

# California community college introduces two-tier tuition system

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In Los Angeles, California, the state governing board of Santa Monica Community College has introduced a two-tiered system to charge several times more for high-demand classes.

Certain classes will now be offered at a rate of \$220 per unit. This is nearly five times the average per unit rate, which is slated to increase from \$36 to \$46 beginning this summer.

The new scheme is unprecedented and will serve to effectively price many working class student out of the most important classes, and therefore out of the college altogether.

The moves in Santa Monica will likely become a model for colleges throughout the state and country. There is a coordinated attack on public education throughout California and at the federal level, with colleges and universities at all levels being starved of funding.

The state's community college system has already seen state funding reduced by \$700 million during the current fiscal year. If revenue expectations are not met in Governor Jerry Brown's current budget proposal, more cuts will follow.

Recent state budget reductions have resulted in shortfall of \$11 million for SMCC. An additional \$5 million in cuts are possible next year.

WSWS reporters recently talked to students at SMCC about the two-tier scheme and the impact of budget cuts on public education.

Eric Leatherwood is a returning student studying political science. "It's wrong because it's harder for people to even afford college. By raising the cost, they are specifically cutting off access to a better education and employment opportunities."

"I first came here 15 years ago when class sizes were much smaller. Now they're large and getting larger.

It's consequently much harder to get classes because more and more students are trying to get in." These are precisely the classes that the college wants to charge more for.

When asked what he thought is causing the crisis in education, Eric replied, "The same reason the whole economy collapsed: greed."

Denise and Diana are nursing students. College attendance for both has only been possible through immense financial sacrifice on the part of each of their families. Getting work to pay tuition themselves has proven very difficult. "I haven't really tried to get a job here in Santa Monica, but outside of Santa Monica it's really hard, because of the hours they give you," Diana said.

Denise described her situation, which is similar to those of many students. "It's very sad because we're here to get a job, to get a career, and once we're finished with school it's going to be awfully hard to get a job. It's very bad."

Neither thought that the Obama administration provided any meaningful help to students. Denise said, "He promised a lot, and he hasn't done much."

Parker and Aaron are studying political science and game design, respectively. "The first semester I did have difficulty getting classes." Parker said. "I had to crash two of my classes, so I'm pretty aware of the problem."

"The real problem is that the state has stopped subsidizing education. It's decreasing every year but overall my experience has been good at SMC. The wait pool [essentially a waiting list for students who want to take classes which fill up early] is designed to help but ultimately just masks the problem."

Aaron agreed. "This is my first year, and it has been very difficult to get classes. Right now I have two

online classes and two regular classes. I only come here two times a week, but I also commute from Antelope Valley [over 70 miles away] so all this is really affecting me financially. I would wish that we had a better way other than the wait pool. It's telling people, 'Yeah, we're going to get you a class,' and they don't get it. I've been in the wait pool twice already, and I've never gotten the class that I waited for."

Parker blamed the state's politicians for the situation. "I'd say it's probably up in Sacramento. Education's not getting subsidized, and that's why you see cuts and the classes being dropped. These people don't think education is a priority."

Mike works full time as a personal trainer and is studying biology at SMC. As he put it, "I'm not your typical student; I'm not 18-19, still living with mom and dad. I basically work a full time job and I come here."

When asked what he thought were the implications of SMC being used as a model to further the privatization of education, Mike said, "Students are going to suffer. There's no way around it. But also I think it's part of mismanagement of the state's budget.

"Things like social programs and schools are the first things to get cut. That shouldn't be happening. If anything, education should be the first thing funded."

About Obama, Mike said, "Maybe he's done various things on a national scale, but on a state scale I don't see that. The school funding was being cut when [former governor Arnold] Schwarzenegger was in office. Now people have taken over like they were going to change that, and it's gotten worse."



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