

Amid budget cutbacks, California colleges reduce or eliminate summer school

Students face long commutes, higher fees and delayed graduations because of severe summer school cutbacks at California colleges.



Jacqueline Villanueva, 19, strains to read the bottom portion of a projection in a history class at Cal State Dominguez Hills. Cuts to summer school offerings mean more students are packed into classrooms on California State University and community college campuses -- if they can get into the classes at all. (Arkasha Stevenson, Los Angeles Times / June 20, 2011)

By Carla Rivera

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It is a summer of discontent on many California college campuses.

Some, including West Los Angeles College and the three campuses in the San Diego Community College District, have canceled the regular summer session because of budget cutbacks, only offering some non-credit classes and a few specialized courses.

Others have severely curtailed course offerings, frustrating students like William Diaz, who found that the few chemistry classes being offered in the nine-campus Los Angeles Community College District were all full by the time he was scheduled to register.

And at some California State University campuses, including Cal Poly Pomona, students will pay hundreds of dollars more in the summer than they would for an equivalent course load during the academic year.

Summer school has customarily been a time for thousands of students to gain ground on degrees or, if hampered by work and family duties, stay on track. But state funding cuts have forced many public colleges into a difficult balancing act, and many have chosen to slash summer classes to preserve more fall and spring programs.

As a result, despite high demand, enrollment has plummeted, students are packed ever more tightly into classrooms and the summer of 2011 is emerging as one of the toughest anyone can remember.

It is a trend that has been building. In the 23-campus Cal State system, estimated summer enrollment fell to 12,000 in 2010 from 92,000 in 2008. Course offerings dropped from about 8,100 to 5,800 during the same period. Figures for 2011 are not yet available but are expected to mirror those from last year or to have fallen further.

Adding to the pressure is the fact that most Cal State campuses this year require students to foot the entire bill for classes, rather than using state funds to subsidize a portion of the costs as they do during the academic year. At Cal State San Bernardino, for example, a summer student taking a full load of 12 units will pay basic tuition of \$1,480 plus an extra \$60 per unit, or an additional \$720.

Community colleges, meanwhile, are experiencing unprecedented reductions. Nearly two-thirds of community college districts responding to a survey conducted by the chancellor's office reported plans to cut offerings for this summer by 50% or more.

"This will be the most severe summer we've faced in terms of course offerings," said California

Community Colleges Chancellor Jack Scott. "We have many four-year students who come back home and want to pick up a course or two in the summer and they can't. There are a lot of individuals out of work who would like to have some training in the summer and can't. We have great demand but inadequate supply."

Mt. San Jacinto College in Riverside County is offering only eight for-credit classes this summer, down from 97 such classes in 2010 — with enrollment in those classes decreasing from 2,269 to 137. The campus also has several non-credit workshops funded by a federal grant.

"It's a great tragedy in California that we are delaying education for students because they can't get the classes they need," Scott said.

The University of California has generally been less affected because the nine-campus system in recent years has used additional state funds to increase summer enrollment, officials said. About 73,469 students enrolled in summer programs in 2009 and about 76,575 did so last year.

On some campuses, such as UC Berkeley, the per-unit fees cover the cost of instruction. But funding cuts have forced some campuses to discontinue incentives such as fee caps, and budget pressures may stall further growth, according to a January report to the Legislature.

Meanwhile, students at many community colleges and Cal State campuses are being shut out now.

Diaz, a chemistry major at West Los Angeles community college, fears it will take him an extra year to earn the credits he needs to transfer to Cal State Northridge if he can't get into a prerequisite chemistry class this summer.

Even though the seven-hour class with a lab session at East Los Angeles City College is full and makes for a difficult commute from his home in South Los Angeles, he plan to show up on July 5, the first day.

"I know there's got to be some students who will drop, so I've come up with a whole plan to bring my own seat, like a beach chair, and just sit there and talk to the teacher. It's an important class, and I feel like I'm fighting against the clock," said Diaz, 22, who has a 3-year-old son and works as a teaching assistant at the Edward R. Roybal Learning Center, a high school in downtown Los Angeles.

Students in a summer history class at Cal State Dominguez Hills said they too had a hard time finding and paying for summer courses.

Dominguez Hills student Teresa Payne, 18, had wanted to take summer classes at Mesa College, a community college near her home in San Diego that canceled most of its summer program, only offering courses in a few specialized areas and for summer graduates. So instead, she is staying in student housing at Dominguez Hills and paying the higher Cal State tuition.

Professor Kate Fawver, chair of the history department and instructor for the class, said summer courses are crowded with students who fear there will be further tuition hikes and hope to complete as much coursework as possible. Some students in her class are there because they couldn't get other courses they wanted, she said.

Trafton Seratt, a junior social work major at Cal State San Bernardino, who just completed spring exams, is preparing to take a full load of 17 units in summer classes that start on Monday. With the summer surcharges, he'll pay about \$2,500 — about \$800 more than he paid during the academic quarter.

Still, some classes he wants are not being offered, he said.

"I think summer is looked on as something of a privilege, but as a student trying to graduate more or less on time, it really does have an impact," Seratt said. "It makes it hard when we have obstacles that hinder you from finishing on time. You want to get back into the economy as a graduated professional. That's the goal we want for everybody."