

# California Urged to Update Master Plan

*Panel reviews hallowed higher education guide, says teaching is sacrificed to research*

CALIFORNIA's master plan for higher education became something of a modern magna charta for U.S. public higher education, a model for many other states to emulate. Now, a quarter-century after the master plan was put into effect, a commission formed to review the California plan says it needs an overhaul.

The commission endorses the master plan's basic framework, but notes that "economic and social conditions have changed dramatically in ways that could not have been foreseen by the original planners." The result, says the commission report,\* is that many Californians—"particularly Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians—continue to be underrepresented in the postsecondary system." Concern about equity results in the report's major focus falling on undergraduate education.

What has been largely lost, says the commission, is a fair chance for a qualified student to start in a local 2-year community college and advance to one of the state's 4-year institutions to complete a degree. Tracing this to a decline in the quality of undergraduate education, the report takes dead aim at the 4-year institutions and finds that "excellence in undergraduate instruction is often sacrificed to the pursuit of excellence in research."

The commission urges that the 4-year institutions in particular assure a higher priority for teaching by giving it more weight in faculty promotion and tenure decisions. In a recommendation that will certainly ruffle faculty feathers at Berkeley and beyond, the report advocates development of "specific performance measures to make it possible to determine the quality of instruction in each of the colleges and universities."

California's master plan was in some respects a treaty that forestalled competition among rival institutions by marking off academic turf and providing the conditions for growth for each segment of the system. The three segments are the 9-campus University

of California (UC), California State University (CSU), with 19 campuses, and the 106 community colleges. UC admits the top 12.5% of state high school graduates and awards degrees through the doctorate. CSU admits the upper 30% of high school graduates and is sanctioned to award master's degrees. The community colleges offer 2-year academic preparation and occupational training and are open to all high school graduates and adults capable of doing the work.

The key to preventing formation of an academic caste system was the guarantee of transfer from one segment to another to students of ability. To foster this mobility, the master plan provided that UC and CSU

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institutions would hold enrollment in their first 2 years to 40% of total enrollment, thus making room for transfers.

The system worked reasonably well until the middle 1970s when a decline in college-age population sharpened competition for students. An increasing percentage of college-age Californians found their way into UC and CSU. Community colleges had to scramble to maintain enrollments and managed in most cases to keep numbers up by enlisting older students and offering nonacademic courses.

In these same years, the so-called tax revolt, in effect, put a cap on local property taxes that supported the community colleges. The state stepped in to relieve the funding emergency, but local authorities

continue to administer the colleges. One of a number of administrative changes recommended by the new commission is to create a unified governing body for the community colleges similar to the UC regents and CSU trustees.

The commission's look at education was a comprehensive one—it advocates amplifying the master plan to cover all of California education from preschool through Ph.D., public and private. And it makes recommendations on a wide range of issues, from curriculum to the public service role of state education institutions.

The report's main theme, however, is undergraduate education and its most controversial recommendations are likely to be on the status of teaching. The report says, "Faculty excellence in teaching must be a high institutional priority. The principal mission of the California State University is instruction, and faculty should be evaluated accordingly. The principal missions of the University of California are instruction and research, and faculty should be evaluated on both those grounds."

How to achieve this revaluation of teaching the commission leaves to the governing bodies of the three "segments." Its recommendation for development of performance measures to monitor the quality of teaching is never fleshed out.

The report of the commission, whose members were appointed by the governor, the legislature, and education organizations, will obviously wield influence, but will not be the only word on the master plan. A study of the community colleges was completed recently and the state legislature currently has a joint committee of the two houses reviewing the plan and the system it guides. Postsecondary education has been a matter of special pride in California and now, forces such as demographic change and the demand for better-trained workers are raising its political profile.

In 1986, a UC task force carried out a study on lower division education in its own institutions. Asked by *Science* to comment on the new commission report, the chairman of the UC task force, Berkeley sociology professor Neil J. Smelser, said, "the broader tensions that underlie the main parts of the report [are produced by the effort] to create an educational system that is simultaneously excellent and encourages equality of opportunity."

The 1960 master plan emphasized access, but, as the commission report says, it was "still assumed that college was for an ethnically homogeneous population of financially able, well-prepared, 18–22 year olds." Access is still the goal but the assumptions now are very different. ■ JOHN WALSH

\*"The Master Plan Renewed: Unity, Equity, Quality, and Efficiency in California Postsecondary Education."