

The Presidential Address:

Budget crisis discussion

CHARLES DASSANCE

President; Special to Patriot Press



I first want to thank the Patriot Press for inviting me to write this column. My focus in this first column is on the economy and the college's budget and I would welcome suggestions from students on other matters they would like me to address in future columns. In that regard, I suggest you contact any of the editors of the Patriot Press with your suggestions.

We are experiencing a national and global financial crisis of greater significance than we have seen in our lifetimes. For most of our students, I suspect it is somewhat shocking and dismaying to be experiencing this recession and to see what it means for unemployment and the general well-being of our community.

The college certainly has not been spared from negative economic consequences. In the 2007-2008 year, the college's state budget was reduced by \$615,504. In the current year, the college's state budget has been reduced by about \$1.15 million. For the new fiscal year, which starts on July 1, the chances are we will see an even larger state budget reduction.

We began over a year ago to significantly reduce expenditures at the college. We have had a hiring freeze on all full-time positions except faculty and we have reduced expenditures in many other areas including travel, supplies, etc. We also have been holding some money in reserve for the past couple of years in anticipation of these years of reduced budgets.

Not surprisingly students have been asked to help with the budget problem by paying higher tuition. The state Legislature has authorized a tuition increase for community college students in both of the past two years as the state has recognized that is the only way they can provide some help for the decreasing state share of the funding for community colleges, except raising additional revenue which so far they have been unsuccessful. While we will not know what will happen with the tuition next year until the Legislature finishes meeting, I expect there will be another tuition increase.

On the positive side, the college has been able to accommodate a large increase in student enrollment. This has been possible because of faculty's willingness to enroll more students in their classes, and because other college staff have been willing to take on extra work. We have also been able to hire more adjunct faculty because of the enrollment growth. Our enrollment this past fall topped 7,000 for the first time and enrollment for the current semester is another record, an increase of more than 14 percent over last spring.

In the stimulus bill which was recently passed by congress and signed into law by President Obama, there is a significant increase in support for Pell grants in both of the next two years. This will be very good news for students who receive Pell grants because the increase they receive will more than offset any tuition increase that the college has to impose. There may be some additional assistance from the stimulus bill, but it is unclear now if much of that funding will actually get to the college to help with our budget problems.

We will continue to do all we can as a college to enroll all of those who wish to attend. We have also worked closely with other organizations in the area to provide special services for individuals who have lost their jobs. We will try to provide some additional resources for both college employees and students that they may find helpful in these trying times.

No one knows how long this economic downturn will last, but there is no doubt that "this, too, shall pass." We can emerge stronger as a college, and as individuals, by refocusing on those things that are truly important. For the college, our core values of service, integrity, responsibility and dignity will serve us well in this difficult time.

Even in these tough times, college employees and students have provided support for the United Way, the March of Dimes, the American Heart Association, and local food banks through the Empty Bowls project in a larger amount than ever before in our history. This is a testament to our common awareness that even if we find our own circumstances difficult, there are many who are worse off than we are. So, stay focused on helping one another and we will weather this economic storm together.



Double dipping leaves us with a bad taste

We're living in some of the most uncertain times ever in the history of Central Florida Community College.

Questions are hanging over our campus right now that can't be ignored. How will the state budget cuts, which only seem to keep growing, ultimately affect our school? Will there be another tuition increase? Will the hiring freeze at CFCC eventually turn into employee cutbacks?

So with all the talk of being financially responsible, and everyone doing their part to help out, why would CFCC ever set a bad example for our young and impressionable minds?

We're talking about the approval of double dipping — and not the chips and dip variety (although that's just as disgusting). Double-dipping is a practice—100 percent legal due to a loophole in the Florida DROP program— which allows government employees to retire from their job for one month, before being rehired to the same exact position. They will collect their regular paycheck, as well as a lump sum payment, and eventually, their retirement pension — all at the same time.

CFCC Athletic Director Bob Zelinski was recently approved by the college's administration to become the latest of Florida's nearly 8,000 double dippers, and CFCC's first.

Florida's double-dippers include state supreme court judges, county commissioners, property appraisers, and lower-level employees like principals, teachers and sheriff's deputies.

The biggest of all the double-dippers is Miami Dade Community College President Eduardo J. Padron. In 2006, he "retired", collected \$893,286 in lump sum benefits and began receiving \$14,631 a month in retirement pay. Today, he is still working as the college's president and collecting his annual salary of \$328,860.

Lawmakers claim that the DROP program was originally intended to encourage earlier retirements, allowing other employees to move up the ladder, while creating new jobs. What it has done in reality, is allow these double-dippers to drain an estimated \$300 million a year from the state's already critically deflated budget, while holding onto jobs that could be going to young professionals, something that every CFCC student will be in a couple of years.

So add one more question to the many that are already looming over this campus: If we've gone this long without jumping onto the double-dipping bandwagon, is *now* really the time to start?

See pg. 4 for Dr. Dassance's email responding to this issue.



Co-Editors-in-Chief

Nikki Torino
Kessiah Ray

Managing Editor

Christopher Spata

Design Manager

Patrick J. Newport

News

Jessica Torino

Features

Amanda Canupp

Sports

JJ Boothe

Photos

Sam Maynard

Advertising

Jessica Torino

Distribution

Patrick Newport

Advisor

Rob Marino

Junior Staff

Courtney Adams
Courtney Barclay
Desirae Black

Nicolette Bovell

Eryn Prest- Bruns

Concetta Cox

Destiny Evans

Katie Greene

Kristen Haeger

Jennifer Hedglin

Liz Lange

Ashley Lee

April Mcleod

Ashton Mcleod

Tom Morris

Guillermo Novoa

Caitlin Rogers

Kent Scott

Chris Velez

Rhiannon Veness

Tommie Warren

The Patriot Press is a designated public forum.

Student editors have the authority to make all content decisions without censorship or advance

approval.

Letters to the editor are strongly encouraged. You may mail, e-mail, or call. All letters should include first and last names, and students should include their major.

The Patriot Press is a monthly newspaper produced by the students of CFCC. It is published by the Gainesville Sun.

The opinions expressed in this newspaper are those of the staff of The Patriot Press and not necessarily those of the students, staff, faculty or administration of CFCC.

The Patriot Press is a member of the Associated Collegiate Press and the Florida Community College Press Association.