

Baccalaureate Programs at the California Community Colleges

Overview and Summary of Issues

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Since the adoption of California's Master Plan for Higher Education over 50 years ago, changes have occurred in the economy and in educational fields that have resulted in changes in the Master Plan. Technological advances, shifts in demographics, and evolving curricula have produced changes in emphasis within institutions of higher education and have produced changes in mission. Although the Master Plan assigned exclusive responsibility for doctoral degrees to the University of California, the legislature, in 2005, extended this provision to the California State University, under SB 724, for the Ed.D. and, subsequently, other selected disciplines. A need was identified and the need was met through a minor change in the Master Plan.

Across the nation, a similar need is being addressed affecting community colleges. Due to workforce shortages and projected workforce needs combined with the lack of capacity and determination of universities to expand baccalaureate programs, community colleges have been tapped to adjust their missions to include the offering of selected baccalaureate-level programs. At the present time, twenty-one states have authorized their community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees in selected vocational/career technical education (CTE) fields.

States Authorizing Community Colleges to Confer Bachelor's Degrees



Twenty-one states allow community colleges to award bachelor's degrees under certain circumstances. They are:

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|-------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Arkansas | 8. Louisiana | 15. Oklahoma |
| 2. Colorado | 9. Michigan | 16. Texas |
| 3. Florida | 10. Minnesota | 17. Utah |
| 4. Georgia | 11. Nevada | 18. Vermont |
| 5. Hawaii | 12. New Mexico | 19. Washington |
| 6. Illinois | 13. New York | 20. Wisconsin |
| 7. Indiana | 14. North Dakota | 21. West Virginia |

This alternative provides greater access for students to attain the bachelor's degree and at the same time increases capacity for workforce training. Community college students who seek transfer to public four-year institutions face a number of challenges: universities have instituted enrollment caps that limit the number of transfer students they can accept; some students are place-bound and do not have the time or financial ability to travel to an alternative public four-year university; some students are accepted but do not receive the financial aid package that makes enrollment in a four-year institution possible; a number of four-year programs are impacted and students are denied admission or placed on a wait list; and most four-year universities have different entrance requirements that limit student options for transfer if they are not accepted into their first-choice campus. These problems are especially acute in California.

There are areas within California (primarily San Diego, San Luis Obispo, and San Mateo counties) in which impaction of the local California State University (CSU) campus is so great, or in rural areas where the nearest CSU or University of California (UC) campus is so far away, that the local community colleges in these areas would be the preferable providers of baccalaureate degrees since they are accessible both in terms of capacity and geographically. In doing so, they would enable their students to remain in their geographical areas and contribute to their own economies rather than be forced to drop out of college, attend a college at a distance with significant expense, or leave the area entirely. The twin benefits of access and capacity are important. Community colleges in other states have demonstrated this, which is also well chronicled by the Community College Baccalaureate Association.

The Community College Baccalaureate Association (www.accbd.org), formed in 1999, is an invaluable consortium that endeavors "to promote better access to the baccalaureate degree on community college campuses, and to serve as a resource for information on various models for accomplishing this purpose." There are now almost 500 baccalaureate programs offered by community colleges. These community colleges have not changed their current mission as two-year institutions, focused on offering associate degrees and certificates, but have added a few, selected bachelor's degrees to their current mission, primarily in workforce fields. These degrees complement the baccalaureates and other graduate degrees offered by the universities by affording greater access to students seeking baccalaureate study, and by focusing on fields that are directly related to workforce needs, thereby providing job training for individuals and providing a boost to the local economy. As the following chart shows, these degrees are in a variety of fields, notably Nursing and other Health Professions, Technology, Science/Environment, Education, Business, Hospitality, and Criminal Justice/Public Safety.

Public Community Colleges Conferring Baccalaureate Degree								
State	Education	Health/ Nursing	Science/ Environment	Technology	Business	Hospitality	Criminal Justice/ Public Safety	Agriculture
Arkansas				✓				
Colorado			✓		✓	✓		
Florida	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Georgia					✓			
Hawaii				✓	✓			
Indiana	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Idaho	✓							
Louisiana	✓	✓	✓					
Illinois	✓	✓		✓				
Michigan			✓	✓		✓		
Minnesota	✓							
Nevada	✓	✓		✓				✓
New Mexico	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
New York		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
North Dakota			✓					
Oklahoma				✓			✓	
Texas				✓				
Utah	✓							
Vermont	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Washington	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
West Virginia	✓			✓				
Wisconsin			✓					

Among the states that have authorized community colleges to offer the bachelor's degree, Washington and Florida are considered models and are widely acclaimed for the success they have achieved. The first baccalaureate graduating class from Washington's community colleges amounted to 7% of all the baccalaureate graduates in the state. In Florida, for the academic year 2011-2012, over 20,000 students enrolled in their top 10 baccalaureate programs. St. Petersburg College alone has produced 6,432 baccalaureate graduates since it was granted authority ten years ago. Currently, nearly 20% of all graduates at the college are baccalaureate graduates.

The chart below presents the highest-demand baccalaureate programs in the Florida community colleges.

Top 10 Baccalaureate Programs in Florida by Enrollment

Program	Number of Colleges	2011-12
Supervision and Management/Org. Mgmt	15	9466
Nursing	15	3599
Public Safety Administration	5	1443
Health Services Administration	3	1266
Exceptional Student Education	6	1082

Elementary Education	5	935
Early Childhood Education	7	865
Information Technology	5	689
Business Administration	4	675
Project and Acquisitions Management	1	565

Graduates of these programs also often fare better than their university counterparts, as recent studies and reports have demonstrated. Of Miami Dade College’s 2010 baccalaureate graduates, 86% found work after graduation compared to 61% from the State University System. They also earned more: \$43,353 annual salary vs. \$36,412 from the State University System.

The experiences of these colleges also affirmed the cost effectiveness of this option. Upon inception, these colleges generally were funded at an 85% level of their university counterparts to provide these programs. The initial tuition for the community college students was 80% of the tuition at the university. By 2013, the community college baccalaureate programs only received 70% of the funding of the universities while student tuition has dropped below 50% of the university tuition (for example, the tuition at Lake Washington Institute of Technology in Kirkland, Washington, is 48% of the tuition at Washington State University). At Miami Dade College, the baccalaureate program students pay only 10% more in tuition and fees than the associate degree seeking students.

Nationally, the community college baccalaureate has demonstrated its viability as a cost-effective option to improve access for students, meet local workforce demands, reduce taxpayer cost, reduce student cost, support under-represented students, and reduce overcrowding at the state four-year institutions. A regional collaborative effort between the CSU, UC, community colleges, and industry will assure that the most appropriate baccalaureate degrees will be offered.

In California, community colleges are not authorized to offer the baccalaureate and, as in the 21 states discussed above, legislation would be required to make this change. In 2013-14, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors and Chancellor’s Office established a statewide Baccalaureate Degree Study Group to explore the issues of this possible option for the California’s community colleges. The final report of the Study Group is expected to be presented at the Community College League of California state conference in late November 2013.

Based upon the successful experience of other states, I would recommend the following as guidelines for future consideration.

1. **Mission.** The mission of community colleges should remain the same, with a focus on transfer and career technical education (CTE), with selected bachelor's degrees complementing the existing mission.
2. **Nature of Degrees.** The bachelor's degrees should be restricted to CTE fields and designed to address workforce needs.
3. **Duplication.** Unnecessary duplication should be avoided where university programs have adequate capacity to meet the baccalaureate demand.
4. **Flexibility.** Planning for degrees should accommodate a range of options. In some cases, 2+2 programs, in which community colleges and universities work in partnership to provide an articulated ladder to the baccalaureate degree, would be an effective format. In other cases, especially where university access is not available or where university programs are impacted, the preferable option would be for community colleges to offer the bachelor's degree.
5. **Process and Approval.** A process should be developed for identification and approval of community college bachelor's degrees that would include oversight by the three systems of higher education (California Community Colleges, University of California, and California State University system), as well as appropriate accreditation authorization by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges and/or Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities.
6. **Quality Assurance.** Just as associate degree requirements and curriculum are formally articulated with the universities, the degree requirements and curriculum for the community college baccalaureate degrees should also be reviewed and articulated with the universities. Professional associations and specialized accreditation should also be part of this process.
7. **Legislation.** Since this would require a change in mission, legislation will be required to authorize the program, probably beginning with a pilot program.

Given the changes and demands of industry, educational formats that were used fifty to a hundred years ago no longer provide a competitive pathway for our students, as 21 other states have addressed, and as our students are now experiencing when they are turned away from job opportunities or forced to go into debt in pursuit of private educational options. The time to turn this corner and authorize California's community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees is now.