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A Crown Jewel of Education Struggles With Cuts

By **TAMAR LEWIN**

BERKELEY, Calif. — As the [University of California](#) struggles to absorb its sharpest drop in state financing since [the Great Depression](#), every professor, administrator and clerical worker has been put on furlough amounting to an average pay cut of 8 percent.

In chemistry laboratories that have produced Nobel Prize-winning research, wastebaskets are stuffed to the brim on the new reduced cleaning schedule. Many students are frozen out of required classes as course sections are trimmed.

And on Thursday, to top it all off, the Board of Regents voted to increase undergraduate fees — the equivalent of tuition — by 32 percent next fall, to more than \$10,000. The university will cost about three times as much as it did a decade ago, and what was once an educational bargain will be one of the nation's higher-priced public universities.

Among students and faculty alike, there is a pervasive sense that the increases and the deep budget cuts are pushing the university into decline.

The budget cuts in California, topping \$30 billion over the last two years, have touched all aspects of state government, including health care, welfare, corrections and recreation. They have led to a retrenchment in state services not seen in modern times, and for many institutions, including the state university system, have created a watershed moment.

The state's higher education budget has been slashed by \$2.8 billion this year, including \$813 million from the university system — about the equivalent of New Mexico's entire higher education budget.

“Dismantling this institution, which is a huge economic driver for the state, is a stupendously stupid thing to do, but that's the path the Legislature has embarked on,” said [Richard A. Mathies](#), dean of the College of Chemistry here at Berkeley, long the system's premier campus. “When you pull resources from an institution like this, faculty leave, the best grad students don't come, and the discoveries go down.”

As the litany of cuts continues, there is a growing worry that senior faculty members may begin to defect. In fact, some colleges around the nation have begun identifying funds to use to recruit U.C. professors.

Since California adopted a master plan for higher education in 1960, the state has been, in the words of the historian Kevin Starr, “utopia for higher education.” Eight of the 10 University of California campuses — all but Merced and San Francisco — are in the top 100 in this year's U.S. News & World Report's [rankings](#). But maintaining that edge, without resources, is difficult.

In 2004, [international rankings](#) by the London-based [Times Higher Education](#) named Berkeley the No. 2 research university in the world, behind only [Harvard](#). This year, Berkeley plummeted to No. 39, mostly because of its high faculty-to-student ratio. The other international rankings, by [Shanghai Jiao Tong University](#), rated Berkeley No. 3 this month.

Patrick M. Callan, president of the [National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education](#), a nonpartisan group that promotes access to higher education, said that while public universities

in many states were facing financial problems, California was in a class by itself.

“In most states, it’s the economy, and you can say that in a couple of years, it will bounce back,” Mr. Callan said. “But in California, it’s really part of a significant retrenchment of the whole public sector. If the perception is that it’s going to be chronic, and people give up on California, the pre-eminence of Berkeley and [U.C.L.A.](#) would be in danger.”

No wonder, then, that people like Bruce Fuller, a Berkeley professor of education and public policy, are asking themselves whether it is time to move on.

As co-director of the Institute for Human Development, an interdisciplinary research group that suffered big cuts, Mr. Fuller worries that the unit is losing its intellectual excitement and its ability to support his grant proposals. Then, too, he lost his two best graduate students last year to Stanford.

“To stay on top, you need to be bringing in new people,” Mr. Fuller said. “And I’m not sure how many of my most stimulating colleagues will still be here in three years.”

So although he was not swayed last year when the [University of North Carolina](#) came calling, Mr. Fuller said, he may be more receptive this year.

Formerly taboo ideas, like allowing U.C.L.A. and Berkeley to charge substantially more than other campuses, or even eliminating the research mission at some of the newer campuses, are being put forward. Many here seem to be in a state of shock that things have been allowed to get so bad at one of the nation’s leading public research universities, one with a long tradition of excellence. Berkeley faculty, past and present, have won 21 [Nobel prizes](#). And last month, two of the 24 MacArthur fellowship grants went to a Berkeley computer scientist and a

molecular biologist.

Students, professors and union workers alike say the state's 20 percent cutback in financing imperils the system's ability to provide a top-quality education to all qualified California students, particularly those from low-income families, who make up almost a third of the university's student body.

Mark Yudof, the university system president, has created a commission that will make recommendations next spring on the future size and shape of the system. Just about everything seems to be on the table. There is even talk of creating an online "11th U.C. campus," to bring in new revenue by offering courses — and degrees — to qualified students in other states and countries.

As support from the state dwindles, it is inevitable that the university will begin to look more like a private institution. The proportion of out-of-state students will rise next year: at Berkeley, almost a quarter of the freshmen admitted for next year will be international or out-of-state students.

And, as at private universities, student fees are rising rapidly, balanced, in large part, by bigger aid packages for low- and middle-income students. Across the 10 campuses, instructional budgets are being reduced by \$139 million, with 1,900 employees laid off, 3,800 positions eliminated and hiring deferred for nearly 1,600 positions, most of them faculty.

Mr. Yudof rejects suggestions to retrench, like adopting a two-tiered system in which the Santa Cruz, Riverside and Merced campuses would be teaching institutions and no longer focus on research.

“My mission is to defend, protect, enhance and grow the University of California,” Mr. Yudof said. He added that he hoped the current measures would be enough to get the system back on track.

But that may not be the case. Just to fend off further cuts, he said, the state will need to add nearly \$900 million to the university’s budget next year.

Whatever that budget looks like, Mr. Yudof said, there will be no more furloughs. “It’s too demoralizing,” he said.

This year, the [University of Texas](#) lured three senior faculty members from the University of California, among them William F. Hanks, and his wife, Jennifer Johnson-Hanks, both anthropologists.

“Last spring, when we made the decision, there were issues, but the budget hadn’t quite slammed down to the extent it has since then,” Mr. Hanks said. “It looks a lot bleaker now.

“But in our case, it wasn’t so much wanting to leave Berkeley as wanting to come to U.T. Surprisingly, there’s more intellectual excitement and dynamism here. The department is growing and expanding, and we’re part of a cohort of new people, which is a fabulous feeling, fraught with potential.”

Meanwhile, back in his old department at Berkeley, things are tight — and no replacements can be hired. “Our biological anthropology course, which is required for psych majors, used to be offered every semester,” said [Meg Conkey](#), an archeology professor, “and now it’s just spring semester, and probably there will be students who don’t get in.

“We just don’t have as many people to draw from, and we’re likely to have three retirements

coming up,” she said. For undergraduates, the budget cuts are creating new strains about graduating in four years. Classes will be larger and teaching assistants fewer, and already, dozens of students have been unable to register for sections of introductory chemistry courses.

“Last semester, I couldn’t get into a lab section for Chem 3A,” said Nawal Siddiqui, a bioengineering major who hopes to go to medical school. “So now I’m taking Chem 3B lectures, with the labs for Chem 3A. It’s kind of hard.”

The chancellor of Berkeley, [Robert J. Birgeneau](#), expresses optimism that more money can be saved without cutting into the educational muscle of the university. “If the budget doesn’t get worse,” he said, “we can recover in two years.”

Dr. Birgeneau tells of a recent meeting with a student leader, who said students were most unhappy about the decision to end Berkeley’s tradition of keeping the library open 24 hours during finals, and an hour later, a parent meeting where he mentioned that complaint — and immediately got a \$30,000 pledge to pay for round-the-clock library access during finals.

“If they keep cutting, it’ll take us longer to recover,” Dr. Birgeneau said. “But Berkeley can always recover.”

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