False Prophet?
Evan Dobelle, president of the University of Hawaii, has some big promises to keep

By Kathy Witkowski

HONOLULU

Evan Dobelle began his public life as the 27-year-old self-described “kid mayor” of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and later served as White House chief of protocol under President Jimmy Carter, so it’s not surprising that he frames university presidencies in political terms. “Presidencies are like campaigns without elections,” said Dobelle, who had been at the helm of three different institutions of higher education before taking on his current presidency at the University of Hawaii. “You’re one point ahead but there’s two weeks to go.”

That is a pretty apt description of Dobelle’s situation these days. Hawaii may look like a paradise in travel brochures, but the educational and political landscape there is a minefield. And Dobelle—who supports consider an unorthodox visionary, and whom detractors suspect is nothing more than a smooth-talking politician—has not been treading lightly. Few people dispute his intellect or eloquence, but his unfulfilled fund-raising promises, his spending and hiring practices, and his impatient, arguably arrogant, nature have alienated some legislators and others in the community, and have put him on shaky ground with the board of regents.

Two years ago, Dobelle resigned his successful presidency at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, where he spearheaded a much-lauded urban renewal project that made him a local hero, and took over as president of the ailing University of Hawaii system. His $442,000 annual salary—one of the highest of any U.S. college or university president, and more than double that of his predecessor—raised eyebrows and expectations at a time when the chronically underfunded university was suffering from the emotional and financial fallout of a weak economy, a 13-day faculty strike, and the threat of losing accreditation at its flagship Manoa campus in Honolulu. Dobelle, who is fond of saying that he throws his figurative hat over the wall just to motivate himself to climb over and get it, wasted no time raising those eyebrows further with his signature bold, idealistic statements and ambitious, imaginative goals.

“The time has come to say that at the end of the day, we are not answerable to the people of Hawaii. We are accountable to the university,” Dobelle said.

A University of Hawaii administrator holds a copy of the newspaper article she and two others wrote, criticizing President Evan Dobelle’s leadership.

Crunch Time
Tuition soars as financially strapped states cut into higher education spending

By William Trombley and Lori Valigra

At the height of the worst financial crunch public colleges and universities have experienced in at least a decade, officials at Virginia Tech, a campus with more than 25,000 students in the Blue Ridge Mountains of southwestern Virginia, are doing their best to make lemonade from lemons.

Except for Missouri, Virginia suffered the deepest state appropriation cuts for higher education of any of the 46 states that responded to a late-summer survey by the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO)—13.2 percent between the 2002 and 2003 fiscal years. In the last two years, Virginia’s support for higher education has declined by more than 20 percent.

At Virginia Tech, the cuts amounted to $72 million, or 28 percent, over a 16-month period that began in fall 2002.

The university has responded by persuading 130 tenured professors and researchers—about ten percent of the faculty—to take early retirement, raising undergraduate tuition almost 38 percent (to $4,190) in the last two years, eliminating some academic programs, merging others and dropping hundreds of class sections.

These austerity measures have enabled Virginia Tech to avoid a hiring freeze and to recruit new faculty in research areas the university regards as promising, such as nanoscience, bioinformatics (using computers to analyze biological information) and biomedical engineering. There was also enough money for a 2.5 percent faculty and staff pay increase, the first in three years.

Undergraduate enrollment has held steady at about 21,500, despite the hefty tuition increases, and cuts in academic programs as the state reduces its support for higher education.
NEWS FROM THE CENTER
National Center Program Associates

The 15 Mid-Career Professionals shown below have been selected by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education as Program Associates for 2003-04. They are faculty members, administrators and postsecondary education specialists who will work closely with the National Center for a year. They will attend three formal meetings and also work with National Center staff members on projects.

The goal of the program, which is supported financially by the Ford Foundation, is to engage scholars, leaders and prospective leaders in the study of higher education policy issues.

Tina Bjarekull
President
Maryland Independent College and University Association

M. Christopher Brown II
Executive Director
Fernando O. Patterson Research Institute
United Negro College Fund

Gilberto Conchas
Assistant Professor of Education
Harvard Graduate School

Tricia Loughter
Policy Analyst
State Higher Education Executive Officers

Karl Engelbach
Chief Fiscal and Policy Analyst
California Postsecondary Education Commission

Mark Figueras
Research Analyst
Educational Opportunity Program
California State University, Los Angeles

Danny Gonzales
Deputy to the President
Great Basin College

Harrison Keller
Senior Policy Analyst for Education
Speaker Tom Craddick
Texas House of Representatives

Daniel Layzell
Deputy Director for Planning and Budgeting
Illinois Board of Higher Education

Patricia Matin
Research Associate, Higher Education
The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University

Christopher Mazzio
Senior Policy Analyst
National Governors Association

Brad Mortensen
Assistant Commissioner for Finance and Facilities
Utah System of Higher Education

Laura Perna
Assistant Professor
University of Maryland

Arlentina Perry-Johnson
Associate Vice Chancellor, Media & Public Affairs
Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia

Amy Sobering
Senate Finance Committee Staff Analyst
Commonwealth of Virginia

New National Center Program

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, in partnership with the Institute for Educational Leadership and the Institute for Higher Education Research at Stanford University, has begun a study of relationships between K-12 systems and postsecondary education in four states—Florida, Georgia, New York and Oregon.

Many states are trying to coordinate public school policies with those of colleges and universities but most of these are “short-term structural approaches,” in the language of the project announcement. It is hoped that this study will provide “a substantive underpinning for devising inter-level strategies that could be effective over the long term.”

The project is being funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. More information can be obtained by sending an e-mail to Andrea Venezia at avenezia@highereducation.org or Shawn White at swhite@highereducation.org.

Correction

I n A Q&A with Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University, in the summer issue, the title of his latest book was missated. The correct title is Universities in the Marketplace; the subtitle is The Commercialization of Higher Education.
The share of instructional costs born by the state at Oregon’s seven four-year public universities has dropped from 51 percent to just 36 percent in the last four years.

By Pamela Burdman
CORVALLIS, OREGON

FROM TIM WHITE’S perspective, Oregon’s higher education institutions need a “salmon problem.” White, the provost at Oregon State University, recalls the impact of a recent front-page Portland Oregonian photo of dead salmon floating down the Klamath River.

“Whether you were a wildlife expert, a biologist, a politician or a librarian, you knew something was wrong,” said White. “We don’t have an image like that. We’re accepting more and more students. Their exit reviews haven’t changed. Employees have 85 to 90 percent job satisfaction.”

All this in spite of a dire state budget picture that, at OSU, has led to a drastic 18 percent reduction in state appropriations and higher student costs. Tuition and fees for Oregon residents (based on 15 credit hours) are rising from $1,338 a quarter in Fall 2002 to $1,648 by Winter 2004.

Part of the reason for the absence of “dead salmon” at OSU is that the overall campus budget hasn’t suffered. Because of sharp increases in tuition and fees, state-mandated salary freezes, and increases in federal research grants, the total budget is up 2-3 percent. In spite of the rising tuition, administrators expect this fall’s enrollment to rise from 18,400 to 18,600.

And yet, White and other higher education leaders see great cause for alarm as the share of instructional costs born by the state at Oregon’s seven four-year public universities has dropped from 51 percent to just 36 percent in the last four years. “We are dishonoring the conditions under which we entered the union,” admonished Dave Frohmayer, president of the University of Oregon and a former state senator and attorney general. The Oregon Admission Act of 1859 contained two substantive provisos, and one required the state to establish a public university, he explained.

Budget cuts began in the second year of the 2001-03 biennium, when state coffers came up short $900 million of a $6 billion one-year budget. Voters had a chance to spare students tuition hikes by passing an income tax surcharge, but they said no. Institutions hiked tuition—ranging from a low of 15 percent at some universities to a high of 60 percent at a couple of community colleges—as their budgets were whittled away in a series of special legislative sessions.

This year, after the longest session in state history, legislators patched together a biennial budget late in August only when Republicans crossed the aisle to help pass an income tax surcharge that reduced—but didn’t eliminate—further cuts to higher education. However, the temporary tax could vanish if opponents successfully place a referendum on the February 2004 ballot.

Overall, Oregon’s total 2003-05 state budget of $11.7 billion was about four percent higher than actual 2001-03 spending. But funding for public universities and community colleges combined was down six percent, with the universities’ decline of nine percent the sharpest. The only increases went to the state’s student financial aid program and to the Oregon Health and Science University, a public corporation that was spun off from the university system eight years ago.

Health care and K-12 education became the legislature’s highest priorities, after newspapers carried horror stories about people committing suicide after losing drug benefits, and elderly citizens being thrown out of nursing homes, and the state’s plan for a truncated K-12 school year made Doonesbury.

Miriam Gonzales, a student leader at Portland State University, recalls testifying before the legislature. “We were literally following people who were losing their health care coverage. One woman was crying because she was going to have her walker taken away,” said Gonzales. Insiders said higher education simply could not compete with these tails of woe.

“Most legislators have a very limited understanding of how universities operate,” said Bill Lynch, an OSU professor and state political commentator. “But they know that we have tuition available as a revenue source. Essentially legislators chose to increase ‘user fees.’”

Higher education leaders trace their problems to a voter tax revolt in the early 1990s that enacted property tax ceilings and transferred responsibility for supporting schools and community colleges from counties to the state. With no sales tax, Oregon’s economy is particularly reliant on the income tax, and vulnerable to recessions.

In the early 1990s, the university system eliminated 100 departments, colleges or schools. From 1990 to 2000, the portion of state dollars spent on higher education dropped from 15 percent to ten percent, while spending on prisons rose from two to eight percent.

Pro-education forces in the legislature sought to reverse that trend in 1999 when the high-tech sector was still soaring. But last year, as technology joined Oregon’s other major industry—natural resources—in an economic slump, the state shot up to one of the top spots in the nation for unemployment.

Discussions in the mid 1990s about closing or privatizing one of the universities led to separate status for the Oregon Health and Science University, and the idea remains in the background as state support falls. “We are being privatized by default,” said Richard Jarvis, who took over last year as chancellor of the seven-campus Oregon University System.

Community colleges are in a similar boat: “The message we have been getting from the state is, ‘Don’t rely on us. It’s up to you to keep your doors open,’” said Mary Spilde, president of Lane Community College in Eugene.

But the fiscal crisis also bare rifts between legislators and higher education leaders, particularly those at the four-year institutions.

The view from inside is that universities have been sorely misunderstood and all but abandoned. Some leaders would have expected thanks from the legislators for their ingenuity in finding other funding sources to keep their campuses healthy. The University of Oregon, the flagship campus, for example, has expanded feder-

The image shows a photograph of Mary Spilde, the president of Lane Community College in Eugene, who discusses the challenges faced by community colleges in Oregon.

Oregon voters had a chance to spare students tuition hikes by passing an income tax surcharge, but they said no.

A 30 percent tuition increase has forced Portland State University student leader Miriam Gonzales to take fewer classes.

University of Oregon President Dave Frohmayer objects to legislative “micromanagement,” even though only 16 percent of the university’s budget comes from the state.

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from preceding page Committee.

“I agree we’re not funding them nearly adequately,” Schrader said in an interview at his veterinary office outside of Portland. “I’ve been trying to be an advocate for higher education, but at the university level, it’s been very hard to do. Some of the information we get is less than forthcoming and sometimes opportunistic. It’s smoke and mirrors.”

Schrader is not alone. “There’s a frustration about the quality of the information and the amount of time it takes to get it,” said Susan Morgan, a Republican, who chaired the Ways and Means education subcommittee.

Even Senator Ryan Deckert, a Democratic, an Oregon University graduate and outspoken friend of the universities, was alarmed to discover the mistrust during budget negotiations. “These aren’t conspiracy-type people,” said Deckert. “The new chancellor has some work to do. That level of mistrust costs them a great deal of resources.”

One Democratic senator, Tony Corcoran of Cottage Grove, has even sponsored a bill to abolish the chancellor’s office.

Lawmakers were particularly incensed late in the session when additional dollars appeared in the system’s budget. “Lo and behold, $25 million appears in the last few weeks of the session,” said Schrader. “This really fries my chops. That’s pretty poor accounting, in my book.”

But Oregon University System spokeswoman Di Saunders explained that no money was “found,” but that unexpected enrollment growth combined with higher tuition changed the system’s expected revenues. If anyone was shorted, they would argue, it was the universities who had to educate additional students without state money.

After picking up the tab for about 1,000 Oregon residents last year, the University of Oregon will now support 2,000 without state help. “We simply cannot educate more and more students at a loss,” said Provost John Moseley. Out-of-state students help defray the cost with tuition of around $16,000. But to keep demand from exceeding supply, the campus raised its required high school grade point average from 3.0 to 3.25.

“For campuses to be doing heavy lifting and have legislators investigating or challenging individual pots of money, leaves them stuck between trying to do the right thing within the spirit of what the legislature wants and frustrated that the legislature has taken away the tools to do it,” said Roger Bassett, a former lobbyist and retired board member for the Oregon University System.

For all the sturm und drang over the universities, the institutions that are probably suffering the most are the 17 community colleges, which have never recovered from the drop in property taxes.

When Mary Spilde took over at Lane Community College in 2001, the school was coping with a three to four percent budget deficit, just as predictions were emerging about a fiscal crisis. Lane’s board cut $5 million from its budget, eliminated 48 jobs, and closed several programs. Tuition began climbing, from $58 a unit two years ago, the second lowest in the state, to $62 today, the fifth highest.

For 2003-04, the higher tuition is backfilling a $6 million budget reduction for Lane. Around the state, colleges have closed or suspended more than 50 programs in the last year, said Camille Preus-Braly, the state’s commissioner of community colleges. Many of the programs are in professional/technical fields said to be crucial to the state’s economic recovery—but are also costly to provide.

To protect its expensive programs, Lane is charging higher tuition for programs like nursing, dental hygiene, and automotive technology. “We were hearing from students, ‘I’d rather pay more and have the program,’” said Spilde.

But getting into classes remains a problem, and that’s how Jeremy Williams knows there is a budget problem. In six terms at Lane, the 25-year-old hotel bellman has yet to be able to enroll in a single math or science class. This fall, he set his mind to it—awakening at 6 AM on the day registration started. But he was too late—registration opened at 4 AM and others beat him to it.

Williams’ story would be less troubling if it weren’t accompanied by a 60 percent tuition hike, and if it weren’t being repeated at colleges around the state.

“There are fewer offerings, because the decision has been not to water down. We’re less affordable, and we’re limiting the options that our students have,” acknowledged Preus-Braly.

If there are any “dead salmon” in the future, they will be in the form of students lost to higher education. But this is a group that is hard to quantify and even harder to capture in a front-page photo. The crisis tends to be incremental—students taking longer to graduate or delaying their education. Take the decision to end the tuition plateau, a policy that allowed students to take up to 18 credits for the price of 12.

For Miriam Gonzales, a third-year student at Portland State University, tuition and fees are rising by nearly 30 percent from $1,295 a quarter for 15 credits in Fall 2002 to $1,666 in Winter 2003. She said her only option is to take fewer classes.

“I can’t see myself taking more than 12 units a term,” said Gonzales, a double major in Spanish and Sociology, and a student government leader. “Almost everybody I’ve talked to says they’re going to have to drop from taking 16 or 18 units to 12 and, in some cases, eight. They can’t afford to be a full-time student anymore.”

In a creative attempt to help reduce costs for students, and to address capacity constraints, the University of Oregon began offering students a 15 percent break on classes taken at the unpopular hours of 3 or 4 PM. Because of student demand, the campus is extending the program to include 8 AM classes this year.

In recognition of the affordability gap, the legislature did increase its commitment to need-based financial aid. Funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grant rose to an all-time high of $45 million for 2003-04, a 25 percent jump over actual spending of $35.9 million in 2001-02.

“There’s a conscious effort by myself and other Democrats to try to beef up the Opportunity Grant,” said Schrader.

But the grants cover only 11 percent of the cost of a student’s education. With both enrollments and tuitions rising, the grants will reach only about 33,500 students, just 70 percent of those who are eligible. And the standard for eligibility, previously 75 percent of median family income, was lowered to 55 percent, reducing the number of students ineligible.

Individual students like Gonzales feel the effects. In her first year, she qualified for a grant of $1,254. Last year, the amount dropped to $1,026, but she was among 13,000 eligible students who weren’t served. This year, the awards rise to $1,401, but Gonzales’ mother earns more than $25,800, the new cutoff for a family of three.

Legislators also capped the amount universities could spend on fee remissions, preferring that aid be distributed by a state agency rather than by individual campus, which gave some remissions to out-of-state students and children of professors.

“The message we have been getting from the state is, ‘Don’t rely on us. It’s up to you to keep your doors open.’”

—MARY SPILDE, PRESIDENT OF LANE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In the coming session, Schrader and others also plan to challenge the larger grants that go to students at private universities. The grants are calculated as a percentage of total cost, so a community college student this year will receive about $1,257, and a public university student will get $1,482, but a private university student’s grant will be as high as $3,232.

For this reason, it has been hard for public universities to lobby for the Oregon Student Assistance Commission (which administers grants to Oregon residents) instead of for fee remission funds that they can dole out as needed. “A dol-

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An Unfriendly Debate

Huge housing project and a proposed biolab rankle some Davis “townies”

By Robert A. Jones

DAVIS, CALIFORNIA

Ask anyone in this college town why things went so wrong between their community and the sprawling University of California campus next door, and they will likely shake their heads. They only know that the situation turned bad and then got spectacularly worse. Of course, bared-teeth relations between towns and colleges are hardly rare. The frequent pairings of local, working-class cultures with university academics often function like arranged marriages between unlike parties, with predictable results.

But the troubles in Davis do not fit the usual pattern. For one thing, the town of Davis is not blue collar but white collar, affluent and highly educated. Its population boasts one of the highest percentages of PhDs of any like-sized town in the country. Nor are there simmering resentments here over income gaps or feudal-like relationships with townie workers.

No, the unpleasantness in Davis has a history all its own. The “town” and the “gown” in this case are struggling over the nature of the community itself and the power each side will have in determining its future. The townies want less exploding growth, the university wants, or needs, more.

As such, Davis’ troubles may be a harbinger of things to come as more college towns shed their blue-collar backgrounds and attract new populations of retirees and others who love the attractions of university communities and, at the same time, want to protect their small-town atmospheres.

So, instead of squabbles over worker wages or slum clearance, the townies of Davis went to the mat this year over a proposed $200 million biolab that many regarded as politically unsavory and dangerous. And they’ve fought expansions of the campus student population that would lead to development of now-open spaces on the campus.

If those concerns suggest a genteel debate, think again. The depth of the fury over the residential development was revealed last summer when the university held a workshop on a planned housing complex. The organizers knew that the proposal was not warmly regarded by its nearby neighbors, who own some of Davis’ very expensive real estate. Still, they expected a civilized discourse.

That didn’t happen. Almost immediately the meeting grew into a tense confrontation between the neighbors and the university representatives. People were getting in each other’s faces, shouting each other down. Some attendees broke into chants, hoping to disrupt the process.

Finally, one university official attempted to carry on the agenda and organize a workshop group at the side of the conference room. As he walked toward a table he was suddenly shoved from behind, nearly falling. Pandemonium erupted, the cops were called, and the university contingent walked out.

No arrests were made, but Marj Dickinson, the assistant vice chancellor for government and community relations, who attended the meeting, characterized the scene as “shocking.”

“I have done this job for 16 years and never have I seen anything like it,” she said.

While Dickinson surely was shocked, she was not entirely surprised. The residential complex has attracted resentment for some time. Even though the university has shaved its size in half, the development remains huge, with an expected population of 4,300. As planned, it will gobble up a section of now-undeveloped campus and, the neighbors fear, flood nearby streets with auto traffic.

The complex, in short, has come to symbolize a primary source of the antipathy here: the galloping expansion of the university campus. It is a problem rooted in the continued, amazing growth of California itself and the commitment of the state to provide a University of California education to the top one-eighth of its high school students.

Only a generation ago, the UC Davis campus was comfortably ensconced as the aggie arm of the UC system. The campus won fame, and sometimes notoriety, by producing tomatoes tough enough to withstand the rigors of industrialized picking, high-yield cows, and ever-finer grapes for California’s wine industry. The student population stood at 15,000.

By this year, the student population had grown to 30,000. Non-agricultural divisions of the university, such as the medical, engineering and law schools, have burgeoned. So much new construction has taken place that some buildings have never acquired names and are simply labeled “academic surge” structures. Finally, and perhaps most ominously for the community, advancements in biotechnology have infused the campus with laboratories and research centers that give it more the aspect of an M.I.T. than a cow college.

“‘We’ve had to grow,’” said Larry N. Vanderhoef, the university’s chancellor. “‘The schools of medicine, law, the graduate school of business, all were added because of what the state needed.’” He added, “‘The real question is whether the university is beholden first to its own community in terms of its future growth, or whether it’s beholden to the state, to the nation and even to the world.’”

The chancellor, by the nature of his question, makes it clear that he believes the university’s obligation falls into the latter category. And the town of Davis, surely one of the more activist and eccentric communities in California, has demonstrated that many of its residents believe otherwise.

This is a town, after all, where activists fought bitterly against the arrival of a Borders bookstore because, as a chain operation, it threatened local bookstores. It’s a town that boasts the highest number of bicycle paths per citizen in the country and that once paid $14,000 for the construction of a tiny tunnel underneath a freeway so that a species of local toads would have safe passage.

UC Davis Chancellor Larry Vanderhoef is finding that growth of the 30,000-student campus is not popular with townspeople who prize Davis’ disappearing small-town atmosphere.

A huge residential complex planned by the university has come to symbolize a primary source of the antipathy here: the galloping expansion of the university campus.

continue next page
So Davis takes its concerns seriously. And the town activists, many of them lawyers and professionals, bring to their conflicts the same legalistic, calculating tactics practiced by the hyper-educated officials of the university. In other words, it’s a good match.

Nowhere was that so well demonstrated as with the ill-fated proposal to build a biolab dedicated to research on deadly disease agents such as anthrax, and the ebola and dengue viruses. The idea of building such a research center had been brewing for years in California academic circles but received a huge boost when the National Institute of Health offered expansion funding for two such projects in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Early this year UC Davis sent off a 700-page application for NIH funding, and the war was on. Originally titled “Western National Center for Biodefense and Emerging Diseases,” the proposal touched a number of raw nerves in the community; it evoked “Hot Zone” images of escaped diseases gone rampant; it had nebulous connections to the war on terror and government secrecy; and, not insignificantly, it raised the threat of reduced property values in Davis.

“The very idea of this high-security facility with guards and bright lights scared people. It didn’t fit with the way they think about Davis,” said Julie Partansky, a former mayor of Davis and a biolab opponent. “And the university plowed forward with this project without telling the community what it needs to know. We were forced to go into the documents to find the truth. That offends me because I am a believer in an educated public.”

By midsummer lawsuits had been filed; the city council had voted unanimously to oppose the lab; and some activist groups were promising civil disobedience if it were approved.

“I talked to people who said they would leave Davis if this thing went through,” said Samantha McCarthy, a founder of the group, Stop UCD Biolab Now. “They would say things like, ‘I have a three-year-old daughter and I can’t live with that kind of threat.’ The university only made it worse by denying some of the obvious problems and then having to admit them.”

Indeed, the summer struggle was punctuated with disclosures that hurt the university’s case. The NIH made it clear that the agency, and not the university, would control research at the facility. And later in the summer the university reversed its previous statements and conceded that some aspects of the research would be conducted in secret. In addition, the university revealed that any release of “disease agents” would be reported first to the NIH and not to the local community. The NIH would then decide when, or if, the community would be informed.

In fairness, most of the disclosures were the result of federal agencies imposing their will on the university as the process moved forward. The reassessment of secrecy rules, for example, grew out of an analysis of the federal Bioterrorism Act of 2002. But university officials concede they got a late start in selling the idea of the biolab. Even though various proposals for an infectious disease lab had been kicked around for years, the university did not approach the community until its proposal to the NIH was submitted last spring.

“We waited because, initially, we did not have a formal proposal for the lab,” said Lynne U. Chronister, associate vice chancellor for research administration. “We did want to make public presentations before we knew, ourselves, exactly what was being proposed.”

Even so, a certain amount of spin consistently crept into the university’s presentations about the lab. The very name of the lab, for example, was eventually changed to exclude the scary word “biodefense.” The new moniker became the “National Biocontainment Laboratory.”

And the disclosures themselves—such as the revelation that some parts of the research would be conducted in secret—were occasionally buried at the bottom of university statements underneath mounds of reassuring verbiage.

“It made you paranoid because you wondered what was really going on,” said McCarthy of Stop UCD Biolab Now. “If they were going to all that trouble to twist the truth around, how bad was it, really?”

By September, both sides were drawing up contingency plans in case the lab was approved. Opponents were promising major demonstrations and civil disobedience. The university was working on crowd control.

But the final confrontations were cancelled when, on September 30, the NIH announced that the university had not been chosen as a biolab site. University officials were philosophical in defeat. “This has been a valuable learning experience,” said Virginia Hinshaw, the university provost, in a statement. She thanked the biolab supporters and then, in a bow to the community, she continued: “I also thank the people who provided critical input that challenged us to address important concerns and generate needed information for the broader community.”

In the aftermath, tensions have dissipated, but the bigger question remains: Will the university’s continued growth create a permanent state of war with the town of Davis, or will the two sides reach some sort of peace?

If Davis residents are hoping for a slowdown in growth to reduce the conflicts, they are probably hoping in vain. The sleepy cow college founded in 1906 along Putah Creek in the Sacramento River delta is gone and won’t be coming back. Barns are hard to find, and the agricultural operation, although still thriving, now tends toward research into genetics and bioengineering.

The biggest changes have come in Davis’ non-agricultural divisions. Students in the Letters and Science school, for example, now outnumber the aggies by two to one. The School of Education is about to triple its faculty and double its enrollment. Many of the former barns and open fields are now filled with academic buildings that have little to do with crops or cows.

And the growth issue will continue because, in a phrase, the University of California is busting at the seams. State budget crisis or no, UC anticipates nothing but expanding enrollments as far as the eye can see.

The California Master Plan for Higher Education places the UC system in a particular bind because it commits the state to providing space for the top 12.5 percent of California’s high school graduates no matter how large that number might be. Current estimates predict the figure will grow by 40 percent over the next seven years. And since some of the older UC campuses, such as UCLA and Berkeley, have no room for expansion, the entire burden will fall on the remaining campuses and a new site planned for the San Joaquin valley.

UC Davis, at 5,300 acres, has the largest campus in the system, and thus will be...
expected to absorb a larger share of incoming freshmen. The UC Regents established a cap of 32,000 students for any single campus, but there have been hints that the caps may be broken and campuses allowed to grow still larger. “The enrollment increases will keep coming, at least for a few years,” said Chancellor Vanderhoof. “And that means more faculty, as well as students, who will need housing. For a new faculty member, Davis is an expensive place to buy a house. If we are going to continue to get the best faculty and students, we have to think about where they are going to live.”

As for the town’s resistance to this growth, Vanderhoof says it leaves him perplexed. “College towns like Davis are very attractive places for many people. They have great public schools, cultural events sponsored by the university, an interesting community. But the same people who are attracted to these things sometimes are not tolerant of the university’s need to grow. Some seem to consider the university the enemy, even though the university is why they are here.”

Other university officials express equal frustration over Davis’ political climate, which they contend is dominated by a doctrinaire minority willing to fight the university over any and all issues. It is this poisoned climate, they charge, that has created the polarized.

“The nature of the debate has deteriorated,” said Assistant Vice Chancellor Dickinson. “The political approach now is to attack the motives and integrity of the other side rather than have a discussion on the merits of an issue. There’s a level of meanness here that does not exist in other places.

“This has taken place over a number of years, and I think it has led to a death spiral in terms of the public debate. Many Davis citizens discover the unpleasantness and they check out of the process. That leaves the stage to those who enjoy making personal attacks.”

Fred Murphy, the designated director of the biolab, had it been approved, noted that he was asked to be the grand marshal of a July 4 parade in Davis precisely because of his role at the lab. “In other words, the community was expressing its support for the lab,” he said. “But if you listen to what comes out of the city council, you’d think everyone in town opposes it. The fact is, there’s a sub-community that dominates public debate, and their voice is the only voice heard.”

No one would argue that the political debate in Davis can be volatile and so peculiar as to make the town the butt of jokes. The city council once debated a policy to preserve potholes on the grounds that fixing them was expensive and unecological. But the present mayor, Susie Boyd, argues that the Davis town-gown issue is both serious and important.

“For years we had no-growth city councils that made it very difficult for developers to build housing for students,” said Boyd. “They were pursuing a worthwhile goal, which was to keep the small-town feel of Davis. But in the meantime the university expanded its enrollment every year and continued to do so. Something has to give.”

The present city council, said Boyd, understands the dilemma and wants to find a solution. “Look, Davis is a company town,” she said. “My late husband taught at the campus, and many others have a connection to the university. By and large, this town has strong support for the university that goes way back, and people want to return to a friendlier atmosphere.”

UC’s Dickinson said she also senses a weariness with the fighting, and a recognition that it served neither side well.

“The real question is whether this past year was a kind of perfect storm that will blow over, once the specific issues are resolved, or whether something fundamental has changed,” she said. “I hope it’s the former, and I hope that, once the storm has passed, we can return to a civil conversation about the future.

“If we can do that, I’m optimistic that Davis and the university can be friends again.”

Robert A. Jones is a former reporter and columnist for the Los Angeles Times.

OREGON

from page 4

lar to the university is a dollar to the university,” said Tim White, the OSU provost. “A dollar to the Opportunity Grant is about 30 cents to the university.”

But financial aid is a top priority for private institutions, and their representa-
tive, Gary Andeen of the Oregon Independent College Association, is one of the Opportunity Grant’s most vocal advocates. He notes that his schools don’t receive a penny in state subsidies. “Even the student with the largest grant gets far less than every student who attends a public university,” said Andeen. “The ques-
tion is not how we’re going to split up the student aid budget. The question is how to get the state to put more money into help-

ing needy students, period.”

Schrader questions that logic, and won-
ders if the state’s money won’t go farther by leveling out the grants. “Our job is to make sure you get a higher education. Our job isn’t to provide you a Cadillac educa-
tion,” he said. The legislature has asked the assistance commission to study the idea of converting to a flat grant.

The new Democratic governor, Ted Kulongoski, also entered the affordability debate this year with a proposal for an endowment to ensure need-based financial aid for future generations. Although many questioned the model—they say students need help now, not in the next generation—most were encouraged that the governor’s first legislative proposal was aimed at college affordability.

“He did that to gain visibility, and I think it will become one of his major pro-

Oklahoma state Senator Kurt Schrader, a Portland-area veterinarian, thinks some information the legislature gets from higher education officials is “less than forthcoming.”

Oregon state Senator Kurt Schrader, a Portland-area veterinarian, thinks some information the legislature gets from higher education officials is “less than forthcoming.”

The portion of state dollars spent on higher education dropped from 15 percent to ten percent, while spending on prisons rose from two to eight percent.

fear it will become one. “If I were in Neb-
raska looking for quality ag people, I’d be looking here,” said Mark McCambridge, OSU’s vice president for finance.

But higher education leaders are loath to say they’re waiting for things to get worse in order to get better, and most are looking for ways to live within the current constraints. “We’re not going to be a Rodney Dangerfield university,” said White.

“The day higher education stops admit-
ting students on one of our campuses is the day that pressure will begin to build. At some point, we’ll stop being able to adapt,” said White.

“Higher education in this state is treat-
ed as an expenditure, not as an investment,” said Bassett, who in addition to his

work for the Oregon University System has also led the state’s community colleges.

“It is not as compelling an expenditure as wheelchairs or people dying in nursing homes. It’s a compelling investment, but that’s not the conversation we’ve been having.

“The budget situation is as good as it’s going to be. It breaks my heart to ac-
knowledge that it’s going to be less than it used to be in terms of access, less than it used to be in terms of affordability, and hopefully not less in terms of quality, but there’s some risk there, too.”

Pamela Bardman is a freelance writer in Berkeley, California, and a former higher education reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle.
BUDGET
from page 1

Provisor Mark McNamee is hoping the worst is over. “We’re holding our breath,” he said. “We don’t expect (more) budget cuts but we’re also not expecting much relief. Our strategy is that we accepted the fact that these will be permanent reduc-

tions in our budget.”

While some higher education officials consider the fiscal crisis to be temporary—“just part of the cycle,” one said—others agree with McNamee that tighter budgets are here to stay.

“The reality is sinking in that this is not short term, that it’s going to be with us for a long time,” said Travis Reindl, director of state policy analysis for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

“I think the ratcheting down of state support is going to continue,” said Donald E. Heller, associate professor of higher education at Pennsylvania State University. “We’re going to continue to shift the financial burden from the state to the students. I’d like to think this will stop at some point, but I’m not optimistic.”

“Most states have created structural—not just cyclical—deficits,” David W. Bre-

neman, dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, wrote recently in the Chronicle of Higher Education; “and higher education happens to be the easiest place to make large cuts in the increasingly small part of the state

Belt funding increases.

Belt funds are tightening on campuses across the country, as financially-strapped states cut into higher education spending. The SHEEO survey found that state spending on higher education declined in 22 states between the 2002 and 2003 fiscal years and that 25 states anticipate a drop in the current fiscal year. The survey also found that states will spend four percent less for higher education operations in fiscal year 2004 than in 2003—a decrease of about $2.1 billion from the $53.2 billion spent in fiscal year 2003 in the 46 states responding to the survey.

The impact has been softened by tuition and fee increases, some of them very large indeed. Arizona’s public four-year camps-

uses have increased tuition by 39 percent this fall; California’s two large systems—the University of California and the California State University—hiked their charges by 30 percent. Counting a ten percent increase last winter, UC undergradu-

ates are paying 40 percent more than a year ago. Another nine institutions, in five states, have increased tuition and fees by 20 percent or more, according to the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, and at least an additional 37 campuses have increased their charges by ten to 20 percent.

The American Association of Commu-

nity Colleges reports an average tuition increase of 11.4 percent this fall among its public members. The survey included 360 colleges, about 35 percent of the organiza-

tion’s public membership.

Tuition and fees at public four-year institutions jumped an average of 14.1 percent this year, the annual College Board survey found. At two-year public campuses, the average increase was 13.8 percent.

But raising tuition is not enough to offset budget reductions in most cases, so

campus budgets are being pared, often painfully.

To cope with a two-year loss of $131 million in state support for its three campuses, in Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, the University of Illinois has eliminated almost 1,000 faculty and staff positions (but no tenured faculty), raised under-

graduate tuition by 15 percent over a two-

year period, and cancelled about 1,000 class sections, among other measures.

“Our school is an enormous bargain, but with the cuts we’re compromising the quality of education,” Chester Gardner, vice president for academic affairs said in an interview. “The faculty are concerned. The faculty are asking what the commit-

ment of the University of Illinois is, and they are asking whether they want to invest their career here. We are losing peo-

ple over that.”

California’s major budget deficit (an estimated $36 billion over 18 months), has led to sharp spending cuts in the current academic year for both the California State University ($345 million, or 13 percent) and the University of Cal-

ifornia ($248 million, or eight percent).

In addition, the legislature has told UC and Cal State not to expect any money for enrollment growth in 2004-

05, an action that might place the state’s Master Plan for Higher Education in jeop-

ardy. The 43-year-old plan calls for the University of California to accept the top one-eighth of the state’s high school graduates, while the California State University is supposed to admit the top one-third. Officials of both systems say they might not be able to fulfill those commit-

ments if no money is provid-

ed for enrollment growth. As a first step, both UC and Cal State are limiting new admis-
sions for the winter quarter or semester.

“We’ll make it through this year, sort of like the walking wounded, but next year is a very big question,” said Charles B. Reed, chancellor of the 23-campus, 414,000-stu-

dent California State University.

Budget cuts led to elimination of at least 5,800 class sections throughout the 108 California community colleges last spring, contributing to an enrollment decline of more than 50,000 students, Thomas J. Nussbaum, the system channel-

lor, has reported. Additional budget cuts this year, and a tuition increase from $11 to $18 per credit unit (still one of the low-

est in the nation), are expected to cause a further drop.

In the nine colleges of the Los Angeles Community College District, the state’s largest, fall enrollment is 121,000, a decline of 6,000 from a year ago. Officials blame an operating budget cut of $19 million and the subsequent cancellation of at least 500 class sections. In addition, there are freezes on hiring, travel and new equip-

ment purchases, and some staff members have been laid off.

Missouri has been one of the hardest hit states, with a decline of 102 percent in state appropriations (excluding lottery funds) for higher education between the 2002 and 2003 fiscal years, according to the annual “Grasp essay” report published by Illinois State University. Another 4.2 percent drop is expected in fiscal year 2004, and this does not include additional monthly “withholdings” the governor is required to make if state revenues fall short of expectations.

The University of Missouri’s flagship campus at Columbia lost $68.3 million in

Counting a ten percent increase last winter, University of California undergraduates are paying 40 percent more than a year ago.

Virginia Tech Provost Mark McNamee, standing next to a DNA sequencer, hopes budget cuts have ended. The university lost $72 million in state support during a 16-month period.

Tuition jumped 30 percent this fall for California State University students like these at Cal State Long Beach.
fiscal year 2002, another $14.2 million so far this year. In response, the campus raised tuition almost 20 percent and has introduced an early retirement program that so far has resulted in the loss of 96 faculty and 531 staff members.

At Southeast Missouri State University, an attractive campus of 9,570 students on the Mississippi River, 95 miles south of St. Louis, a 17 percent cut in state support in the last two years has led to a flurry of changes.

Last year, two deanships and five department chairs were eliminated, and the philosophy, political science and religion departments were combined into what campus wags are calling the “Department of Church and State.” This saved about $100,000, according to Provost Jane Stephens. “That was hard to do but, compared with what we’re doing this year, it seems easy,” Stephens said.

All campus offerings are being reviewed, “with an eye to reducing or eliminating academic programs,” she said. Class size will be increased ten percent, and the percentage of tenured faculty will be lowered from 88 to 80 percent, over time. “We are determined not to lose the quality of what we do,” Stephens added, “but we will have to eliminate some things in order to maintain our highest-quality programs.”

Florida’s 11 state universities suffered a $53 million cut in state appropriations, but an 8.5 percent tuition increase more than made up for the loss. Enrollment on the first day of fall classes was 265,848—3.1 percent higher than a year ago. This is in line with early reports from around the country, which indicate that budget cuts and tuition increases have done little to dampen enrollment demand, at least not in four-year institutions.

Community colleges have not fared as well in some states. In addition to the California losses, Florida newspaper stories suggest that as many as 35,000 students have been turned away from two-year schools in that state because not enough classes were available.

The University of Colorado system, facing a $44.8 million reduction in state support, has eliminated 500 faculty and staff positions, frozen salaries and dropped some degree programs.

West Virginia’s higher education spending was slashed ten percent this year, and Governor Mike Wise has called for another nine percent cut next year, despite record enrollments at some of the state’s public institutions.

So it goes in state after state. These spending cuts are coming just as “tidal wave II”—the children of the baby boomers—reaches campus shores. The national pool of high school graduates is larger than ever. More than 90 percent of colleges and universities report an increase in applications, as students and their families increasingly come to believe that a college degree is necessary to make a middle class life possible.

“Because of enrollment growth and these large tuition increases, this is worse than the recession ten years ago,” said the University of Virginia’s David Breneman. “I think this is a watershed point.”

Some of the new tuition charges have been proposed by legislatures. The State University of New York system and at the University of Oklahoma; 25 percent at the four-year schools in the City University of New York system (which was tuition-free until 1976); 23 percent at Texas Tech; 22 percent at Iowa State University. Penn State undergraduates now pay $9,706 in tuition and fees, a 15.8 percent increase over last year. University of Michigan undergraduates are paying $7,975. Not so long ago, that kind of money would have paid the annual tuition at a selective private college.

Higher tuition and fees will make up for some, but not all, of the state appropriation cuts. For example, public colleges and universities in the State of Washington expect to recoup 82 percent of a $131 million reduction in state funding by raising undergraduate tuition seven percent, according to the Washington Higher Education Coordination Board.

In California, the non-partisan Legislative Analyst’s office estimates that this fall’s 30 percent tuition increase will generate $216 million in additional revenue for the University of California, $160 million for the California State University, even after one third has been set aside for financial aid. Thus, the Legislative Analyst concludes, Cal State lost only two percent of its state support this year, UC only one percent.

However, both systems dispute these calculations. “Our net loss is $304 million, or 11 percent of what we had before, period,” said Cal State Chancellor Reed. State General Fund support per student has fallen from $8,798 in 2001-02 to $7,441 in 2003-04. The University of California contends that its budget has been trimmed by $410 million, not the $248 million cited by the Legislative Analyst. However, UC does not include revenues from the 30 percent tuition increase in arriving at the $410 million figure. “The important point to make is that the state is dis-investing in the university,” a UC spokesman said.

Tuition also has been rising rapidly for out-of-state students, who supply a significant revenue source for some institutions. Last year, 8,540 out-of-staters, one third of all undergraduates, contributed more than $200 million dollars to the University of Michigan’s coffers. At the University of Virginia, out-of-state students—31 percent of all undergraduates in fall 2002—will pay $21,894 in tuition and fees, while resident Virginians pay $5,904.

At his final Board of Regents meeting, in September, retiring University of California President Richard Atkinson suggested that UC might improve its financial condition by admitting more non-resident students, a move that might make it even less likely that the university could fulfill its obligations under the state’s higher education master plan.

Some campuses charge relatively low tuition, then add hundreds of dollars in mandatory fees. At Texas A&M, for instance, tuition increased only $4 per unit, to $92, this fall, but 20-odd required fees—for everything from health services to computer access and permission to use the library—could add another $1,000 to the bill.

Several states are experimenting with efforts to lighten the tuition burden for students and those who pay their bills.

A new “truth in tuition” law in Illinois assures students at the state’s nine public universities that, beginning in fall 2004, they will pay the same rate for four continuing academic years that they paid as freshmen. Such a plan has been in effect for five years at Western Illinois University, in Macomb.

Ohio State University has adopted a three-tiered approach, charging new students $6,474, second-year students $6,172, and other returning students $5,658.

The University of Oregon offers a 15 percent discount on classes taken before 9 AM or after 3 PM. The Dallas community colleges charge half the regular tuition rate of $26 per credit hour for classes taken at off-hours or on weekends.

But many analysts regard these steps as gimmicks that “will do little to slow the troubling long-term trend of unpredictable and seemingly uncontrollable hikes in public tuition,” as James P. Merisotis, president of the Washington-based Institute for Higher Education Policy, wrote recently in the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Representative Howard P. (Buck) McKeon, a California Republican who chairs a key higher education subcommittee in the U.S. House of Representatives, thinks the way to control tuition charges is by penalizing institutions that raise their rates beyond a certain point, by removing some of their federal funds. Not surprisingly, colleges and universities are strongly opposed to that approach.

As tuitions soar, financial aid for needy students is not keeping pace, and that worries many higher education observers. The maximum federal Pell Grant remains at $4,050, after an effort by congressional Democrats to increase the amount to $4,500 was defeated. Some states have reduced spending on need-based aid while maintaining or even increasing support for merit-based programs like Georgia’s HOPE scholarships.

“If tuition goes up by $400 or $600, it’s a problem, but unless you’re a low-income student it’s not going to keep you from going to college,” said Sandra Baum, a professor of economics at Skidmore College. “I’m concerned about states that are cutting need-based aid, because low-income students are the ones who will fall out entirely.”

William Trombley is senior editor of National CrossTalk. Lori Valigra is a freelance writer in Boston.
OTHER VOICES

Changing Admissions Policies
Recent Supreme Court decisions impact affirmative action programs

By Bob Laird

The Supreme Court’s June 2003 decision in Grutter v. Bollinger strongly supports affirmative action in university admissions and comes very close to being a national policy statement on the importance of accessibility and opportunity for all members of American society.

However, while the court held that racial and ethnic diversity is a compelling interest of colleges and universities and that such institutions are justified in considering race and ethnicity in their admissions decisions in order to build a critical mass of underrepresented minority students within their student bodies, the decision also carries with it specific requirements that may create difficult choices for the leaders of colleges and universities across the country, especially large, selective public universities.

The most telling of these requirements is that any institution that wishes to consider race and ethnicity in its admissions process must conduct a full review of each individual applicant and compare each applicant against all other applicants as it makes its admissions decisions.

As director of undergraduate admissions at UC Berkeley when California passed Proposition 209—the landmark 1996 anti-affirmative action initiative—I participated in implementing the kind of policy that all colleges and universities now should consider, including a type of comprehensive individual review process that has long been the practice at most private colleges and universities, but has generally not been used by large, selective public universities.

Many large universities (some private, most public) that receive many thousands of applications use formulas—often a combination of grade point average and test scores—to sort their students and, in many cases, to make actual admissions decisions. Going from a process in which few or no applications are actually read in full to a process in which every applicant is given a comprehensive review means adding lots of readers, building a technological capacity to track and record individual and collective admissions decisions, and developing the ability to evaluate the consistency and reliability of individual readers.

It is admittedly a complicated undertaking to go from a mechanical, formula-driven admission process to a comprehensive review process, but it is a transformation that in recent years has been successfully undertaken in part or in full by the University of Florida at Gainesville, the University of Texas at Austin, and, following Berkeley’s lead, other campuses in the UC system (although some UC campuses still rely on a basic academic formula and then add points for other qualities or experiences gleaned from the application).

A comprehensive review process requires thinking about applicants in more complex, subtle, nuanced ways. The University of Virginia and Berkeley are the models for public universities, reading every single one of their freshman applications and using no formulas or clumsy point totals.

Last August, the University of Michigan became the first college or university to announce its freshman admission policy and process crafted under the Grutter decision, as well as under the finding in Gratz v. Bollinger—the second University of Michigan case decided by the court last June. The campus has modified its admission process to include a review of each individual applicant and to eliminate the point assignments which the Supreme Court found unacceptable in the Gratz decision.

The University of Michigan intends to consider race and ethnicity to the full extent permitted. Its past president Lee Bollinger, and its current president Mary Sue Coleman deserve immense credit for pursing with courage and tenacity—and money—what they believed to be right.

What should colleges and universities do under these Supreme Court decisions?

The discussion that follows applies primarily to colleges and universities admitting freshman or undergraduate transfer students. Most of the items listed, however, also apply to graduate and professional schools.

1. A college or university should have a clearly written, formal admissions policy. This policy should be drafted by the senior policymaking body of the institution, and the policy should be tied directly to the mission statement of the institution. If diversity is identified as one of the university’s goals, the policy statement should include a broad definition of that term, making clear that diversity means a student body that encompasses students from a wide range of geographic origins, socioeconomic backgrounds, races and ethnicities, special talents, and outstanding academic and personal achievements.

2. In achieving its admissions goals, an institution should use a variety of sound criteria in its selection process, and these criteria should be directly tied to its admissions policy statement of purpose.

Before deciding that race and ethnicity will be included in the admissions criteria, a college or university should carefully evaluate race-neutral alternatives. An institution should also seek balance among the criteria it uses. While academic criteria should dominate in such a process, a campus should guard against a single criterion, such as test scores, becoming an overwhelming determinant.

Institutions should avoid using criteria in ways that treat applicants as groups and that treat all members of such groups as exactly the same—not just on the basis of race and ethnicity, a practice which the Supreme Court struck down in the Gratz decision, but also on the basis of zip-code or high school or leadership or achievement or hardship.

Giving all students at a particular high school 300 points as “disadvantaged” without considering the wide variation in circumstances that are bound to exist from one student to another, even within a particularly disadvantaged high school, is careless and imprecise. So, too, are application reading processes that use “binary” review/scoring, a process in which an applicant gets, say, 150 points for “community service” or gets 0 points, with no gradations between the absolutes.

While Ohio State and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst are the only two universities that have publicly admitted to assigning points based on race and ethnicity following the Supreme Court decisions, there are probably others.

3. An institution should decide what “critical mass” means for racial and ethnic groups within its student body and set admissions/enrollment goals based on these determinations. The Grutter decision permits colleges and universities to determine enrollment goals that will achieve a critical mass of enrolled students from particular racial and ethnic groups. One way to do this is to use flexible target ranges that are reviewed and adjusted each admissions cycle.

4. Colleges and universities that have relied on formulas in their admissions decisions should reduce or eliminate their use—especially if the formulas have been used as the primary academic measure—even if the formulas are used only for mass sorting.

Admissions formulas most often combine grade point average and one or more test scores. The problem with such formulas is that they distort the qualifications and achievements of individual applicants in much the same way that assigning 30 points to every African American applicant to the University of Michigan did.

1 Eating all GPAs as if they have exactly the same meaning, without examining what grades a student has taken in achieving that grade point average, or whether GPA includes extra points for honors-level courses that may not have been nearly as available in many other applicants’ high schools, is clearly unfair. It is also unfair to assume that all test scores mean the same thing for all applicants, without consideration of an individual applicant’s family income, parental education levels, race or ethnicity, language history, and access to expensive test preparation courses.

In my view, the use of formulas or indices to make “automatic” admission decisions is not ethical and is in direct opposition to the guidelines set forth by the Supreme Court.

At the very least, an institution that uses a formula or index to sort applicants should ensure that a senior admissions officer reviews applications that have been rejected by such a process.

5. An institution should read as many individual applications as possible. Reading applications is labor-intensive and therefore expensive, but it’s also the way to make the best-informed and fairest decisions possible.

Every application should be read by at least two different readers, and the second reader must not know the evaluations or scores assigned by the first reader. A fair, effective, comprehensive review process depends upon the careful, professional judgment of experi-
enced admissions readers.

6. An institution should consider an applicant’s context in assessing her achievements. It should be obvious that, given the huge disparities in opportunities offered to American youngsters, it is crucial to assess a student’s achievements against her circumstances. This means learning and understanding as much as possible about the student’s individual and family circumstances as well as those within her school and community.

Assessing an applicant’s circumstances does not mean automatically rewarding applicants who have faced difficulties. It means measuring their achievements against those challenges. It means acknowledging the qualities of responsibility and dependability in a student who cares for younger siblings every day after school as much as for the student who is a leader in school activities. It means recognizing that an applicant who has taken only two Advanced Placement courses, and done well in them, may have done all that she could if those were the only two AP courses offered in her high school.

Part of understanding the contexts of individual applicants is building accurate knowledge about individual high schools. A college or university can build academic and socioeconomic profiles of high schools using databases that are widely available. The UC Berkeley admissions staff, for example, has constructed sophisticated profiles of every high school in California.

7. An institution should regularly evaluate its individual criteria and its aggregated criteria to determine if they are achieving the goals attributed to them and to the admissions policy in the statement of purpose. Although there are limits to the precision with which such validity studies can be done, an institution should be obligated to do the best analysis it can on its selection criteria.

8. Finally, a college or university should regularly review the outcomes of admissions cycles to ascertain if race and ethnicity still need to be included among the selection criteria in order to achieve a critical mass of a particular racial or ethnic group within the student body.

Depending on an institution’s application volume and the kind of individual review process it adopts, moving to such a process will cost a significant amount of money. When the admissions office at UC Berkeley moved to such a process for fall 1998, it required an additional $200,000, mostly for increased staff and more advanced technological capabilities. The University of Michigan calculates that its new process will cost the campus between $1.5 million and $2 million in its first year.

At a national meeting in Washington, D.C. just a few weeks after the Supreme Court’s University of Michigan decisions, a number of university presidents argued that they simply can’t afford to do this. The court’s opinion emphasizes, however, that an institution which considers race and ethnicity in its admission process may not avoid a comprehensive review of applicants by pleading that such a process would impose an administrative burden or excessive costs.

The we-can’t-afford-it argument, of course, isn’t true at all—even in the states that have had the most severe budget cuts. In spite of difficult budget times, many colleges and universities have increased their funding for admissions offices. That money, however, has gone to marketing, outreach and recruitment—rather than to increasing the professional admissions reading staff—as part of the intense competition for students among institutions. Colleges do have the resources.

What those presidents were really saying is that they don’t want to take money from faculty research or from salary increases or expansion of the physical plant and redirect it to a more careful and thorough admissions process. It will be interesting, however, to see how many presidents hold to this position. I think it will prove difficult politically in many places to say: “We’re not willing to pay the financial price to give more African American, Latino and Native American students an opportunity at our university.”

Following the Supreme Court’s decisions, the consideration of race and ethnicity in university admissions is now legally permitted at both public and private colleges and universities in every state except at the public universities in three states. That is a painful irony for admissions officers in Washington, Florida and—most especially—California, the most racially and ethnically diverse state in the union.

At the same time, that Supreme Court decisions were a pronounced defeat for the individuals and organizations opposed to affirmative action, such as the Center for Individual Rights (CIR) and the American Civil Rights Foundation in Sacramento. CIR in particular had spent years identifying plaintiffs, framing cases, and choosing what it thought would be very favorable federal court jurisdictions.

There will almost certainly be legal challenges to the admissions policies and processes that colleges and universities put in place to consider race and ethnicity now. Those challenges, however, will be difficult to mount and very tough to prove because of the deference the court has shown to colleges and universities in the Michigan decisions, and because of the law that the court has given institutions to define critical mass and to develop admissions processes based on individual review.

At the moment, faculty admission committees, presidents and chancellors, and boards of trustees and regents at many public and private universities are trying to figure out where they stand with regard to the consideration of race and ethnicity in admissions. And many public universities are working to reconcile the ability to consider such factors against the sharp increase in costs and labor that an individual review process will entail.

The Supreme Court has made it clear, however, that in order to consider race and ethnicity, institutions must evaluate each applicant individually and fully. In spite of the burdens such a process may impose, it will almost certainly mean better-informed and fairer decisions. I think that’s a very good thing.

Bob Laird served as director of undergraduate admissions and relations with schools at UC Berkeley.

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**The Anti-Test Backlash**

**What kinds of changes would make assessment programs more acceptable?**

By Rebecca Zwick

What do California and Florida have in common? Well yes, both grow oranges and produce unusual election antics. But they are also home to extraordinarily active grassroots movements that oppose standardized testing.

And around the country, there is evidence of a small but vigorous opposition to the increase in government-imposed testing in our schools, along with a rash of backpedaling on state testing requirements.

What’s the source of this testing backlash, and what should be done about it?

California and Florida

“One of our first goals is to end the California High School Exit Exam,” a seven-year-old organization called Californians for Justice (CFJ) proclaims on its website. In a report called “First Things First,” the group, which has five offices around the state, claims that “the Exit Exam punishes students for the state’s own failure to provide an equitable, high quality education.”

On July 9, the day the State Board of Education was to vote on whether to postpone until 2006 the requirement that students pass the exam in order to graduate, CFJ sponsored a “Summertime to Stop the Exit Scam.” Although the state board did vote for the delay, this step represented only a partial victory for CFJ, which had pushed for a delay not merely until 2006, but “long enough to truly improve opportunities to learn.”

During its relatively short life, the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) has already weathered several crises. In 2000, the State Board of Education voted to shorten the exam and eliminate some difficult math questions after a field test yielded dismal results. In 2001, the board set the minimum passing scores lower than recommended by an advisory panel of teachers, parents and community members. Also in 2001, a high-profile lawsuit was filed on behalf of special education students. As a result, administration of the exam was barred until policies on inclusion and accommodation were modified.

Along with the recent decision to delay the requirement that students pass the CAHSEE to graduate, the board also approved a reduction in the number of essays to be included in the language arts portion of the test.

In early August, Florida State Senator Frederica Wilson escorted a group of chanting protesters to the governor’s mansion in Tallahassee. Among them were 30 third graders who participated in a “read-in” down the hall from Jeb Bush’s office. The intention was to impress upon Bush (who, unfortunately, was in Miami that day) that these students could indeed read, despite their poor performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), administered to Florida students in grades three through ten each year.

About 33,000 third graders who failed the test in the spring will need to repeat the third grade this coming year. Nearly 13,000 high school seniors failed the FCAT as well, but in the wake of protests, the state passed a measure allowing some of them to graduate through alternative paths.

Later in August, the NAACP filed a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights of the US Department of Education, alleging that Florida’s policy discriminates against black students, who on average, score lower than white students on the FCAT. The complaint also

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**A campus should guard against a single criterion, such as test scores, becoming an overwhelming determinant in admissions.**

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Around the country, there is evidence of a small but vigorous opposition to the increase in government-imposed testing in our schools.
alleges that, because schools with large minority populations tend to have inferior facilities, the state is violating its constitutional duty to provide a high-quality education to all students.

The FCAT protests first made the headlines in May, when a group called the FCAT Protest Coalition threatened a boycott of the state’s tourism and citrus industries. The Protest Coalition, headed by Victor T. Curry, a pastor and radio show host, has gained support among some of the state’s civil rights groups and black churches.

(In a bizarre Floridian twist to this story, it came to light in 2002 that the founder and CEO of Ignite, Inc., a company that developed software to help students prepare for the FCAT, is none other than Neil Bush, brother of Jeb and George. Protesters against testing, and state Democrats have expressed dismay at Neil Bush’s promotion of a product that depends on Jeb Bush’s testing program, which, in turn, assures Florida’s compliance with George Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act. Previously, Neil Bush was best known as director of Silverado Savings and Loan, the spectacular failure of which led to a grand jury investigation under the first President Bush.)

**Backlash and Rollback**

How big is the anti-test backlash? Apparently, not that big. In a study called Reality Check 2002, a joint project of Public Agenda and Education Week, national random samples of 600 public school teachers, 610 parents of public school students, and 600 students in public middle schools and high schools (along with groups of college professors and employers) were interviewed by phone about their views on the standards movement. According to a report of the results in Education Week, “no evidence points to a broad backlash against higher academic standards among any of the groups surveyed.”

Although 84 percent of teachers, 60 percent of parents, and 45 percent of students agreed that “far too much emphasis” is placed on test scores, many of the respondents’ views on testing were surprisingly favorable. Seventy-one percent of students said that the number of tests they take is about right, and 79 percent said they think standardized tests contain “fair questions that [they] should be able to answer.” And large majorities of teachers (75 percent), parents (85 percent) and high school students (61 percent) agreed that students work harder if they must pass a test for promotion or graduation.

But if the backlash isn’t widespread, it is certainly loud. And protests by teachers, parents and students are one reason that many states are rolling back some test requirements. Take high school graduation tests as an example: In addition to California and Florida, at least ten other states have delayed implementation of graduation testing requirements or decided to exempt some categories of students.

**How Can Testing Initiatives Be Made More Acceptable?**

Surveys suggest that only a small minority of parents, students and teachers are opposed to tests on principle. Most protesters object to specific aspects of testing initiatives. What kinds of changes would make assessment programs more acceptable?

1. Opportunities must be provided for school personnel, students, parents and the community at large to become more informed about state and federal testing mandates. In a statewide survey conducted after the CAFSEE had been administered for two successive years, high school principals were asked to estimate the percentage of students and parents who were familiar with the exam. On average, the principals estimated that only 51 percent of students and 17 percent of parents “know what knowledge and skills are covered by the exam.” And indeed, only 58 percent of the 47 principals surveyed, and 65 percent of the sample of 159 teachers, said that they themselves were familiar with the exam content.

   Nor is the public well-informed about federal assessment requirements. In the most recent Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup poll, conducted last spring, more than 1,000 adults were asked how much they knew about the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which, among other provisions, requires that each state conduct annual math and reading assessments of students in grades three through eight, beginning in the 2005-2006 school year. Seventy-six percent of respondents (and 78 percent of parents of public school children) said they knew “very little” or “nothing at all.”

   Because of this information gap, these testing programs are often viewed as incomprehensible requirements imposed on an already overburdened system. Greater information does not assure greater support, but it certainly could help.

2. The tests that are selected or developed must be well designed for the task at hand and must be skilfully administered and scored. Tests are often discussed as though they are interchangeable, but like any other product, a test may be of good or poor quality. And even if an exam has been competently developed, it may not be well-suited to a particular purpose. For example, an educationally and psychometrically sound test of algebra might be poorly aligned with the content of a particular school’s algebra curriculum. The test would be an inappropriate means of assessing mastery of algebra course content in that school.

   Situations in which the content and difficulty of a government-mandated test are found to be inappropriate do little to inspire public confidence in testing. In June, for example, New York State’s education commissioner set aside the results of the Math A Regents exam, which is taken by juniors and seniors and is a graduation requirement. Only about 37 percent of students passed (down from 61 percent the previous June), creating an uproar over the difficulty of the test.

   A complicated three-dimensional geometry problem appeared in national news coverage of the exam fiasco, and even the chancellor of the board of regents called the situation embarrassing. Some well-publicized large-scale scoring errors in state testing programs have also served to undermine public support for testing initiatives. A mistake of this kind sent nearly 9,000 New York City students to summer school unnecessarily in 1999.

   It is the joint responsibility of state officials and testing companies to assure that contracts provide enough time, resources and technical expertise to allow the development of high-quality tests, administration procedures, and scoring methods.

3. Government-mandated tests must be seen as part of a genuine, adequately funded school improvement effort, rather than a reason for punitive action against students, teachers and administrators. Increasingly, tests are used as the sole criterion in determining which students get promoted or graduate—a violation of professional testing standards—or which teachers or school systems receive a bonus.

   In Reality Check 2002, 89 percent of teachers, 75 percent of parents, and 62 percent of students agreed that it’s “wrong to use the results of just one test to decide whether a student gets promoted or graduates.” And in the Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup poll, 77 percent of public school parents said it was impossible to “accurately judge a student’s proficiency in English and math” on the basis of just one test.

   Many students and school personnel regard this reliance on a single test score for major decisions as a form of double jeopardy: Students who attend schools with inadequate resources and facilities, and are therefore already suffering an educational disadvantage, are less likely to be well-prepared for the tests. If they fail as a result, they may be prevented from graduating or advancing to the next grade, and their schools may be in danger of funding cuts and other sanctions. The test, then, is seen as compounding the initial inequity in the distribution of resources.

   In summary, government-imposed testing programs would meet with greater acceptance if there were better communication and better tests. Also, the public would be more enthusiastic if tests were seen as tools within a well-funded good-faith effort to improve education.

   But these changes seem unlikely. Ironically, the White House itself is now proposing to cut the budget for Bush’s No Child Left Behind initiative, the centerpiece of his education program. According to the New York Times, the White House request for continued financing next year is $6 billion less than the legislation authorizes. ±

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**Message in a Bottle**

**Why a 19th century critique of higher education remains timely**

By David L. Kirp

A CROSS THE LANDSCAPE of higher education, a debate rages over the impact of the market ethic. In broad-brush terms, the argument pits those who proclaim a “need for greater reliance on marketplace norms, with their promise of greater efficiency and productivity, against defenders of the community of scholars, with its promise of discovering, sharing and transmitting knowledge. It sets those who believe in the workings of Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” the notion that the public good emerges from individuals’ pursuit of their own selfish interests, against those who argue that public purposes can best be served when universities are able to carve out a space where money values cannot intrude.

Like so much in higher education, these are ancient quarrels. Nearly two centuries ago, in 1828, the governing board of Yale College appointed a committee to explore “the expediency of so altering the regular course of instruction...as to leave out of said course the study of the dead languages.” The committee’s report reached far beyond its mandate to encompass the entire “nature and object” of higher learning. In its time, it was the most influential American analysis of the issue.
Most histories of higher education dismiss the Yale report as a reactionary tract, a last-gasp defense of the old guard. That misses the mark—the report speaks so directly to the current controversies over money and meaning that it could almost have been written yesterday. The nurturing of superstar professors; the use of adjuncts; the place of the “practical arts” in higher education; the money-making potential of extension programs; the temptations and pitfalls of “branding”; the integrity of the liberal arts curriculum; the importance of developing the character as well as the minds of undergraduates; the defense of higher education as a public good, most broadly and basically, the necessity for any college or university worth the name to be attentive to contemporary concerns while preserving the integrity of the institution. All these themes find a home in this fascinating document.

In the early years of the republic there was considerable clamor for Yale, as well as other colleges, to take a more populist approach—to provide greater access and to pay more attention to what, then and now, are called the “practical arts.” In New Haven the controversy was of sufficient gravity to engage the attention of the governor of Connecticut, as well as local worthies and “the academical faculty.”

Be more business-like, the critics were urging, or risk becoming obsolete. “From different quarters, we have heard the suggestion that our colleges must be new-modeled; that they are not adapted to the spirit and wants of the age; that they will soon be deserted, unless they are better accommodated to the business character of the nation.” Although this is the Jacksonian age, it might as well have been the internet age. The big difference lies in how Yale responded to the “suggestion.” While nowadays faculty and administrators are prone to dithering, the 1828 report rejected “accommodation” out of hand.

The bedrock purpose of a college education, the committee concluded, is to “form the taste and discipline the mind.” That’s why the study of classics should remain a requirement: Far from being a “dead” undertaking, it “lays the foundations of correct taste” and provides “the most effectual discipline of the mental faculties.” In the wars over the “dilution” of the undergraduate curriculum, the same argument, dressed in different rhetoric, is still being made.

The report wasn’t resistant to the idea of change. On the contrary: “Salutary reform,” change that solidifies the “higher principle,” was welcome, for the curriculum must be updated to reflect advances in knowledge. Yale in 1828, with courses in chemistry, geology and political economy, was a far better place than it had been in 1714, when the only subjects being offered were “the scholastic cobwebs of a few paltry systems, that would now be laid by as proper food for worms.” Similar claims for the beneficence of change were made on behalf of the “muttversity” a generation ago, and are advanced now by for-profit institutions.

The balance between teaching and research requires recalibrating as well, the Yale committee argued, in ways that today’s superstar professors would appreciate. The report urged that the professorial ranks be largely freed from the intellectual responsibility required to concentrate on research. Tutors, the nineteenth century’s adjuncts—probably better than senior professors in the classroom, the report surmised—should teach the basic subjects.

What liberal arts schools, fighting to hold onto a diminishing share of undergraduates, half as the “campus experience” was also regarded as critical to an undergraduate education. Not, the report noted, ought to be appreciated as a “family founded on mutual affection and confidence,” whose mission included the shaping of students’ “character.” Because Yale is a private university, its leaders weren’t as vulnerable to the whims of state politicians as their counterparts at the then-new “Catholepistemiad of Columbus” (or, University, of Michigan)”—or, nowadays, at public universities everywhere, which are as likely to be state-molested as state-funded. Still, public opinion mattered in New Haven; that’s presumably why the governor of Connecticut was appointed to the committee.

While the report gave a nod in the direction of populism—“the public are undoubtedly right, in demanding that there should be appropriate courses of education, accessible to all classes of youth”—it concluded that Yale College wasn’t equipped to deliver such instruction. Professional schools, trade schools, quick-and-dirty exposure to the liberal arts were all worthy ventures (indeed, schools of law, medicine and divinity were already part of the University). However, those narrower, more specialized subjects had no place in an undergraduate liberal arts education.

Then as now, money was the institution’s life blood. If the “treasury were overflowing, if we had a surplus fund,” the report conceded, then “there might perhaps be no harm in establishing a department for a brief and rapid course of study.” Still, the “higher principle” should rule the day: the mission of the college, “the discipline and the furniture of the mind,” must not be compromised. Such a venture needs to be “as distinct...as the medical or law school.”

The committee was really proposing an extension program, though it did not recognize what is now well understood—that such ventures can replenish the treasury handsomely. Teaching short-term students and regular college students together, in an expanded institution, was rejected because it jeopardized the value of a Yale degree. “It is a hazardous experiment, to act upon the plan of gaining numbers first, and character afterwards.”

The brand matters. How often, if less elegantly, has that argument been made in recent years by university administrators?

A liberal arts education, the report said, promotes self-interest, the private good, by giving students the tools and the credentials they need to prosper as doctors, businessmen and lawyers. But it moved beyond this market-driven analysis in making the Jeffersonian argument that such an education also promotes the interest of the commonwealth, the public good, by molding students into citizens of the republic. “Let the value of a collegiate education be reduced and the diffusion among the people would be checked; the general standard of intellect and moral worth lowered; and that spirit of civil and religious liberty jeopardized, by ultimately disqualifying our citizens for the exercise of the right and privilege of self-government.”

While at almost all colleges the classics have long since vanished from the core curriculum, that’s not the essence of the Yale report. The undergraduate curriculum, as the committee pointed out, had been in flux since the founding of the college; junking the classics requirement simply represented another step in that continuing process of change. (Meanwhile classics professors, attentive to student tastes, have been reinventing themselves as classical studies professors, offering history-and-literature courses in translation, with a touch of Indiana Jones archaeology thrown in.)

What is pertinent differently is that American colleges eventually surrendered control over the design of the undergraduate curriculum. Because there’s less certainty about what is part of the shared “furniture of the mind”—what belongs in the core—the common core has generally been abandoned in favor of innocuous “distribution requirements” that turn liberal education into a bazaar.

While this development makes both students and professors happy, for both are set free to pursue their short-term interests, its impact on liberal education is another matter entirely. Students of an earlier generation were seen as acolytes whose preferences were to be formed; today’s students are increasingly viewed as consumers whose preferences must be satisfied.

Much like Swiss watchmakers, liberal arts professors offer what’s often regarded as a luxury item to an ever-shrinking proportion of undergraduates. Those who teach these subjects typically consider their value to be self-evident, not something that needs to be explained anew; in these precincts, Cardinal Newman still lives. But career-minded students have steadily shifted their allegiance to such “practical arts” as business administration, recreation management and law enforcement, fields in which the tangible benefits of credentialing and training are more obvious. They have been offered no good reason to regard such behavior as short-sighted.

Is it possible to reinvent the academic commons, to reinvigorate the culture of the academy, to find persuasive ways of explaining to a new generation the enduring values of a liberal education?

This much is certain about what knowledge matters most is pervasive. Whether the topic is the nature of scholarship, the criteria for selecting and supporting students, the methods and modes of instruction, or the relationship between the university and its patrons in industry, clarifying voices of authority are rarely heard.

When he delivered the Godkin Lectures at Harvard in 1963, Clark Kerr, then president of the University of California system and formerly chancellor at Berkeley, knew “the direction [universities] were swinging.” Those lectures, published as The Uses of the University, describe the emergence of the burgeoning American metropolis that Kerr labeled the multiversity.

The nineteenth century university “was a village with its priests” and the early twentieth century university was “a town—a one-industry town—with its intellectual oligarchy,” according to Kerr. The new “multiplicity” was a “world of infinite variety...a whole series of communities and activities held together by a common name and...related purposes...neither entirely of the world nor entirely apart from it.”

This was “a period of euphoria,” Kerr wrote, “an era marked by universal access to higher education as well as the postwar decision to house scientific research within universities, and its accompanying influx of resources. The tone of the lectures reflects this optimism. Kerr had glimpsed the future and liked what he saw.

Thirty-eight years later, in 2001, nonagenarian Clark Kerr sat down to write a new last chapter on what has become a classic. He was far less confident, and less positive as well, about what the future might hold. The second half of the twentieth century had been a “grand century for the cities of intellect,” he wrote, but that time “is now past, never to be replicated.” Money is in short supply, and so are ideas. University administrators possess “no great visions to lure them on, only the need of survival for themselves and their institutions.”

The 1828 Yale report exudes a bracing certainty about the university’s mission. It is clear about what the college is—and what it is not. Such clarity is what’s most anachronistic about this message in a bottle.◆
University of Hawaii mediocrity is not acceptable and average not good enough,” Dobelle said in a speech to the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii in July 2001, 11 days after taking office. “As we go forward, there will be only one standard of measurement at the University of Hawaii, and that standard will be excellence.”

The new president proceeded to tick off a lengthy list of things he wanted to accomplish in his first year and a half, including realigning and re-accrediting the ten-campus system; strengthening the university’s commitment to the Native Hawaiian community; moving forward on construction of a new medical school and biotechnology park in Honolulu, and on a new community college campus and academic programs in West Oahu, west of Honolulu; developing a strategy to increase the university’s international education and presence; planning for a U.S.-China Center at the University of Hilo; improving the university’s athletic and academic programs; developing a college town adjacent to the flagship Manoa campus in Honolulu; and obtaining a union contract for university faculty and staff that included adequate compensation.

Today, wherever he goes, Dobelle does not hesitate to pronounce himself successful in turning the university 180 degrees. And in fact, he has accomplished, or at least made progress on, most of the goals he enumerated in that speech, with the notable exception of obtaining an increase in faculty salaries, which the governor refused to consider.

He also has presided over a major reorganization of the entire university system that aimed to put all the campuses on equal footing, and the development of new strategic plans for all of those schools, including one at Manoa that drew input from 1,400 people. The Manoa campus, which had been granted only a three-year accreditation in 1999, received a generally positive report from the accrediting commission’s team when it revisited this year, and accordingly the accreditation was extended. In addition, Dobelle proudly notes increasing enrollment and research dollars, which are up ten and five percent, respectively, since his arrival.

“I’ve always raised expectations,” said Dobelle, 58, who rarely appears anything less than supremely confident. “And I’ve always exceeded them.”

That is exactly what happened at Trinity College, said Thomas Johnson, a member of the college’s board of trustees who was board chair during Dobelle’s administration. Dobelle “absolutely turned the place upside down, and in a positive direction, and we are still enjoying the momentum from it,” said Johnson.

But Hawaii is 5,000 miles, and a world away, from the situation Dobelle dealt with in Hartford. While Trinity is a small, private wealthy school surrounded by a ghetto, the University of Hawaii is a collection of poor, public commuter schools surrounded by wealth. Its ten campuses, including seven community colleges, are spread out across four islands, and its massive bureaucracy serves more than 50,000 students, nearly 20,000 of whom are enrolled at UH-Manoa, in Honolulu.

Although the Manoa campus has some respected departments, including the School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology, the university system as a whole has a national reputation as academically lightweight. Often it is even eschewed by upper-middle class Hawaiian families, who generally send their children to mainland colleges.

With an isolated population of just 1.2 million, about a third of whom live in Honolulu, Hawaii is often described as a big small town, where degrees of separation are small, but where the political power and class structure historically has been firmly entrenched.

Since the state has no professional sports teams, the University of Hawaii football team takes center stage, and in a sense, so does the university itself. “Politics is like big-time sports here,” said Karl Kim, interim vice chancellor for academic affairs, and a longtime faculty member at UH-Manoa.

And like big-time sports, those politics can get vicious. In a recent commentary for the Honolulu Advertiser, one of the city’s two daily newspapers, Hawaiian public radio and television talk show host Robert Rees actually compared Hawaiians to the townsfolk in Shirley Jackson’s short story, “The Lottery.” Like them, he wrote, Hawaiians “enjoy gathering periodically to stone to death one of our citizens.”

And Dobelle, he warned, could be next.

That may be overly dramatic, but it is safe to say that the warm spirit of aloha that initially greeted Dobelle has cooled, and that not everyone agrees with his upbeat assessment of his tenure.

Dobelle is now facing some vocal critics who feel betrayed and angry that he has not yet come through on his fundraising promises. Among those critics are a couple of legislators, a university administrator, and a retired university professor, who detailed their concerns in a 4,000-word essay, titled “Dangerous Equations,” published in July in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, the city’s other daily newspaper.

They point to Dobelle’s as yet unfilled pledge to raise $150 million to match a $150 million bond issue the legislature approved to pay for the new biomedical complex, and his offer to seek private donations to cover $1 million in renovations to the president’s mansion. So far, he has come up with only a small fraction of either. At the same time, they complain, he has hired a team of administrators—the two of whom he knew previously and recruited from the mainland—at salaries of $200,000 or more. Those salaries are far higher—in several cases double—what their predecessors were earning. And in several cases, these are newly created positions.

Dobelle said two of those top positions were originally offered to Hawaiian women of Asian descent, who turned them down. And the Dobelle administration defends the salaries on the basis that they are in line with those at peer institutions on the mainland.

Meanwhile, despite Dobelle’s commitment to increase faculty salaries, they remain in the bottom third of peer institutions, according to a survey commissioned by the faculty union, said J.N. Musto, the union director. Dobelle has been unable to persuade the governor or legislature to approve any increases for faculty salaries, nor has he come up with the money from other sources.

“Everyone likes the visionary part. But where’s the beef?” asked Amy Agybany, director of student equity, excellence and diversity at the main Manoa campus in Honolulu, and a co-author of “Dangerous Equations.”

“I think he’s the best thing that’s happened to Native Hawaiians since the university was founded nearly 100 years ago.”

—Lilikala Kame’elehiwa

Dobelle dismisses the essay as a desperate attempt to derail change, and maintains that it is the sort of resistance he anticipated at this stage—a stage, he predicted, that eventually will be forgotten when his tenure is “romanticized” after he achieves his agenda. The president acknowledged that his efforts to raise money for the house renovations have not gone as planned, partly due to economic conditions after the September 11, 2001 attacks and the SARS scare, but reiterated his belief that the university and its foundation will raise the money for the biomedical center, which is a much higher priority.

“It’s not there today as we speak,” acknowledged Sam Callejo, Dobelle’s new chief of staff and a veteran of Hawaii politics. “But to be fair, it’s not like we need it all today.” Construction on the medical school is currently underway, but it will be
a couple of years before the university's share of the money for the rest of the project is needed, he said. Asked about charges that the administration is being too optimistic, Callee, a recent hire who is widely respected, responded with a shrug and a smile. "Evan doesn't do that kind of thing." The week after "Dangerous Equations" appeared, Dobelle responded in a similarly lengthy essay he titled, "Embracing Hope," also published in the Star-Bulletin. Dobelle's self-congratulatory tone and his optimistic outlook for the university's future stood in stark contrast to the bleak situation described in "Dangerous Equations."

"This is a time of high energy and rising morale throughout UH on all our islands. I am enthusiastic that we can accomplish our goals because we are 180 degrees from where we started in terms of moral, momentum and enthusiasm," Dobelle wrote.

Neither "Dangerous Equations" nor other two essays penned by a longtime professor at the university, which accuse Dobelle of being nothing—themselves a "filthful man," and which have circulated informally, appear to have generated much public outcry. But they have provided fodder for the so-called "coconut wireless," the Hawaiian gossip mill which has perpetuated many rumors of Dobelle's impending exit.

A far more ominous indicator of the challenges facing Dobelle appeared in early September in the form of a strongly worded letter to the editor of the Star-Bulletin. Written by Patricia Lee, chair of the university's board of regents, the letter was in response to an erroneous headline accompanying a story about Dobelle's most recent annual performance review. "Regents Give Glowing Review of Dobelle," read the headline. The story said nothing of the sort. Lee took this unusual step of publicly correcting any misimpression the headline may have created. She wrote, "Glowing" is not a word that correctly describes the evaluation, the discussion or the feelings expressed. "Direct" and "honest" would be more accurate.

In an interview, Lee and the board's vice chair, Kitty Lagareta, expressed considerable frustration with Dobelle's penchant for charging ahead without keeping the board informed. Despite repeated requests for detailed, long-range plans for hiring and fundraising, they say he has never given them one. And they say he has made new, expensive administrative appointments—and raised salaries of others—in a piecemeal fashion, leaving them few alternatives but to approach their "with a real concern that there's not enough consideration for the fiscal realities of this institution and this state," Lagareta said.

There also is a sense among board members that Dobelle is not always completely forthcoming about Dobelle's plans for the community. But Harris is not in the least surprised by the criticism Dobelle is enduring. "Our community is very change-averse," said Harris. So much so that, within minutes of meeting him for the first time, Harris said he warned Dobelle that he should be prepared to run into some buzz saws. Those buzz saws have even some of Dobelle's most ardent supporters holding their collective breath, hoping he will be able to pull off what he has started.

"If [Dobelle] has a weakness, it's a tendency to over-promise," said Walter Dods, chairman and CEO of First Hawaiian Bank, and a member of the advisory committee that overwhelmingly recommended Dobelle for the job of president. But, continued Dods, "a lot of great leaders do that so that they can raise people's expectations. And it's amazing how, after a while, they their accomplishments the things that everyone said they can't accomplish."

Dods, himself a UH graduate and longtime supporter of the university, is not terribly concerned about the apparent lack of fundraising progress.

"You have to create the community enthusiasm first, and the money will follow," said Dods. Dobelle generally has a very good relationship with the business community of Honolulu, Dods said. In addition, he said, finding funds for the biomedical center is a high priority for U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye, whose campaigns Dods has chaired for past 20 years.

"Has he done everything right? No. Has he stepped on some toes? Yes," said Dods. "But overall, is he taking the university in the right direction? I'd say an emphatic yes."

One set of toes Dobelle has stepped on belongs to Republican Governor Linda Lingle. In the final days of the 2002 gubernatorial campaign, Dobelle, against the strong advice of both Dods and Paul Costello, vice president for external affairs, appeared in a television commercial endorsing Lingle's Democratic opponent. Lingle reportedly hung up on Dobelle when he made a courtesy call informing her of what he had done. Dobelle, who believes "education isn't political enough," said in an interview that the endorsement was "a misjudged risk," that came from the heart.

But it was a risk that backfired, and many people, Dods among them, consider it Dobelle's biggest misstep. One board of regents member resigned in protest. Since being sworn into office, Lingle has appointed seven new members to the 12-member board of regents. Among her appointees is vice chair Lagareta, a public relations and marketing consultant who was an unofficial advisor to Lingle's gubernatorial campaign.

Dobelle said he and the governor have put the incident behind them, and they recently exchanged a brief kiss of greeting at a well-attended fundraiser for one of the university's community colleges. But privately, people suspect Governor Lingle has not forgiven him.

There have been other controversies as well. Democrat Brian Taniguchi, chair of the state Senate Ways and Means Committee, called for an audit of the University Foundation, after it was revealed that Dobelle used $1,625 from the president's discretionary fund to take donors and staff members to a Janet Jackson concert instead of treating them to a more typical black-tie event.

And there was so much talk about Dobelle's spending that in December of last year, his administration opened the books to reporters, saying there was nothing to hide. According to a report that followed the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Dobelle spent nearly $11,000 to fly Paul Costello, his wife and child to Hawaii for a job interview and put them up at a luxury resort. According to the same article, another recruitment trip, this one for his executive assistant, included a $2,600 bill at the same resort, as well as a $465 dinner. And according to a story in the Honolulu Advertiser, he also spent $42,000 in airline ticket upgrades, a perk stipulated in his contract.

All of that, Dobelle's critics say, adds up to insensitivity and arrogance, neither of which play well in this heavily Asian-influenced culture. He was smart enough to pack away his cufflinks and tailored suits when he moved from Connecticut, but his new wardrobe of flowered Hawaiian shirts and dress slacks does not completely cover up his mainland ways.

The warm spirit of aloha that initially greeted Evan Dobelle has cooled, and not everyone agrees with his upbeat assessment of his tenure.
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they say.

“I think Dobelle...sees humility as a weakness,” said Amy Agbayani. But in Hawaii, she said, it is better to “promise less and deliver more.”

Senator Taniuchi agreed, saying that while he was committed to higher education and the university, he remained “suspicious” of Dobelle. “I have a hard time deciphering whether what he’s doing is just cheerleading or whether there’s some substance to it,” Taniuchi said.

Taniuchi said he and his senate colleagues were put off when Dobelle, under questioning by a legislator, refused to consider what might happen if he failed to raise $150 million to match the $150 million bond issue for the biomedical complex. Replying that he didn’t “think that way,” Dobelle said that it was not a question he would even allow his staff to ask.

“Everybody was kind of taken aback,” said Taniuchi. “They were turned off by that kind of style.”

“I think a lot of this is style. And that’s not an insignificant thing when you’re president of the university,” said Democrat Brian Shatz, the majority whip of the Hawaii House of Representatives. “There is a respect that we tend to have for the mover and shaker whose name is not well-known.”

That is certainly not Dobelle. He has given so many speeches, radio, television and newspaper interviews that he is something of a celebrity in Hawaii, and is often recognized by strangers, whom he invariably engages in conversation about his latest projects. He has traveled extensively since taking office, to Asia and the mainland as well as within the Hawaiian islands, in an attempt to create new academic opportunities and to raise money. This year, Dobelle was named Salesperson of the Year by the Sales and Marketing Executives of Honolulu, an award given each year to the person who has done the most to promote the state of Hawaii.

Watching him in action, you can see why.

During a recent chance encounter at a coffee shop in the Honolulu airport, he started chatting with a producer for The History Channel; within minutes, he was asking about internships for students in the university’s new Creative Media and Digital Arts program. Once off the plane, on the Big Island of Hawaii, he met a businessman on the shuttle to the car rental and was off and running about his idea to develop an East-West medical program that would tap into interest in alternative medicines and plants endemic to Hawaii.

The businessman gave Dobelle the name of a Hawaiian doctor he thought would be interested in the project.

Shortly afterward, Dobelle was chatting with a local reporter about everything from the future of the university football team—Dobelle eventually wants to broadcast its games into Japan—to a project he’s developing in conjunction with the discount broker Charles Schwab & Company to create a unique residential/retail village that also will house community college classrooms on the west side of the Big Island. He spoke about his desire to capitalize on Hawaii’s location to make the university a bridge between East and West, a place where every educated American needs to spend at least a year.

Then it was on to a speech to the local Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club, where he suggested that the university should offer cultural and natural history tours and courses—even symphony performances—catering to the wealthy homeowners who are flocking to the Big Island.

He talked about developing a culinary arts and hotel management program to fill local employment needs. He suggested that the university could offer a PGA-sanctioned golf management course, given the popularity of the sport in the islands, and proposed a cooperative distance learning program to train more nurses.

“There is so much we can do together,” Dobelle told the audience, “but the key is communicating and working cooperative-ly in a spirit of entrepreneurship. Because if we do, there is nothing we cannot accomplish.”

And there is certainly much to accomplish. While Dobelle proudly said in a recent speech that the accrediting team from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) said the Manoa campus had “dramatically changed” for the better since 1999, he failed to mention that WASC also has issued a formal notice of concern to UH-West Oahu about its institutional integrity, fiscal stability, lack of academic planning and organizational structure. If these problems are not addressed in the next few months, WASC might take steps toward ending West Oahu’s accreditation.

Another WASC team looked at the systemwide reorganization, where it found serious flaws in the budget process, and considerable confusion about some of the changes. It also urged the board of regents and the president to keep partisan politics out of the university system.

Politics is one potential problem; money is another. By one estimate, UH remains underfunded by $82 million. Faculty members, who have been thrilled to hear Dobelle advocate for them, are starting to lose patience as they look to him to deliver an across-the-board pay raise. The community college administrators want to know where they’re going to get nearly $1 million to cover gaps in the new faculty contract, which reduced the teaching load without consulting them about the fiscal consequences.

The economic forecast for Hawaii does appear to be improving, which might free up some more money from the legislature. But it will not make up for all the shortfalls. So Dobelle and his team are exploring various potential sources of additional funding, including more overhead from research grants, revenues from expanded auxiliary services and enrollment and tuition increases. “It’s time to put up or shut up,” said Sam Callejo.

Back in his Honolulu office, Dobelle keeps a bucket of plastic crabs that he has purposely tipped over. That, he said, is what he’s determined to do in Hawaii—to stop people from putting each other back down into the bucket.

“This is all about justice, the capacity to dream dreams and make dreams come true,” Dobelle said. “And that’s what I do.”

Dobelle defiantly has people dreaming dreams. But will those dreams come to fruition? “There are a lot of us who want him to succeed. I don’t know if he can,” said Karl Kim, the interim vice chancellor for academic affairs. “Because people just don’t get it, and they focus on stuff that doesn’t matter.”

Ramsey Pedersen, chancellor of Honolulu Community College and an expert in Pacific Island cultures, said he sees unfortunate parallels between Dobelle’s situation and that of the prophets who emerged in the “cargo cults” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. When ships laden with previously unknown goods first reached the Melanesian islands, the islanders saw what they had been missing, and these prophets raised their hopes and expectations. Do as I say, they’d tell the islanders, and you, too, will attain these goods. And so the islanders obeyed, following rituals designed to purge the old traditions and make way for the new. They built roads and docks, and they waited for the cargo to show up, as the prophet had promised. And when it did not, they felt terribly betrayed, and all their expectations metamorphosed into rage.

In the end, said Pedersen, the islanders invariably turned on the prophet, and killed him.

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