

# CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY'S FINEST

BY HALEEMON ANDERSON



With the signing of the state budget, the California legislature trimmed away another \$15 million from the already ailing budget of the California State Universities, bringing the total reduction for the 23-campus system to a whopping \$345 million.

As the immediate effects of this economic downturn come sharply into focus, education leaders in the state will be faced with the inevitable dilemma—assess the damage and then make the best of it. The good news—and there is some: California's K-12 public schools were largely protected from

cuts; but university students who return to campus this fall will manage a 30 percent increase in tuition fees as they face certain cuts in services and programs.

Because the CSUs will weather other, perhaps more daunting, challenges in the coming months, *In the Black* thought it prudent to hear from some of the nation's preeminent educators, four African Americans who, as presidents and CEOs of California State Universities, must face this crisis head on.

## An Introduction In Brief

**Marvalene Hughes**, one of three female presidents in the CSU, is entering her decade year as reign-holder at CSU Stanislaus. Situated in the Central Valley,

currently the fastest-growing region in the state, the campus is 100 miles east of San Francisco.

Hughes earned her Ph.D. in Counseling and Administration from Florida State University.

**Milton Andrew Gordon** is president at CSU Fullerton, a university ranked first in the CSU—and sixth in the nation—in awarding bachelors degrees to students of color. Gordon's specialization is mathematics; he earned his Ph.D. from Illinois Institute of Technology. Fullerton is 40 minutes southeast of Los Angeles.

The newest CSU president, **James E. Lyons, Sr.** is not new to the role of university CEO. He came to CSU Dominguez Hills in 1999, after seven years at the helm



The four presidents: Marvalene Hughes, Milton Andrew Gordon, James M. Rosser, James E. Lyons, Sr.

of Jackson State in Mississippi and nine at Bowie State in Maryland. Lyons, a native of New Haven, received his academic degrees from the University of Connecticut (Ph.D., Professional Higher Education Admin, 1973), and pursued post-doctoral study at Harvard. The campus is in the city of Carson, between Los Angeles and Long Beach.

**James M. Rosser** will mark his 25th anniversary as president of CSU Los Angeles in 2004. He holds the academic post of Professor of Health Care Management and earned his academic degrees in health education and microbiology from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (Ph.D. 1969). CSULA is 10 minutes from downtown Los Angeles.

### The University, the Mission, the Challenge Ahead

The current fiscal situation is fraught with challenges, said Dr Rosser. The most crucial is the threat to the founding principles of the Cal State system—access and quality. “It has been the hallmark of this state to provide access,” said Rosser, “and clearly it is our intent to honor that commitment.”

The CSU, the nation’s largest university system, was unified in 1961 under the state Master Plan for Higher Education. The plan provides “access,” virtually guaranteed admission, to the top third of California’s high school graduates and makes admitting upper-division transfer students from state community colleges a priority. The state also picks up 75 percent of the average cost of tuition. Still, when budget cuts have been passed on to students in the form of sudden fee hikes, enrollments have historically dropped.

Enrollment at the CSU has grown at a rate of about five percent annually over the past few years, for a system total last year of 407,882. Early predictions for 2003-2004 had been placed at 424,000. But with several CSUs preparing to freeze enrollment for the spring semester per direction from the legislature, expected growth could be trimmed by as many as 10,000 students.

Dr. Hughes, whose campus will cut back from a projected goal of seven percent growth in enrollment to two percent, says this is the greatest disappointment. “We have been growing incrementally and very deliberately at this campus,” said Hughes,

who began making preparation for this hard reality over a year ago. “We saw it coming,” she continues, “and we all agreed not to fill any vacated [administrative] positions.”

Facilities maintenance and capital planning are other measures being slowed or halted systemwide in an effort to retain dollars for access. But Hughes fears it is too little too late. “Tidal Wave II is here, and we are cutting back on access as it enters. So there is a collision between the population growth and the access to public education in the CSU.”

For Dr. Gordon the harsh reality is that the budget reduction will impact the number of students who graduate. “Fullerton is number one in the system in graduating underrepresented students,” said Gordon. “We work hard at that and we don’t want to diminish the quality of service to those students we do serve.”

Cutting classes and faculty would be a last resort, said Dr. Lyons. He is considering the lesser evils of hiring freezes, deferred capital outlay plans and even tapping reserve funds to balance the budget at his campus. “We will try not to hurt academic programs,” said Lyons, “and opportunities for students to come here and graduate in a reasonable amount of time. But the truth is, this financial problem is setting the state back to the early ‘90s.”

It was during the ‘90s that CSU administrators coined the phrase “Tidal Wave” to describe periods of accelerated growth in the system. The second wave has indeed hit, as Hughes suggests, buoyed in part by the fact that in times of economic downturn and unemployment, people tend to go back to school. This phenomenon may well be linked to another key role of the CSU—that of workforce preparation.

The 23 CSU campuses graduate more students in agriculture, communications, health, education and public administration than all other California universities and colleges combined. Add to that fact the role of CSU graduates in shaping industries as diverse as aerospace, entertainment,

information technology, biomedical, international trade, and multimedia, and one begins to see the critical balance that must be maintained.

While it is still too early to predict how limiting enrollment may impact workforce needs, it’s a development state opinion leaders will want to watch closely. Rosser says the picture is far from rosy. “The current [budget] is not reflective of investing in education as a linchpin of this workforce,” said Rosser. “The state is going to be severely challenged,” to supply its education needs, he said, particularly in K-12 where the need for high quality teachers and school-site personnel is already at a precarious level.

### Pulling the Diversity Card

Another key characteristic of the CSU is its ability to generally reflect in enrollment the burgeoning diversity of the state’s citizenry. Campuses dot the 800-mile California coastline and the Central Region, allowing every citizen a Cal State within 200 miles. The system is considered one of the nations most diverse, with more than 53 percent of CSU students from ethnic groups considered minorities. Almost 60 percent are female.

Another indicator of the importance of diversity to the system may well be underscored in its presidential staffing. The CSUs 25-member Board of Trustees, which is responsible for policy decisions and hiring presidents, has appointed women and persons of color to nearly half of its 23 top posts. Each campus brings a unique contribution to the system’s vaunted diversity, and administrators agree this is a quality to be treasured and guarded at all costs.

“There simply is nothing in this country that matches the beautiful diversity that California represents,” said Hughes, whose campus has the largest Portuguese student population in the state. Large Assyrian and Asian populations also exist at Stanislaus, and the college recently achieved the status of a Hispanic-serving institution, with 25 percent or more of its students from Latin

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# CSU

## NOTED CSU ALUMNI

Actor/director Tom Hanks  
 Former San Francisco mayor  
 Willie Brown, Jr.  
 Novelist Anne Rice  
 Director Steven Spielberg  
 Baseball Hall of Famer Joe Morgan  
 Former Olympic Games  
 president Peter Ueberroth

## WEBSITE

For the most current information, check out the CSU website at [www.CalState.edu](http://www.CalState.edu)

## STUDENT PROFILE

- CSU students are not necessarily the traditional 18- to 22-year-olds.
- The average undergraduate age is 24.
- About 85 percent are commuters
  - Only 56 percent are dependent on parents
- Nearly two in five have dependents.
  - Four out of five have jobs, and 36 percent work full time.
  - About one in five students is in the first generation in their family to attend college.
- 40 percent come from households where English is not the main language spoken.
- More than one-third consider themselves to be multiracial.
  - About 8 percent live in on-campus housing.

backgrounds. While the African American student body, at four percent, is not as large as she would like it to be, Hughes says that the CSU's multicultural learning environment is another indicator of high quality.

Cal State Los Angeles has led the way in this area for over 30 years. "The majority of our students are students of color," said Rosser, "and it's been that way since 1972. We believe here that excellence and diversity must go hand-in-hand . . . and that being from a diverse background is enriching and ennobling to this campus."

Every year for the past six years, *U.S. News & World Report* has named Dominguez Hills "the most diverse campus in the West." This distinction comes in part

because no particular ethnic or cultural group represents a conspicuous majority. Dominguez and neighbor Los Angeles serve communities that are economically disadvantaged, with large populations of under-represented minorities. Because neither has reached full student capacity, both campuses will remain open for spring semester enrollment.

There is one troubling trend in the area of diversity about which all four presidents have expressed concern—that of the decline in Black male enrollment. Diversity in the faculty ranks of the CSU is yet another concern, as 75 percent of full-time faculty are white, non-Latino.

## Singing The Praises Of The CSU

Even in a worst-case scenario—and we're not there yet—the Cal State has plenty to recommend itself. And the good news is, most of it is not news at all—it's business as usual at the CSU. Here is a short list of plaudits:

- Since 1961, more than two million degrees have been awarded.
- The CSU prepares the majority of teachers in the state.
- Students of color represent over 53 percent of the population—more than twice the national average for four-year institutions.
- Half of the state's business graduates and 40 percent of engineering grads come from Cal States.
- One in every 10 members of the California workforce is a CSU graduate.

Lyons has remarked that a president must be the college's number one cheerleader and on that note there is little opposition. In spite of their financial woes, the presidents each wield a personal playbook of campus highlights that rival, well, each other.

Dominguez Hills boasts the largest advanced-education nursing program in the West. For its extensive on-line and live TV instructional programs, the campus has been named by *Forbes* magazine one of the top 20 "cyber universities" in the United States—the only university in California to be named so.

"Our role in the state in terms of teacher training is tremendous," said Lyons. "We are tops in this area and have been for some time." A corporate partnership with TRW supports the computer science department and faculty. And perhaps the biggest recent coup—Dominguez Hills' new Home Depot Center is a world-class athletics complex for soccer, tennis and track and field. The deal represents one of the most significant public-private partnerships in the CSU. "The Home Depot Center is an example of a unique partnership," said Lyons. "It's so large, yet we brought no money to the table." Lyons and his executive staff brokered the lease agreement deal, which includes limited campus and community usage at the \$120 million facility and a variety of campus upgrades and revenue streams.

Hughes says hands down, Stanislaus is "absolutely the most beautiful campus in the system," with its elaborate fountains and manmade lakes. Parents have been known to marvel at the beauty of campus housing, said Hughes. But it isn't all style at Stanislaus. A satellite campus in Stockton serves over 15 percent of the total student body. The new privately funded state-of-the-art Faculty Development Center opens in February. This facility will promote curricular innovation through research, strategic partnerships and professional faculty development.

Cal State Fullerton has one of the premier baseball teams in the United States; and the largest college of business of any university in California. It places 80 percent of students in its pre-med programs in quality medical facilities and graduate schools when they finish. "This is an almost unheard of precedent," said Gordon. "Usually the num-

bers are around 20 to 30 percent." Gordon lays claim to one distinction that no other CSU president can, at least not this year. Currently a Fullerton marketing student, Alex Lopez, holds the only student vote on the CSU Board of Trustees.

Rosser said CSU Los Angeles ranks among the top 200 universities that send women to medical school. He is especially proud of a partnership with a small school

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**James Rosser**

located on the outskirts of the garment district in South Central L.A. The school, dubbed The Accelerated School, was started by two CSULA graduates and has become something of a powerhouse in academic circles. *Time* magazine named it the top elementary school in the country a few years ago.

“What this demonstrates,” said Rosser, “is that with ... quality teaching, a proper environment and parental involvement, students of color can achieve at the highest of levels. We have demonstrated that you can make a difference.”

### What Becomes A President Most?

Attaining to one of the highest positions in academia requires a few special characteristics—vision, determination and dedication will most likely serve, as well as a strong desire to make a difference. Gordon, Hughes, Lyons and Rosser possess these traits in good measure, yet their paths to the presidency have been as individualized as their own personal backgrounds.

Lyons is partial to noting that he is “the only person in the country who grew up in the projects and has been the president of three universities. “He says no specific thing can prepare you for this role, which he likens to being the mayor of a small city. “Your job is the only one that must have the perspective of the entire campus.”

Lyons, who left one of the poorest states in the nation to come to its wealthiest, is confident that the state has the wherewithal to survive its financial crisis. “California has always been viewed as one of the most progressive, forward thinking and acting systems and that goes beyond education,” said Lyons. “The key fact is that we run the risk of losing that status and recognition if we’re not careful.”

Gordon, whose commitment to advancing opportunities for underrepresented students ultimately led to his presidency, says that an administrative post was the furthest thing from his mind. “I had no intention early in my career of being a college presi-

dent,” said Gordon. “As a math professor at the University of Chicago, Gordon wrote a proposal targeting minority student admissions. To his surprise he was asked to head the program.

He was director of the Afro-American Studies Program at Loyola in Chicago and served as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Chicago State. Gordon entered the CSU as Vice President of Academic

Affairs at CSU Sonoma. “At every step along the way,” he said, “I saw the chance to help many more students go to college and graduate and actually go on. When I was offered the presidency at Fullerton, it was a tremendous opportunity.”

Hughes credits her success in academia to the foundation she received at Tuskegee. Like Gordon, who attended Xavier University, she received her undergraduate degree at a Historically Black College. And that has made all the difference. As one of eight siblings who all possess degrees, Hughes says no one dared think to chal-

lenge the parental assumption that “education was so critical to our futures.”

She decided on a career in the university, but in the beginning, said Hughes, the idea of a presidency is “not within your reach.” At Tuskegee, Hughes says, “My identity was deeply developed and advanced on a level that demanded expansion in a way no other environment would have. From that foundation I was able to branch out into experiences where often I was the only African American.”

Hughes is one of the founders of the Millennium Leadership Institute, a foundation that targets minority candidates for university presidencies. The program, out of Washington, D.C. is graduating its third class. “We have 14 who are now in presidencies,” said Hughes, “and 38 graduates who have advanced to the next level where they are ready.”

As the youngest of eight and the first to graduate from college, Rosser may have a penchant for being in the right place at the right time. “I’ve been the first African

American literally, in every post I’ve had,” he said. Rosser founded one of the most successful Black Studies programs in the country at Southern Illinois at Carbondale, in the mid-60s. Before coming to the CSU, he served for five years as Vice Chancellor of the State of New Jersey Department of Higher Education and was appointed Acting Chancellor in 1977.

To be sure, there is more than serendipity at work in the lives of these four presidents. Having set out on the path of higher education, they took the road less traveled. They have positioned themselves as an example of what can be achieved with vision and determination and good old-fashioned hard work. They are an inspiration to students and educators, not solely for the heights they’ve reached or for the authority they exercise.

Position and influence may well serve to keep the CSU on track and with these qualities abounding in the leadership of the nation’s greatest university system; there is cause for confidence.

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Enrollment by Campus Fall 2002	
Bakersfield	7,765
Channel Islands	630
Chico	16,246
Dominguez Hills	13,504
Fresno	21,272
Fullerton	32,143
Hayward	13,876
Humboldt	7,611
Long Beach	34,566
Los Angeles	21,099
Maritime Academy	721
Monterey Bay	3,551
Northridge	33,579
Pomona	19,821
Sacramento	28,558
San Bernardino	16,341
San Diego	34,304
San Francisco	28,378
San José	30,350
San Luis Obispo	18,453
San Marcos	7,678
Sonoma	8,219
Stanislaus	7,850
International Programs	573
CalStateTEACH	794
Total	407,882