

# Overview of California's Master Plan for Higher Education

LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

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## What Is California's Master Plan For Higher Education?

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### **Master Plan Was Originally Adopted in 1960**

- The original Master Plan was completed in 1960, after which the Legislature has authorized periodic reviews of the plan. Major reviews were completed in 1973 and 1987.
- Most recently, in 2002, the Legislature's Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan completed a report recommending various policy changes for a comprehensive kindergarten-through-university educational system.



### **Some Master Plan Principles Exist in Statute; Some Do Not**

- Neither the 1960 Master Plan report nor subsequent reviews are themselves in state law. Instead, they are reports commissioned by the Legislature and in some cases endorsed by individual legislators.
- Many significant principles expressed by the Master Plan have been adopted in statute. For example, in 1960, the Donohoe Higher Education Act (Chapter 1010 [SB 33, Miller]) codified many Master Plan recommendations, such as specifying the three public segments' missions.
- However, some major principles from the original Master Plan remain uncoded, including the freshman eligibility targets for the state's university systems.



## Master Plan Differentiates the Missions of the Segments

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### University of California (UC)

- Offer undergraduate and graduate instruction. Jurisdiction over (1) graduate education in law, medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine and (2) doctoral degrees in all fields.
- Serve as state's primary academic agency for research.



### California State University (CSU)

- Offer undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master's degree in the liberal arts and sciences and professional education, including teacher education.
- Authorized to (1) offer selected doctoral programs jointly with UC and private institutions and (2) support research related to its instructional mission.



### California Community Colleges (CCC)

- Offer academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level. May grant the associate of arts and the associate of science degrees.
- Offer adult education programs—including basic skills education; citizenship instruction; and vocational, avocational, and recreational programs.
- Promote regional economic development.
- May conduct institutional research on student learning and retention.



## Master Plan Specifies Freshman Eligibility Targets

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- The Master Plan specifies percentage targets that define the pool from which each higher education segment is to accept its students. Specifically, the plan calls for:
  - The CCC to accept all applicants 18 years of age and older who can benefit from attendance.
  - The CSU to draw from the top one-third (33.3 percent) of public high school graduates.
  - The UC to draw from the top one-eighth (12.5 percent) of public high school graduates.
  
- In order to achieve these targets, UC and CSU have adopted their own specific admissions criteria—such as minimum grade point average and SAT requirements.
  
- When the above targets were established in 1960, both UC and CSU were admitting students from somewhat larger pools of high school graduates. In reducing eligibility thresholds, the Legislature sought to:
  - Protect the quality of the state's higher education system.
  - Recognize limitations on state resources available to accommodate growing enrollments at UC and CSU.



## Master Plan Prioritizes Transfer Function

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- According to the Master Plan, “The transfer function shall be recognized by the Governor, Legislature, and the governing boards of each of California’s postsecondary education segments as a central priority of all segments of higher education.”
  
- The Master Plan expressed legislative intent that high school graduates not immediately eligible for UC or CSU could first attend community college and later transfer to the university. Thus, the plan directs UC and CSU to accept all qualified community college students.
  
- The plan also states that UC and CSU shall maintain lower division enrollment at no more than 40 percent of total undergraduate enrollment, in order to preserve access for qualified upper division transfer students.
  
- In short, the Legislature envisioned the transfer process as an efficient means for students (regardless of their academic preparation in high school) to enroll at UC or CSU.



## Master Plan Expresses Other Goals for Higher Education

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- Affordability.** According to the Master Plan, California residents shall not pay “tuition” at the state’s colleges and universities. However, such students shall pay “fees” to cover various operating costs (such as student services).
  
- Teaching Quality.** The UC and CSU are to adopt and enforce policies that ensure that quality teaching is an essential criterion in the evaluation of faculty for appointment, retention, promotion, and tenure.
  
- Accountability.** Overall, the Legislature expresses board policy and programmatic goals for higher education, and expects the segments to be accountable for attaining those goals. At same time, however, it intends “that the governing boards be given ample discretion in implementing policies and programs necessary to attain those goals.”



## Where Are UC and CSU Relative to Their Master Plan Eligibility Targets?

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### CSU Below Master Plan Target

- The California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) recently found that CSU is drawing from the top 28.8 percent, which is *below* the university's Master Plan target of 33.3 percent.



### UC Above Master Plan Target

- The CPEC found that UC is drawing students from the top 14.4 percent of high school graduates, which is *above* its Master Plan target of 12.5 percent.
- The CPEC also estimated that about 6 percent of graduates met UC's course, grade, and SAT I requirements, but simply did not take the SAT II (which is not required by most colleges). When these students are included, UC is drawing from about the top 20 percent of high school graduates.



### Existing Eligibility Standards Could Be Re-Examined

- Definitions of eligibility reflect important policy choices that affect access to the state's higher education systems, yet they have been made by the segments themselves with minimal legislative oversight.
- Currently, the segments define the state's top high school graduates based on data that are *not* available for all high school students. For example, UC requires students to take voluntary tests like the SAT I and II in order to be considered part of the top 12.5 percent. Alternatively, a test such as the Standardized Testing and Reporting (which is taken by all students) could be used.



## Is the Transfer Process as Efficient as Envisioned in the Master Plan?

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### Not All Community College Students Plan to Transfer

- Students enroll at a community college to achieve a variety of educational goals—including transferring to a four-year university, completing basic skills or vocational education, and earning an associate of arts degree.
- Roughly one-fourth of students entering the CCC system initially want to transfer to a four-year university.

### No Single Way to Measure Success of Transfer Process

- Higher education researchers have not been able to agree on the most appropriate way to measure “transfer rates” (percentage of a cohort of community college students who transfer to a four-year university).
- The primary disagreement is about which students to include in the base of potential transfer students, such as all entering community college students or only students intending to transfer.

### Great Disparities in Transfer Rates

- The CCC Chancellor's Office calculates transfer rates using a base that includes only students who (1) attempted a transferable math or English course and (2) completed at least 12 units within a six-year period. This methodology currently produces a transfer rate of about 43 percent.
- This compares to a rate of roughly 10 percent when all students are included in the base.





## Obstacles to Student Transfer

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### Major Preparation Varies Across Campuses

- Transfer applicants are admitted to selective UC and CSU campuses and majors partly based on their performance in coursework related to their major field of study.
- However, the requirements for a given major can be different for each campus (even within a segment). Students applying to multiple UC or CSU campuses might complete courses that only meet the requirements of one campus.
- Chapter 743, Statutes of 2004 (SB 1785, Scott), requires CSU to establish by June 1, 2005 a systemwide transfer curriculum for each high-demand major.



### Students Take Unnecessary Course Units

- Community college students can transfer a maximum of 70 semester (or 105 quarter) units to UC and CSU.
- However, transfer students on average complete many units in excess of this cap and spend more time than necessary at a community college.



### Course Articulation Agreements Are Too Campus Specific

- The state's public higher education campuses enter into campus-to-campus articulation agreements that specify which community college courses can be completed to satisfy the university campus' requirements.
- A community college course that satisfies a general education requirement at one university campus may not meet the same requirement at another campus. This limits transfer students' flexibility to apply to multiple campuses.



## Obstacles to Student Transfer *(Continued)*

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### Common Course Numbering System Is a Work in Progress

- Since course titles and numbers for the same course can vary across segments and campuses, students often have difficulty determining which CCC courses can be taken in place of a set of courses at a UC or CSU campus.
- In 1983, the Legislature called for the development of a common course numbering system. However, only a fraction of campuses and courses are currently in the system. No UC campuses participate in the system.
- As noted in the recent review of the Master Plan in 2002, "Course alignment and articulation at the postsecondary education level remain problematic."