

Budget Cuts Endanger CSUSM, Higher Education

By Karen S. Haynes

Cal State San Marcos has a promise to keep with the region we serve. That promise began in 1989 when the legislation was signed which created our University. Since that time, we have remained committed to providing broad access to quality education, to forging partnerships within the community to address public needs and priorities, and to be prudent and accountable in our use of public resources. However, unprecedented budget cuts are derailing our progress. The message to students is no longer one of access but one of opportunity denied. The promise of public higher education is being broken.

CSUSM is a university with increasing demand at a time when budget cuts are limiting admission. Last month, we notified over 5,500 students that they could not attend classes this fall compared with 1,000 students who were notified last year. Not only are we a high demand institution but we are also young and vibrant. CSUSM is poised for growth with the capacity to further expand and serve more students, thus serving our region better.

I know firsthand the positive transformational impact a college education can have on a student's life. I was the first person in my family to graduate college. Throughout my career, first as a social worker and then as a university dean and president, I have been witness to the impact that higher education has not only on the lives of students, but on the vitality and robustness of a region. Forty percent of CSUSM's graduates are also first-time college grads, and our student population is as diverse as the region we serve. In terms of our economic impact, a recent survey reported that our annual spending in the region was \$161 million, generating a total impact of \$307 million on the regional economy.

There is no question that we are positively impacting lives – but how can we continue to educate and support students with quality when our budget was dramatically slashed by 14 million dollars, or 20% of state support, in one year? This is the question that keeps me up at night.

In order to address the budget shortfall systemwide, the CSU raised student fees in one year by 30 percent, implemented furloughs with ten percent compensation cuts, and mandated additional cuts at campuses. Knowing that these cuts were coming, we planned and made the prudent decision to implement a hiring freeze in January 2008 as well as curtail non-essential travel and purchases. However, those efforts weren't enough: This fall, we cut enrollment, services and classes as well. And, this past Friday, August 21, the campus shut down in what was the first of 24 scheduled days of reduced campus operation in order to accomplish these compensation cuts.

As we prepare to welcome students back to class tomorrow, the joy and excitement I share with CSUSM staff and faculty is clouded. The promise to our region of quality, accessible, public higher education at CSUSM is being compromised and qualified, bright students are being turned away.

The fact is, Cal State San Marcos and the public higher education system in California is in crisis. The current options of reducing quality service to students, of turning even more students away, and of charging more to our students are all distasteful and largely unacceptable

alternatives – not just for Cal State San Marcos but for this region. An even less educated community of tomorrow will not be the community that attracts and retains businesses; it will not continue to be the place of incubation and innovation. This dilemma should keep *all* of us up at night.

So, Cal State San Marcos needs your help. We need you to recognize how important the University is to this region and how essential higher education is to California's future. Share your story, your frustration, and your anger – tell legislators about a student you know who was denied access, about how your son, daughter or neighbor's graduation date is being delayed, about how a narrowed pipeline of qualified graduates will impact your business. Join me in sending this definitive message: Our state budget cannot be balanced on the back of California's future.