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The Role and Function of the California Postsecondary Education Commission

The Commission is dedicated to improving California higher education by ensuring efficient use of state resources, facilitating strong coordination between public colleges and universities, developing and administering an accountability framework, and guaranteeing that every student have the opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education.

UNIQUE ROLE

The California Postsecondary Education Commission serves a unique role in State government, integrating fiscal, programmatic, and policy analysis across the various systems of higher education. No other agency provides the same breadth or quality of information about higher education in California. (See the chart on page 4 that compares CPEC with three other State education agencies). With a diverse citizen board appointed by multiple entities, the Commission provides independent, non-partisan analysis and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

The Commission is a consistent advocate for higher education but also an informed and independent critic of it. Although the Commission seeks to find consensus among all parties before providing advice to the Governor and Legislature, as an independent entity it can and does reach conclusions and provide advice on issues even when consensus is not attained.

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

The Commission is the sole source of independent information about educational policy and student flow through the system, including its ongoing research reports on the eligibility rate of high school graduates to attend the State's public universities, the percentage of high school graduates enrolling in California colleges, the number of community college students who transfer to a four-year institution, baccalaureate degree attainment, and patterns of attendance in graduate school. The Commission also has responsibility for including the independent and private postsecondary sectors in its planning and coordinating activities.

COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

In addition to providing research information, the Commission serves a coordinating role in bringing together key parties throughout higher education and State government to find consensus on difficult and controversial policy areas. Recent examples of important higher education policy areas where the Commission has developed consensus among different interest groups are:

- *Commission Recommendations Concerning Alternate Delivery Options for the State's Cal Grant Program*, a report that offers recommendations to improve the delivery of financial aid in three ways: (1) use a decentralized, campus-
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California Postsecondary Education Commission

based approach, (2) develop a new methodology for calculating a common high school grade point average, and (3) obtain accurate information about the true costs of the current Cal Grant delivery system and the decentralized model. (Report 03-04)

- *Commission Eligibility Study:* Every 3–8 years, the Commission conducts a study of the university eligibility of public high school graduates. The purpose of these studies is to estimate the proportion of California public high school graduates who meet the admission requirements of the University of California and the California State University. The Commission is currently completing a study of the eligibility of the high school graduating class of 2003. Eligibility studies have a variety of uses. The state Master Plan for Education encourages UC to take its freshmen from among the top eighth of California's public high school graduates and encourages CSU to draw from the top third of high school graduates. Eligibility studies provides a basis for determining whether the proportion of students who are eligible is consistent with the guidelines in the Master Plan and to assess whether there is a need for any changes in admission requirements.

CONSULTATION AND ADVICE

The Legislature and Governor also frequently turn to the Commission to act as the honest broker in areas that are specific to one segment but that require assistance from a neutral party. Recent examples of such "broker" roles are the Commission reports issued on community college transfer and on the admission and attrition rates of community college nursing programs. The Commission has also played an active role coordinating its analyses of the need for new campuses in conjunction with the segments, reserving its advice and conclusions as an independent entity.

PROGRAM AND FACILITIES REVIEW FUNCTIONS

In addition, the Commission is responsible statutorily for reviewing and commenting on the need for new degree programs proposed by the three public higher education systems. The enabling legislation directed CPEC to develop a comprehensive review process to help ensure that new academic programs would meet societal needs while advancing knowledge, technical competency, and educational goals of prospective students. The Commission's review process also is intended to help safeguard the state against gross inefficiencies in the allocation of program resources. During the past two years, the Commission has reviewed well over 150 program proposals.

Concomitant with its program review responsibilities, the Commission also is required by the State of California to review all proposals for new public campus facilities before they are established. A central purpose of the review process is to help ensure that new public colleges, universities, and campus centers develop in accordance with broad statewide needs and priorities, and that capital outlay funds are spent wisely. Over the past two and one-half years, the Commission has reviewed 7 proposals for new campus facilities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Much of the Commission's work becomes policy recommendations that are adopted by the Legislature and the segments. Three examples of our work include:

- *Admission Policies and Attrition Rates in California Community College Nursing Programs*, a report that provides policy options and recommendations

California Postsecondary Education Commission

that the Governor, Legislature, and the Community Colleges should consider as a means to train and employ more nurses. (Report 03-02)

- *Student Transfer in Postsecondary Education*, a report that discusses the role of the transfer function and the many transfer initiatives and their effectiveness. It analyzes and evaluates the transfer process and offers recommendations on activities that should be undertaken to improve it. (Report 02-03)
- *Recommendations for a Long-Term Resident Student Fee Policy Framework for Students Enrolled at California's Public Colleges and Universities*, a report that responds to 2002-03 Budget Language directing the Commission to convene stakeholders and develop long-term student fee policy recommendations. (Report 02-12)

INFORMATION COLLECTION AND DISSEMINATION

The Commission is the information clearinghouse for education beyond high school in California. As a "one-stop-shop," the information collection and dissemination program established by the Commission is based on a commitment to data quality, responsiveness to users, and the consistency and structure of the data made available to its users.

The increased demand for timely, accurate, and accessible data to inform policy decisions on demographic changes, accountability initiatives, and the ongoing fiscal constraints in California places a premium on this responsibility. Education stakeholders increasingly rely on CPEC as the resource for comprehensive and objective information stored in a central location. All of this information is made available to the public at no cost primarily through the Commission's website at <http://www.cpec.ca.gov>.

FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Over the past twenty-five years, the Commission has administered a number of competitive federal grant programs under its authority as the State Higher Education Agency (SAHE) as designated by the U. S. Department of Education. These awards have covered programs ranging from equipment acquisition for colleges and universities to community-based partnerships to provide college counseling services through the establishment of educational opportunity advising "centers". The most recent federal grant programs have focused on improving subject matter content knowledge of prospective and current K-12 teachers.

In the area of K-12 teacher preparation programs, the Commission has made over 200 grants to K-12 school districts, two and four-year colleges and universities, informal science and arts centers, and non-profit educational organizations. These awards total approximately \$60 million.

The most recent grant competition, *Improving Teacher Quality*, concluded in October 2003 with seventeen (17) new awards for teacher recruitment and professional development activities conducted in partnerships between local educational entities and institutions of higher education. Combined with awards made in 2001 and 2003, the Commission has forty-two (42) projects totaling approximately \$11.4 million to support activities for the next one to five years.

California Postsecondary Education Commission

	CPEC	CSAC	CTC	BPPVE
Appointing Authority	Governor, Assembly Speaker, Senate Rules, Segments	Governor, Assembly Speaker, Senate Rules	Governor	BPPVE does not have a Commission
Focus and Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad • Statewide in scope • Policy focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow • Student focus • Manage financial aid program for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow • Manage credential process for K-12 teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow • Oversight of the private postsecondary education sector
Responsibilities	<p>Independent, objective, non-partisan advice and analysis to the Governor, Legislature, and the segments on postsecondary education policy issues.</p> <p>Program & facility review.</p> <p>Information dissemination of postsecondary education data.</p> <p>Administration of the Federal Teacher Improvement Program.</p>	Administer financial aid programs	<p>Issue teaching credentials.</p> <p>Align credential requirements with state adopted academic content standards</p> <p>Develop policies and conduct research & assessment regarding teaching credentials</p> <p>Monitor fitness-related conduct & impose credential discipline</p>	Protect students and ensure quality in privately operated postsecondary educational institutions