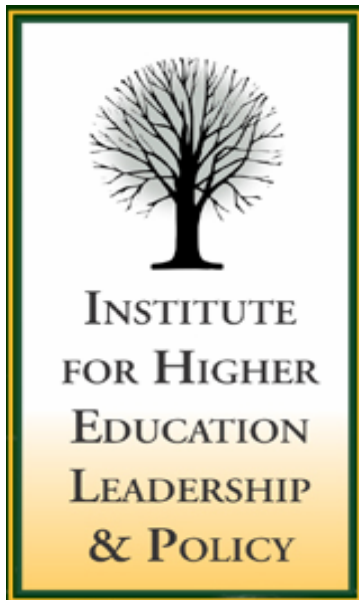


Policy Issue Report

September, 2003



Capacity Constraints in California's Public Universities: A Factor Impeding Transfer?

For more information
contact:

Nancy Shulock, Ph.D.
Institute for Higher
Education Leadership &
Policy
California State University
6000 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95819-
6081

Phone: (916) 278-3888
Fax: (916) 278-3907
E-mail: ihe@csus.edu

www.csus.edu/ihe

Nancy Shulock, Ph.D.
Director

Colleen Moore, M.P.P.A.
Research Specialist

With research assistance from:

Priscilla Aguirre
Sandra Chapin
Mark Mclean
Christopher Roe
Richard & Rhoda Goldman School of Public Policy
University of California, Berkeley

Transfer in California

California ranks among the leaders nationally in college attendance, both in numbers and in the percentage of high school students going on to postsecondary education. This noteworthy accomplishment is largely due to California's extensive community college system with its open admissions policy.¹ California's 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education laid out a three-tiered system of higher education that included the California Community Colleges (CCC), the California State University (CSU), and the University of California (UC), and defined attendance criteria for each segment according to students' level of preparation and academic performance. The Master Plan reserved four-year college attendance for its most well prepared and qualified students. However, all students were offered an opportunity to pursue a four-year degree by first attending a community college. After successfully fulfilling a minimum set of requirements, these students were guaranteed a place at one of the state's public four-year institutions. This transfer mechanism was a key concept that underpinned the California dream of higher education for its citizens, and linked its goals of access and affordability.

Despite its many successes, California has struggled to meet the challenge posed by significant growth in enrollment. While California's total population is expected to increase by 17 percent between 2000 and 2010,² enrollment in the state's public institutions of higher education is projected to increase by more than 28 percent over the same period.³ Community college enrollment has already grown by 20 percent over the past 10 years; however, the number of students successfully transferring to the state's public four-year institutions has remained remarkably flat – fluctuating between 50,000 and 60,000 students per year.⁴ The stagnant numbers persist despite significant investment by the state in efforts aimed at increasing the number of community college students successfully transferring to four-year institutions.

Model of Transfer Process

The number of transfer students is a function of three components: the supply of students intending to transfer, the success of the transfer function in preparing those students, and the ability of receiving four-year institutions to accommodate those students. This Pipeline-Process-Capacity Model is further defined:

Pipeline: The number of community college students that intend to transfer to a four-year institution is dependent on a number of factors, including student aspirations, social capital reflecting family and other support networks and their familiarity with higher education options, outreach efforts to recruit transfer students, and economic variables affecting students' perceptions of alternatives to pursuing the baccalaureate via the transfer process.

Process: Transfer processes include the mechanisms established to facilitate the transfer of students from community colleges. These may include articulation agreements regarding eligible coursework that satisfies entrance requirements at the receiving four-year institutions, counseling efforts at the community college level, communications between the transfer coordinators at the community colleges and the transfer admissions directors at the receiving institutions, special admission programs between community colleges and four-year institutions, and data collection and information sharing among the various institutions. Student and institutional efforts to ensure students' academic preparation for transfer are also critical.

Capacity: Transfer capacity can become limited at receiving institutions if campuses or programs become overenrolled or "impacted," hampering their ability to accommodate more students. When a program is overenrolled, additional restrictions or requirements are usually imposed, thereby increasing selectivity in the admissions process. The basic general education (GE) requirements for transfer are:

- **UC.** Minimum 2.4 GPA and 60 transferable semester units, 1 advanced Math course or quantitative reasoning, 4 transferable courses from at least 2 of the following areas: arts and humanities, social sciences, behavioral sciences, or physical or biological sciences.
- **CSU.** Minimum 2.0 GPA and 56 transferable units; of the 56 units, 30 must be in general education courses to include one course in oral communication, one course in written communication, one course in critical thinking and one course in math/quantitative reasoning above the level of intermediate algebra.⁵

If an eligible student applies to an impacted campus and is not accepted, efforts are made to redirect or refer the student to a campus where there is an opening in the student's field of interest. If applying to an impacted program, students may be admitted at the campus of their choice, but be placed in another area of study that is not impacted, or may be redirected or referred to another campus where that major is available.

In a 2002 report to the state Legislature, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office suggested that the number of transfers in recent years may reflect capacity constraints in the CSU and UC more than ineffectiveness in the transfer function of the community colleges.⁶ The report notes that the number of impacted programs and campuses within the UC and CSU systems has increased, creating the possibility that potential transfer students are being shut out of the state's senior institutions through increases in the requirements for transfer. This research was undertaken to explore that proposition.

Study Purpose and Methods

This paper examines the issue of capacity constraints in UC and CSU, and whether limited capacity is a factor impeding the success of the community college transfer function. In particular, we address the following questions:

1. Is the state of California meeting its promise to offer all qualified community college students admission to its four-year institutions?
2. What is the extent of impaction from a system-wide perspective? From the perspective of individual campuses and fields of study?
3. Does the limited capacity of California's public four-year institutions and/or programs disproportionately affect underrepresented students?
4. Will the system be able to accommodate students seeking to transfer as the numbers of those students increases with Tidal Wave II?

We are asking these questions at what could very well be a turning point in the history of public higher education in California. A massive state budget deficit and significant budget cuts to higher education are calling into question issues of access and capacity more than ever before in the history of the California Master Plan for Higher Education.

Our methodology included interviews with administrators and other experts knowledgeable about the transfer process, as well as document review and data analysis. We conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from California's three public segments of higher education, including representatives from each segment's system office and from individual campuses. The document analysis included institutional publications and reports; campus and system websites; and other documents as appropriate. Our analysis is descriptive in nature, and draws on data supplied by the UC, CSU, and CCC

central offices as well as data from the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) and the California Department of Finance.

Is California Keeping its Promise to Transfer Students?

California’s 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education states that the UC and CSU systems must give qualified California community college students preference in admissions over all other applicants. If a community college student meets the minimum requirements, he or she is guaranteed a place at one of the state’s public four-year institutions. Several revisions have been made to the Master Plan to enhance the transfer process. In 1991, SB 121 called for the UC and CSU governing boards to make certain that transfer students receive priority admission and to ensure adequate upper division placements for CCC transfer students to all UC and CSU campuses. The legislation mandated that CSU and UC maintain at least 60 percent of their enrollment in the upper division in order to keep access open to transfer students.

Applications data from CSU and UC can demonstrate whether or not the state is keeping its promise to students who begin their studies in the community colleges. Table 1 shows the disposition of applications for admission submitted to CSU by community college students seeking to transfer over five years. The total number of students denied admission has increased by 46 percent since 1997-1998. According to CSU, while the current transfer admission requirements have been in effect for well over 10 years, many campuses were not strictly enforcing the specific GE course requirements. However, in 1998 due to anticipated enrollment pressures, the Board of Trustees reaffirmed the transfer admission requirements and mandated their enforcement as a means of controlling enrollment growth. This stricter enforcement may help to explain increases in the number of transfer students denied for failure to meet eligibility standards, but does not explain the increase in the number of “denied eligible” applicants shown in Table 1. In the 2001-2002 academic year, 1,403 eligible transfer applicants were denied admission to CSU, nearly double the number of the previous year.⁷ According to CSU, 1 in 33 transfer applicants was redirected to other campuses or programs, but even with the redirection policy over 1,000 community college students meeting the minimum criteria were denied admission to CSU.⁸ While CSU could offer no data on the reasons for the denial of eligible students, it seems reasonable to assume that the growing number of impacted programs and campuses, as discussed in the following section, is a contributing factor.

SB 121 on the Role of Transfer

- ❑ “A viable and effective student transfer system is one of the fundamental underpinnings of public postsecondary education in California”
- ❑ “It is a community college’s primary role to prepare students for upper division access to the California State University and the University of California”

Table 1
Disposition of Unduplicated Applications to CSU
for California Community College Transfers

	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002
Applications Received (unduplicated)	78,128	81,301	84,773	88,113	91,799
Incomplete Applications	13,057	16,278	16,409	18,361	18,047
Admitted Applicants	57,440	56,148	59,739	61,132	64,375
Denied Applicants	6,047	6,818	6,959	7,962	8,818
Ineligible	N/A	N/A	N/A	7,193	7,415
Eligible	N/A	N/A	N/A	769	1,403

Source: CSU Statistical Abstract 2001-2002

The UC publishes data on the number of applications received from CCC students and the share of the applicants admitted. Approximately 78 percent of more than 16,000 transfer applicants were accepted in Fall 2000, the most recent year covered by published data.⁹ UC does not provide information on the disposition of the non-admitted applications like that provided in Table 1 for CSU. UC staff report that the system accepts all transfer eligible applicants,¹⁰ although the system relies more heavily than CSU on a redirection process. If transfer applicants are not admitted to any campus to which they applied, the UC offers them the option of being included in a “referral pool” from which their application is considered by other campuses with slots available. The average number of UC campuses applied to by transfer students increased from 2.0 in 1996 to 2.4 in 2000, likely reflecting growing awareness among students of the increased competitiveness of admissions to the system. Even with the increased applications, approximately 1 in 6 eligible transfers – about 2,500 – were referred to other UC campuses during the most current admissions cycle in 2003.¹¹

The available admissions data from UC and CSU indicate that the four-year segments have largely been meeting their commitment to offer admission *somewhere in the system* to community college students who apply and who meet the minimum transfer criteria. However, it is not clear from the data how many students whose applications are redirected find that to be a significant barrier to transfer due to work or family commitments or other impediments to relocation. In addition, the available data are two or three years old in most cases, while the most severe enrollment pressures are more recent. For example, UC recently announced that it will not consider the applications of 1,500 community college students seeking to transfer in the upcoming winter term based on lack of capacity due to recent budget cuts.¹² CSU is also restricting access in light of recent budget cuts; the system will not accept any applications for the spring semester.¹³ More recent admissions data, when it becomes available, is likely to provide more evidence of limitations on access through the community college transfer process.

What is the Extent of Campus and Program Impaction?

The University of California has raised admissions standards at many campuses and programs. Six of the eight undergraduate campuses are impacted. Many programs require a GPA higher than the minimum of 2.4, sometimes substantially higher, and also require additional coursework for transfer applicants above the minimum criteria.¹⁴ Many community college students who are “UC eligible,” meaning they have met the minimum transfer requirements, in effect may only be eligible to attend UC Santa Cruz or UC Riverside, as those are the only campuses that can accommodate transfer students meeting only the minimum criteria. It is difficult to estimate the effect of increased admissions standards on transfer, as we cannot know how many students are discouraged from applying for admission by the higher requirements at their campus or program of choice or are admitted but decline the offer of referral to another campus.

Impaction within the CSU system is currently confined primarily to a few campuses and to nursing programs.¹⁵ While approximately 15 percent of all the undergraduate programs offered by CSU campuses are impacted (80 out of 529), a closer examination of the data reveals that the problem is largely driven by three factors:

- Campus wide impaction at San Diego State (29 of 30 programs)
- Campus wide impaction at San Luis Obispo (24 of 24 programs)
- Nursing program impaction across the CSU system (12 of 14 programs)

The impaction rate for the remaining CSU campuses and the other 31 programs offered is only 3.5 percent (16 of 462). Removing Long Beach (8 of 29 programs impacted) from the equation reduces the system wide impaction rate even further to 2 percent (9 of 434). However, the number of impacted CSU campuses and programs is projected to grow. The Long Beach and Chico campuses are impacted for the new academic year (2003-2004), and Sonoma State may be impacted as well. While there were only 30

impacted programs in CSU in 2000-2001, there were 71 in 2002-2003 and the number is expected to continue growing. As that occurs, more students will be redirected to programs or campuses that are not their first choice. Some of the redirected students will find that to be an unmanageable barrier to transfer due to work, family and/or financial considerations.

Are Underrepresented Students Disproportionately Affected?

It is easy to demonstrate with enrollment data for California's higher education system that African American and Latino students are underrepresented among successful transfers.¹⁶ While African American students represent 7 percent of total community college enrollment, they represent only 2.8 percent of transfer students enrolled at UC and 4.9 percent of those at CSU. Latinos are underrepresented among transfer students as well, making up 26.1 percent of community college enrollment but only 19.6 percent of transfers to CSU and 14.6 percent of transfers to UC.

It is more difficult to discern from available data the impact of capacity constraints on the transfer of underrepresented students. Data from CSU on the disposition of applications for transfer admission indicate that both African American and Latino students are less likely than white students to be denied admission to the system if they meet the minimum requirements.¹⁷ However, the data do not indicate how many of the admitted applicants were redirected to other programs or campuses. It is likely that increased admissions standards due to impaction will disproportionately affect underrepresented students whose educational backgrounds may make them less competitive for meeting the higher standards. In addition, underrepresented students may find redirection to be a greater barrier to successful transfer for economic reasons.

What will be the impact of Tidal Wave II?

Between 2000 and 2010, California's public higher education institutions are expecting that enrollment will increase by some 600,000 students.¹⁸ Community colleges are expected to grow by some 450,000 students while CSU anticipates that the system will grow by approximately 110,000 students and UC by approximately 50,000 students. During the first Tidal Wave in the 1960s, increases in enrollment were accompanied by the addition of new campuses in both the UC and CSU systems, which absorbed a significant share of the growth, and growing budgets. Only one new campus is currently under development (UC Merced's enrollment will account for only a fraction of the projected growth in higher education) and budgets are being drastically reduced across all three segments.

CPEC estimates greater demand for transfer as compared to freshman enrollment slots for the senior institutions. For example, UC is expected to face a 44 percent increase in community college transfers (from 12,888 in 2002 to 18,609 in 2010), compared to a 23 percent increase among first-time freshmen. These enrollment pressures will surely further strain the ability of four-year institutions to accommodate transfer students. Most likely to be affected are underrepresented students who may be less competitive in an environment of increasing eligibility requirements, and who may find the redirection or referral of their application for admission to be an insurmountable barrier to transfer.

Summary

The annual number of community college students that transfers to a senior institution can be affected by many factors including characteristics of the students and the institutions, the condition of the economy, and policies and procedures that support or impede transfer. Examples of student factors that can impede transfer include poor academic preparation, family and work obligations, and a lack of the cultural and social capital necessary to navigate the complex higher education system. Institutional factors such as inadequate counseling, an emphasis on vocational rather than academic education in some community colleges, and rigidity among four-year institutions in accepting community college courses for credit can

also influence the rate of student transfer. In addition, specific policy and procedural factors including a lack of clarity and uniformity in the transfer application and admissions process across campuses and segments can affect the number of transfers.

Our analysis indicates that capacity constraints are beginning to serve as another factor impeding transfer. Although UC and CSU have offered admission somewhere in the system to nearly all qualified transfer applicants, the impact of programs and entire campuses and the resulting redirection of applications serve as significant barriers to transfer for students who are more place-bound or who have very specific career interests and objectives. As is often the case, underrepresented students may be disproportionately affected by the higher standards and increased competition for available transfer slots.

Recommendations

1. Improve data collection and reporting in order to understand whose access to what is being affected

In order to better understand the dimensions and consequences of capacity constraints for transfer students, California's policymakers need information on:

- the impact of individual campuses and programs, and resulting increases in admissions standards;
- the disposition of applications to UC that are not accepted for admission and, for both UC and CSU, the reasons for the denial of transfer applicants meeting the minimum criteria for admission where there are such cases;
- the numbers of applications from transfer students that are redirected or referred to other programs or campuses, by program area or discipline; and
- enrollment rates for transfer applicants who are accepted at a campus other than the one(s) to which they applied through redirection or referral, as compared to the enrollment rate for applicants accepted at their campus of choice.

2. Monitor the impact of capacity constraints on underrepresented students

Where applicable, the information above should be tracked by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Such data will allow policymakers to assess whether the impact of capacity constraints on access to the baccalaureate through the transfer process is greater for certain populations.

3. Engage the big policy question: what does "access" mean?

For decades, Californians have benefited from the universal access to higher education assured by the operation of the transfer function. For a variety of reasons, including worrisome transfer and completion rates, variations in quality across institutions, eroding budgets, and now explicit denial of access, it is time for policymakers to consider what California's promise of "access" to higher education means in the context of limited capacity and resources. Higher education officials are being forced to consider which students will be served and which will not; state policymakers must actively consider their own role in such choices. Outright denial of admission to qualified students is clearly a negation of access. But what about the redirection or referral of qualified, place-bound students to far away campuses? While it may strain logic to argue that access is fulfilled only by admission to one's campus of choice, is there a point at which access becomes illusory? Enrollment and budget pressures over the next decade will severely strain the ability of the system to provide the kind of access Californians have come to expect. A "business as usual" approach that fails to confront this difficult issue is indefensible.

Endnotes

¹ The National Center for Higher Education and Public Policy (2002). "Measuring Up 2002: The State-by-State Report Card for Higher Education." Accessed at <http://measuringup.highereducation.org/2002/stateprofilenet.cfm>.

² California State Department of Finance, "Interim County Population Projections: Estimated July 1, 2000 and Projections for 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020" accessed at www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/P1.doc.

³ California State Department of Finance, "California Public Postsecondary Enrollment Projections: 2001 Series," accessed on July 18, 2002 at www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/Post2nd.htm.

⁴ California Postsecondary Education Commission on-line data at <http://www.cpec.ca.gov/OnLineData/FindRpt.asp>. Flat transfer numbers may in part reflect a policy decision in the 1990's to enforce the minimum units requirement for transfer. During the 1980's, when higher education enrollments were stagnant, the four-year institutions accepted lower-division transfer students to boost their enrollment. As enrollments increased, however, UC and CSU returned to accepting primarily upper division transfers. Thus, over the last decade, upper division transfers have increased, supplanting lower division transfers, with overall transfers remaining fairly flat.

⁵ This requirement will be increased from 56 to 60 units beginning with the Fall 2004 admission cycle.

⁶ California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2002). "Transfer Capacity and Readiness in the California Community Colleges."

⁷ Data were not collected for "Denied Eligible Applicants" or "Denied Ineligible Applicants" until 2000-2001.

⁸ According to sources interviewed for this report, neither CSU nor UC keep track of reasons for the denial of applications for admission.

⁹ University of California Office of the President, *Information Digest 2002*, "Application Flow of California Community College Transfers by Campus – All Students: Fall 2000"

¹⁰ Interview, Steve Handel, UC Office of the President

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² UC Office of the President press release (2003, September 2). "UC to Refund Fees to About 1,500 Winter Transfer Applicants."

¹³ CSU Chancellor's Office press release (2003, July 30). "Additional Cuts in State Budget Force CSU to Reduce Enrollment."

¹⁴ Impacted campuses include Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and San Diego.

¹⁵ Information on campus and program impactation was obtained from Judy Osman at the CSU Chancellor's Office, and applies to circumstances as of academic year 2002-03.

¹⁶ Enrollment data gathered from California Postsecondary Education Commission on-line data at <http://www.cpec.ca.gov/OnLineData/FindRpt.asp>.

¹⁷ CSU Statistical Abstract 2001-2002, Table 73b

¹⁸ California Postsecondary Education Commission (2000). *Providing for progress: California higher education enrollment demand and resources into the 21st century*. Sacramento, CA: Author.