



California Postsecondary Education Commission

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State Higher Education Commission Tackles College Affordability

SACRAMENTO — December 7, 2006 — At its December 12-13, 2006 meeting, the California Postsecondary Education Commission will review a report from its Special Panel on College Affordability, as well as several recommendations from Commission staff, regarding ways to make a higher education more affordable for all California students.

While fees at California's institutions are comparable, and in some instances lower than other states' fees, when the total cost of attendance is considered, it's increasingly difficult to make the case that college costs at California's four-year public universities are still a "bargain".

Lack of state support and general increases in the cost of living have taken their toll over the years. Many Californians would be surprised to learn that it's actually less expensive to send their children to public colleges in many other states than California. The state's focus on student fees, even the refusal to call them what they are -- tuition -- has diverted attention from the larger issue of the total cost of attendance. The Commission's development of an affordability policy and accompanying recommendations is a major step in this direction.

According to Executive Director Murray J. Haberman, "Many students and families are facing a true Hobson's choice where college costs are concerned. Students can borrow to finance the whole cost of attendance or they can work more, take fewer units and do whatever is necessary to cut costs. Unfortunately, the second option can cost more and make it less likely that students will graduate, while the first option will guarantee that students will graduate loaded with student loan debt."

Commission Chair Howard Welinsky added, "What many families don't realize, and are shocked to learn, is that when they write the check to cover college costs, fees will be less than half the total price tag. That's because it's expensive to live in California, and whether it's housing, transportation, or textbooks, the total cost of attendance is going nowhere but up." He added, "Providing access to a higher education by making college affordable to all students in our state is a major goal of the Commission."

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The Commission will review a paper of the Special Panel on College Affordability that includes both background information and policy options. The Commission will also review staff recommendations on approaches for resolving the college affordability issue in California, and will examine approaches to reverse the trend in which families and students have had to shoulder a larger proportion of the cost of attending college. The staff recommendations are based on the panel's discussions as well as national research, and include a full range of options from additional financial aid to housing assistance. Following the meeting, if the staff recommendations are adopted, the Commission will pursue legislation to put its ideas into motion.

A copy of the panel's report and staff recommendations can be found on the Commission's website at:

http://www.cpec.ca.gov/Agendas/Agenda0612/Tab_06a.pdf and

http://www.cpec.ca.gov/Agendas/Agenda0612/Tab_06b.pdf

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The California Postsecondary Education Commission advises the Governor and Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. The Commission's primary focus is to ensure that the state's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities.