

CALIFORNIA MASTER PLAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION | Major Features

The original Master Plan was approved in principle by the Regents and the State Board of Education (which at that time governed the CSU and the Community Colleges) on December 18, 1959 and was submitted to the Legislature in February 1960. A special session of the 1960 Legislature passed the Donahoe Higher Education Act, which included many of the Master Plan recommendations. Governor Edmund G. (Pat) Brown signed the Donahoe Act into law on April 26, 1960. For various reasons, many of the key aspects of the Master Plan were never enacted into law although agreed to by the public higher education segments and the State. There are four major dimensions to this accomplishment:

"...It was the first time in the history of any state in the United States, or any nation in the world, where such a commitment was made -- that a state or a nation would promise there would be a place ready for every high school graduate or person otherwise qualified."

– Clark Kerr 1999

- The Master Plan created a system that combined exceptional quality with broad access for students.
- It transformed a collection of uncoordinated and competing colleges and universities into a coherent system.
- It established a broad framework for higher education that encourages each of the three public higher education segments to concentrate on creating its own kind of excellence within its own particular set of responsibilities.
- And it acknowledged the vital role of the independent colleges and universities, envisioning higher education in California as a single continuum of educational opportunity, from small private colleges to large public universities.

The major features of the Master Plan as adopted in 1960 and amended in subsequent legislative reviews are as follows:

DIFFERENTIATION OF FUNCTIONS among the State's three public postsecondary education segments:

- UC is designated the state's primary academic research institution and is to provide undergraduate, graduate and professional education. UC is given exclusive jurisdiction in public higher education for doctoral degrees (with the two exceptions--see CSU below) and for instruction in law, medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine (the original plan included architecture).
- CSU's primary mission is undergraduate education and graduate education through the master's degree including professional and teacher education. Faculty research is authorized consistent with the primary function of instruction. SB 724 (2006) authorized CSU to award a specific Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in educational leadership. Other doctorates can be awarded jointly with UC or an independent institution.
- The California Community Colleges have as their primary mission providing academic and vocational instruction for older and younger students through the first two years of undergraduate education (lower division). In addition to this primary mission, the Community Colleges are authorized to provide remedial instruction, English as a Second Language courses, adult noncredit instruction, community service courses, and workforce training services.

ACCESS AND DIFFERENTIATION OF ADMISSIONS POOLS. established the principle of universal access and choice, and differentiation of admissions pools for the segments:

- UC was to select from among the top one-eighth (12.5%) of the high school graduating class.
- CSU was to select from among the top one-third (33.3%) of the high school graduating class.
- California Community Colleges were to admit any student capable of benefiting from instruction.

ACCESS GUARANTEE Subsequent policy has modified the Master Plan to provide that all California residents in the top one-eighth or top one-third of the statewide high school graduating class who apply on time be offered a place somewhere in the UC or CSU system, respectively, though not necessarily at the campus or in the major of first choice. State law affirms the State's commitment to fund all eligible California residents:

"The University of California and the California State University are expected to plan that adequate spaces are available to accommodate all California resident students who are eligible and likely to apply to attend an appropriate place within the system. The State of California likewise reaffirms its historic commitment to ensure that resources are provided to make this expansion possible, and shall commit resources to ensure that [eligible] students ... are accommodated in a place within the system." [CA Education Code 66202.5]

COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER The transfer function is an essential component of the commitment to access. UC and CSU are to establish a lower division to upper division ratio of 40:60 in order to provide transfer opportunities into the upper division for community college students. The goal was that UC and CSU would enroll at least one community college transfer student for each two freshmen enrolled. All eligible California Community College transfer students are to be provided a place in the upper division and are to be given priority over freshmen in the admissions process.

AFFORDABILITY AND FEES The 1960 Master Plan reaffirmed California's prior commitment to the principle of tuition-free education to residents of the State. However, the 1960 Master Plan did establish the principle that students (as well as faculty and staff) should pay fees for auxiliary costs like dormitories, parking, and recreational facilities rather than the State. Because of state general fund reductions in the 1980s and 1990s, fees were increased and used for instruction at UC and CSU, effectively ending the no-tuition policy. However, these fee increases were accompanied by substantial increases in student financial aid.

CAL GRANT PROGRAM The provisions on student financial aid, now called the Cal Grant program, are designed to ensure that financially needy, high-performing students have the ability to choose a California institution of their choice, whether it be at UC, CSU, the community colleges, or at one of the independent California colleges and universities. The Cal Grant maximum award level was designed to give students the choice of attending independent California colleges and universities, thereby partially alleviating the demand for spaces in public institutions.

SEPARATE GOVERNING BOARDS The plan established a governance structure for the segments, reaffirming the role of the UC Regents and creating a Board of Trustees to oversee CSU and, in 1967, a Board of Governors for the Community Colleges.

HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING AGENCY It established a statutory coordinating body, the Coordinating Council for Higher Education, to renew the Master Plan at regular intervals and to coordinate new campuses and new academic offerings among the segments of higher education. This was replaced in 1973 by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC).

Major legislative reviews of the Master Plan have been conducted by the Legislature (and occasionally by blue-ribbon commissions) about once a decade since the 1970s and aspects of the Master Plan have evolved since 1960.

A team of international visitors from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, here to review higher education in 1988, noted that California had succeeded in encouraging "constructive competition and cooperation" among its colleges and universities and praised the "complex of creativity" that characterizes California's system of higher education and makes it a model for other nations.