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New Reports Find Delays in Earning College Degrees Driving Up Costs for Students and State of California

Students and state spending hundreds of millions more than necessary

“The real college affordability crisis is in the time it takes to earn a degree”

Los Angeles (July 1, 2014) – The time and number of credits it takes most students to attain a degree from the state’s Community College and California State University systems are growing well beyond the traditional two- and four-year benchmarks and are creating a raft of expensive consequences for students and the state, according to two new reports released today by the Campaign for College Opportunity

The reports, the latest in a series on college affordability, detail how delays in obtaining a college degree at California’s public colleges and universities are substantially increasing the costs of college for students and the state’s taxpayers.

The traditional two-year Associate degrees now routinely take four years, and half of all bachelor degree earners at the California State University take longer than 4.7 years to cross the graduation stage. The significant amount of extra time students spend in school translates into a real affordability challenge. The longer students are enrolled, the more they pay in tuition, fees, books and living expenses. And they put off the higher earning potential that a college degree provides, often for several years.

The trend is leading to higher costs and fewer seats available at the state’s community colleges and CSU campuses, and it impacts the state economy at a time when more college graduates are needed to meet workforce demand.

“The cost of college isn’t just what students and their families pay in tuition or fees, it’s also about time – that’s the hidden cost of a college education,” said Michele Siqueiros, Executive Director of the Campaign for College Opportunity. “The real college affordability crisis is in the time it takes to earn a degree.”

Key findings from the report include:

	Community Colleges – Associate Degree	California State University – Bachelor’s Degree
Median Time to Degree	4.1 Years. Degree designed to take 2 years.	4.7. Degree designed to take 4 years.
Median Credits to Degree	78 credits. Degree designed to take 60 credits.	135. Degree designed to take 120 credits.
Demographics	Black students take the longest to complete 4.3 years to graduate and earn 73 credits	Asian, Black and Latino students take about 4.7 years to complete but Whites take a shorter amount of time (4.3 years)
Cost of an additional year in college for tuition, books, and living expenses	\$7,600	\$26,000
Cost of an additional year in lost wages over a lifetime	\$15,000	\$22,000
Savings	Reducing credits by 5% would save students \$8 million in fees and could free up resources to serve 29,280 additional students. Reducing credits by 10% would save students \$16 million in fees and could free up resources to serve 58,560 additional students.	Reducing credits by 5% would save students \$84 million in tuition and could free up resources to serve 22,428 additional students. Reducing credits by 10% would save students \$168 million in tuition and could free up resources to serve 44,856 additional students.

An average student at California State University Long Beach who takes six years to earn a bachelor’s degree will spend an additional \$58,000 on tuition, fees, books and other expenses, and will earn \$52,900 less, over their lifetime than someone who graduated in four years. *As a result, this student will incur \$110,900 in extra expenses and lost wages.*

“The trend in longer completion time is not only leading to higher costs for students, it’s crowding out space in our colleges and universities when every seat is in high demand,” said Siqueiros.

In California community colleges, more than half of associate degree earners take a full extra year worth of credits beyond what is required for the degree. Excess credits are costly to the state and its taxpayers because of how heavily the state subsidizes students’ education, and hinder the ability of colleges to serve more students. Consequently our colleges serve fewer students and the state is slower to produce the educated workforce needed for its economy.

Among the reasons for delays and excess credits on the way to a degree is that budget reductions have led to big cuts in available classes. That keeps students from getting all of the courses they need to meet degree requirements. Colleges may also fail to appropriately match class offerings with the actual needs of students and their degree requirements.

Colleges must also do a better job at advising students of the benefits of full-time enrollment. In response to higher costs, students may also be working more, and that leads to more part-time attendance and students taking semesters or quarters off to work. Without advisement, students are making choices to enroll in college less than full time, which exponentially increases their costs and time

to degree without them really knowing it.

Finally, the need for pre-college level courses at both the community colleges and CSUs adds substantially to the number of credits students must take, and as a result, extends times to graduation. Better high school preparation, an improved system of placing students into college level math and English, and accelerating students through remedial courses could significantly reduce total time and credits to degree.

The good news is that even small changes in these trends can have an enormous impact on overall time and costs.

If the community college system had a marginal reduction – just one credit or one percent – in the number of excess credits students earn, down to 77 average credits, this could save its graduates \$2 million in fees and the state \$21 million, which could create space for more than 7,320 additional full-time enrollment spots. A 10 percent reduction in credits would yield \$16 million in student savings, and \$168 million in savings to the state, which could create space for an additional 58,560 students.

At CSU, the collective savings is more substantial. A reduction of one percent in credits would yield \$12 million in savings for students and \$20 million for the state. And, it would open up 3,204 spots for other students. A 10 percent reduction in credits would save students \$168 million and the state \$280 million to accommodate 44,856 more new students.

While the reports find that there are some current policies and programs in place that address this issue of excess time and credits to degree, it's also clear that more must be done. Among the recommendations:

- Get students in and through pre-college level classes faster and improve the way students are placed into college level math and English
- Require campuses to do a better job of matching class offerings with student needs
- Increase college funding to restore classes so that students can get the courses they need and graduate more quickly
- Encourage students to enroll full-time and take a full 15-credit course load every semester
- Increase financial aid knowledge, simplify the financial aid process, and increase the amount of financial aid available to students so that more students can attend college full time and graduate on time
- Provide information on time to degree to students, policymakers and researchers

For the individual reports on ***The Real Cost of College: Time & Credits to Degree*** prepared by the Campaign for College Opportunity, visit <http://www.collegecampaign.org/resource-library/our-publications/>

About Campaign for College Opportunity:

The Campaign for College Opportunity is a California non-profit organization focused on a single mission: to ensure that the next generation of California students has the chance to attend college and succeed in order to keep our workforce and economy strong. For more information, visit www.collegecampaign.org/ [Facebook.com/CollegeCampaign](https://www.facebook.com/CollegeCampaign) or follow [@CollegeOpp](https://twitter.com/CollegeOpp).

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