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## California Postsecondary Education Commission

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# Progress Report on Funding Gender Gap Research in California Postsecondary Education

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Working Paper WP/07-04 • June 2007 • [www.cpec.ca.gov](http://www.cpec.ca.gov)

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Commission reports show that females outnumber males in college enrollment and graduation, both nationally and in California—a gap that continues to widen, especially for males in underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Recent Commission research described this disparity and how it varies by race/ethnicity, academic discipline, and postsecondary segment. However, the Commission does not have sufficient resources to support additional research that would assess the causes and effects of the gap, along with proposed policy recommendations to close the gap. Therefore, the Commission is seeking funding from outside foundations or other sources to research the influence of K-12 education on gender gaps in the pipeline to college, with an emphasis on underrepresented minority males who are most affected by the education achievement gap.

In March, staff reported to the Commission that letters of inquiry were sent to major national and California foundations whose mission and goals indicated they might be interested in research related to college equity and access issues.

The Lumina Foundation, a large foundation based in Indianapolis, Indiana, that has a high priority of educational equity, has requested that the Commission submit a formal Letter of Inquiry in order to receive further consideration for funding. The staff has prepared and submitted the “Letter of Inquiry” to Lumina; a copy is attached. Staff will report to the Commission at the June meeting on any outcome of that submission, and on any additional responses it has received since this memorandum was prepared.



**CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION**

770 L STREET, SUITE 1160  
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95814-3396  
(916) 445-1000  
FAX: (916) 327-4417 [www.cpec.ca.gov](http://www.cpec.ca.gov)



May 25, 2007

Lumina Foundation  
Program Office - "New Inquiry"  
Lumina Foundation for Education  
P.O. Box 1806  
Indianapolis, IN 46206-1806

Dear Program Officers:

We appreciate your helpful reply to our informal inquiry regarding funding for a research project proposed by the California Postsecondary Education Commission.

The attached document contains responses to questions in your Letter of Inquiry form. We have reordered the questions in our response. A cover sheet required by Lumina is also included.

We hope you will find our proposal intriguing. This important research will assist policy analysts and decision makers in California. Most of all, it will help historically underrepresented minorities gain access to higher education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Murray J. Haberman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Murray J. Haberman, Executive Director  
California Postsecondary Education Commission

cc: Commissioners





Letter of Inquiry  
Cover Sheet

Submission Date: 5/25/07

Name of Organization (and acronym, if commonly used): California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC)

Telephone: 916-445-1000

Fax: 916-327-4417

Mailing Address: 770 L Street, Suite 1160, Sacramento, CA 95814-3369

Web Site: <http://www.cpec.ca.gov>

Brief Mission Statement of Organization: The California Postsecondary Education Commission advises the Governor and Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. The Commission's primary focus is to ensure that the state's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities.

Purpose Statement of Proposed Project (one sentence): To identify the causes, effects, and implications of underrepresentation by males in California postsecondary education, and to develop policy recommendations to address it.

Estimated Total Project Cost: \$250,000 to \$300,000

Total Amount Requested from Lumina Foundation: \$250,000 to \$300,000

Proposed Duration of Grant (in months): 12

Project Director Name and Title: Karen Humphrey

Telephone (if different from above) 916-445-1504

Fax (if different from above) 916-324-6600

Email: [khumphrey@cpec.ca.gov](mailto:khumphrey@cpec.ca.gov)

Address (if different from above): N.A.

Has your organization ever received support from Lumina Foundation?  Yes  No

Is this a request to continue a project supported by the Foundation? (If yes, please include the grant ID number.)  Yes (grant ID )  No

Please note that Lumina Foundation for Education does not make grants to (a.) supporting organizations controlled by disqualified persons to Lumina, or (b.) Type III supporting organizations that are not functionally integrated Type III supporting organizations (as such terms are defined in the Internal Revenue Code).

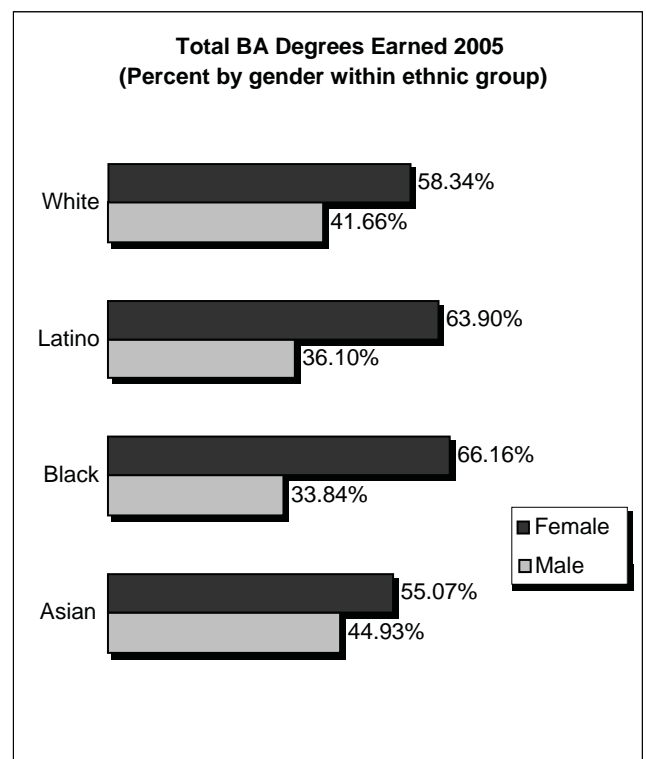
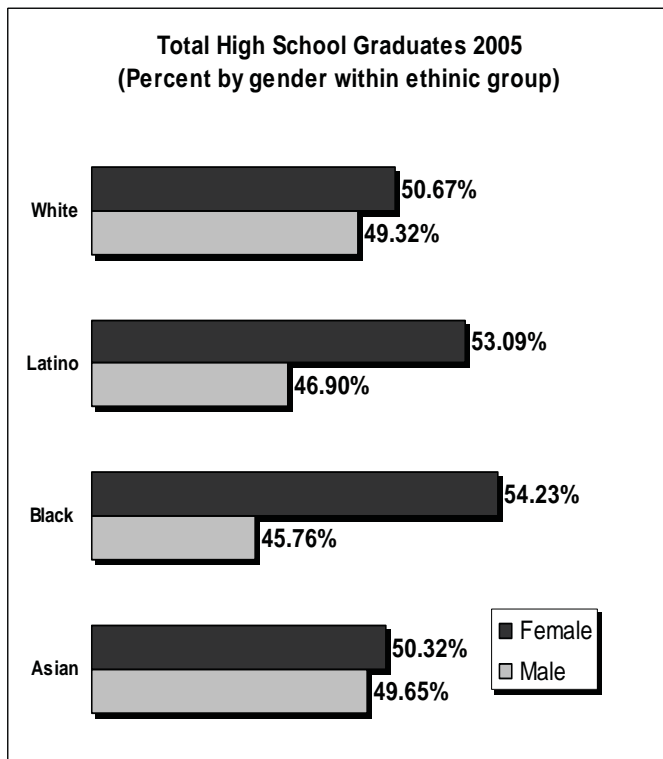


**California Postsecondary Education Commission**  
**Proposed Research Project—the Gender Gap in Higher Education**

*What is the project's goal?*

The California Postsecondary Education Commission (Commission)'s goal in conducting this research project is to identify the causes, effects, and implications of a significant and growing gender gap in California colleges and universities. This is not the traditional "gender gap" that disadvantaged females. A new gender gap has emerged in the past two decades affecting the enrollment and success of males in colleges and universities. By conducting research to better understand this growing gap, CPEC expects to develop public policy recommendations to help address its potential impact on equitable access to education.

Recent reports by the Commission, based on data from the state's postsecondary systems, show that females outnumber males at almost every step in the postsecondary pipeline. This phenomenon occurs in all postsecondary systems and in a majority of academic disciplines. It occurs despite the fact that the proportion of males equals or exceeds that of females in the population, including the college age population. Although the disparity affects all ethnic groups, it is much worse for males of color, especially African American and Latino males, than it is for white and Asian males. The following graphs show how the gender gap varies by ethnicity and how it widens dramatically between high school and college graduation:



The gender gap can be seen at many points in the K-12–postsecondary continuum:

- Males drop out of high school at greater rates than females.
- Males take fewer courses required for college than females.
- Males have lower eligibility rates to California’s major public systems.
- Males have lower college acceptance rates than females and fewer males actually enroll.
- Except in a few male-dominated disciplines, males persist in and graduate from college in lower percentages than females.

While the implications of this gap for economic opportunity and life success are unclear, it is apparent that gender is a significant factor that must be considered in addressing educational equity.

***Why is this project important to pursue at this time?***

In recent years, rising concern over the gender gap for males in education has generated media coverage and calls for action. While there is no consensus among researchers about how serious the issue is, the Commission is convinced that it is significant, particularly as it affects underrepresented minority males who are also most disadvantaged by the long-standing achievement gap. The role of the Commission is to advise state-level policy makers, and it has long been committed to helping California increase equitable access for all students to postsecondary education. Closing the achievement gap and increasing educational opportunity is also a high priority for K-12 educators and all of California’s postsecondary segments. The time is right to consider the role of gender in that effort.

California is also an excellent laboratory for studying the issue. Except for the Commission’s initial work on this topic, there appears to be little state-level research on it. California is one of the largest, most economically powerful, and most educationally diverse states in the country. While its demographics are somewhat different from those of the entire United States, California’s population trends will likely be more and more visible nationally—especially a rapid increase in minority populations of color, and increasing disadvantage affecting males in these groups. What is learned about the gender gap in this state can inform policy both at state and national levels; research that is timely for California will add to the national dialogue on educational opportunity. It will also contribute to explorations of other policy issues, especially the role of postsecondary education in preparing a workforce equipped to compete in a knowledge-based global economy.

Also making this issue timely is the fact that educational equity is being viewed more and more as a complex, interrelated set of issues, not just as isolated influences on educational success. Efforts to address race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, disability, and other issues are being brought together. The passage of Title IX in 1972 put gender on the equity table, but once the worst gender barriers were eliminated, gender receded to a less visible consideration. Specifically exploring the role of gender in the achievement gap and in postsecondary opportunity for males in general will promote a more comprehensive approach to educational equity that is focused on meeting the individual needs of students to achieve educational success.



***Whom will this project serve?***

This project will serve the needs of state-level decision makers and leaders in both postsecondary and K-12 education for policy guidance to help minimize the gender gap in postsecondary education. But ultimately, the study's results will help students. Understanding what is happening in K-12 schools and developing strategies to resolve identified problems can lead to legislative and school-based changes that increase opportunities for males to pursue higher education without eliminating gains achieved by females.

California has nearly eight-and-a-half million public K-12 and postsecondary students, a number that continues to grow, especially among students of color. About half of these students are males. Male students are especially affected by the achievement gap. Policies and programs that may result from this study could improve their educational success and provide long-term benefits to California.

***What are the intended outcomes, and how will the project achieve them?***

The outcomes of this research project will be:

- Within one year: a published report on the gender gap in California higher education, outlining the following:
  - The nature and extent of the problem
  - Significant issues to be addressed
  - The connection with other equity concerns, especially race/ethnicity
  - Policy recommendations for legislative and administration strategies that can be implemented at the school, district, and state levels
- One to three years: initiation of policy recommendations from the report by the Commission, its partner institutions, and the California Legislature.
- Long-term: a measurable increase in the proportion of males, especially African-American and Latino males, pursuing and succeeding in postsecondary education in California.

To achieve these results, the Commission will collaborate with expert researchers in California educational institutions and utilize its own and other data sources to expand upon the research it completed in 2006. Commission staff will coordinate the research, convene an advisory group to assist in implementing a research plan, and manage production of the final report. The Commission will consider and advance appropriate recommendations to the Governor, the Legislature, and educational institutions based on the findings of the study, and will follow through with efforts to assure those recommendations become policy.

***What is the geographic scope of the proposed project?***

The proposed project will study the gender gap in all major educational systems in California—K-12, community colleges, and public and private four-year colleges and universities. The findings will be compared with recent national studies to draw comparisons and suggest where California's findings are relevant to the national picture.

***What is the sponsoring organization?***

The California Postsecondary Education Commission, created by state law in 1974, serves as the planning and coordinating body for California higher education. The 16-member Commission includes designees of all of California's educational systems—public postsecondary, private colleges and universities, and K-12—and public members appointed by the Governor, President Pro-tempore of the Senate, and Speaker of the Assembly.

The Commission is an independent body that integrates policy, fiscal, and programmatic analyses about California's entire system of postsecondary education to assure the effective utilization of public postsecondary education resources. It conducts research and analysis in order to advise the Governor and the Legislature on major policy and planning issues concerning education beyond high school. The Commission is committed to equity and access in higher education and strongly supports student achievement and institutional accountability. For more information, see the Commission's website at <http://www.cpec.ca.gov>. The Commission has a 501(c)(3) foundation, the California Postsecondary Education Foundation, which can serve as fiduciary agent to receive funding that supports this project.

***What special qualifications does the organization bring to this project?***

The Commission has a thirty-year history of recognized expertise researching issues concerning California postsecondary education. Several staff members have considerable experience in and knowledge of educational equity and access. The Commission's broad representation of education and public stakeholders provides extensive opportunities for gathering data and policy input. In addition, the Commission maintains a large and comprehensive database on California's college population—a flexible and powerful tool to determine what is happening in California higher education to inform policy.

***How does the proposed project relate to the applicant organization's mission?***

The California Postsecondary Education Commission fulfills many roles and responsibilities, but two primary statutory purposes of the Commission relate closely to this proposed study:

- Identify and recommend policies to meet the educational, research and public service needs of the State of California; and
- Advise the Governor and Legislature on policy and budget priorities that best preserve broad access to high quality postsecondary education opportunities.

This is not just a general issue of equity and access to the Commission. The gender gap is relevant to all of its current policy initiatives—the academic preparation of underserved students, the nexus between workforce development and postsecondary education, building an accountability system for California higher education, and improving the affordability of higher education in California. Given the Commission's recognized research expertise and data systems and its standing as a body independent of, but linked with, the K-12 system and all of California postsecondary segments, it is the best entity to conduct this study and seek solutions.

***What other organizations are involved, if any? How will they contribute to the work?***

The Commission has received expressions of interest and informal offers of cooperation from researchers at the following organizations:

- The Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles
- The Center for Studies in Higher Education at the University of California, Berkeley
- The RAND Corporation

In addition, the Commission's Executive Director Murray J. Haberman is exploring collaborative activity with several other highly regarded research institutions in California, including:

- The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC)
- The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
- The California Research Bureau

None of these organizations currently has resources to conduct this study, but all have interested researchers who have expressed the willingness to partner with the Commission if outside funding can be secured. We anticipate that several of the organizations listed above will participate in focusing the study questions, gathering and analyzing data, and developing a written report with policy recommendations. Formal partnerships will be developed with outside researchers to conduct the study.

***What is the total cost of the project? What amount do you seek from Lumina Foundation, for what period of time? What resources will others provide?***

The project is estimated to cost \$250,000 to \$300,000 over a one-year period. Commission staff will coordinate the project and assist in the analysis and presentation of data, and we anticipate contributions of staff time and data assistance by our research partners. However, because the Commission has limited staff and funding, as do our potential research partners, we seek a foundation grant that covers all or nearly all of that cost. A full budget will be prepared upon request.

The funds will support extensive review and analysis of existing data including, but not limited to, K-12 and postsecondary enrollments, college eligibility rates, dropout rates, numbers and characteristics of first-time freshmen, college completion and diplomas awarded, and other variables. This data will be disaggregated by gender, by race/ethnicity, discipline or course of study, and other variables such as socioeconomic status, regional geography, and type of institution attended. We will also seek raw data from the University of California Undergraduate Experience Surveys (UCUES) to see if it sheds light on why students make choices that affect the gender balance in university enrollment. A comprehensive literature review also will be conducted. Because the Commission has been unable to identify an existing source of data on student decision-making, we also propose to develop either a survey or a series of focus groups among a representative sample of California high school students and educators to try to identify the gender factors influencing student outcomes and decisions regarding postsecondary education.

