

PHENOMenal News

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 2

SPRING-SUMMER 2011

PHENOM Testifies at the State House

Tax reform and student financial aid, two of PHENOM's top legislative priorities, had hearings at the State House in May.

On May 5, PHENOM brought more than 50 people from across the state to show support for "**An Act to Invest in Our Communities**," which would generate an additional \$1.3 billion per year in revenue for the state. The audience of over 500 people heard PHENOM members **Chris Wilbur** (Bristol Community College) and **Max Page** (UMass Amherst) explain to the Joint Committee on Revenue the impact repeated budget cuts are having on our campuses.

Waving yellow signs with messages like "Tax Me" and "I'll Pay More," students, staff and faculty

made it clear that they had not come to fight for a larger piece of a shrinking pie. Instead, the desire to enlarge the pie brought us together with town officials, human service advocates, K-12 leaders and others.



Chris Wilbur (center) from Bristol Community College testifies about the connection between supporting higher education and supporting progressive tax reform. On the same panel, describing the negative consequences of chronic underfunding, are to the right, Max Page, and to the left (hidden), Donnie McGee, Bristol Community College professor and alumna.

The bill (SB1416 / HB2553 sponsored by Rep. Jim O'Day and Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz) would restore the personal income tax rate to 5.95% but would increase personal exemptions so there would be no additional burden on low-income people.

It would also raise the tax rate on unearned income (interest and dividends).

Six days later, PHENOM members **Stasha Lampert** (UMass Boston), **Patrick Burke** (Westfield State) and **Vonds Auguste** (a former student) testified before the Joint Committee on Higher Education. They offered moving testimony for H.350, the "**Finish Line Grant**" legislation crafted by Representative Sean Garballey and PHENOM. This bill would provide scholarships

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Interview with Senator Stan Rosenberg Co-Chair of the Public Higher Education Legislative Caucus

Senator Stan Rosenberg is co-chair (with Rep. Sean Garballey) of the Legislature's new Public Higher Education Caucus. At its first meeting on February 10, the Caucus heard from Commissioner of Higher Education Richard Freeland, UMass President Jack Wilson, and PHENOM Vice President Max Page (find Max's remarks under News and Commentary/Press Releases at <http://www.phenomonline.org>). At its

second meeting, the Caucus heard from PHENOM member Nancy Folbre, author of the book *Saving State U: Why We Must Invest in Public Higher Education*. "We caught up with Sen. Rosenberg in the midst of a busy budget week in the Senate to ask him about the Caucus.

Phenomenal News (PN): Why did you help start the Public Higher Education Caucus?

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PHENOM Gets Around!

PHENOM continues to take its message all over the state. Here are a few of the places we've been since January.

We have been in the media a lot, including an hour-long TV show we produced for Channel 22, WWLP Springfield. We are in the midst of a series of meetings with the editors of the *Hampshire Gazette*, *Springfield Republican*, and *Berkshire Eagle*.

We made presentations to many groups including the Women's Institute for Leadership Development, the Board of Higher Education's Student Leadership Conference, the Legislature's Public Higher Education Caucus, and large teach-ins at Westfield State and UMass Amherst.

We met with student governments and other groups at many of the public campuses.

We sponsored many events such as the "Underground Undergrads" forum about undocumented immigrants' struggles to access higher education.

We met with leaders of the higher education community, including Commissioner Richard Freeland and Education Secretary Paul Reville.

All our efforts are geared toward building a powerful grassroots movement for affordable, accessible, well-funded public higher education!

THANK YOU RAVI!

Ravi Khanna, Administrative and Development Director, has left PHENOM to pursue a new career opportunity.

Initially hired as a fundraiser, Ravi also played other critical roles behind the scenes. He implemented administrative systems and did all the little things that allow the Board and the staff to do their work more effectively and efficiently.

Ravi is taking his passion for social justice to one of PHENOM's funders! He is working for RESIST, which funds activist organizing. We will miss him but are thrilled that he has kindly agreed to stay on for a while as a very part-time consultant.

Best wishes, Ravi, for your continued success.

Welcome to PHENOMenial News, published twice a year—Fall and Spring—to coincide with the school semesters.

We welcome your comments and suggestions.

We are extremely grateful to the **Massachusetts Teachers Association** for printing this issue of PHENOMenial News.

We also want to thank the **Ben and Jerry Foundation** and **RESIST** for their continued support.

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PHENOM MEMBERS HELP START NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

By Heike Schotten, Assistant Professor of Political Science, UMass Boston, PHENOM Board

When I first heard about the California Faculty Association's (CFA) National Higher Education meeting, I knew I wanted to attend. CFA is the faculty union for the California State University system. This experienced group of activists had sent out a call to public higher education faculty across the U.S. to convene in Los Angeles in January 2011 to build a movement for public higher education.

All I knew about them was their call to action and the draft statement of principles they put together—which I found compelling.

I packed my bag and headed to LAX, strangely eager to spend an entire weekend networking with other faculty inside a hotel whose biggest selling point was that it was a short shuttle ride from the airport. I was not disappointed.

The folks from CFA were smart, competent, gracious, and well organized. They greeted us with food, an agenda, capable staff, and incisive analysis.

Over 70 faculty from 21 states attended the conference. They came from Massachusetts and Vermont, Texas and Nebraska, Washington



The campaign principles and the national launch video can be found at <http://futureofhighered.org>.

and Hawaii. Many were involved in their local unions, though not all, and some were leaders of their statewide unions. Everyone had similar problems and political positions with regard to privatization, student debt, elimination of programs, administrator salary raises, state disinvestment, and the movement away from education and toward "job training."

Refocusing the conversation, energy, and resources on quality, affordable, accessible public higher education for all was the shared conclusion.

Everyone agreed that this new movement we were there to build must go beyond unions as its organizing base and, to be truly grassroots, include not only faculty but students, parents, and everyday citizens and residents of the U.S. All of these people have a stake in accessible public higher education.

We all recognized that affordable, quality public higher education is an issue that everyone in the U.S. should

care about, and that working toward this goal can reinvigorate an increasingly defunct and abandoned public sector.

It became clear that if we, the direct and most obvious stakeholders in our work, do not stand up and fight for it, public higher education will gradually be diluted and destroyed.

The campaign was launched on, May 17, 2011 when CFA President Lillian Taiz led off the group of faculty from around the country and leaders of national organizations who addressed the National Press Club in Washington DC.

The continued connection I have had with the people at this conference since January inspires hope for the future of this movement. It has the potential to ignite a national conversation and even a national transformation regarding the place of public higher education in this country. I hope that PHENOM will be an active participant.

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PN interviews Sen. Rosenberg

Sen. Rosenberg: We are trying to broaden the active participation of members of the Legislature in the issues relating to public higher education. About 6 or 8 years ago, we created the Higher Education Committee, separate from K-12, allowing a group of legislators to focus on issues of public higher education. But that's only about 16 people and we wanted to broaden it.

PN: What do you hope the Caucus will accomplish?

Sen. Rosenberg: We're trying to create a coalition that cuts across the three segments that can work with groups like PHENOM, the Board of Higher Education, and the state and community college associations to form an achievable agenda and try to move it forward. We want to create an agenda we can all get behind that will advance the interests of public higher education and those it serves.

PN: How has the Caucus been received in the Legislature?

Sen. Rosenberg: I would say it's a slow but positive start. It takes a couple of terms usually for a caucus to build momentum. I think we're making progress attracting members and starting to do some work that suggests it's worth being part of the Caucus.

PN: What is the Caucus thinking about doing in 2011-12?

Sen. Rosenberg: We're interested in the Vision Project

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A PHENOM Director Profile: Donald Coverdale

PHENOMENAL NEWS interviewed Donald Coverdale, a retired high school counselor, who joined PHENOM's Board of Directors in late 2010.

PHENOMENAL NEWS (PN): You were a high school guidance counselor in East Boston. What did you see as the biggest obstacles to more students attending college?

Coverdale: Preparation and financial aid. As counselors, we spent a lot of time finding educational opportunities and financial aid for our students, especially first generation students. These are the children of post office workers, policemen, city and state workers. Counselors in the schools spend a lot of time piecing together scholarships from a lot different of sources. But we also have to make sure kids are applying to college in the first place. It's not just money—it's also about values and priorities and messages from families. There are lots of opportunities out there and many students and parents are just not aware of them. We need to play up our public colleges more. The public colleges have really tried to put in retention programs and support services—they are committed to urban first generation children.

PN: What do you think would help make college more accessible for these students?

Coverdale: A focus on achievement. We should guarantee access for students who achieve. Parents should know that if standards are successfully met, then the state would take care of them financially. We should start talking to parents in 3rd grade. The Adams scholarship is a joke since fees are not covered and they are so much more than tuition. Scholarships have to be real—don't play games with us. The standards and the incentives have to be clear well ahead of time.

It would also be good for the state to work more in partnership with community agencies—to encourage tutoring in addition to sports. Students spend many hours at after school recreation programs. They should be more than just a baby-sitting service; they could provide academic support. Education is a continuous lifelong process....things always change....so we need to create a love for learning. Smart people can recover from whatever life throws at them. We're in this together—parents, the community, the schools, the state.

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PHENOM at the State House

public college for residents of Massachusetts in need of financial assistance. The two students and one former student told their personal stories and tied them to the societal need for more college graduates. Their common theme was: improving access is important but it's not enough by itself. Re-

to cover the tuition and fees for the final year at a

PN: What organizations are you involved with?

Coverdale: I have been on the Board of the Massachusetts School Counselors Association (MASCA) representing urban counselors. This is MASCA's 50th anniversary and I recently got an award for making a difference—for being a co-founder of the Urban Counselors Association. We encourage MASCA to discuss urban issues—very different from questions faced in the suburbs—such as financial aid and motivation. We are making inroads with the education dept. There was no money for guidance counselors in No Child Left Behind, but now in Race to the Top there are funds for counseling. We are working on a bill in Massachusetts that every elementary school should have a guidance counselor.

PN: What drew you to PHENOM?

Coverdale: I went to all state schools and so did my daughters so I always felt strongly about state schools. It's unbelievable that Massachusetts is among the lowest in supporting higher education, and I was attracted to PHENOM because it fights to upgrade funding. I also really liked that PHENOM was advocating for free community college. But PHENOM has not yet captured the spirit of the grassroots: students and parents—everyone needs to know what PHENOM is doing. There are way too few people participating. Imagine if all the students and parents of our system were texting their Reps and Senators!

PN: Any final comments?

Coverdale: I am a preacher and I know that everyone has gifts—we just need to uncover and nurture them. Everyone needs encouragement and guidance towards a pathway to careers and colleges.



tention and graduation rates are equally important. As Stasha said, "The Finish Line Grant stands as a mediator of this problem of high costs and compromised graduation rates, by helping students who face struggles getting through their final year (or who are looking forward to at some point having a final year). Students would see this grant as a motivator and potential enabler for the completion of their degree." Continued on page 8

Mobilizing from the Classroom to the State House



Flash teach-in, April 14, 2011. Photo by Amy Todd.



Legislative Call-In Day, April 6, 2011.

PHENOM educates, advocates, organizes, and unites. The question we always face is how much of our resources to put toward campus efforts, and how much to bringing people together in Boston. While it's easier (and may have more impact in the long run) to connect with people on the campuses, our elected and appointed officials are in Boston.

We need the politicians to match their rhetoric with their actions.

Whether it's funding for union contracts, adequate staffing in our classrooms and offices, affordable education for our students. or maintenance of our facilities—these all depend on adequate funding for our campuses. We've never heard a legislator say public higher education is not important, but apparently only a mobilization of our constituencies will prompt them to appropriate the funds. And the heart of that mobilization will come from campus constituencies and community allies.

This spring saw an upsurge in concern about preserving the public sector. With this energy came new tactics like flash teach-ins to add to the standard call-in day and rally.

Support for Wisconsin public sector workers March 2, 2011.



Messages for Revenue Committee, May 11, 2011.



THE BIG PICTURE—AND A BOOK TO HELP US UNDERSTAND IT

By Ferd Wulkan

Every day we read about new attacks on the public sector, about Congress' shredding of the social safety net, and about the privatization of everything from prisons to human services to the military. These are driven by a corporate elite with an ambitious agenda and a gleam in their eyes as they see this as an opportune time to push hard to extend their wealth, their control and their reach even further. They have declared class war, and higher education is a key battleground in this class war.

As we fight our day-to-day, year-to-year battles in higher education, it helps to look around us and see how those battles fit in this bigger context. Higher education is a big business and three quarters of college students nationally attend public colleges (closer to half in Massachusetts), so the corporate elite wants greater control of those colleges. This is true for a few major reasons.

First, who can afford to go to college, who is encouraged to go, and what gets taught—these matter to the elite because these factors select, shape and mold the technocrats, the managers, the politicians, the policy makers and opinion leaders for years to come. This is the context for the attack on tenure (and therefore academic freedom), the increased use of contingent labor (adjuncts and graduate students), the increasing sense of college as “job training” rather than broad education, and the fact that the entire increase in college graduates in the past 40 years has come from the upper half of the income distribution.

Second, there is tremendous untapped potential for profit in higher education. Most clearly, we are seeing the rapid increase in the market share of for-profit colleges. Public

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PN interviews Sen. Rosenberg

that the Board of Higher Education has created as long as it doesn't cut into the base budgets of campuses because it's a way to knit together the 3 segments of the higher education community and to show people that we have an efficient, productive system that's worth investing in.

PN: How do you see PHENOM and the Caucus working together?

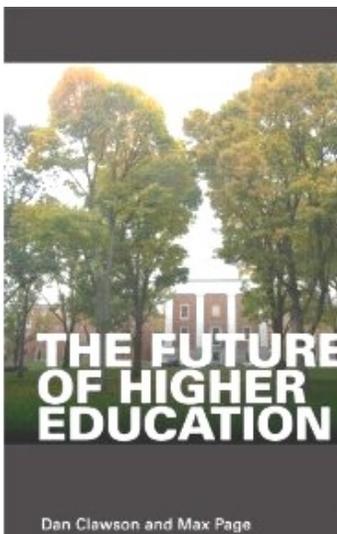
colleges compete with the private sector, so increasing access and affordability at public colleges is hardly a priority to the profiteers! See for example Bristol Community College where students who can afford to pay more can jump to the front of the line and take some of their classes via Princeton Review. The privateers also want to take over more of the operations of our public colleges—construction, renovation, food services, book stores, child care, etc.—and pay less in wages and much less in benefits.

Finally, the privateers know that to the extent that the public treasury is bled dry, there will be more impetus to parcel services out to the private sector. The elite wants to shrink the size of government so as to open up new areas to the market. There is profit to be made in running prisons, hospitals and, yes, colleges and universities. The easiest way to shrink the size of government is to reduce its budget... and then say “there's no money”.

So in their twisted logic, taxes are bad and budget cuts are good.

Intrigued by these ideas? They are fully fleshed out in a new, easy-to-read, short book, *The Future of Higher Education* by PHENOM members Dan Clawson and Max Page, both faculty members at UMass Amherst. Published by Routledge Press, the chapter titles succinctly sum up what supporters of public higher education need to know: “Who Governs the University?” “Who Pays?” “Who Goes?” “Who Works?” Most interesting is the last chapter, “Choosing a Future.” It suggests how things could realistically be different if the “University is not for sale” and public higher education is to live up to its promise of educating and inspiring masses of people in this country.

Chapters end with discussion questions so the book is perfect for instructors to use in class.



Order through PHENOM's website www.phenomonline.org and click on “Buy Books” on the left. You get a choice of vendors and PHENOM gets a few percent at no extra cost to you.

Sen. Rosenberg: PHENOM is trying to do the same thing outside of state government that we're trying to do inside. There is enormous potential to work together to create a mass of public support. I've said before that on a given day there are a million people in Massachusetts who have a vested interest in public higher education. The problem is they don't speak with one voice and they have no coordinated strategy for securing support for their interest from government. And that's what we want to change. That's what PHENOM wants to do and that's what the Caucus wants to do.

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Yes, we encourage people to patronize locally-owned independent book stores. But if you must buy online, please go through PHENOM's website.

PHENOM could mobilize more people, shape more policies, do more media work, educate more communities, build more alliances, do more visible actions, offer more internships....if we only had the resources.

As the articles in this issue of *PHENOMenial News* illustrate, we are at a moment of crisis—and opportunity—in the world of public higher education.

PHENOM has shown its ability to bring together the different issues, the different constituencies and sectors, and all the key players to support public higher education. Your financial support will allow us to continue and expand this work.

Here are a few ways you can help.

1. Make a contribution – see below – any amount makes a difference.
2. Ask any organization with which you work to contribute to PHENOM.
3. Host a house party for PHENOM – contact us and we'll show you how easy this is.
4. Refer us to potential major donors.
5. Let us know of grant opportunities we may not know about.

Contact us at www.phenomonline.org or call 413.461.3300.

Your support allows PHENOM to advocate for an affordable, accessible, high quality and well-funded public higher education system in Massachusetts. Please give as generously as you can. You can mail your check to the address below or make an online contribution by visiting our website: www.phenomonline.org.

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January 3, 2011: Higher Education Summit convened by PHENOM



Front Row L-R: PHENOM's Ferd Wulkan, Melissa Urban, Stasha Lampert, Max Page, and Ken Haar; Gretchen Manning from the Community Colleges Executive Office, Mass. Community College Council President Joe LeBlanc, and Fred Clark from the Council of State University Presidents.

Back Row L-R: David McDermott from the UMass President's Office, Massachusetts Teachers Association President Paul Toner, Neil MacInnes-Barker from the Student Advisory Council, PHENOM's Alex Kulenovic, Bill Hart from the Community Colleges Executive Office, Representative Sean Garballey, and Nancy McGovern from AFSCME Council 93.

Not pictured are Mark Dailey from Senator Rosenberg's office, Higher Education Commissioner Richard Freeland, Roz Jordan from the Joint Committee on Higher Education, and Saeyun Lee from the Office of Secretary of Education Paul Reville.

Continued from page 4 **PHENOM at the State House**

PHENOM members also expressed support for two other financial aid bills. House bill 351 (found at <http://www.malegislature.gov/Bills/187/House/H00351>) would limit to 50% the proportion of state financial aid that went to students attending private colleges. The Education Rewards Grant Program to Assist Low-Income Workers Act (H977/S42) (http://www.liveworkthrive.org/home/home/Key_hearing_on_Education_Rewards_Grant_program_set_for_May_11) would preserve the only state grant available to low-income students enrolled in college less than half time.