

## Heald College begins shutdown of Fresno campus



People connected with Fresno's Heald College talk with security, as seen through the empty lobby Monday afternoon. JOHN WALKER — THE FRESNO BEE |[Buy Photo](#)

- *Corinthian Colleges closes its 28 campuses*
- *That includes Fresno, where faculty met Monday*
- *Heald employees said closure is punishment for something they didn't do*

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For Belinda Alcid, vice president of Heald College's northwest Fresno campus, Monday was a whirlwind of emotion.

Reached by phone that afternoon, Alcid said she still hadn't processed news that her workplace of 22 years was closed. She said it would likely sink in next Sunday when she and her husband follow a longstanding practice.

"Our normal routine is to put together clothes for Monday," she said. "(I'll think) 'What am I doing? I have nowhere to go.'"

Alcid and fellow Heald employees arrived on campus at noon Monday to pick up their personal belongings, and met with campus officials as the college's shutdown began taking shape in Fresno and on locations around the state. Reporters were asked to leave the property.

People were seen carrying plastic bins and boxes out of the campus after security guards checked their names off

after they entered the career college.

Heald's corporate parent, Corinthian Colleges of Santa Ana, announced Sunday that it had ceased substantially all operations and discontinued instruction at its remaining 28 campuses, including Heald's 10 California locations.

Fresno's Heald College was founded in 1906 had around 900 students enrolled through the campus at 255 W. Bullard Ave.

Alcid said campus leaders held a town hall "to go over the shock of the letter," give employees their final paychecks and the opportunity to clean up. .

Around 50 employees attended the meeting, Alcid said. She didn't know exactly how many employees the college had, but said there were more than 200 when she first started.

"Even after all of the fight, I could not believe it when I found out," she said. "It's just a very sad, sad day and we pretty much just comforted each other."

Corky Draconi, who was an information technology instructor at Heald in Fresno for almost 18 years, is most worried over what will happen to the students.

"I have a number of students that have tried some of the other schools in the Valley and were not successful, specifically chose Heald because of the individual attention and the atmosphere," Draconi said through tears.

Reached by phone, Draconi said Heald students are often the first in their family to attend college and many times already have jobs and are trying to better themselves for their children.

Receiving the letter saying Heald would close was a shock, Draconi said.

"Maybe I'm a little bit of a Pollyanna, but I really didn't believe they could close something that was so powerful in the lives of so many people."

Corinthian, which has been in trouble with state and federal regulators, said its efforts to find a buyer for the career college fell short.

The company said in a statement it is working with other schools to provide continuing education for its approximately 16,000 students. Corinthian said those efforts depend on cooperation with partnering institutions and regulatory authorities.

The majority of Corinthian's schools were sold last year to a nonprofit student loan servicer after California Attorney General Kamala Harris sued Corinthian for allegedly misleading students about the value of their education, and a federal inquiry effectively cut off much of the company's revenue flow.

Corinthian's decision to close came less than two weeks after the U.S. Department of Education announced it was fining the for-profit institution \$30 million for misrepresentation.

Harris said in a statement that she and federal officials acted in the students' best interest. "Corinthian continued to deceive its students to the end," Harris said. "Closure of these campuses should help students get out from under the mountains of debt Corinthian imposed upon them through its lies."

Earlier this month, Fresno Heald president Carolyn Pierce warned students at the Fresno campus that the school could be closed if Corinthian could not find a buyer for Heald. She blamed Harris, and on Sunday said the college never had the chance to disprove the attorney general's allegations.

Pierce said Heald leaders tried everything they could to stop the closure from happening. Students protested in front of the offices of the attorney general in San Francisco and Sacramento. Nearly 10,500 people [signed an online](#)

[petition](#) to remove impediments to the sale of the college.

Alcid said administrators would finish out the week to respond to students' questions and concerns. They will host meetings Wednesday and Thursday to let students obtain copies of their transcripts and explore options for continuing their education.

Students enrolled in the Corinthian schools when the campuses are closed may be eligible for a full [discharge of their debts](#), according to a U.S. Department of Education policy that allows 100% dissolution of debt for students who cannot complete the program they enrolled in due to a school's closure.

Pierce and Alcid said students who choose to have their loans forgiven forfeit their right to declare the credits they attained should they choose to go back to school in the future.

"It will be as though they have wasted their time," Pierce said.

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