

It's a Lean, Green, Community College Machine

I've loved seeing the ongoing improvements to the De Anza campus over the last couple of years since I made my long-awaited return to education, but like many I wondered, 'Where is this money coming from and how is this going to benefit your average student?'

While so many are concerned about the environment, many more are concerned about the rising costs of tuition and tremendous budget cuts in our schools. So when the college begins a seemingly enormous amount of construction projects geared toward helping the environment and saving energy, students want to know if the cost of this massive undertaking is taking away from programs to ease the mounting financial burdens they are facing these days.

I spoke with the woman who had all the answers: De Anza's Associate Vice President in Finance and Educational Resources, Donna Jones-Dulin.

According to Jones-Dulin, "[The projects] are paid for by Measure C, a citizen's bond measure where residents of our school district voted to include an assessment on their property tax to pay for improvements at both Foothill and De Anza College."

Unfortunately for students, the funds allotted by Measure C cannot be used for any academic programs. While students crave more assistance and an effort to bring down tuition costs, it is simply

not allowed through Measure C. De Anza would need another measure to acquire those types of funds.

While students will not benefit in a direct monetary way, the projects “will provide students with better learning spaces while using fewer natural resources” stated Jones-Dulin.

Some projects will improve aesthetics while others will improve energy efficiency. Funds from Measure C will be used to improve areas of campus such as the Sunken Garden, solar paneling in the parking lots, and the pool and deck according to De Anza’s web page designation to information about Measure C.

Thus far, two major projects have been completed. “The PV (abbreviated for ‘photovoltaic,’ the process by which sunlight is converted into energy via solar panel) that is in parking lots A and B and an underground utility project” has been concluded, Jones-Dulin stated.

“The Mediated Learning Center (MLC) is currently under construction and includes a buoyancy heating and ventilation system, PV’s for heating water, and daylighting in classrooms,” she added. Additionally, the portion of the project in lots A and B will include charging stations for hybrid electric and electric cars.

While some projects may seem frivolous (hybrid charging stations for college students?), that seems irrelevant. Voters determined that this money should be utilized to fund projects such as those that are currently under construction – end of story. Why would the school opt not to use this funding to its maximum?

De Anza College is not alone. “Most of our local community colleges are engaged in efforts to become more energy efficient,” Jones-Dulin noted.

The Citizens' Board Oversight Committee, which evaluates the progress of projects funded by Measure C, is pleased with the results so far. According to their annual report, there was "significant savings on projects" due to the pace of construction and a competitive bidding climate as well as "significant progress with technology upgrades in classrooms that facilitate cost-effective teaching and learning."

With an initial defensive position and opposition to these projects, I've found myself in approval – and even excited - after learning more about these state-of-the-art undertakings. If anything, as students, we should feel privileged that our taxpayers agreed to such funding and that we are keeping pace with other local colleges.

In order to stay competitive and keep the innovative reputation that Silicon Valley holds, we must continue to improve our schools in any way we can. De Anza College is doing just that.