



The Campaign for

College  
Opportunity

December 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# SHUT OUT

*The Need to Increase Access  
to the University of California  
and the California State University*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The value of a college degree continues to rise. A bachelor's degree in particular provides unrivaled economic and health benefits not just for the individual earning the degree, but for our entire state.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising to see growing demand for a college education coupled with growing eligibility for California's public universities among high school students striving to attend. Unfortunately, students are being met by an increasingly competitive admissions environment and universities have responded to the growing number of applicants by raising the bar for admissions, especially as state funding to expand capacity fails to adequately fund every eligible student.

The 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education is rightfully credited as building two of the best public university systems in the nation, if not the world. **While California's vision for higher education in the 1960s was revolutionary for its time, our state is in dire need of a new roadmap and vision that intentionally ensures greater access to the University of California (UC), and the California State University (CSU) for eligible students, intentionally closes the racial/ethnic gaps that persist in access and success in higher education, and ensures every Californian, regardless of race/ethnicity, zip code, or income, is given a true, equitable opportunity to go to college and cross the graduation stage.** This is a critical piece of the puzzle to ensuring that California remains the economic powerhouse that it is and maintains its standing as the fifth largest economy in the world. The Master Plan's limits on access to the UC and CSU are outdated in the context of the 21st century economy and pose a barrier to keeping the promise of college opportunity to California's students.

This report provides an update on California's progress and persistent challenges related to freshman access to the UC and CSU. While we find some promising progress, there are still many concerns to realizing the goal of capitalizing on the growing talent in our state seeking college opportunity. In addition to analyzing trends in eligibility, admissions, and enrollment to the UC and CSU by race/ethnicity, we also review recent policy changes and campus practices that are impacting access and success. This report concludes with a description of several national examples of ways to increase bachelor's degree capacity, and we make specific recommendations for policymakers and campus leaders toward ensuring that California can increase college access, improve college attainment and close racial/ethnic gaps to ensure individual and collective success.<sup>2</sup>

### THE GOOD NEWS

- Significant increase in the proportion of California high school students completing the coursework required for admission to the UC and CSU from a third in 2007-08 to almost 50 percent.
- The share of high school graduates applying to the UC has grown from 17 percent to 25 percent. The share applying to the CSU has also grown significantly since 2001 from 27 percent to 41 percent in 2017, even though it has declined in more recent years.
- Applications to the UC in the fall of 2021 have increased substantially, with record admission of Latinx students.
- Among the CSU freshman class, Latinx students make up 54% - matching their share of California high school graduates.
- Graduation rates are increasing for Latinx and Black students at the UC and gaps between Latinx and Black students compared to their white peers are narrowing, although they are still significant.
- CSU graduation rates have increased for Black and Latinx students.

### THE BAD NEWS

- The average high school GPA of students admitted to the UC has increased to above 4.0 for nearly all nine UC campuses. This was only true at three UC campuses in the 90s.
- Redirection and referral efforts at the CSU and UC, respectively, result in very few eligible students enrolling at the redirected or referred-to campus.
- 16 of the 23 CSU campuses are impacted at the freshman level, meaning that more eligible students apply than there are seats available, so campuses are able to raise admission requirements to manage enrollment.
- Black freshmen students in the CSU have dropped from 7.2 percent of the class enrolling in 2007 to only 4.5 percent in 2020.
- Among eligible Latinx high school graduates, less than half applied for admission to the UC.
- While graduation rates have increased for Black and Latinx students at the CSU, the gap has grown for these students compared to their white peers.
- The share of the state budget invested in higher education declined from 18 percent in the mid-1970s to 11 percent in 2018-19, where it remains as of the 2021-22 budget.





## State Recommendations

- State leaders should formally establish a degree attainment goal codified in law with a statewide goal of ensuring that 60 percent of Californians earn a degree or certificate of high value.
- State leaders should revise and expand eligibility requirements under the California Master Plan for Higher Education such that students from the top 15 percent of high school graduates will be eligible for the UC and the top 40 percent will be eligible for the CSU.
- State leaders should adopt a five-year plan for increasing enrollment at the UC and CSU to meet our statewide degree attainment goal while intentionally closing racial/ethnic gaps in college access and degree completion.
- State leaders should require the CSU Chancellor’s Office to analyze campus and program impact while identifying alternatives that better serve California’s students.
- California policymakers should establish a higher education coordinating body that would set goals, provide oversight, and collect data to improve transparency and advance California toward a 60 percent attainment goal.



## University Recommendations

- Universities should drop the use of the SAT/ACT in admissions.
- Campus leaders must increase transparency and oversight of changes to eligibility in the UC and CSU, while maintaining a goal that all changes should expand access and close racial inequity in access to the UC and CSU.



## CONCLUSION

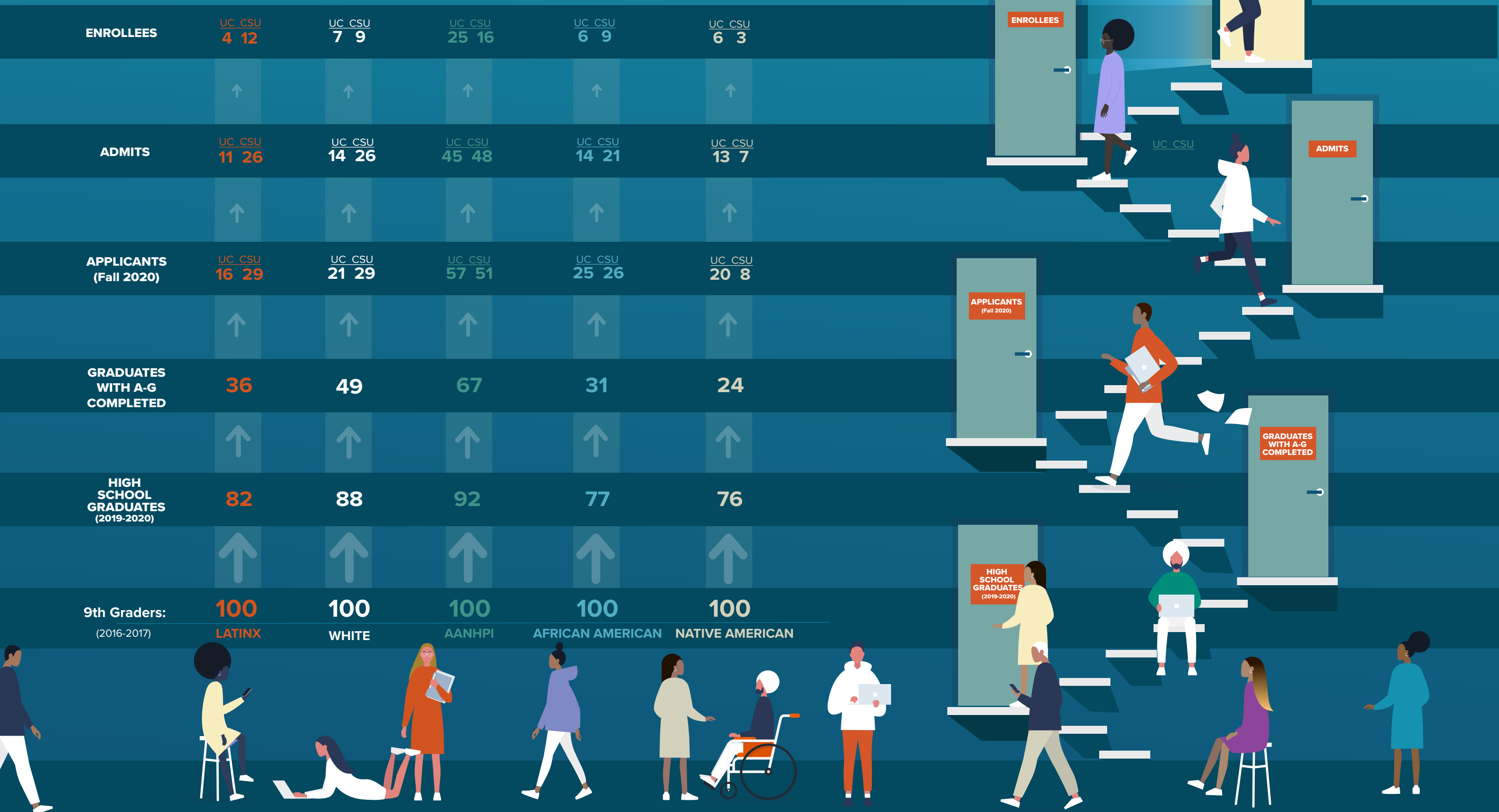
California is fortunate to be one of the strongest states in the nation, with a diverse and young populace and a thriving economy built on innovation and knowledge fueled by our universities. This can only be sustained by increasing college opportunity broadly and specifically, increasing completion of the bachelor’s degree while closing gaps in access and completion by race/ethnicity and gender.

California students deserve equitable access to our public universities. We must make sure that attending a public university today is not harder than it used to be for previous generations. This is especially true as more and more young people recognize the value of a college degree, are preparing accordingly, and when workforce needs are demanding a more educated populace. **Increased competition in admissions to our campuses is not just a disservice to talented students striving to realize their potential, it is harmful to our economic future.**

Increasing the number of Californians, especially those who are Latinx, Black, Indigenous and otherwise underrepresented in our universities, provides more than a personal benefit to the individuals earning a degree. It ensures that our commitment to the California Dream and a California For All is truly realized. There cannot be a promising future for our state without a commitment by our state leaders, especially the Governor and the Legislature, to invest in expanding capacity by increasing funding so that more spots will be available for students in our UCs and CSUs. This increased investment should be directly linked to a clear goal to grow the number of Californians with a degree and to close the racial/ethnic gaps that persist in higher education. This can only happen through a commitment to equity by policymakers and college leaders, faculty, and staff and with effective coordination across our high schools, community colleges, and universities that is informed by the business community and their workforce needs.

We are inspired by the improvements in increased university admission eligibility and decreasing gaps in some places by race/ethnicity noted in this report. We know California students and campuses face many challenges exacerbated by the pandemic and necessary attention to systemic racism across our nation and in California. **If any place can recover with equity and establish a bold path forward – that place is California.**

There are racial/ethnic disparities all along the freshman pipeline into the UC and CSU





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