New UC Study Shows the Outreach Programs that the Governor Seeks to Eliminate are a Lifeline for Disadvantaged Students Seeking to go to College.

UC Outreach provides more than 110,000 elementary and secondary school students in disadvantaged communities with opportunities that many other students take for granted—tutoring, counseling about what courses to take, information about college applications, mentoring, SAT prep, and even information about following a path to a UC campus by transferring from community college. Students participating in these programs attend schools in low-income areas where parents typically have not gone to college.

Recent data from a UC ACCORD study shed light on why these programs are necessary and effective. To better understand the college preparation experiences of California’s public high school students, UC ACCORD conducted an extensive survey of 3000 18-year-old, California high school graduates in summer 2003. As a part of that survey, we asked about whether they had access to the kinds of services that UC Outreach provides.

The results were striking. In addition to the obvious need for students to take the right courses and college admissions tests, students really benefit from being given an extra boost toward college. Not surprisingly, those who get access to information about college and are encouraged to apply are far more likely than students without this information and encouragement to be admitted to four-year colleges.

Yet, the study also found that the students most likely to need an extra boost (those students who would be the first in their families to get a college degree) are the least likely to get one. Their schools are far less likely to steer them toward college and to provide them the encouragement they need to prepare and apply. Specifically

- Students whose parents have college degrees were two to three times more likely than those from less well-educated families to be in schools where they experience multiple facets of a “college-going school culture”—facets such as college information and assistance, encouragement, and steering towards 4-year colleges.

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1UC ACCORD is a state-funded, system-wide research center that studies diversity and inequality in California. It includes UC scholars from such diverse disciplines as public policy, communications, sociology, psychology, law, education, and economics.
• Students who experience strong college-going cultures in their high schools have UC and CSU admission rates that dwarf those of other students. (Over 60% are admitted to UC or CSU, as opposed to fewer than 7% of those who report low levels of the college-going culture factors.)

Making things even more unequal, well-educated parents are also more likely than others to make up for any lapses on the schools’ part by purchasing this extra boost for their children outside of school—including private SAT prep, tutors, and private college counseling.

Specifically

• Tutoring. Students whose parents have college degrees were more than twice as likely as students from less well-educated families to have their family or friends provide them a tutor (32% compared to 14%). Only 5% of students whose parents have not finished high school had tutors provided by their families or friends.

• Extra Classes. Students whose parents have college degrees were nearly twice as likely as students from less well-educated families to attend extra classes offered by a private school or company (9% compared to 5%).

• SAT Prep. Students whose parents have college degrees were more likely than students from less well-educated families to take special classes to prepare for the SAT (42% compared to 35%).

• Private College Counselors. Students whose parents have college degrees were nearly twice as likely as students whose parents didn’t finish high school to use a private college counselor to help with college applications (13% compared to 7%).

These combined disparities in access to “college boosting” services in and out of school may help explain why students from well-educated families are far more likely to be admitted to UC than students whose parents are less well educated. Adults at their schools are more likely to have four-year college expectations for them. Their families’ more often purchase services in the private sector that give them a disproportionate advantage in grades, test scores, and application writing. In contrast, students from less well-educated families are far more likely to be steered by school adults toward getting a job right after high school or attending a community college or a trade school. Their families are less likely to buy private college preparation services outside of school.

UC Outreach has filled these gaps by providing all these services—free of charge—to many low-income students around the state. Forty percent of the African American and Latino freshmen now attending UC participated in UC Outreach. When asked, many students say that it was just these Outreach services that made the difference for them. For example, Adrienne Jones, a Crenshaw High graduate and now in her second year at UCLA, participated in UCLA’s Career Based Outreach Program (CBOP) in the ninth and
tenth grade. She says now that the program helped her to stay focused in high school. “It is hard to seek college information in high school if there is no guidance.” (Adrienne Jones: (310) 267-7586).

Similarly, Simone Leard recalls the UCLA students who came to Crenshaw High as part of UCLA’s Early Academic Outreach Program, “My class looked forward to their Friday visits and I can still remember their names. They provided us with the tools needed to do well in high school, and that would help us get into and excel at a university. I can still remember the “word of the day” they taught me—ambidextrous—because in my junior year it was on the SAT exam.” (Simone Leard (310) 267-7586)

These students have played by the rules. They attended California public schools for 13 years, and they successfully completed their high school diplomas. This completion represents a real sign of resiliency and stick-to-it-ness for students who are often in grossly overcrowded schools with underqualified teachers and inadequate supplies. These are the survivors. Yet, for all of their willingness to play by the rules, such students are disadvantaged by a lack of family wealth that allows them to purchase college enhancing services. Without Outreach, in Adrianna Jones’ words, they may have been “unprepared and uninformed about college.”

And now those coming behind them are about to lose that. The funding is tiny—far less than 1% of the UC budget. Cutting these programs will NOT close the budget gap. It will send a powerful message to the state’s most disadvantaged students that the state cares little about their future. According to the state’s Master Plan, the University of California is supposed to serve the top 12.5% of graduating seniors in California and every student is supposed to have a fair opportunity to be among that 12.5%. Without outreach, private funds will skew the pool of students competing for UC even further. Diminishing so many students’ college dreams places them, their schools, and the state at risk.

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