

VVC rounding up unpaid tuition

College seeks to recoup long-standing debts; some surprised they owe money

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VICTORVILLE – Victor Valley College sent out a wave of more than 5,000 collection letters in September and October that have helped the college recoup \$53,000 in unpaid tuition, a VVC spokesman said.

Some students were baffled to receive letters citing debts owed from as far back as 2005.

"I think it's only right that we provide a service and students who pick up the obligation to pay us for those services are being held responsible to do so," VVC spokesman Bill Greulich said. "What do you do when students don't pay? We have no other recourse."

Analisa Pilecki, 28, said she was surprised to receive a collections letter for \$980 for three courses she took at VVC seven years ago. She said one of the courses was a phlebotomy class for which she has since received state and national certifications.

As the daughter of a disabled military veteran, she said her tuition for the classes was to be covered by her father's GI Bill benefits transferred to her through Veterans Affairs. She said she was asked to submit proof of her VA benefits to VVC three separate times during the year she was enrolled.

She also claimed she had never received a collections notice before this year.

"I think there is a big mess that they're having to be accounted for now," Pilecki said. "This doesn't make any sense. It's been a very complicated process. I turned in my paperwork three different times at the school and now they're saying they never got it.... I should have never received any degree or licenses; I should have never been able to take the national test if I didn't pay for that course."

Pilecki said she spent a chunk of her day Thursday speaking with VVC student services and the accounting department. She questioned whether the collection letters being sent out were connected to the college's financial issues. VVC's Vice President and Chief Financial Officer G.H. Javaheripour warned in September that the college would incur a structural deficit of \$3.5 million if VVC did not balance its budget and begin implementing budget cuts and cost-saving measures.

Greulich denied that the recent collection notices were related to the college's budget issues. He also said Pilecki's class was an independently contracted course and was not covered by the VA during that time. He said she signed an agreement that she would pay for the course, which the college has on file.

"We look like the bad guys because we're sending these letters out," he said, "and in every case it doesn't mean that people don't have an opportunity to debate. But there may be other circumstances involved. ... It's just not a matter of proving you have vet benefits. It may be that the check was sent to the individual or there was additional information that the VA needed."

Greulich said the college is not exactly equipped to be a collections agency but that sending out the letters is a normal practice. He said students were sent a "friendly" version of the notices in September that were followed by a demand letter in October.

The second letter stated dues owed would be sent to a collections agency. Greulich said the funds being recouped are strictly for tuition costs and do not include any "extraneous" charges such as Associated Student Body fees.

Greulich said the notices may result in thousands of dollars more coming into the college. He added that those who do not pay could have their tax returns garnished.

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