

# PHENOMenal News

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Winter 2011–2012

## PHENOM Convenes Advocates

by Ken Haar, Westfield State University

What began in January 2011 as an attempt to get all the advocates of public higher education in the same room to support the FY 2012 higher education budget evolved into regular meetings with those same advocates working together to fight for public higher education on a number of fronts.

The summit's first legislative success was to amend the casino bill. In its original form, it produced no revenue for public higher education. The summit pushed to insure that 5% of the state's annual casino revenues would go to support public higher education. This influx of approximately \$20 million per year is intended to supplement, not supplant, the state allocations to public higher education.

Since August, this summit group has met monthly to work on proposals. As our trust has grown, so has our power—with representation from the Higher Education Committee in the Legislature, the Public Higher Education

Caucus of legislators, the Councils of Presidents of the Community Colleges and State Universities, the UMass President's office, the higher education unions, the Secretary of Education's office, the Commissioner of Higher Education's office, student groups and PHENOM's Board.

The summit group has called for a supplemental appropriation to this year's budget (fiscal 2012) that would provide for increased funding for critical needs: financial aid, deferred maintenance, funding collective bargaining agreements. These have been left to the campuses to fund with increased student fees.

In January, the summit group plans to launch a "Top Ten Reasons to Support Public Higher Education" public relations and organizing campaign to increase funding for public higher education in the fiscal 2013 budget.



UMass Boston Professor Heike Schotten addresses the **Education for the 99%** marchers in Boston on November 2, 2011.

Hopefully all PHENOM and public higher education supporters will join us in asking our legislators to back these funding efforts.

See "Top Ten Reasons to Support Public Higher Education" on page 7.

## INTERVIEW WITH EMILY ROUND, UMass Amherst PHENOM member

**PHENOMENAL NEWS (PN):** What got you interested in PHENOM?

**Emily Round:** I found PHENOM by accident looking for an internship. When I checked out what they were all about I was really impressed with the work they were doing around



funding public higher education. I quickly realized that I already knew who they were as they had helped organize the very successful WTF (Where's The Funding?) teach-in last spring. The fact that they fight for something that I, as well as most other students,

can relate to in such a positive and outgoing manner was one of the things that had me sold. I've always been interested in sustainability but usually through an environmental lens. The chance to get to work on and learn more about issues of equity and economy that affect the whole campus also got me interested.

**PN:** As a newcomer to PHENOM, what are some of your impressions of the organization?

**Round:** PHENOM is full of energy and people who are ready to get work done. There are people from all different backgrounds and age groups coming together for a common cause. The organization runs smoothly and isn't afraid to tackle

new issues as they come up, such as rallying for higher education at Occupy Boston **Continued on page 3**

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## Higher Education for the 99%

by Alex Kulenovic, PHENOM Organizing Director

These are very interesting and challenging times for public higher education, dominated by scarcity in funding and “solutions” that do not fit the problems.

In Massachusetts, we've been hit by horrific cuts in the last two recessions. Since 2001 we have lost about 40% of our public funding.

### Cuts transform campuses

Our campuses are transforming in fundamental ways. All institutions have dramatically raised fees. Many have shed staff or shelved hiring. Due to a bad economy and worse job market, many campuses have seen an incredible surge in enrollment, stretching already scarce teaching and support resources to fit an ever-increasing numbers of students.

Looking for any and all sources of funds, campuses are now desperate to attract more out-of-state students and students who need less financial aid.

Federal stimulus funds allowed Massachusetts to defer some of these effects. PHENOM and many others fought hard to apply stimulus funds to higher education. But all observers predicted an inevitable cliff, and in last year's budget Massachusetts fell off it, with a severe cut of 17%.

### Stuck with a new normal?

Ominously, there seems to be an emerging consensus among policymakers that this situation—being starved of resources, passing costs on to students and families, retooling institutions to serve wealthier students—might be unfortunate, but is nevertheless a “new normal.”

We are told the money simply isn't there, and may never be there.

The imaginations even of many advocates are limited to tiny, incremental increases at best. More disturbing is the recent, microscopic, set-aside to experiment with new programs in the hopes that if colleges can just show the public that they can operate as leaner, smarter, and more self-sustaining institutions, they can attract more investment.

### Boston Foundation rips community colleges

Meanwhile we had the recent Boston Foundation report about community colleges, which isn't shy about proposing sweeping changes.

It argues that the problem with our community colleges (and probably beyond) is that they have too much autonomy, too much local democracy, and waste too much of their resources on mushy stuff like literature and abstract brainy things like philosophy. They should concentrate more on just cranking out more workers! The Department of Higher Education, they say, should not be an advocate for funding. It

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## PHENOM ADVANCES THE NATIONAL “CAMPAIGN FOR THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION”

by Ron Weisberger, Professor at Bristol Community College, PHENOM Board

The 2<sup>nd</sup> national meeting of the **Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (CFHE)** was held at UMass Boston November 4-6. Members of **PHENOM** have been involved with this emerging group since its inception, when representatives from a variety of higher education organizations first met in Los Angeles in January 2011. The success of that meeting led to the launching of the Campaign May 11 at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. (see PHENOM News, Vol. 3 Issue 2).

Almost 100 people gathered in Boston, representing a variety of higher education unions, organizations and student groups. They charted the course of the Campaign for the coming year. In plenary sessions and

breakout groups, participants shared what was occurring on their campuses and regions.

It became clear that each local and regional group needs to fight issues such as privatization and disinvestment in their own areas. A national group is needed to coordinate a national conversation on what is occurring throughout the country—and to offer resources to help in the struggle for quality, affordable and accessible higher education for all Americans.

The meeting established a new **Center for the Future of Higher Education**. This “think tank” will conduct research and issue reports to provide a counter-narrative to right-wing messages and to mainstream foundations

such as Gates and Lumina.

In April 2012 the CFHE will coordinate with the United States Student Association for a week of national actions to promote “affordable, accessible, high quality education for the 99 %.”

PHENOM will be represented on the CFHE Steering Committee, made up of representatives of organizations which have endorsed the CFHE principles. A smaller Coordinating Work Group appointed by the Steering Committee will be responsible for implementing decisions of the larger committee.

Several working groups were set up, and the next national meeting will be held in May or June at a community college in Michigan.

<http://futureofhighered.org/>

**CFHE Campaign for the Future of Higher Education**

### *Interview with Emily Round—continued from page 1*

or working with other groups to save student health services. Something I've found very interesting and helpful is the wealth of resources available on our website ([www.phenomononline.org](http://www.phenomononline.org)).

The facts and figures are astounding and show why the work we're doing is important. One of my favorites is “Key Data about Massachusetts Public Higher Education” which was updated this December. It lays out facts in a compact and yet powerful way. Did you know that Massachusetts now spends 25% more on incarceration than it does in public higher ed?

**PN:** You've done some work on the student debt issue. Tell us what you've done and where you think PHENOM should go with it.

**Round:** I knew very little about student debt coming into this, which is kind of embarrassing for someone who has student loans. It's also one of the reasons that the work I've been doing is

so important—students need to know the implications of having loans and the reasons that they're taking out more and more of them. I've gotten a great opportunity to learn more about these issues and take action.

One of the things I worked on this semester was helping put together a screening of **Default: The Student Loan Documentary** with a few speakers afterwards who gave empowering talks. Over 70 students came! That's 70 more students who are now more informed about student debt and knowing there is action that can be taken to stop this. At the screening I worked on collecting photo-petitions from students. The theme was “Imprisoned by Debt”, and students wore black and white striped shirts and, instead of holding an intake number, they held up a sign with how much debt they'd be in upon graduating.

As I mentioned before, this is really important because it affects so many

students in such a drastic way. Education is a public good, and Massachusetts benefits from its people being educated on many different levels. More and more costs are being shifted onto the student with cuts to funding, making it harder and harder for students to afford college.

PHENOM should continue building momentum with a student movement around this. Being on campus, we're surrounded by students who will be greatly affected by student debt once they graduate, or sooner if loans cause them to not finish their degree. There are more than 200,000 students in Massachusetts' public higher ed system, and if we can mobilize them it will be a force to be reckoned with.

**PN:** What are one or two things you hope you can do with PHENOM this coming semester and beyond?

**Round:** Organize the intern office! But really, I'm excited to start working

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## BUILDING A STATEWIDE STUDENT ASSOCIATION: An Interview with Hollywood Aman

*Student leaders from around the state have begun talking about forming a Statewide Student Association (SSA) of the sort found in many other states. Typically organized as a federation of student governments, the SSA allows students to pool resources to have more power as they work on common issues. Hollywood Aman, a PHENOM Board member, is President of the Student Government Association (SGA) at Bunker Hill Community College and is active in the Massachusetts effort.*

**PHENOMENAL NEWS (PN):** What's it been like being president of the SGA?

**Hollywood Aman:** Extremely busy! Bunker Hill is the largest community college in the state and the 8th largest public institution. So there's always so much to do, so many issues to address.

**PN:** What got you interested in an SSA?

**Aman:** Massachusetts is known as a college state and Boston is the biggest college town in the country – but it's not all Harvard and MIT. Our public colleges are not what they're sup-

posed to be. It's unacceptable that we're 45th in the country in funding. So many students can't complete school – not because of anything but finances. An SSA would help because we would bring issues to light and work toward Obama's goal of more college degrees so we can be the most educated country in world. An SSA could hold politicians accountable. I'm so proud to be part of helping to start one.

**PN:** What have you learned about SSA's?

**Aman:** I've seen what has happened in other states. When California tried -- dared -- to cut higher education, students took to the streets and caused chaos; their anger was felt. They were better able to organize because of having an SSA. An SSA could also help fight against what they're doing to teachers – look at Wisconsin and Rhode Island and their ill use of power. With an SSA, students can better stand up for the teachers.

**PN:** What are you and others doing to help start an SSA in Massachusetts?

**Aman:** We're identifying the problems, trying to educate students about our government, trying to branch out and

build chapters in every public school. I went to the Community College Student Leadership Conference – it gave me good opportunity to connect with people and talk about PHENOM and the SSA.

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

**Aman:** We have the same goals and would work well together. There lots of really committed people in PHENOM. I fully expect Alex (Kulenovic) to be a Senator some day!

**PN:** What should people do if they are interested in this idea?

**Aman:** Band together. Follow your heart. Join the movement. Write to me at [massphenom@gmail.com](mailto:massphenom@gmail.com) We have access to information if you want to make a difference.



## ORGANIZING AT HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE



By Nicole Ouimette

Students for Affordable, Accessible and Valuable Education (SAVE) is a club at Holyoke Community College (HCC). It was formed in September 2011 out of a need for a more involved student body to address the over-

whelming concerns of the inaccessibility and unaffordability of public higher education. SAVE addressed the national and statewide student debt crisis during a "Student Speak Out" event at HCC in October 2011 and hopes to continue the hard work of getting students involved on campus and in the community

during the upcoming semesters.

SAVE was started with the help of HCC Anthropology professor Vanessa Martinez and student Francheska Morales. All of us felt that there needed to be a stronger activist presence on HCC's campus. We knew that starting SAVE was the best way to discuss the concerns of student debt and the rising costs of public higher education. PHENOM made SAVE possible by supplying multiple resources and support from board members.

Starting a club on a community college campus is one of the hardest things to do, but SAVE showed that with motivated and dedicated students as well as help from faculty, forming a new club could come with great success. Veronique Leroy, coordinator of HCC's Student Activities helped us get a spot at the Club Fair, which is held each Fall semester. The Club Fair was a

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## GUEST EDITORIAL: STUDENTS CANNOT DO IT ALONE

by Dan McDowell, Student body Vice President at UMass Boston

Massachusetts Residents:

State support for higher education has been on the decline for decades, with no end in sight.

This trend is not only preparing the state for yet another economic disaster, but is pricing its citizens out of the most reliable avenue for social mobility. It is not for ourselves that students organize and fight cuts, faculty layoffs, and fee increases, but for those generations of students who come after us.

We refuse to see our institutions become less accessible and affordable than they have already become. Rather, we aim to organize and mobilize to reverse the cuts being made to our public campuses, schools that have been villainized for the crime of being taxpayer-funded institutions.

For far too long Massachusetts has obsessed over its private universities, while leaving our world class public institutions to decay slowly. Cuts are being made that impact the quality and reputation of our public institutions, with students forced to pay more for less.

This state will soon be forcing our colleges and universities to cut down to the marrow while calling it "cutting waste."

UMass Boston students have started the process of forming a student union that is planning to organize our students against these kinds of cuts, so that others do not face the unreasonable challenge of choosing between picking up extra shifts at work or being in school.

But students cannot do it alone. We need allies.

Specifically, we need the alumni of our 29 campuses and universities to advocate for their alma mater.

We need the business community to stand up and advocate for the colleges and universities that provide the majority of their workforces.

We need our families to stand up and say that their students deserve an affordable, quality education that will not leave them with significant debt.

It is time for the residents of this state to demand that its government once again prioritize education so we can continue to recover, and attract quality, high paying jobs to this state. Without this help, economic prospects will dry up as companies relocate in states that prioritize education and provide them with a sustainable workforce. Join us as we fight for the future of Massachusetts.

*PHENOMenal News* is published twice a year. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

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

Education for the 99% March in Boston, November 2, 2011.



In our work for affordable, accessible, quality public higher education, we see clearly how we—students, faculty, staff—are the 99%. It is the 1% who support privatization, use "austerity" as a tool to drive up student costs and undermine workers' rights, and who care more for profit than quality education for all.



An Occupy UMass Amherst Moment



PHENOM held a call-in day to the Governor at Occupy UMass Amherst soon after partner organization CEPA (Center for Education Policy and Advocacy) mailed him 300 personal letters about funding for higher education.



**Higher Ed for 99%—cont'd from page 2**

needs to focus on running a more efficient edu-factory.

The foundation report ignores the simple facts. Campuses aren't going to have great outcomes when they are starved of resources, staffed by a growing number of exploited part-time workers, and populated by far more students.

Community colleges are going to continue to be the only affordable option for many poor families and are going to continue to have the most diversity: They host the most students of color, the most students with children of their own, the widest range of educational aspirations.

Calling for community colleges to transform into vocational schools sends a message that low-income students and students of color should be funneled into lower-paying jobs, while upper-middle-class and non-minority students

have the privilege to think creatively, discover who they are, and become holistically-educated human beings.

**Occupy reframes the questions**

Into this infuriating excuse for a debate, enter Occupy. The "Occupy Wall Street" encampment in New York, and its many offshoots, resonated with anyone who has had the feeling that the game is rigged. Anyone who suspected that our entire economy, our tax code, our law enforcement, and our government have been made to serve the wealthiest few at the expense of the rest of us, must have at least been tempted to join a rally and even sit in a tent for a while.

While it is a movement that has confused some and certainly bypassed our notions of what a campaign is (with clear demands, strategy, and conditions for victory), it nevertheless has a crystal-clear theme and focus: that there are people in the financial sector who have gotten away with—and been

rewarded for—the crime of the century.

And OWS has added more breadth and depth to that message. The accusation is finally made that the richest 1% don't pay their fair share, that large swaths of our government are bought and don't answer to anyone, and that the workers, the students, the unemployed, the sick, the poor, the old, immigrants, women, and people of color are always the ones who are asked to sacrifice, who are mocked as privileged or lazy, who are made to suffer for profit, who go to prison.

The 99% are certainly not united, and are not homogenous, but we are beginning to recognize who we are, where our power comes from, who the 1% are, and what their stranglehold on power has done.

Even after the Occupy Boston encampment was raided and removed (the longest running continuous occupation to date) and while most of the camps are gone, the movement continues. It has already had its impact. Inequality is the

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**Organizing at HCC—cont'd from page 4**

success, with over 40 people showing interest in SAVE. Many students voiced their concerns about student debt. Debt is the underlying concern of public higher education costs, which is important to keep in mind when forming a club like SAVE on any campus.

At the "Student Speak Out" event, students were free to voice their opinions and concerns surrounding the student debt crisis after a short dialogue among representatives of PHENOM, the community and HCC students and faculty. The event was a huge success, with over 120 people in a room that only fit 80. Some faculty brought their classes to take part in the discussion about student debt.

Getting faculty support is very important for organizing on campus as they have many resources, such as students, access to other clubs/organizations and can help get one connected to the administration.

Next semester, SAVE hopes to organize two more events, plug into PHENOM's statewide campaigns, and create an even more visible presence on campus. Events like a student debt teach-in or a dialogue on free education are only two ideas that SAVE is

thinking of pursuing. As president of SAVE, I am hoping that we can be the catalyst for more community college students to form a student-active and faculty-supported presence as the struggle for more affordable public higher education continues.

**SAVE**  
your education  
your school  
your future  
(but how?)

**SAVE** First Meeting  
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**Interview—continued from page 3**

on building a student movement around the student debt issue. It's so important that we get students involved and really show them that they have the power to make a difference. I hope that I can make something that seems scary and like an insurmountable task not only approachable but winnable.

**PN:** Any final thoughts?

**Round:** If you can, donate to PHENOM! The reason we're able to do such great work at UMass Amherst and other campuses is from donations from people like you. PHENOM is really a great organization which is working to make great changes and I've had an outstanding time helping them do so.

**Higher Ed for 99%—cont'd from page 6**

new national concern. The concept of the 99% and the 1% is out there. While hardly a new concept it has a new dimension and a new understanding. "Class warfare" has long been going on, but we are finally fighting back.

Activist groups are using the same language, adopting a similar analysis, and becoming braver and more confrontational. With the exhausting, exhilarating, but largely unsustainable tactic of permanent occupation behind us, the movement can only become more focused. Solidarity is now less a buzzword and more simply the way we all expect to behave. We may not be united, but we will get there.

**A 99% vision for public higher education**

In many ways, this is the broader vision we have been waiting for, and in public higher education we must have our own version of that vision. That vision must include bold demands, or no demands at all, but rather convictions that of course institutions of higher learning are a public good.

PHENOM and our allies are launching TOP TEN REASONS FOR THE STATE TO INVEST IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION, a new campaign aimed at securing the best possible FY 2013 budget for our campuses. Backed by data, compelling personal stories, and economic arguments, the campaign is designed to engage the media, mobilize our constituents, convince the public, and encourage the politicians to act. It was really hard to get it down to just 10 reasons! But here they are (in no particular order):

- Keep costs affordable for all Massachusetts residents
- Invest now for higher revenues later
- A well-educated population is healthier and happier
- Provide the best education by hiring more full-time faculty and staff
- Create jobs by modernizing campus buildings
- Decrease the debt burden for hard-working students and their families
- Provide better support services so our students succeed
- Help our businesses fill positions needing educated workers
- Eliminate the achievement gap between white students and students of color
- Allow our colleges to help our communities

This vision must have as its goal education that is truly for the 99%. It can no longer be consigned to what the "experts" and "decision makers" want or will pay for. It must be truly affordable, (ultimately free), high quality, and holistic. It must demand from the 1% that they pay a fair and adequate share for the same public goods that made their wealth, or their ancestors' success, possible in the first place. Beyond education, that includes physical infrastructure and social safety nets.

This vision must include the welfare of all students and workers on our cam-

pus, but also surrounding communities, the state, and beyond. It must harness the exuberance of Occupy in the U.S. and the Arab Spring around the world. It must grapple with the shortcomings of the current system of lobbyists, privileged access, fragmentation. It must leverage grassroots power into a cooperative good will that overwhelms the status quo and leads us in a better direction. It may require more from us—emotionally, physically, financially. It may be uncomfortable and disruptive. But it is our best chance to get out of the rut of the last 40 years and fight for a common future.

**LIKE WHAT YOU READ? WANT PHENOM TO DO MORE OF THIS GOOD WORK?**

Your support allows PHENOM to advocate effectively for an affordable, accessible, high quality and well-funded public higher education system in Massachusetts. Please give as generously as you can by mailing your check to the address below or making an online contribution at [www.phenomonline.org](http://www.phenomonline.org). On the website you can also learn how you can support PHENOM as you purchase books, supplies and gifts!

Enclosed is my donation of: \_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_ \$250 \_\_\_ \$500 \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_  
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Stay tuned for details**

## Another Way Is Possible

Ferd Wulkan, PHENOM staff

In fiscal year 2010, Maryland froze undergraduate resident tuition for a fourth consecutive year with rates set at the 2006-2007 academic year. Yes, in the middle of the Great Recession, a state with understanding and willpower took steps to insure a brighter future for its youth. The tuition freeze helped enrollment at Maryland's colleges and universities grow to record levels.

How could they do it? In 2007 the Governor and Legislature created Maryland's Higher Education Investment Fund (HEIF) through the Tax Reform Act of 2007. The fund is for investment in public higher education and workforce development, and can only be used to supplement general fund appropriations. The Tax Reform Act increased the corporate income tax rate from 7 to 8.25 percent and distributes a portion of the increased revenue to the HEIF. The HEIF received \$16.0 million in fiscal 2008 and \$54.3 million in fiscal 2009. The Legislature has reauthorized the HEIF and the Governor has said he will work to make the HEIF permanent.

Maryland also passed legislation allowing undocumented immigrants whose parents paid state income taxes to pay in-state tuition rates at four-year public colleges if they complete two years at a community college after attending three years of high school. [A 2012 ballot referendum seeking to overturn this law is pending, but that referendum has been challenged in court.]

Here we have a state with all the same financial and political issues as Massachusetts doing what we keep being told can't be done: "You can't raise taxes—it's not economically wise." "You can't pander to illegals - it's not politically feasible." The new UMass president, Robert Caret, comes here from Maryland. We hope he has brought some of that state's wisdom and willpower to share with our politicians.