

EDUCATION SPENDING



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

UC Santa Cruz students protested proposed budget cuts last October.

Brown proposes \$1.4B in higher ed cuts

UC president calls the proposal a 'sad day for California'

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SACRAMENTO — California's colleges and universities face a combined \$1.4 billion in cuts in the next budget year under a proposal laid out Monday by Gov. Jerry Brown.

The University of California and California State University systems would receive \$500 million less apiece from the state in 2011-12, obliterating gains made in the current year's budget. And the state would cut \$400 million from California's 112 community colleges, although a proposed fee hike would make up for \$110 million of that.

Locally, administrators and staff at UC Santa Cruz and Cabrillo Community College are bracing for the tough task of trimming budgets further after successive years of cuts.

Statewide education leaders reacted to the news with anger and disappointment. Cal State Chancellor Charles Reed said the 23-campus system would likely limit enrollment next year, and UC President Mark Yudof noted that 2011 could be the first year tuition comprises a larger portion of the university's budget than state

funds.

"This is a sad day for California," Yudof said in a written statement. "The crossing of this threshold transcends mere symbolism and should be profoundly disturbing to all Californians."

The governor proposed a 38 percent fee hike — from \$26 per unit to \$36 — at the community colleges, although he acknowledged that financial aid would cover the added cost for nearly half the 2.8 million or so students. Compared to today's average price of \$780, the average student would pay about \$1,080 per year, still the nation's lowest fees by far.

He also suggested the colleges could cut costs by counting students later than the third week of class, when the so-called "census" is now conducted in order to determine state funding. Close to one-fifth of community-college students drop out after the third week, so a later census date would lead to lower per-student funds.

At Cabrillo, the vice president of administrative services, Victoria Lewis, said the college planned for the budget to change once Brown took office, and reserves have

been set aside to help balance the budget going forward.

"We didn't expect the proposal on reforming census dates, and it will affect all colleges very directly," Lewis said. "I think for us one of the big issues is going to be, if the tax proposals aren't extended, the magnitude of cuts is much larger than anything we've planned for."

Past cutbacks have left community college students scrambling to find classes, and that will only get worse next year, said Jack Scott, the community college system's chancellor. As many as 350,000 students could be turned away in 2011-12 if Brown's proposal passes, he said.

The governor lamented the cuts, but said higher education was one of the few flexible parts of the state budget.

Yudof said UC would try to avoid raising tuition — which already was increased 8 percent for the 2011-12 school year — and would do what they could to protect academics and research. Chancellors will report back to him within six weeks on possible areas to cut funding at the 10 campuses.

At UC Santa Cruz, where a plan to suspend the American

Studies program due to staff cutbacks was announced last week, the administration will start looking for new areas where savings can be found.

"Our campus has established a framework for priority setting that includes an effective campus-wide consultation process. That process will now begin in earnest," UCSC Chancellor George Blumenthal said in a written response to the budget proposal. "This proposed cut to UC accelerates a pattern of disinvestment in higher education by the state."

The proposed cutbacks most likely will look much like those of two years ago, when UC imposed unpaid furloughs and shortened library hours, according to the state's nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office.

But measures such as furloughs may not save the university enough money, especially without higher tuition, said Patrick Lenz, the UC system's budget chief. Campuses could be forced to cut academic programs and lay off workers, he said.

Mercury News staff writer Lisa M. Krieger and Sentinel staff writer Tovyn Lapan contributed to this report.