CSSA

Cal State Student

ASSOCIATION

Policy Agenda
2020

The Cal State Student Association (CSSA) is a student-led advocacy organization that has been an unrelenting force in higher education advocacy and student representation in the CSU system, state and federal levels. Recognized by the California State Legislature and California State University (CSU) Board of Trustees as the official voice of CSU Students, we exist because of and represent the collective needs and interests of the over 480,000 students of the CSU. Consisting of student leaders from the 23 CSU Campuses, we lead change through our values of servant leadership, stewardship, and social justice and educational equity.

This year, the CSSA Board of Directors has affirmed the critical four areas that will inform our work of pursuing student-centered higher education policies and strategies. As precedented by student leaders of recent years, ensuring an affordable, sustainable, equitable and holistic educational experience that promotes student success and well-being continues to be a priority for our students. Acknowledging the need for students to be involved in this critical year of 2020 in a variety of areas that impact our future, we have set a new priority to foster inclusive civic engagement for CSU students to find agency in their campus, community and governmental affairs.

We have a mission to improve the lives of CSU students by engaging in advocacy for student needs and amplify the voices of students in higher-education policymaking and hope to share your partnership in this endeavor.

Michael Wiafe
President, Cal State Student Association
2019/2020

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MISSION & VALUES

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As the officially recognized voice of the over 480,000 California State University (CSU) students at the 23 CSU campuses across the state, **the mission of the Cal State Student Association (CSSA) as a student-led organization strives to improve the lives of California State University (CSU) students by advocating for student needs and engaging students in systemwide, state, and federal higher education policymaking.**

In order to achieve its mission, CSSA believes that the following values must serve as the foundation for all decision-making and strategic activities:

Social Justice & Educational Equity. CSSA will pursue its mission guided by the belief that social injustices resulting from various forms of oppression must be addressed by ensuring that the CSU and systems that influence outcomes for CSU students are justly organized to remove barriers to success for underserved and marginalized communities.

Servant Leadership. CSSA will pursue its mission guided by the belief that our purpose in our leadership roles is to serve the communities to which we belong with empathy and care.

Stewardship. CSSA will pursue its mission through the responsible, transparent, and prudent management of human and financial resources entrusted to us by CSU students through the Student Involvement & Representation Fee (SIRF).

PRIORITY 1

Enable access to housing, food, and wellness resources that promote overall student health and safety.
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CSU students face many challenges outside of their academic courses, including food and housing insecurity, a lack of access to mental health resources, and physical dangers within the surrounding areas. While the effects of these issues are widely felt, the burdens are inequitably carried by underrepresented minority (URM) students and those from low-income backgrounds. While 41.6% of CSU students across the system have reported being food insecure and 10.9% reported experiencing homelessness, students who identified as both first-generation and African-American experienced higher rates of these basic needs insecurities, with 65.9% of this population reporting food insecurity and 18% reporting homelessness.

According to the 2016 National College Health Assessment (NCHA) survey, students of color and students of non-binary gender within the CSU were most likely to report facing threats to their safety, health, and wellness. African-American students were twice as likely to face physical assault as other students, and non-binary and African-American students were most likely to report that discrimination had impeded their academic performance. Off campus, students also face inequitable challenges to their overall well-being. The NCHA survey found that Asian/Pacific-Islander, Hispanic/Latino, non-binary, and female students felt significantly less comfortable in the campus' surrounding community than the rest of the student population.

In the NCHA survey, CSU students reported mental health issues such as hopelessness (50%), exhaustion (80%), depression (36%), and anxiety (57%), with non-binary students and students of color reporting at higher levels than average. Although only 14% of respondents indicated that they had utilized on-campus mental health resources in the past, the fact that 75% of all respondents indicated that they would consider seeking help from a mental health professional in the future demonstrates the desire and need for sufficient mental health services. Universities must be ready to meet this need with accessible services that reflect the diversity of the campus community.

In order to address inequities in academic success, wellness resources such as mental health counseling, food pantries, and emergency housing services must be expanded to meet the needs of these most vulnerable populations. A 2017 resolution from the CSU Board of Trustees urged increased support for undocumented students, including expanded mental health resources. And according to a 2018 report from the office of the California State Assembly Speaker Rendon, there is low awareness of helpful programs such as CalFresh, emergency

housing, and food pantries on CSU campuses. Across all campuses, more than half of students reported being unaware of a food pantry on their campus and 71% were unaware of emergency services for students experiencing housing insecurity. Students in need of such resources often have lives that do not fit within regular business hours and may struggle to access resources at all due to non-academic responsibilities and conflicts such as off-campus work, family obligations, long commutes, lack of information and community knowledge of resource availability, and fear of the social stigma associated with these struggles.

PRIORITY 2

Ensure that the CSU is accessible, affordable, and sustainable.

The California Master Plan for Higher Education of 1960 outlined the unique role of the CSU, which included providing access to the top 33% of high school graduates. Since 2000, the CSU system has grown undergraduate enrollment from approximately 292,000 to almost 430,000 to meet the increasing demands for a CSU education from high school graduates who meet eligibility requirements. Despite that dramatic growth, the CSU has not been able to keep pace with the growing demand as more high school graduates have become eligible for admission (41%) than the Master Plan allotted (33%). The limited capacity for the CSU to accommodate the additional students is demonstrated by the number of eligible California students who have been denied admission in recent years. The data also suggests that certain groups may be disproportionately affected, with the African-American student population declining from 6.1% (or 22,167 students) of the total undergraduate student body across the system in 2008 to only 4.1% (or 17,607) in 2017--this in spite of the percentage of African-American high school graduates eligible for CSU admissions increasing over the same period.

For the students who do gain access to the CSU, many of them encounter hurdles to affording the total costs that come with pursuing a college degree. Although the Master Plan also prioritized the affordability of public higher education in California, currently too many CSU graduates are leaving with significant student loan debt--the majority of whom are from annual family incomes of less than $27,000 and are not paying tuition. Those students on average are still leaving with nearly the same amount of debt as students whose tuition is not covered, showing that the affordability challenges facing low-income students are not adequately being met. Rising non-tuition costs have proven to be detrimental for college affordability, shown by the 44% increase in California's median rent since 2006 compared to the 8% increase in Cal Grant B, which is intended to help low-income students cover non-tuition costs like food, transportation, books, and housing.

The success of CSU students is tied to the sustainability of the CSU system--both financially and environmentally. State funding and the state budget process itself have created a number of challenges for the CSU system that ultimately impact the success of CSU students. It certainly is a major concern that as both enrollment at the CSU has increased and the cost to educate CSU students has increased, the state's share of covering that total cost has decreased--forcing students to cover the difference by way of tuition increases. It is just as problematic that the unpredictability of the state budget requires the CSU system and its students to expend resources every year trying to convince the state that the CSU is a unique and valuable resource

to our state and the nation. Not only does a lack of state investment directly impact students, but it also creates challenges to the system improving campus facilities and positioning the CSU to be as environmentally sustainable as possible.

It's important that policies and procedures continue to address the needs of California students desirous of accessing an affordable and sustainable CSU education, not only to provide individual opportunities for personal growth and social mobility, but to also meet California's need for college-educated residents in the not-so-distant future.

PRIORITY 3

Ensure the academic success and holistic educational experience of all CSU students.
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All CSU students deserve equal access to a university experience that holistically prepares them for success in their academic pursuits and in the workforce. This preparation should certainly support students to a timely graduation based on their academic aspirations, but must also be reflective of the rich cultures represented in the CSU student body and supportive of their intellectual, emotional, and social development. The Academic Senate of the CSU (ASCSU) captured this balance in their 2018 white paper, which emphasized the variety of institutional factors that contribute to student success, including the faculty-student relationship, engagement in educationally purposeful activities in and out of the classroom, and other extracurricular support services like counseling and psychological services.

To be sure, students should not face barriers to graduation and one-size-fits-all standards are not the best way to determine their success. Although graduation rates are only one of many measures of success, they are informative and offer insight into ways in which campuses and the system at-large may be producing inequitable outcomes for students. For example, graduation rates are increasing for most student populations, but the gap between lower graduation rates for underrepresented minority (URM) students (as well as Pell grant recipients) and the higher rates for their peers has persisted since the implementation of the Graduation Initiative 2025. When looking deeper into the data, there is evidence to suggest that certain campuses, colleges within those campuses, and degree programs within those colleges are contributing disproportionately to the inequities in graduation rates.

The equity gaps related to degree completion do not imply that academic programs are exclusively responsible for ensuring the success of students. Truly, the entire campus contributes to student success, which is why it is just as important that the out-of-classroom experience--which include student leadership opportunities, academic advising, career preparation, and so much more--create an inclusive and safe learning environment, especially for the most vulnerable student populations. Furthermore, as with any major policy changes, such as those the Graduation Initiative 2025 may initiate, it is critical to pay close attention to potential unintended consequences that veer from the true goal of the policy change--which should be to ensure opportunity gaps are closed for underserved and underrepresented students so that all CSU students can achieve to their full potential.

PRIORITY 4

Foster inclusive civic engagement for CSU students to find agency in their campus, community and governmental affairs.

Civic engagement has always been a priority for CSU students. For 2020, CSSA has identified two unique opportunities for CSU students to engage in their campus, community and governmental affairs.

We recognize the need for more students to be engaged in the civic process and we've set forth mutual commitments alongside the CSU Office of the Chancellor, and the California Secretary of State to increase voter engagement through our Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2016. Nationally, college voter turnout and registration has increased across all segments of higher education, but the turnout rate was still only 48.3% (49.5% for public four year institutions). While there have been recent significant advances through legislation, student-led voter engagement is critical and a determining factor of success in increasing participation. In order to ensure engagement, students need to stay vigilant on changing policies to involvement and advocate for increased accessibility to promote optimal engagement.

Additionally, it is fundamental to acknowledge that not all of our students will be able to vote. It will be important that students who are working to register others to vote understand the concerns and vulnerabilities of those who are ineligible. CSSA seeks to pursue civic engagement strategies inclusive for all CSU students.

Lastly, 2020 is the year of the decennial United States census. It is critical that CSU students anticipate partnering with the California State University, government officials, and external stakeholders to gather census data in the most transparent and sensitive way. When specific populations such as students are not counted, the census underestimates the amount of funding needed to support that population in the coming decade. An accurate and inclusive account of CSU students will be crucial in informing decisions to address the issues of California and its students for the next decade. Although In the case of Department of Commerce v New York, the United States Supreme Court determined that the inquiry of citizenship violates federal law, that skepticism and fear still exists in our campus and local communities. Statistically it's the students and families who would benefit the most from Census funding that are undercounted. Information from the census informs decision making for the amount of funding needed for federal student loans, federal research grants, campus funding, campus infrastructure improvements, health and social services, federal legislation as well as federally funded programs to support basic needs.

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