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Squeezed from All Sides: The CSU Crisis and California's Future

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***THE CSU CRISIS AND CALIFORNIA'S FUTURE***  
*Reports from the UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles*

**February 2011**

## ***THE CSU CRISIS AND CALIFORNIA'S FUTURE*** ***Reports from the UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles***

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# Squeezed from All Sides

## Foreword

California long enjoyed rapid growth, abundant jobs, and expanding college opportunity—key elements of the California dream. Now the state is struggling to recover from its worst economic crisis in generations, a demographic slowdown, a devastating collapse of the wealth of the state’s families from the housing crisis, and severe cutbacks in higher education. California’s students are being asked to pay much more to get less. There can be no doubt that these are extraordinary times and if California is to emerge from its worst fiscal crisis in modern times, it will require sacrifice on everyone’s part. Yet, in spite of a lot of discussion about the budget crisis, there has been too little analysis of the consequences of the budget cuts and far too little information on how the cuts have affected the lives and prospects of our young people trying to finish college and prepare for a future.

A recent report from the non-partisan Public Policy Institute of California predicts that the state will be short one million college graduates needed in 2025 to fill the jobs that require a BA. Another recent study from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education projected that by 2020 California would begin to see an 11% reduction in its per capita earnings if the state was not able to immediately increase the number of college graduates. Higher education is the economic engine of the state and that engine produces jobs, and it is in this context that California is slashing the budgets of its colleges and universities. No institution is more central in producing the college degrees that the state so desperately needs than the California State University (CSU), the nation’s largest system of public universities.

If the colleges remain full, and students who can manage somehow pay the rapidly rising tuition, it is easy to assume that things are working out. But at what cost to the state? If students take significantly longer to graduate and their education must be subsidized for 25% or more time, are there truly any savings to the state? If these young people are delayed in entering the job force because they are short courses they need to graduate, how much does it cost the state in foregone tax revenues? Will the state accommodate the rising demand for higher education? This research went to the students on one of the largest CSU campuses to ask them how the changes are affecting their lives. What they told us shows that the challenges they face are severely limiting their opportunities and taking years out of their productive lives; these challenges are putting great stress upon families that are already disrupted by the loss of jobs and income. Too many students are helping support their families, who can no longer help them. Latino and black students are especially hard hit but many white students and their families face all of these problems as well.

Most students are determined to keep going, because they know the consequences of not finishing college, especially in a state where the decent middle class jobs for people without degrees are shrinking away. But students are also facing an alarmingly high level of stress. As we face the prospects of making a very bad situation still worse, it is important for Californians to listen seriously to the voices of California's students, and to weigh the urgent question: at what cost are we shifting the burden to these young people?

We understand very well that the state of California faces a terrible financial crisis that will not be resolved without significant sacrifice. We know that the poor, the elderly, those with physical and mental illnesses and many others are suffering badly and that critical basic services are being cut. But California is a state with many resources that have not been tapped and we have broken the pact that the state has historically made with the young—to educate them so that they can compete with the rest of the country and the world, and so that each generation can reach beyond the boundaries of the prior one to build the state's future. This generation is being asked to pay much more for much less and to do it in the worst economic situation since the Great Depression. Older generations that were offered excellent public higher education at a much lower price have now voted to offer this generation less for much higher costs, even while higher education has become much more crucial for the future of all Californians. The choices are grim. Either we develop the talent of our young people or we decline. There is no easy answer in this difficult time, but we all need to listen carefully to the struggling students who are the state's future.

Professors Patricia Gándara and Gary Orfield  
Civil Rights Project/ Proyecto Derechos Civiles,  
UCLA

## ***The CSU and Opportunity in California.***

The 23 campuses of the California State University system constitute the nation's largest system of BA-granting public universities, offering a rich array of fields of study. The system is not open enrollment. Students need to be in the top third of California students to qualify and some campuses are becoming far more competitive. The CSU is the key to mobility for young people in the state and particularly important for students of color. Twenty-one (21) percent of its graduates are Latino and 5 percent are black. The number of Latino graduates is well over twice the UC number and the number of black BA recipients is more than three times the UC number, as is the small number of American Indian graduates.<sup>1</sup> Although these differences are partially explained by the much smaller size of the UC system and the smaller share of its enrollment in undergraduate programs, the CSU system obviously has great importance for the mobility of students of color and struggling families of all races. Reductions in resources and access will affect the life chances of all groups of students in the state. In a state with a relatively small sector of private non-profit four-year college enrollment, the CSU plays a particularly critical role in higher education. The banning of affirmative action in the state by Proposition 209 makes it critically important for civil rights purposes. Among other important roles, the CSU is the source of the great majority of California's teachers.

### ***The Campus***

We surveyed more than 2,000 students at the CSU Northridge (CSUN) campus, which enrolls more than 35,000 students and is one of the 50 largest universities in the nation though it is just one of the 23 CSU campuses. CSUN reflects the rich diversity of California with thirty percent (30%) of students European American/White, 31% Latino, 7% African American, and 11% Asian (inclusive of all Asian subgroups). Like the nation's colleges in general, it was predominantly female in 2010, 57% female, 43% male. Among Latinos, 62% of the students were female as were 70% of black students.

Across the CSU system 53% of all students are from nonwhite backgrounds as are 50% of CSU Northridge students. It has the largest teacher preparation program of any of the CSU campuses at a time when raising the quality of teachers is a central goal of education reform. Research clearly shows that well-trained and experienced teachers are the most precious resource of our schools.

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<sup>1</sup> 2009 data, California Postsecondary Education Commission website, downloaded Feb. 1, 2011. [cpec.ca.gov/StudentData/EthSnapshotGraph.asp](http://cpec.ca.gov/StudentData/EthSnapshotGraph.asp).

## ***The Survey***

The survey was anonymous and consisted of about 20 questions asking students about aspects of their academic, financial, and future plans as well as half a dozen demographic questions. It also offered the opportunity for students to write a short comment about their personal situation if they chose to do so. Remarkably, more than three-fourths of the respondents chose to write a comment. The survey took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

## ***The Sample***

The survey was conducted in the fall of 2010. Upper division core classes were sampled. The great majority of students in the sampled classes completed surveys in the classroom with 82% of students responding for a total of 2,158 returned. The very high response rate and significant number of respondents lend confidence in the findings. The great majority of the respondents were upperclassmen--38% were seniors and 45% were juniors. Just 13% were sophomores, and 5% were freshmen. The average age of respondents was 23 years old, with 91% unmarried, 94% childless, and 90% citizens.

The focus was on students who had been on campus for several years, who could reflect on changes to their educational situation that accompanied the deepening recession and concomitant increases in tuition and fees. Eighty-three percent (83%) of respondents were full-time students who had been attending this or another CSU campus continuously. Although many also worked, these were overwhelmingly serious full-time students deeply committed to finishing college.

The demographics of the respondents mirror very closely the demographics for the university: 60% female, 40% male; 36% European American; 30% Latino; 5% African American; 8% Asian/Pacific Islander (including Southeast and South Asian, 11.4%), and 18% "mixed" or "other." Other ethnic categories constituted 2% or fewer of students.

Table 1. Study Sample by gender, race, and ethnicity<sup>2</sup>

	Frequency/Percentage									
	White (N=758)		Latino (N=616)		AfAm (N=108)		Asian (N=173)		Other (N=409)	
Female	442	58.3	382	62.0	76	70.4	100	57.8	254	62.1
Male	316	41.7	234	38.0	32	29.6	73	42.2	155	37.9

<sup>2</sup> We do not include in this table or in the analyses very small groups, such as Southeast Asian and Native American, because of instability of findings due to the very small numbers in the sample. However we did collect data for these groups. Targeted research with substantial samples of these groups would be very useful because they surely face the same challenges.

## ***Major Findings***

College is a complicated time for many students and much more challenging now. The CSU students surveyed reported stresses from many directions, with resources shrinking, costs rising, and out-of-school burdens growing. Students had faced mid-year tuition increases with another ten percent increase coming in September. They are living in one of the states most damaged by the recession and among the slowest to recover. The pressures they feel are many sided.

### ***Shift in Student-Parental Roles***

Helping their children to successfully complete college is one of the central goals of many parents, but now many are asking their children for help. For many in our sample, the economic recession has reversed the typical roles of students and parents. Parents facing economic crises must often take help from students that are simultaneously trying to support themselves and pay increasing college costs. Parents find themselves without resources and needing help in the worst economy of their lifetimes. Brothers and sisters have to ask our students for help as the weak economy has pummeled job hopes for the young. Policymakers need to understand the extraordinary situation young people are facing today when they make decisions about aid and tuition levels.

Table 2. Has the economic crisis (since 2008) increased your family's need for financial support from you?

	Frequency (N=2,123)	Percentage
Yes	1,245	58.6%
No	878	41.4%

Approximately half of all students noted that their parents provide less support for them than before the recession and more than a third noted that at least one of their parents has had their salary reduced as a result of the economic downturn. Most respondents noted that they were responsible to help support or provide emergency help for other family members. 45% of these students noted that they had to provide this support for parents, 38% for siblings. Of course, in some cases students are helping both.

These challenges reflect the economic crisis many parents are facing. For example, one in sixteen had their home foreclosed or was facing foreclosure. Home equity is the major source of wealth for most families and a basic part of family stability. Losing the family home and losing whatever wealth had been accumulated are devastating blows. California's housing bubble, the surge of joblessness, and the



widespread use of predatory loans have created a meltdown in the housing market that is affecting many students very directly.

On other fronts, the parents of more than one out of ten students had lost their job and more than a fifth had their income reduced. One in nine couldn't pay their bills. With families providing less support for the students, and many parents reversing roles and needing help from their children while they are full-time students, the situation is causing a squeeze from all sides.

Table 3. Impact of the recession (since 2008) on your parents' economic situation.

	Frequency <sup>3</sup> (N=3,938)	Percentage
None	373	9.5%
Their situation has improved	67	1.7%
One or more parents has been laid off	415	10.5%
One or more parents have had hours or salary reduced	838	21.3%
Home foreclosed or foreclosure threatened	224	5.7%
Family has lost medical coverage	302	7.7%
Family cannot pay bills	448	11.4%
Parents provide me less support than in the past	1,009	25.6%
Other	262	6.7%

Some students cannot afford housing. "Because of financial issues," said one, "I don't have a place to live. I couch surf from place-to-place so my parents could be able to afford medical expenses." Needless to say, it is hard to find a good place to study in someone else's place. Another student also discussed the struggle to pay rent as his family could no longer provide it: "I no longer live rent free because my family's income has gone down, so I use my grant money to pay rent and help my mom and brother."

The recession has hit immigrant families particularly hard. The construction industry, which employs a significant number of immigrants, has largely collapsed, putting these students in the kind of position one undocumented young woman describes: "As a young woman in college, helping to support my family, it is extremely difficult. . . . I had to take on more hours causing my grades to plummet. Seeing my family and my parents struggle is really tough mentally, spiritually, and psychologically and being an AB540 student sometimes makes me feel more hopeless and frustrated."

Those students with families of their own face pressures that are sometimes even greater than those of other students: "I am a single mom with an entire family of

<sup>3</sup> Respondents were directed to mark as many as applied therefore the number and percentage reflect more than the total number of respondents.

parents and siblings depending on me for help,” one wrote on our survey. “We are,” she wrote, “in a dire situation.”

Long-term joblessness, as has been the case for many Californians, has been shown to greatly diminish the chance of successful reemployment. The ongoing economic and social collapse that often ensues puts incredible pressure on college students: “My parents were both laid off 2 years ago and still haven’t found jobs. They have problems paying their house payments and bills. I’ve had to send them money so payments won’t be late for them. I work as much as I can without it interfering with school . . .” This is not the classic college experience of older generations.

Table 4. Impact of the recession on your parents’ economic situation, by race

	Frequency/Percentage									
	White (N=759)		Latino (N=617)		AfAm (N=108)		Asian (N=173)		Other (N=411)	
None	179	23.6	64	10.4	16	14.8	35	20.2	62	15.1
Their situation has improved	25	3.3	18	2.9	2	1.9	4	2.3	14	3.4
One or more parents has been laid off	107	14.1	159	25.8	21	19.4	31	17.9	76	18.5
One or more parents have had hours or salary reduced	253	33.3	300	48.6	43	39.8	66	38.2	152	37.0
Home foreclosed or foreclosure threatened	57	7.5	76	12.3	17	15.7	13	7.5	58	14.1
Family has lost medical coverage	67	8.8	131	21.2	20	18.5	20	11.6	53	12.9
Family cannot pay bills	124	16.3	161	26.1	28	25.9	24	13.9	98	23.8
Parents provide me less support than in the past	306	40.3	314	50.9	55	50.9	84	48.6	216	52.6
Other	102	13.4	70	11.3	9	8.3	12	6.9	56	13.6

Students from every racial group are facing the challenge of having to help out family members while supporting themselves through college, but the burden is distributed somewhat differently by ethnicity. More than 40% of Asian and Latino

students compared to 26% of white students and 20% of African Americans reported having to help out parents. Thirty-five percent (35%) of Latinos and 32% of African Americans reported having to help support siblings, compared to 19% of white students, and 29% of Asians. Latino parents were the most hard hit by job layoffs or having had hours reduced; 49% of Latino students and 40% of African American students said at least one parent had hours or salary reduced compared to 33% of white. Meanwhile, 26% of Latino and 19% of African Americans had a parent who had lost a job, compared to 14% of white students. Latino men have traditionally been employed at high levels with relatively low wages but this recession has hit many of their most important job categories. Many families of all races are in serious trouble, but for families of color it is more a depression than a severe recession.

Table 5. Student responsibility for helping to support or provide emergency help to any other family members, by race

	Frequency/Percentage									
	White (N=759)		Latino (N=617)		AfAm (N=108)		Asian (N=173)		Other (N=411)	
Parents	195	25.7	248	40.2	22	20.4	70	40.5	141	34.3
Siblings	146	19.2	215	34.8	34	31.5	51	29.5	128	31.1
Other relatives	99	13.0	69	11.2	16	14.8	27	15.6	55	13.4

### ***Students facing reduced earnings, and increased expenses***

Students, too, have lost hours or have lower paying jobs as a result of the recession, so many are working more jobs or having to make ends meet with less income. It is hard to work one's way out of the hole when one cannot find enough work or faces lower wages and still rising costs. "I had to take a break from school," one student wrote, he "didn't have enough money and my parents can't help because their own jobs are at stake. I lost my job, for over 5 months I was unemployed due to the city job cuts..." Costs rising, out of work and parents' jobs threatened, the obstacles were closing in.

Often the problems are multidimensional: "My father got laid off 3 years ago, got a new one at a pay cut. I got my new job but now they are cutting hours and minimum wage makes it hard to support yourself." The student and the father are both in very tenuous job situations. Another reports a flock of concerns: "Rent has gone up, work hours have gone down, and my family seems to have financial obligations, so I feel bad asking for help." Students wonder where to turn.

When both the college and the students face economic cuts at the same time, the results on students' lives cumulate. One student told how the interaction of the economy, the surging fees and the shrinking class offerings create a deeply

discouraging situation. It is, the student wrote, “harder to find a job and hours are cut. Classes are cut, fees [have] gone up, all this makes it harder and longer to finish school.” Another student spoke of having to work two jobs, one to help his father who has a terminal illness, and the other to support himself, but with all of this, and trying to be a full-time student he notes, “I sometimes do not buy my books for class because I cannot afford it.” When it gets to this point, of course, the educational consequences become painfully apparent, even in the short run, as a student tries to understand a subject and pass exams without the book to study.

About 80% of all students say it is harder to meet expenses today than two years ago; about 30% say it is *much* harder, or they simply cannot meet their costs. Students live with uncertainty and anxiety. “It’s an endless feeling of worry,” one writes, “I never know if I can afford the next semester and I hate that.”

Table 6. If you have been in college for more than one year, how difficult is it to meet your costs today compared to one or two years ago?

	Frequency (N=2,054)	Percentage
Less difficult	28	1.4%
The same	292	14.2%
A little more difficult	1,162	56.6%
A lot more difficult; Cannot meet costs	572	27.8%

Table 7. If it is more difficult, why?

	Frequency (N=5,255)	Percentage
College fees and costs have gone up	1,616	30.8%
My expenses have increased	832	15.8%
It is harder to find a job to help support myself	635	12.1%
It is hard to get extra hours at my job	555	10.6%
My family is having a harder time helping me	815	15.5%
It is harder to get a loan	213	4.1%
I have maxed out my loan eligibility	80	1.5%
I have maxed out or no longer qualify for grants	150	2.9%
Credit cards have been terminated or maxed out	252	4.8%
Other	107	2.0%

White students, as a group, though seriously affected, are modestly less affected by the economic downturn. 23% say it is much more difficult or impossible to meet expenses, while over 30% of all other major groups say this. The primary reasons students report for their economic predicament are their fees having gone up and their family having a harder time helping them.

Table 8. If you have been in college for more than one year, how difficult is it to meet your costs today compared to one or two years ago? (by race/ethnicity)

	Frequency/Percentage									
	White (N=720)		Latino (N=595)		AfAm (N=102)		Asian (N=162)		Other (N=390)	
Less difficult	12	1.7	5	.8	1	1.0	3	1.9	5	1.3
The same	119	16.5	75	12.6	11	10.8	16	9.9	51	13.1
A little more difficult	422	58.6	330	55.5	59	57.8	92	56.8	214	54.9
A lot more difficult; Cannot meet costs	167	23.2	185	31.1	31	30.4	51	31.5	120	30.8

Table 9. If it is more difficult, why?

	Frequency/Percentage									
	White (N=759)		Latino (N=617)		AfAm (N=108)		Asian (N=173)		Other (N=411)	
College fees and costs up	549	72.3	472	76.5	88	81.5	137	79.2	314	76.4
Expenses increased	273	36.0	279	45.2	44	40.7	54	31.2	156	38.0
Harder to find a job to help support myself	194	25.6	198	32.1	46	42.6	48	27.7	127	30.9
Hard to get extra hours at my job	177	23.3	175	28.4	26	24.1	38	22.0	118	28.7
My family is having a harder time helping me	271	35.7	245	39.7	44	40.7	64	37.0	164	39.9
It is harder to get a loan	72	9.5	45	7.3	18	16.7	18	10.4	52	12.7
Maxed out my loan eligibility	26	3.4	18	2.9	7	6.5	7	4.0	19	4.6
Maxed out/ no longer qualify for grants	36	4.7	53	8.6	9	8.3	12	6.9	36	8.8
Credit cards terminated or maxed out	76	10.0	83	13.5	17	15.7	19	11.0	53	12.9

Another student writes of having his work days on his campus job cut by the furloughs from the state budget cuts, and frozen hourly wages for 5 years, but is trying to cope with “Rent increasing, food increasing, gas increasing, car insurance, medical expenses not covered by insurances increasing.” Some of the responses were plaintive: “Can’t afford it all . . . College is so expensive. Parking \$180 a semester. Books \$500 a semester, tuition \$3,000. Rent \$700. Car \$300. Food \$300. You tell me how I can do this!”

Some are changing their career plans. “It’s difficult because my parents do not support me and the college fees have gone up. I planned on going to graduate school but I already have student loans to pay so I’ve changed my decision about it.”

### ***Classes Closed, Years Lost.***

Students feel that they are paying much more for much less in terms of educational opportunities and that the colleges are requiring courses they cannot offer. Two thirds of all students say they have been unable to get the classes they need to make regular progress toward their degree. Most think it will take them at least one year longer to graduate as a result. That is another year of costs and a year of lost income. One worries: “Classes are extremely hard to get, pushing back my graduation [and] causing me more debt to pay back. . . .It has now made me question whether or not I can go to grad school.”

Another student wrote about the “vicious cycle” she is in, having to pay more and more for full-time enrollment so that she can have access to financial aid, although she can’t get the classes she needs. So she finds herself mounting up debt without getting appreciably closer to her goal of graduation. Yet, she doesn’t see an option because she needs the financial aid to continue in school: “I am unable to get classes, and I feel so uneasy paying more money just so I can take classes I don’t need, so that I can keep my full-time student status, so I can receive financial aid, student discounts, etc.”

Cutbacks in classes may not look serious from the outside, but they have multiple ripple effects throughout the economy, and literally take a year or more of paying work out of a student’s life, deepening his or her debts substantially. They also increase the cost to the state to graduate each student, and reduce the capacity of the campuses to take in new students. Less work, less income, and fewer taxes paid have broader impacts, of course, on local and state revenues. It costs the campus and the state to crowd facilities and overburden staffs with students who should have graduated already. Short term savings can bring long-term costs. On a personal level they can mean many things, including putting off marriage and family and not taking care of medical problems. Almost 8 of 10 students reported that the inability to get the classes they need is delaying their graduation.

Table 10. Do you think it will take you longer to finish your degree because of an inability to get classes?

	Frequency (N=2,117)	Percentage
Yes	1,632	77.1%
No	485	22.9%

Inadequate funding of counseling staff also puts greater pressures on the institution as well as the students. Faced with the decrease in availability of classes, they often don't know what to do. Should they take classes they don't need just to stay in school? Will they lose aid and face bill collectors demanding repayment of loans if they leave for a time? Are there other classes they could take that they are not aware of? What are the consequences of going part-time? Students are having to make difficult choices with little guidance: "I did not attend spring semester of 2010 because I could not get classes. The classes had too many students on the waiting list. The advisement center had only appointments for freshmen, it was very difficult to see an advisor." Lack of good advice can raise costs and delay completion.

"I pay tuition and don't take the classes I need to graduate and I pay tuition at a junior college to get the classes I do need," writes one student caught in this bind, "I pay tuition at CSUN because I don't want to get disenrolled." Another reflects on the maze he's caught in: "I planned to graduate spring 2009 but because I can't afford school and can only get into a few classes I probably won't graduate until fall 2011. Very stressful and at times makes me want to drop out . . ."

About half of all students responding to the survey estimated that it would take them longer than anticipated to complete college because of their financial situation. Most students believe it would take another year; another quarter believes it will take more than an additional year.

Table 11. If you think it will take longer to finish your degree because of your financial issues, how much longer?

	Frequency (N=1,034)	Percentage
One semester	260	25.1%
One year	519	50.2%
More than one year	255	24.7%

For some students the lack of availability of classes has had the impact of changing their entire program of study, and in the case of the following student, almost certainly reducing her competitiveness in her chosen field as a result: "I was

enrolled in the honors program and with the cuts they cut the thesis from the honors program and didn't offer the replacement capstone class in the semester I needed it, so I had to drop out of the program because I didn't have the money for an extra semester to take the thesis capstone class. I will also have to postpone or give up on grad school because of the cost." Not having the honors program can, of course, seriously affect the student's prospects for professional school admission. One out of 5 white students and one of 4 students of color considers giving up getting a degree because it has become too difficult.

### ***Students experience extreme physical and emotional stress***

The single most common word used in written comments by students was "stress." Over and over students wrote about the extreme stress they are under. This is affecting their grades, their motivation, and their mental and physical health. Sometimes we forget the very human stories behind these numbers, and the psychic pain that a lot of these students are experiencing. One writes of "extreme depression every day ever since last year. Finding it hard to stay motivated in school." Another says, "I am a very stressed out student. I am trying to pay the bills now and help my parents with the grants and loans I have. But later on I wonder if I will be able to pay off the debt in loans I already have." They talk about how the squeeze of many pressures hurts their academic work: "I cannot get into classes I need. I don't have enough time to do homework because I have to work. These kinds of problems make me agitated, depressed, and confused." Another writes sadly, "I'm worried every day if I can afford my bills and gas to school.... The pressure is on."

"It's difficult to go to school and concentrate knowing that your family is in need. My parents are also both sick and we no longer have medical insurance. I'm in constant fear that they'll die. I work the maximum hours at work and take classes in the evening. I'm usually tired from being awake since early in the morning, so I tend to doze off in class. . . . or I have to be in a constant battle to stay awake."

"Some days I feel absolutely awful. I work hard and I'm afraid of getting sick or of any other "unforeseen" difficulty coming up because I'm afraid I won't be able to handle things."

Many of these students are trying hard to be responsible family members, students, and citizens, working as much as they can and studying hard, trying to help support parents and siblings while also trying to meet personal educational and career goals. But it is clear that many are stressed far beyond a healthy level. Some of the students wrote what could only be described as cries for help. Some are being pushed beyond their ability to cope with the stress. And, of course, mental health services, even if they could take the time from work and classes to receive them, are being cut back too.



## ***Conclusion***

We knew, of course, when we did this survey that students were in trouble, but we didn't know how deep it was or how many would reach out, even through the anonymity of a questionnaire, to tell us about the stress of their lives. Both of the authors of this report were first-generation college students at public universities and understand very well how college can change one's life. When the state of California adopted the Master Plan for Higher Education in 1960 it made a social contract with the young people of the state to provide them with a higher education. But the state has broken that social contract for many of its students. California has great wealth, but it also has many millions living in poverty with very low levels of education. Prior to the budget cuts of the last two years, California ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> in the nation with respect to per capita expenditures for higher education from state and local revenues. Perhaps there is a failure to understand that we are all in this together.

The Civil Rights Project has had a long-term interest in college access in California. Before the Great Recession, in 2006 we wrote: “. . . .we need to remember two basic things—that we made huge progress on issues of access [to higher education] during the past in very difficult times in a society not nearly as rich as we are today. We created the world's greatest system of public higher education, we trained a new generation of creative leaders from among the World War II veterans the country feared would not be able to find jobs after the war. A generation later, during the civil rights era, our colleges helped create a substantial middle class and a rapidly growing intelligencia in communities that had never had one and were widely believed by whites in a racially stratified society to be incapable of generating one. When we consider the scale of the challenges we face today, we have to . . .keep in mind the example of truly great breakthroughs in our past. . . .California can once again provide the model for what higher education-- at its best—can be. The destiny of th[e] state rests on the courage of policy makers, both within universities and within government, to move aggressively to recapture what has been lost, to reclaim the hope of millions of students who can make enormous contributions to this society if only given the chance.”<sup>4</sup>

We believe these comments are all the more applicable today. We can lay the burdens of a generation of Californians, who chose not to invest in its schools and colleges, on the backs of those who have struggled and continue to struggle to overcome declining educational opportunities--in the midst of a Great Recession no less. Or we can acknowledge that our future rests on today's students. If we care about the future of this state then there is only one option -- to listen to these struggling students and to find ways to lift the burdens and preserve the state's

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<sup>4</sup>G. Orfield and P. Gándara, “Fateful Decisions”, in Gándara, Orfield and C. Horn, *Expanding Opportunity in Higher Education*, SUNY Press, 2006, p. 288-289. (This book was the result of a conference cosponsored with the University of California where scholars from around the nation presented studies focusing on the threats to college opportunity in California).

promise. As we face proposals to raise the barriers still higher and to provide no spaces for the expanding numbers of college-ready students, we need to recognize that it is not only their future but our own that is on the line.