

Following more budget cuts, tuition to increase at California's public colleges

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In his revised May state budget proposal, California's Democratic governor Jerry Brown proposed a multitude of tax extensions and spending cuts to balance California's remaining \$9.6 billion deficit. While the revised budget proposal does not include further cuts to the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems, tuition increases are expected if the tax extensions and spending cuts are not carried out.

Brown's proposal, which includes a 1 percent sales tax extension, a 0.5 percent vehicle license fee extension, and the elimination of the Departments of Mental Health and Alcohol and Drug Programs, as well as the destruction of 5,550 jobs, was unveiled May 16. The alternative to an "all-cuts" budget without Brown's tax extensions would mean that cuts to the UC system would double to \$1 billion. This would result in mid-year tuition increases beginning next January.

According to some calculations, the UC system may have to increase tuition by 8 percent to 20 percent over the course of four consecutive years, if current patterns of state budget cuts and larger enrollments continue.

At a UC Regents Board meeting in San Francisco on Monday, UC President Mark G. Yudof called the proposed tuition increases a "nasty scenario," adding, "It's not desirable. But people have to understand the grave consequences to this university."

California residents would be paying \$14,700 in annual tuition, not including room, board, and other fees. It should be noted the UC Regents already approved a 32 percent increase in tuition in the fall of

2009, and tuition will increase by another 8 percent this fall to \$11,124. The total cost of attending a UC school is now estimated to be \$27,000 a year.

Three years ago, the UC system received \$3.3 billion from the state, but after years of budget cuts and now Governor Brown's recent \$500 million cut, the 10 UC campuses will have to make do with \$2.5 billion starting July 1. This will result in not only increased tuition for cash-strapped students, but also the elimination of teachers and staff, as well as larger class sizes, and fewer classes offered. It will also inevitably mean a resurgence of student protests and unrest.

Last week, the CSU system also announced it would have to increase tuition by 32 percent if it lost \$1 billion in state funds.

California's community colleges are expected to raise fees as well starting this fall. Students will now be expected to pay \$36 per unit instead of \$26 per unit. A full-time student taking 12 units will now have to pay an additional \$120 a semester. The \$10 increase per unit is the second increase in two years; in 2009, former governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a bill that raised tuition at community colleges from \$20 a unit to \$26.

Taken all together, these cuts to the university systems, and the resulting tuition increases and staff layoffs, point to the systematic dismantling of public higher education in California. Working class youth are being increasingly phased out of colleges and universities, not because of any lack of interest in attending and studying, but simply because they cannot afford the skyrocketing increases in tuition, room,

board, and other fees.

To mitigate the effects of \$1 billion in cuts to the UC system, UC officials are considering varying tuition rates across the 10 campuses for the first time. Citing other state higher education systems that have a “flagship” campus, such as the University of Texas in Austin or the University of Wisconsin, Madison, commentators are already touting UC Los Angeles and UC Berkeley as institutions that will charge higher tuition than other UC system schools.

The UC school system is renowned for the fact that tuition rates are uniform for prospective students. To charge different rates of tuition will create an environment where schools will compete with one another for funds and become more exclusive, making a mockery of the idea that higher education is available to all the state’s residents at a fair cost.

Should the UC Regents approve such a plan, many UC schools can charge up to 25 percent above or below a “midpoint” in fees for undergraduate studies. At a recent Regents meeting in San Francisco, UC Santa Cruz Chancellor George R. Blumenthal said that schools like UC Berkeley would increase tuition “in a micro second” and that other schools would do the same, not wanting to be left behind in funds and reputation: “I think once we go down that road, it could mean that some campuses may not be accessible to large segments of California students.”

Gov. Brown’s recent education cuts have not been met without resistance. Students and faculty have responded with rallies and sit-ins at many schools throughout the state.

The California Teachers Association (CTA) declared a “state of emergency” for the week of May 9. This included rallies in the state capitol of Sacramento, San Francisco, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and San Diego, which brought together thousands of teachers and students to protest.

The union strategy to fight the cuts is pitiful to say the least. In Sacramento, CTA officials protested outside the offices of Republican legislators to

convince them to accept Brown’s proposal to extend increases in income and sales taxes, and vehicle license fees, all of which would fall disproportionately on the working class.

On the first day of protests, dozens of Cal State University students began an occupation of the state capitol building, resulting in 65 students and teachers being arrested after closing time.

None of California’s unions even propose raising taxes on the rich, which would more than cover the state deficit. They accept the framework set out by Brown, according to which the five-year extensions of tax increases, which will otherwise expire by June 30, should be sufficient.

Meanwhile, 40,000 teachers have been laid off since April, and class sizes have increased to 32 in elementary schools and 40 in secondary schools.



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