

PHENOMenal News

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1

FALL-WINTER 2009

Preserving the Public Option

In good economic times (remember those?), public higher education has usually seen a small increase in state support. In bad times, we get hit hard since the politicians count on our colleges to raise student fees to make up for the shortfall. For years, administrators, students, staff, alumni and faculty have grumbled about this. PHENOM is determined to change this situation by launching a 3-year campaign to "Just Be Average".

If Massachusetts supported public higher education at the average level of the 50 states,

- We could decrease class sizes and increase support services.
- We could hire and adequately pay more full time long-term faculty and staff.
- We could implement free community college.
- We could improve retention

and graduation rates.

- We could increase access for poor families, immigrants and minorities.

only spends 3.9% of its budget on higher education. Among the states that do better than Massachusetts are not only California,

Michigan and New York but also Mississippi, Alabama, and Alaska.

The campaign will have an intermediate focus on the 2010 election and a longer-term focus on the FY 2013 state budget. This fall our focus has been on strengthening our organizational capacity, enlarging our base of support, and broadening our coalition. PHENOM re-

cently hired a part-time organizer to expand and strengthen our campus based organizing work.

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PHENOM Rally on Boston Common

Only four states spend a smaller percentage of their revenues on public higher education than Massachusetts. Where the national average is 6.5%, Massachusetts

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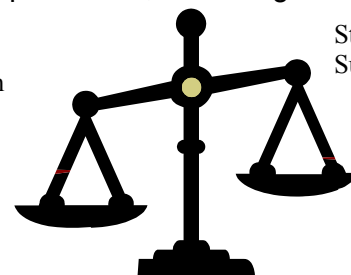
The Tipping Point

For the first time ever, students are contributing more to the university budget than the state. This "Tipping Point" may have come sooner, or may come a little later, at other public colleges, but the trend is clear: the state is disinvesting in public higher education and the burden is being passed on to students and their families.

Once upon a time, our colleges were

Tuition
And
Fees

State
Support



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Updates

Mid-Year Cuts

On October 29, the Governor announced mid-year (9C) cuts to many areas of state government. Funding for state and community colleges and the University of Massachusetts is being reduced by \$62 million, but that funding will be replaced by the use of federal fiscal stimulus funds. While this sounds good, there are still big problems, including:

1. A lot of salaries previously paid from state funds will now be paid from federal funds. This means the campuses have to pay the cost of fringe benefits (about 25%), resulting in significant cuts.
2. The federal stimulus funds run out after this year, so higher education will start off in a very big hole next year.

It will be up to all of us to advocate for both state and additional federal resources for next year and beyond.

Federal Stimulus Funds

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Inspector General issued an "alert memorandum" dated September 2009 which documents loopholes in the federal stimulus law that allowed at least 3 states, including Massachusetts, to violate the intent of the law by *cutting* rather than increasing spending on public education. This report is, at least in part, a result of the formal complaint PHENOM had filed with the US DOE. A subsequent letter from the US DOE clarified that Massachusetts did not violate the law, but it puts the state on notice that its spending on public education is being closely monitored. PHENOM will continue its vigilance to make sure our public colleges get every penny the law requires.

Stretched to the Breaking Point

Community College enrollments are up over 10% since last year while funding has been cut. One creative solution — Bunker Hill is now offering classes that start at 11:45 PM and end at 2:30 AM!

No Relief in Higher Ed Relief Bill

Alex Kulenovic testified at the State House to express PHENOM's opposition to legislation that would have implemented "tuition retention".

We look at legislation affecting public higher education through this lens: will it increase affordability and access, and will it provide the funding needed for our colleges to not just admit students but make it likely they will succeed, the funding needed to not just attract top-quality faculty, but to hire accomplished full-timers who will want to stay; funding that will not just be adequate this year, but stable for years to come. Will tuition retention accomplish these goals? Not if it allows the schools to continue substituting tuition and fee dollars for state appropriations. Not if there are no absolute caps on tuition and fee increases and corresponding mandates for increased state funding. While there are some advantages to having colleges retain tuition – better planning, a more sensible balance between tuition and fees – the grave danger in the Higher Ed "Relief" Bill is that it will not just allow, but will provide incentives for the legislature to cut funding even more.

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Welcome to the second issue of our bi-annual **PHENOMenal News**. This newsletter is 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 PHENOMenal News.

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OP-ED: Higher Education: Better Odds than Casinos

By Ken Haar



Ken Haar is an Associate Professor of Education Technology at Westfield State College and is a member of PHENOM's Board of Directors

On November 4, Jeff Bleich, the chairman of the Board of Trustees of the California State University system, wrote an Op Ed piece for the LA Times entitled "*California's higher-education debacle - Watching the decline of the California State University system from within its boardroom mirrors the erosion of the California dream*". In this article Bleich traces the huge economic expansion, and now the crashing economic decline, of California's economy.

Like California from the 1960's through the 1990's, Massachusetts will experience an economic renaissance. All it takes is will.

This rise and fall coincides directly with the investment Californians made in their state public higher education system, starting with the California Master Plan for Higher Education in 1960 and culminating in the layoffs, collapse of financial aid, failure to maintain infrastructure, and reliance on adjunct professors, we see today. For a system that generates \$4.41 in economic activity for every dollar the state invests in it, the California state public higher education is being ignored by the governor and legislature. Yet supporting that

system is the single strongest economic stimulus project the state could enact.

There is a reason that this year's federal stimulus package emphasized the preservation of the stable operation of public education institutions. Public education is the one place where government can invest its revenue and guarantee a return on its investment in the form of increased economic activity both short and long term. Studies in Massachusetts by the University and the State Colleges duplicate the findings in California. Investment in public higher education returns over \$4.00 in economic activity for each dollar invested.

Yet we in Massachusetts siphoned off stimulus revenue targeted for public education in order to fund other budget priorities that do not stimulate the economy. What is left behind is a public higher education system in shambles: where the funding gap (the amount of new money we would need to sustain the system) jumped from \$400 million dollars to nearly \$900 million dollars in two years. We rank 46th in per capita support for public higher education; our students pay the 7th highest rate in the country for their public higher education; our college attendance rates declined to below 50% of high school graduates this year simply because the financial aid we support has dropped by more than 50% over the past 15 years. Whole segments of our society can't afford to get the education that would allow them to fill the 60,000 jobs in the commonwealth that are unfilled due to lack of properly educated applicants.

This is all fixable with the will to invest in the future of this state. First, raise the income tax to 6% and designate most of the new revenue to investment in public higher education in order to close the funding gap, and bring financial aid back to the level it was 20 years ago, when it paid 80% of the cost of a public higher education degree. Pass the law that says that 75% of the courses taught in our public institutions of higher education must be taught by full time faculty. This will bring a rush of the best and the brightest to our state as the one place where it is seen that faculty are valued for their contributions to the economic well-being of the state. Start each of the 29 building projects targeted by the higher education bond bill passed last year. Since our colleges are spread geographically around the state, these projects will result in new jobs throughout the entire state. Massachusetts will experience an economic boom within a year that will benefit the entire population; in a few years it will generate enough in new tax revenue to fund the many other underfunded areas of state government.

Like California from the 1960's through the 1990's, Massachusetts will experience an economic renaissance. All it takes is will. The bond bill was passed, so release the money. The financial aid programs are there, but underfunded. The 75% bill has been filed and is ready to be enacted. All it takes now is the will to pay for it. And when we find that will, we all will win \$4.00 for each dollar we spend. Those are way better odds than the lottery or any casino that may be heading our way.

Expanding Access To Higher Education

Ninety people from around the state spent a whole Saturday at PHENOM's long-awaited conference, "**Expanding Access to Higher Education**". Coordinated by **Cristy Tondeur** (Westfield State College) and **Vanessa Martinez** (Holyoke Community College), the conference brought together students, professionals, and advocates concerned with expanding access.



Workshops such as "Silenced Voices Speak Out: Obstacles and Opportunities for ALANA Students", "Opening the Doors to Higher Education for Low-Income Working Adults" and "Power and Historical Memory for Under-Represented Student Populations" were lively and provocative. Lots of people signed up to help with two specific legislative initiatives:

- ⇒ The Workers' Pathways to Self-Sufficiency Act (S.37) which would fund the Educational Rewards Grant Program for low-income part-time students hoping to access jobs in high-demand fields. It would also provide pilot funding for student success programs such as intensive advising, counseling, tutoring and child care to help Educational Rewards students complete a degree or certificate.
- ⇒ The Education Opportunity Bill (H.1175 and S.603) which would allow undocumented students with at least 3 years of attendance and a diploma from a Massachusetts high school to pay in-state tuition rates at our public colleges (see box on right).

The conference was amazing and I got a lot from it. My first lesson: I discovered that teen mothers who want to return to school do not get a lot of help from the schools or financial aid. Something should be done because they are capable of succeeding as well as other students. My 2nd lesson: immigrant students tend to suffer when it's time to start college if their parents are undocumented. I found it disturbing that even those students who went through high school in Massachusetts would find they need to pay much higher costs for college than everyone else.

TelmaTalla, UMass Dartmouth

I truly enjoyed the workshops. It was so refreshing to hear all the college students speaking out and fully participating. Every college campus should have a PHENOM program on board.

Kathy Lewis, Mount Wachusett Community College

Punishing Students, Punishing our State

Every year, Massachusetts punishes long-term, high achieving students and denies itself additional revenue, knowledge and skills. We do this by charging children of undocumented immigrants out-of-state tuition rates at public colleges. This means that many good kids who have done nothing wrong and have lived here much of their lives are effectively priced out of college.

The Solution: Pending legislation (H.1175 and S.603) would have Massachusetts join New York, Illinois, Michigan, California, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, Kansas, Nebraska, and Wisconsin in allowing long-term, undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates and gain access to higher education, while contributing an estimated \$2.5 million in additional revenue to the state.

PHENOM is working with the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Association and the Student immigrant Movement on this bill. We are asking our members to talk with their legislators about how passage would benefit our students and our communities. for more information, please see <http://www.miracoalition.org/issues/state/higher-education>.



Expanding Access To Higher Education....



Student Bridges is a student-initiated program connecting UMass Amherst students with local community-based organizations and schools in Holyoke and Springfield.



It's not enough to talk – we need powerful Advocacy!



Conference-goers learned as much from each other as from the presenters.



Workshops didn't just identify barriers; they discussed pathways for overcoming them.



Higher Education for the Teen Parent: A very personal discussion about why it's so important and how it can be done.



Workshop leaders came from many groups including the Crittenton Women's Union, TRIO programs at Massasoit Community College and Worcester State, the ACLU, the Massachusetts Immigrant & Refugee Association, and the Center for Digital Storytelling.



Happy PHENOM members after a long Annual Meeting

Fifty PHENOM members, some of whom had already spent most of the day at the Democratic Party's State Convention, gathered for PHENOM's first official Annual Meeting on June 6, 2009 at Springfield Technical Community College. Main themes that emerged from the lively discussions include:

- The importance of coalitions, alliances, and outreach to high schools;
- Leadership development through trainings, internships, campus councils, and concrete activities for people to plug into;
- Raising revenues in a progressive manner by becoming part of a broader coalition and continuing our work on proper distribution of federal stimulus funds;
- Continuing our work on Affordability and Access by sponsoring a conference, advocating for MassGrant and Free Community College, and ideally having storefronts in every large city!
- Building on our legislative efforts around need-based aid and funding for our campuses by holding more meetings with legislators in districts and on campuses, issuing a legislative report card, and working toward the creation of a legislative Public Higher Ed Caucus
- Increased visibility through new student orientations, campus radio, in-class presentations, T shirts, and buttons.

Many of these priorities are reflected in the work we are doing this year, including the major campaign described on page 1, the conference to Expand Access to Higher Education, and the Campus Camp Wellstone training planned for January.

Tipping Point

(Continued from page 1)

state-supported; now they are state-assisted, soon they will be merely state-located.

Net tuition and fees paid by Massachusetts students was 20% higher than the national average in 2007-08 and has increased substantially since then. Students all across the state are angry, and rightfully so. There were loud demonstrations last year, and no doubt there will be more this year.

While PHENOM encourages student activism in response to the crisis, we also encourage a deeper look: who is the appropriate target of the anger? PHENOM appreciates the dilemma faced by college administrators – most of them want to avoid cutting staff, faculty or programs, and turn to fee increases as an easy source of funds in the face of declining state support.

We believe the anger over fee increases must be channeled into demands for renewed investment by the state.

Training the Next Generation

PHENOM is pleased to be partnering with Wellstone Action to offer an exciting one and a half day training on January 30-31 in Amherst.

Campus Camp Wellstone will help participants gain a better understanding of power, campaign planning, media work, messaging, organizing tactics, coalition building and leadership development – just what every PHENOM activist and campus organizer wants to learn!

The training is free (except for a \$10 registration fee) and housing will be provided. Campus Camp Wellstone is inspired by Paul Wellstone, a former U.S. Senator and passionate community activist, who died in a plane crash in 2002.

To sign up or get more information, please contact Alex Kulenovic at alex.kulenovic@gmail.com or 617-291-5362.

SUPPORT PHENOM SO WE CAN CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR AFFORDABLE ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION FOR ALL

PHENOM is the only organization of its kind in the state and, as far as we know, in the country. It brings together current and future students, faculty, staff, alumni, administrators, parents, community-based organizations, and others who have a stake in public higher education to work toward the high quality public education system that the residents of Massachusetts deserve.

All of the phenomenal activities highlighted in this newsletter were accomplished with very limited resources. We rely on support from students, staff, faculty, parents and alumni and organizations that represent them on campus and in the community. PHENOM is appreciated and valued by higher education stakeholders all across the state and is poised to have a much deeper impact in the coming years. We need your support to make this possible.

There are a number of ways you can support PHENOM. Make a generous donation or become a member. You can mail in your contribution or do it on-line by visiting www.phenomonline.org and clicking on the "*Become a Member*" or "*Donate*" buttons.

You can now also support PHENOM by buying your books and school supplies from a number of on-line stores, or by purchasing socially responsible fair trade gifts by visiting one of the on-line stores listed on our website. The store will donate a portion of the total sale to PHENOM. Learn more by clicking on the "Buy books and support PHENOM" button at www.phenomonline.org.

If you would like to learn more about PHENOM, or about how you can join this growing movement in support of public higher education, please email massphenomonline@gmail.com or call us at 413-577-4121.

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. On the website you can also learn how you can support PHENOM as you purchase books, supplies and gifts!

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Please tell your friends!

Preserving the Public Option

(Continued from page 1)

In conjunction with partner organizations, we are developing a broad statement calling upon all candidates running for statewide and legislative office in the 2010 election to endorse this "race to the median". This winter, we will begin gathering tens of thousands of signatures in support of this statement.

During the election campaign, from the spring through the fall, our campaign will have a presence at all major candidate events across the state. We will show candidates that large numbers of their constituents are demanding a solution to the crisis in public higher education. A media campaign will accompany the grassroots effort.

There are several reasons why PHENOM activists designed this campaign and why we believe our chances of success are higher than at any previous time. Thanks to President Obama, PHENOM's work, the prospects for a higher education caucus in the legislature, and most importantly, the economic realities, there is a broader understanding that higher education, and especially public higher education, is key to a prosperous future of our residents and the state. We also believe that over the next two years the state's economy will begin to turn around. As that happens we want to have built broad support for increased state investment in public higher education.

While there's been lots of public debate over the "public option" in health insurance, we need to preserve the public option in higher education!