

Testimony to

The Assembly Select Committee on

the Master Plan for Higher Education in California

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By

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As scholars of the history of education John Aubrey Douglass and Simon Marginson have documented, in their respective historical analyses of the California Master Plan for Higher Education, Clark Kerr—the principal architect and then-President of the University of California (UC)—envisioned a bold concept of higher education which committed the state to advance the principles of equality of opportunity, even as the colleges and universities would promote meritocracy. In defining a formal structural relationship among the three tiers of junior colleges, state colleges, and UC, Kerr envisioned both social inclusiveness in educational opportunities for students and a culture of academic excellence in path-breaking research conducted by UC scholars. This vision fueled optimism in the Golden State at the crossroads, following the Second World War and in the early stages of the Cold War. The three systems experienced rapid enrollment growth, in the 1960s, and the numbers of campuses quickly rose as the Baby Boom generation reached college age. California emerged as a model for higher education.

From the vantage point of 2018, it is apparent that California’s higher education systems still have many strengths in offering students life-changing opportunities in academic and career technical education, as well as promoting research in arts and letters disciplines and on the frontiers of science. Yet, it is clear now that the great plan which President Kerr articulated has stalled as a result of political factors—the libertarian insurgency and the anti-taxation movement, since the 1980s—as well the changing

demographics of Californians. The rise of the super-rich entrepreneurs concentrated in the Silicon Valley and the intensifying shift of wealth to the elite class has been destabilizing. Some of those newly moneyed venture philanthropists court opportunities with politicians and educational leaders in the top ranks of the college and university systems to promote their brands and various prescriptions to reform education. Buffeted by these forces, faculty in the colleges and universities—many of them in contingent employment status—face marginalization. Faculty contend that, in the push to boost enrollment, increase retention and student success rates leading to award of more degrees and certificates for transfer and employment, their voices are not heard and their professional expertise and practical knowledge of student needs is wholesale disregarded. Complying with the time limits imposed for my address to this committee, today, I focus on these latter issues since we are concerned that the great potential embodied in California's systems of higher education rapidly is fading. Through this presentation, I highlight measures which may help to halt the diminution of our community colleges. I leave it to my fellow panelists from the California Faculty Association and the AFT University Council to address concerns of their respective California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) faculties.

I start by pointing out that, despite negativism expressed in some corners, the successes of the California Community Colleges (CCC) in educating the top 100 percent (!) of all college students in the state are very real. A few statistics from the Community College League of California's Fast Facts 2018 illustrate my point:

- (1) In AY 2016/17, the CCC had an enrollment of 2.15 million students—largest in the nation.
- (2) CCC to UC transfers increased by 1,600 students, between 2015 and 2016, reaching a total of 61,871.
- (3) Some 51% of CSU grads and 29% of UC grads started in the CCC.

(4) Many CCC graduates entered the labor force and earned wages which, on average, were higher than those paid to employees lacking any collegiate degrees.

Those numbers aside, community college faculty face major hurdles every day and the magnitude is increasing, over time, in a world undergoing profound change in the global economy, narrow concentration of wealth and attendant political power, ecological crisis, and social disruption. An April 2018 study by Temple University and the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, which included the San Diego Community College District in its sampling, indicates that 42% of community college students contend with housing insecurity and that 46% suffer from food insecurity. Some colleges are attempting to provide support for impoverished students with no-cost food distributions, but this assistance is only piecemeal. Meanwhile, the best that the colleges can offer for homeless students is referrals to financial aid, contact information for overstretched social services agencies, and lists of “safe” parking lots where homeless people gather in numbers for a few hours of sleep nightly, before having to move on. CSU leadership now recognizes the urgent need for enhanced mental health counseling services, which students have been requesting. The state legislature reportedly is considering mandating improvement in the ratio of mental health counselors to CSU students (CalMatters, 26 April 2018). The needs in the much larger CCC almost certainly are even greater, but the system is grossly underfunded to meet demand. As a society, we struggle with illiteracy and innumeracy. National Public Radio (26 April 2018) featured an investigative report on adult illiteracy, placing the total number of adult Americans who are unable to read on a third-grade level at 35 million, or one-sixth of the population. The greatest number of those Americans who cannot read are white European Americans, but the proportions of those Americans lacking literacy skills are greatest among Latinos (41%) and African Americans (32%). Throughout my three decades of teaching in the CCC system, it has been the case that two-thirds of our students have been assessed as needing developmental training in reading, writing, and/or numeracy. All of these statistics describe real people who are our community college students! So, yes, we face major hurdles daily, and often without the support we faculty need to advance our students’ education.

In this environment, what have been the institutional responses, over time? Instead of having a predictable revenue stream, the colleges are forced to chase enrollment so as to be able to demonstrate to the Legislature and the Governor that we are being productive and deserving of a full apportionment. Given the continuous ebbing and flowing of enrollment, especially now, when the numbers of graduating high school seniors is retreating, enrollment management-based decisions often lead to imprudent policies and adversely affect students attending the colleges and the faculty trying to serve them. Governor Brown's proposed performance-based funding only adds insult to injury. Since the mid-1970s, the growing reliance of colleges and universities on contingent faculty to teach students, while pulling tenure line positions, has been a dirty secret. As data from the CCC State Chancellor's Office indicate, during Fall Semester 2016, the headcount of adjunct faculty employed in the CCC was 42,044 or 69.3% of the aggregate CCC faculty headcount of 60,633. Limited to assignments of 67% of a full load per academic year in any one district, many of the adjuncts in the urban/suburban areas of the state have assignments in multiple districts simultaneously. By driving from campus-to-campus, adjunct faculty struggle to piece together enough income to cover rent, food, and student loan debt; little is left in reserve. It is appalling that in, Fall Semester 2016, the adjunct faculty collectively accounted for 47% of all full-time equivalent faculty.

Compounding this depressing employment practice, the instructional impact on students is well known. Faculty driving hundreds of miles between colleges, every week, and each teaching six, seven . . . and even eight sections often are unable to consult with students to the extent that their tenure-line colleagues do. Thus, students seeking guidance from adjunct faculty often are at a disadvantage and may suffer in their performance.

Generally, as well, the adjunct faculty are able to take on little-to-no service work (program review, curriculum development and revision, industry/community outreach, and never-ending accountability reporting) for their departments. Consequently, the tenure-line faculty are left with more than their fair

share of these responsibilities, as well as time consuming faculty evaluation, in order to keep the departments and the colleges functioning.

Each year, for the last fifteen, the colleges have been confronted with new initiatives or mid-course corrections in on-going top-down mandated reform campaigns, whether those emanate from the State Chancellor's Office or even the US Department of Education. Instigators of the reform agendas often are combinations of two or more of the Gates, Lumina, Teagle, James Irvine, College Futures, and William and Flora Hewlett Foundations. All are launched from the top ranks, with minimal input from faculty professionals, who have practical experience and subject-matter expertise. Most of these disruptive agendas are about instructional methodology and outcomes measurement for accountability. Typically they are steeped in the jargon prevalent in schools of education. In concept, they ignore the subject matter of academic disciplines, while being oriented toward career-technical training programs; but all programs alike are tasked to get on board with the latest regimens, whether these be the measurement of student learning outcomes or Guided Pathways. Some of the initiatives are even inherently contradictory. Thus faculty are prodded to transform classes into online formats so that the colleges will participate in the Online Educational Initiative or even Governor Brown's proposed 115th community college, a fully online institution. At the same time, the inspiration of the Guided Learning Pathways initiative Thomas Bailey et al. (*Redesigning America's Community Colleges*, 2015) provide compelling evidence that online courses are counter-productive in improving the educational outcomes of Latino and African American students, in particular.

So, what am I asking of the Legislature and the Select Committee on the Master Plan? I offer the following suggestions and requests, on which community college faculty generally are in accord:

(1) Replace the inefficient enrollment-based funding model with a simple formula allocating a proportion of the annual budget resources to the CCC to meet the dynamic environment. This would parallel the budgeting process for the Basic Aid districts. With the state's commitment to stabilize the

financial foundation of the colleges, faculty better will be able to promote student success, retention, and attainment of objectives consistent with the Master Plan for the 21st century.

(2) Fund the transformation of the community college faculty. We need to turn away from the over-reliance on adjunct faculty, instead investing in the hiring of tenure-line faculty to meet the 75-25 ratio target for contract-adjunct employment set in AB 1725 (1988). It is long overdue!

(3) In the immediate future, boost funding for the CCC districts to enhance adjunct faculty salary schedules and to raise the level of compensation for adjunct faculty holding even limited office hours.

(4) Build on recent progress to improve the counselor to student ratio.

(5) Allocate funding for student services to address food insecurity in the student population.

(6) Provide incentives for the college districts to partner with public agencies on identifying practical solutions to housing insecurity problems plaguing so many students.

(7) Stop the privatization of the public CCC. The impact of grant-funding is undermining shared governance and redirecting the mission of the colleges, with little substantive input from all stakeholders. Faculty, classified professional staff, students, and . . . yes . . . honest anonymous administrators are reform-initiative weary. We want to get away from the disruptive business model and get back to our core mission.

In conclusion, I thank the committee for hearing my testimony and considering my recommendations.