

Item 8

(Information Item)

Update on COVID-19 Student Survey and other research and data initiatives

SUMMARY:

This informational item will provide an update on activities currently underway in the California Student Aid Commission's (Commission) Data, Analysis, and Research Team (DART).

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an information item; no action is required.

BACKGROUND:

The outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) has become a major disruption to colleges and universities across California, with institutions canceling in-person classes and moving to online-only instruction. The pandemic has also altered nearly every aspect of college life, from admissions and enrollment to delivery mode and grading policies to financial aid and basic needs (food, housing, transportation, technology). Federal emergency aid monies (CARES Act) have been allocated to campuses, who are actively marketing its availability to students. The closures of higher education campuses, as well as disruptions to K-12 schools, have significant impacts on both current and future students' ability to receive and manage financial aid.

The long-term financial strains of the outbreak will be felt in the potential for declining retention and lower fall enrollments. Recent surveys and new projections suggest fall enrollments will be disrupted:

- A national survey from the Art and Science Group found that nearly two-thirds of prospective students are concerned they may not be able to attend their first-choice postsecondary institution. The survey found the largest reason for concern is that the school may no longer be affordable but worries about the admissions process were also considerable.
- Another survey found that nearly 70% of high school seniors believe their financial ability to attend college will be impacted by the pandemic.
- According to data from the National College Attainment Network, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completions for the 2020-21 school year are down 2.6% compared to the prior year.
- Estimates from the American Council on Education forecast that enrollments for the next academic year will drop by 15%, including a 25% decline in the number of international students.

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CSAC Requested to Project Cal Grant Demand for 2020-21 and Beyond

Both the State Department of Finance (DOF) and the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) have recently requested that Commission assist them in forecasting a revised future Cal Grant demand for FY 20-21 and beyond. While the Commission should be able to distribute any and all available student financial aid it has available high-need eligible students, there are some trends in student behavior and choice architecture that could affect Cal Grant distributions. Additionally, the Commission also wishes to see how student perceptions about basic needs, loss of available income and knowledge of available emergency aid has been affected by COVID-19.

Proposed Student Survey

Commission staff is working with a research partner, Dr. Michal Kurlaender (UC Davis School of Education), on developing an electronic survey to be administered in May, 2020 asking these and other questions to assist in estimating future demand, monitoring student perceptions and intentions, and developing/modifying policies and programs to aid the State and students.

The proposed survey would feature the following:

- A random sampling of ~250,000 students who filled out the FAFSA in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 FAFSA cycles. The domain would include all FAFSA filers, not just Cal Grant eligible or recipients. With this, we will have a wider range of students' EFC to evaluate results (effects of COVID-19 on more vs less needy students.)
- The survey would be separated into two domains, each with slightly different (but many overlapping) questions:
 - A survey of "new" students, or those who would be first-time in Fall, 2020.
 - A survey of "continuing" students, or those who had previously enrolled somewhere in higher education.
- Students would be asked to self-provide their email address and consent to allow the Commission to use this as a key field back to their FAFSA/ISIR record so we can link this to other important information about the student and allow us to cross-tabulate results.
- A bank of ~ 20 questions maximum, to keep the survey brief (10-15 minutes.)
- A limited number of "open-ended" response boxes that allow a student to write in qualitative answers to certain questions (such as "How has COVID-19 changed your plans for college?" and "If you are not going to attend college in Fall, 2020, please tell us why?")

We anticipate the survey to be made available via email to students using contact information in their FAFSA/ISIR record in May 2020, with results available in June 2020. CSAC will share all results, (but not individual responses) publicly and to all segments for evaluation and analysis.

Included in this item is an update on the Student Expenses And Resources Survey (SEARS) Food Insecurity Spotlight Report.

California Student Aid Commission

RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):

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ATTACHMENT(S):

SEARS Food Insecurity Spotlight Report
DART PowerPoint Presentation