

Critical Issues Paper: Public Four Year and Community College Affordability

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College gives students opportunity to explore areas of interest, to follow their passions, and further develop their education and social skills. College can provide many pathways for students to journey through. A solid college education builds specific skills, but it also provides graduates with momentum towards a good future as participants in the economy, as citizens, work force, and helps provide financial stability. Unfortunately, many Americans face issues in not being able to afford higher education. Sadly, being able to attend college has become a privilege, not a right.

Although college tuition varies depending on each institution, the price to receive a college degree is increasing. Sadly, the increase in tuition has discouraged many students, especially economically disadvantaged students to pursue higher education. Whether the student is low income or not, many students aspire to attend college and earn a degree that will help them land a job doing something that pays better and is a less objectionable way to spend their working hours than the job they would have received without a degree (Shireman, 2009). Having costs rise at the college institution takes away the hope for another future. Most students do not want to work mundane jobs, but actually desire to work in a career field they are passionate and well educated in.

Underprivileged or not, students have to consistently adapt to the heightened tuition. It is important for people planning on attending college to research the various trends in costs of institutions. A few types of institutions are community college, public four-year institutions, and private college. There are pros and cons to each type of institution. Community and state colleges are more cost effective than UC's and private colleges. The community and state colleges are also very impacted and still have had recent tuition increases as well. Although community and state tuition costs pale in comparison to

UC's and private colleges, it still can be costly. Last year tuitions reported the average yearly cost for community colleges was \$3,264, state colleges \$8,893, public four year institutions \$22,203, and private \$30,094 (Weiss, 2014). These numbers are shocking and continue to grow. Unfortunately, even the more easily assessable and affordable colleges such as community and state are becoming too expensive for students to afford.

Community College

In the past few years community colleges have seen an influx of students. Enrollment has sky rocketed and classes are difficult to register for due to the high demand from the increase of students. Unless students are athletes, have disabilities, or are a part of a special program they are not eligible for priority registration and must fight the crowd for every class. Inside higher Ed reported an experiment, which a few community colleges are entertaining that could be a helpful option for students to secure a few classes at the community college.

Governor Jerry Brown signed a law recently that brought up controversy. The assembly bill 955 will allow six community colleges an option for two- tiered tuition with extension courses in the summer and winter terms. This bill developed concerns due to it conflicting with California's commitment to open access and low tuition rates (Fain, 2013). This bill may create more opportunity for some students while at the same time adding more blockades to others. Charging higher prices for certain popular classes as a way of addressing overcrowding seems unfair to many of the critics of the new bill. Although many people are not supportive of the new bill, it is only an experiment and has not been mandated to all 112 California community colleges.

One main concern of this bill is the two tiered tuition acts as a toll road for the economically privileged (Fain, 2013). Community Colleges charge students \$46 per unit but this bill can could triple the cost. Some may say those who have a strong desire to enroll in these classes will find a way to pay for the classes and filter out those who are not as committed to their education. In the opposite argument this can also create more tension for students who are economically disadvantaged.

Long Beach Community College will act as one of the six participants of the pilot who supports this experiment. The college feels it is a creative way to help students get the classes they need and realizes this is not a permanent fix. Analyzing Long Beach Community Colleges' success or failures in this new endeavor may act as a catalyst for other colleges to emulate or veer far away from implementing the new bill.

This new bill seems it would conflict with many intuitional mission statements. Most colleges have a mission statement that enforces equal opportunity for students. Raising tuition for certain classes provides an imbalance in the system; the opportunity for certain students to get classes is not equal. This could infuriate students who cannot afford the spike in tuition and call upon the 14th amendment. Students could file against the school for inequality in not abiding by the mission statement of the college. Students could use the 14th amendment to support their lack of equal opportunity. The Due Process Clause in the 14th amendment prohibits state and local government officials from depriving persons of life, liberty, or property (Lake, 2011, pg.182).

This new bill seems it will cause more strife for students then actually help them. If community colleges are supposed to have open admission and be the most

affordable way to begin a students' higher education journey, this bill should not even be experimented with. For students with easily accessible funds this bill seems like a dream, but for those who cannot afford the tiered tuition, it is another barrier that holds them from pursuing their goal. The message this bill sends is if you have enough money you can pay your right to enroll in classes.

If the concern is to weed out the unmotivated students and cultivate a learning environment that caters to dedicated students, then community colleges should be pleased with the California Success Initiative. The California Community Colleges are in the midst of a major reform effort aimed at significantly increasing the number of students successfully completing their educational and career goals. The Student Success Initiative was launched in 2012 by the Board of Governors and state Chancellor's Office, and is based on a set of 22 recommendations which now serve as a guiding policy for the system.

“We are implementing an ambitious plan to improve the way our colleges serve students from initial orientation and assessment, through education planning, to basic skills instruction, and all the way through completion,” says Chancellor Brice W. Harris. “This transformation is being accomplished through numerous program and policy changes – all coordinated under the Student Success Initiative. The launch of a California Student Success Center is a natural next step to continue this momentum” (California Community Colleges launch new statewide center to increase student success).

The Student Success Initiative is a great solution to continue to offer access to all students, yet also holding them accountable. If students do not attain a certain GPA or attend all necessary orientation and education plans the students' registration date will suffer. Students need guidance on what classes to take but unfortunately many students do not seek the proper help and end up lost in the shuffle of students taking classes that do not align with their education goal. Having education plans required for each student

will help students be more educated about units and course work needed for their desired certificate, transfer pattern or associate degree. This will help motivated students continue to develop better registration dates ,which offer more open classes, and will deter uncommitted students who are taking up class space just to continue to receive benefits from their parents or receive the financial aid check.

Public Four Year Universities

The average tuition for a four year degree at a public college has increased by more than 250 percent in the past 30 years (Cormier, 2013). It is highly recommended to plan accordingly for the rising costs for students who will receive a bachelors degree. Sixty percent of the twenty million Americans who attend college each year borrow money to help cover costs. As public tuitions sky rocket, state funding is sinking (Weiss, 204).

President Barack Obama is trying to devise a plan to help with the college tuition crisis.

Obama plans to halt the rising cost of college and make higher education more accessible for all students. As part of these plans, universities will be ranked according to their performance, the perceived quality of tuition, their graduates' job prospects, and student accessibility and affordability. Colleges with high dropout rates will be penalized. Currently, universities with the highest number of students receive the lion's share of federal aid -- by 2015, the new system will instead provide the most aid to colleges with the highest ranking (Cormier, 2013).

The possible solution is to create a competition for excellence in higher education. This policy would allow equal accessibility for low-income student to attend prestigious colleges. On the other end, low performing schools will lose funding, making it difficult for students to attend those colleges without the proper financial aid.

Although it is commendable to try to fix the solution, many students do not support this possible policy. Many public university students are frustrated about their student loan debt and rising tuition prices. Many of them blame bloated administrative spending, salaries and misguided cuts in services. There is probably an accumulation of reasons for the rising tuition. Blame and anger will not solve this problem. If students want to see change and do not agree or like what has been proposed, maybe it is time for the students' voice to be heard and research possibilities to help rectify or help this crisis.

This policy seems to bring more barriers to students who are economically challenged. Many students cannot afford to move away to college and need to stay close to home. What if the university close to home is not ranked highly and does not offer financial aid? The student would be trapped and not be able to attend college. Students should not have to suffer on account of how the college performs.

If institutions have high dropout rates then they should be held accountable or implement a retention program. Students should not be denied financial aid because an institution is not graduating the quota needed to "make rank." It seems the students are the ones who suffer most in this policy. Instead of taking away funds, maybe the government can grant aid to research why the institutions are suffering with retention and collaborate in how to remedy the problem.

Whether attending a four year public university or community college in California students may be facing troubling times. Equal access seems to be skewed as some of the new bills and policies are creating more hoops for students to jump through. The higher education systems seems to have a few broken elements and adding more

barriers to receiving financial aid will only add to the frustrations and inequality for students.

As a student affair professional, I must stay current with the trends because they can greatly affect my position or career path. I currently work at a community college and am already seeing many changes due to the Success Initiative. In the long run it seems it will be beneficial but the growing pains to achieve the requirements for the new policy are just that-growing PAINS. Rectifying the brokenness within higher education will not be easy, but changes are needed. Policies which support accessibility and affordability need to be created or else students will continue to suffer.

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