

City College ESL Classes Face Budget Cuts

BY STEFFI LAU

SAN FRANCISCO — At the City College of San Francisco's Chinatown/North Beach campus, English as a Second Language classes are a staple for the student body, which is approximately 90 percent Asian. Many are recent immigrants, simultaneously working six days a week and learning English to survive in the country.

However, with California's \$17.2 billion budget deficit, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposed budget cuts for colleges are causing a crisis in California's higher education and forcing colleges to draw purse strings tight. As one of these measures, ESL classes at CCSF will be reduced.

CCSF, which has 11 campuses scattered throughout San Francisco, will lose \$3 million this year. According to trustee Rodol Rodis, the college will be forced to dip into their reserve, which is already facing a crisis of its own. Though community colleges are supposed to have a 5 percent reserve, CCSF's reserve is only \$6 million, a mere 3 percent. CCSF plans to extract \$2 million, putting it in an even more dire position next year.

"Three million is just the tip of

the iceberg," Rodis said. "Next year will be even worse. It's frightening."

CCSF plans to cut 10 percent of classes across the board. Of its 500 ESL classes, which represent 40 percent of CCSF's course offerings, 50 classes will be cut.

The reduction of ESL classes poses a significant problem for CCSF students. Many are Latino, Chinese, Vietnamese or Filipino immigrants who rely on ESL classes.

"It will have a very severe impact on students who need to learn and master English in order to get into the job market," Rodis said.

The reduction in classes will mean larger class sizes and longer waiting lists, which may delay opportunities for transfer, graduation and jobs. The increased sizes will also mean less individual attention for students.

At the Chinatown/North Beach campus, which offers bilingual services in Cantonese and Mandarin, the reduction in classes will have an especially dramatic impact. The percentage of Asian American students is almost double CCSF's 45 percent Asian American student population overall. Thirty percent of students reside in the Chinatown/North

Beach area; many are immigrants without English skills.

"Many don't know the alphabet ... or even how to sign their name in English on forms," said Joanne Low, CCSF's associate vice chancellor of international education and dean of the Chinatown/North Beach campus. Some are recent immigrants who register on campus days after getting off the plane, Low said, while others are returning to education after years living in the country.

This summer, the Chinatown/North Beach campus will reduce the length of its non-credit, free ESL classes to deal with the budget cuts. While in the past classes have continued until July, the summer ESL programs will end in June this year.

Students will then have a month and a half break until the fall, possibly regressing in their English learning, according to Low. Because many students live in ethnic communities like Chinatown, they are able to live and work without having to speak English, she said, and most can't afford private English classes.

"It will really affect the low-level ESL students because we know that with language learning, if you don't practice it, you lose it," Low said.



Five thousand protestors, including 500 from City College of San Francisco, marched in front of the state Capitol building in Sacramento on April 21 to protest budget cuts and fee increases.

The budget cuts are seen as especially detrimental because of the weak economy, making it even more necessary for immigrants and students to acquire new job skills. However, CCSF is attempting to make the most of its crisis.

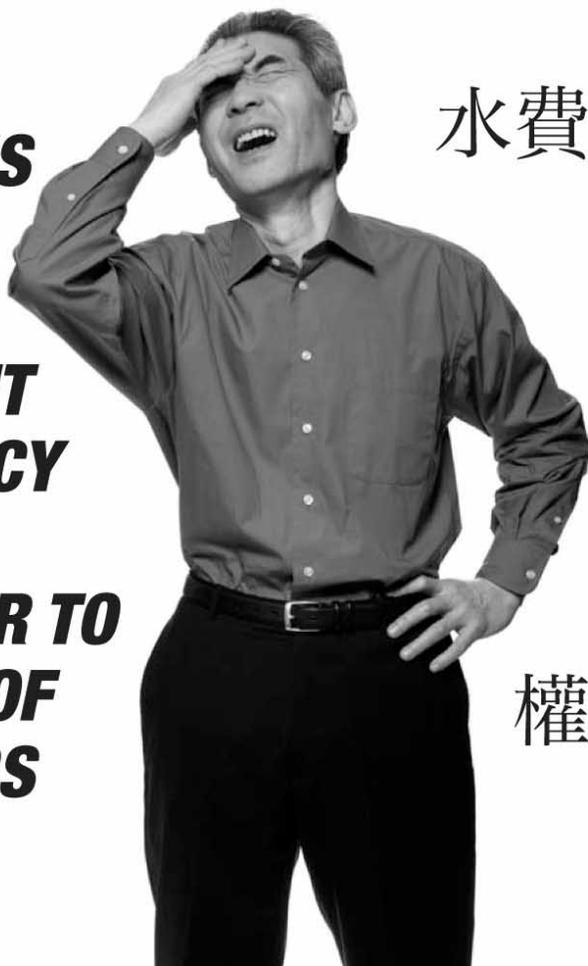
At the Chinatown/North Beach campus, even the smallest measures to save are being taken, from printing double-sided and using lights less.

"We're doing everything we can," Rodis said.

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