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Monumental gift from the Osher Foundation begins paying off for California Community College students

\$625,000 sent to colleges throughout state for Fall 2009 scholarships

SACRAMENTO—September 14, 2009—Just 15 months after its formation, the California Community Colleges Scholarship Endowment has provided \$625,000 in scholarship support to California Community College students for the Fall 2009 semester.

The scholarship money was provided earlier this month to the state's 110 community colleges by the Foundation for California Community Colleges, fulfilling an ambitious pledge to provide swift benefit from a fund created in May 2008 with a \$50 million commitment from The Bernard Osher Foundation. Thanks to this funding, 1,250 scholarships in the amount of \$500 were distributed at community colleges across the state this semester, helping students pay for educational expenses such as text books, lab fees, uniforms and transportation. A second installment of the same amount will be distributed to colleges for the Spring 2010 semester, providing a total of \$1.25 million in scholarship funding this academic year alone.

The California Community Colleges Scholarship Endowment is a permanent fund that provides scholarships of up to \$1,000 annually to students who have already completed 24 units of study, are enrolled in at least six units for the current semester, and who qualify for a Board of Governors fee waiver. It combines the historic \$50 million commitment—including an upfront gift of \$25 million—from the Osher Foundation with a three-year match fundraising campaign that involves all 110 California Community Colleges. Through this campaign, the Endowment will ultimately grow to \$100 million and provide scholarships for thousands of California students annually.

“The Bernard Osher Foundation’s intention in creating this endowment was to provide scholarship support to California Community College students with the greatest need who have also demonstrated a commitment to their education,” said Mary Bitterman, President of the Osher Foundation. “We knew it would be critical to provide scholarships to students as quickly as possible, but we could not have foreseen how fortunate the timing of the first scholarship payments would be.”

The scholarships come at a critical time, indeed. A record-high unemployment rate, coupled with enrollment caps at the University of California and California State University, is sending unprecedented numbers of students to the community colleges seeking a degree, certificate or job training. At the same time, recent legislation has increased California Community College fees from \$20 to \$26 per unit. While California Community Colleges continue to remain affordable compared to other systems, non-tuition costs of college enrollment have grown much faster than the state’s general cost of living in recent years, according to California Community Colleges: Making Them Stronger and More Affordable by William Zumeta and Deborah Frankle.

“Thanks to the Osher Foundation’s generous commitment, California’s community colleges have been able to provide more financial support to their students at a time when it is most needed,” said Paul Lanning, President and CEO of the Foundation for California Community Colleges. “These scholarships are helping students of all backgrounds who were struggling to pay for their education before this financial support became available.”

Hundreds of thank you letters have flooded the Foundation’s office, each providing a glimpse of students’ struggles to pay for their education. “This year has been especially difficult for my family... In addition to the nursing program I also work two jobs and have three teenage daughters. This scholarship will help me pay for books and test materials...and perhaps ease the constant stress I am under just enough to help me make it through another grueling year,” wrote one scholarship recipient from Copper Mountain College in Joshua Tree.

Another recipient, from San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton, added, “Please remember that with each student you help...you’re lifting future families and whole generations from past challenges they have struggled with.”

In addition to the financial hardships students face, the colleges are dealing with budget challenges of their own. With more than 2.9 million students enrolled last year, California Community Colleges are seeing their highest attendance levels in the history of the system. Despite such rapid enrollment growth, \$830 million in budget cuts to community colleges have forced campuses to reduce course offering by as much as 20 percent.

“Local community colleges are facing daunting economic challenges due to state budget cuts and other revenue decreases, yet we must remain true to our mission of providing quality, affordable education to California’s future workforce,” said Mike Stepanovich, Executive Director of the Bakersfield College Foundation and Board Member of the Network of California Community College Foundations. “By creating this endowment, the Osher Foundation has eased the financial burden on students at this difficult time in our economy, and helped the students as well as the colleges serving them.”

The Endowment is managed by the Foundation for California Community Colleges, which also provides tools and support to community colleges to maximize their fundraising efforts. More information is available by emailing endowment@foundationccc.org or by visiting www.SupporttheEndowment.org.

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The Foundation for California Community Colleges is the official nonprofit foundation to the California Community Colleges’ Board of Governors and Chancellor’s Office. The Foundation’s mission is to benefit, support, and enhance the missions of the California Community College system, the largest higher education system in the nation. Incorporated in 1998, the Foundation works with Community Colleges and partner organizations to manage donations, grants, programs, and services that drive excellence in education while saving millions of dollars for colleges each year. The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt non-profit corporation and receives no direct state or public support. For more information, visit www.foundationccc.org.