



A REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE

of the Community College League of California



EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 10:00 A.M. PST

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INTRODUCTION

California's 112 community colleges celebrated their centennial anniversary in 2010. The first large-scale community college system in the country continues to be the nation's largest in total numbers and is continuously a leader in adult participation. In 2009-10, more than 2.7 million Californians enrolled in a California community college, accounting for 1.3 million credit and noncredit full-time equivalent students. More than one-half of the students who obtain a bachelor's degree in a California public university begin their studies in one of the state's community colleges.

In recent years, there has been growing attention to the relative decline in United States' higher education attainment compared to other large, industrialized nations. While at one time the United States led the world in the percentage of adults who earned baccalaureate credentials, the share of the population earning a college degree is in decline. As cited in a recent report by Carnavale, Smith and Strole:

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce shows that by 2018, we will need 22 million new college degrees—but will fall short of that number by at least 3 million postsecondary degrees, Associate's or better. In addition, we will need at least 4.7 million new workers with postsecondary certificates. At a time when every job is precious, this shortfall will mean lost economic opportunity for millions of American workers.

The national attention to this issue culminated in a proposal by President Barack Obama to reclaim the lead in adults earning associate's or bachelor's degrees among nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. As a strategy within this effort, entitled the "American Graduation Initiative," President Obama calls upon community colleges to increase degree and certificate completions by 5 million by 2020 as a component of the larger higher education attainment goal.

The Lumina Foundation for Education projects that reclaiming the global lead in college attainment will require increasing college attainment rates among adults from 37.9 percent to 60 percent. Lumina finds, "[i]f the rate of increase over the last eight years continues, the U.S. will reach a higher education attainment level of only 46.6 percent by 2025, and the shortfall in college graduates will be just under 25 million."

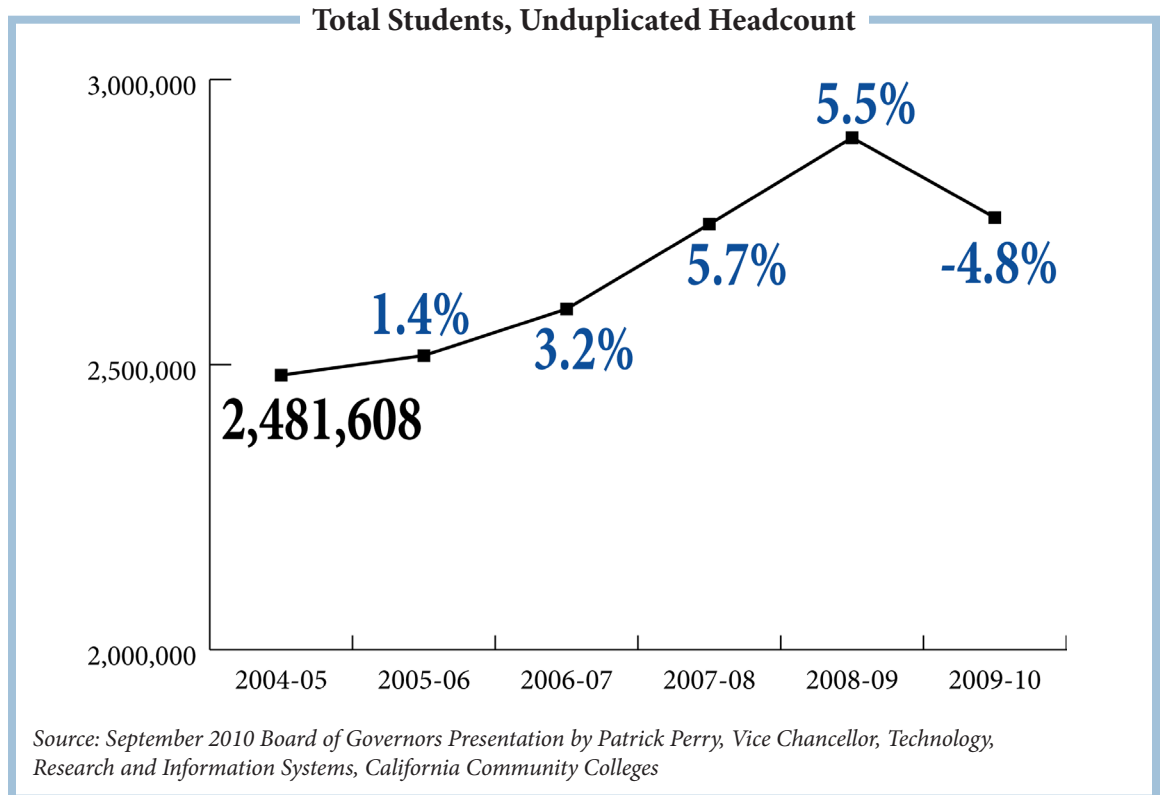
Calling current four-year and two-year completion rates "dismal," the National Governors Association has established a *Complete to Compete* campaign to mobilize governors to increase college completion rates in support of the national efforts to increase educational attainment. The College Board has adopted *The College Completion Agenda* to increase to 55 percent by 2025 the number of 25- to 34-year-olds who hold an associate's degree or higher. The American Association of Community Colleges and the Association of Community College Trustees are developing a Voluntary Framework for Accountability to "provide opportunities for colleges to benchmark their student progress and completion data against peers and to provide stakeholders with critical information on the colleges."

Meanwhile, as the nation has lost ground relative to other industrialized states, California has fallen from a leader within the United States in higher education attainment to a laggard among the fifty states.

According to the Public Policy Institute of California:

[California] has fallen in rankings and now lags behind many other states in the production of college graduates. In 2006, California ranked 23rd among states in its share of 25- to 34-year olds holding at least a bachelor's degree, down from eighth position in 1960. California colleges and universities, both public and private, award relatively few baccalaureates, given the size of the state's youth population: California ranked 43rd among states in the ratio of bachelor's degrees awarded in 2006 to high school diplomas awarded five years earlier.

While California is mired more deeply in the national recession than most states, the state will likely emerge from the downturn into another innovation-driven boom, and higher education attainment will be both a driver of the state's growth and a necessity for those who wish to participate in it. The Public Policy Institute of California estimates that California needs one million more baccalaureate degree holders above the state's baseline projection in 2025 to meet the workforce needs of employers.



“The pursuit, production, dissemination, application, and preservation of knowledge are the central activities of a civilization. Knowledge is a social memory, a connection to the past, and it is a social hope, an investment in the future.”
– Louis Menand

More broadly, California’s social and cultural health has depended for fifty years on the state’s commitment to providing high quality and affordable higher education to our people. California’s higher education system gave our state greater social mobility and political stability, as a more broadly-educated people is the bedrock of a stable democratic society. This was emphasized by the visionaries who published the Truman Commission report in 1947, which carried the formal title *Higher Education for American Democracy* and called for the establishment of a national network of community colleges.

With this backdrop, the Community College League of California convened a commission of 33 college leaders to identify policy and practice changes that, if implemented, could increase meaningful completions in community colleges by 2020. The Commission was asked to constrain its recommendations within reasonably available state resources, a particularly difficult task given the magnitude of the current recession and associated decline in state revenues.

This report specifically addresses the need to increase associate degree and certificate completions in California’s community colleges. The Commission recognizes and affirms the role of community colleges in many other areas of service to California’s residents and economy—including citizenship, health and safety, English as a second language and economic development.

The Commission held three sessions during the first six months of 2010. Rather than conduct original research, the Commission used a comprehensive policy matrix prepared by the California Leadership Alliance for Student Success (CLASS) initiative, which was funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and The James Irvine Foundation, and led by Byron and Kay McClenney of the University of Texas, Austin. The policy matrix provides a “compilation of recommendations from 24 key reports related to fiscal and academic policy and practice, and state and local accountability for student success.”

The Commission understood early that there were an indeterminate number of strategies that could improve student success, including financial and regulatory barriers, student support strategies, and pedagogical changes. It felt, however, that to try to catalog all of the outstanding work occurring throughout the system would be less productive than an effort to identify the common themes found in promising efforts throughout the state. Therefore, readers of this report are less likely to find specific program plans to implement than common themes that are found in successful strategies both inside and outside of California.

Indeed, throughout California, activities to improve student success are already occurring. Whether funded through institutional priority or with grant support, most policies recommended in this report can be found in a California community college. The greatest challenge is identifying which elements of the successful practices can be replicated across the system at a time when leaders are overwhelmed with the challenge of keeping the doors open.

THE COMMISSION'S GOALS

To evaluate the recommendations included in the policy matrix and others proposed by Commission members, the Commission established a vision that “In California, all residents will have the opportunity to complete a quality postsecondary education in a timely manner.”

Underlying this vision were three equally important values—access, success and equity. While some studies have suggested focusing solely on graduation “rates” – the aggregate number of completions produced in higher education – the Commission is deeply concerned that California’s economic and political stability will be threatened unless improvements in participation and completion rates are made across demographic and socio-economic groups.

In California, all residents have the opportunity to complete a quality postsecondary education in a timely manner.

SUCCESS

Programs and support services should be designed to maximize the ability of students to complete a postsecondary education.

EQUITY

Access and success should regularly be monitored in a disaggregated manner and interventions to close achievement gaps should be a campus priority.

ACCESS

California should continue to lead the nation in participation among adults.

As discussed above, several goals for increasing higher education attainment have been set at the state and national levels. Some of these goals pertain to California specifically while others are national. Some address community colleges only; others consider overall higher education achievement. Some focus on the year 2020, and others 2025. Given these different—and at times conflicting—goals, the Commission wrestled with how to select a specific metric by which to measure student success improvements in community colleges.

The Lumina Foundation projects that for California to achieve its share of the national goal of 60% degree attainment of 25- to 64-year-olds by 2025, an additional 4,745,448 baccalaureate and associate degrees, or 34,893 more each year, would need to be produced. As community college associate degrees account for 32.1% of existing annual associate and baccalaureate degree production, the community college share of the Lumina goal would be around 1.5 million more associate degrees by 2025.

Under the American Graduation Initiative's call to increase community college completions by 5 million nationally by 2020, California's share of the goal could be interpreted as 1,065,000, as California enrolled 21.3% of the nation's full-time equivalent public community college students in 2007.

This number, which can be isolated as a community college goal and complements the need for increased baccalaureate attainment, is ambitious, particularly given the state's budget prospects. Nevertheless, while current budget constraints leading to reduced access, lost purchasing power and student service program cuts make the goal daunting, the Commission believes that it is necessary to establish a goal that meets the economic needs of the state and nation.

To achieve California's share of the national goal, it will require that the system increase completions, an average increase of 29,316 (13%) each year. With this annual progress, the system can triple the number of annual degree and certificate completions than otherwise would be awarded. On a per college basis, on average each of the 112 colleges will need to increase annual completions from 1,200 to 3,500.

The Commission calls upon California's community colleges to increase certificate and associate degree completions by 1 million by 2020.

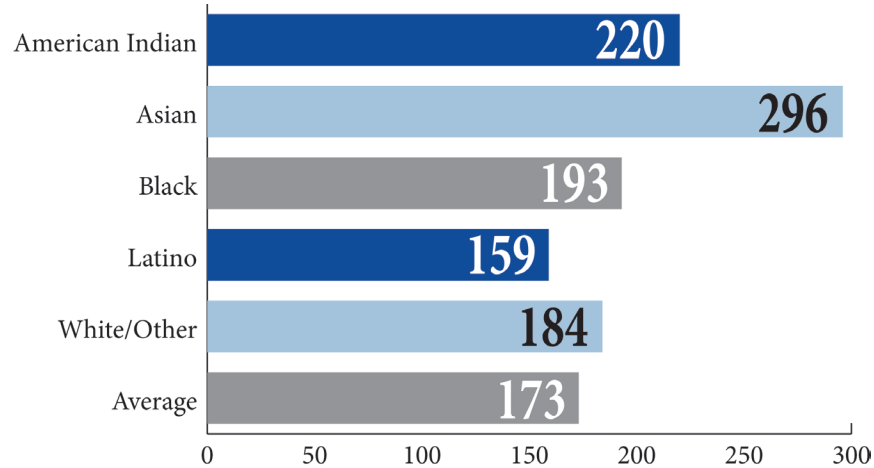
While much of the national focus has been on increasing the absolute number of students achieving higher education credentials, the Commission believes that ensuring that progress is made in a manner that distributes educational opportunity across demographic lines is equally as important as the absolute number of individuals who receive higher education credentials. Educational achievement for the purpose of economic growth is important, but if it is disproportionate among certain demographic groups or geographic regions, a stable democratic society cannot be maintained.

Measuring achievement gaps among enrolled students is difficult because of the lack of disaggregated data within California's community colleges, the difficulty in identifying student goals and external factors affecting student success. Nevertheless, it is well reported and acknowledged that Latino and black students are significantly less likely to complete transfer, degree or certificate programs. Shulock and Moore find that, in addition to overall deficits in completion, Latino and black students are 5-10% less likely to complete than their white and Asian peers, data which are generally consistent with the disaggregated data currently available at the system level.

The Commission calls upon community colleges to eliminate the achievement gap among demographic and socioeconomic groups.

While the achievement gap speaks to differential success rates of students who enroll in higher education, there is also uneven participation among California's communities along demographic lines. This is primarily true for the fast-growing Latino population. Over the next ten years, the California Postsecondary Education Commission projects that Latino enrollment in community colleges will increase by 40% while the absolute number of white students will remain constant. By 2040, there will be three Latino babies born annually for every one white baby. Unless the participation rate gap is reduced or eliminated, it will be very difficult for California to maintain, let alone increase, higher education completions. Meanwhile, political instability will be created as the fastest growing portion of the population will be least likely to participate in the economic promise of the state.

2008 Community College Participation per 1,000 Residents Age 20–24



Source: California Postsecondary Education Commission. Ready or Not, Here They Come: Community College Enrollment Demand Projections, 2009-2019 (12/2009)

The Commission calls upon community colleges to close the participation gap among socioeconomic and demographic groups.

Addressing the achievement and participation gaps is equally an economic necessity, a moral imperative and an expression of the economic and democratic promise of the state. If achievement among the fastest growing communities lags significantly behind the achievement of other communities, the state cannot escape a future of increased inequality, political and social instability, and sluggish economic growth.

In support of the mission and values, the commission presents the following recommendations. These recommendations are divided into four main categories: Leadership and Accountability; Intensive Student Support; Teaching and Learning; Finance and Affordability. While these recommendations are not exhaustive, they represent data-proven best practices for community college student success. These recommendations received overwhelming approval of commission members via an extensive vetting process.

LEADERSHIP & ACCOUNTABILITY

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ✓ *Visible, high-level leadership across districts and colleges is essential for student success.*
- ✓ *A longitudinal student record system should be developed that allows student progress to be monitored from elementary-secondary education into and through postsecondary education and into the workplace.*
- ✓ *The system should regularly gather, report, and use disaggregated student access and achievement data to monitor student progress across achievement milestones to evaluate institutional and program effectiveness.*
- ✓ *System and institutional research should focus more directly on core issues of teaching, learning and student success; and the creation of new reporting and accountability requirements should directly correlate with student success.*
- ✓ *Statutory, regulatory and administrative requirements should be examined to ensure that services improve student success and increased course completions are supported and encouraged.*
- ✓ *Student success should be the focus of a reinvented professional development effort for community college trustees, administrators, faculty and staff.*

Visible, High-Level Leadership and Evidence-Based Decision-Making

The increased completions the Commission believes are necessary to meet the state's economic and moral imperatives cannot be accomplished without committed community college leadership at the state, district and campus levels. In most cases, this will require college, district and statewide decision-making that will be focused primarily on improving student success and measured by rigorous application of data and evidence to guide decisions.

While faculty, staff, administrators and trustees all historically have reviewed institutional outcomes, such reviews have too often been done either in isolation or even in a manner critical of another campus constituency. Instead, the entire campus community must embrace the goal of increasing successful completions, agree on a framework within which to measure success, and regularly review data evaluating progress. Such work now occurs through innovative collaborations at select colleges. For example, the University of Southern California Center for Urban Education has worked with colleges to use existing data to develop "action" plans which promote a "culture of inquiry" and encourage college staff to set benchmarks to track student progress.

Central to strengthening the mission and leadership focus at the college and district level is enhanced research capacity and an increased use of data to measure student success. While California's community colleges regularly report and review data that provide snapshots of institutional effectiveness, the reviews are usually conducted to meet statutory or other compliance purposes, are rarely shared institution-wide, and are not fully used to inform decision-making and to strengthen student success.

Further, data are often evaluated in absolute numbers rather than in a disaggregated way that measures how cohorts of students are doing and whether improvements in completions are related solely to enrollment growth or are truly attributable to program effectiveness.

An increase in the publication and review of data alone would likely overwhelm a system that already produces reports evaluating the effectiveness of many programs and services. As new data products become available, a thorough analysis of state reporting requirements should be conducted to determine if outdated reporting requirements can be replaced by new, more transparent and disaggregated data. Whenever possible, new data products should provide regular and immediate access to internal and external audiences about how student access success is being improved, and systemwide efforts should be expanded to empower faculty with current information about the students they are serving.

“From a culture of anecdotes to a culture of evidence.”

In addition to reporting requirements, many barriers to implementing best practices or enlarging existing and effective, yet small, programs are often cited. These often include labor requirements, facilities and funding calculations and other statutory and regulatory restrictions. Frequent examples include whether or not tutors are included in the requirement that fifty percent of a district’s unrestricted spending be spent on “instruction;” the ability to implement intensive, short-term classes in developmental instruction; and state mandates and limitations on the use of funds intended for improving student success.

When specific barriers are identified to inhibit effective strategies for student success, a cost-benefit analysis should be conducted, using available data, evidence and engagement of campus leadership, with particular weight given to encouraging exploration and implementation of efforts to increase student success.

Professional Development for Student Success

Finally, the expectation of an institution- and system-wide focus on student success cannot be made without addressing the declining investment in professional development in the system. Unfortunately, through several cycles of budget reductions, much of the state and local investment in professional development that was one of the cornerstones of AB 1725 (1988) has been eroded. The last year the state provided professional development funds was 2001-02, when \$5.2 million was provided for faculty and staff development.

The state-funded Basic Skills Initiative provided a model, albeit limited, effort to engage faculty in best practices for student success. This model should be replicated in addressing the broader issue of student success, with the goal of providing leadership training and inquiry activities for faculty, staff, administrators and trustees. The focus should be clearly on evidence-based decision-making.

Two successful models that should be considered for systemwide application are the Bridging Research Information and Culture (BRIC) and the California Leadership Alliance for Student Success (CLASS) initiatives. The first, BRIC, which is focused primarily on research professionals, is enabling fifteen colleges to strengthen their research capacity to enhance their culture of inquiry and evidence. CLASS recently concluded an eighteen-month effort with twelve districts to focus on leadership strategies (primarily among chief executives and trustees) necessary to improve student success in community colleges.

Only through targeted and appropriate leadership development will decision-makers and campus leaders be adequately equipped to review and take action on the data and evidence that should guide student success-based decision-making.

While the restoration of state funds for professional development should be a priority, local college districts and state organizations serving all constituencies should prioritize the discussion of student success and completion at every opportunity.

INTENSIVE STUDENT SUPPORT

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ✓ *Students should be required to participate in integrated student support, assessment, counseling and orientation, and enroll in courses according to well publicized and strictly-enforced registration deadlines.*
- ✓ *Through a statewide initiative, relay clear community college expectations early in each student's educational career regarding requirements for any community college, including the importance of going directly to college after high school.*

“Students Don’t Do Optional”

The formula for ensuring student success in higher education is not a mystery. Students, regardless of economic background, have a higher level of success if they attend full-time (and have the personal or student financial aid resources to do so), are encouraged to participate in the academic or social cohorts, and are adequately informed about successful strategies for college completion.

The Commission frequently discussed that “students don’t do optional.” It also regularly acknowledged that, in most cases, the perception of students toward California’s community colleges is casual, which is reinforced by the lack of mandatory activities associated with instruction and student support. The Commission regularly referred to the need to have “intrusive” student support—a focused effort to engage students and deliver them the services proven to facilitate student success, rather than waiting for students to “opt-in” to services.

Four-year public and private universities regularly employ mandatory success strategies for undergraduate, graduate and professional schools alike and the more advanced the education level, the more strictly the formula for success seems to be applied. Even the professional schools in business, law and medicine that accept only the highest achieving college graduates often incorporate mandatory orientation, forbid or create disincentives to part-time enrollment, have a mandatory course structure before elective coursework, and schedule courses in a manner to create student cohorts.

For most California community college students, these best practices are implemented solely on a voluntary basis. There are admirable pilot projects and student communities, but they are usually small in scale and often serve disadvantaged, but motivated, students. Nevertheless, funding, leadership and regulatory limitations often make it difficult to implement effective practices across the entire student body.

PROMISING MODELS

Academy for College Excellence (Cabrillo)

Student Success Centers (Chaffey)

English Language Acceleration (Chabot)

Career Tech Contextualization (Los Angeles Trade-Tech)

Passport to College (San Joaquin Delta)

Learn more about these and other successful models at www.cccvision2020.org.

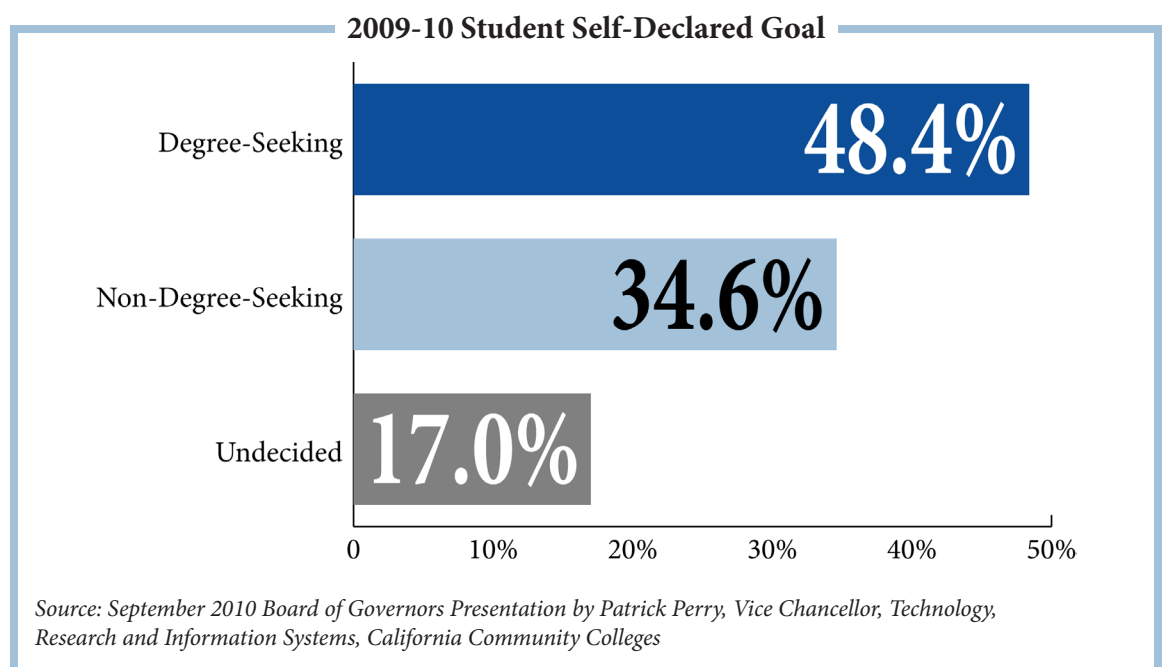
The challenge in replicating these best practices across the large community college student body is the cost of delivering intensive services and the variability of preparation levels of incoming and continuing students. This has been made more difficult in recent years through significant cuts to both general and targeted student service programs.

While a long-term goal should include implementing best practices similar to those used by public institutions for the more advanced students in education, such strategies are costly, and the Commission was limited by its charge to recommend strategies that are reasonably achievable under the existing funding structure. Nevertheless, elements of these best practices, such as intensive orientation for all incoming students, can be implemented with relatively little cost combined with creativity and a willingness to work differently.

Preparation for Success: Successful Registration and Course-Taking Patterns

Most community colleges allow students to enroll throughout the first two or three weeks of a class, a practice known as “late” registration. While this ensures the broadest level of access and maximizes the efficiency of instruction through increasing the student-to-faculty ratio, research generally shows that students who register late are less likely to successfully complete courses than their peers who attend from the first class meeting.

The open admissions process and ready availability of pre-collegiate coursework for California’s community colleges communicates to a portion of high school students that the preparation required to attend four-year universities is not required to attend community college. This leads to inefficient course-taking patterns, lack of financial preparedness for full-time enrollment and the arrival of students who have unidentified achievement goals. While community colleges should still remain open access institutions, far more students likely could achieve timely completion of a degree or certificate if they were to approach community college recognizing that they may need some pre-collegiate coursework.

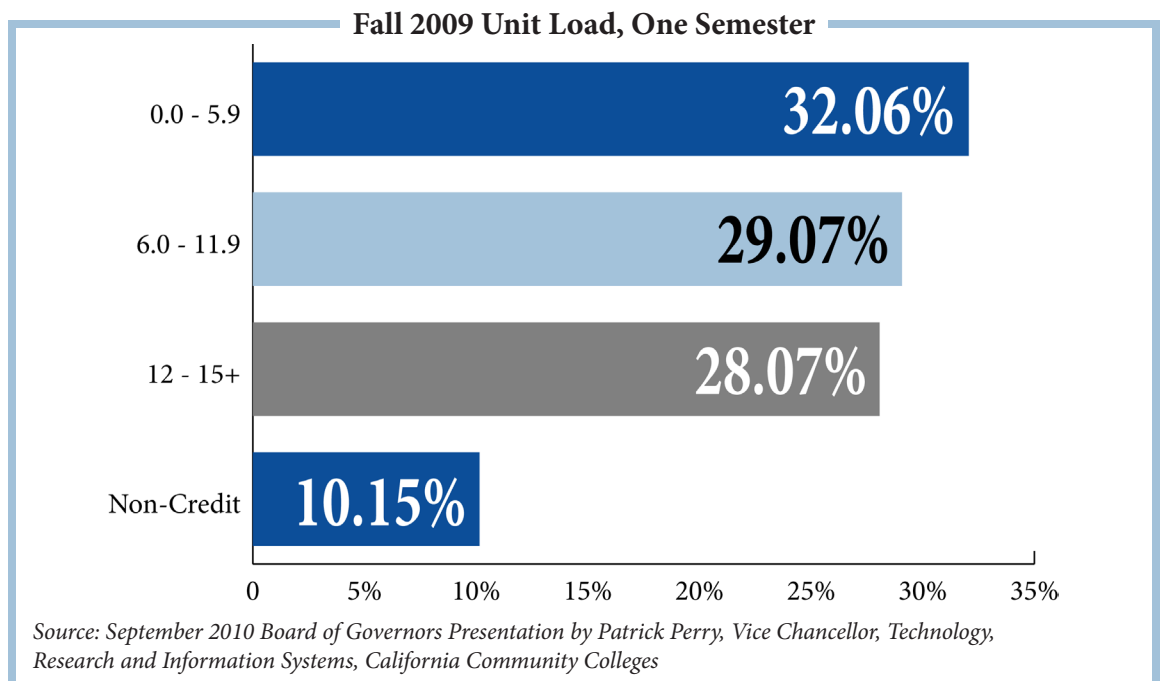


Early outreach should be made to students in middle school and throughout high school about effective preparation for community colleges. Students should understand the economic benefits of higher education and the contributions higher education makes to America's democracy.

Whether a student plans on attending community college or a university, he/she should be encouraged to participate in, and persist through, pre-collegiate coursework in high school. Regardless of their appropriate role as such, community colleges should not be thought of as a "safety net" for students who are unprepared for four-year collegiate work.

The state and community colleges should engage high school counselors to focus on preparation of their students for community college attendance, with an emphasis on completing satisfactory mathematics and language preparation for collegiate study. High school students need a realistic understanding of the rigors of the community college curriculum and the additional time required to complete postsecondary education if they arrive at a community college underprepared.

Further, the importance for completion, and the additional financial aid associated with, full-time enrollment needs to be clearly communicated to students. Although community colleges serve many students who may not need or be able to attend full-time, a concentrated effort to enroll first-time freshmen with a full unit load could yield significant improvements in timely completion. In Fall 2009, only 43.8% of first-time freshmen enrolled in 12 or more units.



TEACHING & LEARNING

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ✓ *Develop an enhanced Basic Skills funding model that includes clear and expedited pathways for students tied to defined research-based benchmarks or “momentum points” leading up to and including completion.*
- ✓ *Develop alternatives to traditional curriculum sequences using linked or contextualized curriculum across curricular areas.*
- ✓ *Establish transfer associate degrees that guarantee admission to all four-year universities with junior standing, as part of a universal statewide articulation system.*
- ✓ *Schedule classes in an inter-departmental manner with the goal of meeting the needs of first-time entering students, promoting full-time enrollment, and enhancing program completion.*
- ✓ *Expand the awarding of credit for demonstrated competency and knowledge using multiple assessment instruments as determined by faculty.*
- ✓ *Encourage (or require) faculty candidates to demonstrate knowledge of effective teaching and learning techniques, particularly in the basic skills subject areas.*

The Commission considered promising evidence of successful pre-collegiate programs from both inside and outside California. Within the state's community colleges, many institutions are implementing learning communities that incorporate basic skills learning in math, language, or both into career-technical or general education content. This is being done either directly in the classroom or in student success centers where the students' additional time serves as laboratory hours.

Washington State has a classroom-based contextualized program integrating basic skills and career technical instruction that is showing promising results. Across the country, there are promising laboratories of student success, but no clear "off the shelf" model that can quickly be brought to scale in California.

What is common across the models both within California and across the country is that they cost far more than the standard funding per student provided for instruction and services in California community colleges. Cost and time-to-degree are extended when students are placed into developmental language courses. Frequently, students arrive at community colleges to learn or re-learn developmental skills funded at \$5,376 per full-time student rather than the \$7,957 per student of funding provided to K-12.

Funding Innovation and Proven Strategies

The Commission was impressed with the successful models occurring in community colleges in California and across the country, but appreciates that these practices cannot be expected to grow naturally to meet the compelling statewide need without more closely aligning program cost with financial support. Therefore, the Commission recommends an enhanced basic skills funding model that will reimburse community college districts at a higher rate for basic skills full-time equivalent students if the college implements one of many best practices, with a focus on moving students through momentum points that increase the likelihood of completing college. A list of components of best practices eligible for the enhanced funding should be developed jointly by system leaders in instruction, research, student services and the Academic Senate.

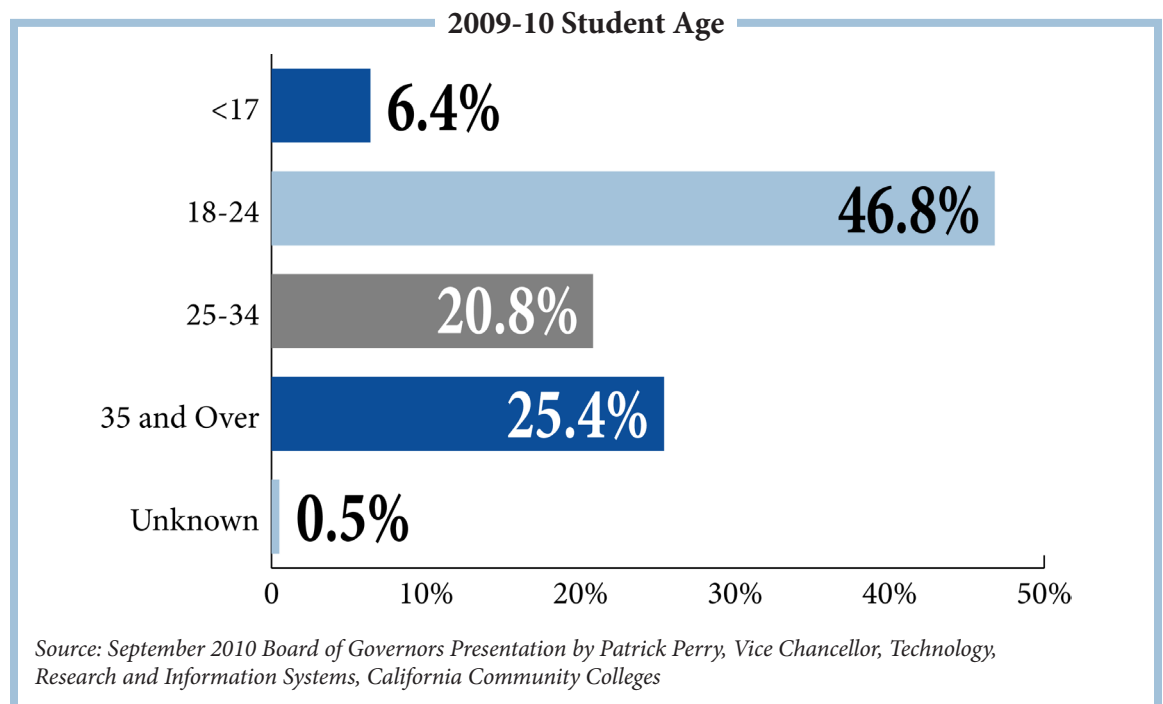
This enhanced funding mechanism will enable districts that have partially implemented successful practices to expand them to include more students and enable other colleges to initiate new programs.

Course Scheduling for Student Success

Community colleges in California use a variety of methods to determine course offerings each term. Often, course scheduling is performed at the departmental level, with courses scheduled based on historic enrollment patterns and full-time faculty availability, rounded out with assignments to part-time faculty and adjustments for state-funded enrollment growth. Scheduling efforts to encourage cohorts of new, full-time students are rarely coordinated among departments, except in some model, but small-scale, programs. The Commission believes college course offerings should be primarily scheduled in a manner that encourages full-time attendance and campus engagement.

Recently, many community colleges condensed their academic calendars and implemented block scheduling to maximize the efficiency of classroom use, leading to fewer but longer course meetings. This may have the consequence of encouraging enrollment patterns that disadvantage student success, such as either part-time enrollment or unreasonable full-time enrollment with insufficient study time. Further, course scheduling decisions made to maximize classroom and parking efficiency should be evaluated to ensure that students are not being discouraged from extracurricular activities that may build cohorts and support networks critical to student success.

Each college should longitudinally evaluate student success in different course offering patterns to ensure that course scheduling does not disadvantage course-level progression nor degree or certificate completion.



A Successful, Motivated and Supported Pre-Collegiate Workforce

With the advent of AB 1725 (1988), there was a significant professionalization of the ranks of community college faculty by moving away from qualifications via lifetime credentials to minimum qualifications and local determination of equivalent qualifications.

In most areas of academic credit instruction, to teach in a California community college, an instructor must have a master's degree in the discipline to be taught, or one reasonably related. However, to teach noncredit courses in pre-collegiate math and English or the equivalent courses in K-12 schools, a bachelor's degree usually suffices. Because individual community colleges are organized differently in how basic skills courses are taught, at some colleges a master's degree may be required under state regulations to teach pre-collegiate courses, while at others, it is not.

Whether a college uses dedicated faculty to teach pre-collegiate courses or rotates math and English faculty between collegiate and pre-collegiate assignments, it is essential that faculty teaching developmental courses are equipped with the latest pedagogical knowledge in developmental education and a desire to teach at the developmental level. Too often the least prepared and most under-supported part-time faculty are assigned to basic skills courses for fiscal or institutional reasons. Developmental students need and deserve the most dedicated and accomplished practitioners available.

Nevertheless, at this time when many students are arriving at community colleges needing pre-collegiate instruction, it is not sensible to exclude instructors who may have the education necessary to teach the same curriculum at the high school level, and have proven themselves effective at that level.

Beyond faculty providing direct pre-collegiate instruction, the responsibility for developing these skills among all students must be embraced by the entire institution. With only 16% of California's community college students demonstrating college-level math skills and only 28% ready for college-level composition, professional development for faculty, staff, administrators and trustees must focus on developmental teaching and learning pedagogy. Community colleges need to embrace and instill a culture that all employees share the responsibility for student success.

Recognizing Prior Student Achievement

The state's funding mechanism recognizes time in the classroom, and not necessarily how quickly colleges provide students with the knowledge, skills and credentials needed to enter the workforce. While the Commission rejects suggestions to lower standards and provide credentials to cosmetically enhance the state's college completion numbers, public community colleges occasionally erect unreasonably high barriers for students to earn college credit for demonstrated competency in a particular subject matter. The Commission believes that community colleges should expand the awarding of credit for students who can demonstrate mastery of subject matter as determined by local faculty.

FINANCE & AFFORDABILITY

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ✓ *Create an additive, categorical incentive funding model that distributes money based upon improvements in institutional and student performance as measured by completion of momentum points linked to student success.*
- ✓ *Enrollment fee increases should be moderate and predictable, and tied to an inflationary index. Enrollment fee revenue increases should supplement the base level of resources from the prior year.*
- ✓ *The continued receipt of institutional student financial aid such as the Board of Governors (BOG) waiver should be aligned with federal criteria for receipt of federal aid.*

As discussed previously, the Commission was restricted to recommendations that could be financed within reasonably available state resources. As funding per student has been reduced over the last eighteen months—including targeted cuts in student success categorical programs—it is difficult to make recommendations without acknowledging that California’s community colleges are funded significantly lower on a per-student basis than their K-12 and four-year university counterparts.

Nevertheless, the moral and economic needs of increasing college completion cannot wait for all of California’s budget problems to be fixed. Districts are already engaged in a prioritization of college courses to focus on core areas of basic skills, transfer and career-technical education, and traditional offerings in lifelong learning which have in many cases been put on hold.

There is broad acknowledgement among internal and external constituencies that increasing completions is a compelling goal. However, these constituencies are often divided over whether significant added resources are needed for the increase in completions, with some external constituencies suggesting that changes in the existing funding structure could provide districts with incentives to increase completions without new money. The Commission rejects both of these absolute arguments and believes that, combined with the other strategies recommended in this report, a modest, additive funding incentive could be provided that would encourage decision-making based on student success.

Building on a Promising Incentive-Funding Model

In particular, Commission members were impressed with the model used by the State of Washington. In Washington, funds have been set aside at the statewide level and earned by community colleges that increase student progress across “momentum points” (or “milestones”) that lead to a “tipping point” of significant economic benefit for students. Using the state’s databases of student and wage data, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges determined that students who completed one year of community college earned higher wages than those who completed only ten units, whether or not they started at the developmental level.

For example, students who complete their first college-level math class in a timely manner are more likely to reach the tipping points, as are students who successfully complete their first 30 college-level units.

While these momentum points are generally acknowledged in research on community college student success, few funding models of community colleges encourage a focus on the progress of an individual student to completion. Rather, most funding models, including those used for the bulk of funds in Washington and California, primarily rely on the absolute number of students. Some reform proposals have focused on penalizing colleges for dropout rates in specific course sections, which could discourage colleges from offering sufficient sections of challenging courses, or worse, discourage service to the most educationally disadvantaged populations.

Under its Student Achievement Initiative, Washington provided each community college with a small amount of seed money to implement best practices, and a larger amount was set aside for grants to colleges based on their increase in the number of student momentum points above the baseline year.

Washington only provided \$7 million for a two-year fund of achievement awards for its colleges under the Student Achievement Initiative, a relatively small share (0.5%) of the system's two-year budget of around \$1.4 billion. Nevertheless, the modest awards have focused faculty, staff, and other college leaders on student completion—arguably the most important strategy for increasing student completion. While the Community College Research Center at Columbia University is currently conducting a thorough evaluation in the overall effectiveness of the program, the system reports significantly higher numbers of students achieving milestones.

The Commission believes that a similar, additive model could be effective in California and could most appropriately measure the momentum points and various completions that are in students' and the state's interest. Given the diversity of the communities and student populations served by the colleges, the Commission discussed the possibility of weighting achievement awards for assisting first generation college students or English Language Learners across momentum points.

Through an incentive funding mechanism, the disadvantages of “performance funding” that could lead to undesirable behavior can be avoided and a flexible model can be implemented as the state budget allows.

Student Enrollment Fees and Financial Assistance

California has a proud legacy as a state with low enrollment fees for its institutions of higher education. While fees at the campuses of the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems have increased significantly in recent years and are now closer to comparable institutions in other states, fees for community colleges continue to be significantly lower than those in other states. The Legislature has clearly set a priority of ensuring the availability of community colleges to all students, including those who would be deterred from attending because of a higher fee level.

While debated significantly, the Commission did not reach a conclusion on a specific fee level or index. Some Commission members believe that, in order to provide a similar amount of resources for California's community colleges as institutions receive in other states, fees must be increased. Others believe that increasing fees will only justify disinvestment from the state, and use as examples the recent experiences at the UC and CSU systems.

There was, however, common agreement that, if fees are increased, it should be done in alignment with an inflationary or another economic indicator, such as the change in the consumer price index or per capita personal income. Further, the Commission believes that any increase in student fees should lead to enhanced student services and not be offset with state General Fund reductions.

The two largest sources of student financial assistance for California's community college students are the state Board of Governors (BOG) waiver and the federal Pell Grant. In 2008-09, 870,318 students (headcount) received BOG waivers totaling \$254 million, while 321,066 students received Pell Grants totaling \$882 million.

The BOG waiver provides a full waiver from the credit per-unit fee for students who qualify. Under the BOG Waiver A, students can apply for the waiver and have automatic eligibility if they are on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Program, or a county general assistance program. BOG Waiver B provides automatic eligibility based on income standards, defined as 150% of the federally determined poverty level, and the BOG Waiver C is available for students who still have financial need after receiving available federal and state grant financial aid. The federal Pell Grant, which is the largest grant aid program in the country, limits grant eligibility to 150% of the number of units ordinarily required for the academic program and continued receipt of the grant to students who make satisfactory academic progress, generally defined as completing 67% of the number of units attempted each semester with a 2.0 grade point average. In the case of disqualification for excessive units or unsatisfactory academic progress, students can generally appeal and receive an additional semester to complete their program or correct their academic deficiencies.

In contrast, the BOG waiver is available to any otherwise eligible California student, regardless of the student's academic performance or quantity of units attempted or completed. Because the BOG waiver is continuously available (assuming underlying financial eligibility is met), in some cases it does not provide students with the same level of motivation to satisfactorily complete coursework and make progress toward completion of their academic goals as does a federal Pell Grant.

The Commission believes that the requirements for the BOG waiver should conform with the requirements of the Pell Grant in most circumstances. By establishing similar satisfactory academic progress requirements for students seeking the BOG waiver, course retention may increase and time-to-completion may decrease.

To ensure that a larger number of eligible student receive federal and state financial aid, the Commission believes that students seeking a BOG waiver should be directed to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and advised of the opportunities afforded through federal and state aid. Where students would be eligible for such aid they should be required to complete the FAFSA as a condition of applying for the BOG waiver.

In summary, the Commission believes that California's community colleges should continue to be the most affordable community college system in the country, but should also consider fee and financial aid policies that encourage students to enroll full-time and complete their educational goals in a timely manner.

CONCLUSION

The Commission recognizes that the recommendations included in this report are only a subset of the outstanding efforts that community college faculty, staff and other leaders are working on to improve student success. It further believes that the most essential element to student success is budgetary stability, something that has been absent in recent years.

In particular, several of the recommendations included in this report—such as enforced registration deadlines, financial aid limitations, and mandatory orientation and assessment—either impose significant costs on local community colleges or will reduce state apportionment payments for enrolled students in the short run. Nevertheless, the changes are smart in the eyes of both students and taxpayers alike, and need to be recognized by state policymakers as long-term savings and investments.

Even through the recent difficult financial times, however, faculty, staff and administrative leaders across California have proven that improvements can be made to system assistance for students to complete their education in a timely manner. From contextualization and acceleration of basic skills instruction to enhanced financial aid delivery to using data to inform decision-making, innovation is continuous at community colleges across California. The greatest challenge indeed may not be regulatory or financial barriers, but instead the leadership it will take to reshape instructional and service delivery models across all institutions and all service populations.

California's community colleges remain the most affordable and accessible system of higher education in the country, and a majority of annual graduates of all institutions attribute at least part of their education to community colleges. Even with this feat as a backdrop, the Commission recognizes that focused strategies as outlined above can deliver the promise of community college completion and the associated economic and social benefits to millions more over the coming generations.

*“With commitment to Success, Equity and Access,
California’s brightest days lies ahead.”*

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