



A lesson in real life at California's public universities

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By Karin Klein

I wonder how much time Gov. Jerry Brown spends on California's public university campuses, chatting up students and professors and getting grounded in some reality, before he comes out with his get-tough policies on how they should be run. Sometimes it seems like it must be very little time indeed, if any at all.



His latest idea is that state funding of Cal State and the University of California should be tied to how many students they graduate within four years.

That makes sense in theory. It's not great for students to hang around forever. It raises the chances that they'll drop out without taking a degree, and if they've already gained all the credits they need to graduate, they're taking up taxpayer-subsidized slots that other students need.

Back when a Cal State or UC education was practically cost-free, hanging on to college was just something a lot of young people did rather than face the work world. That's changed; at more than \$25,000 a year for room, board, tuition and books, students aren't doing a lot of hanging

around just for fun. They're trying to get into overfilled classes or they're in particularly demanding majors—or double majors, or a major plus a minor—with rigorous requirements that might mean taking fewer courses per semester, or just having to take more courses, period. They might be taking on the challenge of an honors thesis, a yearlong course that often involves heavy reading, research and writing, but is particularly good preparation for graduate school. Students who have transferred from another college often need a few extra courses to catch up to the new school's requirements.

The state shouldn't be doing anything to discourage California college and university students from excelling. It would be easy for the schools to graduate students in four years: Reduce graduation requirements. Don't let students double-major or take a minor. If they major in a tough subject, tightly limit any courses outside the major so they don't get a rounded education. Get rid of breadth requirements. All of these would be really bad ideas. But schools are going to do what they need to in order to get more funding.

It would make more sense, once students have finished off all their required credits, to charge them full freight and then some for staying on. Certainly, the universities should be giving the stink eye to students who stay longer than five years; they should be required to pick up the credits they need fast and then get out.

It's similar to other notions Brown has had about the state's public colleges; That funding be tied to how many students take a degree (again, easy: just lower requirements to the point of meaninglessness and the state can graduate as many students as it wants) and make professors do less research and writing and give them a heavier teaching load (possibly appropriate in some cases, but the universities' reputations will quickly diminish if they slow the flow of cutting-edge research and original thought, and many top-name professors will just leave). Turning the state's widely admired system of higher education into just another diploma machine would be a terrible mistake with far-reaching consequences.



Editorial: Governor wants to tie UC, CSU funding to more transfer students, graduating students in four years.

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Gov. Jerry Brown is pushing hard at public higher education in California, trying to make the systems more accountable, more affordable, and more efficient.

Who can argue with that?

Brown's updated higher education plan is to tie some state funding to the ability of public universities to increase the number of transfer students from community colleges and to do a better job of graduating students within four years. He also wants to see transfer students finish their studies in two years.

With new money for higher ed flowing in from Proposition 30, approved by voters in November, the governor now has a microphone to bolster his call for leaner, more student-oriented University of California and California State University systems.

How will his plans affect UC Santa Cruz and Cabrillo College?

Community colleges in California by 2014-15 will see some funding tied to getting students moving on more quickly. Cabrillo already has moved toward a greater emphasis on transfer students, by expanding classes for students who plan to attend a four-year school. A majority will attend UC or CSU. That's one reason Cabrillo is putting more into remedial math and English classes, since only 37 percent of students who enroll and need remedial classes after high school are able to gain enough credits to transfer.

UCSC admits about 1,250 transfer students annually. The campus also is counting on restored funding from the state after years of takeaways and hopes to add back faculty, although not to the full replacement level of what was lost over years of cuts. Still, the revived funding should help students get required classes and give them a better chance to graduate on time.

But Brown also wants a four-year freeze on tuition and fees for UC and CSU — and wants them to forfeit \$511 million in state funding if they try to hike these costs. If they meet his goals, UC and CSU could see their funding approach pre-recession levels.

Top UC and CSU administrators, however, citing their independence from state government, don't want to take orders from politicians. One top UC budget official was quoted this week saying the university was not consulted by the governor on his new plan and that UC wants to "go back to the drawing board." A CSU spokesman said it was OK for Brown to set goals, but details should be left up to the university system.

Brown's plan would grant 5 percent increases to UC and CSU over the next two years, and 4 percent hikes in the two years after that, if his conditions are met.

While officials worry that pension and health care costs could eat up much of the increase and little would be left to improve graduation rates by hiring more faculty and counselors, they also say that for many students, it isn't realistic or practical to expect most to finish in four years. Administrators also don't want to agree to a four-tuition freeze in case state funding drops or doesn't keep up with campus expenses.

The governor, however, has public sentiment on his side — many middle-class families have been squeezed by rising tuition and fees, and students have taken on unconscionable debt loads just to finish college.

The governor isn't interfering with academic freedom. It's a good thing he's giving attention to the plight of public higher education.

Brown is trying to bring back funding; UC and CSU should not forget their mission to educate California's next generation at an affordable cost. Agreeing to a four-year tuition freeze and keeping costs down by graduating more students on time are not unreasonable demands.



California's Governor Seeks to Tie State Money to Colleges' Performance

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Gov. Jerry Brown of California is seeking to tie some money for the state's public colleges to new performance measures, according to a copy of his plan obtained by the Los Angeles Times. The document updates a budget proposal for higher education that Mr. Brown made in January. The governor is expected to release the revised spending plan next month. The performance standards include raising the overall number of graduates and increasing the number of community-college students who graduate within two years. If those conditions are met, the University of California and California State University would stand to get budget increases of 5 percent over the next two years and 4 percent in the two years after that. Some university officials, however, reacted with apprehension to Mr. Brown's plan.