

How to Talk to Your Legislator about the Crisis in Higher Education

1. Find out who your legislator is.

Go to <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/yourleg.html>, and enter your zip code. You will be shown your senator and assembly member. If you click on their names, you will be sent directly to their homepage. On your legislator's homepage, you'll find contact info for two offices: one in Sacramento and one in your district.

2. Make an appointment to meet with your legislator in person.

Call the legislator's office in your district and tell the receptionist that you'd like to make an appointment to meet him or her to discuss the impact that the state's defunding of higher education is having on your family. *This may be intimidating, but don't worry — legislators meet with constituents all the time.* If your legislator is away, ask for a later appointment.

3. Meet with your legislator.

Take your whole family, a copy of the tuition bill you've received for Spring 2010, and a write up of your (basic) family budget. Explain, as clearly as possible, what the impact of the fee increases will be on your family. Will your student be able to stay in school? Will your student have to take on a(nother) job to do so? What will the impact be on studies and grades? Will the increases mean that a younger child will not be able to go to college?

4. Demand that your legislator re-fund public higher education.

Don't beat around the bush. After you've explained the problems you face, ask your legislator directly: "what are you going to do about this?" UC lost 20% of its funding from the state because that was how the state legislature voted on the budget this year. Make it clear that your legislator must behave differently in the next budget session.

5. Give them some options on how to fund higher education.

This is very important. Your legislator will likely tell you that the state has no funds, but this isn't true. There are ways to raise new revenues. There are spending priorities (especially favoring prisons over schools). *See the accompanying sheet of proposals*

6. Follow up with a thank you note.

When you're done, thank your legislator for her or his time. Then write a thank you note. It takes five minutes. All you have to write is "thank you for taking the time to meet with me/us about re-funding higher education." This note will remind the legislator that you're monitoring his or her actions and will hold them accountable.

SAVE the University, UC Berkeley

<http://saveuc.org>

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What Can Be Done to Finance the University?

People say, 'There's nothing to be done; California is broke!'. This is not true. Below is a list of things that can be done to improve state finances and help higher education in California.

1. A Shift in Priorities

In 1991, 17% of the state budget went to higher education and 2% went to prisons. Today, only 9% goes to higher education and 10% to prisons. It costs more to incarcerate people than to provide them with a college education. If you think these funding priorities are wrong, tell your legislator. For more on the crisis, see: <http://www.cityonahillpress.com/2009/12/03/the-insolvent-state-of-higher-education/>

If the Governor and Legislature were to return state funding for higher education and decrease student fees to 2000-01 levels (adjusted for inflation), the cost to the typical California taxpayer would be \$32. For more information, go to: *Keep California's Promise* <http://keepcaliforniaspromise.org/?p=553>

2. New Revenue Sources

State Senator Alberto Torrico's proposed legislation, "Fair Share for Fair Tuition" (AB656), would tax oil companies 9.9% for petroleum extracted from the state and set that money aside strictly for higher education, raising some \$1 billion – enough to close the University of California deficit. California is the only oil-producing state that does not have such a tax! For more information, go to: <http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a20/higher-ed.aspx>

3. Tax Reform

San Francisco Assessor Phil Ting's "Close the Loophole" proposal would prevent corporations from having their property taxed under the same rules as homeowners, thus exempting them from contributing their fair share to the state's revenue stream. For more information, go to: <http://www.closeheloophole.com/> There are many other practical ways to improve our outmoded and unfair state tax system. For more information, go to: <http://www.caltaxreform.org/>

4. Legislative Reform

The California Democracy Act is a proposed initiative to restore simple majority voting to the state legislature. Currently, budgets and revenues require two-thirds votes for approval. Every year, this leads to gridlock on the state budget, and it violates a basic principle of democratic government: *majority rule*. For more information, go to: <http://www.californiansfordemocracy.com/>

4. Federal Aid

Federal aid is desperately needed to help all 50 states close budget deficits created by the Great Recession. California has by far the worst deficit and would benefit most from federal assistance. Yet such aid was cut from the Obama Stimulus by Congressional Republicans. For more information, see: <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=2988>

The Obama Administration and Congress should create new programs to fund public higher education across the nation, as President Lincoln did during the Civil War, and to rebuild schools and put teachers back to work, as President Roosevelt did during the Great Depression. For more on this, go to: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/11/21/IN2H1ALDQB.DTL>

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