

Senate Vent Tent

Faculty, Staff, and Student Responses to CSU Budget Cuts

In late July, the CSU Board of Trustees adopted a strategy to deal with a budget shortfall of \$584 million (relative to the state budget enacted in January), or nearly 20% of the CSU budget. To give a perspective on the size of this cut, it is equivalent to the combined operating budgets of CSU Sacramento and Long Beach. Given that many students had already been admitted to campuses for several months, options for managing such a large cut were limited. Enrollment reductions, student fee increases, and employee furloughs were implemented.

Employee furloughs at CSU Fullerton produced \$17.7 million in savings this year, which saved hundreds of class sections for students. Student fees were increased by 30% on short notice. Summer 2009 enrollment was cut by 38%, and admissions for fall 2009 were reduced by 1,200 students. Undergraduate admissions in spring 2010 were closed, keeping out approximately 2,000 students. State-supported summer session has been eliminated for 2010. We have been directed to cut another 3,000 students next year.

The numbers do not tell the whole story, however. The following articles and video describe how students, staff, and faculty responded to this unprecedented circumstance.

BUDGET CUT IMPACTS

When I accepted my position two years ago here at Cal State Fullerton, I did so knowing that I would be making less money than I am capable of making in industry or even self employed, but the benefits and the retirement were compensatory for the loss of income I would incur.

The impact of the budget cuts is that there is more work and less pay and less time in which to produce the work. I am now wondering if the benefits and the retirement still compensate for the reduction. I know that staff members who have time vested will most likely need to stay on, but considering I've only been employed with the state for two years, I am left wondering if there is enough compensation for me to remain.

Along with everyone else, in addition to no raises in the two years that I've been here, I also have taken the 10.7% pay reduction (thanks to the mandatory furlough situation). Meanwhile, expenses continue to increase. My rent just went up 6%. Groceries continue to cost more, and utility costs are increasing. These things hit hard. I am behind on my property taxes.

I very much enjoy the people that I work with and the atmosphere of the University. However, I must consider that even the local school districts are paying more than \$1,000 over what I make in my position here at Cal State Fullerton (and that is the low end of their pay scale).

I normally am not a complainer and prefer to laugh and look at the bright side of situations. However, I, along with so many other State Employees, am feeling the blow. I am working very hard for minimally above federal poverty level pay. This is unacceptable. I have been told that in other countries, such as Italy, people work so that they can live. Here we are living so that we can work. Our entire lives centered around our work and on doing a good job at what we do, and for what? What is the compensation? That I can live barely above poverty level? The pay-off is not acceptable for the stress and hardship. I would rather sell my California property and buy property in some small rural town and farm. At least then my hard work would be for a purpose.

I am left to wonder if moving out of the state would be a smarter move for a person in my situation. The cost of living is steadily increasing in California while the rate of pay is declining. This is a very bad combination and it will hit the poorest Californians the hardest. It is a sad day and a saddening chain of thought for this born and raised California girl.

-Robin Rawal
Assistant to the Dean
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When is My Job Going to Feel Secure?

I have been terribly affected by the furlough, budget cuts, and campus changes. First I have had to live with the insecurity of a job loss, less pay, and most importantly student dissatisfaction. Students expect instructors to be available outside of class and furloughs interfere with instructors being available for their students. I have very large classes making students feel like a number rather than an individual. The classrooms are in disrepair with broken chairs and badly stained carpets. In some buildings the bathrooms are unsanitary! All of this is a constant reminder that our students are not the priority. I may have to file for bankruptcy if my loan modification is not approved and I feel like such an uneducated consumer. Four years ago I was led to believe that the real estate market was my investment, so I took the opportunity to refinance and invest in another property. Unfortunately, the market crashed and my home is no longer worth what it was. Now I am stuck because I cannot refinance, modify or sell. The future looks so gloomy. Anonymous

It's a Bad Budget Year

The trickling down of greed and politics from our elected officials has led to furlough days for staff and faculty. The low to middle income families are especially hard hit, as is typical.

The month that the furloughs began, Cal State Fullerton also notified us of a 10% cut in pay. At the same time, I received a notice from my homeowner's association saying that my monthly homeowner fees were going up 15%. Each month has been a struggle, and raises for state employees have been few and far between. Why? The standard answer is; "It's a bad budget year". Well, it's been a bad budget year for decades it seems. With the furlough and subsequent cut in pay, it is really going to be a struggle. For the first time, I am really scared of losing my home and everything I have.

When I began working as a state employee over 20 years ago, I never thought in my wildest dreams that I would be faced with a job that wouldn't let me pay my bills and make me feel insecure about potential job loss. It is ridiculous that we got to this point, and even more so that the issue continues to worsen. When will it end? You can no longer put in a hard day's work and be rewarded fairly for a job well done. Maybe if management rewarded its employees in other ways, such as allowing telecommuting or flexibility in hours, etc., it would make the blow to our monthly paychecks a little easier to bare. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

As the wealthy get wealthier, the gap between the low/middle income and the wealthy continues to widen. Students are left out in the cold to come up with more tuition money and fight for the few classes available and therefore take much longer to graduate. An education is the key to rise out of poverty. What part of this do our elected officials not understand? If California can't provide a decently priced education, this country will plunge into even worse trouble. Vote out your elected officials! Let's get a fresh batch that can possibly salvage what is left of California and its economy, and give its residents hope for a brighter future.

Anonymous

The Budget Cut Impact

My Personal Story

Upon hearing that there would be budget cuts for all CSUF employees, I immediately went to Payroll to revise my deductions so that instead of having a fairly good-size tax return in February, I would get a little more in my monthly paycheck. Now, I am left wondering if this will be the first time I will need to pay taxes, instead of getting money back. Only time will tell.

I have gone through my expenditures. To reduce my telephone, cable, and Internet bills Time Warner arranged to combine them, in what they call a “bundle” resulting in an approximate savings of \$40 a month. I am also looking into changing my auto/home insurance to a company who gave me a lower quote for my cars and condo insurance. I haven’t done this yet, but am close to finalizing the change.

I called my credit card companies and asked for a lower interest rate, indicating to them that I was a California state employee affected by furloughs and pay cuts. Chase Bank was wonderful and offered me their “Assist” program, reducing my interest rate from a rate above 20%, to only 8% locked in for a year. Unfortunately, my other credit card company, Capital One, was unwilling to do anything to lower my interest or payments, despite what Chase had done for me.

Although the above changes have helped to “soften” the blow, I am still coming up short each month. Furthermore, the budget cuts have changed my lifestyle. I eat out and drive my car less, and I don’t shop in stores unless I have a real purpose and money to spend. I have cut back on entertainment and no longer attend the opera with a friend, which I truly miss. Also, my grocery shopping has changed, as I am purchasing fewer food items to get by on than before the budget cuts. Moreover, I am not stocking up on good buys like toothpaste, soap, etc. Now, when I need toothpaste I go out and buy one tube and use it down to the last squeeze!

These days, when I get together with colleagues the conversation turns to how we are each getting by with less and how we are handling our work load on two fewer days a month. We are deeply concerned that the budget cuts have impacted our work and duties, thus creating more stress. Furthermore, we hate seeing the students so stressed and unable to get the classes they need to graduate. The added stress at home and at work can’t be good for CSUF employees or students and could create a major problem down the road. Morale is low and we’ve only begun; I fear the worst is yet to come. Again, only time will tell...

Suzanne Tappe, Admin. Coordinator.

Who’s Getting Cut?

Approximately 5 years ago when I moved to La Verne I thought it would be the last time I would ever have to move. My apartment was a modest home. One year ago my 27 year old daughter residing in San Diego lived with me weekdays while she attended nursing school very close to my home. However, as furloughs began, I was no longer able to afford my rent and had to move in with my brother, displacing my daughter in the process. This furlough has affected not just me, but three families. I am eternally grateful that my brother has room for me until April, but after that date, I have no idea where I will live. It is unlikely I will have a first, last, and security deposit to move into a place of my own.

When the furloughs initially were implemented, I sent an email to President Gordon and to Chancellor Reed, asking them if the top executives of the 23 CSU’s were being financially affected like, staff members. I learned from visiting the CSU website http://www.calstate.edu/exec_comp/ that, on top of the 23 president’s \$6,406,889 base salary and the CSU’s executive’s \$1,377,446 base salary, many receive a \$50,000/year housing stipend; some receive 100% of their housing. Their housing stipends alone exceed my annual salary. While deserving of these high wages and perks, it is disheartening when an employee and alumni of the CSU (class of 1999, Phi Kappa Phi, Golden Key, Outstanding Senior - Human Services Dept. class of 1999) cannot afford to rent a \$1,000/month apartment. I am still wondering if these top executives took a cut in pay or sacrificed their housing perks during these difficult times.

Mimi Lawson
Senior Program Coordinator
CSUF, University Extended Education

Editor’s note: All CSU employees, including executives, had a 10% pay cut to their salaries.

More Money, Less Services

My name is Sharon and I work in Women's Studies. The impact of the budget cuts has affected me at work and at home.

At work, our program was cut short by at least six courses which have caused great strain for students who are either trying to graduate on time next year, or who need our courses to fulfill a requirement.

The budget cuts have eliminated scheduled Women's Studies courses. For example, three of our Women's Studies classes were full and closed but later cancelled due to the budget. Furthermore, many students had already bought books for the cancelled classes. As a student I can completely empathize with their frustrations; I hear their complaints regularly by telephone, office visit, or by e-mail.

At home, I am a wife and a mother of four children (a college student, a senior and junior in high school, and a six grader) who have necessities. All of my children play sports, and this puts a strain on my family financially. Our greatest concern is our senior who will go off to college soon. We wonder how we will be able to purchase the yearbook, prom necessities, pictures, SAT fees, ACT fees, college application fees, etc. Moreover, all these expenditures will be repeated a third time for the junior in high school next year. The worst thing is we have to tell our children that we can't afford things now, and that is so difficult to say to a child!

Before the budget cuts began, I had money left over after the bills were paid to help buy food and clothing. Now, the weight is put completely on my husband. Furthermore, we have had to get an extension on some of our bills because we can't pay them until he gets his following paycheck. We need the money right now to buy food, and that is often difficult with the skyrocketing prices of food.

If there is a positive note about furloughs it is being able to spend time with my family. This is important to me, and I can make necessary appointments. However, I do not like losing money by not getting paid for a day off!!

Furloughs Hurt Everyone!

Click on the link above to view video clips illustrating the impact of the furloughs and budget cuts on California State University, Fullerton's faculty, staff, and students.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFWIDZHQICQ>