

Running Head: Tuition-free Initiative for Public Four-Year California Universities

Issue Statement: Whether states should mandate education to be tuition-free at all 4-year California public college/universities?

Eman Alzoghbeih, MPH(c), M.Sc(c), PT

\*Maira Durazo, B.A., MPH(c), MPA(c)

Isaac Diaz, MPH (c), B.S. (DONE)

Giovanna Lopez, B.A, MPH (c)

Ana Y. Quintana, MPH(c), B.S.

Department of Health Science and Human Ecology  
California State University, San Bernardino

\*Department of Business and Public Administration  
California State University, San Bernardino

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Issue Statement</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Problem Statement</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Proposed Solution</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Justification and Precedence</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Counter Arguments</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Proposed Partnerships</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>13</b>

## Executive Summary

Education has long been associated as one of the social determinants of health and directly linked to poverty, health habits, and nutrition accessibility. As a recent topic of discussion for political candidates, the cost of college tuition has been recognized as a barrier for many college-bound individuals. Through our analysis, the question of whether states should mandate education to be tuition-free at all 4-year California public college/universities will be assessed.

Policymakers during the Obama administration historically took a leap towards a limited tuition-free mandate. Research supports positive health outcomes for students who are able to attend college/university tuition-free compared to those who do not (Walseman, Gee & Gentile, 2014). The legislature was well received and widely popular in poor and middle-class communities throughout the United States and in 2017 the State of New York was the first to make all two-and-four-year colleges tuition-free for their residents (New York State, 2018).

A risk assessment of possible unfavorable outcomes as a result of mandating tuition-free California institutions is an essential aspect of maintaining transparency in proposing the policy. Included, is an examination of the effects on private colleges/universities, quality of education delivered by California public institutions, and the potential cost burden.

Also explored, is the vital aspect of forming appropriate partnerships for the successful implementation of tuition-free public colleges/universities. In addition, a discussion of methods of determining compatibility, important questions to ask, and expected outcomes are included as important considerations when selecting a potential long-term, sustainable partnerships.

## Issue Statement

Whether states should mandate education to be tuition-free at all 4-year California public college/universities?

## Problem Statement

In early 2015, President Obama signed a policy titled America's College Promise. This policy would undo almost half a century of denationalization in advancing education by shaping community colleges free of tuition (Collier, Mishra, Houston, Hensley & Hartlep, 2017). This policy allows students to attain the first half of an undergraduate degree debt free. This also allows students to develop skills and experiences necessary for the workforce at zero cost to the responsible student. Investing in education would attract many States to increase funding specifically for advanced education. Community colleges would then offer outstanding programs encouraging students to graduate at a higher rate than ever.

This will help students earn better grades and stay focused on their education program in 2 years. This program encourages millions of Americans and saves an average of \$3,800 in tuition per year ("FACT SHEET - White House Unveils America's College Promise Proposal: Tuition-Free Community College for Responsible Students," 2015). However, this is not enough. Students are in need of more assistance with the additional 2-year education fund to help cover all 4 years of education at a community college/university. It is estimated that 35% of new jobs require an undergrad degree ("FACT SHEET - White House Unveils America's College Promise Proposal: Tuition-Free Community College for Responsible Students," 2015). Student debt has

continued to increase in America due to many college students not being able to afford a reputable college degree.

Many students taking out student loans in California alone has drawn major concern regarding mental health. It has been recently reported in an article by Walsemann, Gee, & Gentile (2014) that student loans can add to mental stress including apprehension, persistent distress including worries concerning re-payment. As we know, student loans are with an obligation for repayment and are challenging to dismiss even when a student files for bankruptcy. Financial strain, psychosocial, and mental health were found to be strong and persistent factors when it comes to student loans (Walsemann, Gee, & Gentile, 2015). Student loans were also associated with poorer psychological functioning when matriculated in a 4-year institution (Walsemann, Gee, & Gentile, 2015).

Among their study, other factors included depression as a key factor of students having trouble re-paying back loans to the federal government while student debt greatly increased levels of anxiety and mental disorders among college students. Walseman, Gee & Gentile (2014) continued to state that young adults with high college debt reported higher than normal levels of perceived distress, anxiety and anger. Other factors also include students who come from a disadvantaged background compared to those who are more wealthy faced stronger mental health issues than those who were wealthy. Students who were enrolled in a four-year college pay higher tuition units and were also likely to pay for an on-campus living (Walsemann, Gee, & Gentile, 2015). To make matters worse, students that have to pause going to college for personal reasons including but not limited to increased out of pocket tuition fees, change of major,

physical injury, maternity or paternity care. Research has shown that students who pause or stop going to a 4-year college eventually become delinquent or default on their college loans.

Students, in turn, will benefit greatly with the factors that contribute to free tuition. According to the study of Walseman, Gee & Gentile (2014), students greatly benefited from better mental health including self-esteem habits, decreased anxiety levels compared to students who did not receive free college tuition. Their research concluded that students benefited from having better levels of overall distress in comparison to students after graduation with college debt. Students with various backgrounds not able to make financial ends meet were found to greatly benefit most of a mandatory tuition-free education at all 4 years California public college/universities institution (Walsemann, Gee, & Gentile, 2015). Mandatory tuition-free education at all 4 year California public college/universities institutions was shown to ultimately benefit students who were committed, determined, and responsible to obtain their bachelor's degree within a 4 year back to back period (Walsemann, Gee, & Gentile, 2015).

Additionally, mandatory tuition-free education at all 4 years California public college/universities institutions would make a positive difference on the outlook of advanced education alone. One of the main reasons mandatory tuition-free education is important is because it allows students that ability to graduate with their 4-year degree debt free. Most notably, it can allow more lower-income students to graduate on time, therefore decreasing the risk or chance of dropping out of college for a paid Bachelor's degree. Universities would also have an increase in receiving increased graduation rates. As an increase of California residents would attend college, there is also an increase of well-educated population entering the workforce.

## Proposed Solution

College affordability in the state of California has increasingly become a public health concern for our generation. A proposed policy would be to implement a program that allows students who have graduated from a California high school and who possess an annual family income of up to 125,000K to attend four-year public universities free of cost. The goal of the program would be to alleviate economic stress and encourage low-income students to pursue higher education.

## Justification and Precedence

Our education system has come a long way in encouraging students to pursue higher education. In 2013, it was estimated that 81% of people graduated from a high school in the United States. Due to the increase in graduating seniors, the demand for a college degree to receive a higher income has increased (The campaign for free college tuition, 2018). Unfortunately, many low-income students have no option but to remain in the same financial class due to their inability to pay for college. If the student decides to pursue higher education, they are often forced to apply for loans and work multiple jobs. Implementing a program that would make tuition free of cost for students who meet specific criteria (such as income and years of residency) can make way for students to be economically stable and hence, live a better life.

According to California's financial aid system, there are a variety of grants that a student may be eligible to receive without having the burden to pay back. Fortunately for California residents, many students qualify for Pell grants and Dream Act grants. Many students who benefit from these grants will potentially qualify for the incoming policy. However, this policy

would solely cover the remaining costs that the Pell grant and dream act could not cover plus additional average costs of book and supplies.

Economic legislation is an important factor to consider when implementing a policy that will allow students to attend a 4-year public university free of charge. Potentially, this policy could propose cutting financial aid from private institutions and used for public institutions. A recent poll estimated that roughly about 20% of students who attend a private university receive some sort of financial aid (Sanders, 2015). In all, the aid would help far more students attending public institutions as tuition rates tend to be a lot lower than private institutions. In fact, on average, 4-year public universities average a cost of \$ 5,742 per year while UC systems average a yearly cost of \$11,000. Private institutions on the other hand, average \$50,210 per year. It is assumed that reducing the amount of aid from private institutions will not impact a countless number of students as many private sectors receive donations from philanthropists to keep their institutions going (Savidge,2018). In addition, to reducing financial aid at a private institution, this policy could benefit from philanthropic donations to make tuition free for qualifying students. Finally, a slight increase in taxes may help. In all, making tuition free would result in having more qualified people in the state of California, benefiting the state and country as a whole.

An implementation of a free -tuition policy in the state of California can give many students, regardless of their immigration status, an opportunity to strive and receive higher education. Policy's like these have been implemented in other states often showing positive success rates. As an example, the state of New York implemented a free tuition program that began in the fall of 2017. The state of New York allowed residents to attend college for free if they met certain criteria. This program named the Excelsior Scholarship required families to earn



no more than 125,000K per year. Students were also required to be in-state residents, have a family income of 125,000 per year and must be planning to live and work for New York the following year. Ultimately, this program secured a safe path to financial security. States like New York, Tennessee, Montana, Oregon, offer free tuition for their residents in order to alleviate financial burdens(Tuition Free Degree Program, 2018). In the long run, implementing a free tuition program similar to the ones in other states would reduce financial burdens for our college students. In addition, California students with a college degree would ultimately be more competent members of society.

## Counter Arguments

The recently passed legislation for New York State residents that offers tuition-free public college, is a notable step forward towards social change. However, it is important to assess possible unfavorable outcomes to the proposed solution of offering California residents the opportunity to attend public universities tuition-free.

The impact on California public universities as a result of tuition-free education would be catastrophic. The detriment of having to compete for students with public universities would inevitably result in private institutions lowering the cost of tuition. The basic microeconomics defines the total marginal utility of a “particular bundle of goods to a particular consumer as the largest sum of money that person will voluntarily give up in exchange for those goods” (Baumol and Blinder, 2008). Because the “particular goods” (university tuition) are optionally free, most consumers (students), would likely not want to pay a higher price if unnecessary. As a result, private universities would be obligated to lower the cost of attendance to their institutions. In the

same vein, private institutions would possibly face going out of business if not innovatively competitive in luring in students with special incentives or offering unique valuable programs of study that would be unattainable elsewhere.

At the same time, it is difficult to say how appealing the idea of tuition-free universities would be to students due to the overcrowding and large stadium-like classes with unfair student-professor ratios. Public universities would need to quickly become equipped to accommodate the expected influx of students as a result of free tuition. The individual cost for the infrastructure and software accommodations to renovate each public university in California would be an unforeseen cost that will quickly add up to billions of dollars for the state.

The cost sum of both infrastructure improvement and tuition would most assuredly mean increased taxes for all California residents. The price tag for tuition-free universities in California would not only include the cost of tuition but also would need to take into consideration the additional billions of dollars it would cost taxpayers up front to fund the added accommodations for more students. By increasing the taxes of the wealthy or businesses of the state for the amount needed, we may inadvertently drive away local corporate businesses and wealthy residents. An increased tax burden for the rest of California residents would further widen the economic gap between the very rich and the poor. With more of their hard-earned money going towards taxes for some to attend college for free, the poorest residents of the state will have less money to spend on basic necessities. Thus, decreasing the sales tax revenue incurred by the local government in the poorest of communities, affecting budgeting for vital services such as fire and safety.

Although free tuition for public California universities may appear like a positive investment for the future overall economy of the state, the immediate cost to stakeholders such as taxpayers, private institutions and professors, can have abysmal results on the entire state's economic health as a whole.

## Proposed Partnerships

As a key area in implementing a tuition-free legislation for the state of California, the aspects of governmental action also known as the institutions that will aid in the implementation of the policy should be taken into consideration antecedently. According to authors Bardach and Patashnik, "whether implementation goes well or poorly depends in part on whether the relevant institutions want to facilitate or impede the policy at hand" (2016, p.165). The relevant institutions or partnerships which would prove appropriate for the success of the implementation of tuition-free universities would stem from asking the right questions.

In identifying the key influencers of public health partnerships, the first vital question to ask is, how does the agency's mission align with our own mission of reducing the social determinants of health by encouraging opportunities in higher education? One relatively new but still a major public health influencer in today's society is the marijuana industry. The marijuana industry has a widely known mission to promote the research of medicinal properties of THC, CBD, and hemp among other marijuana components. Regulation of marijuana sales tax by the State of California could be funneled to aid in funding tuition-free universities. In addition, direct partnerships with marijuana corporations would support specific programs related to science, mathematics, technology, and medicine. The incentive for the marijuana industry to support public universities would be to promote the scientific support of research and development of marijuana-based medical discoveries.

Another important question to consider when considering possible partnerships is “what support/opposition does the agency have for its mission, and for itself?” (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016, p.165). Kaiser Permanente is one of the leading public health influencers in California and other states. The higher level of standards that Kaiser Permanente has for its own internal structure serves as an exemplary model for other health organizations to mimic and follow. As a result, Kaiser Permanente has a great deal of governmental and public support for its mission. In partnering with this organization, our like-minded mission of “improving the health of our communities and eliminating health disparities” through investments in higher education will be fulfilled (Kaiser Permanente, 2018). By improving the socio-economic health of communities, overall health is also improved. Thus, improved community health translates into cost savings for massive health provider networks such as Kaiser Permanente. Additionally, Kaiser Permanente would influence programs of all concentrations within the public universities that are funded. Advanced education opportunities for Kaiser’s staff would be available as well as the selection of well-educated new graduates to serve in Kaiser’s workforce ranging from business administration to information technology, to education and medical professions.

## Conclusion

In all, tuition-free education in California public colleges and universities would play a major role in reducing long-term debt and poverty. As a result, contributing to a higher number of educated persons among the population and adding health wealth to our state. The psychological welfare of students while receiving a tuition-free education leads to a more capable and mentally sound society. The economic effects towards private universities would initiate the much-needed change for higher quality education at a reasonable price. Likewise, the

inevitable need for institutions to accommodate adjustments would result in updated, new facilities that would be repaid with the influx of taxes emerging out of the increased percentage of the population with higher paying jobs. Our stance in supporting tuition-free California public institutions for all four years of higher education encourages the improvement of societal health outcomes by means of attainable educational opportunities and social change.

## References

Bardach, E. & Patashnik, E.M. (2016). *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks: CQ Press.

Baumol, W. J., Blinder, A. S. (2008). *Microeconomics: Theory and Applications*. Delhi, India: Cengage Learning.

Collier, D. A., Mishra, S., Houston, D. A., Hensley, B. O., & Hartlep, N. D. (2017). Americans ‘support’ the idea of tuition-free college: an exploration of sentiment and political identity signals otherwise. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 1-16.  
doi:10.1080/0309877x.2017.1361516

FACT SHEET - White House Unveils America's College Promise Proposal: Tuition-Free Community College for Responsible Students. (2015, June 30). Retrieved from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/09/fact-sheet-white-house-unveils-america-s-college-promise-proposal-tuition>

Kaiser Permanente. (2018). Improving the Health of our Neighbors takes Teamwork: Funding Opportunities. Retrieved from <https://community.kp.org/be-involved/funding-opportunities>

New York State. (2018). New York State Tuition-Free Degree Program: Excelsior Scholarship.

Retrieved from

<https://www.ny.gov/programs/tuition-free-degree-program-excelsior-scholarship>

Q and A: How do I apply for student financial aid? (2007). *PsycEXTRA Dataset*.

doi:10.1037/e594902007-003

Sanders, B. (2015, October 22). Make college free for all. Retrieved from

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/bernie-sanders-america-needs-free-college-now/2015/10/22/a3d05512-7685-11e5-bc80-9091021aeb69\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.2a45696afaf0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/bernie-sanders-america-needs-free-college-now/2015/10/22/a3d05512-7685-11e5-bc80-9091021aeb69_story.html?utm_term=.2a45696afaf0)

Savidge, N. (n.d.). Getting free college tuition in California: A quick guide. Retrieved from

<https://edsource.org/2018/getting-free-college-tuition-in-california-a-quick-guide/599039>

The Campaign for Free College Tuition. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.freecollegenow.org/>

Tuition-Free Degree Program: The Excelsior Scholarship. (2018, January 18). Retrieved from

<https://www.ny.gov/programs/tuition-free-degree-program-excelsior-scholarship>

Walsemann, K. M., Gee, G. C., & Gentile, D. (2015). Sick of our loans: Student borrowing and

the mental health of young adults in the United States. *Social Science & Medicine*, 124, 85-93. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.11.027