Quit cutting UC funding

"Water, water, everywhere, Nor any drop to drink," Samuel Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

With Gov. Jerry Brown’s unveiling of a strict new proposed budget for 2011-12, California’s fiscal crisis has again slapped the University of California, along with most other entities supported by state revenues.

The budget calls for the University of California and the California State University systems each to implement $500 million budget reductions next year, along with similar reductions to the California Community Colleges.

This is on top of years of cutbacks by the state to the general fund at UCR. Indeed, during the past 20 years state support per student has been cut in half, when inflation is taken into account. To partially compensate, the UC regents have been forced to raise tuition by more than 50 percent in the past three years alone.

The new cuts, if implemented, will decrease Californians’ access to UCR, diminish the educational experience for our students, and increase their time (and cost) to obtain a degree.

One maddening part of this is that California has a wealth of resources, but the state’s spending and investments are not well-aligned with core needs and priorities.

In the coming months, UCR expects to implement a cut that could total $35 to $40 million. We continue to turn every stone to eliminate unnecessary costs and are redoubling efforts to raise revenues from other places, such as grants, contracts and philanthropy. For those of us who’ve dedicated our lives to higher education – and the individual and societal transformations that it creates – there is a strong need to more clearly articulate for the citizens of California the negative impacts of continued cuts … impacts that will lower the quality of life for all Californians.

Education and research have proven that they are not a cost to the state, but rather an investment that stimulates economic growth and vitality as well as social mobility.

There is a private good that comes from a college degree, as the recipients are able to access higher paying jobs and enjoy lower rates of unemployment. And, for the first time in California, students and their families are now responsible for paying more than the state pays toward their public education!

But seemingly lost in today’s discourse is the public good that comes from an educated citizenry. College-educated individuals earn more and thus pay more back into society in taxes. They also become engaged with school boards and parks and recreation, endorse and support the arts and humanities, serve in civic organizations, donate to charities, etc. These people are less likely to become a burden on society.

In addition to the human capital that emerges from institutions like UCR, enormous public good comes from the research and intellectual property that make it into the marketplace.

The private good derived from higher education is covered by the significant user fee -- a.k.a. tuition -- that students pay. So it is only logical for us to value the public good as well, and demand of our elected officeholders that proper funding be restored and sustained.

UCR is part of the University for California, for its people, economy, environment, education, nutritious and safe food supply, health care, safety, cultures, arts and humanities, social progress and quality of life. The University for California is for the hopes, dreams and promise of first generation immigrants and multi-generational Californians. The University for California is for our future.

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