

<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/education/20080624-9999-1m24enroll.html>

## Community colleges see enrollment surge

### More workers looking to learn new skills

**By Tanya Sierra**

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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After Portland Bates was laid off from his job at a student loan company last summer, his first thought was, "How am I going to pay my bills?"

Instead of getting another full-time job, Bates, 30, an Escondido resident, enrolled at Miramar College. He hopes the move will lead to a university and a better-paying, more stable career.

Similar scenarios are playing out across California. With a sputtering economy pushing up the unemployment rate, enrollment at community colleges is booming as laid-off employees retrain for other careers and students look for a more affordable college education.



EDUARDO CONTRERAS / Union-Tribune  
Professor Dennis Horn (left) worked with student Fabian Ceballos on Friday in the welding program at the Educational Cultural Complex in San Diego.

About 84,000 students are enrolled in the San Diego Community College District, an increase of about 6,000, or 7.7 percent, from three years ago. An additional 50,000 students use the colleges for noncredit courses, including citizenship, basic skills and a variety of crafts classes.

At Palomar College in San Marcos, enrollment has surged and more men than usual are signing up for

classes, said Herman Lee, director of enrollment services. That's typically a sign that the economy has slowed and that men, families' traditional breadwinners, are going to school in search of a new career, Lee said.

[Graphic: Unemployment's effects on community colleges](#)

Paul Kelly, director of Palomar College's Regional Occupational Program, which helps students train for jobs, said he also has seen a

spike in people taking Regional Occupational Program classes. Enrollment was about 13,000 students for the past two semesters, Kelly said, up from 10,000 to 12,000 in the past.

Kelly said the ROP office has received calls from people who say they are out of work and ask if specific courses are offered, such as QuickBooks, a computer accounting program for small businesses.

The surge is taxing community colleges, which are dealing with cutbacks because of the state's budget crisis.

Next year, the San Diego Community College District will have to use nearly \$5 million of its \$229 million budget to plug gaps as a result of state cuts instead of using that money to grow its programs. Budget cutbacks also prompted the district to cut 350 classes from next year's schedule.



EDUARDO CONTRERAS / Union-Tribune  
Monica Bolden leaned over her work. The continuing education complex is part of the San Diego Community College District.

The statewide community college system has funding challenges, as well. This year's budget was about \$5.4 billion. For next year, the state system requested \$5.9 billion in funding but likely will get \$5.7 billion from the state.

"This is a state that does not invest," said Constance Carroll, chancellor of the San Diego Community College District. "It keeps itself in turmoil. This is a time of great enrollment growth. Our frustration is we're continuing to cut classes rather than expand."

Some of the canceled courses include vocational night offerings that target workers looking to retrain for more stable jobs.

"We knew we were in a recession way before anyone was talking about it," said Anthony Beebe, president of Continuing Education for the San Diego Community College District.

**Thom Davies, an instructor in City College's environmental control technology program, said students learning refrigeration and air conditioning installation or repair are in especially high demand.**

**"A student who gets only 11 units of training can get an entry-level job**

paying between \$16 and \$20 an hour,” Davies said. “Many of the companies around San Diego come to us and hire our students almost immediately.”

Michael Kelly, an engineering manager for DKN Aerospace, said his Poway company frequently considers community college students because they usually are already rooted in the county.

“It's hard to recruit because the talent pool in aerospace manufacturing is limited,” Kelly said.

But with the state's bleak economic outlook – and the county's unemployment rate spiking to 5.5 percent in May – some workers may struggle to get into classes that fit their schedules.

Typically, basic refrigeration and basic controls classes are offered during the day and at night. Next semester, the night section of the basic controls class, which attracts at least 40 students, has been canceled.

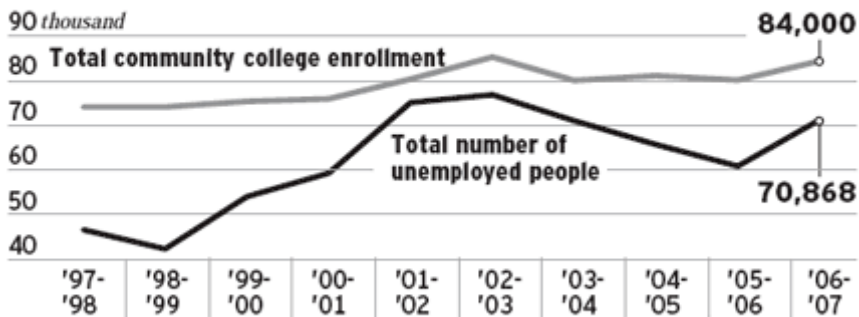
State cuts to public education during bad budget years is commonplace, said Sen. Jack Scott, chairman of the Senate Education Committee.

*Staff writer Linda Lou contributed to this report.*

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### UNEMPLOYMENT'S EFFECT ON COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Officials say more people enroll in San Diego community college classes in tougher economic periods.



SOURCE: San Diego Community College District

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