
Today's News

Tuesday, May 6, 2008

\$50-Million Pledge Is Meant to Spur More Giving to California's 2-Year Colleges

By [BECKIE SUPIANO](#)

The California Community Colleges system will receive up to \$50-million from the Bernard Osher Foundation to use for scholarships at its 109 colleges, the system's foundation announced today. The pledge, which is very large for one made to a community-college group, is designed to spur other donors to give to those institutions.

The Osher foundation is giving the system \$25-million upfront to create an endowment that will provide \$1,000 scholarships for students who have already earned 24 credits or more. The system will provide those scholarships to 1,250 students beginning in the fall of 2009.

Up to \$25-million more will be added to the endowment on a matching basis, \$1 for every \$2 the system raises, over the next three years. The matching strategy is meant to raise the profile of community colleges as worthwhile recipients of gifts.

"We hope people throughout California and beyond will contribute to trigger the full amount of the Osher pledge," said Mary G.F. Bitterman, the Osher foundation's president. "We really want to hearten philanthropists to invest in these institutions."

Receiving large gifts remains very unusual for community colleges. "We haven't been at the table when it comes to philanthropy for years," said Paul I. Lanning, president of the Foundation for California Community Colleges. "To me, it changes things for community colleges nationwide, tells the public community colleges want support."

The Bernard Osher Foundation provides college scholarships, with a special focus on students re-entering higher education. It also operates lifelong-learning centers at more than 100 colleges.

Concurrent with its gift to the community-college system, the Osher foundation is providing \$20-million to campuses in the University of California and California State University systems that it does not already support in some way. The universities will use the money for scholarships for students transferring from community colleges.

Although the cost of attending a community college in California is low—\$26 a unit—students still are in need of scholarships, said Diane Woodruff, the system's interim chancellor. Many of the system's students work full or part time, and they have to shell out hundreds of dollars for textbooks and deal with California's high cost of living. Students who receive the new Osher scholarships will be able to use them for books, laboratory fees, and other educational expenses, as well as tuition.

Turning a Corner

Ms. Woodruff said it has always been her dream to build the community colleges an endowment like that of a four-year college. She was surprised to discover that the founder of the charitable group, Bernard Osher, shared her desire. The gift will mean a "whole transformation of fund raising at our state level and our colleges," Ms. Woodruff said.

"Community colleges, in fund-raising operations, are today where public universities were 20 or 30 years ago," said John Lippincott, president of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education. For a long time, fund raising was almost exclusively the domain of private colleges, but today public ones have practically caught up, Mr. Lippincott said. And now, he said, community colleges are hoping to make similar strides.

They will need to. Community colleges are finding that the present economic and political climate is squeezing their budgets. "Community colleges have always prided themselves on providing quality and affordabilityâ€”that affordability is challenged by state cuts," Mr. Lippincott said. "That's why the Osher gift is such a fabulous gift: It helps community colleges ensure they can continue to uphold affordability and quality of education."

Fund raising can be more difficult for community colleges than for four-year colleges, in part because community colleges do not dedicate as many resources to it.

Another challenge is that community colleges have a different relationship with their alumni than four-year colleges do. Many community-college students live off campus, and they may also have divided loyalties when it comes to giving if they earn an associate degree at one college and a bachelor's at another.

For this reason, community colleges rely on gifts from foundations more than their four-year counterparts do, Mr. Lippincott said.

"We'd really like our Osher challenge to launch a new chapter in higher education in California," Ms. Bitterman said.

[Copyright](#) © 2008 by [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#)

[Subscribe](#) | [About The Chronicle](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Terms of use](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Help](#)