

## Voters agenda: Why is higher education getting shorted in campaigns?

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California faces major long-term challenges, not just short-term economic woes. One of those is producing an educated citizenry. Yet the two major candidates for governor have had very little to say about the state's public higher education system, particularly the community colleges.

Democrat Jerry Brown has a few bullet points on higher education, buried in an eight-page plan on K-12 education. He wants to "convene a representative group to create a new state Master Plan." No details. His solution for community colleges: Keep "burdensome state regulations and mandates" to a minimum.

Republican Meg Whitman has a few sentences on the University of California and California State University systems, buried in a section on K-12 education in her plan. No mention of community colleges.

Both will answer, vaguely, about fees if they're asked, but neither has realistic suggestions for financing higher education.

Whitman thinks she'll squeeze \$1 billion from welfare and hand it over to the UC and CSU systems. Due to earlier reforms, the number of families on welfare has dropped from 925,000 in 1995 to 570,000 today – though we're in a deep recession.

Brown thinks he'll squeeze money from prisons, by stinting on prison medical care and without reducing prison numbers. Smoke and mirrors.

This state is crying out for a new public agenda for higher education and a new funding model.

Here's why:

- In the past, California was able to count on talent from other states and nations to fill work force needs. However, as Dowell Myers of the University of Southern California has pointed out, that magnet effect peaked in the late 1980s. In 2008, for the first time in California history, a majority of the population was California-born (53 percent). In 1970, only 43 percent of the population was homegrown.
- A Public Policy Institute report last year concluded that by 2025, 41 percent of Californians would need a four-year degree to qualify for available jobs. At present rates, however, only 35 percent will have four-year degrees. That's a shortage of 1 million.
- Jobs that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree – "middle skill" jobs – will represent 43 percent of all job openings, according to a California Edge Campaign report. Yet a new

study released this week by the Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy at Sacramento State found that six years after enrolling at a California community college, 70 percent of students had not completed anything. Only 23 percent transferred to UC or CSU; only 11 percent got associate degrees; only 5 percent received certificates.

- With budget cuts and enrollment caps, the University of California, California State University and California Community College systems have had to turn away students. So much for the 1960 Master Plan goal that all Californians with a high school diploma would have a shot at a college education.

In short, with just over two weeks left in the campaign, higher education – deeply in trouble – has been an afterthought.

The voters deserve better, bolder vision from Whitman and Brown.

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