

# Heald College students in Fresno confused, frustrated over school closure

By Carmen George

This flier was handed out to students at the Fresno Heald College campus on Wednesday.

CARMEN GEORGE — THE FRESNO BEE

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More than 100 students lined up outside Fresno's Heald College on Wednesday morning to pick up degrees and transcripts from their now-closed college, some still shocked that their dream of an education was being derailed.

Heald's parent company, Corinthian Colleges of Santa Ana, announced Sunday that it had ceased instruction at its remaining 28 campuses, including the 10 Heald colleges in California.

A security guard at the Fresno campus on Wednesday prohibited reporters from talking to students or staff. But off campus, confused students expressed concern and frustration about what was happening.

Three students said they did not receive an email, letter or phone call from Heald College announcing its closure.

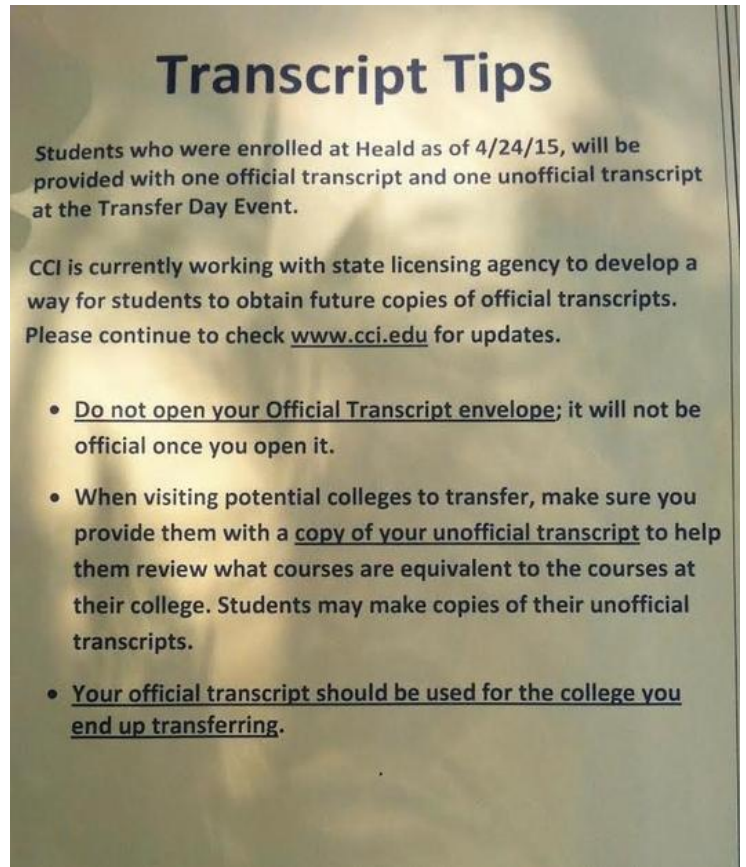
Criminal justice major Melissa Whitaker, 45, learned of it from her daughter in San Jose, who saw the news circulating on social media.

"She's like, 'You know they are closing your school.' I said, 'What are you talking about!?' " Whitaker recalled. "They (Heald College officials) sent me an email to come pick up my degree — that was it."

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.

In October 2013, California Attorney General Kamala Harris sued Corinthian for alleged fraud and false advertising, among other things. Most of Corinthian's schools were sold last year to a nonprofit student loan servicer.

Corinthian Colleges had around 16,000 enrolled students before its closure. Jack Massimino, chairman and CEO, addressed students in a letter: "We want you to know that we made every effort to find a qualified buyer to purchase our remaining campuses and keep your school open, and several had expressed interest in doing so. Unfortunately, largely as a result of recent state and federal regulatory actions, we were unable to complete a sale, and our only option was to close our schools."



Whitaker of Fresno called the closure “messed up.”

“I don’t know how they can blame what Corinthian did on this campus,” Whitaker said. “I mean, if they did something wrong, sue them, do whatever you got to do, but don’t close down the school when kids are barely starting (a new quarter), people are barely getting their classes ... ”

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

Students were invited onto the campus Wednesday and again Thursday to pick up degrees and transcripts. But accomplishing that task wasn’t easy or clear for Florinda Arreguin, 23. She said because she wasn’t enrolled at Heald as of April 24, her transcripts weren’t immediately available. She was directed to a Corinthian [website](#), where updates about how to obtain transcripts will be posted.

Arreguin is also worried her Heald degree may not be worth much in the future, depending on the outcome of the federal lawsuit.

But as of now, Bernell Hirning, associate regional dean for the Central Valley campuses of National University, said most Heald credits are still transferable to a number of universities, including National.

Representatives from National and other colleges in the region were present at Heald’s Fresno campus Wednesday to provide students with information about how to continue their education elsewhere.

National has scheduled two meetings — Saturday and May 6 — for Heald students at its northeast Fresno campus, 20 River Park Place West. More information is available by calling the college at (559) 256-4900.

Some Heald students also are weighing an offer from the U.S. Department of Education, which announced those enrolled in Corinthian schools may be eligible for a full [discharge of their debts](#) if they were unable to complete their school program due to the closure. But college officials said students who choose to have their loans forgiven forfeit their right to declare the credits they attained.

Heald student Stevie Brown, 26, of Madera, said while she and other students “knew something was going on” — campus president Carolyn Pierce told students of the likely closure during an emotional meeting April 8 — Brown still feels “blindsided” by the closure.

“Heald kept going on like nothing was going to happen, like we were going to get bought out,” Brown said. “It is a bit upsetting.”

Contact Carmen George: [cgeorge@fresnobee.com](mailto:cgeorge@fresnobee.com), (559) 441-6386 or [@CarmenGeorge](#) on Twitter.