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Industry Focus: Education

Newsmaker: Sandra Kirschenmann

Premium content from Sacramento Business Journal by Bob Schmidt, Correspondent

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Sandra Kirschenmann, Executive Director and Associate Vice Provost, Drexel University Sacramento Center for Graduate Studies.

Photo by Rudy Meyers | Courtesy of Sandra Kirschenmann

Sandra Kirschenmann is a professional educator who thinks the cost of education in California is “just tragic.”

Born and educated in Sacramento, Kirschenman is the chief administrator at the Drexel University Center for Graduate Studies in downtown Sacramento.

“When I grew up, the Master Plan for Higher Education was in place in California, and the only time my mom or dad or I ever paid for my education was when I was going for my doctoral degree at the **University of the Pacific**,” she said.

“It’s really difficult for young people and their families to pay for higher education today. Stories about young people coming out of higher education with a mountain of debt is just tragic.”

Kirschenmann had a 30-year career as a teacher and administrator in the **Los Rios Community College District** before assuming her job at Drexel last December. Drexel, founded in Philadelphia in 1891, opened a Graduate Center campus in Sacramento in 2008.

Kirschenmann has seen a proliferation of for-profit schools in the last 20 years, she said. “And many Californians seem to believe that there are just two kinds of schools, publicly funded and for-profit. That understanding is incorrect. There are privately funded not-for-profit schools, and that’s what Drexel is.

“For-profit institutions are in the business of selling certifications and skills. Publicly funded institutions sell the same, plus they give students a little bit of connectiveness with alumni associations and other organizations. We give students certifications, skills, connectiveness and soul. We care about values and character. I’m frustrated that people don’t understand that.”

How many students does Drexel’s Sacramento campus have, and where do they come from?

We have almost 400 students this year. We are exceeding our enrollment goals in three programs: our doctoral program in education, in our pre-med program, and in our master’s degree in finance, and all 31 of the students in the finance program are from China. Those students bring Chinese money with them and leave it in Sacramento, and they go home with American values and American buying habits. It helps make China more competitive with us, true, but I believe the positive outweighs the negative.

What is the tuition?

The cost to students is about \$1,000 per unit, and they will take (an average of) 55 units. Many scholarships are available for American students, and almost no American student pays the full \$55,000 cost. The Chinese students get no American scholarship assistance.

Plans for the future?

There will be growth in three areas. The graduate programs we now have will accept more students, we will add new programs, and Drexel's board of trustees in Philadelphia has given its approval to the offering here of an undergraduate business degree completion program for students who have begun the program in community college or other institutions but have not completed it.

What was the career path that brought you back to Sacramento?

My mother was a teacher, and she taught in a one-room school house in South Dakota. She taught every grade, from kindergarten through the 12th, in that one room. She did all the custodial and all the food service, in addition to teaching. I always wanted to be a teacher, but my mother said "Don't be a teacher. The work's too hard, the pay's too low," and she said that since I had done well in sciences, loved to cook, and knew a great deal about food and food science and nutrition, I should look into becoming a dietician. I discovered that the Army had a student dietician program at UC Davis, and joined the Army so my education would be paid for. When I graduated from Davis I went to officer training school, then to Walter Reed Hospital in Maryland and I interned there. I was told I had a gift for teaching, so when I left the Army I went to UC Davis and got a masters in nutrition science, and while I was doing that I started teaching in the Culinary Arts program at **American River College**. I spent the next 30 years as a teacher and administrator in the Los Rios District.

Who is she?

Executive director and associate vice provost, Drexel University Sacramento Center for Graduate Studies

The essentials

- Age: 59
- Native and resident of Sacramento. Husband deceased, June 2004
- Education: B.S. dietetics, M.S. nutrition science, both from University of California Davis; EdD, educational administration and foundations, University of the Pacific

Her favorite things

- Book: "The Social Animal" by David Brooks
- Movie: The Sherlock Holmes series with Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law
- Restaurant: The Press
- Vacation spot: Paris
- Music: "On the Edge of Glory" by Lady Gaga
- Hobbies: Art and antiques
- Hero: Arvin Magusara, student in the masters program in public health at Drexel University
- Pet peeve: People who feel entitled

What would your colleagues be surprised to find out about you?

Maybe that I'm a graduate of the FBI Citizens' Academy. We have to go out to the shooting range and shoot the FBI special revolver. I did that three years ago. A lot of my Los Rios colleagues don't know that I was in the Army and trained to shoot the M-16 rifle.