



We Want the Deal You Got: A civics lesson

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Source: *Boom: A Journal of California*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Summer 2012), pp. 86-91

Published by: [University of California Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/boom.2012.2.2.86>

Accessed: 19/03/2014 15:08

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We Want the Deal You Got

A civics lesson

Their opponents
are fierce.

On 18 November 2011, a small group of students demonstrating against tuition increases at UC Davis linked arms and sat down on the university quad. Soon after, campus police in riot gear coated them with pepper spray.

In fact, this was not the first police assault on UC tuition protesters. The demonstrations in Davis were inspired in part by those held in Berkeley on 9 November, where sheriff's deputies attacked and beat students and faculty, among them Robert Hass, former Poet Laureate of the United States.

Video of these incidents inspired global outrage. Thus, authorities hoping to terminate the demonstrations inadvertently rallied faculty, staff, and students to the cause, at least temporarily.

Since then, UC campuses have been roiled by debates about the use of force against peaceful demonstrators. However, lowering tuition remains as great a challenge as ever. To achieve their original and most transformative goal, students must persuade the legislature to restore funding for the beleaguered UC system.

Their opponents are fierce. Consider a letter to the editor of the *Davis Enterprise* on 27 November, as the controversy over the use of pepper spray rocked the town. Denouncing the campus movement as “the epitome of what is wrong with America today,” David M. Castro, UC Davis alumnus, questioned the very logic of public education. “Why should the rest of society fund your education?” he asked. “I never asked anyone to fund mine. I worked.”

In fact, taxpayers—or “society” as Mr. Castro calls them—footed almost the entire bill for his Bachelor's degree, which he completed in 1987. He paid only a small fraction of what his education cost. Today's students don't get the same breaks.

The fact that Mr. Castro and so many of his generation remain ignorant of the debt they owe suggests how steep a climb the campus movement confronts. Changing the minds of voters and state lawmakers will require not only demanding the same rights

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that Mr. Castro's generation had, but making a call to a new civic purpose, with a promise of future sacrifice in return for restoring a broken promise.

Tuition rises as state funding falls

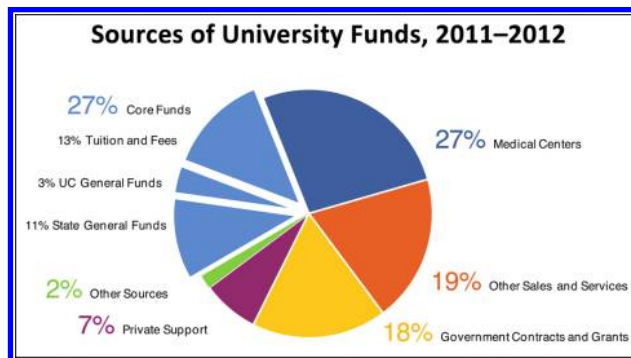
Searching for the causes of spiraling tuition, many point to university administrators and especially the UC Regents. To be sure, they are not without blame. But the primary cause of tuition increases is the decline in state funding. Indeed, the culpability of administrators and regents for the troubled UC stems in part from the ways a legislature too eager to unload its public obligations has empowered them. By restoring public funding, we might begin to reverse a tide of privatization that has brought charges of widespread corruption and conflict of interest among campus administrators. Indeed, public dollars might be among the more effective tools for correcting administrative abuses (or, just as importantly, perceptions of such abuses) across the UC system.

The powers of the regents are delimited in the state constitution, which mandates that the University of California, including its endowment and finances, be managed as a public trust by a Board of Regents. The regents are appointed by the governor, and they don't get salaries. In essence, they—along with the UC President whom they appoint—supervise what has become a ten-campus system.

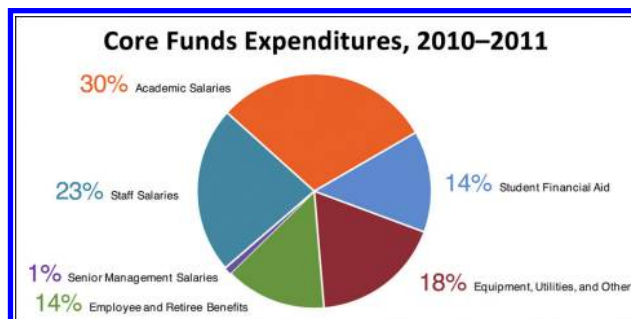
Their budgetary authority empowers them to decide how money is spent within the system (with some important limits, as we'll see). They are independent of the legislature, something that has both advantages and disadvantages. But one of the consequences of this arrangement is that legislators often support student protest against the regents because it keeps the heat off lawmakers. And the legislature should become targets for a great deal more student attention than they have been thus far.

These days, the money the regents manage comes from many places. Almost a fifth of UC's \$22 billion annual budget comes from government contracts and grants. Another quarter flows from hospitals and medical centers.

But by law, only those monies known as "core funds"—the light blue slices of the first pie—can be used to educate undergraduates. And those funds are only about one-fourth of the UC's budget. About half of these core funds



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BUDGET FOR CURRENT OPERATIONS 2012–13, SUMMARY AND DETAIL, S-5.



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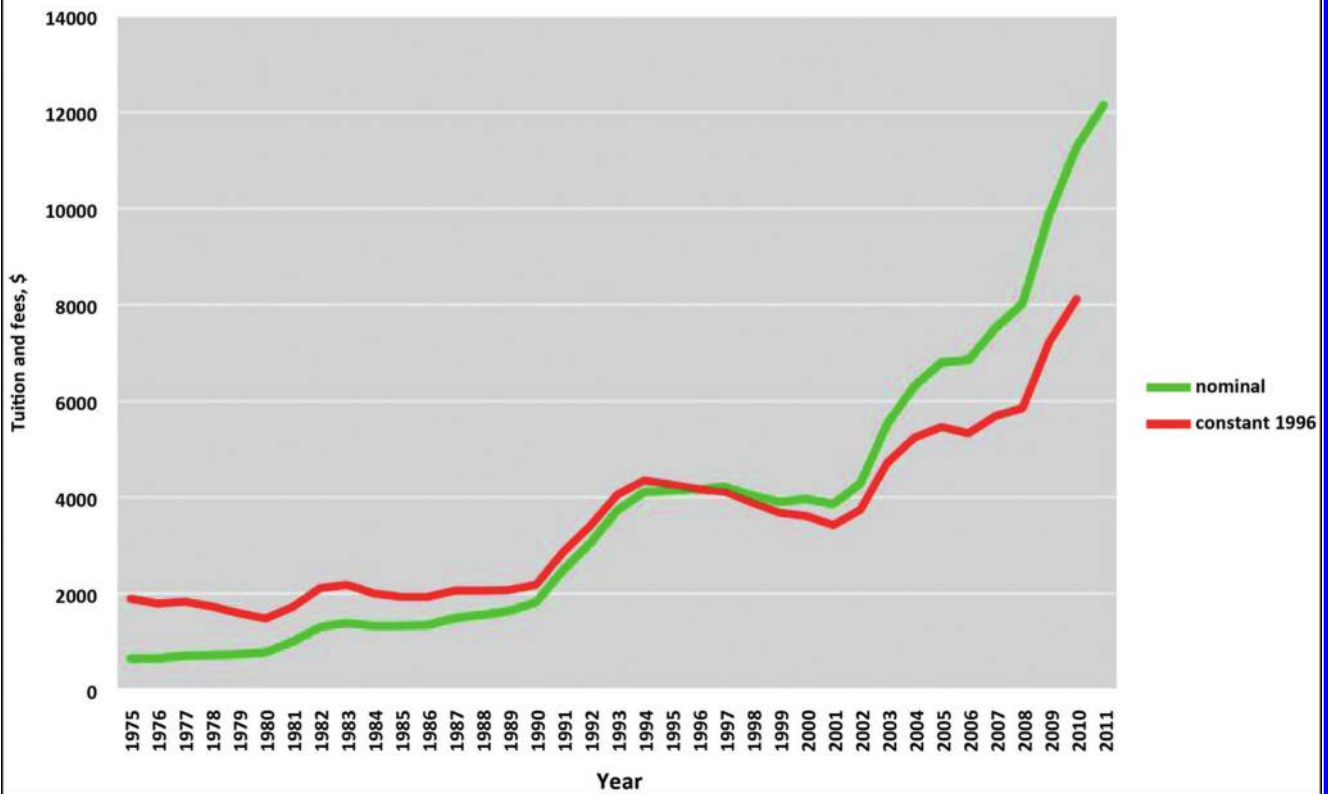
will come from student fees next year, and somewhat less than that, 11 percent of the whole UC budget, will come from the state. This is the wedge of funds that pays salaries for faculty and staff and provides financial aid to students, as well as equipment for classrooms and retiree benefits.

Thus, to lower tuition, students will need to persuade the state legislature to allot more money to the university system, in order to make up for the fees (tuition) they won't be paying.

The rise and fall of California's affordable university

If the legislature followed tradition, allotting more money to the system is what they would do. The University of California was founded in 1868, and students paid practically no fees until 1921, and then only for incidental, non-instructional goods such as student activities, parking, and health care. California became the first state to link public university

Average Annual Tuition and Fees for Resident UC Undergraduates



KATHRYN OLMSTED AND ERIC RAUCHWAY, [HTTP://EDGEOTHEWEST.FILES.WORDPRESS.COM/2011/11/REALANDCONSTANTTUITION.PNG](http://EDGEOTHEWEST.FILES.WORDPRESS.COM/2011/11/REALANDCONSTANTTUITION.PNG).

funding to enrollment, and as the student body grew, so did the university, from one campus at Berkeley to two with the opening of UCLA in 1919. The 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s saw the creation of UC Davis, UC San Diego, UC Riverside, UC Santa Barbara, UC Irvine, UC Santa Cruz, and even a medical campus at UC San Francisco.¹

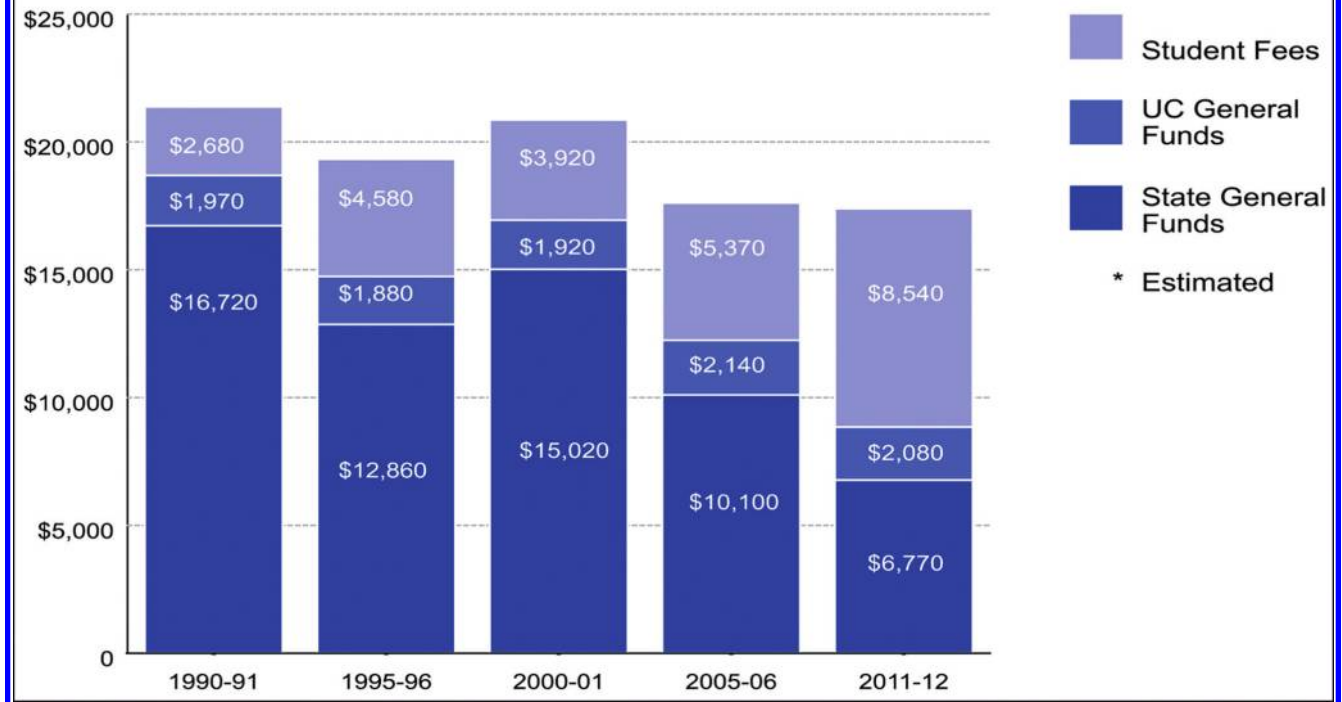
By 1970, when most states had only one major research university campus, California had nine. The UC contributed mightily to making California the top manufacturing state and the number one agricultural producer, the top exporter, and the home of Silicon Valley. It was widely acclaimed as the greatest public institution of higher learning in the history of the United States and the world. And, until the 1990s, the UC maintained an official policy of not charging

Californians for instruction, even barring the use of student fees for faculty salaries. Thus through most of its history, UC degrees were practically free for California students.

That mandate for free education was not seriously challenged until Ronald Reagan became governor in 1966. Reagan was the first governor to demand that students pay at least part of their tuition (some said it was revenge for the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley). The increases were small at first. But once Reagan became the President of the United States in 1981, privatization of public goods became the mantra of the right and an acceptable development for many on the left, who saw it as a fair trade for a tenuous commitment to other elements of the social safety net.

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Per Student Average Expenditures for Education, 1990–2012



UC BUDGET CHARTS 2011-12 AT [HTTP://BUDGET.UNIVERSITYOFCALIFORNIA.EDU/FILES/2011/11/UC_BUDGET_CHARTS_2011-12.PDF](http://BUDGET.UNIVERSITYOFCALIFORNIA.EDU/FILES/2011/11/UC_BUDGET_CHARTS_2011-12.PDF).

How can students and their supporters reverse this trend? First, they'll have to remember that UC education, while free to students, was paid for by taxpayers. Each year since 1868, the UC Regents and the President have submitted a request for funding to the legislature. For decades, the state funded all or most of the budget request. Today, the legislature funds part of the request and the regents pass the bulk of the difference back to the students, as we can see in the above chart. The dark blue bars show levels of state funding for each undergraduate since 1990. The gray bars show the expanding student fee burden.

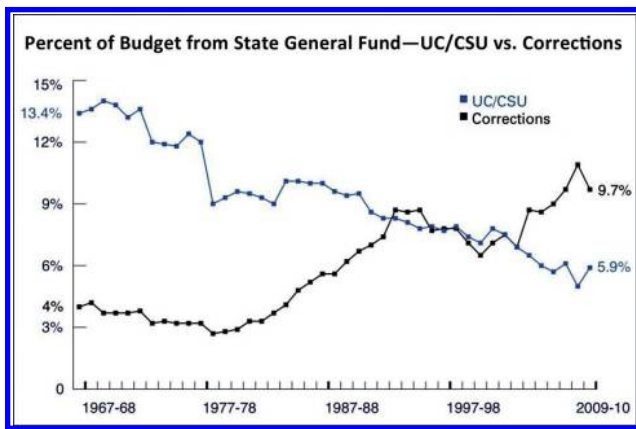
State funding for the UC was relatively constant throughout the 1970s and 1980s, when Mr. Castro and his generation received their degrees. As recently as 1990—the last of the “good years”—the state paid \$17,000 to educate each undergraduate in the UC. Students were left with a bill of about \$2,300 in fees. Today, the state awards less than \$7,000 for each student—a decline of \$10,000.

With 180,000 undergrads in the UC, this means the state's contribution should be at least \$1.8 billion higher to restore what the last generation of UC students had.

It gets worse. Student fees are higher than ever, but they still do not make up what's been lost. In order to reduce prices, administrators have made “economies”: less hiring of faculty, fewer and bigger classes, and similar measures that have tempered cost increases by lowering quality. Today's UC students pay more—much more—to receive less. The promise of a largely free UC has been broken.

The students demanding lower tuition have a very clear message for the generations who came before, and especially for the state legislature, which is comprised of more than a few UC and CSU grads who completed their degrees in the 1970s and 1980s. That message is, “We want the same deal you got.”

They are not asking for special treatment. Indeed, in this sense at least they are asking *not* to be special. They want only what every generation of Californians before theirs



CPEC FISCAL PROFILES, 2008, DISPLAYS 1 AND 21; DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE BUDGET DOCUMENTS.

was given: publically funded higher education, with very low individual costs.

In addition to lowering fees, more public money could bring better, more accountable administration. Although the legislature’s power to dictate how the regents spend state money is limited, reformers since at least Teddy Roosevelt’s generation have known that public money can wash away private corruption. More state funds give the legislature more leverage to demand changes in UC governance. Conversely, the closer they get to eliminating state funding for the UC, the more the peoples’ representatives will surrender whatever power they might have to shape the course of higher education.

The bad economy is a red herring

Why did the legislature abandon the UC like this? Why did they stop funding it at the old levels? The bad economy by itself is a red herring. Even accounting for the recession, California’s economy has expanded by more than 50 percent since 1997.² In the same period, the stream of state funds to the UC has withered. Partly, this is an expression of the triumph of rhetoric over facts, the faith in private enterprise and private money (i.e., higher tuition) despite clear evidence of the necessity and even superiority of public goods.

But also, since the 1980s, large portions of the state’s budget have been absorbed by other sectors, most notoriously prisons, which now swallow more state money than the UC and CSU systems combined.

In addition, some people attribute declining taxpayer support for universities to the state’s diversity. If it is hard to recall how relatively homogenous California’s population once was, it is worth considering that in 1960, the largest group of foreign arrivals to California were native English speakers who hailed from Britain or Canada. White dominance characterized California politics through the 1980s.

Perhaps, to paraphrase the writer L.P. Hartley, the past is another country—or at least another state. For since then, California has undergone a social revolution that the rest of the nation is just beginning to experience. Invigorated by a healthy rate of immigration, by the early 1990s, non-whites for the first time began graduating California high schools in greater numbers than whites. In 1999, California became the first state to gain a non-white majority, while whites continued—and continue—to vote at higher rates and to retain much of the income and wealth. Various observers and scholars suggest a powerful taxpayer reluctance to pay for public goods, be they universities or Medicare, if the public doesn’t look like the taxpayer. In a state with no racial majority, this is a recipe for disaster. Today, over 40 percent of Californians speak a language other than English at home. The public university system might be the one institution that could help bring this vast corps of immigrants and their children into the middle class. Its defunding is a looming disaster.³

So how do we resolve this problem? Students—in all *their* stunning diversity—will have to prevail upon the state to restore funding. It won’t be easy. There’s plenty of money around, to be sure. California is not only the most populous state, its economy is bigger than India’s or Russia’s, and its population and economy far outstrip that of Canada or Australia. Analysts are fond of comparing California to Texas, but if the Lone Star State were to combine with Oklahoma, Arizona, and New Mexico, the California economy would still be bigger. Most Californians have seen their incomes

They want only what every generation of Californians before theirs was given.

State legislators know that they need an educated middle class to pay for the entitlements they'll need when they retire.

decline in real terms since 1987. But in the same period the top 20 percent of earners saw their incomes grow by more than 20 percent—and the wealthiest 1 percent of Californians have seen their incomes grow by more than 50 percent. Thus, by 2009, almost 34,000 California taxpayers earned *annual incomes* of a \$1 million or more, for a total of \$104 billion.⁴

Of course, taxing that wealth will require still more commitment by students and supporters. The state constitution requires a two-thirds supermajority of the legislature to raise taxes. But even this challenge can be met. The 2012 election will be the first to use new legislative districts that may allow higher education supporters to win supermajorities in both houses—but only if activists can be mobilized to turn out their voters. The campus movement could play a central role in that development.

Give us the same deal you got

Along the way, students will need to do more than demand their right to a free, or nearly free education. Taxes aren't free money. Wary voters—a large proportion of them hostile—will resist self-righteous demands for more public money. But students could overcome this by crafting a new call to civic purpose, one that inspires sacrifice *for* them by promising a sacrifice *by* them. Today's state legislators know that they need an educated middle class to pay for the entitlements they'll need when they retire, especially Social Security and Medicare. Student activists can point to this fact, and promise the voters of California, "Give us the same deal you got, and you won't be sorry. We'll do the work. We'll pay taxes and provide you a social safety net. We'll make California richer, greener, better educated, and more humane. We won't let you down."

Students and faculty who have been assaulted in tuition protests will have achieved much if they get justice

against responsible officials. But if they seize this moment, they might begin to turn back two decades of ill-advised privatization. The recent campus occupations could become not only watershed moments in the history of Davis and Berkeley, but of the University of California and the gigantic state it yet serves. **B**

Notes

- ¹ For history of the UC, see John A. Douglass, *The California Idea and American Higher Education: 1850 to the 1960 Master Plan* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); for fee history, see University of California, "The Facts: History of Student Fees" (University of California Office of the President, 2010).
- ² US Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, at <http://www.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?ReqID=70&step=1&isuri=1&acrdn=1> (accessed 25 March 2012).
- ³ Arguments about racial diversity and taxpayer hostility from Peter Schrag, *Paradise Lost: California's Experience, America's Future* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1998), 61. See also Peter Lindert, *Growing Public: Growing Public: Social Spending and Economic Growth since the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004), two volumes, I: 189. Statistics on language are from US Census Bureau, "People Who Spoke a Language Other Than English at Home, By Hispanic Origin and Race: 2009," American Community Survey Briefs, Oct., 2010, 2 (available at www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/acsbr09-19.pdf, accessed 25 March 2012).
- ⁴ Global rankings from California Dept. of Finance at http://www.dof.ca.gov/html/fs_data/latestEconData/documents/BBRANK.XLS (accessed 25 March 2012); Comparative GDP figures from US Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, at <http://www.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?ReqID=70&step=1&isuri=1&acrdn=1> (accessed 25 March 2012); California Budget Project, *A Generation of Widening Inequality* (Sacramento, CA: California Budget Project) 16–18, available at <http://www.cbpp.org/> (accessed March 25, 2012).