

March 12, 2010

Good Conversations

Most of you are aware that our college has been undergoing a set of significant discussions culminating in a “vote of no confidence” resolution undertaken by our Academic Senate against Mesa’s Vice President of Instruction. This action was shared by the Academic Senate with all members of the President’s Cabinet on Tuesday, March 9. The discussion that ensued in President’s Cabinet, while sensitive and difficult, was one of the best illustrations of why open and honest debate of matters that deeply concern all involved is so salutary. I wish to commend all who contributed to the discussion in such an honest and authentic manner, and in particular, our Academic Senate leaders and Vice President McGrath. The most important thing to say about President’s Cabinet is the fact that we acted as colleagues and partners – rededicating ourselves to the importance of “Shared Governance” and its appropriate application. We committed to begin with a re-evaluation of our participatory governance process with one goal in mind; namely, “how do we do the best we can to address the difficult fiscal realities ahead so that we can serve our students and community better.”

Rita in Sacramento

Yesterday, March 10, at the invitation of the Joint Legislative Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education, I presented testimony on the importance of intersegmental coordination of the transfer process. I have taken the liberty of reproducing the text of my presentation below. I am happy to say that it was apparently well received.

Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education

Senator Gloria Negrete McLeod and Assemblyman Ira Ruskin Co-Chairs

Testimony of

Rita M. Cepeda, Ed.D.

President, San Diego Mesa College

March 10, 2010 Hearing

Focus: Eligibility, Admission, Articulation and Coordination

There are no villains, only victims...

I am Rita Cepeda, President of San Diego Mesa College and I am honored to be given the

opportunity to present along with colleagues on the topics of eligibility, admission, articulation and coordination. My comments will focus on one aspect of intersegmental coordination most critical to the majority of students enrolled in public postsecondary institutions in the state of

California; namely, transfer. The perspectives I will share are shaped by a thirty-year history in California Community Colleges, the first eighteen years of which were spent in the California Community Colleges State Chancellor's Office and the last twelve years as a college president. In addition, I have been fortunate to have served as Chair of the Intersegmental Coordinating Committee (ICC) and, subsequently, as Chair of ICC's Transfer Sub-Committee. I offer this background to set the context for my remarks as a direct participant observer in the development of transfer policies and processes in this State. What follows is not a scholarly piece of research; it is, however, the considered perspective of an individual who has participated actively in the development and implementation of transfer policies and programs for nearly three decades, and someone who has reached the conclusion that the time for tinkering around the edges is over.

Some Transfer History

Since the passage of the Master Plan 50 years ago, numerous legislative committees have struggled with the topic of intersegmental coordination and the ways and means to create a seamless pipeline for students Pre-K through G (graduate school). Moreover, while there have been countless well meaning, committed and dedicated individuals who have worked arduously on this problem, success continues to evade our grasp as we "tinker" around the edges – adding, deleting, amending, revising, reengineering, restructuring, and at times, renegeing on painfully drafted agreements.

In 1985, The Master Plan for Higher Education firmly established transfer as a priority for California colleges and universities. Between 1986 and 1987, the Commission for the Review of the Master Plan released two reports with over 100 recommendations focused on community colleges and transfer to four-year institutions (Legislative Analyst's Office, November 2009). A quarter of a century later, the literature on the topic of transfer and intersegmental coordination in California is quite abundant and would fill a small library. It is not that we do not know what needs to be done to improve the transfer function; the problem lies in finding the political will to implement a common framework that is uniformly accepted.

Some of the most pertinent reports on the topic of transfer have been produced by the California Community Colleges State Chancellor's Office, primarily in response to legislative mandates such as those established with the passage of SB 121 (Hart) signed into law in 1991. The Hart Bill made it clear that a strong transfer function was the shared responsibility of the California Community Colleges, the California State University and the University of California. It was clear even then that transfer was critically an interdependent function; however, the majority of policy makers continue to view it as the primary responsibility of community colleges.

In response to SB 121, the California Community Colleges, California State University and the University of California agreed on a "Statement of Common Principles" for strengthening the transfer process. In addition, in 1995, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) titled "Enhancing Student Transfer" was signed between the then Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, Tom Nussbaum, and Richard Atkinson, President of the University of California. This MOU addressed the need for cooperation in order to improve articulation procedures, created an official statewide repository of articulation information, later dubbed the Articulation System Stimulating Inter-institutional Student Transfer (ASSIST), called for the

reinvigoration of transfer center partnerships, the need to increase data collection and exchange, the creation of more part-time student options at the University of California, and the development of cooperative admission programs targeting UC-eligible high school students that chose to complete lower division course work at a community college. In 2005, a similar MOU was signed between the California Community Colleges and National University.

The Chancellor's Office has also issued several grants over the years designed to develop model practices to advance various aspects of the transfer process. Among them was the development of a "Transfer Awareness Campaign" aimed at middle schools to ensure early awareness about transfer, the creation of a Transfer Counselor Webpage, and a research repository including promising practices throughout community colleges in California.

Most recently, the Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy (IHELP), under the leadership of Dr. Nancy Shulock, has produced a series of reports replete with data, assumptions, findings and recommendations in this area, the most pertinent of which include: California Community College Transfer Rates: Policy Implications and a Future Research Agenda (February 2003), Capacity Constraints in California's Public Universities: A Factor Impeding Transfer? (September 2003), Diminishing Access to the Baccalaureate through Transfer, The Impact of State Policies and Implications for California (April 2004), and, Crafting a Student Centered-Transfer Process in California: Lessons from other States (August 2009.)

The Intersegmental Coordinating Committee (ICC), the staff arm to the California Education Roundtable, has also facilitated forums for intersegmental discussions on transfer, conducted regional studies, and produced reports and recommendations for the Roundtable and for the leaders of each of the segments of public postsecondary education and Independent Colleges and Universities. The ICC produced a foundational report titled, Transfer: An Intersegmental Analysis with Recommendations for Improvement (July 2004). The recommendations resulting from this report were categorized in three areas:

- Viability of the Transfer Function—Is it working?
- Student Access to Higher Education through the Transfer Function—Are all students wishing to transfer able to do so?; and,
- Increased Capacity in Higher Education through Better Use of the Transfer Function—Is there room in California's colleges and universities for all transfer students?

The recommendations in this report were reviewed and revised in July, 2009, informed by a series of regional visits conducted by the ICC, and, while this report was first released in 2004, the topics identified are the same topics facing us today. Unfortunately, despite the passage of six years the answer to each of the questions raised above is "no."

It is clear then that there is no dearth of recommendations, guidelines, and frameworks for the development of proposed legislation, policies and procedures. What is still lacking is a definitive requirement imposed statewide to guarantee transfer. We have goodwill, infinite intellectual

vitality, scholarly research, model programs, websites, databases, strategies, MOUs, agreements and principles, and, despite all of that, we still have a serious disjuncture in the transfer process.

As state resources for public postsecondary education decrease and enrollment management tightens around firmly established goals – not to increase but to decrease enrollment – more and more students find themselves in “transfer limbo.” There are many paths to transfer limbo and many start with well-meaning and initially well thought-out agreements. I have worked arduously with intersegmental colleagues, side by side, thinking that we may have found the way to create an efficient transfer path. Unfortunately in most cases, problems arise as these agreements are refined, revised or suspended depending on the ebb and flow of the state budget.

In April, 2009, the Intersegmental Committee of Academic Senates (ICAS) produced a thoughtful report, *Facilitating Community College Transfer: A Master Plan Mandate*. It described transfer as “a complex process to bring into coherence – one that defies simple or low-cost solutions.” The report went on to identify some of the factors that make transfer complex:

- The California Community Colleges (CCC)s serve a diverse body of over 2.5 million students.
- Two-thirds of all CSU students and one-third of all UC students begin their careers in a CCC.
- Each of those student’s preparations and ambitions has to be coordinated and aligned to transfer opportunities via services offered at 110 (now 112) different CCCs.
- The system of transfer opportunities is vast and differentiated: 23 unique CSU campuses and 9 distinct UC campuses with multiple and specialized major programs across the campuses.

In response to these layers of complexity, intersegmental partners have developed numerous avenues in our search to simplify the transfer process. Below are some of the paths we set out for students; however it is important to note that none come with a “real guarantee,” only the possibility of increasing the chances for transfer.

- TAG – Transfer Admission Guarantee
- UC –TCA – University of California Transfer Course Agreement
- IGETC/GE – Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum
- LDTP – Lower Division Transfer Pattern
- Deferred TAG – New option offered to UC and CSU-eligible high school students who could not be admitted because of budget constraints and enrollment reduction goals.

Despite well-meaning efforts, as of this date, March 10, 2010, students still find themselves trapped in transfer limbo. Representative profiles of the students I speak to daily include:

Group A – High school students who, upon graduation, are eligible to attend the University of California or the California State University; nevertheless, these students are denied admission because of enrollment caps, impacted programs or simply because newly established service areas for their local four-year college place them just outside those boundaries. These students (1,700 in the case of CSU, San Diego alone) are now redirected to their local community college under a new category of deferred transfer. These students are provided with a document called a “Deferred Transfer Agreement” that provides the possibility of admission provided these students complete the necessary course work in three years. Still, this agreement is not a guarantee.

Group B – Redirected students who enroll in community colleges but cannot find all the courses needed to fit their schedule, who map out an educational plan for completion of lower division course work and find that it may take three to four years to complete the work given course availability.

Group C – Redirected students who have completed all the requirements at the local community college and find that in three years of enrollment, the rules have changed, the deadlines have changed, articulation course agreements have changed, GPA requirements have changed and, even if they are fortunate enough to gain admission to a four-year institution, they may still linger on the outskirts because admission to their major may still be barred because of impactation in that particular discipline. There is the option of waiting until there is room, thus extending “time to degree” completion.

Group D – Students similar to those in Group A, except that the choice to attend a community college was made by the student at the beginning of the planning stage, particularly as they considered issues of cost, access, and proximity to their home or place of work. With due diligence, these students map out a course of study to fulfill existing TAG (Transfer Admissions Guarantee) and find at the end of their course of study that there is simply “no room at the inn.” They are told by the receiving institution that they are on a priority list for next semester; however, the order of priority may be subject to slight adjustments in order to comply with enrollment management protocols and procedures in coming years. Once again, there is no guarantee.

Group E – Students who start their education at a community college are significantly under-prepared for college-level work, so they enroll in several basic skills courses, spend nearly a year before becoming proficient, and map-out a process to meet transfer requirements established by the local four-year college. They have few options because they are geographically bound by financial, family, and employment reasons; complete all transfer requirements at the end of the fall semester but find that mid-year transfer in the spring semester is no longer available – it is closed as an enrollment management strategy. These students then have to battle critics who want to know why they have “excess units.” What would you do?

The time for “tinkering” around the edges is over.

We must stop “tinkering” around the edges. We must accept that revisions and amendments, however well meaning, have only created layer upon layer of confusion. Counseling faculty

members and transfer advisors no longer trust their course articulation databases, transfer agreement patterns, or major preparation requirements.

The state of California is painfully aware of the fact that, given the current state of affairs, we will not produce the number of baccalaureate-holding individuals to sustain the workforce needs of the state. It is estimated that by 2025 “there will be one million fewer college graduates than are needed in the workforce” (Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy, August 2009). It is also clear that the pathway to the baccalaureate for the majority of Californians is through the community colleges. Finally, we are also clear that the transfer pathway, despite all the effort and discussion by truly committed intersegmental partners, is clearly more akin to an obstacle course and one that changes periodically depending on the budgetary circumstances of the state of California.

It is not however all about budget. It has been said about our State that our strength is the autonomy and independence enjoyed by our public postsecondary institutions. This strength is also our weakness, clearly evidenced by our inability to establish a coordinated, stable pathway for our students to facilitate the achievement of their educational goals in a timely, cost-effective, and efficient manner.

We know what should be done and we know it has been done in other states. In Florida, for example, enabling legislation that established the associate degree as a transfer degree to be recognized by all public universities has been in place since 1971. Other states include Arizona, New Jersey, Oregon, and Washington. These states have found ways to address and accommodate the governance, curricular and procedural aspects of transfer thereby establishing a real guarantee for their students.

The time for working around the edges of a complex problem is over; in fact it is past due. The time for discussion about course-to-course articulation, debates over excess units, and deferred agreements is over. We must have the courage to accept fundamental, structural, procedural and fiscal policy changes in three basic areas:

- Capacity, including not just seating space and buildings, but also resources to maintain quality in our educational delivery programs.
- Establishment of a Transfer Associate degree which is universally accepted in complete fulfillment of lower division transfer requirements guaranteeing junior standing for all students.
- Elimination of funding policies that constrain transfer in all segments of public postsecondary education.

We have worked hard to cooperate intersegmentally and now we must accept the fact that statewide legislative mandates are necessary if we are to establish a credible framework for future work. Our students cannot wait any longer, and the state cannot afford and cannot survive the current state of intersegmental disconnect.

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*Note: All updates are posted on the San Diego Mesa College Website at:
<http://sdmesa.edu/president/updates.cfm>*

Rita M. Cepeda, Ed.D.

President

San Diego Mesa College