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# EDITORIAL: Reject plan for two-tier community college system



Legislators should reject a plan that would give faster access to in-demand community college classes to those students willing to pay more for the privilege.

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THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE | May 06, 2013; 06:19 PM | Comments (1)

Students' access to high-demand classes should not depend on whether they can pay extra for the privilege. The Legislature should reject a bill that would set up a two-tier fee system for some

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A Winchester soldier has been indicted by a federal grand jury on suspicion of forging applications for war medals, veteran's benefits and lying about his combat history. What is your people about people accused of exaggerating their military credentials?

- They should face severe penalties on top of any other crime they are accused. Our veterans are treasures and their courage and commitment should be be exploited.
- It's sad, but there should be no additional penalties. This brand of fraud is no more severe than another.
- I don't know.

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community college classes. State and education officials should find a better solution to the space shortage in must-have classes than letting those with more financial resources skip to the head of the line.

AB 955, by Assemblyman Das Williams, D-Santa Barbara, would let community colleges offer in-demand courses during the winter and summer breaks at a higher cost to students. Community college students normally pay \$46 per course unit, but the new "extension" classes would charge \$200 a unit, or about \$600 for a three-credit course. Over the past month, two Assembly committees have given their approval to the bill.

The bill highlights a legitimate public concern: community college students who struggle to enroll in the classes they need in order to graduate or transfer to a four-year college. Community colleges slashed course offerings as a way to implement budgetary restraint during the economic downturn. The Public Policy Institute of California reported in March that community colleges dropped about 86,000 sections — a 21 percent reduction — between 2007-08 and 2011-12. Students sometimes have to wait months or years to get into the courses they need, which adds to the length and cost of their college careers.

But the Legislature should scuttle any idea of making access to core classes dependent on students' capacity to pay. Legislators would be on stronger ground advocating higher fees for specialized courses, such as lab courses, that cost more to provide, and applying that fee to all students who take the class.

Community colleges have a taxpayer-supported mission to provide broad access to higher education for all Californians. Installing a system that gives an extra advantage to those with ready money contradicts that public mandate. The state's Community Colleges Chancellor Brice Harris warned in March that such differential fee proposals could undermine "a system that has been a gateway to a better life for all Californians regardless of their background."

AB 955 proposes to help out those from lower-income families by setting aside one-third of the fees from the high-cost courses to help provide financial aid to low-income students. That approach does not erase the inequity, but rather compounds it, as more affluent students pay the way for some of their classmates.

The state has better alternatives available. Colleges should explore the use of online education as a cost-effective way to ease the bottleneck for high-demand courses. California's community college fees are also the lowest in the nation. Legislators could increase fees to provide more money to add course sections, and still keep community college class costs well below the level AB 955 proposes.


Building a fast-track education for those with money would set the wrong priorities for community colleges. The state's goal should be ensuring access to junior-college education for all Californians who want it, not providing an edge to students with a bigger bankroll.

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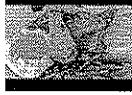
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