Introduction: Charge of the Task Force

In March 2010, Chancellor Gregory Gray, confronted with the challenge of unfunded FTES in excess of 4,500 district-wide, appointed a Task Force consisting of the following members:

Gaither Loewenstein (Chair), Norco College
Aaron Brown, RCCD
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The Enrollment Management Task Force was given a two-fold charge:

Provide the Chancellor with a recommendation for a three-year plan to reduce unfunded FTES to an acceptable number; and

Develop a set of principles to be considered by District and College decision-makers charged with managing enrollment.

Preface: The Countercyclical Nature of Apportionment Funding in the California Community College System

As a precursor to understanding the challenges facing community colleges in California seeking to effectively manage student enrollment, it is necessary to consider the basis upon which community colleges are allocated the majority of their revenues from the state. Colleges are allocated a “base budget” of a certain amount of dollars per credit full-time equivalent student (this number varies, but typically amounts to approximately $ 4,500). Additionally, in some, but not all budget years, colleges are compensated for a certain percentage of enrollment growth, at the same apportionment rate per credit FTES. A third source of state apportionment revenue is the so-called cost of living adjustment (COLA) that is allocated to colleges in some, but not all years. With the exception of COLA, apportionment revenues are a function of a district’s base enrollment, augmented by any growth dollars made available by the state (assuming that a given district’s enrollment grows sufficiently to meet its growth “cap”).

The countercyclical aspect of this funding system stems from the tendency of the state to offer growth dollars during times when state revenues are high. These times tend to coincide with strong economic conditions, under which it is typically more difficult for community colleges to increase their enrollments (since students tend to take fewer classes and work more hours when rates of employment are high).
Consequently, during good economic times when the state tends to fund enrollment growth, many colleges are forced to leave portions of these growth dollars "on the table" as a result of their inability to achieve enrollment growth rates that approach the level of growth being funded by the state. Conversely, community colleges tend to experience much higher rates of enrollment growth during economic recessions, as individuals displaced by the economic downturn return to college in higher numbers. During these times, however, growth funding from the state tends to disappear, since state tax revenues are falling as well. Under these circumstances, California community colleges may find themselves carrying a significant amount of "unfunded FTES", i.e. students for whom educational and student support services must be provided without the financial benefit of a growth augmentation from the state.

This paradoxical arrangement contributes to counterintuitive decision-making on the part of community college decision-makers, who tend to add more class sections when the state is proffering growth dollars (and student demand for classes is lower) and cutting back sections when funding for growth disappears (and demand for classes is increasing). Thus, at the very time when community colleges should be expanding the availability of their classes and programs the lack of state funding availability requires them to cut back, while the availability of growth funding during strong economic times encourages them to over-schedule classes in an (often futile) effort to capture these growth dollars. In the absence of well thought-out, conscientiously applied enrollment management strategies, community colleges often find themselves with large numbers of empty classroom seats during good economic times and long-lines, wait lists, disappointed students and precipitous increases in unfunded FTES during economic recessions.

Achieving and Maintaining an Optimal Level of Unfunded FTES

In the fiscal context in which California community colleges operate, unfunded FTES is not, per se, a bad thing. Since unfunded FTES from prior years can be used to qualify for apportionment revenue in years in which a district's enrollment growth rate falls below the state growth "cap", it behooves colleges to maintain a certain level of unfunded FTES as a cushion. There is, however, such a thing as having too much unfunded FTES. Currently, for example, Riverside Community College District is carrying an estimated unfunded FTES of over 4,500. At this level, if the state were to pay a 3 percent enrollment growth rate for the next five years the district could achieve full funding by drawing upon its unfunded FTES without increasing its actual enrollment by a single student. While the question of how much unfunded FTES is the right amount is a matter of debate, it is clear that the Chancellor's concern over the district's current level of unfunded FTES is well-founded.
After considerable discussion, the Task Force has estimated the appropriate range of unfunded FTES for the district to be approximately 4-8 percent of overall district enrollment. Based on this estimate the district should consider strategies geared toward reducing its unfunded FTES from 4,500 to a range of 1,200-2,200. Maintaining unfunded FTES at this level would provide a cushion to serve the district during years in which its enrollment growth falls short of state growth funding while minimizing the amount of dollars expended to serve students for whom the state is not providing apportionment funding.

Of equal importance in managing unfunded FTES is the manner by which these enrollments are derived. More specifically, if an instructor of a three-unit course with an enrollment cap of 49 students allows five more students to enroll, the district is gaining roughly .5 FTES without paying any additional amount for the direct cost of instruction (i.e. the instructor receives the same pay for teaching 54 students as he/she does for teaching 49 students). There are, of course, non-instructional costs associated with serving these additional students, such as admissions and records services, counseling, maintenance and operations and student support. Relatively speaking, however, this is the most inexpensive means of accommodating increased student enrollment, although the effects on quality of instruction of all increases in class size must be carefully assessed.

By contrast, if a college in the district adds a new course section to the schedule in an effort to serve more students, the instructor of this section must be paid in full; the district has estimated the average direct instructional costs of a section at $ 4,700. In an environment in which the state is not paying growth dollars, these direct instructional costs must be absorbed by the district, making it the most expensive type of unfunded FTES.

A third means of generating FTES growth occurs when an instructor allows his/her class size to increase above 55 students, thereby triggering the large class size incentives included in the 2007-10 Collective Bargaining Agreement. Under the agreement, faculty members teaching a class with 55-69 students receive .025 FTE compensation in the form of additional salary; those teaching between 70-89 students receive .050 FTE compensation. Enrollment growth achieved in this manner costs the district between 25 and 50 percent of the cost of creating a new class section in terms of direct instructional costs.

Thus, in addition to maintaining an optimal level of unfunded FTES the district and its colleges need to consider the cost of serving additional students, taking care to employ the least costly means of achieving enrollment growth. Simply put, adding more sections is the most expensive means of increasing enrollment while encouraging instructors to add students without triggering the large class size incentive is the least expensive, with growth achieved by paying large class size incentives falling in between these two extremes.
Proposed Strategy for Reducing Unfunded FTES to Acceptable Range

The district's currently high level of unfunded FTES arose through a confluence of factors. First, during the mid-2000s, a time in which the state was offering growth funding, department chairs and deans were encouraged to add more class sections to their course schedules in a well-intentioned, but misguided attempt to capture state growth funding. This resulted in a dramatic over-building of class schedules and a concomitant decline in instructional productivity. By the 2005-06 academic year, the district’s ratio of full-time equivalent students to full-time equivalent faculty (a measure of the direct costs of providing instruction) had fallen to 433, a number that is 17.5% below the state-prescribed WSCH: FTEF ratio of 525. While students may have benefited from small class sizes, the district, in effect, was paying 17.5% more in direct instructional costs than would have been the case had it served the same number of students while maintaining a WSCH: FTEF of 525 by scheduling fewer classes. Further, hundreds of seats were left empty while fill rates dropped well below the optimum rate of 85-95 percent.

With the onset of the recession in 2007/8, enrollments began to increase dramatically while state growth funding (and COLA) evaporated. In spite of the district’s effort to control enrollment growth by reducing its 2009/10 class schedules by 1,000 sections, students filled virtually all of the remaining empty seats, pushing the district’s unfunded FTES to its currently unsustainable level.

Another factor that has contributed to the district’s high level of unfunded FTES is the manner in which its class scheduling grid is designed. Several years ago the district moved to a “compressed calendar” based, in part, on the realization that by scheduling class contact hours of 61 minutes in duration the district could derive a higher amount of apportionment revenue from the state. One effect of the compressed calendar was to enable the district to report a higher level of enrollment to the state than would have been the case had contact hours been scheduled for less than 60 minutes. This practice has recently been disallowed by the State Chancellor’s Office.

As it turns out, the means by which the district can reduce its unfunded FTES to the acceptable range are relatively simple. First, in compliance with the State Chancellor’s Office directive, the district has decided to move away from the compressed calendar, beginning in fall 2010. It is estimated that this decision will reduce the district’s unfunded FTES by 1,500-2,000. Secondly, the District Chancellor has directed colleges to reduce their class schedules for 2010/11 by an additional 400 sections. It is estimated that these section reductions will result in an additional reduction in unfunded FTES of 1,200-1,300. The combined impact of changing the scheduling grid to comply with State guidelines for compressed calendars and reducing the number of sections offered by 400 is likely to reduce the district’s unfunded FTES to between 1,200 and 1,800. Assuming that the resulting unfunded FTES falls within this range for 2010/11 no further action will be necessary to reduce unfunded FTES to an optimal level.
Once the level of unfunded FTES has been reduced to the optimum range, the district, its instructional administrators, department chairs and faculty must endeavor to avoid a repeat of the circumstances that contributed to the current situation. Specifically, it is essential that future increases in class sections offered be made based on sound evidence (such as recent enrollment histories) that sufficient student demand exists to warrant their creation and that future enrollment growth does not significantly exceed the likely rate of state growth funding. The district must discontinue the practice of adding sections to the schedule simply to try and capture state-funded growth where insufficient evidence of student demand for class sections exists. Instead, section increases should be targeted toward disciplines and classes with high existing WSCH: FTEF rates, newly emerging programs or classes deemed by the college to be mission-critical. Further, as new instructional facilities come on line the district should endeavor to phase in the offering of classes in the new buildings to coincide with projected student demand and likely levels of state growth funding. Without adhering to these principles there is a significant risk that the district may once again find itself with above optimal levels of unfunded FTES in the future.

**Enrollment Management Principles and Guidelines**

Decisions concerning effective enrollment management should be based on an agreed upon set of principles and guidelines. Principles upon which enrollment management decisions are based may include the following:

- **The level of the organization at which enrollment management decisions are to be made.** In general, except under extraordinary circumstances, enrollment management decisions should be made at the college, as opposed to the district level. Within overall parameters established by the district through collaborative processes outlined later in this report, colleges should be charged with making operational decisions such as the number of class sections to be scheduled and the distribution of these sections across the college curriculum. Class schedules should be built by those in the best position to ascertain likely student demand (i.e. college instructional administrators in consultation with their faculty).

- **Student Academic Needs Should Drive Enrollment Management Decisions.** As a general rule, student academic needs (curriculum balance, quality of instruction, availability of courses, etc.) should be the primary factors guiding enrollment management decisions.

- **The need to practice responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars.** Enrollment management decisions should be based on the principle of providing students access to courses and programs and fostering their success while optimizing the use of financial resources. Student-centered schedules should be planned, efficient and responsive to the communities served.
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In addition to the above principles, district- and college-level decision-makers can benefit from a set of guidelines to assist them in making enrollment management decisions. Several suggested guidelines will be discussed below in the context of the functions to be performed by the district and the colleges in managing student enrollment.

District-Level Functions

Three main functions are best performed by the district in support of its enrollment management strategies: 1) Setting overall enrollment targets and assigning projected growth to the constituent colleges; 2) Allocating sufficient resources to the colleges to support planned enrollment growth; and 3) Providing research and analysis to assist the colleges in making informed enrollment management decisions.

1) Establishing District and College Enrollment Targets

At the district-level, decisions need to be made regarding overall enrollment targets as well as the distribution of planned enrollment among the constituent colleges. The district enrollment target for the next academic year is established by the Office of the Vice Chancellor, Administration and Finance in collaboration with the District Educational Services Office based upon a) the level of funding proposed by the Governor in his/her January budget message; and b) the level of enrollment necessary to maintain the district’s "cushion" of unfunded FTES. The distribution of planned enrollment among the colleges is established by the Office of the Vice Chancellor, Educational Services. In determining this distribution, this office takes the following factors into consideration:

- The need for the district to adhere to the 75:25 law (which encourages districts to move toward delivering 75% of all instruction using full-time faculty);
- The need for the district to adhere to the 50% law (which requires that 50% of all district expenditures be allocated toward direct instructional costs);
- The “full-time faculty obligation” assigned to the district each year by the state (this number specifies the minimum number of full-time faculty members a district is required to employ);
- District and College Strategic, Educational and Facilities Master Plans and scheduled build out of new instructional facilities at each college; and
- Total costs of instruction, including the need for adequate facilities and student services to serve the planned student population.

While enrollment targets have always been established at the district-level and assigned to the colleges by the district office, the Task Force is recommending some enhancements to this process geared toward facilitating improved transparency and
consultation intended to result in greater awareness of and adherence to the enrollment targets at the college level. With this in mind, the following process is proposed:

- During the fall semester, instructional vice presidents will confer with their respective faculties, student services administrators and support staff and review their Educational Master Plans and program review documents in anticipation of their participation in the enrollment management process.

- In late January, District Educational Services staff will meet with instructional vice presidents from each of the colleges to confer with them regarding the appropriate distribution of planned enrollment growth or contraction among the colleges.

- Based on this consultation, as well as an analysis of the factors listed above, the Office of the Vice Chancellor, Educational Services will issue preliminary enrollment targets to each college in early February. These preliminary targets will be accompanied by a written rationale for the proposed distribution of planned enrollment between the colleges.

- In mid-February, each college instructional administrator will consult with representatives of the faculty in an effort to provide the district with feedback and suggestions concerning the enrollment targets.

- In late February, the Office of the Vice Chancellor, Educational Services, relying primarily upon input provided by the colleges, will issue revised enrollment targets to each college.

2) **Resource Allocation**

In the spring of each year, the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance will determine the preliminary allocation of budgetary resources to each college in accordance with the district Budget Allocation Model, which will take into consideration the costs associated with meeting the district and college enrollment growth targets. This process culminates with issuance of the Tentative District Budget in mid-June. The final distribution of budgetary resources is reflected in the adoption of the Final District Budget, which typically occurs in mid-September.

3) **Research and Analysis**

Over the course of the schedule-building process, the District Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Office of Institutional Reporting will respond to the needs of the colleges for research, data and analysis needed to guide them in enrollment management decision-making.
Guidelines for College-level Enrollment Management Decision-making

Once the enrollment target for each college has been determined by the district, college department chairs and assistant chairs may begin to formulate class schedules for each college for review and approval by the college chief instructional officer. The following guidelines are intended for use by college decision-makers in formulating class schedules:

- **Student Access**: Generally speaking, colleges should seek to optimize student access to their courses and programs, taking into consideration factors such as student retention, completion, matriculation, success and quality of instruction. Student access is promoted by offering a college-specific appropriate balance of basic skills, career-technical and transfer courses and ensuring that a mix of classes in each category is offered by time of day, day of week and mode of delivery that corresponds to student demand and student demographics. One quantitative measure of student access that can be used as an enrollment management tool is the ratio of weekly student contact hours to full-time equivalent faculty (WSCH: FTEF). For example, a class with a WSCH: FTEF ratio of 600 serves twice as many students per FTEF as a class with a WSCH: FTEF ratio of 300. Department chairs and assistant chairs can, therefore, consult historical WSCH: FTEF ratios by discipline and course as a means of ascertaining the likely number of students to be served by a proposed course section.

- **Student Success**: The schedule of courses can have an impact on various measures of student success, including successful course completion, retention and matriculation (i.e. the ability of a student to progress through a designated program of study). In some cases, it may be desirable to schedule a course that is likely to be low enrolled if this course is deemed to be a significant contributor to student success. For example, certain fourth semester courses may draw low enrollments but may be necessary in order for the enrolled students to complete their programs of study. College decision-makers may also wish to consider factors such as previous retention and success rates in assigning class sections to instructors.

- **College/District Mission**: The mission statements of the colleges and the district are another important factor to consider in building a schedule of classes. The mission of the California community colleges is multi-faceted, encompassing general education, transfer, career/technical education, basic skills, economic development and lifelong learning. During difficult economic times it may be necessary for colleges to de-emphasize certain aspects of this mission in order to ensure fulfillment of those aspects of the mission deemed to be of higher priority by college decision-makers. The college and district mission statements can serve as a guide in this regard.
• **Primary Terms vs. Summer/Winter.** In allocating increases or decreases in class sections over the course of the academic year as well as determining the mix of course offerings in a particular term, college decision-makers may wish to consider observed differences between primary terms (i.e. fall and spring) and supplemental terms (summer and winter). To the extent that different terms may serve different student populations (such as winter and summer serving proportionately more students from other institutions than "core" community college students) or may be more conducive to student success if certain classes are scheduled within them (for example, if data suggest that students have a difficult time completing high-level math or science classes during shorter terms) colleges may consider adjusting their schedules accordingly.

• **Proportionality versus Targeted Section Increases or Reductions.** In the course of developing class schedules, decision-makers are confronted with the question of whether to allocate increases (or reductions) in class sections across-the-board (i.e. equally to each department or discipline) or to target section increases or reductions toward certain classes and disciplines based on other decision-making criteria. While allocating section increases or cuts proportionately can diffuse perceptions of unfairness on the part of faculty, distributing sections in this manner may result in under achievement of other high priority college objectives, such as student access. If section increases or cuts are not deployed proportionately, decision-makers should be prepared to clearly communicate their rationale for the means by which the targeted increases or reductions have been implemented.

• **Mode of Delivery.** Whether to offer classes in a traditional "live" format, or via online or hybrid instructional delivery is another important consideration in enrollment management decision-making, since the instructional delivery mode can have an impact on student access, success and quality of instruction. Information pertaining to differential rates of student retention and success and differences in the population of students served by mode of delivery can be useful for college decision-makers in this regard. In general, colleges should seek to balance their course offerings by mode of instructional delivery based on qualitative considerations and likely student demand.

• **Effects on Full-time Overload and Part-time Faculty Employment.** Recognizing the primacy of student academic needs articulated earlier in this document, colleges may nonetheless wish to consider the effects of class scheduling decisions on the ability of full-time faculty members to secure their desired number of overload classes as well as the need to retain high quality part-time faculty members. College decision-makers must take care to adhere to the provisions of the Collective Bargaining Agreement in considering these matters.
• **Adequacy of Financial Resources to Support Class Schedule.** In preparing class schedules, decision-makers need to ensure that sufficient budgetary resources are available to support the proposed mix of courses. This is especially important in light of the high degree of variation in the cost of instructional delivery among different courses and programs. In assessing the adequacy of financial resources to support class schedules, commonly agreed upon measures of direct instructional costs, such as cost per FTEF, may be desirable.

As the above discussion makes clear, a multiplicity of factors, principles and guidelines must be considered in managing enrollment through effective schedule-building. Recognizing the primacy of student academic needs, the degree of emphasis placed on each of these factors and guidelines is a matter to be determined by the faculty and administrators of each college. What is essential is that a) all of the factors should be given some degree of consideration; and b) in weighing the different factors decision-makers should be guided as much as possible by *empirical evidence* rather than speculation, conjecture, orthodoxy or political considerations. Statements made in an effort to persuade scheduling decision-makers (i.e. "large classes are detrimental to student success") need to be supported by actual evidence. In most cases data are available for the purposes of analyzing each of the criteria outlined in this report. These data can be provided and in many cases analyzed for colleges by the District Offices of Institutional Research and Institutional Reporting or at the college-level, where recent increases in the analytical capacity of the institutions have occurred.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The Enrollment Management Task Force has addressed the two charges assigned to it by the District Chancellor. With regard to reducing unfunded FTES to an acceptable level, the Task Force has determined that the decisions that have already been made to revise the district scheduling grid to comply with the State Chancellor’s Office guidelines for compressed calendars and to reduce the total number of section offerings by 400 in 2010/11 are likely to have the effect of reducing the level of unfunded FTES to fall within the acceptable range. The Task Force has also developed a set of principles and guidelines to be considered in managing enrollment at the district and the college level, thereby addressing the second charge of the Chancellor. The process of developing this report has been instructive and beneficial to all participants, who may now take this information back to their respective institutions with the goal of making more rational, informed enrollment management decisions in the future.