Creating a future-ready, equitable higher education system
About this report
This report was produced by the Institute for the Future (IFTF) and outlines a new model for a place-based higher education system (A New Multiversity) that serves as an engine of community wealthbuilding and socio-economic mobility. IFTF’s research process involved the use of “ethnographic foresight” methodologies to better understand lived experiences of California students today, interviews and workshops with experts, signals and trends analysis, as well as scenario building. IFTF is grateful to College Futures Foundation for supporting the exploration of models that more closely link higher education to economic mobility. The recommendations are those of IFTF and may not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of College Futures.

About IFTF
Institute for the Future (IFTF) is the world’s leading futures organization. For over 50 years, businesses, governments, and social impact organizations have depended upon IFTF global forecasts, custom research, and foresight training to navigate complex change and develop world-ready strategies. IFTF methodologies and toolsets yield coherent views of transformative possibilities across all sectors that together support a more sustainable future. Institute for the Future is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Palo Alto, California.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was prepared by the Institute for the Future (IFTF) for College Futures Foundation as part of a project to create a bold vision for a higher education system that is affordable and equitable for new generations of Californians. Not only would it achieve degree attainment for many more students, but it would also increase economic mobility of BIPOC and first-generation students.

Over a span of six months, IFTF conducted ethnographic interviews with students throughout California, reviewed relevant historical data and future trends, and conducted interviews and workshops with students, experts, and innovators in higher education and related fields.

Our research centered on the three biggest challenges that stand in the way of an equitable and accessible higher education system: 1) unequal starting points and resources with which students enter college, 2) fragmented and often non-student-centric college system that is difficult for students to navigate and achieve timely degree completion, and 3) a larger economy graduates face, offering many, particularly BIPOC students limited opportunities for upward mobility.

Our findings point to a complex interplay between higher education and the larger economy and society. Who goes to college, what experiences students have while in college, whether they successfully complete their degrees, and what their post-college socio-economic outcomes look like, are all products of many factors. This is why achieving the goals of equity, accessibility, and socio-economic mobility requires integrated action along the entire pre- to post-college continuum.

We explore innovative ideas (both proposed and tested) that attempt to level the playing field and create a more unified and student-centered college experience for students. However, restoring connection between education and socio-economic mobility for upcoming generations requires deeper systemic changes not only within institutions of higher learning but in California’s economic policies. This calls for a bold new vision that places public higher education at the heart of achieving equitable growth and community wellbeing.

We open the report with a scenario that grounds such a vision in a story from the future. Imagine it is the year 2031 and California has created a new type of a “Climate Grant Multiversity,” a place-based educational institution that serves as the engine for community wealth creation, as well as a new model for regional sustainability. The story is told from the perspective of community members who inhabit this multiversity and for whom it is so much more than a college—it’s a community, a place of learning and acquiring new skills, a place to raise a family and engage in civic life. It is a place that is deeply rooted in regional history and assets, while also fostering deep and lasting connections to the region.
Approach this speculative-but-plausible model not as a prediction, but as a provocation to ask new questions: how can all students afford and access higher education in California no matter their starting points, how can colleges become more student-centric so that they meet the learning and personal needs of unique individuals, and how can higher education ensure economic security for students and lift local communities at the same time?

Though set in the year 2031 and seemingly radical, the scenario is built on ideas and innovations that are already in consideration or in play today in California. So, after a brief detour to this future we invite you to read the analysis and research that led us to believe that the scenario we outline is not only desirable but possible, given its alignment with California’s new priorities.

We believe achieving educational excellence and social equity in the coming decades is best accomplished at the regional level, with higher education serving as an engine of upward mobility for all in each of California’s diverse regions. In this new vision, college campuses are not isolated and self-contained. They are part of an integrated cluster of collaborating institutions driven by a united mission—to build community wealth, not just to attract jobs. This more regional approach would place higher education at the center of a new way of thinking about economic development—not just for California, but for the world.
THE YEAR IS 2031. THE SETTING: CLIMATE GRANT MULTIVERSITY—a college campus built on the remains of an abandoned shopping mall in the Inland Empire. More than a school, it’s an active hub where many businesses, community organizations, government agencies, educational programs, and social services are co-located. What brings them together is not convenience but their shared commitment to build community wealth. This commitment to a collective mission is evident in every interaction and collaboration between individuals and organizations at CGM, and the different ways they measure success. It’s this overriding mission to lift up the region that also draws the students to this particular university.

What follows is a narrative scenario depicting a possible future from 2031. Foresight practitioners use scenarios to help make future possibilities more vivid and tangible, immersing the reader in the particular details of a future world so that they can mentally situate themselves in what it would feel like to live there. Without scenarios, the signals, forecasts, and other research that underlie strategic foresight work can feel distant and abstract. Scenarios can be used to center a group conversation in a positive and concrete picture of a future state. Stakeholders can then pursue a shared vision for how to respond to that possibility, or they can mobilize action to bring it into being.
SCENARIO

A Typical Morning at the Inland Empire
Climate Grant Multiversity (CGM)

It's 8:37 am on Thursday, April 24, 2031. 75 degrees, partly cloudy. 45 AQI.

Shama looks up from her watch, and calls again to the twins to grab their backpacks and get out the door. It’s the end of the spring semester, and everyone’s schedule is packed.

Shama herself is lugging two overflowing bags through the hallways of the Dolores Huerta apartment complex today—one for her labs, the other for the semester-end block party happening tomorrow. This complex is one of six surrounding the perimeter of the CGM, but everyone knows Dolores Huerta throws the best community events. Shama’s two-bedroom apartment is a little smaller than the unit they lived in before, but it has the dual benefit of being walking distance from school and amenities, and is much more affordable, as it is supported by the CGM’s Housing-For-All plan while Shama completes her degree.

As she reaches the elevator Shama recognizes Dr. Mastiff, her co-operative economics professor. “Are you ready for the final?” she asks, anticipating the last question Shama wants to be asked this morning.

Dr. Mastiff is tenured at Berkeley, but has been on rotation at the multiversity for the last three months, leading a seminar on co-operative financing for climate resilience. Because the CGM committed to building three times the amount of housing they needed for students alone, almost all of the rotating faculty and visiting scholars live on-site as well, alongside most of the local faculty and hundreds of other community members not directly affiliated with the schools.

Shama laughs politely as the four clamber into the elevator. “I mean, I’d be less nervous if it were just an exam or something. You got us running public events. I don’t know if I’m ‘community leader’ material yet.”

“Oh Shama, I shouldn’t ask questions I already know the answer to. You’re already a community leader! I see that bag full of decorations for the block party. You’ve been taking the classes, your labs are excellent, you’ve been putting the hours in at the credit union. This isn’t a test, this is just you shining your light for everyone coming after you, spreading the community finance gospel. You kids know your mom’s a leader, right?”
Shama can’t help but smile as she steps out of the complex into the community greenspace. She waves goodbye to Dr. Mastiff and hurries the twins to the bus stop, where the bus is waiting to take them the rest of the way to school. The entire CGM campus is set up as a car-free “15-Minute City,” with multi-modal transportation facilitated through walking paths, trains, and electric buses. Shama was initially skeptical about giving up her car when she moved in, but every chance encounter with a friend or classmate in the transition between activities reminds her what she’s gained in the trade.

She bumps into just such a classmate, Daniel, as she crosses over from Dolores Huerta to the CGM central campus. He greets her with a big goofy smile as they approach the south entrance of the massive former mall.

“Uh oh, Daniel. I know that look. That’s the I-need-something-from-you look.”

Daniel and Shama are both in the same “Community Resilience” track at the CGM, one of just a handful of holistic degree programs created for the multiversity at its inception, one supported by the interregional collaborative of community colleges, state universities, and the UC system. Shama had also been tempted by “Community Wellness” when choosing her path, but ultimately felt more drawn to the mix of co-op finance, economic development, and climate adaptation in the Resilience track. Daniel is her lab partner in her “Urban Planning for Sustainable Community” class, and their final project is due in just a couple weeks.

“OK, OK, hear me out,” Daniel pleads. “I know we’re meant to work on the neighborhood simulations today, but for one, I think we’re basically there—the flood zone and fire risk layers are solid. We’ve just got to refine the commercial flows, and we’re still waiting on new data for that. So the big push has to be early next week anyway.”

“Uh-huh, okay. Just tell me where you’re going here, Daniel, you’re making me nervous.”

“No, it’s a good thing. I just got a call from CalTrust, they want me to come in today to get oriented as a services manager. You know I’ve been waiting for this spot to open up for like six months. I need the hours for my degree, but I’m hoping to secure a gig with them longer term.”

“CalTrust? Like the housing co-op? They’re on site, right? Just a couple floors up from the labs. Well, that’s not a problem. My accounting class is right near there, I could meet you after that. Around 5 or 6?”

“Yeah...I mean we could do that, sure... I was also hoping to meet some buddies tonight, but...”

“Yeah, yeah, I see you Daniel. Congrats on the gig! I’ll meet you at 5:30 to revisit the mixed zoning data.”
Daniel nods and peels off from Shama as they enter the massive atrium of the CGM. The “Forum” acts as a kind of town square for the entire CGM campus, thronging with people making their way to and from school and work, or just hanging out at one of the local businesses operating under the CGM’s land grant charter. Outside of the escalators and exterior facade, it’s easy to forget this was once a shopping mall—where previously there were national retailers and endless shoe stores, there are now multi-use meeting rooms, daycares and food banks (as well as a more manageable number of places to buy shoes).

The centerpiece of the Forum is a sprawling and intricately detailed model of the Inland Empire, spanning from Riverside all the way to Beaumont. The model stands five feet above the ground, encased in a shallow dome of glass through which different layers of augmented reality data can be made visible to onlookers. For anyone passing through the atrium, the model serves as an aspirational reminder of the deep commitment to community visioning that lies at the heart of the CGM. More pragmatically, it also serves as a common focal point for the wide range of community meetings that are hosted in the space that invite scholars, students, politicians, artists, and residents to gather for the sole purpose of working through the details of what they build together. When Shama and Daniel finish their neighborhood simulations, they’ll be projected here in the Forum model, adding their contribution to the shared data pool that increasingly informs community development in the region.

Shama stops for a moment to buy a coffee from “Riverside Roasters” and observe the morning’s in-progress gathering. Local activists are meeting with city council members to discuss a planned mass transit extension that will displace several dozen homes. The activists are proposing an alternate route through the affected neighborhood, comparing the two plans on the Forum model so the trade-offs can be more clearly understood by the gathered crowd. The city council members are offering their own climate data that reveals a different side of the impacts.

It was a meeting just like this that first drew Shama to the CGM a few years back. She had no plans at the time to go back to school, but she had heard some good things from a couple of acquaintances, and she was interested in finding ways to improve her quality of life. At first she was skeptical that they would be accessible to someone like her. Her part-time job at the thrift store and full-time job parenting the twins consumed all of her waking hours back then, and she only ended up coming that night because they offered free food and childcare during the meeting.

During that chance, impromptu meeting, a CGM advisor named Rosa happened to ask if she was interested in information about their programs. She wasn’t really interested, if she was being honest—a half dozen attempts at enrolling at community and state colleges had left her feeling overwhelmed and disillusioned at the byzantine pathways that put all of the burden on her but still didn’t promise any kind of rosy outcome on the other side. The CGM model was different. It was easy to understand! A choice of
five degree tracks, available at full-time or part-time, with work co-ops, housing, and transportation built in. The tuition was also manageable, most of which could be worked off or eventually forgiven by the time you get the degree, which is taught locally but granted by Berkeley. She signed up that night.

Shama catches herself feeling sentimental as she progresses through the Forum to the main escalator. She still meets with Rosa as her advisor every other week, and starting next term she will begin serving as one herself. She’s eager to pay forward what she’s received from the multiversity, to have the chance to offer other single moms and dads the same life-changing opportunity that was shown to her that night. She thinks about the twins, and how much she used to worry about their futures. She still does, of course, but when they get to high school they’ll be automatically dual-enrolled in the CGM, meaning their transition from high school to a degree path will be just a short walk away, and not an endless uphill battle.

But that’s still years away, Shama reminds herself. Today are the labs, a few hours at the credit union, planning for the Forum and the block party. Life is full of things that need doing, as always. But there’s a purpose to it, and a path to follow. Shama lifts her head, steels her gaze, and continues to walk it.
MILESTONES

Building the Climate Grant Multiversity

The Climate Grant Multiversity, a speculative model of a future university, is an attempt to integrate the personal, social, and economic needs of today’s students. It’s also an attempt to integrate California’s top priorities in one design—sustainability, job growth, regional economic development, housing, and education. Here’s a possible roadmap for how the multiversity can be achieved by aligning with those priorities.

Financial model

The CGM was born in 2022 when an unusual group of partners across education, environment, community economic development, and social equity sectors assembled to apply for the Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF), the Regional K-16 Collaborative Fund, and various climate investment programs. At first, traditional collaboratives were preparing applications separately for each of the programs, but social equity leaders found themselves invited to several tables and realized the potential synergy of objectives and innovation if the efforts cohered.

• **By mid-2022**, the project had won planning grants from the CERF and K-16 funds and $15 million from the federal Good Jobs Challenge. By the end of the first year, the state awarded $65 million to the project through CERF and K-16 implementation grants.

• **With the first $80 million committed**, the project and its partners secured another $60 million from California Climate Investments, including Transformative Climate Communities and Affordable Housing Sustainable Communities grants, plus $45 million from the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Inspired by the project, the Legislature and Governor invested directly in the 2022 state budget, and the project received one-third ($50 million) of a new statewide appropriation:

> $150 million to add physical, instructional, and operational capacity to support the creation of degree, joint degree, and certificate programs aligned with regional strategies developed pursuant to grants from the Community Economic Resilience Fund or Regional K-16 Education Collaborative Grant Program. This program encourages enrollment by California resident undergraduate and graduate students. It is the intent of the Legislature to provide ongoing resources beginning in 2023–24 to support the enrollment of additional full-time equivalent, California resident undergraduate students in these programs.”
The state appropriation supported the creation of five other Climate Grant Multiversity sites, in addition to the mall retrofit in the Inland Empire, including: retrofit conversions of a sports stadium in the Bay Area, a private college campus in metro Los Angeles, a corrections facility in the southern San Joaquin Valley, a shopping mall in Redding, and a processing plant in Imperial County. The six CGMs enroll nearly 100,000 students—beyond the targets of the Master Plan for Higher Education. The Inland Empire CGM alone accounts for 32,000 students (headcount), enrolled and multi-enrolled across UC Riverside, CSU San Bernardino, Cal Poly Pomona, and seven community college campuses.

Legislation to support the project created two new innovative financing tools. First, the state assigned 40% of incremental income tax revenue paid by students and by residents in the project’s geographic footprint to secure debt financing for the project. Second, the host city and county committed to a pass-through agreement providing the project with 10% of the incremental increase in property tax revenue associated with the project.

Sale of part of the mall's real estate by the project’s special district generated proceeds of $25 million, and leases of other parts ultimately generated an ongoing revenue stream of $10 million per year. Being in an Opportunity Zone, the project was able to optimize the value of the mall's real estate holdings.

Other than lease revenues and funding for student enrollment, the project doesn't receive supplemental ongoing funding from these sources. But with more than $300 million in one-time investments, the project sponsors focused on affordability by design and complementary strategies to use infrastructure and technology to reduce costs and widen the web of possible resources for students and community members using the project. While the project couldn't directly waive tuition, provide a guaranteed basic income, or quadruple the number of counselors, it was designed to reduce the cost of housing, transportation, health, food, and childcare dramatically, and it was designed to increase the income, wealth, and purchasing power of its users significantly.
Collaboration and organization

Rather than a single governing entity with control over all activities and programs, the project has developed an agile, multicentered ecosystem of governance and planning.

• A steering committee originally convened for the Regional Collaborative K-16 grant guides the programmatic vision for the project. It’s comprised of UC Riverside, CSU San Bernardino, Cal Poly Pomona, the region’s five community colleges, employers, the workforce development boards, the onsite social entrepreneur partners (e.g. community bank, cooperatives), and other stakeholders. The committee surpassed the grant requirement that “at least 25 percent of the members shall be local employers, thereby ensuring that regional economic needs inform the creation of the streamlined pathway.”

• A special district was established by the state legislation authorizing property and tax increment financing. As a public agency, the district is governed by a commission comprised of the partner educational institutions, plus representatives from the local city and county, the onsite social entrepreneur partners, and the community land trust. The special district is the legal authority and owner of the project site, and it operates the shared services and common enterprises. It does not supervise or exercise any power over the individual partners.

• A community land trust maintains perpetual ownership of the community housing, which accounts for two-thirds of the total housing on site (the remainder is student housing). With prospective homeowners, it enters into a long-term, renewable lease instead of a traditional sale. When the homeowner sells, the family earns only a portion of the increased property value. The remainder is kept by the trust, preserving the affordability for future low- to moderate-income families. The trust is a membership corporation with a board of directors elected by residents who live in homes in the trust, other users of the trust’s land, neighbors, and the host city and county.

Features and innovations

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

• The entire project is a carbon sink, with minimal demolition and maximum reuse. Adapting universities, colleges, and cooperative economics to an existing array of stores like Hot Topic and Forever 21, food courts, and atriums originally designed for Santa and a sleigh forced the partners to rethink the physical experience and flow of how traditional institutions work.

• There is no parking and there are no cars on the entire site, which has been purpose-retrofitted for walking, biking, personal mobility, and transit to account for 100% of trips. The colleges onsite have the lowest level of transportation emissions in the country, as students, faculty, and staff can all live on campus—and nearly all do so. The project site is laid out as a “15-Minute City.” The project’s density made grocery stores, childcare, and many other essential services economically feasible as soon as the ribbon was cut.
Due to its density and lack of competition by vehicles, the site generates more transit demand per acre and per capita than any other California college or university. That demand has allowed the local/regional bus and rail systems to run more frequent service and to extend their services deeper into underserved areas. It also caused demand for transit-oriented development around other station locations on the transit line to grow tenfold.

- The project’s Housing-For-All plan meant that every student and employee (including faculty) could live onsite, including their families, and also that the project included sufficient housing to contribute to local/regional affordability and housing production goals. There are three times as many housing units onsite as there are students. Along with the community land trust approach, this has meant that the project’s success did not have a significant gentrifying impact on the price of housing in the area.

**STUDENT SUCCESS & EQUITY**

- High-speed broadband is bundled in student, faculty, and staff housing, along with equipment for virtual reality and augmented reality experiences. Students living off campus get access to connectivity suites with the same features, but these suites resemble an office rather than an antiquated bank of desktops in a computer lab. Since every student has access to high-speed, reliable broadband and equipment through one of these two options, faculty and community partners have been able to design immersive, connected learning experiences that take full advantage of technology. This worked due to massive economies of scale in building thousands of housing units, rather than as a special program offering individual subsidies.

- Students take advantage of VR and AR not just for immersive learning and labs, but also for human-centered counseling. “Let’s drop into a couple of analytical geometry professors’ labs and see what kind of vibe you get from them, so you can pick the teaching style that works for you.” Rule-based counseling (What course counts for the degree? Can I squeeze a native language class into my engineering schedule this semester? Are there any classes that meet the collaborative economics practicum requirement that are offered on Thursday mornings and also count for the performing arts requirement?) were offloaded onto AI. That freed up counselors to focus on human concerns like mental health and aspirations. That use of AI also assists with course planning/scheduling so that there are never students who need an English or nursing class to graduate but can’t get it. Students have access to all of their data and to the same predictive analytics as administrators. As an early user, at scale, of the CSU Dashboard to induce reflective transformation, the Climate Grant University became the model case for how the state’s new Cradle-to-Career longitudinal data system could make the difference for students.
• **Rather than human-made gaps** between high school and college, or lower division college and upper division college, or between college and career, students experience seamless autopropgression at each stage, including 12th grade to “first year” of college (also from childcare to preschool to T-K to kindergarten at the onsite lab school)—no application, uncertainty, or anxiety required.

• **Dual enrollment** (meaning simultaneous enrollment in high school and college) and joint degrees, as well as 2+2 and 4+1 sequences are the norm, not the exception. While faculty at other institutions are often skeptical of these approaches at scale, the project’s grant agreements set this condition in advance, and faculty came to the multiversity to accomplish it. They turned out to be the biggest supporters of the approach, as the increased sense of focus and progress their students brought made teaching even more rewarding.

• **The multiversity represents** the first major, concerted interinstitutional graduate and professional education program in California, with joint graduate degrees and 3+1 and other seamless progression options for students to complete the bachelor’s degree and a graduate or professional degree in half the time. A majority of the students on campus are beyond traditional college age. More than one-third already had some college units completed before enrolling, but had fallen through the cracks without completing a degree or credential.

• **Unlike a traditional exploratory liberal arts college** with dozens or hundreds of majors and unlike a single-job trade school, the campus focuses on just a few guided pathways aligned with the regional economic development strategy and community wealth-building objectives.

• **In addition to common operations** like payroll and facilities maintenance, all wraparound services, guidance, and other student support services are institution-agnostic. Your high school counselor is your first-year counselor.

• **Some students have signed up** for income-contingent loans/tuition forgiveness financed by income tax increment funds authorized in the state legislation.

• **The multiversity uses a “lab school” approach.** Students study community wealth-building approaches, models, implementations, and alternatives in vivo at the multiversity’s co-partners (e.g. community bank, community housing land trust, cooperative, etc.). These experiences are formally linked to curriculum and learning at all levels, and they are not merely “community service.”

• **The multiversity** was designed at baseline as a 100% year-round campus, with an academic calendar extending across four quarters. Between the various higher education partner classes and co-partner programs, the facilities are fully utilized day and night, and on the weekends.
In this report, we argue that higher education can only fulfill its promise when it’s responsive to the inequities of the larger economy and society. Whether students go to college, graduate, and achieve socio-economic outcomes are highly dependent on many factors that come into play from the time they are born. Success is also far too dependent on where one grows up. This is why achieving the goals of equity, successful degree completion, and greater socio-economic mobility, particularly for BIPOC and first-generation students, requires integrated action along the entire pre- to post-college continuum and customized for each of California’s diverse regions.

Regions themselves can take the lead in coming up with new models of higher education that are designed to build community wealth, not just attract jobs. They can look beyond granting degrees and take on the bigger challenge of building new pathways to upward mobility.

Fulfilling this new mission for higher education will require leadership from the state as well as the regions.

**A platform for regional collaboration**

Under the Governor’s leadership, the state could spearhead a collective impact initiative to boost college enrollment, degree completion, and economic mobility significantly in each of California’s diverse regions. The initiative would provide a platform for businesses, foundations, education systems, and civic groups in each region to contribute resources and to collaborate and work toward regional goals.

Each region would have its own targets for educational and economic outcomes, defined by a common set of metrics, for low-income and BIPOC students. Together, regional targets ladder up to an ambitious outcome-based public education strategy set by the state.

Although state-wide in scope, collective impact can only be achieved if the system is built primarily bottom-up, responsive to each region’s needs, and built on each region’s unique assets.

In a state as diverse as California, regional leadership is essential. A regional approach also builds on the momentum created by Governor Newsom’s initiative Regions Rise Together to create inclusive and comprehensive plans to uplift every region in the state.
A social compact for place-based higher education

At the core of a successful regional approach is the creation of a strong social compact—an agreement and commitment on the part of leaders of key institutions and constituencies from education, government, business, labor, arts and culture, and others about desired shared goals and pathways for achieving those goals.

This approach envisions institutions of higher education not as exclusive campuses within their own worlds, but rather as key components of a new way of thinking about economic development. Each campus becomes a part of an integrated cluster of collaborating institutions driven by common agreed-upon goals that need to be tackled holistically through a unique combination of new governance, funding, policy, and accountability measures. The measure of success of such policies is public benefit rather than pure economic growth.

What are the key components of an integrated mission-driven approach to achieving equity and economic mobility at the regional level? Here are some ways a new social compact would appear in practice: Many of the actions identified above can become a part of such a portfolio. At a higher level, these can be summed up as follows:

1. **Broad-based agreement and commitment** to achieving equity and social mobility for all students in the region. This includes not only agreement between leaders of key institutions but also public engagement and buy-in when setting the direction.

2. **Governance structure** that bridges existing silos across educational institutions and workforce development, industry, and policy organizations. This governance structure has to be responsible for implementing an integrated strategy and achieving the stated goals.

3. **Measurement and accountability**—setting specific short- and long-term (10 year and beyond) criteria for their accomplishment.

4. **Funding and incentives**—creating a budget allocation mechanism for federal, state, and local funding that is focused on fulfillment of articulated integrated goals rather than allocating funding to individual institutions or providing additional rewards to institutions on the basis of achieving integrated goals.

5. **People-centric policies**—direct participation and inclusion of people who are most affected, i.e., BIPOC and first-generation students and families, in the design and implementation of integrated solutions.

Reimagining higher education is a challenge the world must meet. California can show the way.
WHAT PHILANTHROPY CAN DO NOW

1. **Create and amplify a new narrative** about the role of higher education in California.

2. **Fund collective impact efforts** in regions with especially low social mobility. Support collaboration between colleges in those regions to work across sectors to improve social and economic outcomes.

3. **Fund the development of and provide technical support** in developing policies, incentives, and governance structures that would enforce a new social compact between stakeholders in each region, committing them in new ways to building community wealth and well-being. Support higher education so that it achieves each region’s social, economic, and sustainability goals.

4. **Support creation of a new Multiversity**—a new physical space that integrates higher education with other systems so they can work together to re-imagine higher education so that it achieves each region’s social, economic, and sustainability goals.
As goes education, so goes the future of the state of California.

— Clark Kerr, President, University of California

Inclusivity. Equality of opportunity. Education for all. Those were the bold principles that brought California’s multi-layered and complex higher education system into one cohesive whole through a “Master Plan.” Has the system—the largest in the US—lived up to its promise? Is higher education as a whole equitable and does it offer Californians a way up the socio-economic ladder? If not, what are the problems, and more importantly, what are possible solutions?

Six decades after California’s Master Plan for Higher Education was created, it’s also time to look forward. How ready is the system to face the coming decades, with all of their anticipated disruptions and challenges? What is the role of higher education in the future struggle for social equity for our most marginalized populations? Will higher education be part of the solution or part of the problem?

Back when University of California President Clark Kerr and his supporters crafted the Master Plan, they didn’t simply lay out a framework for how the various colleges and universities would work together. They committed the state to creating a socially inclusive higher education system, simultaneously dedicated to equality of opportunity (wider access) and achievement of excellence in research and academics. Kerr envisioned a society led by a higher education system “grounded in equality of opportunity, serving enterprise and justice in equal measure.”

Sixty years later, we can celebrate many of the achievements of the Master Plan. California’s public higher education system has earned a reputation for excellence in research. Five California public universities are consistently ranked among the top 10 public universities in the country. About 7 percent of all Nobel Prize winners are affiliated with the University of California. However, sixty years since the Master Plan’s introduction, much has changed in California and the rest of the world. California has become more diverse and more unequal, in terms of wealth as well as income of its populations.

Attitudes toward government and public investments have shifted, with trust in government and support for large-scale public investments waning. At the same time, the rest of the world has caught up: California no longer outshines others in terms of student enrollment, education attainment of the population, social equity, and affordability of its colleges and universities. While many more students
are enrolled in the public system’s 148 schools, students of color and first-generation students are not proportionally represented within each tier—instead, they are concentrated in community colleges and state universities. Disparities are also evident in degree completion in all segments of the system and in low transfer rates between community colleges and four-year institutions.

With decreased funding from the state, costs of college attendance have increased for students. Combined with high costs of living in many areas, particularly urban centers in California, the cost burdens on students and their families have grown. The system itself has become fragmented, highly bureaucratic, and not student-centric, placing unnecessary burdens particularly on BIPOC and first-generation students who do not have resources—finances, time, and knowledge—for successfully navigating the system to degree completion. All these challenges constitute the unfulfilled part of Clark Kerr’s and the Master Plan’s vision—achieving equitable access and promoting socio-economic mobility among California’s population.

While California needs to fulfill this original vision, it must do so facing forward. It can’t afford to simply remedy the past and solve problems of today. We need to develop solutions and engage in actions that are future-ready—i.e., recognize the changes, challenges, and opportunities likely to face the system in the next ten years and beyond. These include everything from demographic shifts, the climate crisis (which will place greater burdens on state and local budgets and cause economic and societal disruptions), the spread of disinformation and distrust in science and traditional sources of expertise, changes in work patterns, and the fraying connections between education and economic security.

“\nWe need more college graduates in our workforce than the goals [of the Master Plan] allowed for. And so that means we either need to update those goals or improve transfer from community colleges, or both, if we’re going to improve baccalaureate completion in our state.”
— Hans Johnson, PPIC

The goal of IFTF’s report is to look forward and identify innovative pathways and a set of practical actions for the system and the state to take to achieve equity, affordability, degree completion, and socio-economic mobility for the state’s population, particularly for BIPOC and first-generation students. But in view of future forces and changes on the horizon, a few tweaks and fixes are not enough. What’s needed is a wholesale reimagining of higher education and how it functions with and within a larger regional system to improve social mobility and equity for all its citizens. We call this The New Multiversity.

The stakes have never been higher. The state of California exerts global influence, including in higher education, due to its size, spirit of innovation, and economic and cultural power. One in eight people who live in the United States resides in California. It is the fifth-largest economy in the world and the first state to reach an annual gross domestic product of $1 trillion. That is why the actions California takes in re-imagining its system of higher education will have larger implications for the country and the world. Sixty years after the introduction of the Master Plan, California can once again become a shining example of equitable, diverse, and future-ready public higher education.
Every successful strategy is based on good insights about the future. This has been the IFTF mantra for over fifty years. We believe the purpose of future thinking and foresight is not to predict the future but to help people make better decisions and take actions that would help them build a more desirable future. In this case, IFTF and our partners at the College Futures Foundation envision a future where California’s higher education is more equitable and affordable. In that future, it also delivers greater degree completion and improved socio-economic mobility for BIPOC and first-generation students.

In conducting the research and creating recommendations for action, IFTF followed four core principles that we believe are integral to developing good insights and action plans:

**Look back to see forward**

One cannot start thinking about the future without understanding the past. We looked back at California’s Master Plan for Higher Education and immersed ourselves in its goals and intentions, as well as its possible shortcomings. We also looked back at the documented history of higher education in California to understand the economic, demographic, and political contexts of that time. We also looked at historical patterns in the evolution of higher education systems in California and elsewhere to identify common directions of evolution and change in such systems.

**Understand present context**

All foresight projects need to understand the present deeply and identify key issues facing the system, including its documented successes as well as challenges. We did so by analyzing two types of data—(1) a variety of statistical data on everything from demographics of current students and staff to degree completion by race as well as state-level economic, demographic, and labor data, and (2) qualitative, experiential data. IFTF used ethnographic interviews (see Appendix for key themes) to understand how people are experiencing the present in ways that are likely to grow and have increasing importance in the future. Over the course of May 2021, Institute for the Future (IFTF) conducted individual and group ethnographic interviews with a cross-section of California learners at different stages of their learning journeys. Through guided group conversations, we explored the successes and challenges learners encountered while pursuing a higher education degree, to gain insight into how policies and procedures could be redesigned to improve access, affordability, completion, and equity in higher education for the next decade and beyond.
Identify future signals and trends

To help develop robust, future-ready strategies, the IFTF team identified the larger social, technological, economic, environmental, and political forces likely to impact the future of California’s public higher education. To do this, we synthesized data and signals from our current research and conducted interviews with innovators who are creating new approaches to higher education. We also enlisted expert points of view to identify the current gaps and emerging opportunities for innovation and change within the system to improve access, affordability, degree completion, and mobility for BIPOC and first-generation students. Experts also identified sources of innovation coming from outside of California and pointed to novel ways to deploy technologies to meet the public interests of advancing more inclusive and equitable opportunities for higher education.

Engage diverse voices to test alternative pathways

In coming up with pathways for action to achieve desired outcomes—equity, affordability, degree completion, and socio-economic mobility for graduates—it was important to solicit input from a variety of experts and impacted groups. IFTF conducted a series of workshops that included students, College Futures Foundation staff and members of the Board, and experts in the fields of higher education, government finance, economic development, etc. The workshops explored a range of possible actions that could meet these outcomes by thinking through different levers for change, including governance, budgeting, and funding mechanisms; rethinking admissions, student support, and the use of technology; and leveraging models and innovations from other systems.
FUTURE SIGNALS & TRENDS
The long arc of higher education

Among the different developments on the horizon, IFTF identified three that are particularly important in terms of direct impact, positive or negative, on higher education: 1) expected increase in demand for degrees, 2) the ongoing seismic reorganization of work, and 3) widening inequality and racial wealth gap.

Increasing demand for degrees
Even though California’s college-age population is projected to decline in the next ten years, our analysis suggests that higher education and college degrees will continue to play important roles in both economic and social/cultural spheres of our society. Therefore, demand for higher education will continue to rise. Both historical patterns and future trends point in this direction.

The movement from elite to mass higher education, as described by sociologist of higher education Martin Trow, has made higher education an aspiration for many families and individuals who previously might not have considered such a pathway desirable or necessary (Figure 1).

For them, college attendance becomes a symbol of rising social status and socio-economic advancement, often viewed as laying a foundation for intergenerational mobility. As college degree attainment enters the aspirations of wider swaths of the population, demand for higher education grows in correspondence.

“I want to ingrain that into my children that they could always do better than me. And I want to show my daughter that I could get my degree. She has to always surpass her people. And I want her to understand that when you get a degree, you get more education, and it costs a little with the money as well. But education is the important thing. Nobody can take away what you learn.”
— Priscilla, 18-24, California Community College Student

Figure 1. Patterns in development of higher education as participation of population (%) increases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHASES</th>
<th>ELITE</th>
<th>MASS (15%)</th>
<th>UNIVERSAL (50%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXPECTATIONS</td>
<td>Privilege</td>
<td>Right</td>
<td>Obligation (Mandatory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURPOSE</td>
<td>Shaping minds and characters of the ruling class</td>
<td>Preparing larger groups in professional and technical skills</td>
<td>Preparing population to adapt to social &amp; technological changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://cshe.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/publications/pp.trow.masshe.1.00.pdf
Furthermore, research by Harvard economist Raj Chetty has shown that many elite schools, including UC Berkeley, are able to propel students from poor backgrounds to the very top of the income distribution, even though they admit relatively small numbers of such students at the moment. Demand for these high-mobility schools will most certainly increase. As Chetty concludes on his website, Opportunity Insights: “Increasing the representation of low- and middle-income students at selective colleges could substantially increase intergenerational income mobility in the United States.”

California has a lot of room to grow on this front. It currently ranks 41st among states in the share of high school graduates who start at four-year schools (PPIC 2021). Sending more students to the state’s top schools will be considered a good investment.

On the employer side, demand for degrees in many occupations has also increased (Figure 2). Many service professions—from physical therapists to physician assistants and different specialized nursing occupations—today require degrees, sometimes beyond the Bachelor’s level, justified or not. If current trends persist, employers in 2030 will need one million more college graduates than California can produce (PPIC 2015).

> We’re not seeing employers run away from hiring college graduates. If anything, we’re seeing that demand has increased—even for majors that people often like to pick on like English or history. Those students do very well in our workforce.”

—Hans Johnson, PPIC

While overall demand for college education—from employers and marginalized populations—is likely to grow, the disconnect between college degree attainment and economically secure lives is also likely to widen, barring policy interventions.

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**Figure 2. Employers fuel growing demand for degrees**

> Employers are seeking a bachelor’s degree for jobs that formerly required less education, even when the actual skills required haven’t changed or when this makes the position harder to fill.”

Seismic reorganization of work

We are in the midst of a major transition in how we organize our economy. While in some ways less visible than the climate crisis, the transformation in the structure of companies and organization of labor is equal in terms of impact on our society. Some believe it’s as significant as the transition from agriculture to industrial production. IFTF’s most recent research foresees growth of platform companies and ensuing growth in non-institutional, on-demand work arrangements. This shift will likely result in the decline of “good jobs”—those that provide good wages, stability, benefits, and longer-term economic security.

In fact, in the past 30 years, the number of public corporations that provide stable work with benefits, such as pensions, health insurance, equity, etc. has declined by about 50 percent (Figure 3). Unlike their predecessors, the new generation of companies are not large job creators. The combined global workforces of Facebook, Yelp, Zynga, LinkedIn, Zillow, Tableau, Zulily, and Box are smaller than the number of people who lost their jobs when Circuit City was liquidated in 2009.

![Figure 3. Number of U.S. public companies in decline](image-url)

American corporations listed on the stock market by year

Higher education will need to adapt to these structural changes in the workforce in order to maintain the promise of higher education as a pathway to economic security and socio-economic mobility. Otherwise, more Californians will be underemployed (Figure 4) and the economic value of higher education—both to the individual and to society—will be undermined.

**Widening inequality and racial wealth gap**

While it is still the case that in every demographic category, a person with a degree fares better than a person without one, in terms of income and employment prospects, it is also clear that such benefits have been declining and are highly dependent on one’s race and family background. Recent analysis from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis points to some worrisome trends: recent college graduates still enjoy a significant income premium (as much as double that of their less educated peers), but their wealth premium is “statistically indistinguishable from zero.”

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**Figure 4. One-fifth of low-wage workers in California have college degrees**

Percentage of workers by degree completion

![Diagram showing percentage of workers by degree completion](source: American Community Survey (2017).
The college wealth premium has declined for all groups but has collapsed for Blacks and Hispanics born since the 1980s (Figures 5 and 6).

**Figure 5. Income and wealth premiums have been declining for each successive generational cohort**

Percent of bachelor’s and post-graduate degrees for non-Hispanic white, income versus wealth (1930s-80s)


**Figure 6. Income premiums for Black college graduates are holding up, but wealth premiums have collapsed**

Predicted income and wealth premium by education and birth decade, non-Hispanic Blacks

Wealth, which economists calculate as the sum of one’s assets minus debts, is important as an indicator of longer-term economic security. Incomes are what families earn during a year—amount of money that flows in and out in the household. Wealth, which includes such assets as one’s home, savings, pensions, and equity holdings, is what determines what neighborhood one lives in, what schools their children go to, their social connections, and much more. Wealth is what people rely on in case of sudden upheavals: losing a job, coping with an illness, or dealing with some other unexpected financial crises. As data in Figure 7 indicates, a Black household headed by a college graduate has less wealth, on average, than a similar white household whose head doesn’t even have a high school diploma.

What explains the vanishing wealth premium? Many factors do, including generational wealth transfer and external economic conditions. One of the major factors contributing to the vanishing wealth premium, however, is mounting student debt, the burden of which falls on low-income families.

To realize the benefits of higher education for society and individuals, particularly BIPOC and low-income students, we urgently need to ensure that such education is affordable and delivers longer-term economic security as well as wealth premiums for graduates.

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Figure 7. Median household net worth by race and education

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>WHITE</th>
<th>BLACK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post College</td>
<td>$455K</td>
<td>$141K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>$268K</td>
<td>$70K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>$135K</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>$119K</td>
<td>$7K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; High School</td>
<td>$83K</td>
<td>$3K</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Many factors influence student success. The starting point matters—family backgrounds and resources, places where one grows up, community ties, and much more. In order to increase equity and social mobility in society at large, we have to support a student’s journey before, during, and after college.

Drawing on our ethnographic research, expert interviews, and analysis, we identified three key insights that are most relevant to whether more BIPOC and first-generation students successfully complete their journey to degree attainment and beyond. Though not new, these insights help us focus on the main systemic challenges that need to be addressed if higher education hopes to be more equitable in the coming decades. These are challenges that few students, no matter how hardworking or intelligent they are, can easily escape. They are problems for our systems to fix, not for our students to endure.

For each insight, we explore actions that may help overcome the main systemic inequities and improve lives at scale.

### Insight 1: Different starting points

“Is college a part of my dream?”

“I’m deciding whether to join the Air Force or not. And I say that because student loans need to get paid off. It’s a big, big, big barrier that I’m going to hit. It sucks that it has to be that way, but when you are given so limited options and you are not given the family support that you wish you had, you are kind of pushed, you are kind of pinned down, there are fewer options”.

— Andres, 18–24, Art Student

A state as vast as California is as unequal as it is diverse. Only five other states have greater income inequality. Families at the top of the income ladder earn, on average, more than 12 times more than those at the bottom (PPIC 2020).

What has contributed to California’s ever-widening inequality? For starters, top earners have seen disproportionate gains. Their income has increased 60 percent since 1980 compared to 24 percent for those in the middle. Education is also a factor. The job market has favored college degree holders, who make up only one third of the population. According to the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), the median income for families with at least one four-year degree has increased 30 percent since 1980. It has decreased for all other families. PPIC states, “Families with four-year degree holders earn $2.20 for every $1 that families without degree holders earn.” Whether this income increase translates into wealth is a different story. As noted earlier, for too many American families, it does not.
Wealth concentrates even more unevenly than income. Around 20% of all net worth is found in only 30 zip codes where just 2% of Californians live.

Wealth and income are also distributed unequally across racial groups. African American and Hispanic families are over-represented in low-wage jobs, whereas white and Asian families are over-represented at top income levels (Figure 8).

All of this is to say that students in California approach college with very different starting points.

Many low-income students don’t have any savings or a safety net, need to work at least part-time, take care of children or family members, and face transportation challenges and food and housing insecurity. All of these challenges place college attendance out of reach and create obstacles to successful degree completion. It is particularly difficult for some students to succeed in a one-size-fits-all complex system that requires substantial extra time and resources to navigate.

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Figure 8. White and Asian families are overrepresented among the highest incomes in California
Proportion of Californians at different income ranges compared to overall population

https://www.ppic.org/publication/income-inequality-in-california/
It comes as no surprise, then, that California’s three-tier higher education system mirrors the inequality of the state, with low-income students concentrated in community colleges and higher-income students in the UC system (Figure 9).

The state’s income and wealth divide—the different starting points—will continue to be one of the biggest factors determining whether students enroll and complete college in years to come. These divides have to be addressed first if colleges and universities hope to increase enrollment, help students earn their degrees, and ultimately help students achieve social mobility.

Leveling the playing field for BIPOC and first-generation students isn’t something the education system can achieve on its own. These goals need to be addressed early through bold initiatives, many of which have not been realized: universal healthcare, basic income, free childcare and preschool, etc. But higher education can also play a big role in this endeavor.

Figure 9. Latino and African American students are underrepresented in the UC system (2019)

UC, CSU, and CCC admitted students by race

Actions: Level the playing field

How can higher education level the playing field for incoming students? How can it make pathways to college more inclusive? Many bold ideas have been proposed, and a few that have been tested show great promise.

1. AUTOMATIC COLLEGE ACCEPTANCE

Right now, most students don’t go on to any advanced formal learning after high school. California could use high school GPA and test scores to admit students automatically into multiple colleges throughout the state, with financial aid attached. This eliminates any need for a college application, making the transition from high school to college effortless.

“As Mayor [of West Sacramento], we became the first city in the country last year to do this on a city-wide basis. Every single high school graduate was admitted and received an admissions letter to college, along with a scholarship through College Promise. We take for granted that this huge chasm between high school and college—that is entirely of our own making—requires guidance and counseling but it doesn’t have to be that way.”

— Christopher Cabaldon, Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education

“If we have an applicant who applies to our bachelor’s programs at Georgia State and is not admissible by state criteria, we automatically admit them to a community college. In our system they don’t have to apply again.”

— Tim Renick, Georgia State University
2. LOTTERY-BASED ADMISSIONS

Our most selective colleges could admit many more low-income students if they switched to a lottery-based system for admissions. Harvard professor Michael Sandel and others have proposed that each highly competitive school, including all the Ivies, set a floor for what applicants need to meet to demonstrate they can handle the school’s coursework. Any applicant who meets the criteria would then have an equal chance to be admitted by lottery. This would eliminate the need for all of the “enrichment” activities—test prep, service trips overseas, etc.—during high school that inevitably favor more privileged students.

Source: Humphreys, J., “Why admissions to college should be decided by lottery, not points.” Irish Times (2020).

“Less than one-half of 1 percent of children from the bottom fifth of American families attend an elite college.”

— The Upshot, New York Times

3. COLLEGE GUIDANCE AT SCALE

The typical ratio of high school college counselors to students is 250:1 (NACAC). That clearly isn’t enough. Recruiting more college counselors and combining in-person guidance with innovative technologies, such as Georgia State’s chatbot, would help. Programs can also leverage the power of peers and near-peers to provide more youth-friendly and more individualized guidance. Student Success Agency, for example, recruits college students to provide counseling to high school students (at a 10:1 ratio) via text so that help is available 24/7. College students who have just gone through the admissions process themselves have first-hand knowledge of how to navigate current hurdles.

“We’ve scaled a chatbot that answers literally hundreds of thousands of questions to incoming students on a monthly basis and by making that the default, the answers are there 24/7. Whenever you have a problem with FASFA or registration or any other issue, there’s an answer there.”

— Tim Renick, Georgia State University
4. BLURRING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

The end of high school can be daunting. Too many students drop off—only half go on to earn a post-secondary degree of any kind. Jobs for the Future (JFF) offers a solution: the creation of a new type of school that combines Grades 11 and 12 (upper secondary), and two years of publicly-funded college. In such a school, no student would have to navigate the stressful transition between high school and college. Everyone would leave school with at least some preparation—and credential—for the world of work.


5. COLLEGE STIPENDS FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

Not only are colleges free in Denmark, but also students are paid to go to college. Every Danish student receives approximately $900 a month for their university education—for a maximum of six years! Furthermore, they don’t have to pay it back even if they drop out. This would help students whose main financial burden is not tuition, but living expenses. Not surprisingly, in Denmark a child from a low-income household has the same chance of moving to the top as a child born to wealthier parents. The chances of this happening in the United States are very low.

"We need to reimagine financial aid based on the reality of the students—not just the tuition costs, but other living costs—and also recognize that many of the students are part-time and most of the financial aid is based on full-time equivalency."

— Russ Gould, College Futures
6. INCOME-CONTINGENT LOANS AND NON-PROFIT COST-SHARE AGREEMENTS

Implemented in the UK, Australia, and other countries, income-contingent loans mean no student is deterred from going to college on financial grounds. The government pays colleges directly, without students handling any money. Students then pay back the loan only when their income reaches a certain level. The repayment is part of their income tax, withheld by their employer. In the UK, all unpaid debt is retired after 30 years. The key benefits? Socio-economic bias is removed, and a student is less likely to drop out due to financial constraints.

7. PUBLIC SUMMER EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

In 32 cities across the United States and Europe, Cities of Learning brings together hundreds of organizations, including colleges, to provide students with interest-based learning programs, especially in the summers. Colleges can create more learning pathways to help students close opportunity and achievement gaps, prepare for college, and most importantly, discover their own reasons for higher education.

Source: Cities of Learning, https://www.citiesoflearning.net
Insight 2: A fragmented system
“The onus falls on us!”

“...There is no federated system... Each [university] is on their own, [with their own] policy and regulatory system. And the student has to basically do the kind of landmine jumping of how to do what. But the point is... to make it standardized so that it is one system for all students.”

— Matthew, 45-54, Returning Learner

As challenging as it is for low-income and BIPOC students to go to college, it is equally as challenging to navigate it successfully once they are in it. This is true nationwide, not just in California.

At four-year colleges, 4 in 10 students leave without a degree. Of the ones who drop out, one in three will leave after their very first year. The dropout rate is worse at community colleges. Nationwide, only 5 percent of students in two-year colleges graduate on time with a degree. More will graduate within 3 years—25 percent—but that still means the vast majority either don’t graduate at all or they take much longer to do so. In California, 70 percent of community college students do not graduate or transfer within six years.

Under the current system, dropouts are over-represented among Black, Hispanic, and Native American students (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Percentage of college dropouts by ethnicity: two-year and four-year institutions

In California as well, graduation rates of African American and Hispanic students lag behind their Asian counterparts in each of the three systems (Figure 11).

Social inequities aside, the system itself throws up many hurdles. Unlike high school, colleges have traditionally been much less structured. It’s up to students to choose their major and their courses, fit them into a workable schedule, and make sure they satisfy degree or transfer requirements—and to do all of this on time. Not everyone adapts to this type of self-service model easily straight out of high school. Most students need support and counseling, especially if they’re away from home for the first time. For first-generation and low-income students who are already juggling multiple demands and who do not often have access to required guidance within their families or social networks, this is particularly burdensome.

Figure 11. African American and Latino students’ graduation rates are lagging, particularly at CCCs (2019)
UC, CSU, and CCC graduation rates by race compared to non- and for-profit colleges and universities

That’s especially true if students intend to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution (Figure 12). Many students find they end up wasting a lot of time and money taking courses that don’t transfer. According to one research study, transfer students lose as much as 43 percent of their credits. The transfer process can be made much more streamlined as well as equitable.

“... there’s like separate ways to transfer, there’s a UC system, a CSU system. And it’d be way better if there was just one system. Like you just take these classes for whatever major you’re going for and you can transfer it to any California university—either it’d be a UC or CSU. But it’s really confusing, like, if you’re following one track but you’re transferring to a different school, it’s not going to work because some facets didn’t work for a certain type of school.”

— Pascual, 18–24, CCC alum

For too many students, their college experience is needlessly challenging and fragmented. Under the current “sink or swim” model, student success has less to do with academic excellence and more to do with how entrepreneurial and persistent a student is about navigating barriers and procuring needed resources. Looking ahead, the financial pressure that students face, the complexities of the systems, and inadequate support will continue to be the main barriers to degree completion in the decade to come.

To achieve equitable outcomes, the college experience must be made simpler and more welcoming for all students, no matter their starting point. Going forward, a 70 percent dropout rate should no longer be acceptable.

Figure 12. Number of associate degree transfers (ADTs) has doubled, but racial disparities persist (2020)

ADTs as a share of associate’s degrees

Actions: Unify higher education

Making college a more unified experience doesn’t require a wholesale redesign, even though some schools have attempted to do so. What it does take is a commitment to be student-centric, making sure that the system anticipates students’ needs at every turn and experiments with new ways to meet them. Many new ideas are being tested at schools across the country.

1. WRAPAROUND COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE SERVICES THROUGHOUT COLLEGE

An eight-year study by the University of Chicago Poverty Lab has found that wraparound services—which include tutoring, academic planning, counseling, transportation, childcare, etc.—can help college students stay on track. Community college students who received such services were 35 percent more likely to enroll full time and 47 percent more likely to continue to the next term. More investments need to be made, especially at community colleges, where students get the least support, academic or otherwise. According to the College Board, $10,000 is spent annually per student at community colleges, compared to $14,000 at public four-year colleges, and $45,000 at private universities.

“I was trying to figure out the ins and outs on classes to take and how you can get help with those classes as a tutor or any type of program that can give you assistance. That was difficult for me in my first two years. What also was difficult for me, I don’t know if this may be in just my college or could be another college, is trying to find the counselor that is going to be actually assigned to you and help you on your journey throughout your degree or your certification. That was something that I didn’t get until my third year, an actual permanent counselor. I didn’t have any help.”

— Mya, 18–24, College Student

2. AUTOMATING ARTICULATION REQUIREMENTS AND TRANSFERS BETWEEN COLLEGES

For Laney College President Tammeil Gilkerson, whose college serves 16,000 students, 84 percent of whom identify as a person of color, the bureaucratic nightmare that students face when transferring is very much a social justice issue. Students are being denied pathways that more privileged students enjoy. There are many ways to make such transfers easier. Professor Zachary Pardos at UC Berkeley, for example, is using machine translation to compare content of different courses throughout the system, making it easier to transfer courses between colleges.

“With multi-institution pathways to a degree, there needs to be better hand-holding, better technological navigation support. Otherwise, trying to find your way from high school to a bachelor’s degree going through a community college is a lot like trying to navigate the Internet without a search engine.”

— Zach Pardos, UC Berkeley
Arizona State University has built an online platform, MyPath2ASU, that offers students a seamless process to transfer their college credits to ASU and join one of 400 learning pathways, online or on the ground. The platform lets a student see which classes at their current college are transferable, saving them money and time. Based on each student’s chosen pathway, the platform offers personalized support to help them navigate their transfer experience and stay on track toward earning their bachelor’s degree.

3. GRANTING SYSTEM-LEVEL DEGREES

Schools don’t just educate. College degrees from more selective colleges also serve as signals of competency and achievement to employers and the larger society. The UC system can use its signaling power more equitably by conferring systemwide degrees. Such a degree would speak to the quality of someone’s education rather than signal how selective their particular campus is.

“If we have the ability to broaden the scope of a school’s signaling beyond the courses that they deliver themselves directly, we have the potential to dramatically transform the number of Californians that can earn bachelor’s degrees that bring with them the highest impact on both income and wealth creation over time.”

— Christopher Cabaldon, Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education

4. BLURRING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN CCCs, CSUs, AND UCs (expanding four-year degrees at CCCs, offering more graduate programs at CSUs)

Intentionally or not, the current system consisting of three layers—community colleges, state universities, and UCs—has formed a hierarchy in terms of prestige and recognition. Various college rankings add to the problem, with top UCs assigned the greatest value. Perceptions of value are internalized by faculty and students themselves, leading to many community college students seeing themselves as not as good as those who go to four-year colleges and universities.

“My professor basically said that community college was like... It wasn’t worth it. Basically he was saying that people who go to community college are dumb. He was saying that all you would need to do... that even a dog could go to community college... And I feel like there’s such a stigma to community college that needs to be erased.”

— Priscilla, 18–24, CCC Student

Efforts to minimize distinctions between the three layers include actions such as allowing community colleges to offer four-year bachelor’s degrees (something that’s already starting to happen) or enabling more community colleges and state universities to engage in research. Professor Cecilia Rios-Aguilar at UCLA, for example, is working on bringing research labs to community colleges, so students can engage in research activities and there is a greater mixing of students and researchers between different institutions.
5. USE OF AI TO SPOT PROBLEMS EARLY AND OFFER NEEDED HELP

Georgia State University uses predictive analytics to assess student needs, tracking risk factors to see if any of its 40,000 students faces academic and financial challenges. The system generated 90,000 interventions last year alone. Four-year graduation rates have improved 7 percent and thousands more students graduate every year.

“Once the students enroll, we’re tracking every student for 800 risk factors based on predictive analytics every day, and if we see a problem—like they’re registering for the wrong class, underperforming, not attending their classes and so forth—we don’t wait for them to diagnose the problem and reach out to us, we immediately reach out to them. Our mindset is to assume the system needs to be set up, so that the default is to help students navigate the bureaucracy, rather than the exception.”

— Tim Renick, Georgia State University

6. CHANGING STATE FUNDING CRITERIA FOR COLLEGES BASED ON EQUITY AND COMPLETION GOALS

In the 2018-2019 school year, the CCCs implemented the student success funding formula, which provided additional funds based on various measures of student success. Notably, this formula tied funding to the number of students who are eligible to transfer and those who actually transfer to a four-year university. Since the implementation of that formula, there has been a 34 percent increase in the number of transfer-ready associate degrees awarded.

7. CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING FOR BIPOC AND FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

Unfortunately, racism, verbal abuse, and physical assaults are experienced by too many students of color on campus. In addition, the faculty and staff at UCs and many colleges throughout the system do not mirror the diversity of the student population. Research, however, shows that having a doctor, a teacher, or a counselor who shares a person’s background consistently results in better outcomes in terms of health and educational achievement, as this gives non-white students a sense of belonging and relatable role models. Campuses can go further to increase diversity of faculty and staff as well as access to BIPOC counselors. Several universities have instituted trainings in trauma-informed education as requirements for faculty and staff. Dr. Cecilia Rios-Aguilar advocates creation of a system-wide unified database for reporting instances of abuse and tracking actions taken to address them.

“After experiencing my own incident of racial harassment, I got a call from a friend who told me that a Black student, named Josiah Lawson, was stabbed to death by white supremacists not too far off campus. From that point on, I just felt like I had to effectuate more change quicker. I’m interacting with all these administrators, and it felt like I was getting nowhere. I’m telling them that Black students don’t feel safe on our campus and the conversation somehow morphs into one about hair, they clearly don’t get it.”

— Nicole, 24–34, UC Student
Insight 3: Fraying connection between degrees and economic security

“I have a degree, but can I still make a living?”

What is the success measure for our systems? If it’s graduating and getting a job afterwards, then we’re really failing, because we’re not setting them up for success and we’re not giving them those connections right before we leave. They complete their courses, we send them an email: ‘Congratulations, you graduated. Please donate to our alumni association once you have a job. Bye.’ And that’s it. So how are we measuring that success if we don’t know what’s going to happen to them, a year after they graduate, or if they even got a job? I think that’s the biggest problem that our systems have is that they’re just not defining what that measure is. And with that, they’re not focusing on how to succeed in it. They’re not focusing on how to provide exactly those services that our students are needing.”

— Danielle, 18–24, CSU Graduate Student

Just because you have a college degree does not mean you automatically can find a job or express your talents. And it doesn’t mean your financial prospects will continue to improve. External economic conditions and where students live will shape post-college economic returns for graduates.

Harvard economist Raj Chetty has shown in his recent groundbreaking research that if what we care about, ultimately, is upward mobility, then place matters. Your ability to move up the socio-economic ladder depends a lot on where you live (Figure 13, see page 30). Chetty states, “In Salt Lake City, a person born to a family in the bottom fifth of household income had a 10.8 percent chance of reaching the top fifth. In Milwaukee, the odds were less than half that.”

It doesn’t matter if your city is Charlotte, NC, which has seen record job growth and income growth. Charlotte still ranks 50th among the 50 largest cities in terms of upward mobility for children growing up there. The new jobs, it turns out, are going to people who move there. In too many cities, job growth and upward mobility are not correlated in any predictable way.
Furthermore, low mobility can be entrenched at a hyperlocal level. One neighborhood can offer upward mobility while an adjacent neighborhood just half a mile away can trap people in cycles of poverty. Most economic indicators such as job growth tend to miss the nuance. It’s time to understand social mobility at a much more local level—region by region, neighborhood by neighborhood.

“At a local level, the key driver of differences in economic mobility doesn’t fundamentally appear to be about jobs.”

— Raj Chetty

Figure 13. The geography of upward mobility in the United States
Average income at age 35 for children whose parents earned $25,000 (25th percentile)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBDQLYMTIIY
Of course, race is just as important a factor, and it’s intertwined with place. When mapping social mobility for Black men and white men, the distributions of their outcomes are almost non-overlapping. They inhabit almost two different realities (Figure 14).

Chetty finds that there are five factors related to where you live that correlate most clearly with positive economic outcomes. These are: access to high quality schools, high social capital, a high share of two-parent families, low racial segregation, and low economic inequality.

Regional economists have long studied vibrant economic clusters in places such as Silicon Valley, Route 128 near Boston, Northern Italy, Detroit, and many other areas. What they find is that these clusters rely on institutional infrastructure, consisting of educational institutions, capital sources, various support services, strong formal and informal social ties, and forward-looking government agencies that work together to transfer ideas and knowledge, invest in priority areas, provide needed training, and build social cohesion. As anchor institutions, colleges can play a pivotal role in connecting all the region’s assets and building areas of opportunity where students live.

Only by strengthening each region, in collaboration with other sectors, can colleges provide students with real social mobility. Only by mobilizing many place-based investments can progress indicators be improved on multiple fronts. Higher education isn’t the solution to everything, but it is often a region’s best asset. Beyond educating students, it helps create equitable economies by working with others in a new social compact. Without such a compact, social inequity may worsen and the connection between degrees and economic security may continue to fray.

It’s time to imagine a regionally integrated higher education system, built on a new social compact. It’s time to imagine The New Multiversity.

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**Figure 14. Two americas: the geography of upward mobility for Black vs. White men**

Average income at age 35 for men whose parents earned $27,000 (25th percentile)

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8DQLyMtiY
Over the course of May 2021, Institute for the Future (IFTF) conducted individual and group ethnographic interviews with a cross-section of California learners at different stages of their learning journeys. Participants comprised a mosaic of backgrounds and geographic locations (Fresno County, Los Angeles County, Kern County [Bakersfield], Inland Empire [San Bernardino or Riverside Counties], and the Sacramento-Stockton corridor). Participants were chosen primarily for their experience profiles, such as a current student in one of the college segments (community, state college, research university), a college dropout, a working student, and so forth, and secondarily for demographic profiles, including age, gender, ethnicity, and geography. Through guided group conversations, we explored the successes and challenges learners encountered while pursuing a higher-education degree, in order to gain insight into how policies and procedures could be redesigned to improve access, affordability, completion, and equity in higher education for the next decade and beyond.

This study prioritized the experiences of BIPOC learners, as their completion rates fall below those of their white counterparts. Of the learners participating in the study, 100% self-identified as Hispanic, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander and/or Middle Eastern. All participants had attained at least a high school diploma and had either already completed a degree in higher education or expressed an aspiration to receive a degree in the future.

Throughout the interviews, participants from across the state shared experiences, both individual and collective. While individual stories are unique, clear themes arose from the conversation. They include:

1. **Fragmentation**: The “system” doesn’t operate as one
2. **The New College Student**: Perils of one-size-fits-all education
3. **Bureaucracies**: Navigating fragmented processes hinders success
4. **Student Success**: Insufficient guidance and support
5. **Institutional Performance**: High costs, lagging outcomes
6. **Stigmatization**: Inequity, polarization, stratification across segments
7. **Campus Climate**: Lack of safety and sense of belonging
Each theme in this document represents some aspect of the learning journey toward obtaining a degree: from the early stages of applying and gaining acceptance to an institution of higher education, whether immediately after high school or later in life; to the middle stages, where students must juggle multiple responsibilities while pursuing a degree, often moving in and out of school as life’s demands take priority; and to the late stages, where students are near completing their requirements or re-entering the higher-education ecosystem to complete their degree and pursue career aspirations.

Taken together, these themes reveal the challenges of many, particularly BIPOC learners in California, whose success requires the ability to navigate fragmented processes, the ability to learn to thrive in a sink-or-swim environment, and an entrepreneurial mindset to find and procure for themselves the resources they need to succeed.

1 | Fragmentation: The “system” doesn’t operate as one

California’s systems of public higher education are made of multiple layers, each with entry, transfer, and exit points that can be overwhelming. These disparate parts can create burdens on the learner. Learners want processes that are easier to navigate, such as transferring from community college to a UC campus. Many respondents found current processes confusing, discouraging, and a hindrance to completion, including:

TRANSITION TO COLLEGE CAN BE OVERWHELMING

Many students entering the system are on their own for the first time. Some have families, older siblings, or other social supports such as an alum to help. Those with less support often feel lost, overwhelmed, or unprepared, making it difficult for them to stay on the path toward completion.

“I just feel like 18-to-20-year-olds need a lot of support. And I think I’m in this early stage because, once you turn 18, technically we’re just pushed out and then, ‘Okay, fend for yourself.’ And I think there needs to be a good transition to support, right? There is... Like for example, one of the main things. There is no finance class in high school. You don’t learn that. Really? You don’t learn that. You don’t know how to apply for Medi-Cal. You don’t know how to apply for food stamps. You don’t learn that. You just have to naturally learn how to do it yourself. And I mean, I did. But it was definitely not an easy process.”

— Andres, 18–24, Arts Student
COURSE REQUIREMENTS ARE CONFUSING

The process of transferring courses between systems—i.e., from community colleges to the CSUs and UCs—ought to be seamless. With the plethora of courses and different requirements at each of the colleges, however, the process is often confusing and stressful to navigate for students. In addition, the requirements often change, without sufficient communication to students or counselors, and without updates on the websites that are supposed to consolidate the information. Students often bear the costs of fragmentation, making decisions with inaccurate information, which results in wasted time and money and lots of discouragement.

“I’ve taken wrong courses because they told me that this is a specific one to take, and as you all know each one of those is money and time. I have withdrawn from classes on [counselors’] recommendation being told that they wouldn’t appear on my transcripts, and when I asked about that later, they’re like, ‘Oh, I’m so sorry. I just checked in and that’s not the case.’”

— Arianna, 18–24, UC Student

“... CSU Sacramento requires humanities like racial awareness. And then there’s one for UC Davis where you need something else. And then I know... Oh, you need a communications class to transfer to any CSU but you don’t need it for UC. And then if you don’t figure all this out and you think you’re ready to graduate but you’re not able to transfer, and you have to spend more time and then not graduate for another semester.”

— Pascual, 18–24, CCC alum

TRANSFERS WITHIN THE SYSTEM ARE DIFFICULT FOR STUDENTS TO NAVIGATE

Many are frustrated that community colleges, CSUs, and UCs often operate independently, creating unnecessary barriers.

“There is no federated system. Everything is kind of a feudal system. Each kind of region [university] is on their own, [with their own] policy and regulatory system. And the student has to basically do the kind of landmine jumping of how to do what, and a lot of it falls on... the onus falls on us as students to kind of figure that out with the help of, again, student advisors or career advisors or counselors, basically. But the point is to make it federated, to make it standardized so that it is one system for all students, not, ‘Oh, this system for this school or this system for this school or this kind of track for this school.’ It obviously makes it not just confusing, but it makes it obviously more time-consuming. It discourages a lot of people as well.”

— Matthew, 45–54, returning learner
The New College Student: Perils of one-size-fits-all education

Higher education is primarily designed for recent high school graduates. However, more than 40 percent of students enrolled in California’s community colleges are aged 25 years or older, with many working full-time and caring for their families. A study by RTI International found that these nontraditional students outnumber traditional students. Lead researcher Alexandria Walton Radford defined a nontraditional student as having one or more of the following characteristics:

- Are financially independent from their parents
- Have a child or other dependent
- Are a single caregiver
- Lack a traditional high school diploma
- Delay postsecondary enrollment
- Attend school part-time
- Have full-time employment

The existing model is a poor fit for the thousands of California’s learners who have significant responsibilities outside of academics. Many interviewees described struggling to finish coursework on the expected schedule because there were few classes available outside of the typical 9-to-5 business hours, during which they work. For these students, hybrid and online learning experiences that offer asynchronous learning allow them to fit education into their lives—rather than the reverse.

Lack of Time for Managing Everyday Life

Most of the interviewees worked at least part-time while also enrolled in college. Many of these students also had family responsibilities. Several recent high school graduates have unstable housing situations and live with their parents for a wide range of reasons. Fulfilling the demand of coursework on top of life responsibilities in the same 9-to-5 window is an impossibility.
"I started off at a community college...I moved to San Diego because I moved in with my partner. I started going to work full-time instead of just part-time. And I was still pursuing online classes at the community college. And then after that, she actually got accepted into medical school. So we moved to the Bay Area... And then I took on really a full load of just working a lot. As you know, the Bay Area's traffic is terrible. I would spend an hour and a half commuting, sometimes to work from Pleasant Hill to Oakland, and then working three jobs at my school site. I worked as a behavioral specialist. I worked as a coach for volleyball and a coach for soccer. Sometimes I would do security for the basketball games, stuff like that. And I was still pursuing school. When I moved to the Bay Area, I had transferred to the community college over there. I did that for about, I would say like two years, 'cause I was going to school part-time and then finally I got enough credits.”

— Connie, 25–34, Former CCC student, current ASU student

LACK OF CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

Many students described years of relevant expertise that went unrecognized by their institutions, forcing them to retake classes that did not transfer, submit to redundant internships, and otherwise delay deepening their knowledge to meet institutional requirements.

"Unfortunately I need credentials for that. A lot of this stuff that I’m going to be doing there, I already do on my own since I was nine years old. I’ve helped, I assisted. I was just given certain qualities. But unfortunately in the real world, in order for you to be taken serious, in order for you to be considered as appropriate for that position, you got to carry a paper that says you know what you’re doing. You got to learn the terminology. That’s been my main struggle in school. I’m doing this, I’ve been doing it, but there’s a name to it. That’s been my hardest thing.”

— Cristina, 25–34, CCC Student

INFLExIBILITY IN ACCOMMODATING INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

To justify time off or request deadline extensions, interviewees described having to provide doctor’s notes to show that they were caring for a sick child or a death certificate if they needed time to grieve a loved one. Institutions often fail to acknowledge that education is one of many demands on students’ time and attention. Additionally, they do not often enough allow students to manage with any approach that helps them to complete coursework.
When I requested that my class be changed because I was in a class with my friend’s rapist, they could’ve moved me out of that class. It was uncomfortable at that time, because as they were going through the case, the university, they don’t really have anything. And they were saying, ‘It’s too late into the semester. We’re not going to move your class.’ The faculty weren’t being supportive about that, even though I had to sit there and pretend I didn’t know what he did to my friend and I had to ‘play nice.’ It’s just the mental gymnastics that I had to go through to just sit there and pretend I was okay.”

— Zafira, 25–34, CSU Graduate Student

3 | Bureaucracies: Navigating fragmented processes hinders success

Due to the fragmentation and lack of coherence across California public higher education, students have to learn to navigate processes creatively to find and get the resources they need. Successful students often have to hustle multiple bureaucracies to access what they need. They have to network, coordinate, and map resources outside of higher education to meet multiple responsibilities as parents, workers, renters, caregivers, and transit riders while ensuring essential needs for security, safety, food, health, and shelter for themselves and their community.

STUDENTS NETWORK TO CREATE THEIR OWN INFRASTRUCTURE

There are often gaps in fulfilling the needs that students require to be successful and focus on being a student. When there is insufficient institutional support for those needs, students will network and create their own safety nets or infrastructure to support each other mutually.

... that system [carpool] that we had built, that community that we had built, suddenly it was gone. And there was a month where I just had all of my friends say, ‘Yeah, I can’t do this anymore. I can’t continue anymore. I can’t afford it. It’s too much. I’m tired, the commute is crazy. I could be working and making more money. I could be doing this and making more. I can’t even afford my books for this semester. So I already know that I’m going to fail my classes.’ And suddenly it was like, wow, I was so focused on myself and my path that I never looked to the side. And I really didn’t realize that my peers that were directly next to me were struggling so much, and I couldn’t help them. And by the time they told me, they had already made up their minds, and they left. So, that was the change for me. That was the wake-up call.”

— Danielle, 18–24, CSU Graduate Student
SOLVING THE FINANCIAL AID PUZZLE

Every student and family will ultimately confront the question of affordability. Countless decisions, from which schools to consider, to balancing work with school, to even postponing or abandoning the dream to go to university altogether, hinge on finances. While there is often money available in theory, navigating financial aid, loans, real costs, and more can often feel like a black box.

“How are we going to be able to afford it? How does it even work?’

…but my parents were really on top of just jumping in and saying, ‘Okay, what is FAFSA? What does that mean? How do we do it? And where can we find more information?’ So we were going to literally [every] workshop that some colleges would host... that’s how we got through the process. And I remember [my father] was so excited for me to look at the big-name schools that everyone was looking at. So UCLA and LMU and USC, and the reality was that when we applied and when we started seeing the costs, he just started getting more and more discouraged. So that was really heartbreaking for my family to bear. I remember having the contact information of all the financial... the departments that I wanted to get into just saved on my phone. And I would call every single day like, ‘Is there an opportunity? Can I talk to someone? Is there anything I can do?’”

— Danielle, 18–24, CSU Graduate Student

COUNSELING AND EDUCATION PLANS CAN HELP STUDENTS NAVIGATE TRANSITIONS

Degree completion isn’t a given. A number of students we interviewed completed some but not all of their graduation requirements before dropping out for any number of reasons, often painfully close to completion. Getting back into the groove of things is easier said than done, and many give up, not knowing where to begin. Intervention, coordination, and guidance at key transition points appear to work, especially for those students who just need an education plan to get re-started.
“... the only reason I got help to get into college, and I went to Fresno City, was because I was in foster care. So they helped me, I guess, apply, and how to take the test to get in, and then to make a college plan. But once I started off from a plan, because I wanted to be able to be a teacher, I started to switch up my majors and then I didn’t know what I wanted to be anymore. So I kept taking different classes, and that slowed me down. And then I started working, and then the income competed with education, so I dropped out for a while. And then after I had my daughter, I really wanted to go back, because I realized that working minimum wage jobs sometimes doesn’t cut it when you have kids. So luckily, I’d gone to the Reading and Beyond Program and they helped me, and right now they helped me create the plan, and I stuck to my plan to get my associate’s degree. I feel like that helped a lot. They’ll help you set up an education plan to get to your associate’s degree, and then help you along the way to pay for the books and other utilities you might need.”

— Priscilla, 18–24, CCC Student

4 | Student Success: Insufficient guidance and support

A variety of factors contribute to student success: preparation, financing, sense of belonging, a social safety net, and institutional support. Critical to helping learners navigate these issues is having guidance and support from counselors and advisors regarding planning, coursework selection, and funding. Many of the students interviewed experienced highly interrupted and unplanned learning journeys in their pursuit of higher education, due to unforeseen life circumstances but also due to poor and insufficient guidance from counselors and advisors, as well as inaccurate information.

INCONSISTENT/INADEQUATE ACADEMIC ADVISING

Many students struggle to decide which classes to take upon starting college. In many cases where students were given counseling, counselors failed to provide accurate information and students often received conflicting information from different counselors. Without effective guidance from advisors, students end up wasting time and money by taking unnecessary courses and failing to take the courses required for completion.
“So as far as my learning journey, the only reason I got help to get into college, and I went to Fresno City, was because I was in foster care. So they helped me, I guess, apply, and how to take the test to get in, and then to make a college plan. But once I started off from a plan, because I wanted to be able to be a teacher, I started to switch up my majors and then I didn’t know what I wanted to be anymore. So I kept taking different classes, and that slowed me down. And then I started working, and then the income competed with education, so I dropped out for a while. And then after I had my daughter, I really wanted to go back, because I realized that working minimum wage jobs sometimes doesn’t cut it when you have kids. So luckily, I’d gone to the Reading and Beyond Program and they helped me, and right now they helped me create the plan, and I stuck to my plan to get my associate’s degree. I feel like that helped a lot.”
— Priscilla, 18–24, CCC Student

GUIDANCE IS TOO NARROW IN SCOPE

In addition to academic counseling around course selection, students looked for advisors who could relate to their issues and could understand that many students had lives outside of school. For advisors to guide learners successfully towards completion, they must provide counseling that takes into account students’ personal needs and lifestyles. Those who took a more holistic approach to counseling made a big difference in leading students towards degree completion.

“I think they really need to come back to basics, right now, more than ever with the pandemic. And say, it’s not [just] about how our students are going to graduate? It’s, hello, are our students eating? Like, are our students in a house? Do they have a laptop? Do they have an internet connection that allows them to take this test that they need to take this Friday? That’s what we need to focus on. Not the bigger picture, because we were so focused on the bigger picture that we forgot that out of our systems, every single one of them is one person, and we’re not reaching out to them, or the university system is not touching them at all. Because at this point, we have students that go through their four, five, six years of college without ever talking to anyone, without ever talking to an administrator, without ever going to tutoring, without asking for help. So if we’re not touching every single one of them, then I don’t believe we’re doing our job. And I think that’s what the system needs to change.”
— Danielle, 18–24, CSU Graduate Student
NO CLEAR TRANSFER AND CAREER PATHWAYS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Within the current model, many learners struggle to understand how to prepare themselves for next steps after community college. Without clearer pathways to either four-year institutions or the labor market, it is difficult for students to make effective choices and stay motivated to complete their degree.

“There’s like separate ways to transfer, there’s a UC system, a CSU system. And it’d be way better if there was just one system. Like you just take these classes for whatever major you’re going for and you can transfer it to any California university whether it’d be a UC or CSU. But it’s really confusing, like, if you’re following one track but you’re transferring to a different school, it’s not going to work because some facets didn’t work for a certain type of school.”

— Pascual, 18–24, CCC alum

5 | Institutional Performance: High costs, lagging outcomes

Students are increasingly aware that their success does not depend on purely individual efforts and merit. Increasingly, they are seeing their learning journeys in the context of larger institutional constraints and barriers that are out of their control. They look not only at costs but also at the value and return on investment in education, which are not always clear to them. Some students question the overall performance of educational institutions when measured against metrics such as access, affordability, completion, and equity.

INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT CAN’T HAPPEN WITHOUT FIRST DEFINING SUCCESS

Students are asking institution-level questions and understand that without a clear definition of success, institutional improvement cannot be tracked or measured. Without clear performance indicators, interventions and actions can’t be targeted, and students lose.
What is the success measure for our systems? Because once we find that, then we can say, okay, well, if it's retention rates, our Black male students aren't staying in school. So we're failing them. If it's graduation rates, our students aren't graduating on time, and sometimes not at all. Because we're failing them with counseling and mental services and programs that we provide on campuses. If it's graduating and getting a job afterwards, then we're really failing, because we're not setting them up for success and we're not giving them those connections right before we leave, they complete their courses, we send them an email, especially right now during COVID, we send them an email: Congratulations, you graduated. Please donate to our alumni association once you have a job. Bye. And that's it. So how are we measuring that success if we don't know what's going to happen to them, a year after they graduate, or if they even got a job? I think that's the biggest problem that our systems have is that they're just not defining what that measure is. And with that, they're not focusing on how to succeed in it. They're not focusing on how to provide exactly those services that our students are needing.”

— Danielle, 18–24, CSU Graduate Student

COLLEGE ATTENDANCE REQUIRES DIFFICULT TRADEOFFS FOR STUDENTS

Beyond affordability and paying for the actual costs of getting an education are the costs associated with balancing the pursuit of higher education with the responsibilities of daily life. Many participants described the tradeoffs higher education demands of them: choosing between taking classes and working to pay the bills, trying to balance being a student and being a parent, and sustaining purpose and vigilance toward goals while experiencing a series of failed starts and restarts.

“Knowing whether you're going to try to go get a second job so you can have a home, so you can have adequate essentials for your family versus getting more credits, trying to get your education. I think income was a big one and a lot of people, and let's be honest. They'll rather go work for certain businesses right now that are offering you $18, $19, $36 an hour to go deliver stuff versus you going and getting a degree and then getting paid a minimum wage at a medical office. And that's what we're battling with.”

— Cristina, 35–44, CCC Student
AFFORDABILITY EXTENDS BEYOND TUITION

Many factors impact a student’s ability to stay the course, complete their coursework, and get their degree. Many students had unplanned and highly interrupted learning journeys but were driven to improve their economic situation for the betterment of their children and successive generations. Many talked about how affordability and navigating the need to work often impacted their decision to stay in school or not. Choosing to work, unfortunately, was a choice driven by necessity, even knowing that choosing to work meant picking up a minimum wage, dead-end job.

“... when I dropped out, it was about money. You have to decide whether you want to go to school or you want to pay the bills. And after I had my daughter, I was working a part-time job. And luckily my husband, he started working and I was a stay-at-home mom doing my work. And it's hard, sometimes when you're low-income, you have to decide whether you want to go to school or you want to stay at a minimum-wage job. And it's true, you have to teach your children. Because I come from a family where my parents were immigrants. They couldn't go to any higher education, my mom did the best she could. And I want to ingrain that into my children that they could always do better than me. And I want to show my daughter that I could get my degree, she has to always surpass her people. And I want her to understand that when you get a degree, you get more education and it costs a little with the money as well. But education is the important thing. Nobody can take away what you learn.”

— Priscilla, 18-24, CCC Student

6 | Stigmatization: Inequity, polarization, stratification across segments

California’s stratified public higher education, designed to offer multiple pathways for different types of students, has led to unintended negative stereotypes. No matter how much California has improved in providing access to public higher education to diverse populations across the state, especially at the community-college level, a persistent reality surfaced throughout the interviews: a community college degree didn’t “count” as an accomplishment. It was often seen as lesser by employers, educators, administrators, and the students themselves. Obtaining an associate’s degree came with an uncertainty of its value and a reminder that it was not enough—despite the personal accomplishment it represented.
AN INGRAINED “NEGATIVE” NARRATIVE

So much of the intended plan to expand higher education access and completion in California hinges on community colleges, due to their geographic reach across the state and their low barriers to entry. Community colleges are the most universal access point in the system. But the value of community colleges and their role in helping the state bring more equity through the power of four-year transfer is far from reality for many. Students shared experiences of being told by people—even within the public higher education system itself—that community college wasn’t worth it, that getting your associate’s degree wasn’t something worth celebrating.

“When I was a freshman or sophomore in high school, there used to be a program called Avid. I don’t know if you guys heard of it and it’s to help you go to college, basically like full prep for college. My professor basically said that community college was like... It wasn’t worth it. Basically he was saying that people who go to community college are dumb. He was saying that all you would need to do... that even a dog could go to community college and him and his friends signed up their dog to go. And I feel like there’s such a stigma to community college that needs to be erased.”

— Priscilla, 18–24, CCC Student

THE DRAWN-OUT, DEGREE-LESS, DEAD-END EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY

The suggested two-year completion time with full-time enrollment appeared to be a pipe dream for many of the students interviewed. While that signaled the possibility for flexibility and the ability to balance multiple things for some, others found themselves either discouraged after four years without a degree or questioning the legitimacy of the institution altogether.

“A City College counselor on Freshmen Day basically tried to tell me, like, ‘yeah, let’s treat [my class schedule] like true, real college.’ Now at the time I was like ‘yeah whatever, all right, this is real college, this is real college—let’s do it.’ And then the first day comes and that shit is...excuse me...that college is a joke. I have my big homies still at City College. That’s not good. My big homies that graduated [high school] five, six years ago. And they are still there.”

— Isaias, 18–24, former CCC student (no degree)
THE LOW MARKET VALUE OF AN AA DEGREE

Clearly, completion of a degree yields far better economic results on all fronts. Those who had received credit towards their AA but hadn’t achieved their degree felt little to no market advantage, despite having spent significant time—sometimes years—in the classroom. However, while many felt a great sense of accomplishment upon completing their AA, the actual market value and advantage it provided to them when on the job market seemed to be in question.

“ I graduated in 2020 with an associate in computer science. I couldn’t find a job, and I took a job at Amazon. I got COVID, I became unemployed and I’m currently searching for work in the tech industry. So far I got in interviews from Apple and Best Buy. And I’m returning to college to get my bachelor’s degree, because I learned I’m competing with people who have bachelor’s degrees and master’s degrees in my field, and they’re not going to take me unless I graduate.”

— Pascual, 18–24, CCC alum

“ 2020 left a bad taste in my mouth. I think 81 interviews was the amount I was rejected for, and they were all entry-level internships. I couldn’t get any of them.”

— Pascual, 18–24, CCC alum

7 | Campus Climate: Lack of safety and sense of belonging

Whether or not a student feels safe can have a major impact on degree completion. In order to feel comfortable at college, students must view their college as a safe space wherein the administration will protect them and provide them with resources to maintain their mental health. While most students struggle to maintain their emotional and psychological health when faced with the academic and social challenges of the collegiate environment, this is especially true for those groups of students who are directly impacted by instances of racism, sexism, and homophobia. Several of the interviewed students from underrepresented backgrounds felt that higher education institutions needed to address issues of violence against students more effectively and provide services to promote their emotional and psychological health and healing.

MARGINALIZED STUDENTS FEAR FOR THEIR PHYSICAL SAFETY

Instances of racism, sexism, and homophobia can make for hostile learning environments for students of color, women, and queer students. This is even more true when violent attacks against students go unchecked by the administration. Fearing physical violence compromises the psychological health of students from targeted groups and negatively impacts their likelihood to complete their program.
"I was at Humboldt State in the last semester of my junior year. I was kind of despondent because a lot of these things are happening on that campus. It was too much. But, I remember I was walking into class, I had something of a profile up there because of some of the work I was doing, a local news was covering some of the things I was doing in the group that I was a part of. Right? This guy came up to me and he said, ‘Oh, you’re that N-word girl. You’re that N-word B from television, aren’t you?’ I’m like, ‘Whoa.’ And I’m walking on the footbridge toward campus, so clearly he knows I’m a student and he’s honed in on... I’m the one he’s talking about. He continued to accost me and people are just not trying to look, right? And no one’s doing anything. I’m like, ‘Oh, okay. This is just me and this grown man.’ Right? He’s in my face. I’m like ‘You need to move.’ And he’s mirroring me and my motions. Then I’m finally like, ‘You need to back up. You need to step away from me. Get away from me or else.’ Right? I had pepper spray. As I started walking away, he grabs me, he spits on me, he calls me the N word again. So it was a moment I’m like, ‘Okay, that just happened. I’m no longer safe on this campus.’”

— Nicole, 24–34, UC Student

ADMINISTRATION’S FAILURES TO ADDRESS ISSUES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND RAPE ADDS TO STUDENT STRESS

As conversations about gender and sexual harassment and rape have become more mainstream, some institutions have not improved their protocols for addressing these issues on their campuses. Doing so is critical to making students feel safe and supported and they pursue their degrees.

“... when I requested that my class be changed because I was in a class with my friend’s rapist, they could’ve moved me out of that class. It was uncomfortable at that time, because as they were going through the case, the university, they don’t really have anything. And they were saying, ‘It’s too late into the semester. We’re not going to move your class.’ The faculty weren’t being supportive about that, even though I had to sit there and pretend I didn’t know what he did to my friend and I had to ‘play nice.’ It’s just the mental gymnastics that I had to go through to just sit there and pretend I was okay. And on top of faculty not understanding why I didn’t want to show up to class, there wasn’t enough tutoring services to support me.”

— Zafira, 25–34, CSU Graduate Student
MARGINALIZED STUDENTS MUST NAVIGATE HOSTILITY

Students with marked racial and/or cultural differences are vulnerable to hostility at varied scales. Aside from the threat of physical violence, these students must constantly navigate racial microaggressions in their everyday interactions with faculty and fellow students. Learning under these conditions puts unfair strain on these students, making it more difficult for them to be successful in their coursework.

“My classmates would look at me and they would be so weirded out. I had to face a lot of racism and sexism. There's a lot of negative stereotypes from people where I come from. A lot of people walk around and say, ‘Oh, you're just buying the degree. Or you're paying someone to do your assignments for you.’ And faculty, as soon as they walk in, don’t believe in me because they’re like, ‘Oh, you're just here to mess around. You're here on a scholarship and then you're going to go back to Kuwait and that's all you want. You just want to buy your way into a degree.’ Maybe if I didn’t have all these stereotypes and racism and barriers from classmates, staff and faculty, maybe I didn’t have to fail three times... That’s honestly what pushed me to student government.”

— Zafira, 25–34, CSU Graduate Student
Overview

IFTF uses ethnographic interviews to understand how people are experiencing the present in ways that are likely to grow and have increasing importance in the future. Futures ethnography anticipates emergent futures by understanding the values, behaviors, and toolsets of populations of interest in the context of their daily lives at home, school and work. Typically, this understanding is gathered in multi-hour interviews in which researchers use a structured interview protocol to gather a deeper understanding of key domains of experience, in this case college experience. Futures ethnography does not yield representative samples of the larger population but rather aims to uncover a range of experiences to gain insight into the underlying values, motives, and choices that drive behaviors.

Recruitment Strategy

This study prioritized the experiences of BIPOC learners, as their completion rates fall below those of their white counterparts. Of the learners participating in the study, 100% self-identified as Hispanic, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and/or Middle Eastern. They represented varied geographies, levels of education, ages, and employment statuses. All participants had attained at least a high school diploma and had either already completed a degree in higher education or expressed an aspiration to receive a degree in the future.

Screening and Selection

Researchers asked participants to reflect on key turning points in their lives and share the needs, priorities, and constraints that influenced their educational choices and experiences in the past, as well as their hopes and expectations for the future.

Of the 308 individuals who responded to the call for research participation, 157 were contacted via email to request a ten-minute phone screen. The research team ultimately scheduled and conducted 80 phone screening interviews. From these interviews, 45 individuals were selected to participate in five group interviews conducted in May. The team chose demographically diverse participants willing to speak to past and present educational experiences in a virtual group setting. Ultimately, 35 individuals participated in these interviews.
Outcomes
Throughout the interviews, participants from across the state shared experiences, both individual and collective. While individual stories are unique, clear themes arose from the conversation. Each theme in this document represents some aspect of the learning journey toward obtaining a degree: from the early stages of applying and gaining acceptance to an institution of higher education, whether immediately after high school or later in life; to the middle stages, where students must juggle multiple responsibilities while pursuing a degree, often moving in and out of school as life’s demands take priority; and to the late stages, where students are near completing their requirements or are re-entering the higher education ecosystem to complete their degree and pursue career aspirations. There are seven themes in total:

1. Fragmentation: The “system” doesn’t operate as one
2. The New College Student: Perils of one-size-fits-all education
3. Bureaucracies: Navigating fragmented processes hinders students
4. Student Success: Insufficient guidance and support
5. Institutional Performance: High costs, lagging outcomes
6. Stigmatization: Inequity, polarization, stratification across segments
7. Campus Climate: Lack of safety and sense of belonging

Together, the themes reveal the challenges of many—particularly BIPOC learners in California—where success requires that students have the ability to navigate fragmented processes, the ability to learn to thrive in a sink-or-swim environment, and an entrepreneurial mindset to find and procure the resources they need to succeed.
Demographics and Participant Characteristics
There were a total of 35 ethnographic interview participants. Their demographic details are as follows:

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Interview Guide
This is a copy of the interview guide that was developed and utilized by the ethnographic interviewers in this project.

Navigating California’s Higher Education System: Choices, Decisions, and Turning Points for The College Futures Foundation by The Institute for the Future
Virtual Group Interview Guide
6.24.21 (Revised)

PREAMBLE AND CONSENT
The Institute for the Future (https://www.iftf.org/home/) is a Bay Area nonprofit futures research organization that helps individuals and organizations think systematically about the future. We conduct research to understand what people are experiencing in the present in order to understand what experiences might be like in the future.

To that end, we are conducting virtual group interviews with people of color as part of a research project with the College Futures Foundation (https://collegefutures.org/). We are seeking to understand how you—California’s diverse learners and students—make decisions about your future. We want to understand the factors you weigh and the trade-offs you make in decisions regarding your educational choices. We also want to learn more about your views on the future—how you’re preparing for it and what role your educational choices play in reaching your goals. Your views will be combined with other voices to inform policy and university leaders as they plan for the future of higher education in California.

We are interested in your stories. No preparation is required.

During the interview, we’ll ask you questions about:

• You and your views about the value of higher education
• Your views about the future—what you are anticipating and how you’re preparing for it,
• Your learning journey and how you’ve approach decisions about your education, and
• The larger system of higher education in California and the kind of changes that would make a difference.

You filled out a consent form beforehand, that states what I just told you, and outlines the conditions of participation and how we’ll use the information we collect. We will never use your actual name or identify you in any way in any publication. We will be your facilitators and a few others on the research team are listening and taking notes.

Please let us know if we have your permission to record this interview by saying “Yes”. Thank you.
Okay, before we get started, here are some participation guidelines:

• Hear from everyone
• Speak to your experience
• Help keep us on time; ask to mute when not speaking
• What is shared in here, stays in here
• If you’d like to chat, please use the chat feature in Zoom

Do you have any questions before we start? And with that I’ll turn it over to...

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

*Part 1: Tell me about yourself and your views about the value of higher education*

1.1. **Tell me more about yourself—who you are, your family and where you live and so on?**

   **Probe:** Who lives with you? Are there other people around you?

   **Probe:** Who are the people that depend on you? What are your responsibilities?

   **Probe:** Are you currently working? If so, what do you do for work? (and by work we mean any activity that generates an income including: babysitting, caregiving, hair, nails, gig work, etc.)

1.2. **Tell me more about your life during the last year under the pandemic of COVID-19? What changed about your life? What stayed the same?**

   **Probe:** What impact has the pandemic had on your educational choices and goals? Did it interrupt or change your goals?

   **Probe:** What do you think the impact of the pandemic will be on you and your family going forward?

   **Probe:** Do you see your educational decisions and choices differently? If so, how? If not, why not?
1.3. We want to learn more about your learning journey to date. By learning journey we want you to think about all the educational choices and learning experiences you’ve pursued and completed after high school, and even those you are planning for the near future. You can take notes or draw a picture on a piece of paper. We’ll keep coming back to your learning journey throughout the interview and asking you to reflect on your experience. Tell us about your learning journey? Tell us about any key entry points, turning points or milestones?

**Probe:** Why are you pursuing higher education? What are your goals?

**Probe:** What influenced your choices and ultimate decision about the university/college/school attended and course of study?

**Probe:** Has your pursuit of higher education been planned or unplanned? Why?

**Probe:** What is the value of a degree to you? Is this similar or different to other people you know?

1.4. Is your education preparing you for the future or not preparing you for the future?

**Probe:** If so, how? If not, why not?

**Part 2: Tell me about your views about the future, what you are anticipating, and how you’re preparing for it**

2.1. Let’s fast-forward and jump ahead and think about the future itself. We’re continuing to come out of the pandemic and the year is now 2031, ten years out from now. Keep in mind potential shifts in jobs, the economy, technology, the environment, society, culture and politics.

You’ll be ten years older and would have continued on your learning journey, some of you will complete your education while others will change directions, and come back to it at a later time moving in and out of school and the workforce.

Thinking about 10 years from now and the world around you, your family, and your community. What will the future be like? What are you preparing for? How are you preparing for the future you anticipate?

**Probe:** What educational choices will you make to prepare for the future?

**Probe:** What do you anticipate will change? What do you anticipate will remain the same?

2.2. Let’s continue to think about the future ten years out. Now, describe how you’re making a living and what you’re doing for work? How did you get there?

**Probe:** How did your learning journey prepare you for this future work/career/path?
**Part 3: Tell me more about your learning journey and experience to date and how you approach critical decisions and choices about your education and learning**

3.1. Let’s come back to the present (we’re back to thinking about 2021) and take a moment to reflect on your overall learning journey to date, thinking about all of the decisions and choices you’ve made along the way.

How would you describe the stage you are at now? Would you say 1. You are just starting, 2. You are somewhere in the middle, or 3. You’re near reaching your goals and getting ready for what’s next?

Why do you say this? And, how do you know this is where you’re at right now?

**Probe for #1:** What has your experience been like up to this point? What were your expectations of higher education? Are your expectations being met? Why? Why not?

**Probe for #2:** Describe this halfway point. Tell me how you got here. What comes next?

**Probe for #3:** What did it take to get near completion? What is next? Is there anything you wish would have been different about your experience? (e.g., about the system, the support you received, etc.)

3.2. Wherever you’re at, tell me more about one of the more important decisions you made along the way in your learning journey to date, in other words, think about a key turning point (e.g., deciding which university or college to attend, deciding which area or discipline to study, deciding to change directions, shifting from being a full-time to part-time student, deciding to leave school and join the workforce).

What was a key turning point or decision in your learning journey?

**Probe:** How did you go about making that decision? What support, if any, did you receive to make that decision? What factors did you weigh?

**Probe:** What were your choices? What tradeoffs did you have to make?

**Probe:** What questions did you have? How did you answer those questions?
Part 4: Tell me about your learning journey going forward and the actions you’ll take to pursue the best possible future for yourself.

4.1. Now for a moment let’s elevate the conversation and talk about the whole system of higher education in California. What changes do you think are needed?

   Probe: Improve access?
   Probe: Improve affordability?
   Probe: Improve completion?
   Probe: Are there other areas you like to see improved? What difference would these changes have made in your experience?

4.2. Now let’s just talk about the future overall. Can you tell me about a learning/education experience or story that triggers your worst fears about the future of California’s system of higher education? The story can be your own or from a trusted source.

   Probe: What can the system (or you?) do now to avoid these fears from becoming reality?

4.3. Tell me about an experience or story that gives you hope for the future of California’s system of higher education? What are the things you hope will change?

   Probe: What can you do now to ensure positive long-term change and outcomes?

Conclusion:
Thank you for your time and participation. Thank you for sharing your incredible stories. We will be following up with each of you and share the results of our work with you. Again, thank you and with gratitude we wish you well. Stay safe.
APPENDICES
Appendix III: Stakeholder and expert workshops

WORKSHOP 1: Stakeholder Workshop to Present Findings and Develop Insights
Innovations in California Public Higher Education: A Workshop
Facilitated by Institute for the Future (IFTF) for College Futures Foundation
July 27th & July 28th, 9am-12pm PT

DAY 1 | Tuesday, July 27th

GOALS
• Situate ourselves within the larger project arc
• Develop a baseline understanding around the state of affairs with California public higher education, and the future forces that will impact its next decade
• Align around the goals and design requirements of the future system and this exercise
• Ideate innovations and interventions that could help to work toward the design requirements

AGENDA
9:00   Settle In
9:05   Welcome
Our journey will begin with welcomes and context setting from the leadership of both College Futures Foundation and IFTF. What do we hope to accomplish together over the next two days?

9:15   Introductions
Our virtual room will be full of many incredible people. To orient ourselves, we will ask College Futures Foundation, IFTF, and student participants to share their name and who they are.

9:30   Setting the Scene
IFTF executive director Marina Gorbis will provide participants with a high-level overview of where we are right now, contextualizing the state of California public higher education for the purposes of this workshop.

9:40   Expert Viewpoints
There is a wealth of knowledge amongst our participants. We will spend 4 minutes with each “expert” invitee, asking them the following question: “What do you see as the systems-level changes that would make the California public higher education ecosystem more efficient, affordable, and equitable and help more Californians achieve four-year degrees?”
10:10 Future Forces
Too often we assume that the future will pretty much look the same as the present. But several trends are already shifting and changing the world around us and are critical to take into account in designing innovations for the future. IFTF researchers will share seven future forces likely to impact the future of public higher education in California.

10:25 Break

10:40 Design Criteria
This workshop is a critical part of a larger College Futures Foundation project to design system-level models that could result in a more equitable, student-centered, efficient, and affordable California public higher education ecosystem. In this session, we will review the criteria we will use to develop innovative models.

10:55 New System Models: An Overview
The rest of the workshop will be spent building out robust pictures of new system-level models for California’s public higher education. To kickstart ideation, we will introduce four baseline models (as well as review the model of the status quo): No Hierarchy, Whole System Admissions, Regional Promise, and Digital First. We will explore the models and seek participants’ feedback.

11:25 Building Out Models, Part 1
In the final session of the day we will work in four pre-assigned groups, each focused on one of the models. The groups will engage in deeper explorations of needed changes and design choices that would make the models successful. Working with a template, each group will consider governance, infrastructure, staffing, culture, and other levers that need to be activated in order for the model to meet the design criteria.

11:55 Preview of Day 2

12:00 Adjourn
Day 2 | Wednesday, July 28th

GOALS
• Understand the dynamics and possibilities of applying 4 different transformation models to the CA public higher education system
• Develop a deeper understanding of the behind-the-scenes changes needed to enact large shifts in systems
• Gain insight into the human impacts of systems-level changes
• Explore and analyze potential consequences of each transformation model

AGENDA
9:00 Settle in
9:05 Overview of the Day
9:10 Ethnographic Themes
The goal of this project is to create a coordinated system that works for students. A key element of our research to date involved a series of ethnographic group interviews with primarily BIPOC Californians, all of whom had some experience within the California’s public higher education institution, and most of whom were first generation college students. In this session we will share high-level themes from ethnographic interviews to recenter the discussions on students.

9:25 Building Out Models, Part 2
We will head back into our small groups to continue filling out our revised models using the template started on Day 1.

9:55 Sharing Revised Models
All four groups will share key elements of their revised models, followed by reactions and feedback from other participants. Groups will be asked to address specifically how their models meet the design criteria discussed on Day 1.

10:25 Student Reactions
What would it feel like to be a student in these new models? We will ask our two student participants to give brief reactions to the four models—what excites them? What questions do they raise? What challenges do they foresee?

10:32 Break
10:47  Consequences/What Happens Next?
We’ve thought about what would need to happen in order to make the models work, but what happens after that? What are the consequences, both intended and unintended, of these new financing models, student pathways, partnerships, governance structures, and more? We will head back into our small groups one last time to consider the implications of these system-level changes.

11:15  Accelerants
What key levers, tipping points, or events could make these models more likely? As a whole group, we will go through each model together and ask: “What could accelerate our path to this model in the next 10 years?”

11:45  Closing Thoughts
To bring our time to a close, we will ask participants to share their final reflections. After these two days together, what is one key priority that IFTF and College Futures Foundation should consider when putting together these final models? What should we be sure to keep in mind?

12:00  Adjourn
WORKSHOP 2: Foresight to Insight to Action Workshop
Pathways Toward Transformation:
Expanding Access, Affordability, Completion, and Economic Mobility
College Futures Foundation Workshop
August 27, 2021
9:00 am – 1:00 pm | Held via Zoom

GOALS
• Provide project context, share progress to date and plans for completion
• Share emerging vision and pathways toward transformation
• Develop recommended actions for distinct stakeholders across pathways

AGENDA
9:00 Settle in
9:05 Welcome
9:10 Overview of Agenda and Process
9:15 Introductions
9:30 Framing the Problem and Design Principles for Transformation
10:00 Pathways Forward
11:00 BREAK
11:15 Proposals for Action
11:30 Proposals for Action Report Out and Discussion
12:15 Constraints and Enablers Group Discussion
12:40 Closing Take-Aways from Participants
1:00 Adjourn