

EDITORIAL: Fresno State president Joseph Castro would be wrong to impose 'success fee'

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By The Bee Editorial Board

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When Gov. Jerry Brown hit the campaign trail in 2012 to push his Proposition 30 tax hike, he spent considerable time on college campuses.

Brown said that the proposition would keep college costs down while helping public schools and the state budget. A majority of voters took Brown at his word. State government's dire finances have improved and public schools -- along with public institutions of higher learning -- are getting increased funding.

But some campus presidents in the California State University system -- including Fresno State's Joseph Castro -- desire even bigger budgets and are chafing under Brown's 2013 directive to run "a tight ship."

And so the presidents have stolen a page from the politicians' playbook by coming up with a term -- in this case, "student success fees" -- to gussy up a reach into students' pockets.

Don't be fooled by the language. Success fees are simply a way to raise tuition without getting the needed approval of CSU trustees. Tuition has been frozen at Fresno State and the other CSU campuses at \$5,471 for the past three years -- and rightly so. The freeze makes sense because of California's painfully slow recovery from the Great Recession.

Over the past 10 years, fees paid by Fresno State students on top of tuition have more than doubled from \$370 to \$815. Now Castro is looking to add a success fee of about \$100 that would take effect for the 2015-16 school year. He's also contemplating raising the student athletic fee to pay for the reinstatement of men's wrestling and the addition of a women's sport.

Moreover, Castro says that students will not vote on the success fees. The reason seems obvious. The last time Fresno State students voted on fees, they turned them down. Yet then President John Welty imposed them anyway.

Understand: Fresno State students have always been an easy mark because the administration knows that their voice does not matter on questions such as fees.

As for raising the athletic fee, students should not be subsidizing the sports entertainment of the entire community.

Budgeting is about deciding priorities. Castro says the success fee would help more students graduate -- and graduate faster. Here's a better way to pay for that help. Castro should figure out which programs don't serve Fresno State's mission, cut them and shift the money to his student success effort.

At the very least, he should allow Fresno State students a binding vote on the student success and athletic fees.