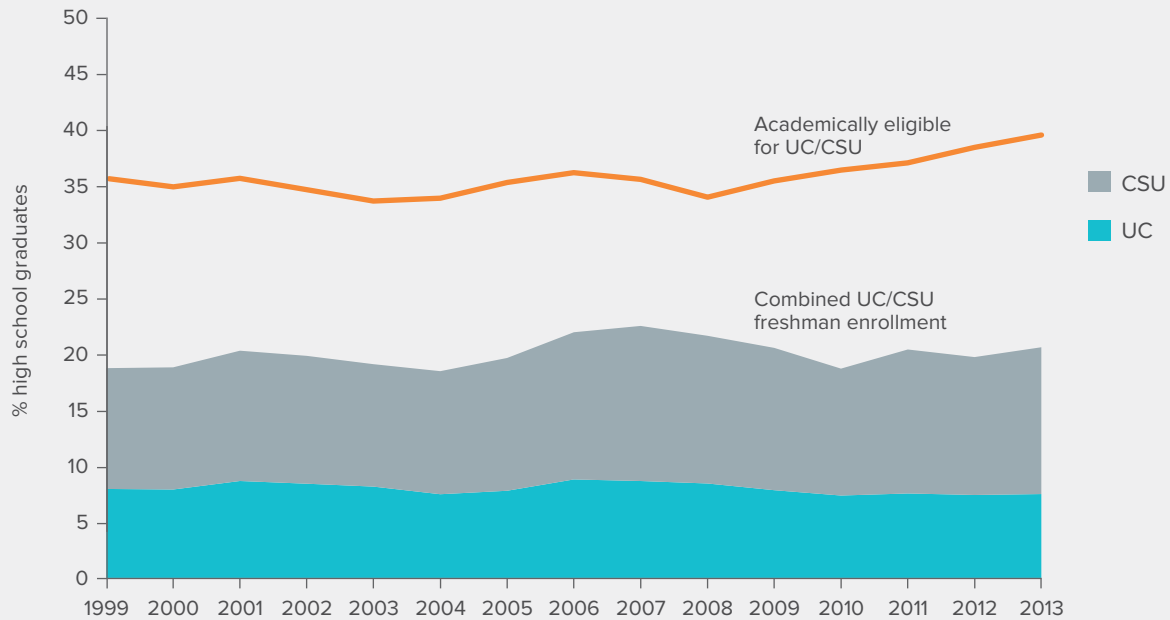


Access to college is essential for California’s success

More California high school graduates than ever are ready for college, but more applicants than ever are being turned away from the state’s public universities. This may explain why a 2012 PPIC Statewide Survey found that two-thirds of Californians think access to California’s public colleges and universities is a problem.

Expanding access to college will benefit both individuals and the state as a whole. The economic returns to a post-secondary degree have grown, even as more Californians are attending college; and workers with bachelor’s degrees will continue to play a crucial role in the state’s economic growth. Expanding access can also ensure that our system of higher education offers opportunities to students who have traditionally been underrepresented in postsecondary institutions, including those from low-income families as well as California’s Latino and African American populations.

CALIFORNIA’S PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITIES HAVE RESPONDED SLOWLY TO INCREASES IN ELIGIBLE STUDENTS



SOURCES: University of California, California State University, California Department of Education.

More high school graduates are competing for limited university spots

The growth in the proportion of California high school graduates completing a college preparatory curriculum has increased the competition for access to California’s four-year colleges. Enrollment growth at UC and CSU has not kept up with demand. Some students choose other colleges in California, but growing numbers are leaving the state to attend college.

- **California’s Master Plan offers higher education opportunities for all students.**

The state’s enrollment framework for public systems was set more than 50 years ago by the Master Plan for Higher Education. According to the Master Plan, UC selects from the top 12.5 percent of students, CSU selects from the top 33 percent, and the California Community Colleges offer access to all state residents. In practice, students also choose to attend nonprofit and for-profit private colleges, as well as colleges in other states.

- **More students are ready for college . . .**

To be eligible for enrollment at a public four-year college in California, students must successfully complete a set of college preparatory courses that includes four years of English, three years of math (including advanced algebra), two years of lab science, two years of social science, two years of a foreign language, and one year of visual or performing arts. The proportion of high school graduates who meet this requirement is increasing rapidly: from 34 percent of public high school graduates in 2003–04 to 42 percent in 2013–14. Gains have been especially strong for Latino high school graduates, with the share completing the UC and CSU required preparatory coursework increasing from 22 percent in 2003–04 to 32 percent in 2013–14.

- **. . . but the enrollment framework at UC and CSU has not expanded.**

Even though more students are meeting entrance requirements, CSU and UC have admitted about the same proportion of students as in the past, leaving an increasing number of qualified applicants without access. In the past three years, more than 30,000 qualified freshmen applicants were redirected to UC Merced (fewer than 600 of those students registered). In the California State University system, 17 of the 23 campuses are unable to accept all qualified applicants to the majors to which they apply. In 2013–14, CSU campuses rejected more than 14,000 qualified freshmen applicants.

- **Nonresident enrollment at UC is on the rise.**

Nonresident enrollment (students from another state or country) in the UC system has increased from 5 percent of incoming freshmen in 2007 to 21 percent in 2014, but it is still below the average for public research universities in other states. Nonresidents pay a supplemental tuition of \$24,024 in addition to the in-state tuition. Nonresident tuition has helped make up for state funding cuts, and UC indicates that nonresidents provide funding to support the enrollment of more California residents. UC admitted 1,039 fewer state residents in 2015 than in 2014. Were it not for funds provided by nonresidents, enrollment of state residents would have declined even more.

- **Many more California students are leaving the state to attend college.**

Between 2008 and 2012, the number of recent high school graduates leaving California each year to attend college elsewhere in the United States increased more than 40 percent to almost 33,000—roughly equal to the number of freshmen enrolling at UC.

- **The number of California students enrolling in the state’s private nonprofits has increased modestly.**

The number of recent graduates attending private nonprofits in California increased 23 percent during the same time period, but still amounted to only 7 percent of all high school graduates.

Accessibility varies across types of institutions

Greater numbers of poor and underrepresented minority students enroll at CSU and the community colleges compared to UC; increased competition and rising tuition may widen this gap.

- **Access is high at community colleges, but low at four-year colleges.**

Among the 50 states, California ranked 47th in the share of recent high school graduates who enroll in four-year colleges. Many recent high school graduates in California enroll in community college. The state ranked fifth in the nation in the proportion of recent high school graduates who enroll at a community college.

- **Some colleges are more diverse than others.**

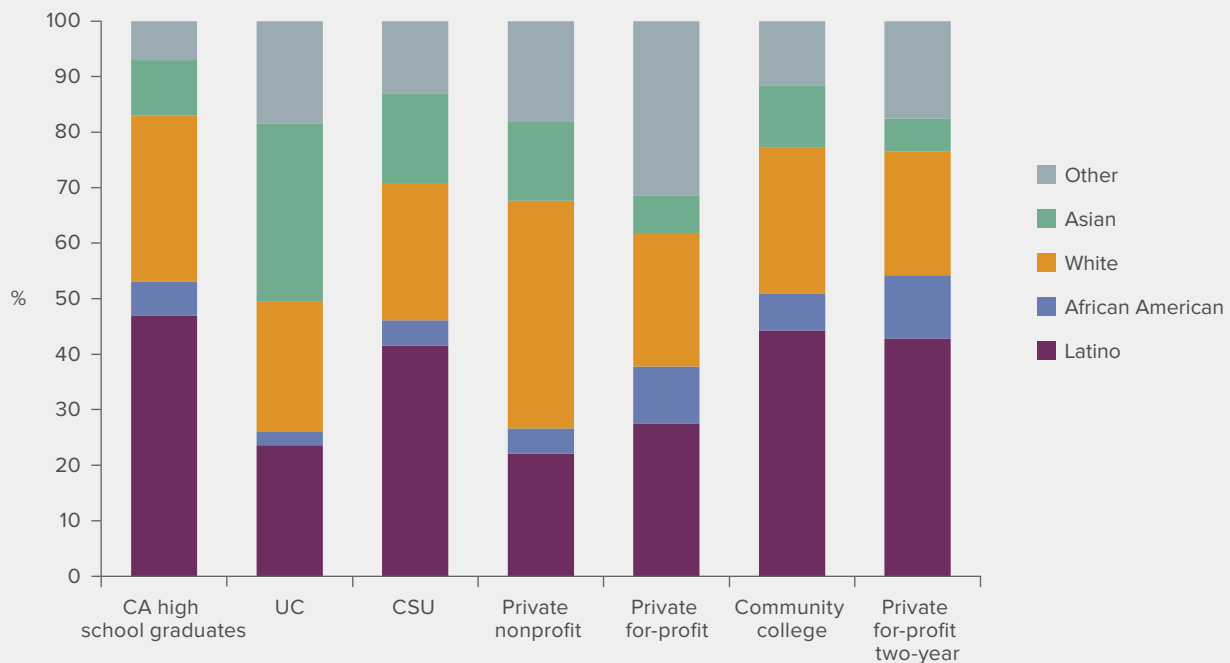
California’s community colleges and CSU serve student populations that more or less match the racial breakdown of high school graduates in the state. In the UC system, Asians are overrepresented, while African American and Latino students are underrepresented. The gap between the share of underrepresented minority high school graduates and the share of underrepresented minority students enrolled at UC has grown since Proposition 209—passed in 1996—eliminated race as a factor that can be considered in the admissions process. Private nonprofit colleges are, on average, less diverse than the state’s public systems.

- **California’s lowest-income students are more likely to start at community colleges.**

The state’s lowest-income students come from families making less than \$30,000 a year. About half of the students at California’s community colleges, private for-profit four-year institutions, and private two-year institutions are from California’s lowest-income families, compared to about one in four at CSU and UC and one in seven at private nonprofit four-year schools.

- **Some students who start at community colleges do transfer to four-year schools, but most do not.**
For some students, community colleges are a cost-effective way to begin work on a bachelor's degree. In fact, transfers from community colleges make up about half of CSU graduates each year. However, most students who begin at a two-year institution intending to transfer do not succeed in doing so, and they are less likely to earn bachelor's degrees than those who start at a four-year university. New initiatives such as the Associate Degree for Transfer are beginning to address the challenge of taking the right kind and number of classes to transfer.
- **Cost concerns may discourage students from low-income families from attending four-year colleges.**
According to a November 2011 PPIC Statewide Survey, 70 percent of Californians believe that the cost of college keeps students from enrolling. California high school graduates from low-income families are eligible for grants that fully cover tuition at California's public four-year universities. But books, housing, and other living expenses can cost thousands of dollars and are only sometimes partially covered by grants.

CALIFORNIA'S DIVERSE COLLEGE POPULATION IS UNEVENLY DISTRIBUTED



SOURCE: California Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

NOTES: High school graduates are from 2014. College enrollment is for fall 2014 first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students. Students in the "other" category include Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, students who mark two or more races, students with unknown race, and students who are not citizens or nationals of the United States.

Looking ahead

Providing meaningful access to college is essential to California residents and the state economy. Projections suggest the number of high school graduates will not change dramatically over the next 10 years, but additional resources devoted to college access could boost enrollment.

Prepare for the impact of better K–12 preparation. In 2014, California began implementing the Common Core State Standards, designed to better prepare students for college and careers. If Common Core is successful, the number of college-ready high school graduates is likely to increase, and therefore boost demand for higher education. California must be ready to provide access to college for these students.

Expand access to four-year colleges. The share of high school graduates admitted to UC and CSU has not changed substantially in more than 50 years, even though the economy is dramatically different and requires far more highly

educated workers. The state and its public systems should increase the share of high school graduates eligible for admittance to UC and CSU. Doing so would have the added benefit of diversifying the student body.

Develop effective online learning strategies. Online learning is the fastest growing area in California’s community colleges, with enrollment reaching about one million students. It provides access for nontraditional students and allows students to make faster progress toward long-term goals. But achievement gaps are wider in the online setting, and Latinos are less likely to take online courses. As online learning becomes increasingly common throughout higher education, strategies that lead to improved student outcomes are essential.

Connect high school and college data. Understanding transitions from high school to college is essential to improving access and efficiencies. Unlike many states, California has no longitudinal data system that spans K–12 and college. This limits the state’s ability to identify programs and practices that could improve access for California’s students.

CONTACT A PPIC EXPERT



Jacob Jackson
jackson@ppic.org




Sarah Bohn
bohn@ppic.org



Hans Johnson
johnson@ppic.org

READ MORE

-  CALIFORNIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM
-  ADDRESSING CALIFORNIA'S SKILLS GAP
-  EXPANDING COLLEGE ACCESS
-  IMPROVING COLLEGE COMPLETION
-  INCREASING EQUITY AND DIVERSITY
-  INVESTING IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION
-  MAKING COLLEGE AFFORDABLE

This series is funded by The Sutton Family Fund.

The PPIC Higher Education Center advances practical solutions that enhance educational opportunities for all of California’s students—improving lives and expanding economic growth across the state.

The Public Policy Institute of California is dedicated to informing and improving public policy in California through independent, objective, nonpartisan research. We are a public charity. We do not take or support positions on any ballot measure or on any local, state, or federal legislation, nor do we endorse, support, or oppose any political parties or candidates for public office. Research publications reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff, officers, or Board of Directors of the Public Policy Institute of California.

Public Policy Institute of California
500 Washington Street, Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94111
T 415.291.4400 F 415.291.4401
PPIC.ORG/HIGHER-EDUCATION

PPIC Sacramento Center
Senator Office Building
1121 L Street, Suite 801
Sacramento, CA 95814
T 916.440.1120 F 916.440.1121



PPIC

PUBLIC POLICY
INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA