

**Assembly Select Committee on  
The Master Plan for Higher Education in California  
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Good morning Chairman Berman, Committee Members and guests, my name is Jose Aguilar and I am the Director of Financial Aid at the University of California, Riverside. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Assembly Select Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education in California. In 1960, our state developed a visionary plan for the future of higher education, known as the Master Plan. Much has changed in California during the ensuing decades – population growth, increased diversity, change in leading industries and their need for talent, as well as innovations in technology and the field of education itself. My understanding of the Master Plan is that it can be compared to a three-legged stool: one leg represents the Community College System, one leg represents the CSU System and the one leg represents the UC System. All three legs support and hold the seat portion of the stool. Students seeking a degree are in need of that seat. In my opinion, the seat of the stool implicitly represents the support services that students deserve and require to succeed in attaining a degree. Examples of these services are academic support services, admissions, financial aid, career and enrichment services, housing, food and social safety net programs, health and mental health services, access to technology, and many more services that extend beyond the direct teaching and research mission offered at the University.

The University of California (UC) is the largest public research university system in the world, with more than 264,000 matriculated students, 165,000 faculty and staff, and 1.8 million living alumni. It includes 10 campuses, five medical centers and three affiliated national laboratories. UC remains committed to carrying out its research, education, health care and public service missions. Strengthening programs and support through the Master Plan for Higher Education will allow the university to continue to thrive and serve as an economic engine for California and the nation.

State funding is key and critical to ensure adequate services are provided to our growing student population. UCR receives more than 60K undergraduate (freshmen and transfer) applications every year to fill approximately 6,500 seats. These 6,500 seats join UCR's continuing student population to comprise a total enrolled population of approximately 23,300 students for the 2017-18 year. This total enrolled population steadily increases year after year depending on institutional targets and student acceptances. For example, ten years ago, the total enrolled population at UCR was at approximately 18,000 students, which equates to a 30% increase of enrolled students in the last decade. Increases in staffing have not kept up to student growth levels. For the 2017-18 award year, the Financial Aid Office had a staff of 28 full-time employees (FTE), when compared to the staff size ten years ago, that only translate to a 16% increase in staff. Of the 28 FTE, nine FTE are designated as financial aid counselors able to serve the total UCR student body, which has complex and unique financial circumstances. This translates to a 2,600 to 1 student to financial aid counselor ratio. Ten years ago, at eight financial aid counselors available to serve 18,000 students, the ratio was a 2,260 to 1. Therefore, for the 2017-18 award year, the student to financial aid counselor ratio increased by 340 students per counselor, evidence of staff size not keeping pace with student growth. We are regularly asked to do more with less often times, resulting in staff working overtime to meet the demands of our students. Excess overtime often causes staff burnout that then leads to staff turnover.

This challenge is not unique to UCR. I regularly meet with other UC Financial Aid Directors to collaborate on various topics and issues related to financial aid. At these meetings, we have discussed staffing needs on various occasions and we all recognize that we are severely understaffed to meet the needs of our respective student bodies. Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge that it is also a challenge in other departments within the University and not unique to financial aid offices.

In addition to adequate staffing, we also need to ensure our staff are adequately compensated. Staff salaries must be competitive with the private sector. Often times, I lose well-trained and talented staff to other institutions due to low salaries. Adequate facilities, supportive services and healthy work environments also contribute to a staff members overall job satisfaction which translates into improved customer service for our campus community. Professional

development is also a key factor in assisting staff in the continuous process of acquiring new knowledge and skills that relate to their profession, job responsibilities or work environment.

Institutions of higher education need technological tools to remain competitive and to provide more self-service venues to students. These tools should mitigate the high volume phone calls and office visits. For example, enhanced phone systems and web tools would greatly benefit students and prevent them from waiting on hold for 30 to 60 minutes for a customer service representative.

Understanding the challenges and opportunities that staff face is also important. UC recently conducted a staff engagement survey, which has helped UCR identify areas of strength (e.g., positive working relationships and communication with supervisors) and areas for attention (e.g., workload and change management). As an institution, it is vital for us to collaborate with staff to develop solutions and value their perspective in improving efficiencies of our systems.

My recommendation to the committee is that the Master Plan ensure the state provide adequate funding and resources for staff to support student growth, increase the capacity, and address deteriorating infrastructure such as technology at our existing campuses. Today's students deserve the same quality education as in past generations of Californians. As we continue to expand enrollment, we must provide students and staff with the classrooms, the laboratories, the libraries and the living and learning spaces they need to thrive and succeed. And, we must recognize that every faculty and staff member plays an important role in advancing UC's mission of education, research and public service.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide my perspective and associated recommendations.