Full classes forcing students to take more than 2 years at community college

By Carla Rivera, Los Angeles Times

Marianet Tirado returned to Los Angeles Trade Tech community college this fall, optimistic that she would get into the classes she needs to transfer to a four-year university.

Of the courses she wanted, only two had space left when she registered in May. She enrolled in those and “crashed” others. In one of those cases, she lucked out when the professor teaching a political science class admitted additional students. But she couldn’t get into a biology class because she was too far down on the waiting list.

If the math and English courses she needs aren’t offered next spring, she may have to push back her plans to apply to San Francisco State, UCLA or USC.

Her mother is puzzled that Tirado may spend three or four years at what is supposed to be a two-year college.

“Because that’s what we think community college is,” said Tirado, 24, a journalism major who lives in Watts. “It’s hard to explain to my mom that I’m trying to go to school but the courses are not there.”

This is the new reality for Tirado and about 2.4 million other students in the nation’s largest community college system. The system is the workhorse of California’s 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, which promised affordability, quality and access to all.

In reality, the state’s two-year colleges are buckling under the stress of funding cuts, increased demand and a weak record

of student success.

The situation can be seen on all 112 campuses — students on long waiting lists, those who take years to graduate or transfer and others so frustrated that they drop out. Most of them enter ill-prepared for college-level work. Eighty-five percent need remedial English, 73% remedial math. Only about a third of remedial students transfer to a four-year school or graduate with a community college associate's degree.

"We're at the breaking point," said Jack Scott, who served as chancellor of the California Community College system for three years until retiring this month.

"It's like a nice-looking car you've been driving for several years: It looks shiny, but the engine is falling apart," said Eloy Ortiz Oakley, president of Long Beach City College. "The wheels fell off the Master Plan 20 or 30 years ago. We're finally feeling the results because we have enormous needs for our educational system to produce qualified workers, and we're playing catch-up now."

The consequences of not meeting those demands are huge: About 80 percent of firefighters and law enforcement officers and 70 percent of nurses embarked on their careers in community college. By some estimates, California will need 2.3 million more community college degree and certificate holders by 2025 to meet the demands of employers.

President Obama has described community colleges as a major engine of job growth and set a goal of graduating an additional 5 million students by 2020. But in California, home to a quarter of the nation's community college students, those efforts are hampered by the state's budget crisis.

The colleges also play a vital role in the state's higher education system, preparing students to transfer to University of California and California State University campuses. About half of all Cal State graduates began at community colleges.

California’s community colleges started early in the 20th century as offshoots of high schools. Gradually they became separate junior colleges with a state-appointed Board of Governors.

The idea was to offer free classes to high school graduates, people looking for job training and those who just wanted to take a music, art or language class on a neighborhood campus.

Classes were free until 1984. At $46 per unit today, they remain among the least expensive in the nation. About 44 percent of all current community college students qualify for fee waivers based on income.

The system has experienced explosive growth, peaking at about 2.9 million students in 2008-09, while funding grew to about $5.8 billion last year from $200 million in 1965.

Community colleges have three main sources of revenue: state funds, property taxes and student fees. State aid accounts for 61 percent of the system’s budget.

State funding has not kept pace with enrollment growth. Funding per full-time student has declined from a peak of $6,400 in 2000 to about $5,000 today. Course offerings have been slashed by almost a quarter since 2008, and enrollment has dropped by 485,000 students since then.

The community college system is divided among 72 districts run by locally elected boards of trustees, which control their own budgets and the hiring and firing of staff.

Four affluent districts – Marin, Mira Costa, South Orange County and San Mateo County – collect so much revenue from local property taxes and student fees that they don’t qualify for most state aid. Still, with declining property taxes in recent years, they’re not immune to cutbacks.

Many other college districts that depend on state aid are in

more serious financial trouble. They have been forced to dig deeper into their reserves or borrow money. The 90,000-student City College of San Francisco appears to be in the worst situation and faces potential insolvency.

Campuses are cutting counseling and tutoring and dropping winter and summer sessions, trends that officials say could accelerate if voters reject a November ballot measure that would temporarily raise the state sales tax and the state income tax for high earners.

With a 3.6 gpa out of high school, Eduardo Vargas could have gone to a four-year university but chose East Los Angeles College because it was more affordable. During his first year, he was unable to register for any of the high-demand classes he needed for his business administration major.

This fall, he enrolled in honors classes — political science and statistics — because fewer students meet the requirements, so they're easier to get into. Even with an added speech class, he doesn't have the required 12 units to be considered full time.

"I look at the time frame it's going to take me to transfer to San Jose State and it's probably two more years," said Vargas, 19, of Monterey Park. "It's not that important anymore if I get a high-paying job. I just want to get my master's and be stable. Society needs an educated workforce, but it's going to have to invest more in education."

A study by the U.S. Census Bureau showed that, over the course of their careers, high school graduates earned an average of $25,900 per year compared with $33,000 for those with a community college degree and $45,400 for those with a bachelor's degree. (The figures are expressed in 1999 dollars.)

College leaders have begun to narrow the mission of two-year schools, focusing more on job training and preparing students

to transfer.

To help move students more quickly through the system, the Legislature and Board of Governors recently approved measures that would set systemwide registration priorities, including preventing students from repeating courses to improve their grades and giving first choice to students who bolster their chances for success by participating in orientation and academic assessment programs. For the first time, students would have to maintain satisfactory grades to continue to qualify for fee waivers.

Keith Richardson, a 47-year-old former security guard, is trying to complete a degree in electrical construction and maintenance at L.A. Trade Tech. He hopes to graduate next spring so he can become a union electrician, but he's not sure he can get the classes he needs.

"I've got it all laid out and I just need a big break and the classes – and that's the hard part," Richardson said.

The vocational classes, taken by Richardson and more than 800,000 others statewide, are funded at the same level as other academic courses – even though they can cost twice as much to provide. Scott, the former chancellor, said these costlier classes should be funded at higher levels. Some campuses, he said, have even been reluctant to add technical or vocational classes because of the cost.

Last spring, Santa Monica College proposed a controversial two-tier tuition plan to allow students with means to pay higher fees for sought-after classes. Officials said those students would be able to move through the system more quickly, and the added revenue would help fund additional classes for everyone else. But the college abandoned the idea after Scott warned it could violate state education laws.

Ultimately, community colleges must consider bold steps, such as shifting resources from less populated regions of the state

to areas with larger numbers of young people and combining some smaller districts, said Scott Lay, president of the Community College League of California, a nonprofit association of the state's community college districts.

"I think we're finally at the point where the majority of districts … have to realize that the landscape has changed," Lay said.

Tirado, meanwhile, took classes at both Trade Tech and East Los Angeles College last spring to fill out her schedule. This time around, she may need to find a biology class at another community college during the winter session – if she can find a campus still offering winter classes.

"Sometimes it's very discouraging to have to go through all of these obstacles to get an education," Tirado said. "But if we see it that way, we're not going to succeed."

Tahoe photographer part of expedition using drone in Pakistan

By Rebecca Santana, AP

ISLAMABAD – The use of drones in Pakistan normally brings to mind images of U.S. spy planes attacking tribal areas. But drones now are being used to capture a different kind of picture in the country – showing some of the world's highest mountains being scaled by world-class climbers through some of Earth's thinnest air.

Drones, or remote-controlled aircraft, have long been the

domain of the American military and are used extensively in Pakistan's tribal areas near the Afghanistan border to spy on and target militants. Recently, however, civilians have increasingly turned to drones to shoot ground-breaking footage of adventure sports.

This summer a Swiss expedition used remote-controlled helicopters to shoot rare footage of climbers on the Karakoram, one of the world's most demanding and formidable mountain ranges.

"People are going to see footage from the Karakoram that no human being has ever seen," said Corey Rich, a photographer and videographer from South Lake Tahoe who was on the expedition.

The expedition was a joint project between outdoor clothing and equipment company Mammut, and Dedicam, a firm that specializes in using remote-controlled helicopters to shoot video. Their goal: to document world-class mountaineer David Lama and his climbing partner Peter Ortner as they climbed Trango Tower. The sheer granite tower in the Baltoro Glacier is more than 6,000 meters (19,685 feet) above sea level and is one of the most technically difficult climbs in the world.

Filmmakers long have used helicopters to capture aerial footage of climbers – as well as other extreme sport athletes like surfers and skiers –that is hard to capture from the ground. But helicopters are costly and can be dangerous if they crash or get too close to the people on the ground. Additionally, their beating rotors often kick up dust, snow and wind – and can push climbers off balance.

Drones, which can weigh just a few kilograms (pounds) and cost between $1,000 and $40,000, are a fraction of the size and cost of the helicopters traditionally used in adventure photography. Newer models tend to have all of their rotors facing into the sky, making them look a bit like a mechanical

flying spider or insect.

The main concern for the summertime expedition was how – and if – the drone would perform in Pakistan's rugged conditions and high altitude.

"The main challenge was that the air is much thinner, and we didn't know how the flight controls would work with this and the propellers and motors," said drone operator Remo Masina, from Lucerne, Switzerland. He brought two drones on the Pakistan expedition – one with four propellers and another with six. From the ground, he flew them with a handheld console that resembles a video game console, and wore goggles to let him see the camera's view.

Another challenge was to find the climbers on the mountain. Tracing the planned trek route, Masina directed the drone up the mountain until he spotted them – more than a mile (roughly 2,000 meters) away.

The result was stunning images of the Karakoram and the climbers making it to the top.

Experienced climbers say the Karakoram puts the rest of the world's mountain ranges to shame. Neighboring Nepal has Everest, the tallest mountain in the world, but Pakistan has four of the world's 14 peaks that soar to more than 8,000 meters (26,246 feet) above sea level, including the second highest mountain on earth, K-2.

Lama and Ortner said climbing the legendary Pakistan mountains was an amazing experience.

"Here there are so many mountains, and so many difficult mountains, and mountains that haven't been climbed," said Lama. "That's probably why the Karakoram is known as paradise for us."

This year has been particularly successful for Pakistan's

climbing industry, which plummeted in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks in the U.S.

In addition to hosting the renowned Lama for the first time, Nazir Sabir, Pakistan's elder statesman of climbing who was the country's first person to scale Everest, said 30 climbers summited K-2 in 2012, the first summits from the Pakistani side of the mountain since 11 people died trying in 2008.

And the drone footage obtained during Lama and Ortner's climb will expose even more viewers to the legendary Karakoram mountain range.

Drones also increasingly are being used in other adventure sports to push conventional photography boundaries. Cameras on drones have been used to capture video of surfers on Hawaii's North Shore and to chase mountain bikers speeding down mountain trails.

"I've filmed anything from kayaking, rock climbing, mountain biking, to track and field to just casual walking," said photographer and videographer Mike Hagadorn, who has begun to build his own drones to support his Colorado-based firm, Cloud Level Media. "Anything you can dream of – and as long as you don't crash – you can make it happen."

Experts predict drone cameras eventually will become an integral part of every sports shoot. But for now, they're definitely a novelty. The Swiss team filming Lama said villagers in Pakistan stood in awe, staring at the drones as they buzzed around, whenever he used one on the expedition.

"We were trying to do this shot that showed this quaint village," Rich said. "But every single person in the shot is standing, stopped in the street, looking up at the helicopter."

A haunted tour of Truckee for adults only

Spirits of days gone by will be summoned to haunt the streets of historic Truckee during the adults-only Historical Haunted Tour on Oct. 18-19.

The annual walking tour attracts more than 300 attendees, more than 60 volunteers and features tales of yore with a memorable and entertaining twist at Truckee's historic gems and watering holes. The spooky walking tour begins with a glass of wine, interesting characters and a prize packed raffle at Moody's.

New featured haunts include the downtown Mountain Home Center, MOBO Law, Bespoke, Coffee Bar and Scraps Dog Bakery. And, attendees will return to favorite stops – The Pour House and the Old Jail Museum.

Historians and researchers from the Truckee Donner Historical Society spearhead the tales about Truckee's Wild West railroad roots. At each stop, attendees' imagination and senses will be tapped by original performances, visits from the infamous Truckee Regulators and songs by the Barbershop Quartet. It is rumored a libation or two will also be featured when least expected.

There will be never before told stories about the scars left by raging fires and the tragic mishaps on the rails in Truckee. And, for the first time, the tour will dive into the lingering haunts left by Wells Fargo & Co.'s Haunted Express Train Car No. 5. Attendees will experience the most gory, frightening and amusing tour this October.

The Historical Haunted Tour, a fundraiser for Trails & Vistas

and the Truckee Donner Historical Society, has raised more than $15,000 for the two nonprofits. Admission is $35 per person. Tickets are available online.

French vintners want ‘chateau’ off U.S. wine bottles

By Edward Cody, Washington Post

PORTETS, France – When Dominique Haverlan pastes the label “Vieux Chateau Gaubert” on his wine bottles, he proclaims this to his customers: I am selling you 400 years of French pedigree, the shadow of aged Palladian buildings restored at a cost of nearly $2 million, the fruit of 87 acres of vines tended to like children and the glories of a winemaking heritage here in the Graves flatlands near Bordeaux that reaches back for centuries.

How, then, Haverlan asks, can American winemakers pretend to put “chateau” on their labels from the New World? What chateau? They have chateaux in America? The very word is French, he notes, and the Vieux Chateau Gaubert, formerly Le Bordillot, was standing here before there even was an America. Worse, how can American merchants try to sell such wines in Europe? And even in France – maybe even Bordeaux?

But they are.

The European Commission, the 27-nation European Union’s executive body in Brussels, is considering a U.S. request to

drop a ban on import into Europe of American wines bearing the label “chateau” or “clos,” a similar term used mainly on wines from Burgundy in eastern France. An E.U. wine committee is tentatively scheduled to vote on the request Sept. 25, whereupon it will go to the commission for a final decision that, given the tides of globalization in Europe, could well be positive.

“They’re trying to steal our reputation,” Haverlan said during a tour of his sun-splashed property. “The real chateaux, they’re certainly not in the United States.”

Preservation of “chateau” on wine bottles is another chapter in France’s long struggle between tradition and globalization. Throughout the country, peasants and craftsmen are fighting to maintain the value of expensive prestige accumulated over centuries – just the right cheese, or a perfect dress – against an onslaught of cheaper imitations sloshing in on the latest freighter from abroad. With borders disappearing and trade increasingly ignoring origins, their voices are getting weaker every year.

Read the whole story

Infrastructure crisis a growing concern in U.S.

By David Cay Johnston, Newsweek

The damage wrought by Hurricane Isaac, coming on the seventh anniversary of the flooding that decimated New Orleans and stunned a nation, serves as a not-so-subtle reminder of how much infrastructure matters to our safety and our economy.

This time the levees held, thanks in part to the $14.5 billion a shamed federal government was forced to invest following the 2005 disaster. But for decades, America has scrimped on taking care of the public furniture, endangering people and weakening the economy as bridges rust, roads crumble, dams weaken, and water mains leak. The sudden collapse of an Interstate highway bridge in Minneapolis in 2007, killing 13, and the cracks that shut down the Sherman Minton Bridge connecting Indiana and Kentucky last year (it reopened in February) are warning signs of widespread, but hidden, dangers lurking all around us.

Even greater threats can be found among the decrepit corporate-owned infrastructure, including high-pressure oil and natural-gas pipelines that can explode without warning, electric power poles long past their replacement dates, and a telecommunications system that is far less reliable today than it was two decades ago—despite customers paying more than a half-trillion dollars for upgrades.

America's infrastructure gets a grade of "D" from the American Society of Civil Engineers, which recommends that we spend $2.2 trillion on repairs and maintenance.

A troubling event in the July heat foreshadowed what we can expect from continued malign neglect. The electric grid serving more than half of India abruptly failed—twice. Pumps that supply New Delhi with drinking water shut down. Some 300 trains stopped, stranding thousands of passengers. People in elevators found themselves in pitch-black windowless cages with steadily rising temperatures, while 200 miners were trapped underground. Those rich enough to afford air conditioning steamed at the loss of the defining technology of modern life.

The electric power outages affected 670 million Indians— every 10th person on the planet—but the event was treated in the news as a passing curiosity.

Yet what happened in India can, and will, strike America, because our utilities are in dangerous disrepair.

Who can forget the massive outage that nine years ago knocked out the entire Northeast and parts of Canada. With the events of 9/11 still fresh in their minds, Manhattanites stranded in darkened skyscrapers wondered if terrorists had struck again. But this disaster, which caused $6 billion in damage and resulted in the deaths of six people, was homegrown.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• South Lake Tahoe Food and Wine Festival is at Harrah's and Harveys Lake Tahoe Oct. 5–7.

• Here are the weekly roadwork schedules from Caltrans for El Dorado-Tahoe and Sierra.

• Celebrate the book launch of Jared Manninen's graphic memoir "Mega 99" about hiking the Appalachian Trail and Suzanne Roberts' memoir "Almost Somewhere" about hiking the John Muir Trail on Sept. 29, 6pm at Bona Fide Books in Meyers (1069 Magua, No. 4, behind the Getaway Cafe).

• Tahoe Regional Young Professionals will keep the fall feisty at the pub inside 968 Park Hotel, Sept. 26 from 7:30–10pm.

• Work on Highway 28 in Incline, which includes a roundabout at the Mount Rose Highway, will be done by Oct. 15 – three

years ahead of schedule.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe

Billie Jean is a nice, Oriental mix girl who came to the shelter very pregnant. She had her kittens at the shelter and raised them in a foster home. They have all found homes of their own now and Billie Jean is still waiting for hers.



She doesn't mind other cats or well behaved dogs. She is a big talker and cuddler.

Billie Jean is spayed, microchipped, and vaccinated. She is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes. Go online to see photos and description of all pets at the shelter.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

– Karen Kuentz

Opinion: GOP platform hurts Nevada

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

One of the reasons so many people hate politics is that well-meaning leaders often do more harm than good when they try to legislate public policy.

The Republican Party's attempt to protect people from themselves by pledging to oppose online gambling illustrates that point, and it could ultimately result in negative consequences for Nevada's tourism industry.

Nevada gaming professionals and government leaders worked diligently to deliver thoughtful online poker policies, draft regulations and begin issuing licenses. But the GOP platform stands in the way of triggering play on a scale that would benefit our state.

The state is counting on some form of federal online gaming legislation to be approved for nationwide online poker play. And although the state Gaming Control Board and Nevada Gaming Commission are making a good first step issuing licenses for intrastate play, Nevada simply doesn't have the number of players needed to make online poker a game-changer.

The presumed next step would be to add players by developing compacts with other states and finding a way to share tax revenue with them. But the GOP platform is a new impediment.

Adopted at the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Fla., under the category of "Making the Internet family-friendly," the platform states: "We support the prohibition of gambling

over the Internet and call for reversal of the Justice Department's decision distorting the formerly accepted meaning of the Wire Act that could open the door to Internet betting."

It is hard to say what effect legalizing Internet poker would have on Nevada's casino industry. Some say it would drive people out of casinos and onto their computers to play. Others say online poker represents an opportunity to increase player volume because online competition builds a bigger pool of gamblers who eventually will want to experience live play in a casino poker room.

Read the whole story

Schue: Streamline processes, business experience, elect a new generation

Publisher's note: ***This is the third of five Q&A profiles of a South Lake Tahoe City Council candidate running in the Nov. 6 election.***

Name: Clinton Schue

Age: 35

How long have you lived in South Lake Tahoe?: My family has been in Tahoe for over 40 years. My grandparents owned a motel and I spent most of my childhood visiting on weekends, holidays and summers. I have been a permanent resident since 1992; 20 years.



Clinton Schue

Work/volunteer experience: I worked for COO West Coast Cable managing over 1,000 employees. I started my own business at age 25 – CJS Development. I have developed many homes in South Lake Tahoe. I since have owned and operated CJS Ventures Dba: Brothers Bar & Grill in South Lake Tahoe for five years. I am very familiar with development in Tahoe and understand the difficulties of running a seasonal Tahoe business.

Why are you running for City Council?: To ensure a thriving economy to pass down to our children.

What is your vision for South Lake Tahoe, the South Shore and the entire Lake Tahoe Basin?: I would like to see business growth, more jobs for generations to come and financial stability, while retaining the beauty of Tahoe.

What are the three best things about South Lake Tahoe?: To limit to just three is almost impossible. I love the seasons, the recreation and the community.

What three things would you like to change in South Lake Tahoe and how will you go about changing them?: I would like to see an increase in new businesses by offering different incentives to help spur employment for our city. I would also like to see a faster decision-making process implemented with all agencies by working with the public and agencies to see what we can do to streamline the processes.

What would you do to balance the budget?: I would like to implement incentive programs to bring new business, which will generate more revenue for the city. There are many ways the

city can generate more revenue without raising taxes.

What would you like to see in a recreation master plan?: I would like to see more recreation available for our children and adults by working with the city to plan more activities that can also generate income to the city.

Promoting recreation was touted two years as a means to stimulate the local economy. Nothing has been done in that time. What will you do so that same sentence can't be said two years from now?: I would create marketing and advertising campaigns to get more visitors to see what South Lake Tahoe has to offer.

What types of recreation do you enjoy in Lake Tahoe?: Boating, wakeboarding, skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling, paddleboarding, hiking, walking, biking, dirt biking, golfing. Did I miss anything?

How will South Lake Tahoe be different in four years after the end of your term?: At the end of my term in four years I would like to see a rebounded economy with a surplus budget and a bunch of happy voters.

Being on the council requires working with four others. Give readers an example of how you work well others in difficult situations with differing opinions: In construction and the restaurant industry every day you are faced with new challenges in how you deal with many opinions and peoples differences. I have always been one to step back and analyze issues subjectively in order to diplomatically implement needed changes that work best for everyone.

What are your opinions about the following issues and/or entities?:

• **Loop road** – I'd like to see more of a study done on how it will impact our residents. I would like to review options on how not to relocate business and residents.

• **Hole at Stateline** – I would like to see a convention center come to town.

• **Tahoe Valley Plan** – I would like to see more public input.

• **Giving money to any chamber or tourism bureau** – Important to business and tourism.

• **Benefits, including pensions, for city staff** – I believe they are entitled.

• **Tahoe Regional Planning Agency** – Needs more voter interaction on regulations that effect homeowners and business owners in our community.

• **Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board** –

• **South Shore Vision Plan** – Need more public input.

• **Lake Tahoe Airport** – I would like to see more use of our airport.

Why should voters vote for you over someone else?: I am an active member of the business community. I see the problems we face on a day-to-day basis and we need new leadership. It is time for a change.

Is there a person or business you would not take a campaign contribution from?: Not that I can think of.

Tell readers something about yourself that they may not already know: I was asked by several of my peers who are local and business owners to run for City Council because they believe that our generation needs to start making change and they think I am the right candidate for it. I have been told that I am a person that gets things done.

Truckee River Day involves restoration, celebration

Time to grab those gloves, shovels and boots and bring the family and friends out to help restore the Truckee River. The 17th annual Truckee River Day is Oct. 14.

Volunteers will have their choice of half or full day restoration projects with different levels of difficulty. There will be 12 to 15 projects. including re-vegetation at Perazzo Meadows, plantings to help restore areas near the Truckee Legacy Trail, removing aquatic weeds from the Truckee River in Tahoe City, and collecting data for Squaw Creek Restoration.

Projects start at either 9am or 11am and finish between 2 and 3pm.

The River Fair will be from 1-4pm at Granite Flat Campground. This community event is presented by Sierra Watershed Education Partnerships and will feature environmental activities for kids and adults, and the annual fish release at 3pm. There will also be food from Red Truck and live entertainment. Everyone is invited to the fair even if you're not involved in restoration projects.

To participate in this year's restoration projects call (530) 550.8760, ext. 1 by Oct. 5.