

January 17, 2018

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**RE: CSU Graduation Initiative 2025 Progress**

Provision 1.3 of Item 6610-001-001 of the Budget Act of 2017 requires the California State University (CSU) to report to the Legislature no later than January 15, 2018, regarding (a) Opportunities for campuses to make more courses available by reducing the number of units earned in excess of degree requirements **AND** (b) The specific activities undertaken, and spending for each activity undertaken, to meet the state's goals for student success, including activities to close achievement gaps by improving outcomes for low-income students, first-generation college students, and students from underrepresented minority groups.

In response to this requirement, enclosed is a report detailing efforts undertaken by the CSU in support of Graduation Initiative 2025. Should you have any questions about this report, please contact Nathan Evans, chief of staff and senior advisor, Academic and Student Affairs at (562) 951-4624 or [nevans@calstate.edu](mailto:nevans@calstate.edu).

**CSU Campuses**

Bakersfield  
Channel Islands  
Chico  
Dominguez Hills  
East Bay

Fresno  
Fullerton  
Humboldt  
Long Beach  
Los Angeles  
Maritime Academy

Monterey Bay  
Northridge  
Pomona  
Sacramento  
San Bernardino  
San Diego

San Francisco  
San José  
San Luis Obispo  
San Marcos  
Sonoma  
Stanislaus

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Loren J. Blanchard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L".

Loren J. Blanchard  
Executive Vice Chancellor

LJB:nse

Full report posted to [www.calstate.edu/budget/fybudget/legislative-reports/](http://www.calstate.edu/budget/fybudget/legislative-reports/)

- c: Members, California State Legislature (if applicable)
  - Paul Steenhausen, Principal Fiscal & Policy Analyst, Legislative Analyst's Office
  - Timothy P. White, Chancellor, California State University
  - Loren J. Blanchard, Executive Vice Chancellor, Academic and Student Affairs
  - Garrett Ashley, Vice Chancellor, University Relations and Advancement
  - Ryan Storm, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Budget
  - Kathleen Chavira, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Advocacy & State Relations
  - Kara Perkins, Executive Budget Director
  - Nathan Evans, Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor, Academic and Student Affairs

## Graduation Initiative 2025 Progress

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### *Student Success Activities and Opportunities*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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The California State University (CSU) is more than a year into Graduation Initiative 2025, its ambitious plan to ensure student success, increase graduation rates and eliminate achievement and equity gaps for all students. Through this initiative, the CSU is ensuring that all students have the opportunity to graduate in a timely manner, positively impacting their lives, families and communities. In doing so, the CSU will continue to fulfill its founding mission to produce the graduates needed to power California's future prosperity.

As the nation's largest and most diverse four-year public university system, the CSU plays an essential role in driving the economy and innovation in California and the United States. Indeed, half of California's teachers earn their credentials through the CSU and more than half of all California bachelor's degrees in agriculture, public administration, engineering, criminal justice and business are earned at the CSU.

The CSU's role in California's higher education framework has never been more important. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, the state faces a deficit of 1.1 million bachelor's degrees by 2030. With sufficient annual investment of new general funds to grow enrollment and support student success, Graduation Initiative 2025 will allow the CSU to meet its share of the projected workforce need, graduating an additional 500,000 students by 2025. The achievements would mark a doubling of four-year graduation rates.

While every student will benefit from the collective effort driving Graduation Initiative 2025, the CSU is specifically measuring progress based on six systemwide goals:

- A 40 percent 4-year freshman graduation rate
- A 70 percent 6-year freshman graduation rate
- A 45 percent 2-year transfer graduation rate
- An 85 percent 4-year transfer graduation rate
- Elimination of the graduation rate gap between Pell-eligible students and their peers
- Elimination of the graduation rate gap between underrepresented minority students and their peers.

To achieve the CSU's Graduation Initiative 2025 goals, all 23 campuses developed and are implementing individual student success plans. Simultaneously, the CSU is making systemwide changes to be even more innovative and strategic to better support students. The CSU is focused on six operational priority areas that have a tremendous impact on student success and completion, particularly addressing graduation rate gaps:

- **Academic preparation:** The CSU will provide all students, including those who arrive academically underprepared, the opportunity and support needed to complete 30 college-level semester units – 45 quarter units – before beginning their second academic year.
- **Enrollment management:** The CSU will ensure that students are able to enroll in the courses they need, when they need them.
- **Student engagement and well-being:** The CSU will continue to address the well-being of all CSU students while fostering a strong sense of belongingness on campus.

- **Financial support:** The CSU will ensure that financial need does not impede student success.
- **Data-driven decision making:** The CSU will use data-rich evidence to identify and advance the most successful academic support programs.
- **Administrative barriers:** The CSU will identify and remove unnecessary administrative impediments.

Over the past year, the CSU has made great progress toward its Graduation Initiative 2025 goals, aided by the state’s \$35 million in one-time funding. Nearly 99,000 CSU students earned their bachelor’s degree in the 2016-17 academic year. This represents an all-time high for the CSU, with an additional 7,000 students crossing the commencement stage compared to the previous year.

The progress demonstrated over the past year is due to the hard work that is occurring on campuses and systemwide as the CSU moves forward with Graduation Initiative 2025. This includes strengthening advising services to help students develop efficient academic paths, hiring more tenure-track faculty to teach additional courses and strategically targeting academic support services to students who need it most.

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## 2 MEETING THE STATE’S GOALS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

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CSU investments in Graduation Initiative 2025 are categorized into three broad areas that aim to support student success and graduation for all students, and to close the achievement gaps for low-income students, first-generation students and students from underrepresented minority groups:

- Hiring additional tenure-track faculty and offering more course sections
- Hiring new advisors
- Investing in student and academic support programs to close the achievement gap

At the close of the fall 2017 term, CSU campuses reported on these areas with total new investments of more than \$88 million. Campuses re-prioritized existing budgets, and with the addition of \$75 million in new funding for the 2017-18 fiscal year, were able to achieve the goals endorsed by the CSU Board of Trustees to hire 400 new faculty, offer 3,000 additional course sections, add academic advisors and invest in programs specific to reducing time to degree and closing the achievement gap.

### 2.1 FACULTY HIRING AND OFFERING MORE COURSE SECTIONS - \$46 MILLION

The CSU continues to hire new tenure-track faculty, including replacing those faculty who retire or leave for other opportunities. Adding net-new faculty to improve tenure density within our faculty ranks, while also ensuring we have enough faculty to meet the needs of our student course demands, is critical as we work toward our Graduation Initiative 2025 goals. New tenure-track faculty and lecturers are key

to achieving the second goal of offering more sections so average unit load can increase for all undergraduates.

### **2.0.1 Tenure-Track Faculty Hiring**

For the 2017-18 academic year, preliminary data show that more than 700 new tenure-track faculty were hired, with another 700 searches underway. Of those, approximately 25 percent represent new positions above retirements and separations. This equates to nearly 400 new tenure-track faculty positions already added across the CSU in 2017-18, with an estimated total cost of just over \$46 million.

### **2.0.2 Adding Course Sections**

With the addition of new faculty, each campus can offer additional course sections. As a result, students have more access to the classes they need to graduate and are able to enroll in more units each term. In addition to tenure-track faculty, campuses hire thousands of lecturers to teach anywhere from one to five sections per term. In the 2017-18 academic year, campuses have added more than 3,200 new course sections.

In one example, CSU Sacramento's "Finish in Four" and "Through in Two" programs encourage students to earn a degree in four years (for first-time freshmen) or two years (for transfer students). As a result of the campus' efforts, the number of first-year students taking 15 units or more during fall semester has risen from 27 percent in 2013 to 84 percent in 2017. To help ensure these students can enroll in the courses they need, CSU Sacramento added 658 course sections this past year.

## **2.2 INVESTING IN ADVISING - \$18.2 MILLION**

One of the primary strategies for improving completion rates is providing greater access for students to their advisors to have a clear roadmap to graduation. As a student moves through their academic career at the CSU, the ability to regularly meet with an advisor and get timely information about course opportunities and scheduling are critical to success. Even with stronger technology-based tools available, regular engagement and communication with an advisor is a best practice for student success, especially for first-generation students.

With Graduation Initiative 2025 funding for 2017-18, campuses are continuing to reduce their student-to-advisor ratios. In so doing, 142 advisors have already been hired, and another 86 searches are open or will open in the coming months. These 228 new staff members will be a critical component in closing achievement gaps and helping all students navigate through general education and into their majors. The investment in these new positions totals more than \$18 million.

Campuses are also thinking more strategically about how best to ensure students can access advising. For example, San Diego State is changing its class registration process, moving registration earlier in the semester. Beginning with the fall 2018 semester, this change will make it easier for students to meet with advisors and develop academic schedules during critical pre-registration periods.

## **2.3 STUDENT AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMS - \$24.2 MILLION**

Campuses continue to develop and refine their academic and student support programs to ensure that they are meeting the changing needs of their unique student populations. In 2017-18, with an emphasis on closing achievement gaps, campuses are spending approximately \$24.2 million on these efforts.

### **2.0.1 Focusing on Academic Support**

Student academic support – including learning centers, tutoring centers, supplemental instruction and the redesign of high-demand, high-failure rate courses to improve student outcomes – remain institutional priorities. CSU campuses have shown the value of these efforts on improvement of student course outcomes, with the largest gains often attained by students from historically underserved communities.

### **2.0.2 Investing in Mentoring Programs**

Campuses have invested in mentoring programs (peers, alumni, faculty, staff and administrators) that allow for development of greater connectivity to the university and its community. Students gain a better sense of how their experiences, challenges and opportunities are like those experienced by their mentors and at the same time gain the advantage of potential paths to success that might otherwise have gone unseen. These programs increase academic and social integration with the university and have been shown to improve student outcomes for all students and particularly for students from historically underserved communities.

Campuses have invested in mentoring programs created in response to the recognized national need to address African American and Latino males' success, persistence and graduation rates. For example, Cal Poly Pomona used a portion of its funding to invest in its Project SUCCESS. Now in its second year, Project SUCCESS is mentoring male African American and Latino students, connecting them with faculty, staff, alumni and the community to help them successfully navigate the educational process.

### **2.0.3 Incentivizing Intersession and Summer Session Enrollment**

Offering courses in winter/spring intersession and summer session provides students additional opportunities to enroll in the classes they need for graduation, allowing a student to increase the number of units they complete each year if they so desire. Campuses are offering seniors nearing graduation financial support or incentives to encourage enrollment in intersession and summer session. This financial support – beyond the traditional student financial aid package – enables students to complete their degree in the summer when they otherwise would have been delayed at least one additional term.

Based on available resources, CSU campuses have shown the value of financial incentives on a small scale, with larger gains made by students from historically underserved communities. At Fresno State, for example, micro-grants are available to students who are on track to graduate but face unexpected financial challenges, particularly during their last planned term of enrollment.

### **2.0.4 Reducing Administrative Barriers**

CSU campuses have also invested to reduce administrative barriers that can keep an otherwise qualified student from graduating. Through coordinated communication to – and proactive tracking of – students nearing graduation, graduation planning outreach and improvements to graduation evaluation and processing, these efforts have provided gains for students from historically underserved communities who may not otherwise understand the administrative requirements that need to be met before an earned degree is awarded.

### 2.0.5 Addressing Student Well-being

Food insecurity and housing insecurity impact many CSU students, just as each affect countless communities across the state and nation. When a students' basic needs are not addressed, it can have an impact on their personal and academic growth. Campuses have provided leadership, coordination, strategic planning and communication to address and ensure appropriate basic needs services and programs for students experiencing food or housing insecurity.

All 23 CSU campuses have a food pantry or food distribution program for students. For example, CSU Bakersfield opened its food pantry in September 2017, and by November 3, nearly 600 students had utilized the pantry. Additionally, campuses have developed emergency housing programs, and many have launched websites that list local housing and food resources available to students.

### 2.0.6 Targeted Support

To address and support the unique circumstances and needs of specific student groups, campuses have developed targeted efforts enabling them to be more responsive to their student populations. This includes staffing and support for new or expanded Dream Centers for undocumented students on more than two-thirds of CSU campuses. It also includes new and expanded initiatives for minority male outreach and support programs as well as other targeted retention programs and personalized academic support services.

### 2.0.7 Data-driven Decision Making

The CSU is making additional investments in campus data fellows programs to enhance data literacy and build educational research expertise among faculty and staff. These programs engage diverse campus constituents in meaningful inquiries to enhance student success and facilitate cross-unit/division collaboration. These efforts promote a culture of data-driven decision making through education and communication.

Data-informed campuses can identify, address and resolve issues affecting all students. For example, CSU Fullerton used a portion of its funding to develop a data dashboard that will better predict course demand, improving student access to the classes required for graduation.

### 2.0.8 Nurturing a Sense of Belonging on Campus

Campuses promote, foster and enhance self-advocacy, empowerment and leadership among students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. Integrated into programming on all campuses are efforts to raise awareness of the social, political, economic, historical and cultural realities of the CSU's diverse student populations. Student centers on CSU campuses build a strong foundation that enrich cultural identity and develop a sense of family within the campus. A sense of identity and belonging promotes retention and degree completion.

## 3 INCREASING AVAILABLE COURSES BY REDUCING THE NUMBER OF UNITS EARNED IN EXCESS OF DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

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Like institutions nationwide, the CSU regularly assesses the average and range of units taken by students completing baccalaureate degrees at their institutions. Calculations of units completed at graduation are complex, particularly considering averages across multiple institutions and an expansive

range of academic disciplines. With nearly 100,000 graduates each year, the CSU “average” represents only a high-level aggregation of the multiple pathways taken to earn a bachelor’s degree.

The CSU has taken many steps in the last five years to prioritize and emphasize the most expeditious pathways to degree, make students’ options and choices clearer, and to address areas in which the CSU could make a policy or process change to reduce administrative barriers. These efforts are integral parts of Graduation Initiative 2025, and the CSU will continue to make improvements to better serve students and provide efficient pathways to graduation.

### 3.0.1 Advisement

The CSU has improved advisor-to-student ratios and increased access to technology-enabled advising resources (eAdvising) across the system. As a result, the CSU has improved the messages and reinforcement students receive as they navigate their respective paths to degrees and made significant improvements in course availability, scheduling and sequencing.

In 2013, while all CSU campuses had rudimentary degree audit systems to allow students to verify completion of total units and basic degree requirements, only three campuses provided term-specific degree planning tools for students. By 2017, 20 campuses had implemented or are implementing degree-planning systems, with the remaining three campuses planning an implementation after their quarter-to-semester conversions are complete.

During the same period, all campuses implemented student scheduling software, allowing students to maximize their class schedule each term and better manage time constraints. For example, the [College Scheduler](#)—designed by a Chico State alumnus—is used at 21 CSU campuses and is one of many e-advising strategies used by the CSU to help place students in classes that fit their academic needs and busy schedules.

As more students begin their education at the CSU with access to these critical tools, we expect to see small, sustained and incremental decreases in excess units over time. Collectively, each of these efforts provide opportunities for individual students to make more timely progress toward their degree and accumulate only those units necessary for graduation.

### 3.0.2 Academic Programs

Through several years of intentional efforts, the CSU has successfully reduced nearly all baccalaureate degree requirements to the minimum of 120 semester units. In 2016-17, 96 percent of the more than 2,600 baccalaureate degree options and concentrations required exactly 120 semester units.

Efforts to provide more structured, formal degree pathways have also expanded across the CSU in recent years. As the CSU and the California Community Colleges work to increase the number of students transferring with a completed Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT), this will impact the total number of units completed by transfer students pursuing a CSU baccalaureate degree. The ADT pathway provides students with the opportunity to earn a bachelor’s degree by completing 60 semester units at a California community college prior to transfer and then completing 60 semester units in a similar degree program after transfer to a CSU campus. The share of new transfer students completing ADT pathways increased from 14 percent in 2014-15 to 30 percent in 2016-17. Currently, there are more than 99,000 pathways available through the ADT between the 114 California community colleges and 23 CSU campuses.

CSU campuses have also implemented and expanded the California Promise Program and similar pledge programs to provide clear, articulated plans for students who elect a structured and predictable degree plan. The California Promise Program enables CSU campuses to establish pledge programs for new students who are both interested and able to complete baccalaureate degrees in four years if they enter as freshmen, or two years as transfer students. Students who commit to enter either the four-year or two-year pledge are given priority registration for each academic year enrollment period and provided with routine academic advisement. To remain in the program, students must meet with their advisors as prescribed, develop an enrollment plan and complete 30 semester units (or the quarter equivalent) within each academic year, including summer. Participating campuses may stipulate additional requirements as well.

While some CSU campuses had existing pledge programs, the California Promise Program was formalized through legislation in September 2016. Growth in student participation is expected to result in increasing numbers of students completing baccalaureate degrees with fewer, if any, excess units.

### 3.0.3 Institutional Policies

The CSU has also taken steps to examine institutional policies and practices which impact educational equity, retention and degree completion. Work groups, comprised of students, faculty, staff and external constituents, have been tasked with examining each of the six operational priorities driving Graduation Initiative 2025 efforts to identify opportunities for institutional change to improve student success. In addition, systemwide policies directly impacting baccalaureate degrees have been reviewed and revised. For example, two executive orders (EO) were issued in August 2017 that address other policy-related barriers that could lead some students to earn excess units.

[EO 1100](#) revised systemwide General Education (GE) breadth requirements to: (1) provide clarity, (2) ensure equitable opportunity for student success and (3) facilitate timely graduation. The revised policy requires double-counting of courses which satisfy both major and GE requirements and ensures equivalent degree requirements for CSU students, regardless of entry as a first-year freshman or transfer student.

[EO 1110](#) institutes the use of multiple measures for placement in GE mathematics and English courses, so that more students begin their first semester earning units that count toward graduation.

Together, these policy changes help students streamline the path to degree, and remove policy barriers that affect student course-taking patterns.

## 3.2 REDUCING TOTAL UNITS EARNED – A SAMPLE MODEL

As the CSU continues a multifaceted approach to improve degree completion and decrease average units completed by students, it is important to consider the context and scale of the CSU. With nearly 500,000 students, the impacts of each effort will be incremental.

To illustrate the scale of the CSU, a sample model is shared to approximate the resulting full time equivalent student(s) (FTES) and class sections generated by a reduction of one earned unit by 100,000 students earning a baccalaureate degree. For comparison, in 2016-17, 98,771 bachelor's degrees were earned by CSU students. One hundred thousand degree recipients earning one fewer semester unit results in 100,000 'saved' units. These saved units would equate to 3,333 FTES preserved.

Course sections vary in size and FTES generation. For this sample, we assume a three-semester unit undergraduate course with 25 students as an approximation of an average CSU course section. The 3,333 FTES represents 1,333 additional course sections that could be offered in summer, fall, winter or spring across the 23 campuses. While the ability to offer 1,333 course sections across the CSU would provide real opportunities for students, it represents an increase of only one percent in total class sections systemwide during a college year. Assuming the additional sections are distributed proportionally across CSU campuses, increases would range from three at CSU Maritime Academy to 115 at CSU Fullerton spread across the entire college year.

### 3.3 CHANGES IN ENROLLMENT PATTERNS

Over the past five years, across the CSU, average unit load for undergraduate degree-seeking students has increased from 13.1 (fall 2013) to 13.3 (fall 2017). At the same time, undergraduate enrollments have grown from 387,000 to just over 426,000. While a two-tenths increase in units per student seems small, when combined with an increase in undergraduate students enrolled, it results in the need for more than 600,000 additional units or 40,000 additional FTES. Over that same period, state budgets provided new baseline resources for only slightly more than 5,000 of these FTES.

### 3.4 COMPLEXITIES

Student course-taking behavior and paths to degree reflect multiple and sometimes competing considerations. Some of the factors affecting course-taking behavior and total units taken over a typical undergraduate academic career include:

- Entry as a first-year student versus as a transfer student
- Student academic interests, including external requirements for certification or licensure
- Timing of declaration of a major and changes of major
- Academic advisement
- Financial aid and academic progress requirements
- General education or unique campus or degree requirements
- Course availability and sequencing
- Preparation for graduate or post-baccalaureate education
- Participation in academic research, co-curricular or extra-curricular activities
- Work commitments
- Family and other non-academic obligations and commitments.

Beyond the personal choices and preferences of students, external factors impacting student behavior also exist. Federal and state financial aid unit requirements for need-based grant aid remain an often-conflicting matter for students. To receive need-based grant aid, a student must enroll in six or more units for a partial financial aid award or twelve or more for full allocation, regardless of the actual number of units needed for the term.

With strong financial and academic advising, academic support and clear degree plans, students ultimately determine their own curricular path and, as a result, the total number of units earned at the time of their graduation.

### 3.5 LOOKING AHEAD

Each year, CSU campuses assess the average and range of units taken by students completing baccalaureate degrees. As a result of actions taken by campuses and systemwide – coupled with ongoing Graduation Initiative 2025 efforts – units per earned degree in the CSU should continue to decline in the near term in small and incremental, but measurable, ways.

Campus investments in academic advisors and the use of degree-planning and advisement tools coupled with course and space management tools should result in improved student progress to degree. Increased student participation in more structured degree plans, such as the ADT and California Promise Program will also likely contribute to ongoing, incremental decreases in excess units completed. Further, purposeful campus efforts to ensure strong starts by new undergraduates through improved orientations and student communications focused on timely degree should further reduce units per earned degree. And finally, elimination of pre-baccalaureate quantitative reasoning and written communication courses in favor of supported baccalaureate credit courses should also provide additional declines in units per earned degree.

## 4 CONCLUSION

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When Chancellor Timothy P. White officially launched Graduation Initiative 2025 in January 2016, he contended that “a student’s chances of graduating should not be determined by their family income or their ethnicity but by their willingness to work hard and our determination to help them achieve their goals.”

Two years later, the CSU is even more focused on providing all students the opportunity and support to be successful, earn a degree in a timely manner and reach their life and career goals. This report details a number of actions taken systemwide and by campuses, including investments in additional faculty, advisors and courses, and efforts to provide students efficient pathways to a degree. While expansive, the actions described in this report represent only a fraction of the ongoing and innovative work occurring throughout the entire CSU in support of this initiative.

Through the continued efforts of the CSU and its faculty and staff – reliant upon predictable, sustainable and sufficient state investment – Graduation Initiative 2025 will continue to improve outcomes for all students, allowing them to grow, innovate, teach and build an inclusive and prosperous California.