

The Mercury News

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San Jose Mercury News (California)

February 20, 2007 Tuesday

Report ignores community college mission; PROPOSED CRITERIA FOR FUNDING WOULD DESTROY SCHOOLS

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SECTION: A; Pg. OP1

LENGTH: 800 words

Remember when \$100,000 for a house in Silicon Valley was outrageous and gasoline was 25 cents a gallon? That was in the 1960s and appears to be the same time referred to by the recent "Rules of the Game" study by the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy at California State University-Sacramento. When the college master plan was created, students would typically finish high school in 12 years, attend their local community college for two years, obtain an associate degree and transfer to CSU or UC where they would receive a bachelor's degree in two years, land their dream job and buy a home.

In 2007, University of California and California State University students are taking about six years to graduate. The average age of a community college student in Silicon Valley is 29, and most of them work to afford school and housing, and juggle family responsibilities. Many high school students who enter community college are unprepared for college-level classes.

Community colleges are the last truly democratic educational option in California, the United States and, indeed, the world. This is why the recommendation in the Shulock Report ("Rules of the Game") to base funding of community colleges on degree and completion rates would be a disaster. The community college system's core mission is access. The Shulock recommendations would create a huge barrier by not acknowledging the comprehensive nature of whom we serve.

By law "essential functions of the colleges include: basic skills instruction, providing English as a second language, adult non-credit instruction, and providing support services that help students to succeed." These are NOT tied to degree and completion rate, and to use these rates for base funding would ignore and undermine our legally mandated mission.

No one denies the importance of degrees and/or completion to our students, but to ignore the other services that the community colleges offer is shortsighted. The Shulock report does not seem to understand the nature of the community college student. While many of our students come from local high schools and go on to four-year universities such as the University of Santa Clara, UC-Santa Cruz and San Jose State University, others have not graduated high school, do not have a GED or do not yet speak English at a level that will allow them to transfer or attain a job with a pay level that will support a family. These students come to San Jose-Evergreen and West Valley-Mission Colleges to learn English, gain job skills or transfer. Instead of the sieve the Mercury News called us in an editorial last week, the community colleges are a net.

California Community Colleges are successful because of their open-door policy, not in spite of it, as this report suggests. It allows students, who often have no other option for higher education, to improve their lives by taking affordable classes online, on evenings and weekends, and off site. If the Shulock criteria were

imposed, the programs that support these students would not be funded. Our ESL programs would disappear; our non-certificate vocational programs would disappear; our arts and theater programs would disappear; eventually, we would disappear.

This study did not include students who dropped out of community colleges to accept high-paying jobs. Our colleges have numerous industry partnerships to train students for high-paying careers and fill market-place needs, such as nursing, EMT and fire science.

It's ironic that the rest of the world envies the California Community College system and wants to adopt our model at the same time we are hearing criticism in our back yard. Community colleges are spotlighted as a success story in the Jan. 20 edition of the National Journal. The article describes the colleges as "quintessentially American: open to all, regardless of high school record, religion or race; inexpensive, or free with the help of federal and state aid; locally run, often with the involvement of business leaders; and quick to adapt, with courses changing as local job markets evolve."

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education issued an A grade to California Community Colleges both for the number of residents taking advantage of college and the benefits the individual and the state receive from this education experience.

California's community colleges have been, are and will continue to be a key element in the economic future of this state. In fact, we will lead this state into the 21st century by educating and training a globally competitive and diverse workforce.

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LOAD-DATE: February 20, 2007

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

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