ITEM 16
DRAFT

California Postsecondary Education Commission ■

March 2007

Accountability Framework Goal: Student Success

How Are California's Public College Students Doing?

Based on the five accountability framework reports presented to the Commission for measuring student success, this report assesses major findings and options for improving outcomes.

Contents

Summary of Findings 1
Why Student Success is Important 1
What Student Success Measures Show 2
Assessing Student Success 5
Conclusions and Recommendations 6

The Commission advises the Governor and the Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. Its primary focus is to ensure that the State's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities. More information about the Commission is available at www.cpec.ca.gov.

Draft Commission Report

Summary of Findings

Students at California's public colleges are doing about as well or better than students at similar institutions nationally, but there is significant need to improve success. Areas needing attention include:

- A "four-year" college degree now takes five or six years for most full-time freshmen enrolling directly from high schools into California's public universities.
- Most students take more than two years to earn baccalaureate degrees after transferring to public universities from community colleges.
- Less than a third of the community college students studied by the Commission earned an AA degree, a vocational certificate or transferred to a UC or CSU campus.
- Latino and African-American students, particularly males, are experiencing lower graduation rates.
- Part-time students are struggling—they are less likely to earn degrees and pay more for college than other students.

Why Student Success is Important

Learning and earning a college degree matter. Labor market studies show that even some college helps workers improve their incomes, but the big dividends come from completing college and earning a degree.

California has a big stake in the success of students. State taxpayers invest over $14 billion annually into

the State's higher education systems. This represents an investment of approximately 10% of the State's General Fund. Billions more in federal financial aid are spent to support college students. But increasingly this is not enough. So students and families spend billions more to pay for college fees, room, board, books and transportation costs required to attend college—often racking up considerable debt.

California has approximately 2.3 million college students enrolled at its public colleges. Most of these students, approximately 1.6 million, are community college students. The California State University has 435,000 students at its 23 campuses, and the University of California has 206,000 students at its ten campuses. About half of public high school graduates proceed to college; yet only about 15% earn a four-year college diploma in the decade after high school.

This report assesses major findings from five reports prepared by the Commission examining persistence, degrees earned and community college student transfer success. This report also summarizes options for possible next steps by policymakers and postsecondary education leaders to improve student success.

What Student Success Measures Show

California's taxpayers and students demand and deserve a public postsecondary education system that optimizes student success. The Commission has adopted an accountability framework that presumes California's investments in postsecondary education should be measured by improvements in student outcomes. With assistance from California's three public postsecondary segments, the Commission identified five key indicators for measuring student success:

- Time-to-Degree
- Full-time/Part-time Ratio
- First-Year Persistence Rates
- Four-year degrees conferred for transfer students
- Community college two-year degrees conferred, certificates awarded and successful transfer.

The following summarize the findings from five Commission reports assessing these indicators.

Measure: UC & CSU Time-to-Degree

The Commission analyzed student-specific data, reported by the CSU and UC systems, to assess four- and five-year degree-earning success of students. The students selected for evaluation were between the ages of 17 and 19 when they enrolled as first-time freshmen.

Only 16% of the CSU students examined in the study, who maintained a full-time course load for the entirety of their first- year, graduated by their fourth year. About 39% of the students graduate by the fifth-year. For CSU

The Accountability Framework

Student success should be measured through outcomes. Performance indicators for student success that focus on measuring completion, educational quality, and satisfaction with the educational experience were reviewed and recommended by a multi-segment advisory group established to advise the Commission on what performance measures should be used. As the California's independent higher education planning and coordinating body, the Commission is in a unique position to assess performance without bias or conflict of interest. Additionally, under State law, the Commission is the only public agency with data that allows assessments of student success across the University of California, the California State University and California Community College systems. The Commission used this data to compile the evaluations summarized here. The Commission also has access to national data that allowed the Commission, for some success indicators, to compare California's public colleges with similar institutions nationally as a benchmark to gauge relative performance. For these comparisons, the Commission used data from the national Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

students who maintained a full-time course load for their second- and third-year, the four-year graduation rate was 29% and rose to 61% by the fifth year.

The average four-year graduation rate for UC students, who maintained a full-time course load for the entirety of their first-year was 56%, and rose to 79% by the fifth-year. If the students maintained a full-course load for their first-, second- and third-years, the average four-year graduation rate was 65% and rose to 89% by the fifth year.

While a slight majority of the UC students graduated by their fourth year, overall, the four-year graduation rate of the students studied was below 50%.

The Commission also examined Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data to compare the outcomes of similar freshman students at comparable public universities and colleges nationally. The comparison showed that UC and CSU four-year graduation rates were similar to comparable institutions nationally. However, the five-year average student graduation rate was 8% higher in the UC system and 5% higher in the CSU system, than at comparable public institutions nationwide.

The Commission also examined the experience of students by race and gender.

The data show five-year graduation rates for UC students who maintained a full-time course load during their first year were: White–80%, Asian–79%, Latino–72%, and African-American–67%. Similarly, the five-year graduation rates at the CSU varied by ethnicity. For CSU students the rates were: White–47%, Asian–38%, Latino–33%, and African-American–22%. The data demonstrate that Latino and African-American students have statistically longer time-to-graduation periods than White and Asian students.

There also was a nine-point gap between male and female CSU students who graduated in five years (males–38%, females–47%). Comparable universities nationwide had a ten-point gap (males– 27%, females–37%). There was a five-point gap between males and females who graduated from the UC in five years (males–76%, females–81%). Comparable universities nationwide have a six-point gap (males–67%, females–73%).

The good news based on these data is that the UC and CSU students who enter college directly after graduating from high school seem to be doing as well, or better, than students at comparable public colleges nationally. The bad news is that most students take more than four years to earn baccalaureate degrees, and there continues to be gaps in the outcomes for students based on race and gender that will need further corrective action.

Measure: UC & CSU Full-Time/Part-Time Ratio

Part-time student enrollment at UC and CSU campuses is declining. This decline cuts across gender and racial groups.

- Part-time enrollment declined by 1.7 percentage points at UC campuses between 2000 and 2005. In the fall of 2000, part-time UC enrollment was 7% but dropped to 5.3% by the fall of 2005.
- Similarly, over a four-year period, the CSU experienced a 2.8 percentage point decline in part-time enrollment, from 23.4% in 2000 to 20.6% in 2005.

Some experts caution that fewer part-time enrollments may signal that public universities are not adequately responding to the needs of students with employment and family obligations. Research shows that part-time students face some of the most significant challenges to success in college. Part-time students have higher drop-out rates, have higher college costs, and suffer greater lost earnings than full-time students.

Helping students shift from part-time to full-time, in order to attain education goals faster, benefits the State and the students. However, it is equally important that colleges efficiently and effective accommodate the needs of students who need to enroll part-time. Several national studies show that particularly for segments of the population that have not traditionally been able to attend college, providing effective part-time pathways to college graduation has significant public benefit. Therefore, expanding programs that efficiently increase the success of part-time students should also be a public priority.

National education experts contend that if California brought the outcomes of its least successful students up to the levels of its most successful students, the State would reap hundreds of billions of dollars in added benefits through economic growth, added public revenues and wage earnings.

Measure: UC & CSU First-Year Persistence Rates

The Commission examined data on how successful students were, in California's public universities, at staying in college and making progress towards earning a degree. One measure of how well students are doing is the percentage of freshman students that return to college for a second year. The Commission used student-specific records reported by the CSU and the UC to compile data on freshman students between the ages of 17 and 19, who maintained a full-time schedule in their first year, and who returned as a full-time or part-time student their second year. This "persistence" by students is a good indicator of how well colleges are doing to support student success. Student persistence is also linked to shortening time-to-degree. For example, California's public universities with the best four- and five-year graduation rates also have the highest freshman-to-sophomore persistence rates.

The Commission's data showed that 92% of UC freshmen, who maintained a full-time course load in their first year, returned for a second year. The data also showed that 82% of the CSU freshmen, who maintained a full-time course load in their first year, returned for a second year of college.

California's four-year public universities outperform their peers in other states. As with time-to-degree, the Commission used IPEDS data to compare California's UC and CSU campuses with the persistence rates of students at similar public campuses across the nation. The persistence rate for first-time students (17-19 years of age) who began their first term with full-time course loads was 4% higher at UC campuses than at comparative institutions nationwide. The persistence rate for first-time students (17-19 years of age) who enrolled full-time at CSU campuses was 12% higher than at comparative institutions nationwide.

Measure: Two-year Degrees, Certificates and Transfers by Community College Students

The gateway for many students who wish to attain a four-year degree is a community college. In addition to preparing students for transfer, California's community colleges also provide opportunities to earn two-year degrees and vocational certificates. The Commission examined outcomes for California's community college students regarding their ability to earn two-year degrees, certificates and transfers to the CSU and the UC systems. The Commission tracked the outcomes of first-time freshman community college students who enrolled in the fall of 2000. During a five-year period, more than half of the students studied left the community college system without a earning a degree or a certificate or transferring to a public university in California.

About a third of the students examined earned a degree, a certificate, or were able to transfer to a UC or CSU campus. Only 17% of the students earned a degree or certificate over the five-year period, and less than 1 in 4 of the students transferred to a public university in California.

Measure: Four-Year Degrees Conferred to Community College Transfer Students

The Commission also measured the success of students in earning baccalaureate degrees after transferring to either a CSU or UC campus from a community college. The data showed that most of these stu-

dents must complete more than two years of additional college coursework before earning four-year college degrees.

To measure outcomes of transfer students, the Commission analyzed data reported by California's community colleges, the CSU and the UC to examine "time-to-baccalaureate degree" rates for those students who transferred to the CSU or UC systems in the fall of 2000.

Data on the success of students who transferred to the UC showed:

- 44.2% of these students graduated within two years of transferring.
- 78% graduated within three years after transferring.

Data on the success of students who transferred to the CSU showed:

- 21.8% of these students graduated within two years after transferring.
- 52% of these students graduated within three years after transferring.

For many students, transfer isn't resulting in a four-year degree within four years.

Assessing Student Success and Building Upon Best Practices

Benchmarking California's public universities against comparable institutions showed that in many ways the State's students are succeeding about as well as students at similar institutions nationally. The data also suggest, however, a need to address troubling inequities and areas of under-performance in order to improve student outcomes.

In its evaluation of student success, the Commission found a number of CSU and UC campuses demonstrating innovative leadership in improving student outcomes.

For example, at the UC Santa Barbara campus, administrators integrated their Equal Opportunity Program (EOP) into the full spectrum of student support services available on the campus. As a result, teaching faculty and support staff from other student service departments, such as Health Education and Campus Learning Assistance Services, are more familiar with the needs of students, better understand the challenges students face, and have developed a sense of ownership for the success of students. UC Santa Barbara has the highest five-year graduation rate for Latino (76%) and African-American (71%) students among UC campuses.

Similarly, the CSU Stanislaus campus is a leader in improving student persistence rates. A recent study conducted by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities singled out this campus as a leader in streamlining its administrative structure to give campus service personnel greater flexibility to serve students and promote seamless service across departments. The Commission found that CSU Stanislaus was among the top 25% of colleges in its national comparison of performance of freshman students persisting to a second year of college.

The Commission also found an exemplary effort at CSU Fullerton. The CSU Fullerton (CSUF) Student Diversity Program (SDP) provides academic and social support to "at-risk" students. SDP students graduated at twice the rate of comparable CSUF students who lack the benefit of participating in such a program.

There are other success stories throughout California's college and university systems. Campuses vary in the manner in which they encourage student success and no single solution is appropriate to every institution. The Commission hopes that its accountability framework will draw attention to programs that

help more students succeed, and that the recognition of these models will encourage campus administrators and state policymakers to replicate and expand programs that significantly improve student success when appropriate.

While applauding what campuses are doing to improve student success, the Commission also recognizes a need for postsecondary education improvement in a number of areas:

- There is a widening gap in the number of students earning postsecondary degrees and vocational certificates in comparisons between generation groups.
- Latinos, African-Americans and Native Americans are not succeeding as well as Asian and White students at all levels.
- There is a growing gender gap—with a declining number of males participating in postsecondary education and earning degrees and credentials.
- A decline in part-time enrollment may result in more students earning degrees. But public higher education also must remain sensitive to meeting the needs of students with employment and family obligations. Improved efforts are needed to customize study programs to efficiently help part-time students attain the benefit of a college education.

The costs for addressing these weaknesses will require billions in additional public investments, but inadequately addressing these problems threatens to cost even more.

Conclusions and Recommendations

California is doing better at attracting certain students into its postsecondary institutions, but less well in regard to attracting students from the fastest-growing population groups.

The State needs to ensure successful and timely attainment of postsecondary goals equally across all ethnic and gender groups. The kinds of programs that need expanding or strengthening include:

- EOP and student support services that assist students to overcome the full spectrum of educational, emotional, social and financial barriers to success.
- Programs that reduce the financial burden on students and their families. Make college more affordable so more students can attend on a full-time basis. For those students with employment and family obligations who need to attend part-time, colleges need to ensure that educational services are tailored to efficiently meet the needs of these students.
- Better connections between postsecondary education pathways for community college transfer students are also needed.