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Measuring Equity in Higher Education: An Accountability Framework for California Colleges and Universities

Performance gaps point to the need for an accountability system in California.

SUMMARY

California does not have a formal accountability system for its public colleges and universities. Estela Bensimon's *Academic Equity Scorecard* provides a framework to model a higher education accountability system by calling attention to both the equity of opportunities and the equity of outcomes across all subpopulations of the state.

Data from the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) reveals that Latinos and African Americans attend California's colleges and universities in lower numbers than they represent in the general population. Equally important, according to Bensimon, is the disproportionately low number of degrees awarded to Latinos and African Americans by the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems.

KEY FINDINGS AND DATA POINTS

Enrollment in colleges and universities is one measure of equity that can be considered by policymakers. Additionally, completion rates can also be considered as an additional measure of equity. By considering both, policymakers can begin to consider equity of opportunities and equity of outcomes as they assess the performance of public colleges and universities.

1. Latinos and African Americans enroll in UC, CSU, and California Community Colleges (CCC) at lower rates than whites or Asian/Pacific Islanders.

Table 1: Enrollments in Public Colleges & Universities (All Degrees, 2004)

RACE/ETHNICITY	UC	CSU	CCC	18-24 POPULATION
Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino	36.79%	22.42%	16.99%	11.45%
Black	3.33%	6.49%	8.03%	7.18%
Latino	13.75%	24.48%	30.47%	43.11%
Native American	0.66%	0.83%	0.96%	0.85%
Other	2.75%	3.16%	2.08%	2.40%
White	42.72%	42.62%	41.46%	35.01%

Source: California Postsecondary Education Commission

- Less than nine percent of graduate school enrollments in the UC system are Latinos.
- More than 58 percent of graduate school enrollments in the UC system are whites.

2. Latinos and African Americans receive proportionately fewer degrees from UC and CSU schools.

Table 2: Degree Recipients in UC and CSU schools (2004)

RACE/ETHNICITY	UC	CSU	18-24 POPULATION
Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino	35.55%	19.25%	11.45%
Black	2.94%	5.76%	7.18%
Latino	12.16%	21.39%	43.11%
Native American	0.64%	0.87%	0.85%
Other	2.97%	3.71%	2.40%
White	45.75%	49.03%	35.01%

Source: California Postsecondary Education Commission

3. First year community college students return for their second year at a lower rate than top-ranked states, but freshmen return to their second year at the same rate as top-ranked states (84 percent).¹
 - 48 percent of community college students return for their second year compared to 63 percent in top-ranked states.

POLICY ANALYSIS

There is not a formal accountability system for California's public colleges and universities. The *Academic Equity Scorecard*, developed by a team of researchers led by Estela Bensimon at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education, provides a framework that states can use as an accountability model.

The *Academic Equity Scorecard* establishes equity in educational outcomes as its primary goal under four concurrent perspectives of institutional performance:

- Access – measures access to institutions, programs, and resources;
- Retention – measures returning to school, transfer rates from CCC to four-year institutions, and degrees awarded;
- Excellence – measures high achievement such as degrees awarded in competitive fields such as engineering or computer science; and²
- Institutional Receptivity – encompasses indicators of institutional support.

An Equity Index, using this framework of indicators, can be constructed to measure performance as defined by equity:

¹ *Measuring Up 2004: The State Report Card on Higher Education*, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. Data not reported in disaggregated form.

² For instance, 45.10 percent of UC engineering degrees were awarded to Asian/Pacific Islanders, 1.95 percent to blacks, 9.41 percent were awarded to Latinos, and 35.65 percent to whites.

$$\text{Equity Index} = \frac{\text{Target Group with Outcome} / \text{Total Students with Outcome}}{\text{Target Group in Population} / \text{Total Students in Population}}$$

The goal index number is 1.0, an indicator of an equitable outcome for a given subpopulation, e.g., Latinos, Asians/Pacific Islanders, African Americans, whites, etc. An index number for a specific indicator of below 1.0 would indicate that an equity gap exists.

CALIFORNIA CONTEXT

Using the *Academic Equity Scorecard Framework*, Bensimon's 2003 analysis of California's public colleges and universities included 22 indicators.

Table 4: The California Academic Equity Scorecard (2003 Report)

Perspectives		Equity indicators	Equity Scorecard			
			White	Black	Asian	Latino
Access	1	12th graders who fulfill A-G requirements vs. K-12 enrollment, 1988-2001	1.3	0.7	2.1	0.5
	2a	Undergraduate enrollment in CCC vs. high school graduates, 1988-2001	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.7
	2b	Undergraduate enrollment in UC vs. high school graduates, 1988-2001	0.9	0.5	2.4	0.4
	2c	Undergraduate enrollment in CSU vs. high school graduates, 1988-2001	0.9	0.8	1.2	0.6
	2d	Undergraduate enrollment in independent colleges vs. high school graduates, 1988-2001	1.2	0.8	1.1	0.4
	3a	Needing remediation in Math upon entrance vs. number of freshmen in CSU, 2000-02*	0.8	1.7	0.8	1.4
	3b	Needing remediation in English upon entrance vs. number of freshmen in CSU, 2000-02*	0.6	1.4	1.4	1.3
	4a	CCC students transferring to UC vs. CCC enrollment, 1988-2002	1.0	0.4	1.9	0.6
	4b	CCC students transferring to CSU vs. CCC enrollment, 1988-2002	1.0	0.7	1.1	0.8
	4c	CCC students transferring to independent colleges vs. CCC enrollment, 1991-2000	1.2	1.1	1.0	0.7
Retention	5a	AA degrees in CCC vs. 20-24 age group in CA, 1990-1999	1.3	0.8	0.8	0.5
	5b	BA degrees in UC vs. 20-24 age group in CA, 1990-1999	1.2	0.4	1.9	0.3
	5c	BA degrees in CSU vs. 20-24 age group in CA, 1990-1999	1.3	0.5	1.0	0.3
	5d	BA degrees in independent vs. 20-24 age group in CA, 1990-1999	1.5	0.6	1.0	0.3
Excellence	6a	BA degrees in UC Engineering vs. UC undergraduate enrollment, 1988-2001	0.9	0.4	1.2	0.4
	6b	BA degrees in CSU Engineering vs. CSU undergraduate enrollment, 1988-2001	0.9	0.4	1.8	0.5
	7a	Doctorate degrees in UC vs. UC undergraduate enrollment, 1988-2001	1.3	0.5	0.3	0.3
	7b	Doctorate degrees in independent vs. independent undergraduate enrollment, 1988-2001	1.0	0.6	0.6	0.3
Institutional Receptivity	8	UC faculty composition vs. student enrollment, 2002	2.1	0.8	0.4	0.4
	9	UC new appointments of faculty positions vs. student enrollment, 2002	2.0	1.0	0.5	0.5
	10	CCC tenure/tenure track faculty vs. CC student enrollment, 2002	1.8	0.9	0.6	0.4
	11	CCC educational administrators vs. CC student enrollment, 2002	1.6	1.4	0.4	0.5

* The direction of the measure is opposite to others, so a value greater than 1 indicates inequity.

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For Latinos, 21 indicator indexes were well below equity goals with only one indicator (CCC students transferring to CSU) measured at near equity with a 0.8 index. For African

Americans, 13 indicator indexes were well below equity goals, five measured at near equity, and four indicator indexes were at or above equity.

The California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) examined higher education goals and performance indicators in 30 states across the nation. From their analysis, CPEC recommended in March 2005 five statewide goals for California's higher education system defined by:

- Student Success and Efficiency in Student Progress;
- Efficiency in Administration;
- Diversity and Access;
- Educational Quality; and
- Public Benefit.

CPEC presented some outcome indicators under each goal that could be considered – some similar to Bensimon's framework indicators – without presenting a final set of outcomes for California in its report. However, given the lack of a formal accountability system in the state for public colleges and universities, CPEC recommended that the legislature enact a statutory accountability framework that would enable the state to assess the performance and effectiveness of its public colleges and universities in meeting the state's needs.

AB 196 (Liu) proposes creating a statewide accountability system to assess the progress made by the state's system of postsecondary education in meeting policy goals related to educational opportunity, participation, student success, public benefits, and efficiency.

RESOURCES

Bensimon, E., Hao, L. and Bustillos, L., "Measuring the State of Equity in Public Higher Education," Paper presented at the Harvard Civil Rights and UC Conference on Expanding Opportunity in Higher Education: California and the Nation, Sacramento, California, October 2003.

California Postsecondary Education Commission, www.cpec.ca.gov.

"Measuring Up 2004: The State Report Card on Higher Education," The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, available at <http://measuringup.highereducation.org/statespecificpdfspresentations.cfm>.

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