

From: Scott Lay [scottlay@ccleague.org]
Sent: Wednesday, August 28, 2013 12:15 PM
To: Mary Rees
Subject: The case for equity.

August 28, 2013

Dear Mary,

Fifty years ago today, the largest civil rights march in our nation's history occurred in Washington, DC. The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom is seen as the cornerstone of the foundation for the legal progress made by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Today, we observe and celebrate the remarkable event, remember the contributions of A. Phillip Randolph and Bayard Rustin--the original organizers--and revisit the words of the speakers, the most notable of course, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

It's also important to think back of the path from legal inequities to the socioeconomic equities that remain with us today.

Our community college system has taken significant steps to set up a stronger infrastructure to maintain access and promote student success, and more work is in the pipeline. However, until we address the fact that so few of our students are provided the opportunity to complete a degree, certificate or transfer within a reasonable period of time, we are failing them and our desire to significantly increase completions will be curtailed.

California's community colleges are a great system. I credit everything I have to the opportunity provided by this system. However, I am a lucky one, as I was provided the opportunity to attend full-time because of the financial support of my parents. Had I been part of the 69.4% of our students taking fewer than 12 units, it is very likely that I would be among the majority of our students who after six years have no credential.

In a sense, I think of a parallel in the promise of the Master Plan for Higher Education to Dr. King's "bank of justice" passage on that overcast Wednesday. Our colleges are that bank, and the idea of access to college is a promissory note granted the citizenry. Let's remember Dr. King's words:

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

Each year, thousands of California's most economically disadvantaged citizens arrive at a California community college with that promissory note in hand, believing that a college degree or transfer is available if they just work hard. Many start out full-time. However, in their later semesters they can't get the classes they need or fall into a culture of part-time enrollment that we too often have suggested is acceptable, perhaps even have encouraged through course scheduling. Or, they accumulated too many units, lost Pell Grant eligibility, and had to turn to work. And, the longer a student takes to complete college, the more likely it is that life will get in the way. California's community colleges are 46th in the nation in percentage of part-time students, with

69.4% of our students taking fewer than 12 units. And, only 8.4% of our students are taking 15 units--the number required to complete in two years.

It's time for us to loudly declare that the system is rigged against community college students. And, in doing so, that promissory note is a broken promise, and students find themselves given a bad check by the state. Consider the following:

- Community colleges, which enroll 2.3 million Californians, receive 28% less per student than K-12 schools, 57% less than the California State University, and 78% less than the University of California.
- Cal Grants are rigged against community college students as well, providing only \$1,473 per year, when students attending for-profit colleges for the same program can get up to \$9,223.
- Only 8% of the 290,000 students who apply and are eligible for a competitive Cal Grant actually are awarded one. Only 1 out of every 17 Cal Grant dollars goes to a California Community College student, even though 8 out of every 10 undergraduate students in public and private California higher education are enrolled in a community college.
- There are more Latino students in California's community colleges than total undergraduate students enrolled in all other public and private colleges and universities in the state.
- The enrollment of African-American students in California's community colleges nearly matches the undergraduate enrollment of the University of California.

It's time for a frank talk about equity. Sure, the term is nothing new, and nobody is against equity. However, state funding and policy choices have too often created barriers to equity, and we must fight to remove them. It's an uncomfortable issue, as it's about race and socioeconomics. However, higher education equity is the key to California's economic future, something that we all must be concerned about.

I hope you'll join us in a year-long conversation about equity and ensuring that we do what's right for California's tomorrow, and we start today.

Let's make sure that our students find that the promissory note of the Master Plan is cashable.

Sincerely,
Scott Lay
President and Chief Executive Officer Orange Coast College '94

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