



Wheelhouse

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A Missed Opportunity for Improving Equity?

Early Observations on California's Community College BA Pilot

IN 2014, THE LEGISLATURE approved a pilot program allowing California Community Colleges for the first time to confer baccalaureate degrees within the community college system. With this authorization, California followed the nearly half of states nationwide that allow community colleges to award BAs. That same year, the Civil Rights Project/*Proyecto Derechos Civiles* at the University of California, Los Angeles embarked on a study¹ to understand how other states that offer community college baccalaureates, confronting similar demographic challenges, address possible racial/ethnic gaps in degree attainment within these programs.

This brief highlights findings from those states, takes a closer look at early implementation of California's community college baccalaureate (CCB) pilot programs, and offers recommendations to take better advantage of what may be an overlooked opportunity presented by the program: the narrowing of persistent racial/ethnic gaps in bachelor's degree completion.

Background and Context

Given a projected deficit of one million baccalaureate degrees in its labor force needs by 2025, California is in dire need of increasing the numbers of its citizens who succeed in graduating from college. Adding complexity and urgency to this challenge, college completion data show a significant racial/ethnic gap in degree attainment.

TOPLINES

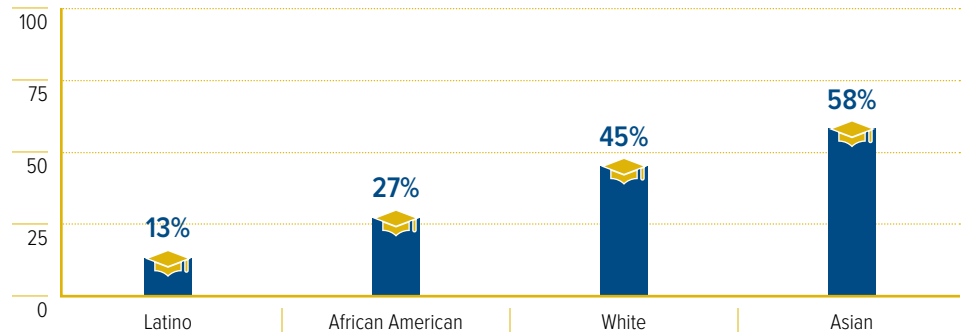
- > Without an intentional equity focus at the implementation level or without direction from policymakers, California's Community College Baccalaureate (CCB) program may miss an opportunity to address the state's biggest postsecondary challenge: increasing degree completion among underrepresented minority students.
- > CCB programs in California and elsewhere have been framed as meeting workforce needs, an important focus that, unless broadened to include equity, may limit the program's potential to increase degree completion among underrepresented students.
- > Other state CCB programs are similarly limited in focus and do not offer California a road map for increasing degree production among underrepresented minorities. Where equity is concerned, *California should lead*, not follow.

California’s K-16 population is “majority minority,” which means that any strategy to substantially increase degree production must aim to graduate higher percentages of minority students with college degrees.

Community college baccalaureate programs are uniquely positioned to help address some of the state’s degree production challenges and disparities.

California’s K-16 population is “majority minority,” which means that any strategy to substantially increase degree production must aim to graduate higher percentages of minority students with college degrees. In 2015, however, only 13% of Latinos and 27% of African Americans between the ages of 25 – 64 possessed a baccalaureate degree, compared to more than 58% of Asians and 45% of White residents.²

Figure 1: Percentage of Californians ages 25 – 64 with a BA



California sends a higher percentage of its high school graduates to community colleges than any other state, relying heavily on that system to produce not just associates’ degrees and professional certifications but, increasingly, transfer pathways to four-year colleges and universities. CCB programs are uniquely positioned to help address some of the state’s degree production challenges and disparities, with 64% of Latino and 62% of African American college freshmen enrolling in a community college.³ Research shows that the high representation of these two groups in community colleges can be attributed to the colleges’ lower cost and relative accessibility. Research also shows that because of low academic preparation in high school, underrepresented minority students do not typically have many choices when selecting a college, and are directed towards community colleges as their point of entry into postsecondary education.

Figure 2: CA Community College Baccalaureate Pilot Programs and Campus Demographics*

COLLEGE	PROGRAM	CAMPUS DEMOGRAPHICS
Antelope Valley	Airframe Manufacturing Technology	Majority URM**
Bakersfield	Industrial Automation	Majority URM
Cypress	Mortuary Science	Majority URM
Feather River	Equine and Ranch Management	Majority White/Asian
Foothill	Dental Hygiene	Majority White/Asian
Mira Costa	Bio-manufacturing	Majority White/Asian
Modesto	Respiratory Care	Majority URM
Rio Hondo	Automotive Technology	Majority URM
San Diego Mesa	Health Information Management	Majority White/Asian
Santa Ana	Occupational Studies	Majority URM
Santa Monica	Interaction Design	About 50/50
Shasta	Health Information Management	Majority White/Asian
Skyline	Respiratory Therapy	Majority White/Asian
Solano	Bio-manufacturing	Majority White/Asian
West Los Angeles	Dental Hygiene	Majority URM

* Campus demographics in this table offer a snapshot from the time period when CCB pilot campuses were selected. They are based on 2012-14 campus enrollment as posted on campus web sites, if available, or, where not available on web sites, as reported in Student Equity Plans compiled by each campus. Recently updated campus web sites and campus-level Student Equity Plans show that student demographics at two colleges represented in the table—San Diego Mesa and Solano—have since shifted slightly to “majority URM” status.

** URM: For the purposes of this brief, underrepresented minority includes African-Americans and Latinos. Though Native Americans are also URM, their representation in CCB programs was low overall and the authors were not able to include them in their analysis. The authors further acknowledge that sub-populations of Asian students within California share similar struggles to other URMs; however the data did not allow them to identify those sub-populations.

CCBs in Other States

To explore whether other states might offer models for California in its implementation of a CCB program, we interviewed directors, deans and provosts who work directly with similar programs in Florida, Texas, and Washington, three states that are demographically similar to California. In these states, meeting workforce needs and increasing baccalaureate attainment were cited as the primary impetus for implementing CCB programs.

These interviews revealed that, while awareness of attainment gaps is strong among some administrators in the states examined, none of the CCB programs is explicitly focused on addressing gaps for underrepresented minorities. Few make any special efforts in marketing, recruiting or providing support services targeted to the student groups at issue. Notably, trends in data from these states showed that significant race/ethnicity gaps persist in feeder programs and subsequent enrollment and completion of the community college baccalaureates. Moreover, a recently published study on Florida found that while degree attainment in teacher education increased as a result of expanding community college baccalaureate programs in this field of study, the representation of underrepresented minorities earning baccalaureates declined over time.⁴

CCBs in California

In the early stages of California's CCB implementation, we observed that, like the other three states studied, narrowing attainment gaps is not a stated goal for the program. Given the potential for the program to help achieve equity goals, and in light of legislative proposals already afoot to expand the BA-granting authority of the community colleges, we offer these policy and practical recommendations for policy maker and implementer consideration:

- **Explicitly connect authorizing legislation to the goal of narrowing attainment gaps:** Education Code language requires the Legislative Analyst Office to report on “the impact of the baccalaureate degree program on underserved and underprepared students,” but nowhere does that statute state that gap narrowing is a goal of the program. In addition, “impact” and “underserved” are not defined.
- **Locate strategic targets of opportunity:** Offer baccalaureates in colleges and programs that already attract and enroll large numbers of underrepresented minority students.
- **Ensure affordability:** The BOG application waiver, currently available only for lower division coursework, should be extended to upper division courses to extend cost reduction through the baccalaureate programs.
- **Attend to the most vulnerable students:** Those with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status and other undocumented students have specific financial needs that must be considered to further ensure baccalaureate programs are accessible and affordable. In addition, the needs of foster youth, English learners, and young adults who have had contact with the juvenile justice system or who had been formerly incarcerated deserve extra consideration.

Beyond these policy recommendations, community college leaders and local implementers of the CCB pilots may also want to consider these implementation recommendations as they work to both meet workforce needs and reduce gaps for underrepresented minority students:



FLORIDA

Community college baccalaureates first approved in 2001. By 2014, 25 of the 28 colleges in the Florida College system offered Bachelors of Science degrees, primarily in Education and Nursing, as well as Bachelors of Applied Science in technology-oriented fields.



TEXAS

Community college baccalaureates first offered in 2005 at one college. By 2008, two additional colleges offered these degrees, primarily Bachelors of Applied Technology and Bachelors of Applied Science.



WASHINGTON

Applied baccalaureates first piloted at four community and technical colleges in 2007, with four more added in 2009. By 2014, 15 of the 34 community and technical colleges offered at least one Bachelor of Applied Science program.

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- **Focus explicitly on equity:**
 - Devise an equity plan with guidelines for ensuring access and success is equitable.
 - Collect data and monitor the extent to which programs enroll and graduate underrepresented minorities; determine if programs are equally appealing to underrepresented minorities as to others.
- **Make special efforts in outreach and recruitment:**
 - Market the programs and provide timely information to underrepresented minorities.
 - Collaborate with existing college success programs, such as Puente and Umoja, to reach students.
- **Increase institutional commitment to student success:**
 - Provide bridge programs or intensive courses to help low-income and underrepresented minority students better prepare for admission and success in these programs.
 - Articulate programs with universities to ensure that students interested in graduate studies can seamlessly pursue advanced degree goals.
 - Recruit diverse faculty within programs, and offer professional development for existing faculty to understand and support underrepresented minority students.

Looking Ahead

It is by no means too late to incorporate some of these strategies in this early stage of CCB implementation across the state. As programs mature and develop, competition for admission may increase, as has been the experience in other states. Without an explicit equity focus, this increased competition could create new barriers for underrepresented minorities. A careful focus on the kinds of students who access and successfully complete these programs is essential. So, too, are intentional strategies for making CCBs accessible to underrepresented minority students. Without such efforts, California may miss an opportunity to implement a nation-leading community college baccalaureate model that not only helps meet the state's labor force needs, but fosters equity as well.

This brief was prepared by Marcela G. Cuellar, Assistant Professor at the University of California, Davis, School of Education, and Patricia Gándara, Research Professor at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies and Co-Director of the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at the University of California, Los Angeles.

¹ The full report is available at civilrightsproject.ucla.edu. The original report was produced with support from the Ford Foundation.

² United States Census. (2015). *Current population survey*. Retrieved from census.gov/cps/data/cpstablecreator.html.

³ California Postsecondary Education Commission. (2009). *College-going rates to public colleges and universities*. Retrieved from cpec.ca.gov/StudentData/CACGREthnicity.asp.

⁴ Park, T. J., Tandberg, D. A., Shim, H. K., Hu, S., & Herrington, C. D. (2016). Community college teacher education baccalaureate programs: Early evidence yields mixed results. *Educational Policy*, 1-23. doi: 0895904816682317.

Wheelhouse: The Center for Community College Leadership and Research was established in 2016 to support California community college leaders through annual professional learning institutes and independent, actionable research on relevant topics and trends. Wheelhouse is supported by the University of California, Davis, the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative, the James Irvine Foundation, the Hearst Foundations, the Foundation for California Community Colleges, the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund and the U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences. Housed at the UC Davis School of Education, the Wheelhouse Institute on Leadership welcomed its first annual cohort of Fellows—20 sitting and aspiring community college CEOs—in 2017.