

Item 9

(Information Item)

Presentation by institutional segmental representatives COVID-19 impact on enrollment and student services

SUMMARY:

This item provides an update on how California colleges and universities have responded to COVID-19 and continued to make financial aid accessible for their students, as well as any challenges that have arisen in that process. Representatives from the University of California, California State University, California Community Colleges, and Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities have been invited to share the experiences of their segment.

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an information item; no action is required.

BACKGROUND:

On March 4, 2020, Governor Newsom declared a state of emergency to facilitate the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the weeks following this declaration, local and county governments issued a range of orders dictating the ability for residents to gather in groups or restricting use of shared spaces to slow the spread of COVID-19. As a result, most college and university campuses have been closed to students and the public, while instruction began online in a distance learning format. In order to deliver courses online, many institutions quickly began to ensure that their students and faculty had access to the necessary technology and internet to participate.

On March 27, 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) was signed into law. The CARES Act included \$14 billion in funding assistance for postsecondary institutions nationally, including approximately \$1.7 billion for California institutions. At least half of all funding received by colleges and universities was required to be utilized for the purpose of providing emergency aid to students, with the balance available to support expenses related to COVID-19 and continued campus operations.

Despite the initial flexibility for the use of these funds indicated in an April 9, 2020 letter from U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, the Department of Education released further guidance on April 30, 2020 which indicated that emergency aid offered with CARES Act funding could only be provided to students eligible for federal financial aid authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act. The actions of the Department have faced legal scrutiny and are subject to two lawsuits, including one filed by California Attorney General Xavier Becerra on behalf of the California Community Colleges. On June 10, 2020, a federal judge ruled that the U.S. Department of Education could not place eligibility restrictions on California community college student to receive emergency coronavirus financial aid.

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Higher education institutions have begun to plan for the continued impact of COVID-19 on campus operations for the 2020-21 academic year. For example, the California State University announced its intention to plan for Fall 2020 courses to primarily be delivered via distance learning. Other institutions have shifted the start of their Fall term in order to conclude in November, prior to the next flu season and potential second wave of COVID-19.

Commission staff continue to engage the Financial Aid Advisory Board and other higher education segment partners to identify student needs, challenges to financial aid administration, and areas where Commission action or state policy responses are needed to facilitate continued access to state student aid.

Representatives from the University of California, California State University, California Community Colleges, and the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities will discuss how their segments have responded to COVID-19, how they are assisting students in continuing to access financial aid or other assistance, and the related challenges that have emerged.

RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):

Jake Brymner, Director
Government and External Relations

Shawn Brick
Director, Student Financial Support
University of California

Dean Kulju
Director, Student Financial Aid Services
California State University

David O'Brien
Vice Chancellor of Governmental Relations
California Community Colleges

Alex Graves
Vice President for Government Relations
Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities