



# THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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**DAVID S. SPENCE**  
EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR  
CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER

Code: AA-2003-17  
Date: May 23, 2003

**Response Requested by  
Friday, November 14, 2003**

To: CSU Presidents

From: David S. Spence *David S.*  
Executive Vice Chancellor/Chief Academic Officer

Subject: **Campus Plans for Improving Degree Completion**

At its meeting in March 2003, the CSU Board of Trustees endorsed *Facilitating Student Success in Achieving the Baccalaureate Degree: A Report of the California State University Task Force on Facilitating Graduation*. Hard copies of this report were disseminated to many constituencies on all CSU campuses in December 2002. The report can also be accessed electronically at the following URL: <<http://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/FacilitatingGraduation.pdf>>. At the March 2003 meeting, the Board also requested that campuses submit their plans to address the Task Force recommendations. These plans will be consolidated for Board review at the January 2004 meeting of the Trustees.

This memorandum serves as a reminder that CSU campuses should be preparing plans to indicate the strategies they intend to implement in order to help students progress to their baccalaureate degrees. In the cover memo (see enclosure #1) accompanying the report, we indicated that campus plans should include some elements common to all CSU institutions and some elements unique to the specific culture and environment of the campus. The task force recommendations can be found in enclosure #2.

When your plan is complete, but no later than Friday, November 14, 2003, please send a copy to Dr. Lorie Roth, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Academic Programs, CSU Office of the Chancellor, 401 Golden Shore, Long Beach CA 90802. You can also reach her at 562-951-4779 or [lroth@calstate.edu](mailto:lroth@calstate.edu).

c: Chancellor Charles B. Reed  
Gary Hammerstrom, Associate Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs  
Lorie Roth, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Academic Programs  
Robert Cherny, Chair Elect, Academic Senate CSU  
CSU Provosts and Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs  
Campus Senate Chairs

Enclosures: (1) Memorandum from David S. Spence to CSU Presidents (12/5/02)  
(2) Recommendations of the Task Force




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**DAVID S. SPENCE**

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR  
CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER

To: CSU Presidents

From: David S. Spence   
Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Date: December 5, 2002

Subject: Facilitating Student Progress to the Baccalaureate Degree

With an overall graduation rate that exceeds 60 percent, we know that the CSU's success in graduating students is comparable to—and sometimes even better than—that of peer institutions. Nevertheless, we also know that almost all undergraduates enter the CSU intending to get a bachelor's degree, yet 40 percent never earn a CSU degree and a third never earn a bachelor's degree from any college. This failure represents an unfulfilled commitment of substantial time and money made by tens of thousands of students and by California's citizen taxpayers. More positively, improved graduation rates would significantly benefit students and California's society and economy. As noted by Clifford Adelman, one of the country's top educational researchers, "The admissions line is not the commencement line." To help CSU's commencement lines more closely reflect the admissions lines, a CSU Task Force on Facilitating Graduation has been meeting for many months to consider additional strategies that can help CSU students make progress towards and complete baccalaureate degrees.

Enclosed with this memorandum is the report of the CSU Task Force on Facilitating Graduation. The Task Force was composed of students, faculty, and administrators and was co-chaired by Jacquelyn Kegley, Chair of the Academic Senate CSU, and Louanne Kennedy, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at CSU Northridge. In preparing the report, the Task Force examined research on the factors associated with degree completion as well as information on strategies used to improve degree completion at universities across the nation. When an early draft of the report had been developed, the Task Force met with four members of the CSU Board of Trustees, all of whom had indicated a strong interest in the topic and announced it to be a major initiative for the upcoming year. With feedback and guidance from the Trustees, the Task Force conducted further research, discussed, deliberated, and made a commitment to place the responsibility for graduation on both the institution and the student.

The culmination of the report is a set of recommendations: some addressed to the individual CSU campuses, some to the CSU system, and some to the CSU Board of Trustees. The most significant of the recommendations is that each CSU campus prepare an individualized campus plan for facilitating student progress to the degree, with the plan containing some elements common to all CSU institutions and some elements unique to the specific culture and environment of the campus.

Because one campus has already developed a plan much like the one described in the report, I have asked President Jolene Koester of CSU Northridge for permission to disseminate the Northridge plan more widely so that others can see one possible model for addressing the recommendation of the Task Force. That report is also enclosed with this memorandum.

The CSU Task Force on Facilitating Graduation has done considerable research, consulted widely, held intensive discussions, and debated forcefully the merits of various strategies to improve students' chances for graduation. The report is not as bold as some would have liked, and it will be found, no doubt, to be too prescriptive for some others. It does, however, try to present the strongest possible case for why we should undertake a significant initiative on facilitating graduation and suggests the best methods, based on research, for achieving that goal.

We welcome any comments and feedback on the report that you may wish to offer. We will receive written remarks until January 20, 2003. The report "Facilitating Student Success in Achieving the Baccalaureate Degree" will be presented to the CSU Board of Trustees at their meeting on January 28-29, 2003.

An electronic copy of the CSU Task Force report can be found at:

<http://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/RelatedDocs.shtml>

c:           Chancellor Charles B. Reed  
              CSU Provosts and Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs  
              Campus Senate Chairs  
              Jacquelyn Kegley, Chair, Academic Senate CSU  
              Susana Gonzalez, Executive Director, CSSA  
              Artemio Pimentel, Chair, CSSA  
              Members, CSU Task Force on Facilitating Graduation

Enclosures: (1) "Facilitating Student Success in Achieving the Baccalaureate Degree"  
              (2) "California State University, Northridge Graduation Rates Task  
                    Force Report"

## **B. Recommendations of the Task Force**

In making these recommendations, the Task Force has reviewed the research on degree completion and the many “possible future actions” listed in “Section II: On the Path to the Baccalaureate Degree.” We understand that we have limited influence over the most important factor: exposure to a rigorous curriculum in secondary school. We understand that, given a diverse student body, imposing standardized requirements—such as full-time enrollment—is not possible. We understand that we cannot markedly affect students’ decisions about the relative priorities of family, work, and school. Hence, in offering these recommendations, we focus on aspects of students’ experiences and aspects of the CSU that are realistically subject to intervention and change, and, as indicated below, recommend only some of the “possible future actions” listed earlier.

### ***For CSU Campuses:***

Develop a plan, based on local institutional research, to improve graduation rates. The plan should include these strategies:

1. The development of 4-year, 5-year, and 6-year graduation roadmaps for all academic degree programs. These roadmaps should be term-by-term depictions of the courses in which students should enroll over the entirety of their academic careers (general education and major) and should address both day and evening programs when program size is sufficient to support both patterns. After the plans have been developed, they should be shared with feeder community colleges and high schools.
2. The development and implementation of projected class schedules designed to accommodate these roadmaps and ensure that required courses will be available during the specified terms.
3. A mandatory progress-to-degree audit at a specific checkpoint (such as when a native freshman accumulates 65 semester units or upon entry for a transfer student), followed by the requisite advising.
4. The review of policies for course drops, withdrawals, incompletes, and repeats in order to reduce the number of these student actions.
5. The improvement of online and hard copy university catalogues so that they are well designed, well organized, readable, useful, and usable.
6. The utilization of summer term to promote student progress to degree by analyzing student course needs so as to offer a class schedule that enables students to enroll in bottleneck courses and required courses in GE and the major.

The plan should include other strategies appropriate to the individual campuses. These could include such strategies as:

7. Expanding faculty professional development for improved instructional effectiveness.
8. Offering new students an intensive first-year experience.
9. Improving advising practices.

***For the CSU System:***

10. Ensure that there is an infrastructure and funding to allow each campus to establish on-demand, online graduation progress reports and progress-to-degree audits.
11. Sponsor multi-campus workshops for the sharing of effective strategies for facilitating graduation.
12. Convene a group to consider the need for CSU systemwide policies on course drops, withdrawals, incompletes, and repeats.

***For the CSU Board of Trustees:***

13. Review campus plans and progress annually.
14. After four years, assess the improvements in graduation rates, and consider if more incentives and disincentives are needed. These might include fee surcharges for excess units, fee incentives for students who graduate with close to the minimum number of semester-credits needed to earn the degree, fee rebates for graduating students who attended summer school, mandatory summer school attendance, and performance funding based on improvements in graduation rates.