
REMAPPING DEBATE

Asking "Why" and "Why Not"

Mission Shrinking

Original Reporting | By Diana Jean Schemo | Education



The campus of the University of California at Berkeley

December 7, 2010 — In the galaxy of public higher education, the University of California system once shined as a kind of North Star. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Golden State's premier institutions, the University of California at Los Angeles and at Berkeley, boasted some of the strongest research and teaching faculties in the world. A UC education was virtually free to state residents.

That model is under assault. Over the last two years, with the state facing a \$20 billion deficit, the University of California system lost 20 percent of its state funding — nearly 1 billion dollars. Recently, California's outgoing Gov-

ernor Arnold Schwarzenegger restored some of that money. But it is unclear that the university will entirely recover from the major cuts, and the consequences thus far have included steep increases in student tuition, totaling 57 percent over the last two years.

Indeed, budgetary strains are emboldening critics in the state legislature who would not only cut funding, but whose vision rejects the idea that the government should maintain world-class research and teaching universities with universal access. Their proposals would dramatically shrink the function, size and identity of these institutions, and change significantly whom the schools would serve.

The Master Plan

The [Higher Education Master Plan](#) of 1960, which has been called one of the most influential documents in the history of American higher education, was California's blueprint for its three-part public college and university system. Post-Sputnik, it came at a time the country feared losing ground in science and research to the Soviet Union, and looked to academia for answers. Closer to home the charge was also pressing: the state needed some rational plan to guide growth and avert turf battles between its various publicly funded institutions of higher education.

The master plan, under the leadership of Clark Kerr, then president of the University of California, organized the state's seemingly helter-skelter array of public higher education options with an eye toward providing broad access to all "at a minimum cost to the taxpayer," in the belief that citizens had the right to a college education that would be very nearly free.

For the vast majority of high school graduates, the plan provided open enrollment to a network of community colleges, with the possibility of transfer to public four-year institutions. Above that were four-year state colleges, which did not have a research mission at the time of the 1960 plan, and which were open to students in the top third of their high school graduating class.

And above them all were the teaching and research universities — the sole institutions eligible to receive most federal and state research grants. The master plan heightened their selectivity, narrowing the pool of candidates to the top 12.5 percent from the top 15 percent of high school graduates, but course offerings were left intact. There was an "implicit assumption" that the state's public university system would offer a broad array of courses, and that knowledge for its own sake had value — both at the top tier universities and in higher education generally, said Neil J. Smelser, an emeritus professor of sociology at UC Berkeley, who wrote the foreword to Kerr's memoirs.

EXCELLENT EDUCATION, NO TUITION?

The master plan did not envision charging tuition to students, but only minor "fees." Tuition-free higher education was deeply rooted in California, and goes back to the statute creating the University of California in 1868. A college education was seen not so much as a private benefit but as a public good, in the belief that the state could only gain by having an educated citizenry.

The master plan supported this view. It quoted a 1958 speech by the then-president of the University of Minnesota, James L. Morrill, who had rejected a proposal to charge tuition at public universities as "a betrayal of the 'American Dream' of equal opportunity to which our colleges and universities . . . have been generously and far-sightedly committed." Morrill criticized those lawmakers who had been looking at tuition as a "panacea," a way to avoid the "pocketbook burdens of the cherished American idea and tradition."

Forcing students to pay tuition, he said, was an "incredible proposal to turn back from the world-envied American accomplishment of more than a century."

Chris Newfield, a UC Santa Barbara professor and principal author of a 2006 Academic Senate report on the University of California's future, said the Master Plan was emblematic of then-Governor Pat Brown's "social compact with post-war California."

"The combination of quality and broad access was key to the whole concept of the public university," Newfield wrote in an e-mail. He quoted Brown's declaration in his 1963 inaugural address that, "Through the turmoil of change, and sometimes chaos, Californians have pressed on toward the good society—not for the few, not for the many, but for all." Brown's inaugural continued, "We are here to prove that a civilization which can create a machine to fulfill a job can create a job to fulfill a man."

Throughout the 1960s, the state’s newly affirmed commitment to public higher education, and its protection of the University of California’s research mission in particular, made the university a beacon among institutions of higher education. Enrollment at its campuses doubled in the course of ten years, and so did its full-time faculty. Along with the expansion, its reputation for cutting-edge research and innovation grew. The university faculty earned 11 Nobel Prizes between 1960 and 1970.

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Shifting the burden

The first significant erosion of support for the University of California began 30 years ago, when higher education funding, which had increased substantially in the years following the adoption of the 1960 Master Plan, fell steeply. From 1980 to 1983, per capita spending from the state General Fund fell to \$96 from \$120 — a drop of 20 percent (see chart on next page).

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Beginning in 1990, the university started turning to students to make up for the losses. The balance between state general funds and student tuition began to shift, with the state paying less and students paying more. In 1990, student tuition for state residents at the University of California amounted to \$2,362 in today’s dollars — roughly a fifth of the current level.

As state support fell (except for a brief recovery during the dot.com boom), the university also lost its competitive edge in recruitment, with faculty salaries lagging 3 to 22 percent behind comparable institutions, according to the Academic [Senate’s 2006 study](#).

In 2010-11, state General Fund support for the University of California is now lower than it was in 1965, and is only 57% of the 1986 peak (see chart on next page).

“California’s public [higher] education segments,” John Aubrey Douglass, senior researcher at the Berkeley campus’s Center for Studies in Higher Education, wrote in a [paper](#) earlier this year, “have suffered from a million small cuts in their budgets over the past three or more decades. Now, the Great Recession has brought a bludgeoning budget-cutting blow.”

In November, the state’s Board of Regents adopted the term “tuition,” to reflect the steadily growing burden carried by students. It also approved the fourth in a series of tuition hikes that began in 2009, bringing the total increase in tuition for state residents to 57 percent as compared with tuition for the 2008-09 school year. In the 2011-12 school year, tuition will be just over \$11,000, not including campus-based fees.

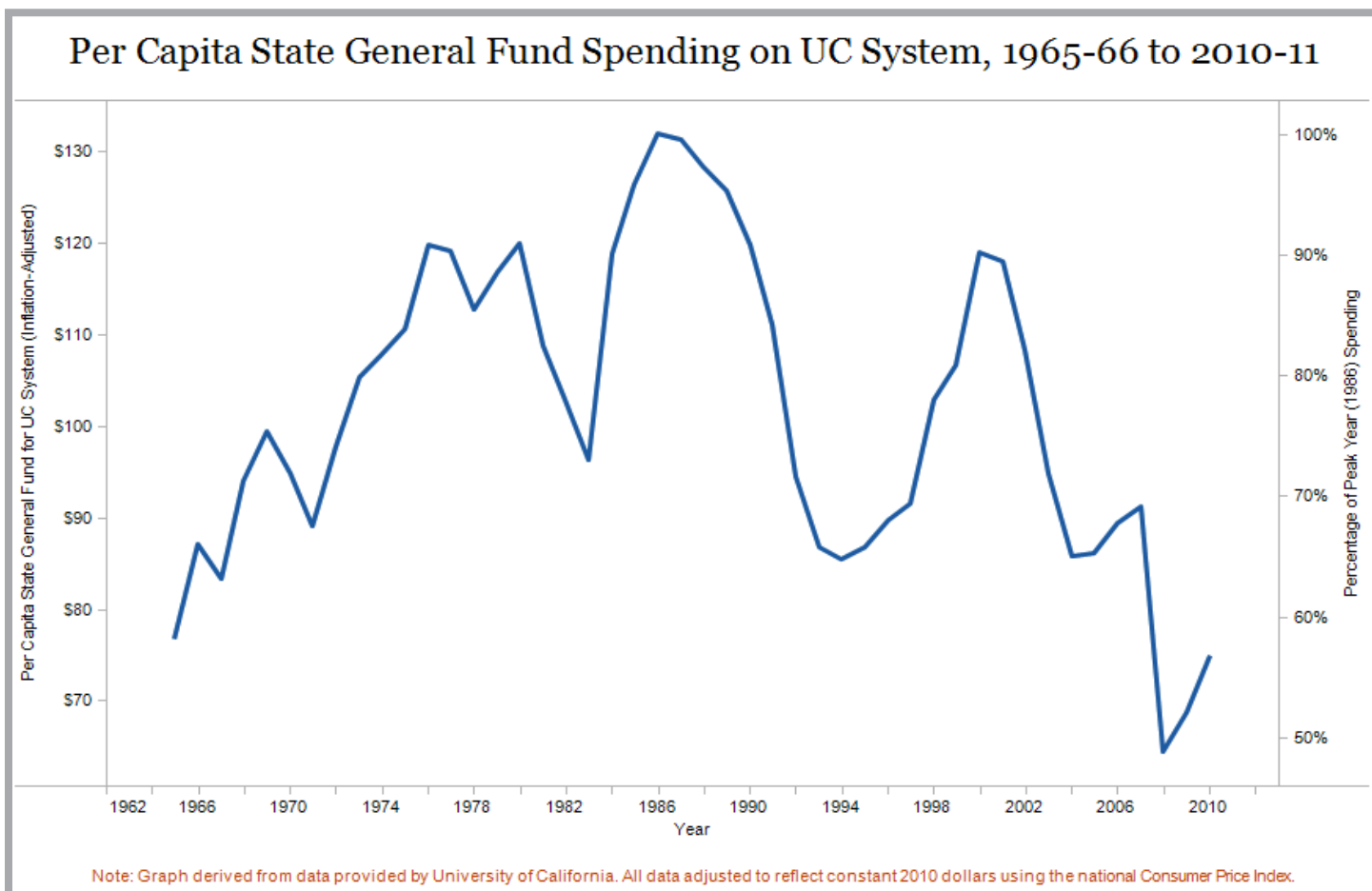
Of cuts and consequences

The decline in support has forced campuses to lay off 2,600 employees and eliminate some 1,400 positions. UCLA has dropped its writing requirements from two courses to one, and there is talk of eliminating even that. “That’s very worrisome,” said Christopher Santos, external vice president for the UCLA student association, which has been active in protesting the cuts and using student funds to make up shortfalls. “Whatever profession you end up in, it’s super important to write well.”

At the University of California’s ten campuses, course offerings are down — by 10 percent at UCLA between 2008 and 2009, and 8 percent at Berkeley. At UCLA, an initiative dubbed “Challenge 45” asks department chairs to pare down the classes required to major in their fields to 45 credits.

Student to faculty ratio is up system-wide by about 25 percent over the last 10 years, said Lawrence Pitts, provost and executive vice president. A comparison to the 1960s is even more startling: then, there was one faculty member for every 14 students; now, there is one for every 24 students.

With faculty workload rising, the university is also hiring fewer graduate students as teaching assistants. That leaves professors with less time available for student questions outside of class. Students report difficulty getting into courses, with lecture halls for mandatory core classes filled beyond capacity.



Some students end up sitting on the floor for an entire semester, or waiting a year for an opening in a course required for their majors, Santos said.

“If they stay on this trajectory, it’s very clear that the university [system] will face terrible challenges in maintaining its quality and the premier status that it’s had,” said Robert M. Berdahl, former chancellor at the Berkeley campus and president of the Association of American Universities.

Some programs are under threat of being eliminated entirely. UCLA’s Academic Senate suspended admissions to its “International Development Studies” major last year, largely because of the difficulty students had in fulfilling the course requirements in the face of so many class cancellations. Campus libraries are closing earlier, and some book collections are being moved to save money on overseeing access. Students contributed funds in order to help the library maintain its tradition of staying open 24 hours a day during mid-terms and finals, Santos said.

University officials contend that the budget cuts enacted in 2008 and 2009 crippled UC’s ability to woo promising new research faculty. Faculty were already earning 11 percent less on average than their counterparts at other public institutions and 20 percent less than their colleagues at top private research universities. With the cuts, searches for new faculty virtually halted. Restrictions on travel saved the university \$110 million, according to budget documents, but meant scholars had a harder time attending academic conferences, where they present their work, connect with colleagues, and learn about new research.

The new emphasis on shedding course requirements, rather than building up areas of scholarship, may also signal retrenchment to the rising stars of research, leading many to make their academic home elsewhere. Particularly at a research university, the premium is on original contributions to scholarship, rather than on teaching alone. New research also brings in funding, which further sustains the university enterprise.

More importantly, said Hartle, of the American Council on Education, the uncertainty and dislocation generated by sudden budget cuts, forced furloughs, salary freezes, and crowded classes, hurts campus morale. That, in turn, hinders recruitment of new talent. “If you go visit, and faculty and staff are demoralized, that gets conveyed,” Hartle said. “Financial turmoil never helps recruit faculty or staff.”

“If they stay on this trajectory, it’s very clear that the university [system] will face terrible challenges in maintaining its quality and the premier status that it’s had,” said Robert M. Berdahl, former chancellor at the Berkeley campus and president of the Association of American Universities, which represents the nation’s 63 top research universities — six of which belong to the University of California system. “These are extraordinarily difficult reductions in revenue to accommodate. There’s no doubt that the reduction in recruitments, the challenges they will have in retaining faculty — and to some extent already have in retaining faculty — will worsen considerably.”

“This is like watching a car accident in slow motion, to see what the state of California is doing to what should be a priceless resource,” said Hartle. “There’s nothing positive you can point to in this development.”

Outsiders in, insiders out

To offset some of the cuts to its budget, the university plans to admit more students from other states and overseas. Those students pay higher tuition and, in the case of foreign students, are largely ineligible for financial aid. Currently, out-of-state and foreign students account for 22 percent of the freshmen at Berkeley and 15 percent at UCLA. Their payments — \$23,000 on top of the \$11,000 in-state residents pay for tuition — ultimately subsidize students who are state residents, officials say. But they also come as the university, for the first time, is lowering freshman enrollment in response to a decline in state support.

The shift undermines a central tenet of the master plan: that the campuses should be open to any state resident who qualifies. The university does offer generous financial aid to lower-income students, covering full tuition for families earning less than \$70,000 this year, and \$80,000 next year, and giving middle class students a one-year reprieve from the latest round of tuition increases. But in response to budget cuts, the University of California reduced enrollment by 3,800 eligible freshmen over the last two years, primarily by denying them admission to their choice of campus, while the much larger Cal State system cut enrollment by about 40,000. Community colleges, feeders for the Cal State and UC systems, [turned away](#) 140,000 students last year.

In the 1960s, California led the nation in access to higher education, and in the share of students graduating with a college degree. Today, it ranks well below average among the states, 34th in terms of college access for low-income students, and [15th](#) in the share of its population with a bachelor’s or more advanced degree.

UC belt-tightening

With their institution’s future in the balance, officials at the University of California have launched an all-out drive to cut spending. Their 10 campuses teamed up with the 23 of the state university system to save on travel and purchase costs, and introduced a raft of other administrative measures, with projections that they would save \$500 million over the next five years. Officials revamped the university system’s defined benefit pension scheme to require employee contributions for the first time. They are also reducing benefits for employees hired after 2013, and raising the retirement age for new employees to 65 from 60. Those steps, they estimate, will save 20 percent on the university’s pension bill.

UC sees these savings “as the tip of the iceberg,” Nathan Brostrom, executive vice president for business operations at the University of California, said during a recent press conference at which university officials unveiled their budget request for next year.

In a later interview, Brostrom said that the university could earn another \$600 million a year by raising its charges for overhead on research and foundation grants. Currently, the University of California collects 53.5 percent from government research grant awards for overhead, while private Ivy League institutions typically collect 60 to 68 percent. (The chances of recovering the full amount projected may be slim, however, as federal grants carry strict rules about charges for such “indirect costs.”)

“There’s going to be no single silver bullet,” Brostrom said, but many places where the university will go after new sources of revenue.

Asked at the press conference why the university had not taken these cost-cutting steps sooner, Mark Yudof, president of the University of California, told Remapping Debate that, “historically, we were slow. We were not as out front as we should have been. We’re a big complicated system,” he said. “Even though we did find individual campuses taking this on, we didn’t see it across the board, and that’s what we’re trying to do now.”

Shrinking the mission

PERCENT OF PEOPLE 25 AND OVER WHO HAVE COMPLETED A BACHELOR’S DEGREE

1. District of Columbia, 48.5%
2. Massachusetts, 38.2%
3. Colorado, 35.9%
4. Maryland, 35.7%
5. Connecticut, 35.6%
6. New Jersey, 34.5%
7. Virginia, 34.0%
8. Vermont, 33.1%
9. New York, 32.4%
10. New Hampshire, 32.0%
11. Minnesota, 31.5%
12. Washington, 31.0%
13. Illinois, 30.6%
14. Rhode Island, 30.5%
15. California, 29.9%
20. Utah, 28.5%
25. Alaska, 26.6%
30. Arizona, 25.6%
35. Iowa, 25.1%
40. Idaho, 23.9%
45. Alabama, 22.0%
50. Arkansas, 18.9%

Note: Data taken from 2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Margin of error, depending on state, ranges from +/-0.2 percent to +/-1.2 percent.

The objections lawmakers raise to the University of California, however, do not appear to revolve solely around its success or failure in saving money, but around the system's essential profile and purpose. Critics in the state legislature say that given the deficit, the University should drastically pare down its ambitions, and focus on a "core" mission. Their view of that core mission, however, is not so much a return to its roots — which, in this case, would restore the university to its towering stature in American higher education — so much as a wholesale severing of its limbs.

Jean Fuller, a Republican state assemblywoman representing Bakersfield, suggests the UC system should "return to core values and core services." The University of California, Fuller contends, should conduct a review of the needs of employers throughout the state. Then, taking into account the strengths of each campus, it should tailor academic programs to provide the education and expertise to meet the demands of business. Currently, she said, the state was facing an acute shortage of engineers and nurses with advanced degrees.

"To me, when you get to the point where you're trying to do everything for everybody, you lose sight of what your niche is," said Fuller, a former schools superintendent in Bakersfield.

The focus on immediate economic conditions is antithetical to the aspirations that fired the University of California's growth in the 1960s, both in enrollment and intellectually, said Neil J. Smelser, an emeritus professor of sociology at UC Berkeley.

But wouldn't such a narrowing of the university's mission shatter world class research and teaching institutions that Californians have built up over generations? Should California be satisfied with educating its citizens to compete primarily for jobs in-state, particularly with unemployment hovering near 10 percent?

Fuller believes so. "When the taxpayer sends money to Sacramento, that money is supposed to be directed at increasing the state's productivity," she said. "The educational system needs to be very focused on what are the occupational needs of the state. Are we doing what we can to attract the best professors in the fields that we need, like engineering?"

"Sometimes," Fuller said, "you have to go back to the basics."

Fuller added that she had voted against the state budget that restored some \$300 million to the University of California. The university, she recalled, had given administrators raises just before the first round of cuts, and she objected to professor salaries that could, in medicine and law, approach \$200,000 a year. (Supporters of such high salaries argue that academic stars bring in many times their salaries in research grants, which help support the university and have a multiplier effect on the local economy.)

Fuller is not alone in her belief that California's public university system should scale back its ambi-

tions, and its spending. Bob Dutton, the Republican leader in the California state senate, said he would not dismantle programs, but he contended that the system should focus incentives (like scholarships) on encouraging the production of engineers and nurses.

“If you have limited resources, you put them in an area that will generate revenue,” Dutton told Remapping Debate. “There are certain majors that have greater value to the public as a whole. Creative writing may not be a priority right now.”

Dutton said he did not consider his view a departure from the initial mission of the state’s public university system. “I do actually think that’s what they were originally set up for, to build the workforce for the next century.”

While the law ceding federal land for public colleges and universities, which President Lincoln signed in 1862, envisioned the primary mission of such land grant colleges as training for agriculture and engineering, it also included “other scientific and classical studies,” as well as courses in military tactics, in their charge. Nearly a century later, California’s Master Plan of 1960 did not contemplate narrowing their offerings to match the most pressing needs of industry in the state at the time.

Jackie Goldberg, a leader of the Free Speech Movement on the Berkeley campus in the 1960s, said there were voices by the mid- to late-1960s calling for the universities to focus more on professional training, but they did not prevail. Then-Governor Brown “knew that the state universities were economic engines for the state, and I don’t mean by having teachers and engineers and nurses coming out of them,” said Goldberg, who also served on the Education Committee of the State Assembly from 2000 to 2006. “He knew it because he knew that when you have a well-educated population, people want to move their businesses here.”

The focus on immediate economic conditions, said Smelser, a scholar of the master plan, is antithetical to the aspirations that fired the University of California’s growth in the 1960s, both in enrollment and intellectually. “The university, the liberal university as we know it, has been conceived and reached its greatest heights by carrying out the literal implications of the word university: university means universal. This means not only technical knowledge, but knowledge of the most esoteric fields: historical knowledge, general education, the humanities, dead languages,” he said.

“Top-tier universities, like the University of California, are extremely important because they lead the way in innovation,” Smelser added.

Unlike Fuller, Dutton voted for the most recent budget that restored some \$300 million to the Univer-

Assemblywoman Jean Fuller: “When the taxpayer sends money to Sacramento, that money is supposed to be directed at increasing the state’s productivity...The educational system needs to be very focused on what are the occupational needs of the state.”

sity of California's coffers, but he did so reluctantly. The money was included in a larger state budget bill, and Schwarzenegger had indicated early on that he would not sign a budget without the 10 percent increase for public universities that he had put in. But Dutton was not happy about it. "If it would have been up to me," he said, "I would have cut funding to the University of California again this year."

Dutton said that he would like to see the two most sought-after institutions in the University of California system, UCLA and UC-Berkeley, cease operating as public universities altogether—and go private. "I think it's just worth exploring at what point do you say, 'Okay, you've reached that top tier and it's time now to cut you loose, so you can actually go beyond that next step.' I think Berkeley and UCLA have reached those levels." The quality of their programs, he contends, is on a par with private institutions like Stanford University, and would allow them to succeed without public support.

While many in California speak about privatization as shorthand for the trend toward students and donors carrying a greater share of university costs, Dutton's proposal would cut UCLA and Berkeley off from public funding altogether, with profound implications for the universal access contemplated by the Master Plan.

Neither UCLA nor Berkeley boast endowments anywhere near their private counterparts. Berdahl, Berkeley's former chancellor, noted that Berkeley has twice the number of students as Harvard, but an endowment that is only one-tenth the size. "It would be impossible for Berkeley to ultimately be a total private university without a complete abandonment of its model of providing access to students in California," Berdahl said.

Dutton said the state had more pressing needs. "Right now," Dutton said, "we're having a hard enough time funding our [kindergarten through 12th grade] and the California State University system."

PRIVATE VERSUS PUBLIC

The top 10 private university endowments are anywhere from two to 10 times larger than Berkeley's:

- Harvard University, \$25,662,055,000
- Yale University, \$16,327,000,000
- Stanford University, \$12,619,094,000
- Princeton University, \$12,614,313,000
- MIT, \$7,982,021,000
- Columbia University, \$5,892,798,000
- Northwestern University, \$5,445,260,000
- University of Pennsylvania \$5,170,538,000
- University of Chicago, \$5,094,087,000
- University of Notre Dame, \$4,795,303,000
- University of California at Berkeley, \$2,345,000,000

Note: figures reflect endowments as of June 30, 2009. Data on private schools from Chronicle of Higher Education; data on Berkeley from Annual Report of Philanthropy, 2009-10 (UC Berkeley Foundation).

A [December 2006 analysis](#) of various scenarios for the future of the UC system, one of them a freeze in public funding and gradual shift toward privatization of the University of California campuses, concluded that the student body on the UC campuses would alter dramatically.

As tuition increases rapidly, and a college education comes to be seen as more of a personal privilege than a public good, access and economic diversity would suffer, the study predicted. Lower-income students would flood toward the California State and community college campuses, while more students from families with upper middle-class incomes flock toward the University of California's top three institutions, Los Angeles, Berkeley and San Diego.

“This scenario, the report said, “would end the UC system as we know it.”

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