

# **Extended Education's Role: Facilitating Higher Education to Historically Underrepresented Groups**

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## **Abstract**

*Extended Education, the home for outreach and access, is an often overlooked resource for accomplishing the university's mission. This article focuses on the role Extended Education has played in serving underrepresented minority groups in the California Central Valley. Through both description and analytical review of data generated from the Early Start Program, and review of Extended Education functions, policies, and practices, the authors share lessons learned serving diverse student populations. Implications for student access, retention, and graduation also are discussed.*

While each public university enjoys a negotiated mission with their state legislature, the history of land grant universities largely accentuates access. Similarly, both public and private universities usually task an educational unit with providing access for specialized populations or specialized education. Degree programs with highly focused audiences, professional seminars, non-credit programs, certificates, and life-long learning opportunities frequently find their home in Extended Education. While the organizational structure of each university system varies somewhat, Extended Education units frequently parallel a school or college structure and are routinely housed under the authority of Academic Affairs. Tasked with identifying educational needs of their service area and providing educational access to populations of students who are not routinely matriculated degree-seeking students, Extended Education has seen itself at the forefront of innovative educational modes of delivery and new educational initiatives.

Extended Education units are more nimble and quick to react to community needs than state-funded operations largely due to their autonomous funding. While state governments subsidize the educational cost for students to attend public university, programs in Extended Education chiefly operate in self-support without additional public underwriting. Similar to the mission of the land grant institutions, Extended Education is about access. Providing education opportunities to students not served by state-funded operations is the main goal of Extended Education and a significant part of a university as a whole. To illustrate this point, consider California State University's Extended Education revenue for 2011–2012. Extended Education operations topped \$291M, over 10 percent of the \$2B state appropriation for the entire system! This manuscript reflects on the function of extended learning, by reviewing both programs and procedures that facilitate access to the diverse student population of California's Central Valley.

## **California's Central Valley**

The extended education role of Fresno State, nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and in the heart of California's Central Valley, is to provide higher education access to rural communities through innovative programs and services. As a Department of Education Title III Hispanic Serving Institution, California State University, Fresno, or "Fresno State," is an exceptionally diverse campus. It serves as the premier institution of higher education in the Central Valley of California. The university serves a diverse county of over 942,000 residents who are housed across nearly 5,600 square miles of land. The diversity of the county's population is one of the area's most pronounced features, and it is this diversity that informs the university's work within the region. As of the 2012 census, approximately 49.8 percent of the residents of Fresno County were Hispanic or Latino, 9.3 percent were Asian, and 4.8 percent were Black or African American. In addition, census data indicate that Fresno County lags significantly behind national averages in both median household income (\$46,903 as compared with \$61,632 nationally) and per capita income (\$20,638 as compared with \$29,634 nationally) (United States Census Bureau 2012).

The United States Census Bureau's (2012) report indicates that a mere 19.5 percent of the county's total population aged 25 and older holds baccalaureate degrees. This statistic is particularly staggering when compared with the national average of 30.2 percent of the population that holds such degrees. Even more telling, the county faces a daunting 15.7 percent rate of unemployment among its residents (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). The combination of the county's diverse population, severely restrained incomes, and high unemployment rate represents a significant need for a university that is invested, integrated, and strategically linked with its surrounding community—a role that Fresno State takes seriously and aims to fulfill. As a Carnegie Foundation "engaged university," Fresno State is committed to transforming the Central Valley region through education, scholarship, and research that better the lives of its populace. Extended Education, as one of the university's primary vehicles for providing open access to the Institution, plays a major role in meeting this commitment.

Socioeconomically depressed in comparison to the rest of the state, California's Central Valley is populated by many historically underserved populations of learners and provides unique challenges for higher education access.

## **Fresno State's Diversity**

Fresno State recognizes the unique diversity of its region and continuously evaluates and improves the service it provides to underrepresented groups. In 2012, the university adopted a strategic plan to affirm its commitment to diversity and align the priorities of the Institution with objectives to promote this end. As Theme One of the Diversity Strategic Plan for Excellence indicates, the university is focused on "improv[ing] the campus and regional communities' awareness of its active efforts to[ward] attract[ing], retain[ing] and graduat[ing] a student body that is regionally,

nationally, and globally diverse, through open and timely communication about access and success of all domestic and international student population groups.” (Fresno State Commission on Human Relations and Equity, 2012) This diversity plan is supported and driven by the vision of Fresno State’s President, John Welty, who has called for every level of the Institution to “reduce barriers to success related to differences in areas such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, religion, linguistic diversity, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, geographical region, and more” (Fresno State Commission on Human Relations and Equity 2012).

Like the community that it serves, Fresno State is home to a diverse student population. In fall 2012, the university served a total of 22,565 students. Of these students, 38.8 percent were Hispanic, 14.8 percent were Asian, and 4.4 percent were African American. In addition, the university also hosted over 600 international students in this same semester—a group that represented nearly 3 percent of the student body (Fresno State Office of Institutional Research 2012). In addition to these diverse student groups, the university also serves and supports a population of undocumented immigrants through the provisions of Assembly Bill (AB) 540, which exempts such students from being required to pay out-of-state tuition under certain delineated circumstances and provides for unique support and student success services (California Education Code § 68130.5). The diversity of Fresno State’s student population contributes to the richness of its culture and the success of its programs.

At Fresno State, the Extended Education unit is labeled *The Division of Continuing and Global Education* to reflect its role in lifelong learning and international education opportunities. To align with common university labels, this manuscript refers to Fresno State’s Continuing and Global Education unit as simply *Extended Education*.

Fresno State’s Extended Education serves a critical role in identifying, supporting, and expanding open access to the Institution for diverse and underrepresented populations. The unit offers a variety of programs, such as Early Start and Open University, which provide opportunities for remediation and academic skill development to groups that would otherwise not be eligible to enroll in the Institution. Through these programs, Fresno State’s Extended Education has implemented a variety of tactical and strategic measures to ensure success of underrepresented and diverse students. The implementation of intrusive advising models, as well as the elimination of unit enrollment restrictions in the division’s Open University program, has contributed to the success of such groups.

## **The Early Start Program**

In May 2010, the California State University (CSU) Board of Trustees (BOT) established an initiative to prepare incoming freshmen for the rigors of academic study. Dubbed Early Start (ES) for its focus on providing skill development before entrance into college, the program used standardized tests to identify those students struggling in both English and mathematics and required their participation in a summer remediation program prior to matriculation into the CSU. Upon approval of

the BOT and issuance of Executive Order 1048, the CSU system implemented the program on all of its twenty-three campuses, excluding the Maritime Academy, beginning in summer 2012.

The CSU BOT identified the need for the ES program after an analysis identified that over half of CSU first-time freshmen (FTF) were unprepared in the core competence areas of English and mathematics (Fallis 2012). Despite acceptable high-school GPAs and directly a result of grade inflation at the K–12 level, 60 percent of CSU FTF tested deficient in one or both areas (Early Start Initiative 2013). Possession of both English and mathematics skill sets were deemed core to the successful completion of the baccalaureate degree, and as such the BOT considered the program to be critical to the CSU's long-term success.

The ES program was designed to engage students in core curriculum prior to matriculation for the remediation of deficient skill sets, which should, ostensibly, improve a student's likelihood of graduation while decreasing time to obtain the degree. Students earned one to three semester units of credit for completion of the program. Students could choose to satisfy the ES requirement on any CSU campus, regardless of the campus they would ultimately matriculate. This intentional design decision ensured that all students, regardless of regional barriers, had access to ES.

### **Early Start's New Home: Extended Education**

Because the CSU BOT identified the ES program as self-supporting, the natural home for the coordination of campus resources was Extended Education. Extended Education, then, needed to bring together requisite information systems technology and tracking with a multitude of campus educators and services. Across the CSU, each campus' offices of admissions and extended education worked with faculty and administration to develop new ES curriculum and avenues to provide open access to the multitude of campus-specific services available during the summer.

### **Funding the Early Start Program**

As delineated by Executive Order 1000, extended education reimburses the campus for the services provided. Campus services such as library access, custodial services, learning management systems, and the like are provided in support of self-supporting students. To pay for these services and faculty salaries, ES student tuition was set at \$180 per unit of credit. An additional two dollars per student was collected to compensate for student health services and student union access, which operate as separate 501(c)3 campus auxiliary organizations as defined by the California Education Code.

Since ES was designed to occur prior to student matriculation, traditional forms of financial aid, including federal grants and loans as well as the popular California State University Grant (SUG), were not available. In response, the Chancellor's Office (CO) offered full tuition waivers to select students based on the Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) component of the FAFSA application. With an EFC score of 5000

(equivalent to \$5,000) or less, tuition for early start was waived for the student and reimbursed to campuses by the CO using State Lottery funds.

By using the EFC scores for entering Fresno State students, 75 percent of FTF deemed deficient in mathematics qualified for the tuition waiver. Further, an astonishing 91 percent of FTF qualified for the tuition waiver in English.

### **Early Start and AB 540 Students**

The decision to utilize state lottery dollars to fund ES was not without controversy. While considered discretionary by the BOT, state lottery funds have several conditions for their use, including the necessity for disbursement to support U.S. citizens and legal residents. While international students were explicitly exempted from ES, AB 540 students—or individuals who reside in the state of California without government authorization and meet certain delineated requirements—were not. This placed AB 540 students in a unique predicament. Historically, this population of students has been disproportionately represented in the lower quartile of the EPT, increasing the likelihood of triggering the ES requirement. This group of students also has historically lower socioeconomic standing, and cannot file a FAFSA application due to their legal status, making this group of students ineligible for any type of fee waiver.

## **Fresno State's Extended Education**

### **Solution: Partner with CLASE and CAMP**

In California's Central Valley, where poverty is greater and student median income lower than many other CSU campuses, the impact of Early Start's implementation meant that students would be required to integrate early start coursework into their summer schedules. Community advisors suggested this created an undue burden on low-income students who may need to take time from work and secure transportation or childcare services while participating in a program required for matriculation.

Recognizing this need, Fresno State devoted resources to support optimal learning environments for Latina/o students. Operating with funds supplied by the U.S. Department of Education's Title V Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) program, Fresno State's Commitment to Latina/o Academic Success & Excellence (CLASE) program is tasked with improving the graduation rates of the Latina/o student community. Fresno State's CLASE program has attracted financial support from both private citizens and corporations alike, which has furthered programs for their students.

To help mitigate the number of students disenfranchised by the AB 540 funding issue, Fresno State's Extended Education and CLASE partnered to provide a local campus sponsorship for AB 540 or likewise financially needy students who would otherwise not be covered by state lottery funds. Using non-state and non-federal dollars, CLASE supplemented the tuition of students identified by staff familiar with migrant issues and programs. Fresno State houses an office familiar with the unique needs of migrant students and is home to the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP).

CAMP students are typically from families working in agricultural industries. Students participating in CAMP receive specialized assistance with admission applications, academic assessment, study groups, and campus orientation. Experimental research firmly validates the positive impact of peer learning, including the indirect benefits of a socially supportive learning environment (Boud, Cohen, and Sampson 2006). As part of Early Start planning, special enrollment processes were developed to assist students participating in CAMP to seamlessly enroll in ES sections with their peers.

The majority of CAMP students were required to participate in both English and mathematics ES subjects. Fresno State's Extended Education created special sections of each subject, timed to correspond with CAMP orientations. Behind the scenes, AB 540 students, as well as others identified as having specific financial need, had their tuition sponsored by CLASE. Remaining CAMP students were sponsored with alternative funds from the CAMP office. At Fresno State, CAMP students would have entire days of campus acclimation, including service tours and coursework in both English and mathematics to satisfy their ES requirements. From the students' perspective, their campus orientation was seamlessly integrated into the ES experience.

## **Access Barriers in Disadvantaged Groups**

Socioeconomically disadvantaged students face unique and challenging barriers to educational access. In the application of ES, these difficulties are substantially greater than simply the financial cost. Such students struggle with even more basic items such as transportation—especially in areas where major public transportation routes are scaled back in the summer months to adjust to decreased ridership on routes feeding major universities (assuming public transportation is even available). In rural and undeveloped areas where educational achievement may be most lacking, transportation may similarly trail the norm. These same students struggle with the opportunity cost of the ES program; in essence, their participation does not afford them the opportunity to work in summer jobs, which are paramount to students being able to pay tuition for fall semester matriculation.

When designing the local campus implementation, Fresno State's Extended Education recognized the difficulty of some socioeconomically disadvantaged students' abilities to participate in the summer ES program. Fresno State's Extended Education designed schedules to align both English and mathematics options seamlessly and without overlap with multiple start dates and times that would enable a student deficient in both subjects to compete the ES requirement concurrently. Additionally, some ES courses were offered in the evening, and some courses were offered at a satellite facility fifty miles from the main campus in order to decrease commute time for rural community members.

While online English ES options were not available at Fresno State, online mathematics options were both available and popular. Extended Education held three sections of ES mathematics in reserve, using special coded registration for students identified by Fresno State staff to students who would face commuting hardship.

## Fresno State's Early Start Success

By most accounts, Fresno State's ES program was quite successful. Excluding international students, Fresno State admitted 3,467 FTF for fall 2012. In the mathematics subject area, 2,288 students were exempt from participating in the ES program, leaving 1,179 students expected to complete ES mathematics (34 percent of FTF). In the English subject area, 2,754 were exempt from participating in the program, leaving 713 expected to complete ES English (21 percent of FTF).

**Table 1: Early Start Completion Statistics for Fresno State First Time Freshmen**

Subject	Expected to Complete	Completed at Fresno State	Completed at Another CSU or Community College	Did Not Complete
Mathematics	1,179	886	107	185
English	713	494	57	162

*\*Note one cannot sum mathematics and English statistics in Table 1, as students that were deficient in both subject areas would be double counted.*

Note that the exemptions noted previously included those with high enough scores on the ELM/EPT, out-of-state residency status, and participation in other local campus programs, such as Summer Bridge. Therefore, the actual number of FTF identified as required to participate in summer preparatory work (ES or a program that exempts ES participation) is a higher percentage of Fresno State's FTF than reported in Table 1.

Fresno State enjoyed a 95 percent completion rate in the mathematics subject area and an 89 percent completion rate in English. Additionally, 293 students enrolled in mathematics were fully remediated, demonstrating a competency at the end of ES, which cleared further university subject concerns. These completion rates are laudable, especially given that not all students can be expected to complete ES as not all students are actually intending to matriculate (it is relatively common for a student to apply to multiple universities and fail to satisfy admission conditions at one institution after deciding to attend a different university).

The California State University will be closely tracking the success of this program. Ostensibly, by engaging this population of students prior to their semester of matriculation, the students are likely to remediate faster, graduate sooner, and have a higher retention rate than previously admitted students with similarly deficient academic preparation.

## Open University

A unique process through which community members gain access to higher education is Open University (OU). OU can directly be traced to the CSU's mission statement:

“to encourage and provide access to an excellent education to all who are prepared for and wish to participate in collegiate study” (Office of the Chancellor, California State University 2012). The OU program, enacted through Section 40202 of Title V, has enjoyed a deep and long-term impact on the state of California and specifically, the county of Fresno. In fall 2012 alone, the program provided 575 students access to Fresno State that would have otherwise been denied enrollment in classes and turned away from the institution.

In addition, the BOT, in promulgating the regulations and policies of the CSU through their ability to legislate under Title V of the California Code of Regulations (commonly referred to as the Education Code), adopted § 40202: *Special Session Enrollment in State Supported Regular Curriculum Offerings*, which states, “each campus may designate . . . state supported regular course offerings which may be attended for special session credit; provided, that enrollment in any such course for special session credit shall be permitted only after students otherwise eligible to enroll in the course as a state supported regular course offering have had an opportunity to do so.” By enacting this Education Code regulation, the Trustees created the concept of “concurrent enrollment, or the ability of any individual meeting basic requirements to enroll in and take university courses without the being admitted into a university program.

While Extended Education programs like OU are designed to increase access to higher education, historically underrepresented groups also benefit from Extended Education considering the consequences of its internal processes. Our discussion now turns from the programmatic function of Extended Education toward internal processes, which, if thoughtfully considered, may facilitate both student access and degree completion.

### **Eliminating Unit Restrictions**

Consistent with Fresno State’s mission of extending access to education throughout our community, Fresno State’s Extended Education—the unit that oversees OU—took steps in spring 2012 to further extend community access to Fresno State classes. Prior to spring 2012, students were required to petition and receive administrative approval for enrollment in multiple classes through OU. Those restrictions on the number of units a student was able to register for were complicated to interpret, confusing to our students, and a barrier to access for the diverse and underrepresented populations the program serves.

In addition to expanding access to greater educational opportunities for prospective OU students, this change also resulted in faster paths to graduation for academically disqualified students seeking completion of degree requirements and reinstatement into the university. California Education Code § 40407.1 allows up to 24 academic units acquired through OU to be applied toward the conferral of an undergraduate degree. By lifting the OU unit restrictions, students are able to acquire necessary units faster and return to the university to graduate in a more expedient fashion.

## **Implementing General Academic Advising**

In addition to eliminating the unit enrollment restrictions noted previously, Fresno State's Extended Education also developed and implemented an intrusive advising model for its OU students. Beginning in spring 2012, administrative processes were implemented to require students taking over 10 units in OU to meet with a member of the Fresno State's Extended Education staff trained to provide advice and counsel to students in areas such as grade replacement regulations, general education, and major advisor connections. This was implemented after thoughtful review of best practices and advising models (Morillo 2012) and specifically supports the significant number of students participating in the OU program that are on academic disqualification through the university.

Garing (1993) discusses the importance of an intrusive advising model that places interventions at structured and deliberative times between the admissions and graduation cycles. Under Garing's *Intrusive Advising Model*, advising sessions are organized in a methodical, proactive, and timely fashion so as to focus on student goals. Emphasis is placed on the importance of registration and orientation advising, specifically as it fosters and develops relationships with students that set an expectation for attainment of short- and long-term goals. Furthermore, Garing emphasizes the importance of in-person advising as a foundation for intrusive advising. Each of these recommendations are now incorporated into the intrusive advising model adopted by Fresno State's Extended Education for OU students, and Fresno State's Extended Education has seen progress in the number of students able to return to the university for degree completion after meeting requirements set by their academic disqualification.

## **Conclusion**

In the period between 2007 and 2012, California significantly divested in higher education. State appropriations reduced over thirty percent, totaling over one billion dollars, to levels consistent with 1996 state allocations while the system had grown by 90,000 additional students (State Allocations and Enrollment 2012). Increasing tuition and reductions in the state funding has left many California students disenfranchised with higher education, and it is Extended Education that increasingly serves as a point of access to higher education for these students. Through self-support degree programs, professional development programs, and access points to university curriculum that do not require university admission, Extended Education has become the nimble, innovation shop to rapidly respond to changes in higher education.

Fresno State was the first CSU to develop an office of Extended Education (State University Administrative Manual § 3103 Continuing Education 2013). Operating as the primary comprehensive four-year public institution in the California's Central Valley, the application of extended learning at Fresno State supports the university's mission to provide access to underserved and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations of students.

The Early Start Program, operated through Extended Education, requires students with low ELM and EPT test scores to begin their remediation the summer prior to matriculation. Recognizing the disproportionately large number of historically marginalized groups, Extended Education expanded access to the program by providing online course offerings, dovetailing into existing programs, including CAMP and CLASE, and using existing organizational outreach efforts to communicate with socioeconomically disenfranchised students. Fresno State's Extended Education also found ways to supplement ESP funding for AB 540 students who were not eligible for fee waivers due to state regulations on state lottery funds.

Fresno State's Extended Education also has also expanded access through OU by removing localized barriers. Fresno State lifted OU unit restrictions to provide non-matriculated students increased access to course seats. In addition, Fresno State's Extended Education is now providing individualized academic advising to ensure returning students have a pathway not only to admission/readmission but also graduation and post-graduate career planning. In its increasing role of providing educational access, it is Extended Education that will lead the call for innovation in higher education delivery. Because of its unique capabilities, including the ability to cross traditional semesters, offer condensed course schedules and teach at distant locations, and to quickly combine campus resources with educational opportunities, Extended Education is uniquely equipped to serve historically underrepresented groups of students with higher education access points.

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