The Commission’s Vision for Postsecondary Education

Where there is no vision, the people perish. — Proverbs 29:18

If I have seen further [than you and Descartes],
it is by standing upon the shoulders of Giants.

-- Sir Isaac Newton, Letter to Robert Hooke, 1676

EDUCATION is the State of California’s most important function. It is the prerequisite for the existence of democratic institutions, the motive force behind economic growth, the preserver of culture, the foundation for rational discourse, and the guarantor of civilization. No democracy ever survived, no economy ever prospered, and no culture ever advanced without a healthy educational system. All that Californians regard as valuable, useful, or productive, even noble, can trace its roots to an elementary, secondary and postsecondary educational system once thought to be without equal.

In the California of the 1990s, postsecondary education is in danger of eroding into mediocrity. For four years, postsecondary education has been starved for resources, and the results are beginning to appear. In the face of rapid population growth, postsecondary education institutions have experienced lost classes and programs, higher class sizes, faculty layoffs, huge tuition and fee increases, declining enrollments, shrinking financial aid, and a growing obsolescence in buildings and equipment. Even more than such measurable signs as these, the greatest losses may be in morale and commitment: the evidence is mounting that many in higher education are losing hope.

The leaders of our colleges and universities have taken significant steps to adjust to the tightened fiscal conditions in which they must operate. They have trimmed administrative staffing and expenditures, deferred badly needed plant maintenance and repairs, reduced expenditures on instructional support equipment and library purchases, reduced or constrained growth in student enrollment, reduced staffing throughout the system -- including faculty -- and initiated very painful strategies to eliminate and consolidate entire academic programs. These kinds of actions cannot continue unabated without placing postsecondary education seriously at risk.

The Commission believes that it is more than postsecondary education that is at risk; it is California’s future. If the State is to meet the challenges of the twenty-

Item C.1
June 23, 1994
first century, then fundamental reforms must occur -- reforms that will reorder fiscal priorities and restore higher education’s prominence among the array of public goods and services. Some of those reforms will necessarily be internal, since higher education itself must find new ways to conduct its business more efficiently, but savings and efficiencies alone will not be enough. As the higher education members of the Education Roundtable put it:

Time is running out. For the sake of tomorrow’s students, for the economic future of California, we cannot continue dismantling our colleges and universities under the cumulative force of deep annual budget reductions. To do so will surely signal the tragic demise of the higher education system we inherited from our predecessors. California’s children -- indeed all Californians -- deserve much better.

California must face the fact that the future is now. We must not only learn to do things differently, we also must learn to do different things. Accordingly, the Commission believes that the changes needed today to reposition education at the center of California’s social and economic prosperity must be guided by a common vision of the very best within the Californian spirit.

California requires a cohesive system of education -- public and private -- guided by a clear set of expectations, collaboration between and among institutions, and public accountability for institutional performance. This system of education must receive adequate levels of financing to assure all Californians who are prepared to benefit from it high quality education and training that equips them to participate fully in a democratic society, recognize and value the unique benefits of diversity, and contribute to a continually changing economic workplace. Constant, purposeful innovation must be the one steady characteristic in this educational system to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in meeting public expectations and preserving the highest standards of quality in educational offerings.

The expectations that California should have of its educational institutions and the responsibilities of all who benefit from their existence spring from this vision. The Commission explicates its planning priorities for postsecondary education in the pages below.
Outcome Expectations for Postsecondary Education

(This section will include contextual narrative summarizing the fact that there are few, if any, concise goals or outcomes specified for our postsecondary education institutions -- with the possible exception of universal access. As a consequence, no basis exists for judging whether those outcomes are satisfactory or not. We will then offer the Commission's global recommendations on what should be expected from our postsecondary institutions in at least the following areas:

- Goals for postsecondary education;
- Student learning, with a focus on value added to students' ability to apply rationality to life;
- Workforce preparation and retraining; and
- Institutional accountability/performance, with a focus on public accountability of postsecondary institutions and student information system requirements.

It is expected that each of these recommendations will be preceded or followed by a brief narrative that clarifies the issue being addressed and why the recommendation makes sense.)
3
Educational Planning and Collaboration

(This section will provide background information that summarizes the historical tendency and/or incentives for the educational enterprise to operate as independent sectors, cooperating with each other only as needed or required by legislative direction. It should set the stage for a conclusion that this is inherently a wasteful, adversarial, and frequently duplicative operation. It will further make the case that the Commission believes priority must be given to more explicit collaboration between and among the various sectors of education.

At a minimum, recommendations should address the following areas:

- Developing incentives for all of education to establish and pilot test new educational delivery systems — including distance learning and use of multimedia technology — and strategies for achieving operational efficiencies;
- Strategies for reducing student time-to-degree, including subject-mastery testing, pilot projects to shorten time-to-degree, and improved use of high school years; and
- Shared use of facilities and instructional resources among campuses — both public and private — within geographic proximity to each other.

It is expected that each of these recommendations will be preceded or followed by a brief narrative that clarifies the issue being addressed and why the recommendation makes sense. There should also be acknowledgment — where appropriate — of the efforts that have already been made by the various sectors to engage in greater collaboration and cooperation, albeit insufficient in the face of the tremendous fiscal exigencies they face.)
Financing
Postsecondary Education

(This section will provide background information on the eroding financial condition of postsecondary education, particularly over the past five years, and some of the more apparent consequences of that financial erosion. It should set the stage for global recommendations that touch upon how postsecondary education should be financed and cover at least the following areas:

- The need to modify or eliminate existing constraints on how California is able to generate and expend the revenue needed to finance public goods and services.

- The need to develop a mechanism or strategy for public financing of postsecondary education that is tied to enrollment goals and that identifies the proportional responsibility of State and local government, as well as students and their families, for this financing.

- State policy for financial aid that assures the capacity of the State to do what it must to assure access to postsecondary education for poor Californians -- provided they have prepared themselves to benefit from it.

It is expected that each of these recommendations will be preceded or followed by a brief narrative that clarifies the issue being addressed and why the recommendation makes sense.)
Setting Priorities

(This section will provide the contextual background on the challenges faced by California’s educational system brought on by the tremendous demographic, economic and technological changes occurring in the state and the rest of the world. It should make the case that even the best efforts to redesign our educational delivery systems and enhance efficiencies from our institutions will be insufficient to comply fully with the social contract embodied in our Master Plan for Higher Education. The Commission’s recommendations, then, should cover at least the following areas:

- The setting of priorities for access to postsecondary education if all who desire and can benefit from attendance cannot be accommodated.

- Ways by which independent colleges and universities, private and vocational institutions, and other states with excess postsecondary education capacity can and should be used to accommodate demand by Californians for education beyond high school.

- Steps the Legislature and Governor should take to reestablish their collective capacity to appropriate funding for postsecondary education consistent with the priority assigned to it by the general public.

It is expected that each of these recommendations will be preceded or followed by a brief narrative that clarifies the issue being addressed and why the recommendation makes sense.)
Summary Statement

This section should conclude the report with a restatement of the most important message the Commission wishes to convey. It should also reflect the Commission's belief that adopting and following a well-conceived plan (such as the one we just laid out) provides reason to expect a more optimistic and prosperous future than recent historical trends would suggest.