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“Public Policy and Higher Education to the Year 2000,” remarks to the Commission for the Review of the Master Plan, Sacramento, California

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Chairman Shansby, members of the Commission: Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today. Your review of the California Master Plan for Higher Education will affect the course and future development of our state's colleges and universities, just as the work of our colleges and universities will influence the future of California. Yours is a work of fundamental importance to the state and the nation; and I wish you success.

Much of what I will say today bears on the Master Plan itself. Thus, I will begin with a few words about that landmark legislation. Before the adoption of the Donahoe Act in 1960, higher education in California lacked cohesion, possessed no overall plan for growth, and was characterized by unproductive and highly politicized competition among and between the state's colleges and universities. The Master Plan changed all that, and just in time, as California in 1960 confronted the prospect of doubling enrollment in its institutions of higher education during that decade. The Master Plan for Higher Education gave California, for the first time, a coherent and rational structure within
which three fundamental educational goals were to be sought: 1) to provide broad geographical access to students; 2) to offer an education of high quality to all students enrolled; and 3) to facilitate student mobility between and among our colleges and universities according to each student's level of preparedness and educational objectives. These goals of access, quality, and mobility were to be the common objectives of a system in which each segment was assigned an overlapping but nonetheless distinctive mission; and the system itself was to be studied and monitored by an independent state agency, originally called the Coordinating Council for Higher Education, now known as the California Postsecondary Education Commission. Thus, when we discuss the Master Plan, we are really talking about an educational blueprint that set forth with remarkable foresight, clarity, and coherence a broad framework within which public higher education in California was to develop and do its work.

Just as we need to keep in mind what the Master Plan seeks to accomplish, however, we also need to keep in mind what it does not seek to do. For example, it is not the means for sorting out conflicting opinions about what students should learn, how faculty should teach, what researchers should investigate, or what course requirements should lead to which degrees. It does not delineate how many colleges and universities California needs, or where they should be located, or how small or large each should be, or how they should be financed. The Master Plan established a context and a framework within which these and
other such crucial issues could be rationally addressed, as free as possible of political and sectarian influences.

Moreover, many of the problems and challenges higher education faces today have nothing to do with the Master Plan, even though there is an inclination to ascribe to the Master Plan whatever problems our colleges and universities are presumed to possess, and then to conclude that if these problems are to be corrected the Master Plan itself must surely be changed. This is what I call the "grand non sequitur" approach to the Master Plan review. It is of overriding importance to California and to the future vitality of its colleges and universities that you avoid this approach, and instead make a clear distinction between those matters that can be appropriately dealt with in the context of the Master Plan and those that must be addressed in other ways.

Let me now turn to the issues that I believe deserve most of your attention.

First, we need to think very hard about how to offer the broadest possible access to California's culturally and ethnically diverse student population. Far too many minority students, for example, never complete high school. Far too few of those who do graduate qualify for either the California State University, the University of California, or institutions with similar standards. Thus, we must make a more enduring commitment to the improvement of schooling for all of our young people, taking into more
explicit account the social, economic, ethnic and other factors that bear upon the adequacy of schooling. And we need public policies that encourage and support such a commitment.

In my view we should not address that question, however, by fundamentally changing the current Master Plan provisions that assign the top one-eighth of high school graduates to the University of California, the upper one-third to the California State University, and preserve open admissions in the Community Colleges. This arrangement is a basic building block of the Plan and has guaranteed a place somewhere in the system to any student with the ability and the desire to succeed. It makes as much sense now as it did in 1960. I have read no study or examined any thoughtful view to the contrary. Differential admission standards have worked well for everybody—for students, for higher education, and for California—and it seems to me that those suggesting alternatives carry the burden of proof. At the same time, of course, it is incumbent upon all of us to see that the system works as well in this respect as the Master Plan envisioned—a matter I will turn to later when discussing the transfer function.

But there is one dimension of the access question that I believe warrants your attention. When the Master Plan was drafted in 1960, it started from certain premises and assumptions about precollege education that are less secure today than they were then. That is because California's schools have had some rough
times in recent years. The problems are familiar to you: declining student achievement, which is reflected at the college level in a dramatic increase in remedial work; deteriorating support for teachers and an erosion of their status and compensation; a falling rate of high school completion that today compares unfavorably with the national average; increasing disciplinary problems and weakened parental support for the schools.

This trend has had profound consequences for our society, and not just for our schools, colleges, and universities. Thus, the relationship between higher education and K-12, and their obligation to work more closely together, have even greater significance now than they had in 1960. Higher education has a responsibility to help here—not as critics but as colleagues and partners, working together with the schools to improve teaching, to strengthen the elementary and high school curriculum, to reduce student attrition, and to bolster student preparation for work or further education.

Along with the independent institutions, the California State University, and the Community Colleges, the University of California is presently making a major effort along these lines. I have brought along a partial list of intersegmental efforts in published form to give you an idea of the range of our joint activities, and invite you to make it part of your official record. Dated March 1986, it is entitled "The University and
Precollegiate Education in California: Inventory of Collaborative Projects."

Second, the Master Plan anticipated that students would be able to move from one segment to another without encountering unnecessary barriers, unhelpful bureaucracy, or arbitrary constraints, and our experience in this respect needs to be addressed. As a Commission you have already made a substantial contribution to the public discussion of this issue during your study of the Community Colleges. One result is that UC's Chancellors and Academic Senate are considering a system of intra- and inter-institutional reciprocity for lower division general education requirements. Each UC campus, for example, would consider its lower division general education requirements to have been satisfied by students who have fulfilled the lower division general education requirements of any other UC campus. Thus, transfer students who have met such requirements for one UC campus would be regarded as having met them for any of the others. You may also know about the excellent work of the intersegmental faculty senates in preparing statements that define, by discipline, the skills and knowledge expected of entering students. These statements will be important in making transfer among the segments easier, including students coming directly from K-12.

As you consider issues related to mobility and the transfer of students between and among segments, I urge you to consider that
the solution will not be found in simple, mechanistic approaches. Such approaches will not work, principally because they fail to take account of the variety and diversity of undergraduate education in the state's colleges and universities. This diversity is not a weakness but a strength. It permits students to fit their special interests, needs, expectations, and personalities to an environment that will nurture and develop them.

We can and should look, however, for ways of stripping from the system unreasoned and irrational barriers, arbitrary requirements, overreaching bureaucracy, and other impediments that serve the convenience and interest of the institutions rather than those of the student. At the University of California, we are currently involved in a number of successful campus-to-campus efforts that could serve as models for improving the transfer process, one of which is the ASSIST computerized information system pioneered cooperatively by our Irvine campus and Los Angeles/Harbor College. To the extent that the Commission wishes to examine this topic further, we will be glad to help in any way we can.

Third, the quality of undergraduate education is an area of critical importance. As you know, this is an issue not just of local but of national import as well. During the past year alone, four major national reports critical of undergraduate education have appeared. It is both timely and appropriate, therefore, for the Commission to inquire about the nature and
character of undergraduate education offered by California's colleges and universities. Much attention has been directed to lower division general education, and quite rightly so, because those are two crucial years, not only for their intrinsic significance, but also because what universities and colleges offer at the lower division level is as much a function of the preparation students bring with them as it is a function of what we expect them to know by the time they are juniors and seniors.

In response to the concerns expressed in the national reports--and to concerns that have been made evident closer to home as well--I have appointed a University-wide task force to examine UC's lower division education. We expect this review will be available by summer or early fall and we will, of course, provide copies to the Commission.

But let me make one point now. I believe we should not make the segments more like each other in this respect or homogenize the kind of undergraduate education we offer. The diversity of higher education in California has served many excellent ends, but those who have gained the most have been students--and they are the ones who stand to lose the most if fewer educational options are available.

Fourth, reaffirming the Master Plan's differentiation of function among the three public segments of California higher education is of overarching importance to the future of higher education in
this state. It was the genius of the Master Plan to define for each of the public segments of higher education a special and distinctive mission, each related to the other but not identical.

This has meant that no single institution, or set of institutions, has had to be all things to all people. Each of the three public segments has been free to concentrate on its own educational tasks and, as a result, to aspire to the highest levels of quality in fulfilling its mission.

Yet the assignment of special tasks to each segment has not meant that each operates without regard to the others or without the whole receiving impartial oversight. The California Postsecondary Education Commission is responsible for looking at the needs of the state as a whole, comparing these with the offerings of California's colleges and universities, and determining whether those more global needs are being met. Thus, CPEC provides a built-in corrective to any fragmenting tendency of the segments themselves. I believe that CPEC has done a difficult job well, balancing on the one hand the perspectives of the colleges and universities themselves, while on the other hand not only meeting its statutory obligations with skill and sensitivity but also assuring the public and its elected representatives an impartial and professional monitoring of the entire enterprise.
The differentiation of function among the segments is the linchpin that holds the Master Plan together. If the state should alter this aspect of the Master Plan, then quite simply we will have no Master Plan at all. I would even go so far as to say that we would most likely revert to our pre-1960 circumstances of unhealthy competition, duplication of effort, politicized educational decision-making, and dissipation of scarce state resources.

Fifth, we very much need to reinvigorate the role of the independent colleges and universities in California. You heard from President Mary Metz of Mills College last month about the contributions the independent sector makes to higher education and to California. I wish to underscore her statement about public and independent education: "To a far greater extent than is generally understood, the destinies of public and independent higher education in California are intertwined." That being the case, it is no surprise that the Master Plan cannot work as it was intended to work if our state's fourth segment--the independent colleges and universities--is less than a fully vital and healthy partner in California higher education.

Fortunately, keeping the fourth segment vital and healthy requires a relatively small expenditure of public funds in relation to what the state appropriates for the public sector. Of most immediate importance will be the need to close the tuition gap--the difference between the cost of tuition and fees
for students at public institutions compared with those at independent ones. A closing of the gap would permit students, once more, to have real freedom of choice among the diverse institutions in this state. I do not favor dramatically increasing fees or introducing tuition for California residents in the public sector in order to close this gap. Instead, I believe the Commission should recommend a return to the State's original Master Plan policy of having the Cal Grant maximum award cover one hundred percent of average tuition at the independent colleges.

On this issue especially, state policy has moved away from the original intentions of the Master Plan. Whatever the reasons, the share of state-funded financial aid going now to the independent sector has dropped from seventy percent to fifty-one percent in the past ten years. While this can be attributed variously to the decline in the relative value of the Cal Grant awards and the resulting shift of student enrollment from the private to the public sector, the end result has not been in the state's interest. Public higher education in California has a critical stake in the well-being of the independent colleges and universities of our state, and I hope the Commission will consider this aspect of the Master Plan explicitly, and with sympathy for the present condition and future vitality of California's independent sector.
Sixth, cooperation among California's postsecondary institutions will take on increasing importance in the years to come. This is not a new idea; the Master Plan assumed that cooperation among the public higher education segments would be commonplace, and indeed, in general, it has been. In fact, the number of joint efforts has increased dramatically in recent years. It is a myth to suggest that at one time there was a high degree of cooperation and that with the Master Plan came less. The reverse is true, and our range of common interests, and the scope of intersegmental activities, are presently increasing, not decreasing.

One example is the recent appointment of an intersegmental planning committee for the public segments to coordinate their budget initiatives. This new arrangement will help each of the public segments to consider their respective initiatives in a statewide planning context. And it will also enable the Governor's office and the legislature to deal with segmental proposals in a more comprehensive and connected manner—particularly those intended to attract more minority students into higher education and to improve the schools.

But you should not simply take our word for it. The Commission should ask for evidence that the Master Plan has indeed evoked the kind of intersegmental cooperation its authors intended. You will find some examples on the list of school improvement projects I mentioned a moment ago, and we will be glad to supply others if you wish. It would, of course, be useful if the
Commission were to inventory the kinds of collaborative projects that now exist and suggest areas where, in your considered opinion, further opportunities for cooperation remain.

Seventh and finally, the Commission should include in its discussions some consideration of the growth that is likely to occur in higher education and the resources that will be needed to accommodate that growth. I realize there are many variables to be considered in assessing such questions--demographic, social, economic, political. But from all we can tell demand for higher education is more likely to increase than to decrease in the years ahead; at the University of California, despite predictions of declining enrollments, we have been setting records in undergraduate enrollment for the past five years. Some assessment of how growth can be expected to distribute itself across the segments, how to address the long-deferred capital needs of higher education, and how to do so despite such potential constraints as the Gann expenditure limit are all questions we very much need to be thinking about. Even if these matters may not technically be encompassed within the Master Plan itself, they bear directly upon the prospects for the success of all that you are considering. This is all the more important because our goal to the year 2000 must not be simply to accommodate growth, but to accommodate it while extending and preserving the quality that has been the hallmark of higher education in this state--and which the Master Plan has been so instrumental in creating and protecting.
These, then are the seven issues that I commend to your attention: 1) access; 2) student mobility between and among segments; 3) the quality of undergraduate education; 4) differentiation of function among the segments; 5) the vitality of the independent colleges and universities; 6) cooperation among California's colleges and universities; and 7) the prospects for growth and how to deal with them.

I appreciate having been able to share these views with you. I will be pleased to answer your questions and respond to your comments.