Furloughs—how are they working out for us?

A mid-term check-up yields mixed results

By Leanne Brown, Sonoma State University

When we began furloughs, we all had ideas on how things might go. Leave pay, 2 days that we needed to take off in the next six months, and, we were told, 10% less work. How would this affect the students, as faculty were getting furloughed as well? Did the Chancellor have the answers to all these questions? How could we manage these closures when we work with the everyday demands of education?

The cut in pay is hard, and it is coming to light that we should have been equally worried about workload. With furlough days, vacations, sick days and work environment limitations, this has become a big problem.

On one campus during a 5 night meeting, members did not relate their frustrations over the lower pay. Instead, their frustrations were with not obtaining the supplies they needed to get their job done. Budgets have been cut, leaving departments with less money for supplies. The custodial staff were frustrated that management had not given them a plan for the challenges they were experiencing with skeleton crews.

Employees are finding their workloads not being reduced—just the opposite. While we are working and getting paid, 10% less, the work is not reduced by 10%. Temps have been let go, and permanent staff are expected to pick up the workload. Foot traffic is not decreasing, neither are clients and managers’ expectations. Students, faculty, and administrators are angry that we can’t get the work done quickly enough. In turn, the stress levels of our employees are rising.

One member did the math to quantify the impact on her department. During Spring 2009 the office had a temporary part-time person who worked 20 hours a week. Due to budget cuts the temp was let go. Fall semester furloughs meant 16 hours less a month for the full time employee. The loss of the temp resulted in another 96 hours less work per month. The total loss equaled 112 hours a month. The employer’s work was not reduced by 10%; in fact, it was increased. She is now expected to get 256 hours worth of work done in 144 hours. What is wrong with this picture?

Students are also affected. Some have had to move back home, tuition is higher, work hours have been cut, and some have lost their jobs completely. Faculty also voted to furlough. Their furlough day might fall on a day they have office hours, leaving students with less contact hours than before.

What is the final picture? Students are not able to absorb it all, and grades are going down.

Faculty are trying to cram so much into a class that students are not able to absorb it all, and grades are going down.

“The backbone of the CSU, representing Bargaining Units 2 (Health Care) • 5 (Operations) • 7 (Administrative) • 9 (Technical)

March 4, 2010

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NOTE: This issue went to press just as layoff notices were being announced at CSU East Bay and the Chancellor’s Office. Please check the CSUEU web site, www.csueu.org, for the latest news.

President’s Message

From the desk of Pat Gantt, CSUEU President

The Governor presented a New Year’s surprise to Higher Education on January 8th with a state budget proposal that removes $380 million to the cuts from last year. The CSU campuses had been planning for another round of deep cuts at that point in time. Everyone in the CSU, administration and unions, are now looking at the budget carefully to see what the level of restoration really means at the campus level. Do we need furloughs at all? Is the threat of massive layoffs removed?

The budget process is long and tedious. Parts of the budget get cut all the way and sometimes without warning. The CSU budget was cut in 2004 by $80 million in the last minutes of the budget process just before the Governor signed it. In that case there was no warning or public discussion or debate. It is critical that every CSU employer contact state legislators and tell them about the need for funding for the cuts from the current year. While the economy has not yet fully rebounded, the deep cuts from last year, if continued, will drastically affect the ability of the CSU to meets its mission and serve the students and return to California a prepared workforce and productive society members.

The Higher Education spending versus savings plan has put CSU funding on the front burner of the budget process. We must all try to keep it there and remind every Californian of the impact the cuts will have.

The CSUEU will continue to research and fight to restore funding for the system and eliminate the need for any or deep budget cuts. Please visit our web site regularly at www.csueu.org as we will keep you in the process to restore funding to the CSU.
One thing has become clear recently: in order to survive, we can’t sit back and expect others to fight our budget battles in Sacramento. The Alliance for the CSU was the first step in working as a unified front in management, faculty, staff, and students on lobbying for the CSU. Student group efforts are underway at the grass-roots level. CSUEU is involved with several voters on the campus focusing on key legislators of higher education’s worth in today’s society. Each of us can play a part in getting the message out. Here are some ways you can get involved: CSUEU’s CapWiz program gives employees the power to contact their legislators with a few keystrokes. As the first furlough days approached, we saw a surge in e-mail use, using this tool. We need to continue doing that the day before every furlough day at our respective campuses. As the financial impact of furloughs becomes more apparent, it’s important to personalize your message according to your unique level of hardship and your observations of degraded services. To use CapWiz, on a computer connected to the Internet, go to the CapWiz URL: http://www.csueu.com/votes/issue and click the link to contact your legislator.

Rallies and informational activities can help get the word out to the public. Watch for announcements about your chapter leaders about upcoming events. Voice your opinion by carrying a sign or handing out information. Students are eager to learn what’s going on and how they can help determine their educational future. Talk to students and guide them to news and action sites on campus and on the Internet.

Contact your legislators at their local offices. Even in districts that tradition-ally don’t put education at the top of priority lists, legislators and their aides will listen to voters. Incumbents are more willing to listen, since 2010 is an election year. Tell them your concerns about the public service that you are proud to provide, and how the budget affects it, and why higher education is so important.

The Cost of Furloughs
Do furlough programs achieve their goals?

Some of us who work for the state are too fully aware of the hardships that furloughs impose on families. We’re also aware of the impact of furloughs, reduced class sizes and increased fees, on students. But, do furloughs work? They appear to save money, but does it really pay off? According to a variety of recent studies and articles, it is possible that state furloughs do not save much money. In a recent edition of the online journal California Progress Report, David Greenwald of the UC Berkeley Labor Center said that state furloughs save California’s general fund only 2 cents for every dollar in cuts we make.

Our sister union, SEU Local 1000, represents 95,000 of the 193,000 state workers covered under the furlough program. Many of these workers are furloughed three days per month, a 14 percent pay cut.

In a recent policy brief, “The High Cost Of Furloughs,” UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education Chair Ken Jacobs wrote, “Whether imposed on employees paid from state, federal, or special funds, furloughs impact the broader economy in multiple ways. The short-run wage cut is a reduction in spending in the local economy and will have a multiplier effect, resulting in reduced private sector job loss and subsequent loss of tax revenues.”

He added, “It’s poorly designed to provide savings to the general fund. Key design problems include furloughing state workers in revenue-generating positions, continued accumulation of pension and benefit debt, and exclusion of workers whose salaries are paid by the federal government and other special funds, in addition to the general fund.”

While the tool may be popular and widely used, that doesn’t make it effective or the best choice.

—Dr. John Sullivan

Even some conservatives question furloughs. In a post titled “Employee Furloughs Can Be A Bad Alternative To Layoffs” in the employee-recruiting forum ERE.net, SFSU Professor John Sullivan, Ph.D. wrote, “While the tool may be popular and widely used, that doesn’t make it effective or the best choice.”

Sullivan cites many reasons for this conclusion, including productivity loss, morale decline over loss of income and increased workload, increased employee stress, higher error rates, angry customers, possible lawsuits over furloughs, loss of good employees who react to furloughs by leaving, and a general decrease in innovation.

Sullivan said, “It’s hard to plan ahead and think of innovations when your job security is up in the air.” These and other factors are considerations that may have to be taken account next year if the furlough question comes up again.

Furloughs Working Out?

Continued from page 1

We might be wise to think now about how the biz is. If next year’s budget isn’t better, would we do this again if asked? I don’t know: I have spoken with are learning more

Quotables

“I strongly urge you to recommend to the Trustees that the CSUEU allocate their proposed funds (from the Governor’s proposal) to remove the need for the furlough program when the current agreement expires this summer. That will allow us jointly to bring the workforce back to full operations to serve the students and provide a quality education.”

—CSUEU President Pat Gartn to Chancellor Reid. Jan. 21, 2010

One of our top priorities is to restore the state’s budget to its former stature. The efforts are in severe trouble. The efforts of CSU, UC, and community college administrators will have convinced the voters to provide better budgets for education. But the deal isn’t done yet. Action on our behalf may tip the balance toward increasing the CSU to its former stature. It might be unforbearable to do some of the above, but what’s the alternative? What harm can come from trying? More importantly, what harm can come from not trying?

The big hope for the CSU is that state leaders will agree to fund higher education at the level needed. If that happens, the other “ifs” will go away.

Workplace Bullies

Close to half the workforce has either been a victim of bullying or has witnessed it.

By Annal Martin, CSU San Bernardino

Do any of the following situations sound familiar?

• Coworkers refusing to help you when asked
• Being given the silent treatment
• Rude or disrespectful treatment by others in meetings when your ideas are expressed
• Being yelled at or shouted at
• Someone interfering with or sabotaging your work
• Being put down in front of others
• Being denied a raise or promotion without a valid reason
• Others staring, glaring or using nonverbal communication to intimidate you

Well, you are not alone. The situations listed above are some characters of a workplace bully. Workplace bullying is defined as “the tendency of individuals, groups, or organizations to communicate to intimidate you.” According to Wikipedia, some types of bullying tactics are verbal, nonverbal, psychological, and physical. Some examples are filled to capacity. On one campus, we held public hearings on what he called “the epidemic of bullying.” As chair of Berkeley’s Commission On Labor, Kilday-Hicks told us jointly to bring the workforce back to full operations to serve the students and provide a quality education.”

Workers have witnessed workplace bullying. Close to half of some types of bullying tactics are: verbal, nonverbal, psychological behavior against a co-worker.” According to Wikipedia, students are eager to learn what’s going on a sign or handing out information. Students are eager to learn what’s going on and how they can help determine their educational future. Talk to students and guide them to news and action sites on campus and on the Internet.

Contact your legislators at their local offices. Even in districts that tradition-ally don’t put education at the top of priority lists, legislators and their aides will listen to voters. Incumbents are more willing to listen, since 2010 is an election year. Tell them your concerns about the public service that you are proud to provide, and how the budget affects it, and why higher education is so important.

The Alliance for the CSU was the first step in working as a unified front in management, faculty, staff, and students on lobbying for the CSU. Student group efforts are underway at the grass-roots level. CSUEU is involved with several voters on the campus focusing on key legislators of higher education’s worth in today’s society. Each of us can play a part in getting the message out. Here are some ways you can get involved:

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Continued from page 1

We might be wise to think now about how the biz is. If next year’s budget isn’t better, would we do this again if asked? I don’t know: I have spoken with are learning more towards the no box on this issue. 80 percent of us felt strongly last July that we need to save jobs and we gave the Chancellor time to work this out. If funding doesn’t improve, will he come up with solutions? He has a few more months… will it be enough? What are the alternatives if furloughs aren’t workable?

The big hope for the CSU is that state leaders will agree to fund higher education at the level needed. If that happens, the other “ifs” will go away.
Great (Work) Expectations

A little realism can go a long way, with communication

By Nancy Kibbey, CSUEU/SEIU 2579, Classification Committee Chair

“Expecting the world to treat you fairly because you are a good person is a little like expecting the bull not to attack you because you are a vegetarian.”

—Dr. Dwayne Whaley, PBS host

E xpectations! We all have them. We expect that people will behave nicely to us. We expect our cars to start. We expect that people will be nice to us, that we’ll have good health, good marriages, a satisfying job. It’s almost as if some managers are under the illusion that employees will be nice to them and do their jobs well. That’s why so many employees say to their managers, "I don’t have anything, I must be doing okay." To their shock and amazement, many employees only discover the hard news at performance review time—or worse—when receiving a disciplinary notice. It is the responsibility of both employers and employees to communicate expectations to each other—and especially if they aren’t done.

We are paid to do a job, as specified in our collective bargaining agreement, not something more, not less. It is unrealistic for managers to expect employees to do more than the job description calls for. Due to the nature of our work, many employees will never be able to meet the expectations of the job. That’s true for all employees. We agreed to accept a 10 percent pay cut in exchange for 10 percent less work. The CSU agreed to compensate us for the time we were not working. Thirty-two hours is the rule during furlough weeks, but we expected that we would be paid for the work we did.

Tales of overwork and exhaustion, mistrust and despair are not the ramblings of a few disgruntled workers who can’t keep pace.

Job dissatisfaction often occurs when these expectations are not met. Frustration and disengagement can result. Here are some suggestions on how to avoid them:

• Be realistic about your expectations.
• Be relaxed and at peace with your work.
• Be flexible and expect change.
• Be trustworthy in your relationships.
• Have a positive attitude when dealing with difficult situations.
• Be open to new ideas and alternatives.
• Be mindful of your own needs and limitations.
• Be proactive in finding solutions to problems.
• Be willing to accept responsibility for your own actions.
• Be willing to take risks and accept challenges.
• Be willing to give up control in some situations.
• Be willing to compromise when necessary.
• Be willing to listen to others and consider their viewpoints.
• Be willing to accept feedback and constructive criticism.
• Be willing to change your approach when necessary.
• Be willing to seek help when needed.
• Be willing to accept consequences for your actions.

The following reports from the Bargaining Unit Councils address issues and current news items from our diverse membership. After dealing with reduced paychecks, the impact of furloughs on workload seems to be the primary concern for most of us.

BU 2

Bargaining Unit 2 Chair Terry Renee (San Diego) reports staggered furlough schedules were created to release job openings for health care personnel, bargaining unit staff whose pay was frozen. The exit of many employees will leave the CSU Fresno Classification Committee Chair position, with April Webster (San Diego) becoming vice chair. The Classification Committee is responsible for setting and establishing policies and procedures that ensure fair and consistent classification of employees in the bargaining unit.

BU 5

From Bargaining Unit 5 Chair Sharon Cunningham (San Diego) comes news of recent threated bumping at two campuses. A Public Employment Relations Board ruling allows SETC (Unit 6) employees who receive layoff notices to retreat to Unit 5 positions if they have achieved permanency in those positions prior to joining Unit 6. Those notice triggered a domain effect, and some Unit 5 employees with fewer seniority points received layoff notices. Cunningham was outraged on behalf of the people the representatives and voted to fight every case to the fullest.

The good news is the effect was recently reversed on all campuses following CSUEU-initiated negotiations. Other cases are pending. Cunningham, proud of her fellow bargaining unit members, vows to pursue the cases fiercely.

BU 7

Bargaining Unit 7 Chair Rich McGee (San Bernardino) reports a disturbing statewide trend in under-classified new job openings. There have been several recent reports of technical jobs posted at the foundation level which involve system administration, data analytics and lead work assignments. These are not foundation level tasks! A foundation job is typically designed to be a bridge between a student assistant and a career-level campus position. A job at the foundation level requires only knowledge of key work terms and concepts; specific job knowledge is not required. Likewise, foundation employees must have constant, direct supervision.

Most all BU 7 employees keep an eye on announcements and respond to violations to their campus representatives immediately. An employee without a campus representative during the furlough period. Thirty-two hours is the rule during furlough weeks, but that doesn’t mean non-furlough weeks can be overloaded past 40 hours to compensate.

That’s true for all employees. We agreed to accept a 10 percent pay cut in exchange for 10 percent less work. The CSUEU agreed to these conditions also. Report violations of the agreement to your campus representatives; part of our responsibility as union members is to watch each others’ backs as well as our own. And, as times get tough, your union will be stronger.

Keep in touch with your campus unit representative if you observe problems of any sort.
Communications Committee Spotlight

This term, the committee will explore how to best use each medium. It also focuses on the collection and distribution of information to our membership in all its forms. Communication channels are changing and expanding in today’s increasingly connected environment. Micro-blogging (Twitter), social networking (Facebook), and portals (The Activist) have joined the more traditional newsletters, flyers, websites, phone, and e-mail as different and effective modes of communications. This term, the committee will explore how to best use each medium, increase chapter communication, and streamline communications to meet challenges to our union.

The Communications Committee includes:

• Ray Finnell (president, Chapter 310): Ray is chair of the committee and works as a performing arts technician at CSU Bakersfield. He is excited to work with what he terms “a new group of talented and dedicated people.”

• Leeanne Bowes (president, Chapter 304): Leeanne works in information technology at Sonoma State, providing computer support for staff and faculty. “Communications means getting the word out. It excites me that, in these challenging times, we are becoming stronger.”

• Joseph Dobzynski, Jr. (president, Chapter 324): “You’re truly works in the Information Technology department at CSU Channel Islands as campus solutions lead for the campus CMS systems (don’t hate me for it!). I am excited to find better ways to communicate with members and expand my involvement with my union.”

• Annel Martin (activist, Chapter 320): Annel is an electronic medical records analyst at CSU San Bernardino and longtime CSUEU activist. She is looking forward to, as she puts it, “sharing experiences and supporting other committee members to ensure that member voices are heard.”

• Donna Melendez (secretary, Chapter 311): Donna works as an administrative support coordinator for the Civil Engineering Department at CSU Los Angeles. She sees her committee work as an opportunity to learn more about the union.

• Jessica Post (president, Chapter 301): Jessica is a payoff/benefits representative at Chico State, handling new hire paperwork, customer support, and whatever else they throw her way. She is excited to work with other campuses to keep members informed throughout the state.

• Steve Sloan (activist, Chapter 307): Steve is an information technology consultant and lecturer on new media at San Jose State University and a former newspaper photographer. He says he would “like to see our union have a communications strategy that evolves beyond the old metaphor of web, e-mail and print.”

• John Watson (communications officer, CSUEU Staff): John is assigned staff for the committee. He handles all communications for CSUEU, including newsletters, websites, press releases, fact sheets, and e-mails. He admires the enthusiasm and skills within the new committee.

Communications have become more important as we meet the twin challenges of damaging economic times and fast-paced technology changes. It is easy to lose the union message in the flurry of information that comes our way. However, this committee is well formed to ensure that everyone, from those on the cutting edge of the technologically-challenged, find useful information when they need it. “We are here for you!”

Handling Furloughs

President Nancy Kohets of Fresno’s chapter has made a colorful, sarcastic door sign thanking Gov. Schwarzenegger, Senate Dean Flores, Senate Drew Cogdall, and Assembly Member Mike Villines for the severe budget reduction imposed upon the CSU. Voice and e-mail messages and door signs acknowledging furloughs and their impacts can be found throughout the 23 campuses, including: “Today is a furlough day for me. I will be out of the office until the next business day, and I will return your call at that time. Sorry for the inconvenience.”

Another sign seen on a CSU office door: “Due to severe cuts in state funding, today is a designated furlough day, when most offices are closed. Getting some time off from work is usually considered a good thing—but not when it’s unpaid and unwanted, no matter the circumstance. We (staff) will remain committed to and will be providing high quality of service to our students and will maintain a positive attitude through these difficult times.”

Keep up the slogans, doors signs, and out-of-office AutoReply messages to remind the public why you are there.

And keep CSUEU informed. We want to hear from you about how you handle furlough days! E-mail University Employee Officer or Finnell@calsea.org with your furlough message stories.

Workplace Bullies

Employment policies in the workplace are often geared towards the needs of management. However, it occurs in all work environments, from the fast-food employee to the university president. Bullies can silence and alienate their victims and set the workplace on a downward slide. This term, the committee is going to explore how to deal with bullying and harassment.

Great Expectations

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