

Executive Summary

Listen Up:

Californians

Respond to the

College-Access Crisis

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The Campaign for
**College
Opportunity**

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Executive Summary

The state of California is experiencing a rapid increase in the number of young people of college age. Whether these young people will have the opportunity to go to college depends entirely on the choices we make as a state.

This surging demographic growth has enormous repercussions for the state's community colleges and universities, which are already struggling with overcrowding and budget shortfalls. Over the course of the next 10 years, an increasing number of eligible and qualified Californians are likely to seek college above the current capacity of our higher education system. At the same time, more than ever, California's economic future will depend on a skilled and educated workforce.

Many studies have quantified this approaching crisis. But the Campaign for College Opportunity is the first to go directly to every major region in the state to document what Californians have to say about the challenges ahead and their ideas for solutions. Over five months, beginning in November 2004 through March 2005, our College Opportunity Listening Tour took us from the classroom to the boardroom and many places in between.

We heard the views of 1,612 diverse Californians. While Californians are polarized on many issues, there was resounding agreement in every region and from all sectors that the state must develop a plan to ensure college opportunity for this growing young population.

"Listen Up: Californians Respond to the College-Access Crisis" chronicles what we learned. The report includes new regional enrollment forecasts, the findings of the Listening Tour, real-life student stories, and recommendations for solutions.

Regional Enrollment Forecasts and the Impact on Community Colleges and Universities

In each of the next several years, California will graduate its largest high school classes ever. In 2008 alone, California will have an additional 45,000 high school graduates. This factor, coupled with an overall increase in the young adult population, the growing importance of vocational training or a college degree, and state education policy goals, will substantially increase demand for community colleges and universities in California.

This report includes new data from the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC), the state's higher education planning agency, that shows the likely demand for California community colleges and universities at the undergraduate level. CPEC estimates nearly an additional 672,000 community college students, 119,000 CSU students, and 46,000 UC students by fall 2013. Regions such as Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange County, the Inland Empire, the Central Valley, and the Bay Area will all experience significant growth.

	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY	UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Fall 2003 Actual Enrollment	1,655,789	328,348	159,018
Fall 2013 Projected Enrollment	2,328,278	447,392	204,578
Percent Change	40.6%	36.3%	28.7%
Numerical Change	672,489	119,044	45,560
Average Annual Change	3.47%	3.14%	2.55%

Source: CPEC

In addition, California's private colleges and universities currently enroll about 125,000 undergraduates, two-thirds of whom are California residents. These institutions expect their undergraduate enrollment to increase between 37,000 and 65,000 students over the coming decade. The report does not include an analysis of graduate and professional education or the potential role of private vocational schools.

Major Findings

The Campaign for College Opportunity spoke with 1,612 individuals from more than 400 organizations across nearly every major geographic region in the state. Four participants discussed factors driving demand for college, the impacts on their communities and potential solutions to address the issue. From these discussions emerged a number of key themes, described below:

1) Limited college access is becoming a major problem and will only worsen, unless we act soon to fix it.

Older Californians who have benefited from the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education spoke with pride about the state's historic commitment to college opportunity and an "intergenerational responsibility" to solve the college-access crisis.

Many current college students reported experiences dealing with the limited capacity of their colleges: driving to multiple community colleges to get required classes, being forced to wait for classes until a later semester, facing class cancellations that delayed their degrees, and difficulty transferring to a four-year university.

2) California's future economy depends on an educated workforce.

One of the greatest points of consensus was that attaining a college degree or vocational training is a must to meet the workplace demands of today's economy. Representatives from community groups, job training centers, labor unions, and regional business associations spoke to the importance of higher education for the well-being of families and the state workforce. Representatives from many businesses and corporations spoke to the workforce needs of a variety of sectors, including health care, agriculture, technology, education, defense and others.

3) Promoting a "culture of college opportunity" must begin at the K-12 level.

Programs that prepare young people to go to college should begin as early as elementary and middle school, followed by high school programs that help them succeed. The state's focus on improving high schools, both through higher academic standards and increased rigor in vocational programs, were cited as factors that will increase demand for community college and universities. Participants spoke to the need to dramatically improve the pipeline between high schools, community colleges and universities through such as efforts as P-16 Councils aligning standards between systems, early assessment of future college students to address remediation needs while they are in high school, and concurrent enrollment for high school students to complete some college-level work.

4) Education institutions must share resources and streamline services to increase efficiency.

Participants encouraged greater efficiency among higher education institutions as a big part of the solution to the college-access crisis. Many students told us it is widely understood that college now takes five or more years to complete even for full-time students. Top recommendations included shared use of facilities, improved transfer rules, better student counseling, flexible course scheduling, increasing the number of high-demand courses, and better use of data to improve student progress. There were those who, while supportive of greater efficiency, noted the limits of future efficiency gains due to the fact that higher education budgets have already been cut.

5) More state funding is an important part of the solution.

Overwhelmingly, participants agreed that more state funding for higher education must play a key role in solving the access crisis. Many noted that higher education is “an investment in the state’s future.” It was widely acknowledged that funding for higher education has declined in recent years as a proportion of the state budget. Many noted that other important state programs are also doing without, but agreed that we must invest in higher education and California’s future workforce now or risk having to make even greater sacrifices later down the line. They agreed that more state funding must be part of the solution, even if tough choices have to be made.

6) Tuition revenue and financial aid must play a role in solving this crisis.

Possible increases to fees — with additional financial aid — generated the broadest range of opinions from participants. Some proposed a return to tuition-free college education. Others insisted that this is no longer a realistic option. Many participants felt that California higher education fees are reasonable and that increased fees matched with financial aid can generate additional revenue to fund enrollment. Proposed solutions included making tuition increases moderate and more predictable, increasing student and parent awareness of financial aid beginning in middle school, and harnessing high schools to work with seniors to complete their financial aid applications. Participants often stated the core value that no student be denied a college education because of his or her income status.

Recommendations

Based on the comments we heard on the Listening Tour and our own analysis, the Campaign for College Opportunity proposes the following five recommendations to improve college access and success for all Californians:

1) Develop a comprehensive College Opportunity Plan. The state of California, with leadership from the Governor, state legislature, higher education, and the K-12 system, must develop a long-range plan to ensure access to community colleges and universities and success once students are admitted. The Compact between Gov. Schwarzenegger and the UC and CSU is an important starting point. A long-term plan should include community colleges, CSU, UC, independent colleges, K-12, and provisions for financial aid.

2) Create greater efficiency. Higher education leaders, at the campus level and system-wide, should create and implement plans to promote greater efficiency, such as better college preparation for high school students; dual enrollment in high school and college; and clearer paths for obtaining vocational degrees, transferring from community college to university,

or obtaining a bachelor's degree. These efforts will increase the likelihood that students will achieve their academic goals and graduate on time, also helping to create space for new students.

3) Make funding for higher education a top priority. The Governor and the Legislature should focus on meeting the needs of future college enrollment growth in part by developing a long-term financing plan based on projected state revenues. The goals should be to avoid restricting access, severe budget cuts, or drastic fee increases.

4) Set a predictable fee policy. The ideal policy would set a firm, predictable fee schedule to generate needed revenue to help solve the access crisis while keeping any increases moderate. This fee policy should be matched with additional financial aid.

5) Better education on financial aid. The state should create a comprehensive marketing and public education campaign about financial aid availability. The campaign should begin as early as middle school to assure students and their parents that college is within reach for every Californian who chooses to pursue it.

Conclusion

Changing demographics, evolving workforce demands and a host of other trends are placing intense pressure on California's community colleges and universities to accommodate a growing generation of students and prepare them for the job market. The Campaign for College Opportunity launched its Listening Tour to stimulate dialogue on the issue by bringing together voices from across the state. This report is offered as a launching pad for further discussion and collaboration as we work to identify policies and solutions to improve access to California's premiere higher learning institutions.

Methodology

The Campaign for College Opportunity's Listening Tour took place between November 2004 and March 2005. Over that period, a total of 1,612 Californians — among them parents, local elected officials, labor leaders, business and corporate leaders, high school and college students, high school and college faculty, counselors and other staff, college and university presidents, religious groups and community-based organizations. Additionally, 712 stakeholders filled out a questionnaire rating the three proposed solutions to the college-access crisis. CPEC's enrollment forecast methodology factors changing population among specific age groups, college participation rates and state policy goals to generate valid forecasts by sector and region. The methodology is described in detail in the agency's reports.

About the Campaign for College Opportunity

The Campaign for College Opportunity is a nonprofit organization solely devoted to ensuring that the next generation of Californians has the chance to go to college as promised by the state's 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education. The co-founders of the Campaign are the California Business Roundtable, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the Community College League of California.

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