



Promoting Access to Higher Education: A Review of the State's Transfer Process

ELIZABETH G. HILL • LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

In adopting the *Master Plan for Higher Education*, the Legislature envisioned an efficient process for students to transfer from community college to the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU). Thus, the plan calls for UC and CSU to accept all qualified community college students into their respective systems. This report reviews current transfer admission policies and identifies institutional barriers that can make the transfer process difficult for qualified students. We conclude that the current process lacks the systemwide standardization envisioned in the Master Plan, and recommend steps to make the transfer process more efficient and effective for students. ■

Acknowledgments

This report was prepared by Anthony Simbol, and reviewed by Steve Boilard. The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) is a nonpartisan office which provides fiscal and policy information and advice to the Legislature.

LAO Publications

To request publications call (916) 445-4656. This report and others, as well as an E-mail subscription service, are available on the LAO's Internet site at www.lao.ca.gov. The LAO is located at 925 L Street, Suite 1000, Sacramento, CA 95814.

INTRODUCTION

The Legislature has long recognized the importance of facilitating the efficient transfer of students between community college and four-year universities. According to the *Master Plan for Higher Education* (originally adopted by the Legislature in 1960 and periodically reviewed), “The transfer function shall be recognized by the Governor, Legislature, and the governing boards of each of California’s postsecondary education segments as a central institutional priority of all segments of higher education.” Moreover, existing state law assigns a high priority for the admission and enrollment of community college transfer students at the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU).

Despite this emphasis by the state, however, the transfer process has not been as efficient and effective as envisioned in the 1960 Master Plan. As noted in the Legislature’s recent review of the Master Plan in 2002, “Course alignment and articulation at the postsecondary education level remain problematic.” This is because many campuses (even those campuses within the same system) have different course require-

ments. Thus, students have to navigate a complex maze of transfer admission requirements and often receive conflicting information from the segments and individual campuses about which requirements apply. Since such barriers can make it difficult for qualified students to transfer to UC and CSU, we believe it is important for the Legislature to revisit and assess the student transfer process in California.

In this report, we:

- Review legislative intent concerning transfer admissions.
- Discuss current transfer admission practices and recent changes.
- Identify problems with having different general education and pre-major requirements across campuses.
- Present issues for the Legislature to consider, including recommendations to make the transfer process more efficient and effective for students.

BACKGROUND

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Many of the policy issues in higher education in California fall under the broad category of “access.” Historically, the Legislature has expressed considerable interest in promoting access to the state’s higher education segments—UC, CSU, and the California Community Colleges (CCC). In the 1960 Master Plan, the Legislature adopted a series of principles for

ensuring college access that remain the state’s official policy today. This is because the Master Plan serves as a reference point to guide legislative and executive decisions. In general, the expressed goal in current law is that all Californians should be afforded the opportunity to attend college.

As we discussed in a previous report, *Maintaining the Master Plan’s Commitment to College Access* (February 2004), many state and

campus policies can affect Californians' choices about college. For example, the level of student fees can influence whether and where individuals choose to attend college, and thus affects overall enrollment demand. In addition, each segment's admissions process (both for first-time freshman and transfer students) influences who eventually attends that institution.

While our February 2004 report focused exclusively on freshman admissions, this report examines the impact that transfer admissions policies have on access to UC and CSU. Specifically, we discuss the purpose of a student transfer process and how certain policies can affect a student's ability to transfer to a four-year university.

IMPORTANCE OF THE TRANSFER PROCESS

In the Master Plan, the Legislature established admission priorities to help guide future state and campus decisions. As we discuss below, the Master Plan's freshman eligibility parameters were established as a means to preserve educational standards at UC and CSU. At the same time, the Legislature stressed the importance of the transfer process in maintaining access to higher education for all California residents.

Freshman Eligibility— Maintaining Educational Standards

The Master Plan establishes parameters for who should be eligible for admission as a freshman to UC and CSU. Specifically, the plan calls for UC to draw its entering freshman from the top one-eighth (12.5 percent) of public high school graduates, and for CSU to draw from the top one-third (33.3 percent) of public high school graduates. Based on these targets, UC

and CSU develop admissions requirements to determine who is "eligible" for admission. Eligibility applies to the segment as a whole, and does not guarantee admission to any particular campus. This is because some campuses do not have the capacity and resources to admit all eligible applicants (as defined by the university). Eligible students who cannot be accommodated at the campus of their choice typically are offered a space at a different campus in the system.

When the Legislature established the Master Plan targets in 1960, both UC and CSU were admitting students from somewhat larger pools of high school graduates. In reducing the eligibility pools, the Legislature sought to protect the quality and reputation of the state's higher education system by maintaining high education standards. The Legislature also recognized the limits of state resources available to accommodate growing enrollments at UC and CSU. Thus, while the state provides all residents the opportunity to attend college, the state's three-tiered higher education system limits access to UC and CSU based on their distinct missions and standards.

Transfer Process— Maintaining Access

In establishing the Master Plan targets for freshman admissions, the Legislature recognized that a majority of high school graduates would not be able to attend UC and CSU as freshman. In order to ensure broad college access, the Master Plan (1) directs community colleges to accept all applicants 18 years and older who can benefit from attendance and (2) expresses legislative intent that community colleges should serve as an alternative pathway for eventual admission to UC and CSU. Specifically, the plan declares that "so long as any high school gradu-

ate can be admitted to a junior [community] college, it will not reduce the opportunity for students able and willing to meet the requirements for transfer to the upper division in the state colleges and the University of California.” In order to facilitate this transfer process, the Master Plan calls for UC and CSU to accept all qualified community college transfer students into their respective systems.

For transfer applicants, therefore, the Master Plan anticipates that community colleges provide a “proving ground for those who have not made records in high school good enough to justify entry into senior college [four-year university].” Overall, the Legislature envisioned the transfer process as the avenue for any student (regardless of academic performance in high school) to enroll at UC or CSU.

Transfers Given Priority in Undergraduate Admissions. In order to guide UC and CSU in their enrollment planning and admission decisions, the Legislature has adopted statutory admissions priorities stating that, to the extent practicable, the two segments should admit and enroll California residents at the undergraduate student level in the following priority order:

- (1) Continuing undergraduate students in good standing.
- (2) Qualified community college transfer students who have successfully met all transfer requirements.
- (3) New students entering as freshman or sophomores.

In addition, current law requires that UC and CSU maintain upper-division enrollment of at least 60 percent of total undergraduate enrollment. The expressed intent is to preserve access

for qualified upper-division transfer students from the community colleges.

HOW MANY STUDENTS TRANSFER?

The Transfer Rate

The Master Plan and state law assign the community colleges many, and sometimes competing, roles. As a primary mission, the state’s community colleges are required to offer academic and vocational instruction at the lower-division (freshman and sophomore) level. Community colleges may grant the associate of arts and the associate of science degrees. Based on agreements with local K-12 school districts, some colleges also offer a variety of adult education programs—including basic skills education; citizenship instruction; and vocational, avocational, and recreational programs. State law also directs the colleges to establish programs that promote regional economic development. As a result of this broad mission, students enroll at a community college for a variety of reasons.

Many CCC Students Initially Want to Transfer... Students enrolling at a community college for the first time are asked to identify their principal education goal on their application.

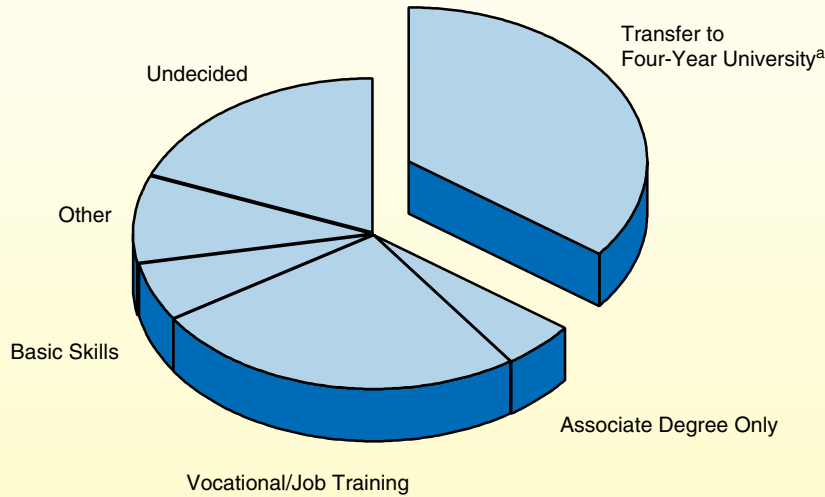
Figure 1 (see next page) summarizes the proportion of first-time students in 2003-04 choosing particular educational goals when they entered the community college system. As the figure shows, about one-third of the students indicate that they would like eventually to transfer to a four-year university. We note that some students who do not indicate transfer as their initial goal may later change their plans and seek transfer to a four-year university.

...But Few Students Actually Transfer. Although many students enter community college with the expressed goal of transferring to a

Figure 1

**Principal Educational Goal Expressed
By Students Entering Community College**

(2003-04)



^aIncludes students who also plan to obtain an associate degree.

four-year university, many do not meet that goal. Currently, the CCC Chancellor’s Office does not regularly track the outcomes for students who indicated on their application that they would like to transfer to a four-year university. As a proxy, the Chancellor’s Office assumes students intend to transfer when they (1) attempt transfer-level math or English and (2) complete at least 12 units at a CCC within six years. About 35 percent of first-time students that entered community college in 1996-97 met this definition. (This includes students that may not have indicated a goal to transfer on their application.) The Chancellor’s Office reports that about 43 percent of these “intent to transfer” students actually transferred to a four-year university within six years. (This rate reflects an increase compared to the transfer rate of similar students that entered community college in the previous

three years, which was roughly 30 percent.) The Chancellor’s Office asserts that its definition of intent to transfer screens out students attending for brief remediation, English language instruction, or other nondegree pursuits, and allows for an accurate measure of “value-added” by the community colleges. However, such a definition most likely overestimates the transfer rate because it excludes from the base students who expressed an initial goal of transfer but for whatever reason did not

complete certain courses. Alternatively, some measurements of transfer rates include *all* first-time student’s in the base—not just those with intent to transfer. Under this definition, the CCC’s transfer rate has been about 19 percent.

The Number of Transfers

Figure 2 indicates the type of university—UC, CSU, independent institution in California, or an out-of-state university—to which students who entered community college in 1996-97 transferred within six years. As indicated in the figure, most community college students transfer to either UC or CSU. For example, more than half of the 1996-97 students who transferred from a community college went to CSU. According to the CSU’s Chancellor’s Office, nearly two-thirds of all CSU students began their higher education

at a CCC. Figure 2 also shows that about 20 percent of community college transfers went to UC. The UC reports that close to a third of the university's bachelor degrees are awarded to students who started out at a community college.

During the past decade, the number of new transfer students at UC and CSU has fluctuated modestly. As Figures 3 and 4 show (see next page), in recent years about 15,000 community college students have transferred annually to UC and almost 60,000 have transferred to CSU. The figures also show the proportion of new undergraduates that entered the universities as transfer students and freshmen (recent high school graduates) for each of the past ten years. As displayed in Figure 3, less than one-third of UC's new undergraduates were comprised of transfer students. This means that a majority of students entered UC at the freshman level. In contrast, a

sizable majority of CSU's new undergraduates have consistently been transfer students (see Figure 4). For example, transfer students comprised about two-thirds of CSU's entering undergraduate class in 2004-05.

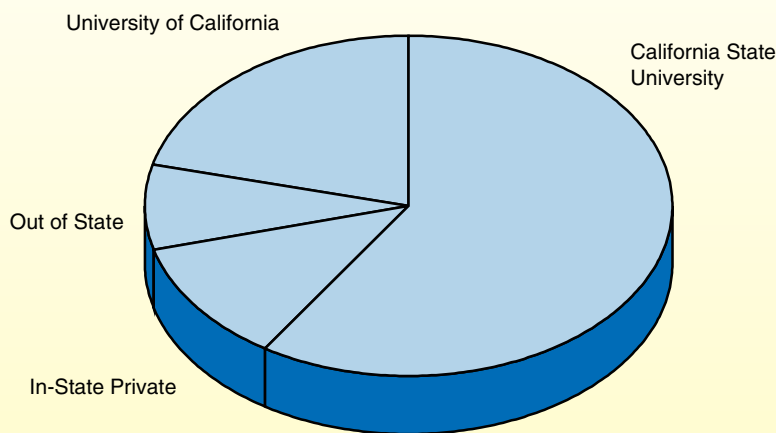
Figure 5 (see page 9) summarizes the percent of transfer students that graduated within four years of entering UC and CSU. As shown in the figure, the four-year graduation rates of transfer students at both universities have increased in recent years. About 82 percent of students that transferred to UC in 1998 graduated from the university within four years (for example, by spring 2002). (This excludes the time transfer students were enrolled in community college.) This is an increase from a graduation rate of 79 percent for students that transferred in 1995. According to the figure, about 61 percent of transfer students that entered CSU in 1998

graduated within four years.

Figure 2

Where Community College Students Transfer

(1996-97 Cohort of First-Time Students)



DIFFERENT FACTORS AFFECT STUDENT TRANSFER

The rate that community college students transfer to four-year universities can be affected by a variety of factors. In many ways, these factors are influenced by state and campus policies. For example, over the years, the Legislature has invested in initiatives that promote the transfer

process. Below, we discuss in detail some of the factors that affect student transfer to UC and CSU.

Institutional Capacity. As we discussed earlier, some campuses may not have the capacity to accommodate additional students at a given time. The number of applicants a university accepts and when it stops accepting applications partially depends on the level of funding provided in the annual budget act for enrollment growth. In 2005-06, the Legislature provided funding to support 2.5 percent enrollment growth.

Student Preferences. Although many students enter community college intending to transfer to a four-year university, many subsequently change their minds and pursue other goals. For example, students may conclude that earning a vocational certificate or entering the work-

Figure 3
New UC Undergraduates—Freshmen and Transfers

(1994-95 Through 2004-05)

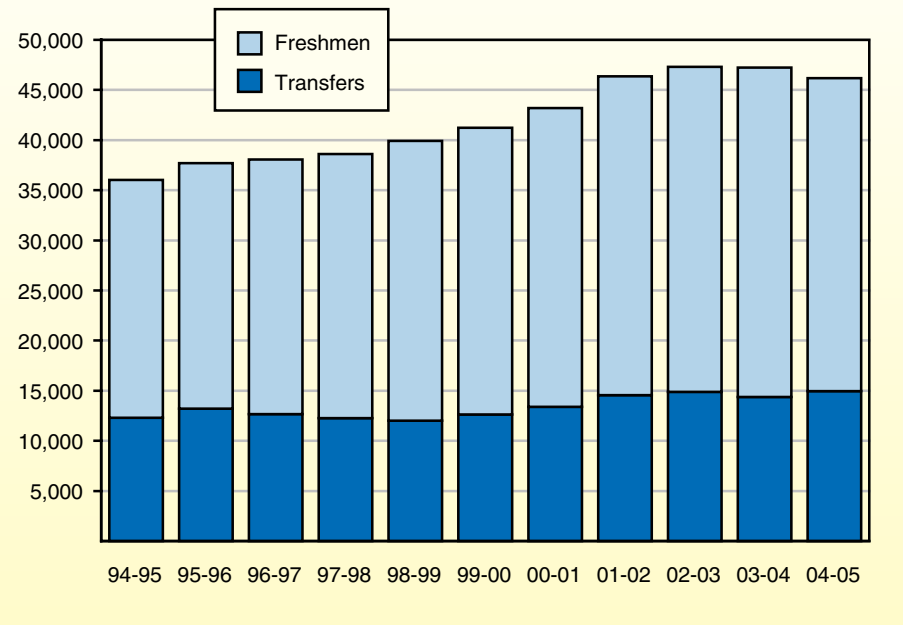


Figure 4
New CSU Undergraduates—Freshmen and Transfers

(1994-95 Through 2004-05)

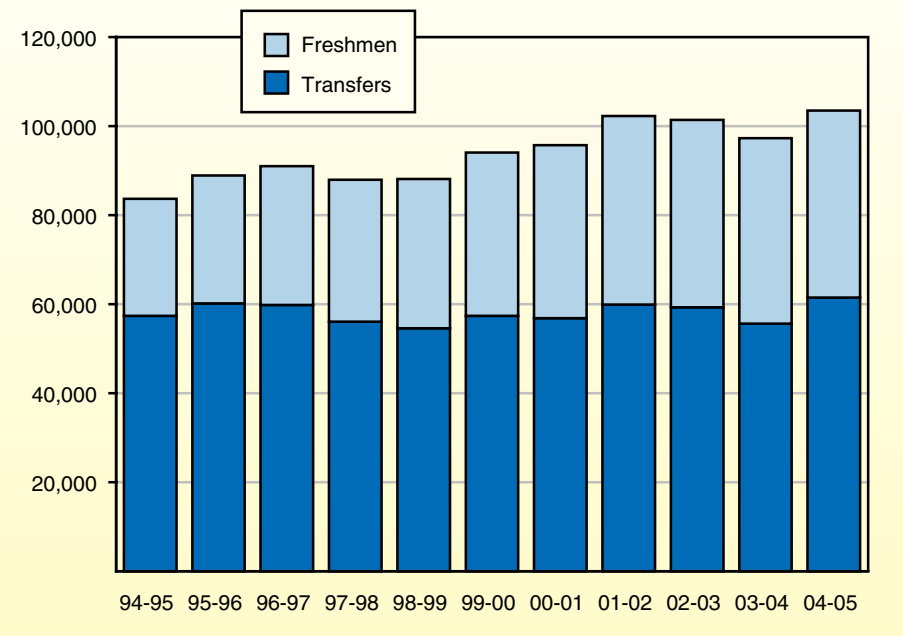


Figure 5
UC and CSU Transfer Students

Percent Graduating Within Four Years

| Entering Year | UC ^a | CSU |
|---------------|-----------------|-------|
| 1995 | 78.6% | 53.6% |
| 1996 | 78.7 | 54.7 |
| 1997 | 79.8 | 57.2 |
| 1998 | 82.4 | 60.5 |

^a Includes only regularly admitted transfer students.

force can better meet their particular needs. Also, students often change their major preference, which can delay their transfer to a four-year university. This is because such students may have to first complete additional pre-major requirements at the community college.

Academic Performance. The ability of community college students to meet minimum academic standards also greatly affects whether they successfully transfer to a university. This is because poor academic performance in high school and community college can make it difficult for students to qualify for transfer admission. For example, many students enter community college unprepared to enroll in college-level courses (based on their high school preparation) and must enroll in remedial courses before they can attempt transfer-level courses. In 2002-03, more than 40 percent of entering freshman at the community colleges needed to take at least one remediation course. In effect, this extends

the time a student must enroll at a community college and delays the time of transfer. In addition, some community college students earn grades that are below the minimum for transfer eligibility to UC and CSU.

Institutional Course Requirements. In order for community college students to successfully transfer to UC and CSU, they must complete specific transfer admission requirements. Transfer is facilitated when students (1) clearly understand the requirements, (2) are able to determine which community college courses meet these requirements, and (3) have access to the required courses at the community college. However, students often have to navigate a complex maze of transfer admission requirements and may receive conflicting information from the segments and individual campuses about which requirements to complete. The primary reason for this is because general education and pre-major course requirements often vary across university campuses.

The remainder of this report focuses on how the variation in course requirements affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the student transfer process in California. Specifically, we (1) review current transfer course requirements and the obstacles they can create for students, (2) discuss recent efforts to mitigate these obstacles, and (3) offer recommendations to further standardize the transfer process.

THE STATE’S TRANSFER PROCESS

Students are considered potential transfer applicants to UC and CSU if they graduated from high school and are enrolled in a regular session at any other college or university. Each segment uses an admissions process for determining which applicants may attend that institution. Figure 6 summarizes the major features of the state’s transfer process. In the following sections, we walk through each component of the transfer process.

TRANSFER ELIGIBILITY AND SELECTION

For the most part, the admissions process for transfer students consists of two parts: (1) eligibility for admission to the segment and (2) selection to a particular campus or academic program.

Eligibility

In order to qualify for transfer admission, California residents must meet minimum admission criteria—such as grade point average (GPA) and course requirements—as established by UC and CSU. Community college students that meet these requirements are deemed eligible for transfer. Eligibility applies to each segment as a whole, and does not guarantee admission to any particular campus.

UC Eligibility. Essentially, there are two distinct pathways for community college students to be eligible for transfer admission to UC at the upper-division level. (The university currently does not accept lower-division transfer students.)

- **Eligible for Freshman Admission Upon High School Graduation.** Students who were eligible for freshman admission to UC when they graduated from high school are eligible to transfer if they have at least a 2.0 GPA in transferable coursework. (The university currently has two distinct pathways for freshman eligibility: (1) satisfying the university’s A through G course requirements and earning a particular GPA and set of scores on the

Figure 6

Major Features of the State’s Transfer Process

| |
|---|
| Transfer Eligibility and Selection |
| To be eligible for transfer, students must meet minimum admissions criteria (such as GPA requirements). However, UC and CSU campuses that do not have the capacity to admit all eligible applicants use supplemental criteria (such as awards and achievements in a particular field) to select new students. |
| General Education and Major Preparation |
| Students can improve their chances of being selected to a competitive campus or program by completing “general education” and “pre-major” courses. General education courses give undergraduates a broad background in all academic disciplines. Major preparation courses prepare students for advanced study in a particular major. |
| Course Articulation |
| Prospective transfer students must make sure that community college courses they complete will be accepted by the university campus to which they are applying. The process of linking these courses to university prerequisites is known as “articulation”. |
| Transfer Agreements |
| Students can enter into a “transfer agreement” with a specific UC or CSU campus. Such an agreement works as a contract between the student and the campus by guaranteeing admission when specific academic requirements are met. |

SAT I and II exams or (2) being in the top 4 percent of their high school graduating class—commonly known as the Eligibility in the Local Context Program.)

- ***Not Eligible for Freshman Admission Upon High School Graduation.*** Students who were not eligible for freshman admission must complete (1) 60 semester units of transferable college credit with a GPA of at least 2.4 and (2) a specific course pattern (that includes English, mathematics, arts and humanities, and sciences) with a grade of C or better in each course. Students who did not meet UC’s A through G high school course requirements must complete transferable courses in the missing subjects with a grade of C or better in each course.

CSU Eligibility. Unlike UC, CSU admits both upper-division and (a small number of) lower-division transfer students. Beginning with admissions for fall 2005, transfer applicants with at least 60 transferable semester units enter CSU as upper-division transfer students. Those students with less than 60 transferable semester units enter as lower-division transfers. Currently, very few CSU campuses admit lower-division transfer students. This is because the university assigns the highest priority for admission to upper-division transfer students, including transfer students applying to “impacted” majors. (We discuss impaction at CSU in further detail later in this section.)

- ***CSU’s Lower-Division Requirements.*** Lower-division transfer applicants are eligible for admission if they (1) were identified by CSU as being in the top one-third (33.3 percent) of public high

school graduates and (2) have a GPA of at least 2.0 in all transferable coursework. (Currently, CSU identifies students in the top 33.3 percent of high school graduates as those who (1) completed the university’s A through G high school course requirements and (2) earn a specific combination of SAT I or ACT score and high school GPA.)

- ***CSU’s Upper-Division Requirements.*** Upper-division transfer applicants are eligible for admission if they (1) complete 60 semester units of transferable college courses, (2) complete certain general education courses (such as in mathematics, written communication, and critical thinking), and (3) earn a GPA of at least 2.0 in all transferable coursework. According to the Chancellor’s Office, over 80 percent of all upper-division transfer students enrolling in CSU have a GPA of 2.5 and above.

As we discuss in the accompanying text box, the Master Plan also permits UC and CSU to admit a small percentage of transfer applicants outside the minimum academic standards for eligibility.

Selection

Some campuses do not have the capacity and resources to admit all eligible applicants that apply to them. For example, six out of the nine UC campuses are unable to accept all eligible transfer applicants. (We discuss the particular CSU programs and campuses at CSU that cannot accommodate all eligible applicants later in this section.) As a result, impacted UC and

CSU campuses use additional admissions criteria (beyond systemwide eligibility requirements) to select new students from among eligible applicants. The segments often use supplemental criteria (such as completion of major preparation courses) to admit transfer students to particular majors. Unlike eligibility requirements, which are uniform across each segment, the criteria and processes that campuses employ to select from among eligible applicants vary somewhat, although each campus must comply with a pre-

scribed set of systemwide criteria and process guidelines.

UC's Selection Process. In order to select transfer students from among eligible applicants, most UC campuses use supplemental criteria that include both academic factors (including grades and completion of general education and major preparation courses) and nonacademic factors (including special talents and location of applicant's college and residence). The weighing of factors and the details of the evaluation

UC and CSU Special Admissions for Transfers

Although UC and CSU require community college students to meet minimum standards in order to be eligible for transfer admission, the Master Plan permits a small percentage of applicants to be "admitted by exception" to these standards. Specifically, the 1960 Master Plan allows each segment to admit up to 2 percent of its new transfer students through special procedures outside the minimum standards for academic coursework and grades. In subsequent reviews of the 1960 Master Plan, the Legislature acknowledged that the segments' policies actually exceed the 2 percent special admit limits.

Currently, the special admission policies for transfer students to UC and CSU are as follows:

- ***UC—Up to 6 Percent of Transfers.*** The UC permits each campus to admit by exception up to 6 percent of newly enrolled transfer students. Within the 6 percent designation, up to 4 percent may be drawn from disadvantaged students (those who have limited educational opportunities or low socioeconomic status) and up to 2 percent from other students. According to UC's policy, students admitted by exception must demonstrate potential for college success.
- ***CSU—Up to 8 Percent of Freshmen and Transfers Combined.*** The CSU authorizes admission by exception under two categories—"general exceptions" and "exceptions for applicants to special compensatory programs." General exceptions are reserved for students that lack qualifying grades or test scores, but have special skills or talents deemed important by the university. The special compensatory category is reserved for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The policy provides for admission of up to 4 percent of new freshmen and lower-division transfers in each category, for a total of 8 percent.

process are largely left to the discretion of faculty on individual campuses. This creates some variation among the campuses. For example, the Santa Cruz campus selects some of its transfer students based on a comprehensive review of students' academic and personal achievement and potential. At the Los Angeles campus, all transfer applicants to the School of Engineering and Applied Science are selected on the basis of academic qualifications, based on completion of major preparation courses, as well as the strength of the GPA.

According to UC, the level of performance needed to gain admission to particular campuses and programs varies from year to year depending on the size and academic qualifications of the applicant pool and the number of available spaces. As noted above, students can increase their chances of acceptance to the campus or major of their choice by completing lower-division major preparation courses and by fulfilling some or all of the university's general education courses. (We review the UC and CSU's general education requirements later in this report.)

CSU's Campus and Major Impaction Practices. The CSU campuses use impaction policies in order to allocate limited enrollment spaces among eligible transfer and first-time freshman applicants. A campus must first use administrative strategies to control enrollment (such as not accepting applications after the initial filing period, limiting "special" admissions, and not accepting lower-division transfer applications) before it can implement policies for impaction. Impaction status allows campuses to impose higher academic standards to limit the number of eligible applicants that enroll in a particular campus or program. Currently, 17 of the 23 CSU campuses have at least one impacted major. However,

only five of these campuses have more than two impacted majors. The basic nursing program is impacted at most campuses. All of the programs and majors at San Luis Obispo are impacted. In addition, Chico, Fullerton, Pomona, San Marcos, and Sonoma are impacted at the freshman level and Long Beach and San Diego are impacted at both the freshman and transfer levels.

Once CSU's Chancellor's Office declares a major or campus impacted, campus administrators may use supplemental criteria (such as completion of general education and major preparation courses, GPA ranking, special talents, extracurricular activities, and socioeconomic disadvantages) to select students. For example, a campus could simply rank all eligible applicants by GPA and admit the highest-ranking applicants until the available enrollment spaces are filled. The university's impaction policies state that campuses must use the criteria to "determine how serious an applicant is about his/her choice of major, and the extent to which applicants are fully prepared academically to fulfill the requirements of that major and be able to graduate with a degree in a timely manner."

GENERAL EDUCATION AND MAJOR PREPARATION COURSES

Community college students seeking to transfer to UC or CSU do not need to complete the respective university's lower-division general education and pre-major courses in order to be *eligible* for transfer admission. As mentioned above, however, completing such courses at the community college level may improve a transfer applicant's chances in being *selected* to a competitive campus or program (such as engineering and chemistry).

General Education Courses

General education courses are designed to give UC and CSU undergraduates a broad background in all major academic disciplines—physical sciences, social sciences, mathematics, humanities, and visual and performing arts. Completion of these courses is required for graduation. With careful planning, students can complete most general education courses while attending a community college. According to the universities, completing such courses may improve an applicant’s chances for transfer admission.

Uniform Across CSU Campuses, but Different Across UC Campuses. The segments each have their own set of lower-division general education courses. The CSU’s general education requirements consist of 39 semester units in five areas: (1) Communication in the English Language and Critical Thinking, (2) Physical Universe and Its Life Forms, (3) Arts, Literature, Philosophy, and Foreign Language, (4) Social, Political, and Economic Institutions, and (5) Life-long Understanding and Self-Development. Such course requirements are the same across all CSU campuses. However, at UC, general education course requirements can be different across campuses (as well as among the schools at a given UC campus). For example, some colleges may require students to complete a course in cultural diversity or computer programming or additional courses in writing or calculus, while others may not require such courses.

The different general education requirements between the segments can sometimes make it difficult for community college students to apply for admission to both UC and CSU. Out of concern, the Legislature in 1988 called for the establishment of a series of courses that prospective transfer students may complete at a CCC to satisfy the lower-division general education requirements for all campuses at UC and CSU. This set of courses is currently known as the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC). Figure 7 summarizes the courses under IGETC. The IGETC generally requires completion of a minimum of 37 semester (or 56 quarter) units of lower-division work with a grade C or better in each course. (Please see nearby box for a more detailed description of IGETC.)

Although community college students can complete IGETC to satisfy the lower-division general education requirements for both UC and CSU, each UC campus continues to maintain different general education requirements. These campus-specific requirements can present complications for students intending to transfer

Figure 7
IGETC^a Subject Requirements

| Subject Area | Courses Required |
|--|------------------|
| English Communication | 2 ^b |
| Mathematical Concepts and Quantitative Reasoning | 1 |
| Arts and Humanities | 3 |
| Social and Behavioral Sciences | 3 |
| Physical and Biological Sciences | 2 |
| Language other than English | — ^c |

^a Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum.
^b Students intending to transfer to CSU are required to take an additional course in oral communication.
^c Students intending to transfer to UC need to demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English. Students transferring to CSU do not need to demonstrate foreign language proficiency.

to UC. For example, a student who initially plans to apply to only one UC campus and begins completing the general education requirements of that particular campus and later decides to apply to multiple UC campuses may be required to take extra courses. Since general education requirements are the same across all CSU campuses, such problems do not exist for community college students who apply to multiple CSU campuses and choose not to complete IGETC.

Undergraduate Major Preparation

At most UC campuses, entering transfer students are required to specify a particular major on their admissions application. In other instanc-

es, students can apply as “undeclared” majors. Some CSU campuses, particularly those that are impacted, require transfer applicants to declare a major on their admissions application. Although some UC and CSU campuses require all students (regardless of whether they entered as freshman or transfer students) to declare a major by the time they begin upper-division coursework, there are no systemwide requirements. (However, the CSU Board of Trustees is in the process of discussing whether such a requirement is needed.) In order to ensure that students are prepared for advance study in a particular major, some university campuses (often depending on the major) advise students to complete

What Is Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC)?

The IGETC, which was developed in response to Chapter 973, Statutes of 1988 (AB 1725, Vasconcellos), is a series of courses that prospective transfer students may complete at a California community college to satisfy the lower-division general education requirements at both UC and CSU. The universities have agreements with each community college that specify which courses may be applied to each category of IGETC (such as English Communication). Typically, community college course catalogs indicate whether a course satisfies an IGETC requirement. Students must complete all IGETC courses with a grade of C or better.

While students do not need to complete IGETC in order to be eligible for transfer admission, it provides an alternate transfer pathway well-suited for some students. The IGETC is most helpful to community college students who know they want to transfer but have not yet decided upon a particular segment, campus, or major. Other students may not be well served by completing IGETC. According to UC, students who intend to transfer to a major that requires extensive lower-division preparation, such as engineering or the physical and natural sciences, should concentrate on completing the many prerequisites for that major.

Students who do not complete IGETC or campus-specific general education requirements before transferring must complete the general education requirements of the UC or CSU campus they attend after successful transfer. However, completing lower-division general education courses prior to transferring—whether through IGETC or the campus-specific requirements—may improve a transfer applicant’s chances for admission to a competitive campus and/or program.

major preparation courses during their first two years of college. These courses—most of which are offered at local community colleges—may be required as part of a major. For example, CSU’s Long Beach campus requires transfer students interested in majoring in Business Administration to first complete courses in “Elementary Financial Accounting” and “Introduction to Law and Business Transactions.”

Pre-major courses may also be prerequisites for other courses that are required as part of the major. For instance, an introductory course on statistics is often required as a prerequisite for certain courses required for a baccalaureate degree in Psychology. All majors at UC and most majors at CSU require completion of some pre-major courses at the lower-division level. Some majors, particularly in the sciences, require significant numbers of pre-major courses, while others may require only a few pre-major courses. Both UC and CSU encourage students to begin coursework in their major as soon as they have selected one. Given the selectivity for admission to certain majors and the importance of completing pre-major course requirements, prospective transfer students who decide on a major early on in their studies at the community colleges have an advantage.

Major Preparation Courses Vary Across Campuses. As stated above, completing major preparation courses may improve an applicant’s chances for admission, particularly if there are many more applications than spaces. However, the preparatory courses for a particular major can vary across UC and CSU campuses. For example, the pre-major courses for physics can be different at each campus (even within the same university segment). This means that a student intending to transfer to a specific campus might

complete courses that only meet the major requirements of that campus. If the student later decided to apply to a different university campus, this could require the student to take more course units and spend more time at the community college.

COURSE ARTICULATION

In completing the general education and pre-major course requirements for UC and CSU, prospective transfer students must make sure that the lower-division community college courses they complete will be accepted by the universities in meeting a particular requirement. Linking these courses to university prerequisites (commonly known as “articulation”) involves UC and CSU representatives agreeing to accept sets of community college courses as having the focus, content, and rigor necessary to meet the baccalaureate course requirements. Articulated courses are not necessarily considered as equivalent, but rather as comparable courses. In other words, course content ensures similar outcomes and warrants advancement to the next level of instruction.

Community college counselors and students can retrieve information on articulated courses via the Internet at no charge to the student through the Articulation System Stimulating Interinstitutional Student Transfer (ASSIST), which is administrated by UC. The goal of ASSIST is to allow students to identify all community college courses that satisfy IGETC, UC’s, and CSU’s own general education requirements, as well as specific requirements relating to certain majors and specialized programs. Currently, ASSIST is the only complete statewide database that seeks to provide accurate and timely articulation information to community college students and counselors.

As we discuss below, the actual process of articulating courses can vary depending on the university requirement that a community college course is intended to satisfy. Specifically, there is a separate articulation process for courses seeking to meet (1) IGETC requirements and (2) all other university requirements (such as UC and CSU pre-major requirements).

IGETC Courses—“Systemwide” Articulation. In order for a community college course to qualify as meeting a particular IGETC requirement (such as English Communication), the UC Office of the President and the CSU Chancellor’s Office must approve it. If the two university segments jointly approve a course as satisfying IGETC, then it is automatically transferable to any UC and CSU campus. In other words, the articulation of community college courses for IGETC is done on a systemwide basis. (This is similar to how high school courses are approved as meeting the UC and CSU’s A through G subject requirements for freshman admissions.) The IGETC courses are reviewed and approved on an annual basis.

Other Courses—“Campus-to-Campus” Articulation. Unlike the articulation of community college courses for IGETC, the articulation of courses that satisfy non-IGETC requirements (such as pre-major courses) typically involves two college campuses entering into a formal written agreement in which one campus agrees to accept specific courses or groups of courses from another campus that meet its own requirements. This is because campus-specific course requirements require multiple campus-to-campus articulation agreements. Generally, articulation officers at each university campus review requests from individual community college campuses for a particular course to be articulat-

ed. Essentially, these officers determine whether the community college course meets the basic content requirements of a specific university course. Community college courses are typically reviewed and articulated each year.

Given these campus-to-campus articulation agreements that specify which community college courses can be completed to satisfy a university campus’s requirements (excluding IGETC), UC and CSU campuses may not accept the same community college courses. Thus, a particular community college class may be accepted by one university campus but not another campus. For example, several UC campuses may accept a specific community college lower-division statistics course as meeting their requirement for students majoring in Economics. However, another UC campus with the same pre-major requirement may not accept the specific statistics course. This inconsistency limits transfer students’ flexibility to apply to multiple campuses, which is problematic given the difficulty in gaining admission to first-choice campuses. Students may also have to enroll in “replacement” courses that are not accepted once they enroll at a UC or CSU campus, which could further increase their time to degree.

Articulated Courses Can Have Different Course Titles and Numbers. Although campuses may have agreements on comparable courses, students often have a difficult time determining which specific community college courses are articulated. In part, this is because course titles and numbers for the same course can vary across segments and among campuses. For example, an “Introduction to Statistics” course could be listed as Statistics 1 at one community college and Math 43 at another community college. Moreover, the same course could be

identified as Math 180 at one CSU campus and as Statistics 100 at another CSU campus. Conversely, courses with the same number at two campuses might *not* be comparable. This lack of standardization causes confusion among students about which community college courses can be taken to satisfy university course requirements and can make students repeat unnecessary courses.

In the early 1980s, the Legislature recognized that a common course numbering system would simplify the identification of transferable courses and the specific disciplines and programs to which those courses are transferable. As a result, in 1985 CCC and CSU developed the California Articulation Number (CAN) System to cross-reference many lower-division community college courses. Under CAN, each campus retains its own course number and title. However, if a course is articulated, it is also assigned a CAN identifier (such as CAN ENGLISH 1). Once a community college course is given this identifier, all university campuses participating in CAN must accept that community college course in lieu of their own course, regardless of whether the university campus has an articulation agreement with the community college for that course. Courses with the same CAN identifier are considered interchangeable.

Historically, all community colleges, most CSU campuses, and four independent colleges and universities have voluntarily participated in the CAN system at some level. However, because of the requirement that participating university campuses must accept all CAN courses, none of the UC campuses have participated in CAN since 1994. As we discuss later in this report, CSU recently withdrew from CAN.

TRANSFER AGREEMENTS

Each UC and CSU campus provides the opportunity to enter into a “transfer agreement” to all students that attend certain community colleges (regardless of whether they were eligible for admission to UC or CSU upon high school graduation). In most cases, students must complete a certain number of units before entering such an agreement. A transfer agreement works as a contract between the student and the campus he or she wishes to attend by guaranteeing admission if specific academic requirements are met. For example, a community college student may enter into a transfer admission agreement with UC Davis. With the assistance of a community college counselor, the student develops an agreement for review by a UC Davis admissions representative. This agreement would list the community college courses that the student will complete, with emphasis on general education and pre-major courses. If the student fulfills the agreement and applies for admission during a specified filing period, he or she is guaranteed admission to the Davis campus. Although UC and CSU campuses primarily enter into transfer agreements with students enrolled at nearby community colleges, some campuses also have agreements with students from outside their regional area.

New Dual Admissions Agreements. In adopting the 2004-05 budget package, the Legislature established specific transfer agreement programs for students who were eligible to attend UC or CSU directly from high school. Pursuant to Chapter 216, Statutes of 2004 (SB 1108, Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), eligible freshman applicants are given the option to enter into a “dual admissions” agreement that guarantees admission to a specific UC or CSU

campus after they complete a transfer program at a CCC. All students participating in the program in 2004-05 could have their fees waived

during their first two years at a community college. Now, only financially needy students have their community college fees waived.

IMPROVING THE TRANSFER PROCESS

RECENT LEGISLATIVE ATTEMPTS TO STANDARDIZE TRANSFER

In recent years, the Legislature has adopted policies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the state's transfer process. These changes have primarily focused on standardization. Specifically, the Legislature has taken steps to (1) streamline pre-major requirements across university campuses and (2) simplify the identification of transferable courses. We discuss these two initiatives in further detail below.

New Admissions Path for CSU Upper-Division Transfers

In approving Chapter 743, Statutes of 2004 (SB 1785, Scott), the Legislature expressed its intent to discourage transfer students from taking more course units than necessary in earning their degree. The Legislature wanted to "ensure that community college students who wish to earn the baccalaureate degree at CSU are provided with a clear and effective path to this degree." Essentially, Chapter 743 requires CSU to develop a new degree path for transfer students, which would be based on course requirements totaling no more than 60 semester units. This new pathway is to consist of the following two components:

- **Systemwide Transfer Curriculum.** The university as a whole must establish by June 1, 2005 a systemwide lower-division

transfer curriculum consisting of at least 45 semester units for each high-demand baccalaureate major that will be common across all CSU campuses. This curriculum is to include general education, pre-major, and elective courses. By June 1, 2006, CSU and CCC shall articulate those lower-division courses that meet each systemwide pre-major requirement for each community college.

- **Campus-Specific Course Requirements.** Each CSU campus must identify by June 1, 2006, additional course requirements (beyond the lower-division transfer curriculum) for each major of no more than 15 semester units. Thus, these additional course requirements could vary across campuses.

Chapter 743 requires each CSU campus to develop a transfer agreement with each community college student who intends to meet the above course requirements. As part of this agreement, students need to identify a major early on and commit to a CSU campus by the time they complete 45 semester units. Students that satisfy the terms of the agreement are to be guaranteed admission to the campus and major identified in that agreement. The statute requires CSU to establish transfer student admissions requirements that give highest priority to transfer students who satisfy the above course requirements.

CSU Implements Chapter 743. In July 2004, CSU's Board of Trustees adopted guidelines to implement the major provisions of Chapter 743. The new policies—commonly referred to as the “Lower-Division Transfer Pattern” (LDTP) Program—would officially take effect beginning with students seeking transfer admission for fall 2007. In implementing Chapter 743, CSU will first develop LDTP requirements for the 30 highest-demand majors. At the time this report was prepared, the university had established the systemwide lower-division transfer course requirements for these majors and planned to articulate by June 1, 2006 those community college courses that meet the requirements. The CSU is in the process of developing the campus-specific requirements for these 30 majors. The university stated that it would soon begin to establish LDTP requirements (both systemwide and campus-specific requirements) for additional majors.

Common Course Numbering System Expansion

As mentioned above, participation in CAN has been voluntary and the number of courses in the system has been limited. In recognition of this problem, the Legislature recently approved Chapter 737, Statutes of 2004 (SB 1415, Brulte), which directs CCC and CSU (and authorizes UC and the state's independent colleges) to establish a common course numbering system for the 20 highest-demand majors in the respective higher education segments by June 1, 2006. The legislation also requires that the segments report to the Legislature by June 30, 2006 on the status of implementing this program and on plans to implement a common course numbering system for all other majors.

CSU Will No Longer Participate in CAN. In spring 2005, CSU informed CCC that it plans to withdraw from the CAN system. Instead, CSU will develop its own transfer course numbering system that will be based on the new LDTP Program, which will be officially known as the “CSU Transfer Course Number System.” The CSU stated that a new numbering system is needed to provide common course numbers for LDTP courses (for example, CSU Government 1). These course numbers will represent the results of the analysis and articulation of courses between CSU, its campuses, and all community colleges. Until the new system is in full operation, CSU plans to continue using existing CAN numbers.

In adopting Chapter 737, the Legislature expressed its intent to “facilitate articulation and seamless integration of California's postsecondary institutions by facilitating the adoption and integration of a common course numbering system among the public and private postsecondary institutions.” Since the new CSU numbering system will only link common courses between CSU and the community colleges, and not with courses at other institutions (such as UC), the state will not have a single common course numbering system for all of higher education.

TRANSFER PROCESS STILL LACKS STANDARDIZATION

In order for the state's transfer process to work most effectively for students, the requirements must be clear and standardized. Community college students should be able to (1) easily understand the requirements for transfer and have assurance that these requirements are consistent among the campuses within each segment, (2) readily identify transferable courses, and (3) have confidence that the community

college courses they complete will be accepted by university campuses as meeting particular requirements. In recognition of this, the Legislature has recently taken steps to help community college students transfer to UC and CSU.

Notwithstanding these efforts, our review found that the state's transfer process continues to lack standardization. Because the state lacks a comprehensive and integrated approach to transfer policies, students must navigate a complex maze of requirements that vary across campuses (even within a segment). The transfer process currently tends to be based more on specific university campus requirements, rather than "statewide" or systemwide goals and objectives. This can make it difficult for qualified community college students to successfully transfer to a four-year university.

Major Problem Is Variation in Course Requirements

The primary obstacle to standardization is the variation in course requirements—both general education and pre-major courses—across campuses. Each of the segments has its own set of general education courses. Unlike CSU, however, UC's general education requirements continue to vary across its campuses (as well as among schools at a given UC campus). Although IGETC was established by the Legislature as a series of statewide course requirements that prospective transfer students could complete at a community college to satisfy lower-division general education requirements at both UC and CSU, the existence of campus-specific requirements can cause unnecessary confusion among students intending to transfer to UC.

In terms of pre-major course requirements, CSU's new LDTP initiative does begin to streamline many pre-major course requirements at the university. The program establishes common pre-major course requirements for each high-demand major across all CSU campuses. However, because each CSU campus will be permitted under the statute to add additional pre-major course requirements that differ by campus, LDTP does not ensure a truly "common" curriculum. We also note that pre-major course requirements continue to vary across UC campuses.

In our review of the state's transfer process, we found that the variation in course requirements unnecessarily complicates the process. Figure 8 (see next page) summarizes the problems caused by having different general education and pre-major course requirements at each campus within a given segment. We discuss these issues in further detail below.

Limits Students' Campus Options. The variation in general education and pre-major course requirements can limit students' flexibility to apply to multiple UC and CSU campuses. This is because students who have fulfilled requirements for one campus may not have fulfilled the requirements for other campuses. For example, a community college student who initially plans to apply to only one UC campus and later decides to apply to other UC campuses may be required to satisfy additional general education and pre-major course requirements. Moreover, the transfer courses required by each university campus may not be offered by specific community college campuses. The variation in course requirements is particularly troublesome given the competition for admission to first-choice campuses.

Requires Multiple Campus-to-Campus Articulation Agreements. As a direct consequence of the segments having campus-specific course requirements, most course articulation agreements are developed on a campus-by-campus basis. As noted in the review of the Master Plan in 2002, “Course alignment and articulation at the postsecondary level remain problematic.” This is because there are no systemwide course articulation agreements for community college courses that meet university requirements other than IGETC. Rather, the state’s higher education campuses enter into campus-to-campus agreements that specify which community college courses will be accepted at a particular university campus to satisfy specific requirements. This creates substantial inefficiencies. Campus-to-campus articulation agreements can be difficult and time-consuming for the segments to establish and maintain. Also, community college students may have to take multiple courses to satisfy the same requirement at different UC or CSU campuses.

Increases Difficulty in Identifying Comparable Courses. The variation in course requirements across UC and CSU campuses can make it difficult for students to identify comparable courses at their community college. Students must identify whether a community college course satisfies a particular requirement at

each UC and CSU campus, rather than whether the course satisfies a systemwide requirement for all campuses. The variation in course titles and numbers across segments and campuses further increases this difficulty.

LAO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SYSTEMWIDE COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In order to further standardize the state’s transfer process, UC and CSU should implement policies on a systemwide basis that streamline general education and pre-major course requirements. Specifically, we recommend UC develop general education course requirements that would apply to all its campuses. We further recommend that both UC and CSU develop pre-major course requirements for most majors that will be common across their respective campuses.

The Master Plan specifies the mission of

Figure 8

Transfer Problem: Campus Variation in General Education and Pre-Major Course Requirements

- ✓ **Limits Students’ Campus Options.** Students who have fulfilled requirements for one UC or CSU campus may not have fulfilled the requirements for other campuses in the system. This is particularly problematic given the competition for admission to first-choice campuses.
- ✓ **Requires Multiple Campus-to-Campus Articulation Agreements.** Each community college must enter into an articulation agreement with each university campus for each community college course intended to satisfy a particular campus requirement. Such campus-to-campus agreements can be difficult and time consuming for the segments to establish and maintain.
- ✓ **Increases Difficulty in Identifying Comparable Courses.** Students must identify whether a community college course satisfies a particular requirement at *each* UC and CSU campus, rather than whether the course satisfies a systemwide requirement for all campuses. The variation in course titles and numbers across segments and campuses further increases this difficulty.

each of the state’s public higher education systems. In adopting this plan, the Legislature envisioned an efficient process for students to transfer from one system to another system, mainly from the community colleges to UC and CSU. Thus, the Master Plan calls for UC and CSU to accept all qualified community college students into their respective systems (although not necessarily to the campus of the student’s choice). In this report, however, we found that the state’s transfer process lacks the systemwide standardization envisioned in the Master Plan. This is because general education requirements vary across UC campuses and pre-major course requirements vary across both UC and CSU campuses. As a result, we recommend that the Legislature require the segments to implement policies on a systemwide basis that streamline such course requirements. Figure 9 summarizes our recommendations.

Streamline UC General Education Course Requirements. Currently, community college students can satisfy CSU’s general education requirements by completing either the university’s systemwide requirements or IGETC.

However, the options for students interested in transferring to UC are not as clear. In addition to IGETC, these students must navigate through the different general education course requirements at each UC campus. To facilitate transfer, we recommend the Legislature require UC to develop general education course requirements that would be consistent across all its campuses (as is currently the case with CSU).

Streamline UC and CSU Pre-Major Course Requirements. Chapter 743 took an important step in this direction by reducing pre-major course differentiation across CSU campuses. We believe that additional steps could be taken to further advance the Legislature’s expressed intent to provide a clear and effective baccalaureate degree path for community college students. Thus, we recommend the Legislature eliminate the provision in existing statute that permits each CSU campus to require pre-major courses of up to 15 semester units that could be different at each campus. In addition, we recommend that UC develop pre-major course requirements for most majors that will be consistent across its campuses. The UC could phase in the streamlining of pre-major courses

beginning with the 30 highest-demand majors, as was done by CSU. Under our proposal, UC and CSU would each have their own systemwide pre-major course requirements that would be the same at their respective campuses.

Figure 9
Summary of LAO Recommendations for Systemwide Course Requirements

- ✓ **Streamline UC General Education Course Requirements**
 - Recommend UC develop general education requirements that would be consistent across all its campuses (as is currently the case with CSU).
- ✓ **Streamline UC and CSU Pre-Major Course Requirements**
 - Recommend repealing the authority of CSU to adopt pre-major course requirements that could be different at each campus.
 - Recommend UC develop pre-major course requirements for most majors that would be consistent across its campuses.

Benefits of LAO's Recommended Actions

Our proposals for systemwide course requirements would help alleviate institutional barriers that make it difficult for qualified community college students to transfer to UC and CSU. Specifically, a systemwide approach would achieve the following benefits:

Increase Students' Campus Options. Consistent general education and pre-major courses across each segment would provide greater flexibility to students interested in applying to multiple campuses within a segment, without having to take extra course units and spend additional time at a community college. Maintaining flexibility is particularly important given the increasing difficulty for eligible students to transfer to impacted campuses and programs.

Facilitate Systemwide Articulation Agreements. The development of systemwide course requirements would eliminate the need for campus-to-campus articulation. Instead, course articulation agreements would link a community college to a university *system* (rather than an individual university *campus*). This approach would be consistent with a report by the 2002 Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education, which recommended that the governing boards of UC, CSU, and CCC "provide for the devising of systemwide articulation policies to enable students to transfer units freely between and among public colleges and universities in California."

CONCLUSION

In summary, our proposed recommendations would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the state's transfer process. Building on recent legislative efforts, our proposals further attempt to standardize the process, so that students can more easily identify transferable courses and have greater flexibility to apply to multiple campuses.

Such a systemwide approach to articulation would be similar to how the universities approve community college courses for IGETC. For example, an IGETC-approved math course at a given community college is automatically accepted at every UC and CSU campus for meeting IGETC requirements. Similarly, our proposal would increase the number of university campuses that will accept a given community college course.

Facilitate Universal Course Identification. As discussed earlier in this report, students can have a difficult time determining which community college courses meet a particular set of course requirements at a UC or CSU campus, partly because course numbers for the same course can vary across segments and campuses. Our proposal for systemwide course requirements would make it easier for community college students to identify university-approved courses. Instead of having to find out whether a community college course meets a requirement at each specific UC or CSU campus, students would only need to find out if the course satisfies a particular systemwide general education or pre-major course requirement. If the course meets such a requirement, then it would be universally accepted by all campuses in that system. Ideally, community college course catalogs would identify whether a course satisfies a university course requirement.

At the same time, our proposals maintain the universities' flexibility and authority to decide which community college courses are transferable on a systemwide basis. In addition, the community colleges themselves would still be able to determine their own course offerings (regardless of whether the courses are transferable).