clubs. We all win when community college students win.