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*Long Beach Press Telegram*—November 19, 2008—Article on education budget protests.


*Long Beach Press Telegram*—November 23, 2008—Article on community colleges needing economic support.
LBCC aims to keep its ‘Promise’

By Kevin Butler
Staff writer

LONG BEACH — Long Beach City College has awarded 50 scholarships this year as part of an effort to eventually offer free tuition for the first semester to all Long Beach-area high-school students who don’t qualify for sufficient financial aid.

College officials hope to raise enough money so that, starting in 2011, they can begin paying for the first-semester tuition for students who do not qualify for financial aid or who don’t get enough aid to cover the costs of tuition.

The initiative is part of the “Long Beach College Promise,” a joint effort by LBCC, the Long Beach Unified School District and Cal State Long Beach, aiming to facilitate area students’ higher education.

The 50 scholarships awarded this week stemmed from a $30,000 donation from the Long Beach Rotary Club, which wanted the money devoted to the Long Beach College Promise program, said LBCC Superintendent-President Eloy Oakley.

The 50 scholarships were awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, but plans call for expanding such scholarships to all students when the program is fully implemented, he added.

“We have begun implementing pieces of the Long Beach College Promise, but the entire promise won’t be funded until the fall of 2011,” Oakley said.

The college will need about $400,000 to $500,000 annually to pay for the program when it is fully implemented, he said.

The Long Beach City College Foundation hopes to raise about $9 million to $10 million to create an endowment to fund the effort, Oakley said.

The fundraising arm of the college has raised nearly $6.5 million so far, he added.

Right now, LBCC is receiving about 1,500 students annually from the Long Beach Unified School District, a number that could jump to 3,000 by 2012, he said.
CSULB offers tech workshop

EDUCATION: Program is designed to teach skills to people without home computers and others without jobs.

By Kevin Butler
Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — Dislocated and transitioning workers can learn about the use of technology in business from Cal State Long Beach faculty as part of a new program at the city’s Career Transition Center.

Verizon donated $100,000 for the Verizon Community Information Clubhouse, a computer lab at which CSULB faculty will train about 20 workers in a four-week course on how technology can be used to improve business decision-making.

The program is operated by the Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network, which oversees career programs on behalf of Long Beach but serves other cities as well.

The course is designed for workers who have lost their jobs, or who want to plan for a career change, start a new business or improve their skills, said project director H. Michael Chung, a CSULB professor in the College of Business Administration.

Chung said the classes are also geared toward underprivileged people who don’t have regular access to a home computer but want to develop their skills.

“We try to teach people how to apply computer technology to business and managerial decision-making,” Chung said.

Course participants will learn how to find the most reliable information through Internet research, said Chung, director of the Center for Information Strategies and Technologies at CSULB.

Participants also will be taught how to analyze data to make good business decisions, Chung added.

If the class goes well, Chung may seek additional grant funding to continue or expand the program, he said.

The class, which will start Nov. 18, meets twice a week — on Tuesdays and Thursdays — from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the Career Transition Center, 3447 Atlantic Ave., Long Beach. Those interested in the class are asked to contact Pacific Gateway at 562-570-WORK (9675), or drop by the center.

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“All this stuff is something I had to experience for me to become the person I am. That’s why I work with children. The children are the ones who really suffer in war.”

— AKINSANYA KAMBON, veteran who teaches African Art at Cal State Long Beach and offers free Saturday art classes for children at his studio.

LONG BEACH — In his studio on Atlantic Avenue, artist Akinsanya Kambon flies through a stack of paintings depicting his experiences in Vietnam. Each scene is more horrific than the next.

The paintings show images of weeping soldiers and mangled civilians in bold colors of blood red, jungle green and bright yellow. One piece, titled “From Limb to Limb,” shows a Marine blown in half after stepping on a land mine. His shuddering upper torso hangs from a tree limb.

“In the Marines, they train you to think you’re invincible,” Kambon says. “But you realize you’re not so tough when you see some of your tough buddies get killed.”

Kambon completed his series of 10 oil-on-canvas combat scenes in 2000 as a part of a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder treatment program at the Long Beach VA hospital.

Veterans were asked to write about their 10 most stressful experiences. Kambon, being an artist, was asked to paint.

From terra cotta soldiers to drawings of shackled nurses, Kambon keeps more than 10,000 original works of art in his studio at 2228 Atlantic Ave. The 61-year-old veteran also teaches African Art at Cal State Long Beach and holds free Saturday art classes for children at his studio.

For Kambon, art isn’t an occupation. It’s a means of survival. “I don’t do it to sell it,” he says. “I do it for my sanity.”

Born in Sacramento as Mark Termer, Kambon as a baby was stricken with polio that left one side of his face paralyzed. To avoid being teased by the other schoolchildren, Kambon kept his head down and drew quietly.

Kambon says he was illiterate when drafted into the Marine Corps in 1966 at age 19.
His superiors, however, noticed his artistic talents and stationed him as a combat illustrator at bases in Da Nang and Chu Lai.

Kambon drew hundreds of combat images for the Marines. Some that showed the war in a not-so-favorable light, such as soldiers murdering children, were shredded by his superiors, he says. Kambon remembered many of those images and drew them again.

As an artist, he has the unique ability to imprint images in his head. The images are impossible to erase.

"It's something I live with every day," he says. "The smell, the sight, the feeling of blood. That's something you never forget."

Despite experiencing trauma and racism during his nine months in Vietnam, Kambon says fighting for his country gave him a sense of patriotism.

"It made me believe that I was part of America," he says. "I didn't find out I wasn't until I got back."

Returning to Sacramento, Kambon says he was recruited into the Black Panther Party much like he was recruited into the Marines.

As a Black Panther, Kambon taught himself how to read and even illustrated a Panther coloring book for children.

Kambon soon found himself in trouble with the law, named as one of the Oak Park Four who were accused and then acquitted for the killing of a Sacramento police officer in May 1970. He later was convicted and served time in jail on drug charges he says were "trumped up" by law enforcement.

Looking for a clean start, Kambon moved to Long Beach in 1984, where he founded the nonprofit organization Pan African Art. The program, which will celebrate its 25th anniversary next spring, is designed to teach children ages 5 to 18 about African and Latin culture through art.

Kambon's wife of 13 years, Tama-sha, says living with a husband who suffers from PTSD is extremely hard.

"I don't think that there's anything in his life that he experiences today that is not influenced in some way by the Vietnam experience," she says.

But the war, she says, also opened his mind to humanity and made him especially sensitive toward children.

The artist, a grandfather of 16, pours most of his time and money into his free art classes, leaving little for himself, she says.

"All this stuff is something I had to experience for me to become the person I am," says Kambon. "That's why I work with children. The children are the ones who really suffer in war."

Pan African Art is now accepting donations to keep its free Saturday art classes going. Beginning in February, the nonprofit will also hold fundraisers the third Friday of each month, featuring art auctions, poetry and more.

For information, call 562-424-8717.

Coming Tuesday: Sgt. Maj. Jesse Acosta, who was blinded while fighting in Iraq in 2006, is learning how navigate thorough darkness.

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CSULB will cut student enrollment

BUDGET: President says change applies to out-of-area first-time freshmen and transfers — not qualified local applicants.

By Kevin Butler
Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — Cal State Long Beach plans to decrease its enrollment by about 1,500 students next academic year in response to state budget cuts, according to university President F. King Alexander.

Alexander said that the university aims to lower its enrollment from about 38,000 students this year to 36,500 next academic year by reducing the first-time freshmen and transfer students it will accept.

The university remains committed to accepting all local, qualified students in its geographic service area, he said. But students coming from schools outside that area will see fewer spots available next academic year, he added.

The change won’t affect students already attending CSULB, he said.

The move is needed because CSU this year committed to growing its enrollment by as many as 10,000 students even though the system receives no funding from the state to do so, CSU officials said.
However, CSU officials are considering discontinuing that practice and keeping enrollment static systemwide next academic year because of budget cuts. That would require the CSU system to declare itself “impacted.”

Facing a widening budget deficit, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has asked legislators to cut another $66 million from the CSU syst, on top of a one-time $31 million reduction previously approved for this year.

The zero-enrollment-growth plan is scheduled to be discussed at next week’s meeting of the CSU Board of Trustees, which is not expected to vote on the issue. The CSU administration could proceed with the “impact” plan without a vote from the board.

For popular CSU campuses like Cal State Long Beach that are already over their enrollment target, the move would force them to reduce students.

“The CSU has been educating these extra students without any (state) money and can no longer keep doing it,” Alexander said. “So we are going back to our (enrollment) target, and the system is going back to its enrollment target.”

This year, the university had aimed for enrolling 3,900 first-time freshmen and 2,900 transfer students. Ultimately, 4,800 first-time freshmen accepted offers, while the number of transfer students came in as expected, Alexander said.

Next year, the university aims to admit between 2,800 to 3,000 first-time freshmen and about 2,300 transfers, he said.

The cost of the 1,500 unfunded CSULB students is only partly offset by their tuition fees, Alexander said. In order to accept more students than its target allows, the university has had to redirect resources using measures such as increasing class sizes and reducing faculty hires, he said.

“We think we’ve been able to handle it, but it’s strained us,” Alexander added.

In addition to budget cuts, an improved student retention rate also is fueling enrollment pressures at CSULB, as fewer students are dropping out than in the past, Alexander said. On top of that, the popular CSULB campus also saw a greater-than-anticipated jump this year in the percentage of students who accepted admission offers, he added.

If CSU declares itself impacted, campuses like CSULB that are now exceeding their enrollment targets would have to reduce their numbers, said CSU spokeswoman Clara Potos-Fellow. The CSU system has been funding the extra students through measures such as enlarging class sizes and hiring part-time faculty, she said.

“But there is a point where you cannot continue doing that because then you are really watering down the quality of education that students get,” she said.

CSULB and other CSU campuses who get more applicants than they have available spots are committed to admitting all eligible students coming from schools inside the campus's geographic service area. But such campuses restrict the enrollment of students attending schools outside that area by applying tougher admissions standards.

If the CSU system declares itself impacted, then more campuses will face the prospect of implementing higher admission standards for nonlocal students, Potos-Fellow said.

Even campuses that are currently at their enrollment target may be affected should CSU officials proceed with a zero-enrollment-growth plan.

In an effort to curtail applications, CSU campuses are moving up their application deadlines, shortening the window in which students can apply. CSULB won’t be affected by that change because it already moved up its deadline to Nov. 30.

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THREE FOR ALL

By Kevin Butler

The CSULB triplets have been teaming up for years when it comes to school and life.

"A lot of people say, 'I'm in the one with a lot of attitude,'" Brea Boyd said. "But I'm the one with the outgoing, friendly attitude.""}

Carly said she is outgoing and confident. "I don't let anything bring me down," she said. "I just go with the flow and let things happen."}

But even the triplets say they sometimes have moments of conflict. "We all have our moments," Carly said. "But we always make it up and have fun."}

The triplets, who attended the same high school in Long Beach, said they didn't have an urge to go to CSULB until they discovered their shared classes.

"It's great to have some similarities," Carly said. "We can help each other with homework and study."}

The triplets have been working on the same classes for the past few years, and they said they have a lot of fun together.

"It's great to have someone to call when you need help," Brea said. "We can always depend on each other."}

The triplets have been living together for most of their high school years, and they said they have become very close friends.

"We share everything," Carly said. "We even share the same clothes and shoes."}

The triplets said they love being together, and they enjoy spending time with each other.

"We're always there for each other," Brea said. "We'll always have each other's backs."
LONG BEACH

CSULB will host ‘Practicing Peace’ festival on Tuesday

Cal State University Long Beach’s College of Liberal Arts and the Center for Peace and Social Justice are bringing campus, student and community organizations together for a daylong “Practicing Peace” festival on Tuesday.

The College of Liberal Arts and the Center for Peace and Social Justice will present a daylong campus celebration to share their mission of working for peace across the planet.

LONG BEACH

CSU enrollment to decrease by 10,000

California State University, the nation’s largest four-year public university system, expects to tighten enrollment by 10,000 students this fall due to funding cuts.

Chancellor Charles Reed said Monday he is setting a limit on enrollment at the system’s 23 campuses, with priority given to students within each campus’s geographic area. Students from outside the area will go on a waiting list and be ranked by grades and test scores. Students who meet requirements but don’t get in could be offered a place at another campus.

Reed, who will discuss the plan with CSU trustees Wednesday, expects enrollment to drop from the current 460,000 to 450,000.
Academic UpRise preps students

EDUCATION: Weekend events help teens and parents explore options.

By Pamela Hale-Bums
Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — Academic UpRise Inc. will host its Seventh Annual Educational Symposium this week in the Student Union Building at Cal State Long Beach.

Academic UpRise Inc. provides tutoring service to prepare students for the California High School Exit Exam and the SAT, which provides students with opportunities to succeed and advance to college. The organization was founded by Eddie Pierson, an educator and associate at New Hope Baptist Church.

As a former teacher, Pierson was inspired to make a positive difference in the education of students.

"The California High School Exit Exam was about to be implemented and I saw a need for students to go somewhere to get assistance — a place where they could find out about scholarships and other ways of going to college," Pierson said.

"It's just making sure parents understand the importance of being involved in their children's education and not leaving it to chance and to step up to the plate and not leave it all on the counselors."

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. Friday for the sessions on Friday and Saturday. There will be workshops on cable in the classroom, financial aid, how to make college requirements and more about the state exit exam.

This year, UpRise is partnering with Free Application for Student Aid (FASFA) and will be talking to all minorities to get them familiarized with the application to help them get into school. Workshops will be in English and Spanish.

"Parents who would like to take advantage of learning more about it, or getting assistance filling out the application, should be at the event on Saturday," Pierson said.

The students come from Poly, Cabrillo, Jordan, Lakewood, Millikan, Renaissance, Reed, Wilson and Education Partnership high schools.

"We have invited 300 students from the LBUSD, mostly juniors and seniors from eight of the high schools," Pierson said. "They will be treated as VIPs on the university campus and will be in a workshop discussing the 12 principles of success present by Mr. Jeffrey Carter of Inspiration 62."

Tutors also known as academic coaches, who volunteer with UpRise, come from CSULB, Long Beach City College and the Long Beach Unified School District.

"They've done an excellent job getting students prepared for the exit exam," Pierson said.

Since UpRise began in 2001, it has helped approximately 1,500 to 2,000 students.

"I think what it does is it connects the community support with the students and provides outstanding resources for students to supplement what the school provides," Pierson said. "To get that support really embodies what these students receive."

CAHSEE staff members will be answering questions about the exit exam and to inform parents and students about college matriculation requirements. They will provide information on the changes that will affect student academic achievement in middle and high school within the LBUSD.

During Saturday's event, UpRise will give out turkeys, while supplies last, to the first arrivals.

UpRise has three venues where the tutoring is done. The main office at 2501 Cherry Ave., Suite 160, Signal Hill; Long Beach Bible College, 465 Artesia Blvd; and North Long Beach Christian Fellowship, 5640 Orange Ave.

"We are prepared to work with students if they really need or desire to get help," Pierson said.

The Academic UpRise Leaders of Distinction Awards Dinner will be held at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Hyatt Regency Long Beach. Tickets are available at $125 each and tables are $1,250. Scheduled guest speaker is Congresswoman Laura Richardson.

For more information about Academic UpRise visit www.academicuprise.org or call 562-988-5811.
LONG BEACH — Hundreds of California State University students, staff and faculty Tuesday afternoon protested state budget cuts that CSU officials say could force the university to enroll about 10,000 fewer students next academic year.

Protesters chanted slogans and waved signs in front of the CSU administration’s headquarters building in Long Beach, where the CSU Board of Trustees gathered for the first day of its two-day meeting.

“They say cutbacks, we say fight back,” chanted the crowd, which numbered over 400.

The protesters were joined by Lt. Gov. John Garamendi, who said the state needs to find more revenue for the CSU and University of California systems after state leaders placed it on a “starvation diet.”

“You cannot have the best education system in the world on the cheap,” he said.

Facing a widening budget deficit, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has asked legislators to cut another $66 million from the CSU system, on top of a one-time $31 million reduction already approved for this year.

Trustees today are scheduled to discuss a plan to discontinue the board’s policy in the past two years of growing enrollment by about 10,000 students even though the state had provided no funding to do so.

Because of current and impending budget cuts, CSU officials may decide to enroll only those students for which it has state funding, meaning that systemwide enrollment could decline from about 460,000 students to slightly above 460,000 next academic year.

Cal State Long Beach student Christopher Chavez said that students are already seeing the effects of cuts, including fewer class sections and larger class sizes.

Students are struggling to afford tuition fees, which increased by 10 percent this year.

“I know students who have had to work four jobs,” Chavez said.

CSU Chancellor Charles B. Reed said the enrollment management plan is needed because the university can no longer afford to
PROTEST
FROM PAGE A1

increase enrollment without adequate state funding. To do so would risk diluting educational quality by stretching university resources too thin, according to Reed.

CSULB, which recently has exceeded its enrollment target, plans to reduce its enrollment by about 1,500 students next academic year by offering fewer spots to students outside the university's geographic attendance area, according to CSULB President F. King Alexander.

CSULB will continue to admit all eligible local students.

The trustees have hiked CSU student tuition fees by nearly 50 percent since the 2003-2004 school year. Full-time undergraduate students pay an average of $3,797 per academic year, including the systemwide CSU fee and campus-specific fees for student services.

Elaine Bernal, a part-time faculty member in the CSULB chemistry department, said that her students have told her that they didn’t have a lab manual book for her class yet because they had to wait a year for the next paycheck to be able to afford one.

“These are devastating cuts,” she said.

The cutbacks have resulted in classes being cut and class sizes being increased, said CSULB professor Peter G. Kreysa, treasurer of the California Faculty Association, the CSU faculty union.

“I’ve never seen it worse,” he said.

Reed said that he will hold off on implementing the new enrollment plan until he gets feedback from trustees at today's meeting.

Reed told those at the rally that the state needs to raise more revenue for education. He urged the crowd to lobby legislators and the governor to adequately fund the CSU.

“The trustees and I don’t want to cut a penny,” he said. “But this state right now is in an economic free fall.”

As part of its enrollment management plan, campuses that expect to be over-enrolled would shorten the time period in which they will accept applications. Campuses would move up their application deadline to as early as Nov. 30.

The change will not affect CSULB, which had already set a Nov. 30 deadline for itself.

Marcia Marx, a professor at Cal State San Bernardino, said she worries that the deadline change will particularly hurt low-income and minority students. Such students often end up applying later in the application period because they want to make sure that they can afford to attend, she added.

“I feel so badly for those students (who) are going to be affected,” Marx said.
Student cuts near at CSUs

EDUCATION: The 23-campus system plans to reduce enrollment by 10,000. Long Beach would lose 1,500.

By Kevin Butler

LONG BEACH — California State University appears set to reduce its enrollment by about 10,000 students next academic year in response to state budget cuts. CSU Chancellor Charles B. Reed could announce as soon as today that the 23-campus system will discontinue its policy in the past two years of growing enrollment by about 10,000 students even though the state had provided no funding to do so.

The CSU Board of Trustees discussed the enrollment management plan Wednesday at its Long Beach headquarters.

Trustee Herbert Carter said that the move would be painful.

“But it is indeed a necessary one,” he said.

Reed has not yet implemented the plan. He does not need a formal vote of the trustees to proceed.

Facing a projected $11.2 billion budget deficit, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has asked legislators to cut another $66 million from the CSU system, on top of a one-time $31 million reduction previously approved for this year. He also has proposed to raise the sales tax. If Reed implements the plan, CSU systemwide enrollment would drop from about 450,000 students to slightly above 450,000 next academic year.

Cal State Long Beach will enroll 1,500 fewer students next academic year by offering fewer spots to applicants outside of the university’s geographic attendance area. All qualified local applicants will continue to be admitted.

Students, faculty and trustees at the meeting urged state legislators to provide more revenue to the CSU system.

“The solution is not denying access to thousands of qualified students this fall of 2009,” said Barbara Talalemotu, a senior at Cal State Dominguez Hills. “The solution is for all of us to work as a united front to ensure adequate funding for the CSU.”

Lillian Taiz, president of the union representing CSU faculty, urged trustees and CSU leaders to lobby state legislators.

“We need each (CSU) board member and each executive to send that message over and over to every newspaper, every elected leader, every member of the business community that the impact of these cuts will haunt us for generations to come,” said Taiz, a professor at Cal State Los Angeles and president of the California Faculty Association.

Crenshaw Cottrell, another CSUHD student, told trustees that he has seen the impact of the cuts on his campus. Students are having more difficulty getting needed classes, and academic programs have been cut, he added.

“I just want to get across the message that cuts really do have consequences,” he said. “It’s just got to the point now where it is so unbearable financially and emotionally to deal with the cuts that are taking place at my school.”

Trustee Jeffrey Bleich, who chairs the board, said that CSU supporters need to tell legislators to “stop being afraid to raise revenues.” Every dollar spent on the CSU generates $4 of economic activity for California, Bleich said.

“When we take $100 million away from education, we are stealing $400 million from the future,” he said. “And when we turn 10,000 students away from our campus, we are cheating 10,000 futures.”

In addition to reducing its enrollment by 1,500 students for next academic year, CSULB also will not admit 500 to 700 transfer students in January as it has in the past, CSULB President F. King Alexander said after the meeting.

Alexander urged concerned students and citizens to lobby their legislators to increase funding for the CSU.

“Call Sacramento, and make this change,” he added.

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Wrong cuts, wrong time

Community colleges serve a uniquely necessary role.

California is slicing deeply into its great system of higher education by raising student fees and restricting access. Nowhere will this cause more harm than to the community colleges.

The timing is awful. It is when unemployment rises and the economy is in upheaval that the community colleges are most needed. As Jeff Kellogg and Doug Otto describe in their column on the Comment page, people who have lost a job and need training to find another often turn to a two-year college for help.

Kellogg is president and Otto is a member of the Long Beach Community College District Board of Trustees. They see firsthand the damage further budget cuts will do. The college already has absorbed a loss of $3 million and now is looking at as much as $6 million more.

Statewide, a proposed cutback of $332 million would result in shutting the door to more than 200,000 students just when California’s struggling economy has the greatest need for better trained workers and fewer jobs for low-skilled workers.

The two trustees are asking readers to write to their elected officials in Sacramento and remind them that community colleges are the best and sometimes the only source of training needed at this time. You should.

If you do, you might wonder whether this will affect the outcome. It might not.

But at the very least it will drive home a point that must be made if California is to remain a great economic force in the nation and the world. The state’s system of higher education is essential, including especially the unique contributions of its community colleges.

Prison extravagance

Should taxpayers lavish money on the equivalent of eight new $1 billion medical centers like the new high-tech facility opened recently at UCLA? That’s what a federally appointed prison health czar is telling the state of California.

There’s no doubt that the state’s medical care for aging prison inmates is inadequate, but there has to be a better way than to bleed off $8 billion from a budget that already is in the red by many billions, and is about to undergo surgery that would do serious harm to vital services. For a much more reasonable cure, see Thomas Elias’ column on the Comment page.
Community colleges need support

By Jeff Kellogg and Doug Otto

For more than 60 years, Long Beach City College has been in the business of helping people achieve the American dream by providing life education and technical career skills needed to succeed in life. However, our institution's ability to provide the education which improves the lives of people in this community is being threatened by the state budget crisis.

The midyear budget proposal recently released by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger calls for $332.2 million in midyear cuts to the state's community colleges. This cut would come on top of the $200 million reduction included in the recently enacted 2008-09 state budget. This proposal translates to an estimated $6 million in cuts on top of nearly $3 million in cuts already absorbed at LBCC. This means that, despite very conservative fiscal policies adopted by the Board of Trustees, the courses that your student — or out-of-work neighbor — needs may not be available locally.

These cuts come at the worst possible time for community colleges — and the people of California. The economic downturn translates into huge financial and job losses for our state and local economy. The recounted recession has created a flood of displaced workers seeking to upgrade their job skills. California's unemployment rate has risen to 8.3 percent. Thousands of people are out of work and trying to upgrade their skills so they can get back into the work force. The demand will increase further because of recent announcements by the University of California and California State University systems that they will reduce access to their institutions. Already community colleges are serving 100,000 more students this year than they were last year.

California's community colleges are not only the only system of higher education in the state whose mission is to provide economic and work force development. Community colleges are open to anyone who wants an education. No other system is ready to fill these needs.

Simply put, hard economic times are the worst time to cut our community colleges.

Here are some facts to consider:

Community colleges are the key to California's economic recovery. As the largest provider of work force training in California, community colleges offer more than 175 degree and certificate programs in hundreds of educational fields such as nursing, business and computer science. With statewide unemployment rising, displaced workers must access to job training to return to the work force.

The proposed $332.2 million reduction would force the community colleges to turn away more than 200,000 students. To put this in perspective: This cut affects the same number of students as closing the entire University of California system — all 10 campuses. Such a massive reduction in work force training would be a tremendous blow to California as the state weathered with an economic crisis of historic proportions.

Community colleges generate enormous benefits to the state's economy. Students earning a degree or certificate from a California community college increase their earnings by 69 percent in three years. For every dollar that California invests in getting students in and through college, the state's economy receives a $5 return on investment as graduates earn higher wages.

The sheer enormity of the state's fiscal crisis will force many difficult choices and it is clear that we are in for several years of challenging budget times. But California's community colleges are a vital part of the state's economic engine — one that should not be reduced when needed most. Long Beach City College, and community colleges around the state, are providing the California economy with the skilled workers it needs to compete.

The LBCC Board of Trustees, the president and the entire LBCC community are united in our efforts to protect this community's access to the classes and services that our displaced workers and other students need to improve their skills and to get back to work.

But our efforts will fail short without your support. We urge every member of this community to contact their elected state leaders in the Assembly and Senate and explain to them that, in this time of economic turmoil, community colleges can lead us to more jobs and prosperity. Now, more than ever, is the time to provide the economic and work force development courses that are only available at Long Beach City and other community colleges.

Jeff Kellogg is president of the Long Beach Community College District Board of Trustees. Doug Otto is a member of the Long Beach Community College District Board of Trustees.