

LABOR DAY 2007 • STATEMENT FROM CFA PRESIDENT LILLIAN TAIZ

Higher Education is Slipping Away from Working Families Just When California Needs Educated People the Most

Labor day is a moment when we all honor the contributions of hundreds of millions of working people (past and present) to this nation.

For the faculty who teach in the CSU it is one of many days when we worry about how we can continue to educate the working people of CA who will make these kinds of contributions in the future.

It took visionaries some 40 years ago to create the higher ed system that has been a crucial element in making California a powerhouse in the world.

Today, we seem to be short on the visionaries needed to keep our state universities strong.

The three segments of our state higher ed system educate nearly two million students. The UC is our great research university and the Community Colleges make two-year degrees available to everyone.

It is the California State University, though, that does main duty for California's working people, providing the four-year degrees that have become essential for the success both of individuals and of whole economies in this high-tech era.

Most of our students also work. Most come from working families. More than any other university, we educate students who are the first in their families to pursue college.

And a huge number of our students go into working careers - especially as teachers, nurses, engineers, accountants, computer professionals, and public servants of all kinds including fire and police captains.

But California is not taking good care of this vital resource. As a state we are taking it for granted. And as it declines, we will regret it.

Reports and studies this year alone, reveal that on the present course we will spend more on prisons than higher education. And, that we are not educating enough of our population right now to meet the future needs of California's economy for people with bachelor's degrees.

Later this month, the CSU Trustees will start their budget request process for 2008/09. Every year, the Trustees must tell the governor and the legislature how much money the CSU needs from the state to provide education for the more than 400,000 students we teach.

As in past years, the California Faculty Association will call on the Trustees to ask for the funding the CSU really needs to live up to our mission to teach all qualified students.

It is just not good enough to ask only for what we think we can get. Adequate funding is fundamental to the quality of student learning conditions; we must ask for what we need.

Yet, an agreement struck between the governor and the CSU chancellor in 2004 specified the funding the CSU will get through 2010. It is based on one of the worst budgets in CSU history - after our state universities were slashed by more than half a billion dollars.

We have never caught up. Yet we must serve the growing numbers of qualified students that seek admittance to the system each year.

Meantime, undergraduate student fees have nearly doubled in five years. Annual student fee increases of up to 10 percent are assumed in the funding agreement.

No study has been done to uncover the impact these fee increases have had on the ability of qualified students from working families to stay in or start attending the CSU. Anecdotally, we hear from students that they are dropping out, working more, taking longer to graduate, and running up larger debt for themselves and their families. We do know that they are graduating with twice as much debt today than ten years ago.

The CSU is always vulnerable to cuts in the state budget process because it is one of the few areas in the state budget that is not mandated by ballot measures, laws or court orders.

If you are one of the more than two million CSU alumni, have a relative in the CSU, or among the tens of thousands of employers who hire CSU graduates, you must help push for improved funding to save our California State University system from this long and perilous decline.

Lillian Taiz is the President of the California Faculty Association and a History Professor at Cal State Los Angeles.

The CSU Trustees meet publicly on Sept. 18 & 19 at the CSU Chancellor's headquarters at 401 Golden Shore in Long Beach. Budget planning documents for 2008/09 can be seen at <http://www.calstate.edu/budget> soon. 400,000 students attend the California State University system.