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Archives > Education    Monday, September 07, 2009

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## Enrollment soars at community colleges

By Max Zimbort  
 Published: Last Updated Monday, September 7, 2009 7:17 PM PDT

NORTHEAST GLENDALE — Enrollment at California community colleges rose 4.9% since the end of the 2007-08 academic year, state officials announced, with similar trends tracking at Glendale Community College.

Fewer admissions to public four-year colleges and an 11.9% unemployment rate have propelled record numbers of students to community colleges, state education officials said. The number of students in California community colleges is about 2.9 million, the highest enrollment in the history of the system.

"It's wonderful that students are coming back to get educated and people are trusting Glendale Community College for training," interim President/Supt. Dawn Lindsay said. "So from that perspective, it's a great thing because it speaks to the quality of our programs."

But college and state administrators acknowledged that the spike in enrollment comes at a challenging time of shrinking services.

"We have a supply and demand problem," Lindsay said.

Budget cuts to the Cal State and University of California systems have triggered fewer admissions while community college students face harsh competition for limited space.

"In order to accommodate the state fiscal crisis, we've had to cut back, like every other community college, with our course offerings," Lindsay said. "At the same time, we have more students than ever who want to take classes with us."

Over the next two years, California community colleges will operate with \$840 million less, forcing them to reduce courses by 20% at some campuses, state officials said.

Glendale Community College was forced to trim its spending by more than \$1 million from last year, to \$86.9 million, and institute a hiring freeze as a result of state funding cuts. A third of the campus' winter class offerings also had to be cut.

"These new enrollment figures confirm . . . the demand for a community college education is soaring at a time when there is an unparalleled divestment in higher education," Jack Scott, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges system, said in a statement.

The Campaign for College Opportunity, a statewide coalition of business, labor and education leaders, projects that community colleges will need to increase capacity through the next 10 years or risk turning away more than 220,000 potential students. And those were conservative estimates based on population growth, not employment or other economic conditions.

Community colleges expect to earn \$80 million from new tuition fees this year. Even with the 2% in additional funding approved by state lawmakers for 2008-09, community colleges are operating with 8% less overall because of the state financial crisis, according to the Campaign for College Opportunity and state officials.

"Community colleges always have an increase in enrollment when times are harder," said Anita Quinonez Gabrielian, member of the Glendale Community College Board of Trustees. "We are trying to do more with less. We have faculty trying to take more students than they ordinarily would."

Money from the federal stimulus bill will offset some shortfalls, but educators said they see pain ahead, and that Glendale Community College is no different.

"Students have specific desires for classes, and what they're finding is that many of the classes they want are full or there's long waiting lists," Lindsay said.

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Colleges raised tuition, but they are not the direct beneficiaries of higher fees. Funds are pooled in Sacramento where they are apportioned throughout all of California's 110 community colleges.

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