

THE POLITICS OF ACCESS: REMEDIATION POLICY AT THE CALIFORNIA  
STATE UNIVERSITY

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A Thesis submitted to the faculty of  
San Francisco State University  
In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree

Master of Arts

In

Education: Equity and Social Justice in Education

by

Heather Ann Hall

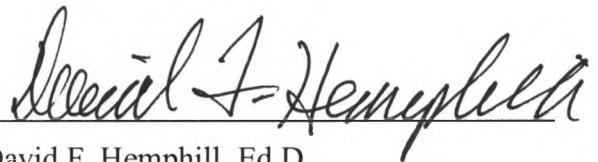
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January 2018

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *The Politics of Access: Remediation Policy* at the California State University by Heather Ann Hall, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Education: Equity and Social Justice in Education at San Francisco State University.



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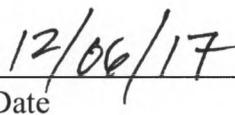
THE POLITICS OF ACCESS: REMEDIATION POLICY AT THE CALIFORNIA  
STATE UNIVERSITY

Heather Ann Hall  
San Francisco, California  
2018

This study critically examines the historical discourse surrounding postsecondary remediation policy in the United States. As opposed to considering remediation as an objective ahistorical remedy for students who lack basic English and math skills, this study highlights remediation as a political phenomenon situated in a historical, political, social, and economic context. It analyzes six decades of remediation policy at the California State University (CSU), an institutional system driven by its mission to offer democratic access to a four-year education. This study considers how institutional decision-making at the CSU has impacted access, student success, and degree outcomes for underrepresented minority students. An examination of neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologies is utilized to argue that student success is not simply a measurement of individuals, but rather is contingent upon the structure of institutions. The study concludes with final thoughts and recommendations that consider the CSU's upcoming plans to radically reform remediation at its campuses.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair, Thesis Committee

  
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Date

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my parents for their continued support throughout my educational endeavors. Mom, thank you for bringing me sandwiches while I worked on my thesis. Mike, thank you for keeping me sane while I pursued my degree and for making sure that I did not step in front of the bus.

Dr. Hemphill, I have learned so much from you. Thank you for your endless support and guidance. Thank you for helping me to believe in myself as a writer and student.

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## **Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem**

### **Description of the General Area of Research Interest**

An ongoing remediation “crisis” in higher education has been a contentious topic of debate in the United States as far back as the 1970s (Soliday, 2002), and it continues to be one of the most important topics in post-secondary education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Tierney, 2015). Despite the endless debate over its use, remediation has been a fixture in higher education and has become one of the fastest growing areas in higher education curriculum (California Post Secondary Commission, 1983). Remedial students are defined as students who are assessed, most commonly by standardized tests, as lacking sufficient preparation in college level English and math skills. (King, McEvoy, & Teixeira, 2011). Remedial education, also referred to as developmental education, consists of “below-college-level noncredit courses and trainings in reading, writing and math aimed at teaching competencies necessary to succeed in college-level coursework” (Center for American Progress, 2016). In this thesis, I will use the term “remediation,” which is the historical term used nationally and by the California State University. I will also use the term “college ready,” defined as “the preparation a student needs to enter college and persist to graduation without needing remediation” (Duncheon, 2015, p. 10).

Educational stakeholders have long engaged in discussion about the effectiveness of remediation, its impact on student achievement, as well as determining which institutions should be held accountable for the growing number of college students who

are deemed unprepared for college level work. Critics of remediation have referred to it as a “systemic black hole from which students are unlikely to emerge” (Center for American Progress, 2016). Other critics have questioned whether incoming freshman who are not “college-ready” belong at 4-year institutions (Duncheon, 2015). They contend that offering remedial education at four-year institutions presents a threat to educational quality (Bettinger & Long, 2007). Allied with this argument is the notion that secondary institutions need to be held accountable for the lack of student preparedness and basic skills courses should be restricted to open access two-year institutions. In 1995, 81 percent of four-year colleges reported that they offered remedial education (Bettinger & Long, 2007), but increasingly there has been a “national backlash” against remedial offerings at the four-year level (Soliday, 2002). States such as Arizona, Hawaii, Tennessee, and the CUNY system in New York have eliminated remedial education at the four-year level. This reflects a growing trend as four-year colleges are reevaluating traditional remediation programs and their role in the education of underprepared college students. Some critics of remediation are rightly concerned by a growing body of evidence that suggests remedial programs tend to reproduce economic and racial inequality and as a result are deleterious to student success (King et al., 2011). In particular, they are concerned about the impact of remediation on attrition and an increased time-to-degree (Duncheon, 2015). This research has prompted concerns regarding equity and outcomes for underrepresented minority students in particular (King et al., 2011). However, proponents of remediation note that remediation as a policy tool

still has historically granted underrepresented students access to four-year institutions (Soliday, 2002).

The California State University (CSU) provides over 50% of Bachelor's Degrees that are awarded in the State of California (CSU, 2017). The CSU has positioned itself as a democratic institution guided by a mission to serve the economic and social needs of an increasingly diverse state. The CSU is the nation's largest four-year public institution and across 23 campuses it educates roughly 478,640 students (CSU, 2017). The CSU has held firmly to remedial programs and rather than eliminating remediation all together, it has focused on aggressive reforms designed to reduce the need for remediation.

System-wide approximately 38% of the Fall 2016 freshman admitted to the California State University were deemed unprepared for college level work in math and/or English (CSU, 2016). Marginalized students, such as ethnic and racial minorities, first generation college students, and low-income students are disproportionately placed in remedial courses (King et al., 2011). According to the CSU, students who need additional academic preparation are less likely to persist in college when compared to their college-ready peers (CSU, 2016). Remedial courses are non-credit bearing, which has raised additional concerns regarding time-to-degree, retention, and degree completion. Remediation placement rates have remained relatively unchanged at the CSU despite aggressive attempts at institutional reform since the 1990s (CSU, 2016). These reforms have included measures such as the early assessment of college readiness during high school and some arguably punitive policies that result in administrative

disqualification when remedial coursework is not completed within one year of conditional admission. To date, there has been little evidence to suggest that reform efforts at the CSU have markedly decreased a need for remediation. In August 2017 the CSU Chancellor Timothy White announced that beginning Fall 2018 the CSU will eliminate its standardized English and math placement exams and will eliminate its non-credit bearing remedial classes (CSU EO1110, 2017). The effort to reform traditional remediation practices fits into the CSU's Graduation Initiative 2025, which aims to increase graduation rates, reduce time to degree, and close the completion and opportunity gap for underserved minority students (CSU, 2016). To meet these goals the CSU is taking steps to increase the number of units students earn within their first year and the elimination of remedial non-baccalaureate credit courses is central to that endeavor.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examines CSU remediation policy over the last six decades by applying the theoretical perspective that remediation is a political and regulatory structure embedded in the politics of institutions (Soliday, 2002). It has been argued that to study the historical evolution of remediation is to learn about the politics of individual institutions, as they balance ongoing political friction between democratic access and academic excellence (Soliday, 2002). Rather than considering remediation as an objective ahistorical remedy for students who lack basic English and math skills, this study will highlight remediation as a political discourse situated in a historical context. Recognizing

that remediation is a political phenomenon, the study will explore remediation's historical evolution in the CSU. It will examine how the CSU fulfills institutional needs, internal and external political demands, and student need, while pursuing an institutional mission to offer democratic access to higher education. By providing a brief overview of the history of remediation in the US, the study will seek to challenge the notion that remediation is a new phenomenon and a "crisis" facing higher education that must be reduced over time with reform.

In the effort to unfold the story of remediation at the CSU, the study is guided by the following research questions: 1) How have institutional needs driven remediation policy at the CSU? 2) To what extent has the privatization of education impacted remediation reform at the CSU? 3) How have remediation policy and California's political climate shaped access and outcomes for minority students at the CSU? 4) To what extent have institutional policies at the CSU eliminated barriers for underrepresented populations?

### **Justification**

Fall 2016 admissions data for the CSU suggest that only 41% of entering African American students were judged as proficient in math and English and 27% needed remediation in both subjects (CSU, 2016). Similarly, 52% of Mexican American students were proficient in math and English and 18.5% needed remediation in both subjects (CSU, 2016). Asian American students were 67% proficient in math and English and 10% needed remediation in both subjects (CSU, 2016). In contrast, 80% of White

students were proficient in math and English and only 6% needed remediation in both subjects (CSU, 2016). However, it should be noted that although minority students are disproportionately placed in remedial courses, White students are the second largest group behind Mexican American students deemed in need of remediation (CSU Proficiency Reports, 2016). Yet White students are often removed from the discourse of remediation (Soliday, 2002). The CSU reported that while the average CSU student will graduate in six years, White students have an eight-percentage point advantage of graduating in six years when compared to African American students and a four percentage point advantage over Hispanic or Latino students (CSU, 2016). The CSU recently reported that a 9.9% equity gap exists between the six-year graduation rates of underrepresented minority students and their non-underrepresented peers (CSU, 2017). Only 19% of CSU undergraduate students graduate within four years (CSU, 2016). Consequently, the CSU launched the Student Success and Graduation Initiative in 2016 to address educational outcomes and existing equity gaps. With the increased privatization of schooling, the stakes are higher for underprepared students, in particular because the costs associated with additional coursework have been passed onto students with increased tuition fees and loan debt.

In light of reforms at the CSU in recent decades, coupled with enhanced efforts to eliminate traditional remediation via Executive Order 1110, it is important to examine institutional change not simply as a means of remedying lack of preparedness, but also as a political and discursive tool to remedy problems within the institution. While projected

reforms in Fall 2018 may be promising, it is helpful to examine the history of remedial structures at the CSU in order to understand how institutional decision-making occurs and what purposes are being served. The goal of this inquiry is to highlight the view that student need does not necessarily align with institutional need, and that the needs of students can at times be overshadowed by political forces. The study suggests that when student need is considered above all else, remediation policy does not need to be punitive and can in fact serve the CSU's goal to provide open and direct access to education at four-year institutions.

## **Chapter 2: The Politics of Access in Higher Education**

This chapter provides a historical overview of remedial education in the United States to demonstrate its form and function in the modern university. Soliday (2002) contends that there is a “peculiar historical amnesia surrounding postsecondary remediation in American culture” (p.21). Soliday (2002) further contends that the history of remediation not only explains how remediation is practiced today, but that this history is embedded in the foundation of the modern university. Despite the historical foundations of remediation practices, it has often been regarded as a new problem and with each new crisis, “in the myth of transience, no group of students needs as much writing instruction as the group we currently serve” (Soliday, 2002, p. 11). This chapter reviews the history of remediation to better explain how it became an institutionalized practice and how it is represented and structured at the CSU.

### **A Historical Overview of Remediation and the Modern University**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, college admission requirements had not been fully formalized and standardized. Admissions policy was tied to funding needs, so the strength of an institution was largely dependent on gifts from private entities and other institutions (Soliday, 2002). As a result, colleges were primarily concerned with enrollment growth as opposed to exclusivity (Soliday, 2002). However, the colonial colleges in New England expected incoming students to be proficient in the classical subjects such as Greek and Latin and by 1870 that had been expanded to include

arithmetic, history, and English (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1983). Considering that only 60% of men and 30% of women were literate and 97% of high school graduates went to college (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1983), it is evident that college attendance was exclusive and reserved for upper class White males. College going was not the characteristic middle class endeavor that it is today (Soliday, 2002). Despite the exceptionally high placement of high school graduates in college, most students actually did not meet college admissions requirements, which did not present a problem as long as the requirements were not clearly defined. (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1983).

Additionally, many of these students were deemed unprepared for collegiate study. Remedial English composition courses were not yet fully developed, but there were structures in place that were designed to remedy student “deficiencies” (Soliday, 2002). A common structural approach was to house preparatory programs that offered pre-collegiate coursework within the college (Soliday, 2002). Rather than outwardly offering remedial courses, some other private colleges would send unprepared students to feeder schools (Soliday, 2002). Still other colleges offered pre-college writing courses designed to remediate students beyond their freshman year (Soliday, 2002). Preparatory programs were so common that in 1870 only five states did not offer these programs within higher education institutions. (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1983). By 1894, over 40 percent of college students in the United States were enrolled in some form of college preparatory program (Soliday, 2002). As Soliday (2002) contends,

higher education institutions began to serve a dual mission of preparing conditionally admitted students for collegiate work while maintaining the objective of serving an elite population. Some of the very first remedial composition courses are believed to have been established at both public and private institutions across the country, such as Harvard College, Wellesley College, University of Wisconsin, and the University of California (Soliday, 2002). However, remedial courses did not appear in college catalogues until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Soliday, 2002). As the lines between pre-college curriculum and the freshman composition curriculum became blurred, concern mounted about standards, and why students were being admitted when they were unprepared. As concern and uncertainty over literacy and admissions standards admissions grew, complaints from faculty emerged regarding college readiness (Soliday, 2002). The *English Journal* (1912) clearly illustrates that concerns about literacy standards are not new to postsecondary education.

Most college teachers, and this seems true in virtually every country, complain that the high schools do not equip their students with the capacity to write their own language clearly and dramatically, and that, therefore, the colleges must do a kind of work in composition which the schools should have done and which the schools should be able to do better than the colleges. The result has been that in most colleges there is some remedial requirement in English composition (as cited in California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1983, p. 18).

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many faculty and administrators felt that collegiate preparation in literacy and classic subjects were best taught by secondary institutions, though this statement also suggests that despite protest from faculty, there was a place and a purpose for remedial courses in the curriculum. During a time when college enrollment was relatively low, the use of college preparatory programs and remedial coursework enabled institutions to resolve the problem of college readiness while maintaining fiscal health through steady enrollment (Soliday, 2002). Institutions had largely undefined admissions policies and enrollment was largely restricted to the elite. The value of a university was measured by the size of its population and its popularity as an institution (Soliday, 2002).

During times of fiscal crisis, higher education institutions had flexible admissions and utilized remediation to bolster enrollments. However, as Soliday contends, open admissions policies did present a problem when critics began to question the standards and prestige of the institution. Soliday asserts that remediation was also used as a “crisis management” tool to help institutions navigate a balance between excellence and access (Soliday, 2002). To address concerns about declining standards, institutions created concrete and universal admissions criteria that helped to define and firmly establish hierarchical distinctions between high school, pre-college preparatory school, college, and university. Soliday (2002) contends that institutions continue to accomplish this balance by utilizing a time-honored tradition of stratifying institutions, students, and subjects into sectors.

Harvard is most notoriously identified with instituting the first freshman composition course, which subsequently was regarded as a linguistic “gatekeeper” in higher education (Shor, 1997). Completion of this course was used to certify which students were suitable “Harvard men,” and in this sense it served as an “instrument to exclude some and socialize others” (Shor, 1997, p. 92). Freshman composition as a universally accepted course was born out of the “need” to remediate. It enabled institutions to classify English courses into credit- and non-credit-bearing basic composition skills courses, while establishing “content” disciplines such as honors English and Literature. As a result, English studies became standardized across institutions. This not only allowed for easier articulation of courses between institutions, but it helped to define what a college education was (Soliday, 2002). English composition helped shape the different types of postsecondary institutions. Freshman English and remediation became a sorting mechanism that established a hierarchy between subjects and by regulating entry into the Liberal Arts; English composition, and specifically remedial English composition, have become a persistent “other” (Soliday, 2002). As Soliday contends,

Composition had become one of the few fundamental subjects used to distinguish between groups of students...as a way to resolve the ongoing conflict in American higher education between a selective research mission and democratic access within a single institution (Soliday, 2002, p. 40).

Remediation as a crisis management tool was used to stratify students and disciplines. Literature was delineated from composition, and college-ready students from the unprepared. Composition became a “fundamental” subject that was used to distinguish between groups of students (Soliday, 2002). Meanwhile, remediation sustained “immediate institutional needs to solve a crisis in growth—enrollment, curriculum, missions, and admissions standards -- as much as it served the needs of the students who were judged to be unprepared (Soliday, 2002, p.2). On the surface, remediation appears to be a problem that individual’s possess, an examination of remediation’s historical underpinnings reminds us that it is an institutional creation designed to socialize and organize people.

Historical context highlights that remediation is not a naturally occurring phenomena, and institutional decision-making is not neutral. Institutions set the rules, and they define who is remedial, and who has access to certain disciplines. Remediation is a fixture in higher education and it will exist as long as institutions continue to find it useful. Every literacy crisis in history, portrays a loss or decline in individual capability, and history reminds us who benefits from remediation. In light of the demographic changes and increased access to higher education for unrepresented populations, history is an important reminder of who has “needed” remediation (Soliday, 2002). Additionally, the internal and external sorting mechanisms that put remediation into the lowest academic tier are represented in today’s institutions. Deconstructing these helps us understand how remediation practices and admissions policies are structured at the CSU.

## **1960 California Master Plan**

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century California's bustling economy drew workers and settlers to the west coast. The desire to move west was driven by financial opportunity. California was described as a place "full of social wrecks" who were guided by "the relentless pursuit of self-interest" (Stanley, 2010, p. 24). When the College of California became the University of California in 1869, it was predicted that a public University would socialize and bring prestige to the unruly state and eventually rival prestigious institutions in the East (Stanley, 2010). In 1857, Horace Bushnell, a cleric who had traveled from New England to bring piety and education to California stated, "until they come together in the creation of a University, Californians would never become a people in the proper and organic sense of that term" (Stanley, 2010, p. 25).

By 1909, the University of California (UC) became California's largest and most prestigious institution. Educating the majority of California's citizens was the primary responsibility of the UC. The UC was responsible for managing California's rapidly growing postsecondary enrollment (Stanley, 2010). To accommodate enrollment growth at the UC, the legislature began allocating money from the general fund on a per-student basis (Stanley, 2010). In order to facilitate increased access to higher education for California's citizens, the legislature approved 7% increases in funding each year for the UC (Stanley, 2010).

Much like the East Coast Universities, California aimed to serve its economic and social needs, which meant that the UC would continue to admit two categories of students: those students who met and represented the institution's standards, and those deemed unprepared or "deficient" in basic subjects (Stanley, 2010). The pass rate for the Subject A exam has historically been low. In the 1970s, 50% of students in this "lower tier" did not pass the UC's Subject A exam (Stanley, 2010). The Subject A exam was the UC's assessment instrument to classify which students needed remedial coursework in basic subjects. These second-class students were "conditioned" into the liberal arts curriculum and were valuable financial resources to the institution because they ensured additional per-pupil funding for UC (Stanley, 2010). As the history of remediation in the United States suggests, full-time enrollment of remedial students ensured the fiscal health of the UC while granting Californian's access to higher education. By publicly complaining about its bottom tier students, UC administrators were able to assert its high standards to protect its prestige yet continue to receive funding on a per student basis (Stanley, 2010). In this regard, remedial students were simultaneously welcomed and marginalized by the institution (Stanley, 2010).

In 1932, the Carnegie Foundation commissioned a study asserting that "problems of policy and organization" in higher education had resulted in waste, inefficiency, and an inequitable distribution of state funds (Callan, 2009). The study determined the following:

There is a lack of articulation among the various units of the education system.

This has resulted in vigorous controversies over admission requirements, transfer regulations, and curricula. These controversies are aggravated by regional rivalries and local ambitions (Callan, 2009, p. 2).

Following the findings of the Carnegie report and the enduring economic crisis of the Great Depression, California legislators submitted a series of proposals to convert many of the state's private colleges into public state regional colleges (Stanley, 2010). The growing sentiment was that the UC had become far too "elitist," and in order to stimulate employment in California, it was necessary to expand access to four-year vocational colleges. (Stanley, 2010). These regional colleges would ensure that students could attend a public college located in their region of the state, making mass education more attainable. Proposals to create these colleges were repeatedly defeated by the UC, arguably because the UC wanted to maintain its hegemony over higher education, its status as the only state university, and its lion's share of state funding (Stanley, 2010). In 1960 the California Master Plan for higher education was adopted as a compromise that effectively resolved tensions between the UC and the State Colleges. This plan sought to bring organization to chaos by codifying institutional admissions policy, which ultimately shaped institutional missions and access to public colleges.

The 1960 California Master Plan is significant to this study because it serves as the policy framework for California's higher education institutions, and contemporary educational policy is still largely defined by the plan. It also serves as a mediator of

remediation policy in California. The Master Plan is not a single document, but a series of values, some of which were enacted into law with the 1960 Donahoe Higher Education Act. The issue of remediation is related to the Master Plan, as some have argued it is a “natural consequence” to the educational access that the Master Plan aspired to provide (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1983). The Master Plan heavily influenced higher education structures in other states, so much so that it is often called the “California idea” (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). The Master Plan made California the first state to establish universal access to higher education as public policy (Callan, 2009). The plan ensured that “Every California high school graduate that was able to benefit from college could attend a college or university” (Callan, 2009, p. 4). Yet the foundation of the plan was not solely driven by access. The plan was also a response to the anticipation of further growth in higher education and an understanding that state funding was not limitless (Stanley, 2010).

The post-World War II era brought tremendous growth to college enrollment, and California was considered at the time a leader in quality and expansion of higher education (Callan, 2009). As the state’s population accelerated in the 1950s, and the first “tidal wave” of baby boomers approached college age, the plan sought to expand educational options for students and resolve the immediate problem of enrollment capacity through planned and coordinated growth (Callan, 2009). The Master Plan sought to “recognize, balance, and institutionalize the values of competitive excellence and egalitarianism, selectivity and open admissions and growth and efficiency” (Callan, 2009,

p.6). The plan pioneered universal access by expanding college options and by instituting a tuition-free education for all students. A state scholarship program, now called Cal Grant, was made available to students. It served the dual function of giving students the option to attend private colleges while also ensuring the private colleges absorbed a share of California's enrollment growth (Callan, 2009).

The core premise of the plan was to section public higher education into three segments by establishing a framework of admissions criteria and institutional mission. The plan stipulated that students in the upper 12.5% of their graduating class were eligible for admission to the UC. The overall organization of the UC was left largely untouched, as it would continue to hold the sole authority to offer state-funded advanced research programs in law, medicine, dentistry, and veterinary science (Callan, 2009). Students in the upper 33.3% of their graduating class were eligible for admission at the California Colleges (later called the CSU). The CSU would be required to accept students in the top 33.3% as long as they had a 3.0 GPA and had taken the requisite high school courses for admission (Crouch & McNenny, 2000). The CSU was authorized to offer undergraduate and graduate programs, and was permitted to offer some doctoral degree programs as long as they were offered jointly through the UC (Callan, 2009). Unlike the UC, it was understood that the CSU would primarily be a teaching college rather than a research-based institution. The community colleges would accept all high school graduates. Articulation rules were eventually formalized so that Californians enrolled in two-year colleges could either pursue vocational training or qualify to transfer to UC or

CSU. The selective admissions policy outlined in the plan limited the growth of the four-year colleges, with the intent that the majority of Californian's would be eligible and would enroll in community colleges (Callan, 2009). Stratifying the public institutions in this way ensured that the two-year schools absorbed the majority of enrollment growth.

As much as the Master Plan was about access, it also served the institutional desire to control and limit enrollment in the upper tier institutions and channel the majority of access to the lower tier. The foundation of the plan permitted an avenue for the four-year colleges to redirect remedial enrollment to two-year colleges. (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). This re-direction of enrollment through the CSU's remediation policy is discussed later in this chapter. However, remediation proved to be an important ingredient in the mission to expand access to four-year institutions and move toward mass universal education. (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1983). Whether or not it was the intention of the Master Plan, remedial coursework would be a central component and gateway to the CSU's liberal arts curriculum. Although the Master Plan did not explicitly limit the CSU's role in offering remedial education, its intent was that the community colleges would relieve the four-year colleges from the "burden of doing remedial coursework" (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1983). Since the expectation was that the majority of Californian's would attend community colleges, the plan's authors may have anticipated that the CSU's more restrictive admissions policy would funnel underprepared students into the community college system for either vocational training or eventual transfer to the CSU.

In many ways, the plan was a positive advancement. The Master plan established an organizational framework that met the goal of providing college access to Californians, while successfully navigating a balance between “egalitarian and meritocratic imperatives” (Callan, 2009). The hierarchical structuring of California’s higher education system set an example of democratic access while continuing to preserve the quality of its revered four-year institutions, in particular its upper tier research institutions. However, the Master Plan’s organizational framework also positioned remediation and the CSU at odds with one another in the effort to maintain meritocratic balance. The CSU continues to follow the Master Plan in terms of its function, its institutional mission and its admissions policies (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1983). However, the Master Plan’s emphasis on the “quality” of its four-year institutions, has proved to be political “problem” that the CSU has had to continually negotiate.

The CSU has adhered to the Master Plan’s objective to admit all students who are eligible, but at the same time it has engineered a complex accountability system that uses standardized testing to reinforce standards and excellence. The end result is that some students are welcomed into full membership, and others are marginalized (Stevens, 2002). Furthermore, in some cases, remedial students are redirected to community colleges despite being fully eligible for admission to CSU. Although educational stakeholders, including some CSU Trustees have proposed changes to CSU admissions policy, the CSU cannot unilaterally change admissions requirements (Crouch &

McNenny, 2000). For this reason, the remediation problem has been managed by a series of reforms and Executive Orders that have expanded the use of remedial assessment tools in an attempt to “cut-back on remediation activities” at the CSU (Crouch & McNenny, 2000).

### **Chapter 3: Remediation Policy and Reform at the CSU**

This chapter examines four decades of remediation reform at the CSU. It first considers the testing instruments used by the CSU to assess students in need of remediation. The chapter then considers the impact that standardized testing has had on student outcomes as the lead indicator of student success. Latter sections review CSU remediation policy by discussing three of the most significant reform movements at the CSU; Executive Order 665, the Early Assessment Program, and Executive Order 1048. The chapter finally considers how institutional decision-making at the CSU has labeled and marginalized remedial students.

#### **Standardized Testing at the CSU: System-wide Assessment Expansion**

College readiness at the CSU is primarily determined by two assessment tests, the English Proficiency Test (EPT) and the Entry Level Mathematics test (ELM). However, students can also be exempted from remedial math and English with a sufficiently high score on the SAT or ACT. The English Placement Test (EPT) was initially implemented in 1977. Prior to this, some CSU campuses offered locally designed assessment tools, and as a result, assessment and placement varied by campus (Garcia, 2015). Students could be categorized as “remedial” at one campus and “proficient” at another (Garcia, 2015). English faculty at one CSU campus argued that prior to the implementation of EPT students “sank or swam,” and EPT placement in basic skills classes provided these students with a “safety net” (California Post Secondary Commission, 1983).

In 1983, the Entry Level Mathematics test (ELM) was piloted, but was initially only voluntary. As with the EPT, assessment tests and remedial curriculum were implemented differently at each CSU campus, but once the ELM became mandatory, the CSU had its first system-wide instrument of college readiness assessment (Garcia, 2015). Faculty designed both tests, but the “cut scores” were established by the state legislature (Garcia, 2015). At some campuses, remedial placement could require a student to take up to three remedial courses prior to enrolling in college level work. Initially each campus established its own cut scores and determined how they would offer remedial courses and whether they would offer them for credit (California Post Secondary Commission, 1983).

In the California Post Secondary Commission’s 1983 report “Promises to Keep: Remedial Education in California’s in California’s Public Colleges and Universities,” the authors suggest that these systematic testing instruments are essential in identifying students in need. In fact the report’s authors imply that not offering the tests and the associated remedial courses could result in an inequitable disservice to students (California Post Secondary Commission, 1983). In reference to one CSU campus that did not offer a distinct remedial Math course based on test placement, the authors report that a faculty member at that campus stated, “we give them a map to the local Community College,” when referring to students that exhibit a need for remedial math (California Post Secondary Commission, 1983). This assertion from the Commission suggests a belief that students benefit from the assessment tools, and furthermore that the mandatory tests protect remedial students by preserving their access to a four-year education. The

insinuation is that certain students are not capable of succeeding or engaging in liberal arts curriculum without taking basic skills courses first. This argument is not new, and even critics who are opposed to the concept of remediation at the four-year level have argued against mainstreaming students who are judged to be remedial (Soliday, 1996).

While the CSU's assessment tools may have been implemented in the spirit of access, the disproportionate placement of minority students into remedial courses with the use of standardized assessments is a major concern. This is the case particularly in light of data that suggests that the graduation rate of students who have to take multiple remedial courses is 12%-15% lower than those who do not (King, McEvoy & Teixeira, 2011). There are numerous studies that suggest racial and economic bias of standardized tests (Walpole, McDonough, Bauer, Gibson, Kanyi, & Toliver, 2005). College admissions exam scores are linked to socio-economic status, and students from high-income households often receive supplemental test preparation (Duncheon, 2015).

Single test measurements raise the stakes significantly for students, particularly for low-income students attending underfunded high schools. Additionally, anecdotal evidence suggests that low test scores on placement tests discourage students of color from enrolling in four-year colleges (Guzman-Lopez, 2017). The validity and reliability of standardized tests to predict success in English and Math have also been questioned (Duncheon, 2015). Many educational scholars now advocate for the use of multiple measure assessments to accurately assess something as complex as college readiness (Duncheon, 2015).

Although the CSU eventually established uniform cut scores across its campuses, there is an arbitrary nature to standardized tests when readiness is measured on a dichotomous scale of either “ready” “or not ready” (Duncheon, 2015). The lack of a statewide or national cut score makes it challenging to establish a clear definition of English and math proficiency. (Bettinger & Long, 2004). Critics assert that standardized placement mechanisms are outdated and unfairly categorize one group of students as full-fledged members of the university, while others are relegated to non-credit courses (Stevens, 2002). Stevens (2002) contends that our inability to tell where a student belongs without a test score suggests that placement cut scores “represent one of the greatest fictions of academic life” (Stevens, p.5). Given the challenges and contradictions associated with standardized testing and the lack of data surrounding the implications of misplacement, steps toward eliminating standardized testing as the sole measure of college-readiness should be taken nation-wide (Walpole et al, 2005).

In a country that is highly dependent on standardized tests as the primary measure of accountability for both students and institutions, it is a challenging political feat to eliminate them. The CSU thus took a major step forward in terms of equity by eliminating the ELM and EPT in 2018 in favor of multiple assessment tools. The following section discusses the ongoing tension in the CSU between access and quality through various measures designed by the CSU to “get out of the business” of remediation. Implications of these measures in terms of access and success for marginalized students is discussed further in this chapter.

### **Foundations for Remediation Reduction**

The California Post Secondary Commission's report (1983) recommended some key measures that would enable the CSU to reduce remedial activities within five years. The commission suggested exploring cooperative arrangements with K-12 schools to ensure better preparation for students on the secondary level. It also recommended that the CSU continue to define standards through the continuation of diagnostic assessment testing (California Post Secondary Commission, 1983). The report applauded the CSU's 1980 effort via Executive Order 338 to cease offering baccalaureate credit for remedial courses in favor of workload credit or non-credit that would remain eligible for federal aid. As the authors state, "credit is higher education's coin of the realm; it designates that both the student and the course have met certain standards" (California Post Secondary Commission 1983, p. 106). In the Commission's view, a continuance of this policy would ensure the quality of remedial courses and would allow for better evaluation and tracking of remedial programs.

The commission lamented a universal lack of remedial program evaluation across the country, which remains a commonly reported concern of educational scholars today. The report suggests setting clear standards and clearly demarcating remedial courses, in order to make it easier for the CSU to evaluate and be held accountable for steps taken to reduce remediation. Considerations were also to be made in terms of how many chances a student should have to repeat a remedial courses and whether a state should continue to pay for it (California Post Secondary Commission 1983). The report remarks that some

states place repeat limits on remedial courses, which begs the question of “whether or not an individual should be given unlimited opportunities to obtain a higher education” (California Post Secondary Commission 1983, p. 111). The commission submitted a brief follow-up report one year later, “CSU Plan to Reduce Remedial Activity, 1985-1990,” that predicted that 88% of admitted freshman would demonstrate competency on the EPT by 1990 (Crouch & McNenny 2000). However, the goal to drastically reduce remediation by 1990 and the recommendations by the commission had little impact on preparedness (Crouch & McNenny 2000). On the one hand the 1983 report suggested an understanding of remediation as a highly complex problem, yet on the other hand the commission suggests short-term measures to be accomplished in only five years (Crouch & McNenny 2000). The CSU’s imperative to rapidly reduce remediation through several reform efforts was likely influenced by the California Post Secondary Commission’s report.

### **Holding Students Accountable: Executive Order 665**

Following a series of public hearings on the remediation problem that were held throughout the state, the CSU Board of Trustees announced that the CSU would take a new “sophisticated approach to standards development,” to ensure that no more than 10% of incoming freshman would need remediation by 2007 (Stevens, 2002, p. 3).

Unfortunately, this emphasis on “standards development” directly targeted students through altered admissions practices that closed the doors on remedial students (Stevens, 2002). The CSU Trustee’s Committee on Education stated the following about EO 665.

The proposed policy is intended to help ensure that students come from high school well prepared to make the most of their college opportunity. It is intended to maximize access to a university education guaranteed by the Master Plan, and to promote excellence with diversity within the student body of the CSU....As a public university committed to providing educational access to all citizens, especially those for whom other forms of higher education are financially and logistically out of reach, the CSU is sensitive to keeping the doors of access and opportunity open to qualified students (cited in Stevens, 2002, p. 6).

The 1997 Executive order was enacted by CSU Chancellor's Office requiring incoming freshman who did not demonstrate proficiency on the EPT or ELM to enroll in remedial classes during their first term (Crouch & McNenny 2000). Prior to this, the requirement of immediate enrollment in remedial programs was not heavily enforced, and often students delayed taking remedial courses until the end of their degree (Crouch & McNenny 2000).

EO 665 solidified the CSU's reliance on the EPT and ELM and made testing the leading indicator of success (Crouch & McNenny 2000). The most critical change brought about by EO 665, with the most substantive implications for access by minority students was a stipulation that campuses were:

Encouraged to establish and enforce limits on remedial/developmental activity and to advise students who are not making adequate progress in developing foundational skills to consider enrolling in other educational institutions as appropriate (CSU, 1997).

The implication was that CSU campuses could academically dis-enroll students who did not complete their remediation within one year. While campuses could make exceptions to extend the one-year remediation on an individual basis, the result was that a certain percentage of students would lose their admission and be advised to enroll in a community college until remedial requirements were met. The policy was imbued with the sentiment that “remediation can be tolerated, but only for limited periods of time” (Crouch & McNenny 2000, p. 53).

The CSU Trustees’ declaration that the CSU would reduce remediation to 10% was paired with a belief that the end result would be a “virtually unprecedented University” (Stevens, 2002. p. 5). Stevens (2002) contends that the CSU Trustees’ belief that this accelerated goal was achievable was informed by the persistent myth that the need for remediation is transient (Stevens, 2002). EO 665 and similar efforts to reduce remediation greatly simplify the problem. As Stevens contends (2002), the remediation paradigm suggests that a few hours of reviewing grammar and extra time in writing labs will put students back on track to earning a degree that CSU Trustees refer to as “the primary gateway for social mobility and economic advancement” (Stevens, 2002. p. 5).

The urgency to eliminate remediation was also reflected in the popular media at the time. The *Los Angeles Times* ran two articles in 1999 entitled, “Cal State is for College work” and “College is for the prepared” (Crouch & McNenny 2000). Numerous reports and documents from the period support this sentiment, and even the CSU Board of Trustees proposed extreme changes such as eliminating remedial courses at the CSU altogether and ceasing to admit students who do not demonstrate proficiency on the ELM or EPT (Crouch & McNenny 2000). The *Los Angeles Times* further reported that Ralph Pesqueira, a Board of Trustees member who chaired the CSU Remedial Education subcommittee attended a series of public hearings on remediation to listen to the concerns of educational stakeholders. When describing these lively hearings, he stated, “some of our professors wanted us to shut the gates tomorrow.” (*Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1999). Pesqueira asserted that the proposal to limit the admission of remedial students was a “document of hope, not of despair” (LA times, November 29, 1999). The statement implied that requiring remedial students to attend community college prior to their first term at a CSU campus was a reasoned approach and the best solution for everyone. However, the framework of eligibility established by the Master Plan prevented these proposals from being fully realized (Crouch & McNenny 2000). The CSU instead pursued a strategy in EO 665 that superficially maintained the spirit of the Master Plan by continuing to admit eligible students, with the added stipulation that they would need to further demonstrate their “worth” in order to stay enrolled. The imposed time limits on remediation enforced by EO 665 demonstrate the desire to limit the CSU’s

role in remedial education, if not eliminate it entirely, by shifting that responsibility to Community Colleges.

EO 665 has had social justice implications for the diverse population of students that the CSU is mandated to educate (King et al., 2011). As California's population grew more diverse, the Master Plan was reauthorized in 1987 with a section entitled, "Toward Greater Equity" (Crouch & McNenny, 2000). The report stated that remediation is "essential to retention." This claim appears contradictory, since EO 665 forces admitted students to leave if they do not successfully meet remediation requirements. The policy risks sending students the message that they are unwanted at the CSU. The CSU Board of Trustees subsequently published a report stating that the CSU "enrolls the most culturally diverse student body of any senior college system in the nation, a student body that closely mirrors the diversity of California's population" (Crouch & McNenny, 2000, p. 54). The data illustrating high minority enrollment in remedial courses, however, suggest that the CSU is at risk of homogenizing its campuses by diminishing the diverse student body that it claims to serve (Crouch & McNenny, 2000).

There is thus the appearance of hypocrisy in the CSU's rhetoric of diversity, as the CSU applauds itself for providing greater access to a diverse array of students while sending them to complete their remediation elsewhere (Crouch & McNenny, 2000). Seven per cent of students who enrolled at the CSU in Fall 1998 were not permitted to return in Fall 1999 (Calstate, 1998-1999), and the number of dis-enrolled students has increased in recent years. Thirteen per cent of the Fall 2015 class did not complete

remediation and were dis-enrolled by Fall 2016 (CSU, 2015-2016). Four per cent of the Fall 2015 class did not complete remediation, but were allowed to re-enroll by exception (CSU, 2015-2016). The CSU does not report disenrollment by demographics such as race or ethnicity, but it is evident the implications of these policies could be grave for minority students. Ironically, the “sink or swim” mentality that the California Postsecondary Commission claimed assessment tools could prevent in fact had the counter effect of marginalizing these students further. In this scenario, the assessment tools that were meant to protect access for marginalized students instead became the measures of their success. This not only worked to penalized them for their “failure,” but also increased the stakes of the assessment process dramatically (Crouch & McNenny, 2000).

The assumption of EO 665 is that students lack agency and need to be forced to complete remedial courses because they are not motivated to do so on their own. The systemic problem of access and equality in secondary education is thus constructed as an individual deficit, rather than an institutional problem. As Chancellor Reed noted when speaking of the Executive Order, “the CSU wants to be firm and fair...the message is that we mean business” (November 18, 1999, Crouch & McNenny 2000, p. 51). What might appear as a reasoned approach to “business” actually holds severe consequences for thousands of students admitted to the CSU (Crouch & McNenny 2000).

The fact that over 83% of students of the Fall 2015 freshman class did successfully remediate suggests that something worked for those students. Yet it is curious that the CSU does not investigate more closely the 13% who did not remediate

successfully. Considering the racial, linguistic, and ethnic diversity of California and the fact that minority students are more likely to attend underfunded high schools, it is evident that EO 665 is likely to cause the CSU to fail many of these students. CSU campuses with the highest remediation rates and the greatest proportion of “high” needs students also have the largest disenrollment rates (King et al., 2011). Campuses such as CSULA and CSU Dominguez Hills serve students from feeder high schools with large proportions of low income and ethnically diverse backgrounds, and data suggests that students at these campuses are more likely to be dis-enrolled by virtue of attending a high remediation CSU (King et al., 2011). As a result, what ends up occurring is “de facto academic segregation of low-income students and minority students into high-remediation CSU campuses where they have a greater likelihood of disenrollment” (King et al., 2011). p. 22).

There is further distressing evidence suggesting that enrolling in a two-year college reduces the likelihood of obtaining a Bachelor’s degree (Kurlander & Long, 2009). Minority students disproportionately attend and rely on community colleges for their education (Kurlander & Long, 2009). A study by Kurlander and Long (2009) found a “penalty” associated with enrollment at two-year colleges. Although this study specifically examined students who initially began at two-year colleges, it does raise the concern that CSU students who are dis-enrolled as a result of EO 665 could be at risk of failing to return to their CSU campus. The researchers suggest that “due to the penalty experienced by community college students, caution should be exercised when designing

policies that shift enrollment patterns more towards the two-year colleges” (Kurlaender & Long, 2009, p. 47).

The desire to reduce remediation to an unparalleled and unattainable percentage as outlined by the California Post Secondary commission, then, may ultimately punish individuals who cannot meet the CSU’s stated goals of remediation and readiness to pursue higher learning. These institutional goals appear to completely discount systemic inequities in the education system, which often cannot be resolved by a limited menu of remediation. EO 665 illustrates a policy that represents the needs of an institution rather than the individual students’ needs. “When remediation is thought of simply as a term rather than as a population of students, limits for it are easy to set” (Crouch & McNenny 2000, p. 53).

### **The Early Assessment Program**

The California Post Secondary commission optimistically predicted that the CSU would drastically reduce remediation by 1990. The Commission advised the CSU to build partnerships with public secondary schools to reduce remediation, an approach that has been echoed by numerous educational stakeholders since the commission’s 1983 report. However, it was not until roughly 18 years after the commission’s report that the CSU received adequate funding to formalize this goal with the Early Assessment Program (EAP) in 2001 (Crouch & McNenny 2000). The EAP was a reform aimed at finally bridging the gap between secondary preparation and postsecondary enrollment.

Additionally, it became clear to the CSU that it would not reach the goal of 90% proficiency by 2007 (Garcia, 2015).

EAP is a collaborative partnership between the CSU, the California Department of Education, and the California State Board of Education that is designed to improve academic preparation of potential CSU admits. EAP is guided by three primary goals: 1) identify students in need of additional preparation in English and math prior to their senior year of high school; 2) Provide students, parents, teachers, and administrators information about their students' level of preparedness; and 3) Motivate students to take the necessary steps to become college ready by their senior year of high school (Howell, Kurlaender, & Grodsky, 2010). EAP includes three components: an 11<sup>th</sup> grade standardized test; professional development for teachers to better prepare their students for the CSU's readiness standards, to include training in a CSU designed English curriculum called ERWC; and revised curriculum for students in need of improvement, to include online materials to prepare for EAP (Almeida, 2016). The intent of the program is to provide an "early warning" signal for students who need to "catch up" on English and math skills in order to meet readiness levels as defined by the CSU's assessment tools (Garcia, 2015).

Although EAP is a voluntary program, participation has grown (Tierney & Garcia, 2011). The EAP assessment test is offered alongside the California Standards Test (CST) as a supplemental tool to gauge the college readiness of high school juniors. While most students take the test, the percentage of students who complete the

supplemental portion of the test is lower. In the 2005-2006 academic year, 72.6% of students completed the Math test and 47.6% completed the English test (Howell et al., 2010). Students receive their results in the summer prior to their senior year of high school. The results categorize the students as “ready for college”, “not ready for college,” or “ready-conditional” (Garcia, 2015). Students who are deemed “ready” are allowed to take college level courses upon entry to a CSU, students who are “not ready” must take the EPT and/or ELM, and “ready-conditional” students must take an approved year-long English or math course in their senior year of high school (Garcia, 2015). In 2013, 23% of students were deemed ready for English according to EAP results and 14% were deemed ready for college level math (Garcia, 2015).

The true impact of EAP on student preparedness and overall student success is still relatively unknown, despite a small number of studies that examined its effectiveness in achieving its stated goals. Data do suggest that first-time freshman remediation rates for CSU students have decreased since 2006 (Garcia, 2015), but scholars are cautious to call EAP a full-fledged success due to limitations in data. Some scholars suggest that reduction in remediation rates could be attributed to the fact that the CSU lowered the EPT cut score in 2012 (Almeida, 2016). Researchers also suggest that the CSU’s expansion of readiness status for EAP beyond the binary “ready” or “not ready” and the addition of the status “ready-conditional” has presented students with alternative ways to gain college-readiness in their senior year besides taking the EPT or ELM (Garcia, 2015). Although research on the success has so far been inconclusive, a study by Howell et al.,

(2010), found that EAP participation reduced the average student's probability of needing English remediation to 6.1% and 4.1% in Math. In their examination of the impact of EAP on Sacramento State students, the researchers also concluded that EAP did not discourage poorly prepared students from attending that campus (Howell, et al, 2010). This research suggests some value in the CSU's early warning system and establishes cause for the possible expansion of the program.

Studies also suggest that although 70%-80% of eligible high school students participate in EAP, they often do not know that they have participated in the program (Garcia, 2015). Qualitative evidence also suggests that seasoned high school counselors do not know about EAP or are confused with the purpose of the program (Tierney & Garcia, 2015). Since high school students and counselors are heavily focused on college entrance requirements, they are not always aware of the long-term effects that remedial placement can have on degree completion and persistence (Tierney & Garcia, 2015). The CSU has taken steps to expand the ERWC English curriculum, but only 20% teachers have been trained on use of the curriculum (Garcia, 2015). Use of the CSU's online materials by students has also been minimal and passive (Tierney & Garcia, 2011).

There is evidence that the benefits of EAP are not far reaching enough and may be less effective for marginalized groups, particularly for first-generation college students. Almeida's (2016) study examined how low-income Latino students perceive and make sense of their EAP results. It was found that EAP has fallen short of its goals to improve readiness for students who attend majority Latino under-resourced high schools

(Almeida, 2016). The biggest failure of EAP for low-income Latino students is that the “call-to-action” component of EAP has not worked for this population due to lack of prior knowledge of the program (Almeida, 2016).

Almeida further contends that the success of EAP depends on students’ prior knowledge of EAP and the strength of their school-based relationships with teachers, counselors, and school administrators (Almeida, 2016). The researcher found that if students were well informed about EAP, they were not only more likely to take the test, but they were also more likely to put effort into the test (Almeida, 2016). Since many low-income Latino students are often first-generation college students, they rely more heavily on guidance from high school counselors and peer support networks that help prepare them for college. Latino, low-income, first-generation college students are less likely to have prior knowledge about college readiness from their family or community contexts when compared to their white peers (Almeida, 2016). EAP results are mailed to students in the summer before senior year and are not shared with school officials. This communication gap is problematic for students who do not have strong social networks at school to help guide them. Students are more motivated to act on results when their results are coupled with strong relationships with a teacher or counselor (Almeida, 2016). High school teachers have reported that they typically are unaware of their student’s EAP results (Tierney & Garcia, 2011).

It also may be that high school students have testing fatigue and as a result are less likely to pay attention to, trust, or apply meaning to their EAP results on their own

(Almeida, 2016). Almeida contends that the early warning mechanism without proper communication could discourage students. In fact, some students that completed the EAP assessment dropped their AP coursework in their senior year when their EAP results showed that they were “not ready” or “ready- conditional,” believing that they should enroll in courses more appropriate to their current ability level (Almeida, 2016).

Academic rigor in secondary school remains the most valid predictor of college success, and first-generation minority students are less likely to enroll in AP courses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Almeida’s study (2016) suggests that if the goals of EAP are not fully communicated, the program can have the unintended consequence of encouraging students to take actions that could be harmful to their college-readiness.

Educational scholars continue to recommend that crafting K-16 partnerships is a significant step to building readiness expectations (Jackson & Kurlaender, 2016). EAP remains the largest early warning program in the United States, and researchers seem to agree that it is useful for identifying a lack of college-readiness in math and English (Garcia, 2015). EAP is often the first opportunity the CSU has to engage and communicate its readiness standards and let students know that admission to the CSU is not a predictor of preparedness in college level English and math (Garcia, 2015).

However, as evidence suggests, information alone is not sufficient to prepare students to take action (Almeida, 2016). Further steps need to be taken to motivate students to use the information presented by the EAP results, and high school teachers need more EAP-related professional development. Tierney and Garcia (2011) noted that

most high school teachers reported that they did not have a direct CSU contact person. The data suggests that while EAP is likely a step in the right direction, partnerships between secondary and post secondary institutions are not as strong as they need to be if students are to be motivated to take actions that support their college readiness.

### **Executive Order 1048, the Early Start Program**

In June 2010, building on the previous reforms to reduce remediation, the CSU Chancellor's Office issued EO 1048 mandating that campuses restructure their remedial education programs by making existing summer programs mandatory. By Summer 2012 each campus would be required to develop Early Start summer courses for admitted students who are believed to be "at-risk" in terms of English or math proficiency as defined by the ELM and EPT (CSU, 2010). The majority of students who enroll in Early Start classes are Latino and African American (Legislative Analyst's Office 2014). The order states that incoming freshman who have not demonstrated proficiency in English or math will be required to begin remediation the term prior to matriculation as a stipulation of their admission (CSU, EO 1048, 2010). Exemptions to Early Start were granted. Students could complete remediation at a community college in the summer and individual campuses were permitted to design an appeal process, but the stipulation that students complete remediation within one year via EO 665 would stand (CSU, EO 1048, 2010).

EO 1048 expanded upon EO 665 by imposing a new time limit, stating that if students “have not started to address a deficiency in either mathematics an/or English, they will not be permitted to enroll at the CSU campus of their admission” (CSU, EO 1048, 2010). The goal of the program is to reduce the time to degree, the time it takes to remediate, and the overall cost of remediation to students and the CSU (Legislative Analyst’s Office 2014). The Early Start program was met with major opposition from scholars and in particular the CSU English faculty. The CSU English Council called Early Start “deeply flawed, misguided, and discriminatory” (CSU English Council, 2010). They also wrote to the CSU Trustees and stated that Early Start undermined the California Master Plan (King et al, 2011) and that by

Forcing an identified group of students to participate in summer as a pre-condition of enrollment to the university, even though this same population of students is not only fully qualified for admission, but arrives at the CSU having earned high school GPAs of B or better (CSU English Council, 2010).

Much like EO 665, the Early Start mandate was seen as another yet another threat to college access for unrepresented students (King et al, 2011). Requiring Early Start in the summer prior to matriculation meant that students could lose their admission if they did not comply with the condition (King et al, 2011). Additionally, many low-income and first-generation students do not possess the “college knowledge” that makes the college application process easier (Almeida, 2015). Adding additional steps and deadlines to the college application process via the Early Start program, arguably presents unwarranted

challenges for these students (King et al., 2011). Critics of the program argue that it places a financial burden on students. Early Start courses are not state-funded, so only Pell grant-eligible students receive financial assistance for the courses. Low-income minority students often rely on summer employment, and for some families financial aid will not cover all costs associated with enrollment in the program. This sentiment was also echoed by the English Council, which suggested that even with financial aid, families would incur some of the costs, and mandating the program “could lead to resentment, hardship, and disenrollment (CSU English Council, 2010). The English Council argued that the Early Start program simply established an additional remedial course for students to take.

The Early Start program was partially modeled after the Educational Opportunity Program’s (EOP) Summer Bridge program, and the belief may have been that the transitional supports associated with that program might benefit all students in need of remediation. However, the CSU English Council challenged this in its written statement commenting on San Francisco State University’s pilot attempt to offer Early Start classes alongside summer EOP bridge. The Council asserted that the program failed to prepare students for first-year composition despite successful completion of the summer course (CSU English Council, 2010).

The faculty at many campuses felt that they had developed their own nuanced and innovative English courses. Many campuses had already begun to eliminate pre-baccalaureate courses altogether in favor of “stretch” English models that allowed

students to enroll in a yearlong credit-bearing English course with the same professor (Goen-Salter, 2008). The model that English faculty at most campuses began to follow was one that avoided remedial labeling, and as some faculty assert, it has improved student outcomes (Duncheon, 2015). On the contrary, these faculty members regarded Early Start as a deficient thinking approach that stigmatized low-income students of color (Duncheon, 2015).

In Duncheon's study on faculty impressions of Early Start implementation, faculty reported that by only requiring one group of students to attend summer school, the policy positioned those students in a problematic way. One faculty member stated:

I think that remediation functions as a way to say we can fix something. We're going to fix student writing. We're going to get all these people who are designated as remedial and get them to do something that says they're not remedial anymore (Duncheon, 2015)

Many faculty perceived Early Start as a quick fix to a complicated problem (Duncheon, 2015). In light of the fact that literacy research suggests that writing skills are developed as an ongoing process, building overtime with instruction and experience (Duncheon, 2015), the accelerated model of Early Start does not appear to be informed by literacy theory. The CSU English council urged the Chancellor's Office to "abandon simplistic notions of proficiency determined by a score on a single test, as well as the obsession

with where and when students receive particular types of educational experiences” (CSU English Council) (cited in Goodwin, Miller, & Chaput, 2017).

Despite faculty opposition, the majority of students who participate in Early Start do complete the program (Legislative Analyst’s Office (2014). However, the larger question is whether faculty concern that Early Start is just an additional unnecessary remedial course is warranted. The most recent proficiency data from 2015-16, suggests that 83% of CSU students system-wide do become proficient in math and English within their first year (CSU, 2016). In light of the fact that most students are able to complete remediation by the end of their first year, this does provoke further inquiry as to how Early Start enrollment might impact student success. There are few studies that have examined the effectiveness of Early Start and its impact on student success. A preliminary study in conjunction with the CSU, by Kurlaender, Lusher, and Case (2017), suggests that the Early Start program has not had a positive effect on student performance (GPA) or persistence rates. The study also did not find significant harm associated with enrollment in the program (Kurlaender, et al, 2017). The results of the study were revealed just prior to the CSU’s announcement of its upcoming overhaul of remedial policy via EO 1110. Despite the findings of this study, the CSU has reported that it will strengthen Early Start programs at each campus. EO 1110 stipulates that CSU campuses will continue to require Early Start for students who do not demonstrate proficiency in English and/or math, but under the new policy students will earn baccalaureate credit for these classes (EO 1110, 2017).

This chapter provided an overview of remediation's historical foundations and the mandates that have shaped remediation policy and practice at the CSU. The intent was to illustrate remediation policy as a complex set of political and social forces that come together to define the failure or success of individual students. This chapter highlights the problematic nature of relying on standardized tests as both the key indicator of college readiness and as a reliable measure that drives policy. The CSU's historical progression of reforms largely served the institutional mission to reduce the number of applicants in need of remediation, and resulted in punitive policies in direct opposition to the institution's aspirations to provide opportunity and direct access to underserved communities. These same remediation policies will be referenced in the next chapter to discuss some of the external economic and political forces that drive the CSU's compulsion to eliminate the percentage of students in need of remediation.

## **Chapter 4: Defunding Higher Education**

The 1960 Master Plan promised broad ranging access to higher education for Californians, and a central component of that access was an affordable, tuition-free education. The Master Plan ambitiously ratified universal access and enrollment growth as a form of public policy (Callan, 2009). Central to the plan was the belief that education provided a benefit to the public interest, positioning education as a public good (Callan, 2009). The promise of a tuition-free, state-sponsored education has now been substantially diminished, and California's continuing fiscal crises have passed educational costs on to students and their families. This chapter examines economic and social policies that have acted to defund education and eliminate expansive access to higher education in California. The chapter considers the influence of neo-liberal economic policy and neo-conservative thinking on decision-making around remediation and its role in reproducing social and economic stratification of students attending CSU.

### **The Neo-liberal Alliance**

Apple (2001) contends that we are experiencing a period of crisis that "has affected all of our economic, political, and cultural institutions" (p. 409). Apple asserts that education in the context of an increasingly globalized society operates within an ongoing struggle and collaboration between two political factions: neo-conservatives and neo-liberals (Apple, 2001). The neo-conservative faction views education as a battleground for a crisis of standards. Education is claimed by neo-conservatives to be

about preservation of traditions; they spin a romanticized narrative of the need to ‘return’ to a ‘lost’ past (Apple, 2001). Contemporary educational problems are grounded in the theory that there were once higher standards and a ‘common culture’ (Apple, 2001). Furthermore, neo-conservatives assert that the only way to improve educational quality and outcomes is to return to “real knowledge” (Apple, 2001). This mythologized image of a time when schools were more effective is largely embedded in a perceived threat to White Christian values and concepts of “real” or “legitimate” knowledge is not organized around students of color and other minority communities (Apple, 2001).

The allied neo-liberal faction for its part is committed to an ideology focused on measurement, accountability, and a “new managerialism” that is operated and controlled by the middle class (Apple, 2001). Neo-liberals believe that a solution to effective schooling can only occur when we turn our schools, teachers, and children over to the competitive market (Apple, 2001). Apple suggests that while tensions and conflicts remain, these two factions have formed a “power bloc” or “new alliance” that aims to produce the necessary educational conditions to encourage profit, competitiveness in the global market, and establish discipline and a set of standards that return us to a shared collective ‘ideal’ of home, family, and school (Apple, 2001). Apple asserts that this “new alliance” governs all social sectors to establish an

Eloquent fiction, the free market; the drastic reduction of government responsibility for social needs; the reinforcement of intensely competitive structures of mobility both inside and outside of school; the lowering of people’s

expectations for economic security; the ‘disciplining’ of culture and the body; and the popularization of what is clearly a form of social Darwinist thinking (Apple, 2001, p. 410).

### **Neo-Conservatism and the “Crisis” of Standards**

The History of educational policy suggests that access is expanded in times of economic and political pressure, while standards are reinforced by fear and defensiveness (Fox, 1999). California’s Master Plan illustrates the pragmatic restructuring of higher education in anticipation of population growth and the need for economic expansion. It has been argued that in times of significant historical social change that results in broad open access, standards are asserted to limit access (Soliday, 2002). This was the case in the late nineteenth century when higher education institutions began admitting the middle class and the elite were no longer the only group attending college. A wave of immigration at the end of the century resulted in increased educational opportunity for middle class students, but it also coincided with the creation of freshman composition, which was critiqued in Chapter 2 as a means of gate-keeping and assimilation for students considered culturally different. The most serious challenge to the “rhetoric of gate-keeping” occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, which brought historical moments of major social change such as racial integration, affirmative action, and the establishment of “equal access” with the open admissions movement in higher education (Fox, 1999). Following the wave of open access movements, by the mid-1970s there was a reversion to formalized remedial curriculum (Soliday, 2002), and remedial students became visible

again. In fact, by 1975, the United States was believed to be experiencing a “full-blown” literacy crisis, made possible by the “permissiveness” of the 1960s (Soliday, 2002). This crisis is recounted in *Newsweek*'s infamous issue, “Why Johnny Can’t Write.” The *Newsweek* article addresses parents directly.

If your children are attending college, the chances are that when they graduate, they will be unable to write ordinary, expository English with any real degree of structure or lucidity. If they are in high school and planning to attend college, the chances are less than even that they will be able to write English at the minimal college level when they get there (*Newsweek* December 8, 1975) (cited in Trimbur 1991, p. 278).

The article goes on to express the importance of establishing fixed rules and linguistic norms in order to ensure that the English language remains decipherable. The statement reflects and incites a “crisis of confidence” in public schools and implies that changing demographics has not only led to social decline, but poses a direct threat to the middle-class educational endeavors that are linked to economic health and individual success (Trimbur,1991).

The standards agenda and the “crisis in confidence” was furthered by evidence that standardized test scores were plummeting. Standardized tests were used as the empirical evidence to establish a direct correlation between the literacy crisis and open access (Trimbur, 1991). Rather than viewing the tests and the evolving demographics in

education as a sign of equality and social justice, they were used to illustrate social decline (Trimbur, 1991). This so-called empirical evidence fueled Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983 report "A Nation at Risk," which recommended that four-year institutions increase their admissions standards and administer standardized tests at "major transition points," in particular between high school and college (A Nation at Risk, April 1983).

Trimbur (1991) contends that "the very words 'literacy crisis' have become a ritual invocation that justifies our activities and shapes our self-images" (Trimbur, 1991, p. 277). The words "literacy crisis" hold a rhetorical power condensed into a series of cultural, political, and economic anxieties that were shared by the middle and upper class (Trimbur, 1991). In the 1970's these anxieties were linked to a drop in standardized test scores, the prevalence of Black English, progressive educational reform, and America's failure to compete economically with the Japanese (Trimbur, 1991). The discourse of literacy crisis in the 1970's was embedded in a nostalgia for a golden age of American education, but Trimbur (1991) argues even further that it was

an antidemocratic attack on the educational reforms of the 1960's and the 1970s, an offensive to stop affirmative action, remedial and equal-opportunity programs in higher education and to firm up the meritocracy in order to consolidate the privileges of middle-class and upper middle-class students (p. 283).

Standards and access are inextricably linked. They are always an extension of the past and are asserted as a mechanism to halt change and more specifically to secure class, race, and gender distinctions (Fox, 1999). The discourse of literacy standards is “always articulated in a relation to power and the negotiation of cultural hegemony” (Trimbur, 1991, p. 280). Trimbur (1991) asserts that a “crisis in literacy cannot be understood apart from the rise of mass schooling and the establishment of a meritocratic educational order” (p. 280). Literacy is a moral and cognitive measure of an individual and is inspired by middle class aspirations of upward mobility that portrays education as an arena of opportunity and an explanation for success or failure (Triumbur, 1991). Central to this rhetoric includes the idea that cultural and class differences can be overcome by mastering literacy (Fox, 1999).

Persuasive arguments that suggesting standardized tests were racist resulted in open admissions policies at many four-year institutions in the 1970s (Fox, 1999). Fox contends that institutions exhibited a “brief window of generosity” and for a moment, generally speaking, overlooked standards, but as soon as underrepresented students were granted access to the university, individual students were held to standards in the singular sense (Fox, 1999). The hegemony of this rhetoric believes that individuals will assimilate and, yet institutions can remain the same (Fox, 1999). In summation, the discourse of literacy serves the hegemonic elite in two fundamental ways: it is used as a social “explanation that individualizes oppression by blaming victims,” and it socializes and assimilates “other Americans”, namely ethnic and racial minorities, immigrants, and the

poor into a “monolingual body politic” (Trimbur, 1991). Fox (1999) contends that “failure” is never experienced as a result of the complex social and political circumstances that make up educational policy, failure is always assumed to be flaws within an individual. With this logic, institutions never seem to fail students. When remediation fails, it is because student’s fail. When standards fail, it is because open access fails. In short, the hegemony of the literacy crisis suggests that excessive access leads to lowered standards, which results in increased failures (Fox, 1999).

### **The Politics of Access and Remedial Stratification**

The standards movement fueled by the invention of the 1970s literacy crisis shifted the terrain of higher education in two significant ways. It established an indelible association between remedial basic skills courses and the “needs” of minority students. It also established a highly stratified education system with remediation as the central demarcation between curriculum and the upper, middle, and lower tier colleges (Soliday, 2002). Remediation programs have historically enabled institutions to resolve the conflicting tensions between democratic access and excellence (Soliday, 2002). Following the standards movement a discourse of student “need” became the justification for remediation reforms in the 1980s and 1990s that sought to stratify through curriculum (Soliday, 2002). The discourse of “student need” utilizes “cultural arguments” instead of “structural arguments” to explain the success or failure of remedial education, its students, and teachers (Soliday, 2002). These cultural arguments attribute “student need” to educational problems, which detracts from attempts to downsize remedial programs by

shifting attention to curriculum and standards (Soliday, 2002). A literacy crisis is dependent on the discourse of student needs, which assigns blame to groups, individuals, and programs (Soliday, 2002). Just as the literacy crisis is dependent on the discourse of student need, institutional decisions to stratify were also dependent on it (Soliday, 2002). Stratification as a strategic management tool has become a defining feature of post 1960s education to resolve the tensions between democratic access and selective excellence (Soliday, 2002). As Soliday contends,

Critics of remediation waved the red flag of declining standards and literacy crisis to justify the need to downsize, privatize, and effectively re-stratify higher education. By blaming remedial programs for a constellation of educational woes, from budget crisis to low retention rates and falling standards, the critics of remediation practiced an effective politics of agency. They attributed problems that public higher education faced throughout the decade to students (Soliday, 2002, p. 106).

The rhetoric of the literacy crisis suggested that the open access movement resulted in a new generation of students with a set of unique needs (Soliday, 2002). Although students have always “needed” remediation, those who support fixed standards will always argue that “standards don’t change, only students abilities do,” thus the “literacy crisis is always- new” (Soliday, 2002, p. 120). Soliday (2002) asserts the importance of challenging standards as set of static shared beliefs in order to counter the myth that remediation serves the “special needs” of non-traditional students (Soliday,

2002). The discourse surrounding “student need” has been used to justify and resolve many of the tensions that exist between access, standards, and institutional needs (Soliday, 2002). There is a “service ethic” attached to English composition that suggests that “at risk” students need what we teach them (Soliday, 2002). The rhetoric of “student needs” not only suggested that students “needed” remedial courses, but it justified sorting students into non-credit and credit granting curriculum. By establishing distinctions between remedial curriculum and the regular curriculum, institutions were able to assert standards, while maintaining its image as an “access granting institution” by continuing to offer courses that had become associated with underrepresented minorities (Soliday, 2002). The discourse of “student need” portrays basic skills courses as a “gift” to minority students, while obscuring the benefits that remediation programs provide to institutions (Soliday, 2002).

The rhetoric of “student need” has also been used to justify the “downward movement” of remedial programs to the two-year community colleges (Soliday, 2002). In the 1990s, studies citing declining standards, poor retention rates, and the expense of “special” programs prompted four-year colleges to push remedial programs to two-year colleges, which further stratified the educational tiers and closed the borders between institutions (Soliday, 2002). A combination of factors have contributed to an increase in minority enrollment at two-year colleges, such as the rising cost of tuition, and the end of affirmative action programs, but “remediation’s shifting attachment to various segments” is central to institutional missions and how they define access (Soliday, 2002, p. 115).

The tiering of higher education institutions incited by remediation reform in the 1990s was not exclusively connected to race and class, but it increasingly became aligned with race and class (Soliday 2002). At four-year institutions the number of upper and middle-income students has increased (Soliday 2002). The international student population has also portrayed an appearance of cultural diversity (Soliday, 2002). However, the number of low-income students represented at four-year institutions has declined (Soliday, 2002). Soliday (2002) contends that institutions have used a discourse of “student needs” to enact remedial policies that further institutional aspirations to stratify. The “crisis of standards” had less to do with the failure to acquire basic skills because most students already possess basic skills, but it had more to do with the political, economic, and social policies that serve to “gate-keep” and limit access (Fox, 1999). The consequence of institutional stratification was that it aligned low-income and minority students with institutions that are associated with “vocational missions and downward-tilting disciplines” (Soliday, 2002, p. 107).

Soliday (2002) contends that the backlash that occurred against remediation in the 1980s and 1990s did not always result in the abolition of remedial classes. Institutions could assert their image as an “access granting institution” by offering courses that had become largely associated with minority students, while asserting standards by placing students in demoralizing non-credit classes. The CSU negotiated institutional aspirations to provide democratic access while asserting its interest in standards using these stratification strategies. In the tradition of “gate-keeping,” (Fox, 1999) the CSU changed

its for credit remedial course offerings to non-baccalaureate credit in 1980. When the Master Plan was renewed in 1987 it defined students in basic writing programs as “students who are nearly college ready, but exhibit serious multiple skills deficiencies that require instruction at two levels below the freshman level English” (cited in Fox, 1999). Fox (1999) argues that this deficit approach to basic skills acquisition was made official policy and helped shape and define “student needs” in California’s higher education institutions. It not only justified placing students in “special” courses that attended to their needs, but it also used “cultural arguments” to downsize remediation at the CSU by suggesting that the community colleges were uniquely and better qualified to deal with remedial students.

In the 1990s there were several attempts on the part of CSU Trustees to change admissions requirements to require college level work at entry as a condition of admission. In 1995, leading up to EO 665, CSU Trustee Marian Bagdasarian told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that remedial classes “belong in the community colleges” (cited in Soliday, 2002, p. 111). Trustee Pesqueira reported that he “advocates sending many of the growing number of freshman who need remedial instruction to community colleges until they can show that they are ready to do college-level work” (cited in Soliday, 2002, p. 111). This statement is firmly grounded in widely held assumptions about the meritocratic nature of education and that access can only be possible after “objective” standards of excellence have been met (Stevens, 2002). Stevens (2002) suggests that this logic abuses the discourse of “student needs” by suggesting that relocating students to

community colleges is for their own good so that access can be granted when they are ready. This statement also justifies the institutional tiering between the CSU and community colleges by suggesting that those institutions are better equipped to handle the very unique needs of remedial students. Although as Stevens (2002) points out, the irony of this argument is that the adjunct faculty that teach basic skills courses at the community colleges often teach at the CSU as well (Stevens, 2002). The common argument by those who assert standards is that remedial education is the mission and the specialization of the community colleges (Stevens, 2002). Stevens (2002) asserts that the argument that justifies diverting enrollment to the community colleges must be challenged. In particular, we must question why community colleges are better equipped to prepare students in basic subjects or why they are any better suited to pave the way to the middle class (Stevens, 2002). Stevens (2002) argues that the CSU maintains an appearance of democratic access, by retaining its remedial offerings, but it can only be rhetorically invested in access, as long as it privileges standards over access. On the one hand the CSU has come to represent pluralism by offering remedial courses, yet at the same time it continues to implement reforms to eliminate the remedial offerings that represent “curricular threats to excellence” (Stevens, 2002). In this regard, remediation serves a political purpose for the CSU, as much as it serves student need. The CSU must fulfill its commitments to provide access for historically underrepresented student groups (Soliday, 2002) and remediation programs at the CSU have come to represent and signify access for marginalized groups. As a policy, EO 665 seems to be a compromise between

stakeholders who argue for standards and those that argue for remedial courses as an avenue for access.

While the open access movements and pragmatic attempts to increase enrollment in the 1960s did generate access for low-income students of color, it appears that middle-class students were the greatest beneficiaries (Soliday, 2002). When research institutions like the University of California eliminated their remedial programs in 1991, remedial enrollment was pushed to the middle and lower tiers (Soliday, 2002). Proponents of remedial programs assert that in California, there is evidence that black and Latino students are more likely to enroll in middle and lower tier institutions that still offer remedial programs. There is also some evidence that suggests that when upper tier institutions eliminate their remedial programs, they also tighten their admissions standards (Soliday, 2002). At the UC, admissions standards have tightened in particular at impacted campuses (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). The elimination of remedial programs at UC coincided with an increase in White and Asian students at UC, while the attendance and the transfer rate for other minority groups has decreased (Soliday, 2002).

Looking at the racial demographics at California's four-year colleges decades after the Master Plan, it is clear that in terms of access, the tiering of California's public institutions most benefitted White middle and upper class demographics. In fact, less than 5% of California's Minority population aged 18-29 attends a four-year campus (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). Underrepresented minority enrollment is heavily concentrated in California's two-year institutions at a rate of roughly 80% (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). It

has been argued that given California's low rate of underrepresented minority enrollment in Baccalaureate granting institutions, it is not surprising there are major inequities in underrepresented minority degree completion. (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). California ranks 45<sup>th</sup> in minority degree attainment and 47<sup>th</sup> in terms of minority enrollment at four-year institutions (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). Increasingly, critics have challenged the Master Plan's claims of democratic access and suggest that the Master Plan as it currently stands is not built to accommodate California's increasing demographic diversity (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). California's landmark Master Plan has in fact limited access for minority students in California's upper tier institutions (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). This is important because it suggests that some of the "cultural explanations" used to explain student outcomes, such as lack of academic preparation may only partially account for inequities in degree outcomes. Remediation has assumed the "symbolic burden of access" in California's education system by becoming the dividing line in a highly stratified system of meritocratic order (Soliday, 2002).

The hegemony of standards discourse in its efforts to overstate the responsibility of individuals has detracted from discussion of the increased privatization of higher education. Neo-conservative standards and neo-liberal ideology have converged into the educational realm. This convergence has resulted in policies that support marketization by offering incentive systems that support individual and personal goals rather than collective altruistic ones (Apple, 2006). In times of budget crisis, remediation is often regarded as costly and ineffective. The increasing privatization of education has resulted

in remedial programs that are less effective, have less autonomy, and are increasingly costly for students (Soliday, 2002). Neo-liberal marketization when combined with neo-conservative standards suggest that “if underclass students are adrift in school, then it is because of cultural, not social class, difference, for in the American dream, college is available and affordable for those who really want it” (Soliday, p. 127).

Neo-liberal policy has incorporated a neo-conservative reliance on standards with a market responsive educational policy resulting in more rigidity, more control, more regulation, and more competition (Hargreaves, 2012). Four important neo-liberal ideological perspectives have shaped the terrain of education: privatization, marketization, performativity/accountability, and unbridled individualism (Apple, 2001). This portion of the study considers how these four ideologies, which are embedded in the political discourse of California, have informed remedial reform and policies at the CSU. Neo-liberal ideology is important to the discussion of remediation because remedial policy and practices have acted to amplify the marginalizing effects of the neo-liberal agenda on individuals (Gulea, 2016).

### **Defunding Secondary Education: Prop 13 and Marketized “Solutions”**

Since the 1970s, neo-liberalism has shaped all aspects of life in the United States (Giroux, 2014). The privatization of public services is widespread, and education is one of the sectors that has experienced dramatic defunding. Radical disinvestment in education has little to do with money and everything to do with priorities (Giroux, 2014).

The United States allocates more than 60 percent of its federal budget to military spending, while only 6 percent is allocated to education (Giroux, 2014). In 1978 California's voters passed Proposition 13, which lay the foundations of reduced educational spending and continues to have serious implications on access and opportunity for students enrolled in in the state's public schools. Proposition 13 reduced property taxes by 60% limited future tax increases (Callan, 2009). California's secondary schools are primarily funded by property taxes, and with the enactment of Proposition 13, the state was estimated to lose \$9 billion a year in property tax revenue (Hedrick, 2017). As a result of Proposition 13, the state has become increasingly reliant on taxes such as income, capital gains, and sales tax, which are vulnerable to precarious economic conditions (Callan, 2009).

Under Proposition 13, educational funding is largely dependent on the market, so in times of economic crisis, educational sectors in California have experienced extreme fiscal constraints (Callan, 2009). Prior to prop 13, California once ranked at the top of K-12 education. It now ranks in 42<sup>nd</sup> based on a ranking criteria that considers teacher training, class size, teacher-to-student ratios, 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math scores, and college preparedness (Hedrick, 2017). In 1978, California ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in per pupil spending, and it now holds the 41<sup>st</sup> place in per pupil spending (Hedrick, 2017). While prop 13 cannot explain all of California's educational problems, it seems clear that the defunding of secondary schooling should be accounted for when blame is cast on

students and teachers for the high percentage of students deemed unprepared for college level work.

The public K-12 sector has experienced many neo-liberal initiatives, which has had an “upward push” on higher education (Goodwin, Miller, Caput, 2017). Efforts to align secondary education with the labor market have been embraced since the Reagan administration in the 1980s (Berman, Marginson, Preston, McClellan, & Arnove, 2003). This ideology is driven by the notion that resources should be moved from the state to the market in order to reduce the cost of public expenditure (Hargreaves, 2012). The government’s role in providing education has been denigrated for lacking the efficiency and flexibility that exists in the private sector marketplace (Berman et al., 2003).

Recent reforms in secondary education such as President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and President Barack Obama’s Race to the Top (RTT) have illustrated that quantitative metrics, most commonly used in the market, have become the primary tools for social decision-making. Both NCLB and RTT stem from concerns that the American education system no longer holds a competitive place in the global economy. These education reforms were built around performance indicators and the notion that schools, administrators, and students must be held accountable for improving educational outcomes. Both reforms were designed to improve educational outcomes for low performing schools and in particular for low-income and minority students who were underperforming on standardized tests in relation to their peers.

These reforms have utilized testing cut scores to sort students, teachers, and schools into binaries such as “failing” and “successful” (Lipman, 2006). These binaries, which claim to constitute what makes a “good” teacher or student, have been heavily critiqued for being tied to funding and financial incentives. The policy of offering funding and monetary incentives is also critiqued for being ineffective, and simplistic in its disregard for the real issue impacting achievement, poverty (Davis, 2013).

Additionally, these reforms resulted in closing low performing schools, laying off teachers, and a proliferation of charter schools that low-income students of color are often unable or less likely to attend. What these reforms have established is a culture that allows the state to transfer accountability for failure and inequality in access away from itself and onto students and teachers (Gulea, 2016).

One of the most common complaints in the argument against college remediation is that secondary teachers and institutions have not successfully completed the job of preparing students for college level work. Attempts to privatize secondary schooling via proposition 13 and marketized reforms such as NCLB and RTT have rendered individuals wholly responsible for educational outcomes. After decades of an imposing administrative authority that uses statistical metrics to finance secondary education and penalize students and teachers for their “failure,” it is little wonder that students from “failing” schools are more likely to enter college unprepared. Analyzing these problematic government policies and interventions helps to understand why students may need remediation when they enter post-secondary schooling.

### **The “New Managerialism” and the Accountability Movement**

The public education sector has been restructured by a business-style management philosophy that promotes privatization (Yamada, 2010). Educational stakeholders, including private corporations such as the World Bank, criticize higher education for its inability to produce graduates equipped to work in the “knowledge economy” (Yamada, 2010). National and international corporations, independent think tanks, and wealthy foundations are believed to have the solutions to producing better graduates fit to compete in the global economy (Yamada, 2010). Standardization of curriculum and educational goals has shifted education to a tangible commodity that can be sold on the global market. Increasingly college campuses are responsible for raising money through public-private partnerships (Yamada, 2010). At the CSU this is represented through the formation of privately funded organizations called “auxiliaries” that provide services to campuses (Yamada, 2010). Former CSU Chancellor Barry Munitz, who issued the EO 665 memorandum and urged for the reduction in remedial students, is argued to have embraced this new form of business style management at the CSU (Yamada, 2010). In his article, “Managing Transformation in an Age of Social Triage,” Munitz outlines his vision for the reinvention of the modern university.

For better or worse, our institutions are going to be held to standards comparable to those that corporations apply to their business or that governments are beginning to apply to their agencies. We are not immune from the productivity

pressures that already exist throughout the world and will have to be more market responsive in our publications and our offerings (as cited in Yamada, 2010, p. 96).

Under the neo-liberal ideology, schools are now responsible for providing the appropriate market conditions necessary to generate enterprising and competitive individuals who are “perpetually responsive” to markets (Apple, 2001). The “invisible hand of the market” is believed to be subject to less political interference and unhindered by government bureaucracy (Apple, 2001). The “inefficiency” of the government is believed to be far worse than the risks associated with the free market (Klees, 2008). In this regard, markets are depoliticized because they are governed by merit and effort and when they are combined, the results are always neutral and positive (Apple, 2001). The contradiction of this ideology is that on the one hand, it seeks to establish unfettered “free market” individualism and on the other hand, “audit” mechanisms are put into place to control, compare, and publicly assess individuals (Apple, 2001). In an era of declining social welfare, student needs have been overshadowed by student performance. The history of remedial policy at the CSU seems to suggest that during times of fiscal crisis the “logic” of the market makes its way into educational reform. “Budget constraints” are presented as the rationale to reduce funding and privatize education because there is simply no other “choice” (Klees, 2008). Two forms of accountability mechanisms have resulted in education, one focusing on the performance of individuals and the other on the performance of institutions.

Neo-liberalism has shifted thinking around education so that it is no longer viewed as a public good, but rather as a form of “academic capitalism” (Rhoads, Wagoner, & Ryan, 2009) (cited in Gulea 2016). In this regard, higher education now only benefits those who can afford it. Politics is driven by economic growth rather than social needs, and as a result social services are driven by the belief that the market should rule every human activity (Giroux, 2014). California’s waning investment in education signals a radical departure from the Master Plan’s commitment to making higher education available to all through enrollment expansion.

There have been few formal changes to the Master Plan since its inception. Yet following passage of Prop 13, student enrollment fees were introduced, though still not called “tuition” (Callan, 2009). Additionally, the expansion and construction of new campuses that previously enabled maximum participation in college was brought to a halt (Callan, 2009). The state’s commitment and fiscal support for enrollment expansion has proven to only be available during the best of economic times, and a series of recessions have shown that support has diminished (Callan, 2009). During times of fiscal crisis, enrollment reductions have been felt most severely at the Community Colleges, but also at the CSU. Enrollment decreased at the CSU by 50,000 in the recession of the early 1990s (Callan, 2009). In the early 1990s student fees at the CSU increased by 103%, and enrollment continued to drop until 2001 when it finally recovered to pre-1990 levels (Callan, 2009).

Higher education's vulnerability to the market has resulted in a reduction of full-time faculty, reductions in on-campus childcare for students and faculty, and tuition increases—all of which have the potential to discourage students from attending CSU altogether (Callan, 2009). Tuition has increased to twice the rate of inflation (Davis, 2013) and institutions are increasingly reliant on adjunct, graduate student teachers, and non-tenured faculty, many of which are treated as “indentured” servants, receiving little pay and no benefits (Giroux, 2014). Not only has state spending diminished, but also tuition rates are no longer based on actual costs, but what students (the consumers) are willing to pay in relation to what other schools are charging. (Davis, 2013). Meanwhile, government officials assert that tuition costs have risen because colleges have not figured out how to effectively control costs and manage spending (Davis, 2013). Callan (2009) argues that the “rationing” of higher education access in California has taken place without necessary formal changes to public policy and has resulted in a de-facto policy that allows for the suppression of enrollment during challenging economic times (Callan, 2009). This rationing of enrollment disproportionately impacts students of color and low-income students. Furthermore, the funding trends suggest that success for minority students will continue to be dependent on California's economic marketplace.

During the 1990s fiscal crisis, “frantic cost cutting in the CSU” led Trustees to question the value and expense of remediation programs (Stevens, 2002). The associated costs of remediation are almost always central to any discussion on the effectiveness of remediation. A study by the Alliance for Excellent Education reported in 2008 that the

institutional cost of remediation would cost \$2.9 billion annually (Duncheon, 2015). Proponents of remediation have studied the social costs of not offering remedial programs. A 2005 study by the Texas Public Policy Foundation estimated that when high school graduates do not acquire knowledge in basic skills subjects the state loses 13.6 billion annual in terms of worker productivity and costs associated with an increased need of social services (Bettinger et al., 2013). In the neo-liberal world where every social program is believed to be experiencing a crisis of efficiency, remediation is no exception to reforms that attempt to reduce educational costs. Educational stakeholder's who oppose remediation commonly lament that tax payers must pay twice for an educational service that should have been provided in secondary school (Duncheon, 2015).

Some have argued, however, that remedial education is hardly bankrupting the education system and the "cost crisis" is a myth (Wellman & Vandal, 2011). An Ohio Board of Regents study found that in that state only 3.6% of instructional costs went to remedial instruction (Ohio Board of Regents, 2006). In the 1980-1981 year, the CSU spent \$9,297,707, which only accounted for 1.01% of the total budget (California Post Secondary Commission, 1983). Today the CSU spends more on remediation related programs, but remedial classes tend to cost less than regular classes. This is due to the fact that education has been restructured to mirror the market. Educational policy has become about finding the best deal and doing more with less. Cost cutting measures are commonplace in remedial instruction. Education has taken a business-oriented approach

to administering education and the “value” of education has been redefined. In President Obama’s 2013 State of the Union Address, he announced that the US Department of Education would offer a College Scorecard that would measure individual colleges on graduation rates, tuition costs, and student-loan debt (Blumenstyk, 2015). President Obama described the tool as a response to the escalating costs of higher education and as a place where student and families could see “where you get the most bang for your educational buck” (cited in Blumenstyk, 2015). This neo-liberal approach to cost cutting assumes that competition in price and services will drive down costs and like private corporations, universities will find cheaper ways to implement programs.

The Implementation of the Early Start program in 2012 was the CSU’s attempt to offer remedial coursework at a reduced cost to the state and to students (Duncheon, 2015). The CSU initially reported that the Early Start program was not intended to be a “services consuming” program for campuses (CSU, 2012). The *Sacramento Bee* reported that 51 percent of faculty at the CSU are part-time (Lambert & Reese, 2015). Hiring part-time faculty to reduce costs is a national trend and part-time faculty continue to teach the majority of remedial courses. Although, the CSU’s attempt with Early Start was to facilitate academic progress and graduation (CSU, EO 1048 Memorandum, 2010) at a low cost to institutions, some argued that off loaded unwarranted fees onto students, which has the largest impact on minority and low-income students (King et al., 2011).

It has been argued that in the neo-liberal era a trend in “cost recovery” has swept higher education in the form of “individual user fees” (Klees, 2008). One critique of

Early Start is that it requires, as a contingency of admission that students pay additional fees prior to their first term (King et al., 2011). Since most campuses offer the summer classes through private self-support Extended Education programs, state support was not available to students to assist with the fees. However, Pell grant money is available to students who qualify. The cost for Early Start courses was set at \$182 per unit and the CSU does not attach any additional campus based fees. The guiding logic behind Early Start was that the program would utilize summer enrollment to facilitate progress and ultimately reduce the probability that a student would need to enroll in future remedial courses.

After the Chancellor's office made the announcement in 2010 requiring CSU campuses to revamp their remedial programs, the California Faculty Association (CFA) took issue with what they felt was a cost reduction program to either force students to take remedial courses at the community college or take ineffective online courses (Access and Equity group, 2010). In 2010 the CFA's Access and Equity group quoted a *Forbes* article on CSU Bakersfield's piloted attempt at offering an online remedial math class. *Forbes* reported:

Faced with a drastic decline in state funding, administrators at the California State University's Bakersfield campus decided to cut costs by replacing all the sections of the remedial mathematics course in the fall 2009 with an online computer program overseen by a single instructor. Unfortunately, substituting the internet for personal contact with a

classroom teacher proved disastrous, especially for the 700-plus ill-prepared undergraduates who needed intensive work to bring their math skills to college level. When these students took their final exams only 40% passed, compared with a 75% success rate the prior year (Forbes, 08-12-2010).

From the perspective of English faculty, the accelerated summer session was an “inoculation” approach (Duncheon, 2015) to present quick cost-effective results. At many campuses, English Faculty had already implemented and designed programs that took the opposite approach to teaching foundational English skills. In lieu of traditional non-credit remedial courses, many campuses offered two semester length “stretch” courses for college credit that had shown to be effective for students needing extra support in English (Goen-Salter, 2008). In order to meet the institutional need to speed up the remediation process, faculty felt that they were forced to participate in a program that placed undue financial stress on students (CSU English Council) when they already had an English curriculum that addressed the unique needs of their students (Duncheon, 2015). English faculty felt that they had made progress since EO 665 and had designed a program that in allowing students to earn college credit for the “stretch” courses avoided “remedial” labeling (Duncheon, 2015). The Early Start program on the other hand, made “remedial” students visible by making admission into the university contingent upon completion of a summer course that was deemed unnecessary in the professional view of faculty.

The CSU's obsession with the need to reduce remediation to unparalleled extremes illustrates the extent to which the neo-liberal milieu has been normalized within higher education goals (Goodwin et al., 2017). Goodwin et al (2017), contend that the standardization of remedial course work via the Early Start program privileged administrative ease, statistical merit, and market success. In the climate of neo-liberalism decision-making and policy goals are governed by "biometrics," in other words, by the statistical characteristics of populations (Goodwin et al, 2017). Whereas the faculty measure success qualitatively through their professional experiences with individual students, the CSU measures success through quantitative measures (Goodwin et al., 2017).

These quantitative measures include the smallest percentage of remedial students, a low ratio of general education classes to major classes, and ultimately a short time to graduation with as few units completed as possible (Goodwin et al., 2017). As illustrated by the CSU's disregard for faculty concerns regarding the format and pedagogy of Early Start classes, marketable metrics are valued over professional advice (Goodwin et al., 2017). Individual learners become overshadowed by the statistical characteristics of homogenous student populations (Goodwin et al., 2017). Additionally, administrative policies become less about improving people, and more about improving statistical merit (Goodwin et al., 2017).

As this study illustrates, at times the obsession with metrics has banished some CSU students to the community colleges when they do not comply with remedial policy.

Some argue that Early Start (EO 1048) and EO 665 were as much about students need as they are about altering admissions criteria to increase the statistical well-being of campuses. By introducing conditional admissions criteria based on remediation compliance, the Chancellor's Office offered CSU campuses a form of state sponsored absolution of social responsibility. A healthy university possesses a "statistical well-being" that is marketable to both students, donors, or any form of private investment (Goodwin et al., 2017). In this view, neo-liberalism has restructured education so that "marketability and competition replaces professional agency with statistically accountability" (Goodwin et al., 2017, p. 27). In the neo-liberal era, individuals are viewed as statistical populations rather than individuals who possess social needs (Goodwin et al., 2017).

### **Disenrollment and Student Performativity**

There is a link between deep funding cuts and disenrollment at the CSU. These enrollment conditions that have clear implications for college access and success are played out in remedial policy and reform at the CSU. The argument that remediation policy is as much about institutional need as is it about student needs is evident with further analysis of EO 655. EO 665's mandate that requires students to complete remediation within one year has been described as a response to an institutional need to control enrollment when many CSU campuses felt a strain on enrollment capacity and financial resources (King et al, 2011). California was just beginning to recover from recession in 1998 when EO 665 was enacted. By 2008 at the height of the great recession,

the CSU announced a goal to reduce enrollment at the CSU by 40,000 students over two years (King et al., 2011). An examination of the CSU's "one-year-to-proficiency" data shows a 7-percentage point increase in disenrolled students from the time EO 665 was enacted in 1998 to 2008 during the Great Recession. This seems to provide additional support for the argument that deep cuts disproportionately impact marginalized students through punitive remediation practices.

Particularly disheartening is the assertion that students who did successfully complete remediation at the CSU within one year had virtually the same graduation rate as students who entered the CSU without needing remediation (King et al, 2011). This suggests that those students who have been disenrolled each year might have a greater chance of persisting through to graduation if given the opportunity to complete remediation at the CSU. An "economic Darwinism" that has become typical of the private marketplace has become a driving force behind political and social decision-making in education policy (Giroux, 2014). Neo-liberal ideology has normalized punitive practices to the point that they appear to be "neutral" and "fair" because they are believed to be based on merit (Apple, 2001). Students have become increasingly commodified and must demonstrate their value by meeting institutional standards (Apple, 2001). Institutions must also demonstrate their value and are conditioned to "market" their image by limiting admission to the most "valuable" students (Apple, 2001).

While the CSU does grant access to *some* historically underrepresented students, the disenrollment of "unremediated" represents a neo-liberal mode of thinking that

reduces “social problems to individual flaws” (Giroux, 2014). These policies ensure that some populations, particularly those that are marginalized by class and race are cast aside to “zones of terminal exclusion” (Giroux, 2014). Stevens’ (2002) contends that CSU policy made remedial students *invisible* in the curriculum by forcing them to enroll in non-credit courses, but they were made *visible* again when limits were placed on admission, forcing students to repeatedly demonstrate their value.

### **The Completion Agenda: Holding Institutions Accountable**

A fundamental shift is occurring in higher education policy. After decades of educational policies focused on access, educational stakeholders are now concerned with degree completion (Kelly & Schneider, 2012). In President Obama’s State of the Union address he announced, “by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in world” (as cited in Kelly & Schneider, 2012). Bill and Melinda Gates declared that their foundation will help to “double the numbers” of low-income college graduates (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2008). While the “completion agenda” (Kelly & Schneider, 2012) is likely governed by neo-liberal ideology, the ongoing corporatization of higher education, as well as concern about America’s precarious position in the global market, it could result in strategic practices that help students finish their degree. That could be the case, if these policies do not prioritize completion *over* access.

One positive outcome that we have seen from the completion agenda so far is that it has put remediation under the spotlight again. Private think tanks and non-profit organizations that are guided by the completion agenda are now actively involved in the remediation debate. Remediation has been identified as the “bridge to nowhere” in particular for low-income minority students (Complete College America, 2012). Complete College America, a non-profit organization places an overhaul of remediation on their list of five “game changers” that will improve degree completion for underrepresented students (Complete College America, 2012). Complete College America has established partnerships with 31 states working with “Governor’s who get it” that incorporate CCA’s methodology behind degree completion and remediation reform (Complete College America, 2012). Their reform methodology is guided by acceleration and results. They suggest designing co-requisite remedial courses that provide built-in supports and offer degree credit. This methodology for accelerated degree completion includes encouraging students to take more units each semester, intrusive advising, and nudging students into major pathways rather than allowing students to matriculate into an “undecided” major (Complete College America, 2012).

Liberal think tanks such as The Center for American Progress are working toward establishing consensus around the definition of remedial education, placement practices, and the structuring of remedial education (Center for American Progress, 2016). While the literature suggests that decades of remedial reform has yet to accomplish consensus of definition or placement, the Center for American Progress proposes that the government

tie federal funding to “better data on remedial programs, including enrollment, placement, progress, and completion rates” (Center for American Progress, 2016). Both the Center for American Progress and Complete College America agree that traditional remediation does not work and believe in further expansion of the K-12 Common Core as well as any expansion of K-16 programs, for example the CSU’s Early Assessment program. The proposition of tying federal aid funding to performance outcomes could incite expansive remediation reform.

Twenty-five states currently use some form performance-based funding and the number appears to be growing (Public Policy Institute of California, 2014). However, some states that adopted early models of performance based funding have now switched back to traditional funding models (Public Policy Institute of California, 2014). In Most states, performance funding is offered as an incentive on top of an institution’s base operating budget (Public Policy Institute of California, 2014). Some performance metrics include graduation rate, transfer rate, and time to degree.

California Colleges are currently held to accreditation standards, which necessitate that colleges track student progress and completion (Public Policy Institute of California, 2014). In California higher education funding is currently tied only to enrollment, Full-time equivalency (FTE). California had some attempts at an outcome-based model at the community colleges, but they were short-lived (Public Policy Institute of California, 2014). In the 2013-14 budget, the Governor set aside performance-based funds that represented a 20% increase in general funds to CSU and UC over four years

(Public Policy Institute of California, 2014). The Legislature did not have an appetite for it and both the CSU and the UC opposed it (Public Policy Institute of California, 2014). In the end, the final budget that year required some performance metrics, but it was not tied to funding (Public Policy Institute of California, 2014). The Public Policy Institute of California (2014) warns that although many states have experimented with performance models, it is still unclear whether those models would work in California. Looking at the national trends, however, it does not appear that performance-based funding is entirely out of the question for California in the future.

The completion agenda appears to be a positive goal with implications for both the US market and for students. However, there are valid concerns that by overemphasizing completion rates, this new agenda could sacrifice college access for low-income students and other marginalized populations without improving outcomes (Rodriguez, 2015). This is particularly true since many of the completion efforts discussed so far have not been proven effective yet. There are several federal policy changes to Pell Grant that aim to incentivize degree completion, but raise concerns about access. In 2012, Congress approved reducing student Pell Grant eligibility from nine years to six years (Rodriguez, 2015). The CSU's six-year graduation rate is currently 53% (CSU, 2017) so this change in Pell Grant eligibility does impact students, in particular low-income students and student's of color who often take longer than six years to complete a degree (Rodriguez, 2015). Congress also passed a 20% minimum graduation rate threshold for institutions to remain eligible for Pell Grant funding

(Rodriguez, 2015). First generation college students make up 80% of Pell Grant recipients and depend on it to attend college (Rodriguez, 2015). The concern with the reforms to Pell Grant eligibility as well as the performance-based funding models, is that institutions will be incentivized to create more selective admissions criteria to exclude “at-risk” populations in order to enhance degree completion rates (Rodriguez, 2015). However, proponents of performance-based funding suggest that some states using performance-based models have improved persistence rates for minority students (Shulock, 2011). Additionally, unlike the traditional enrollment funding models (FTE) that address student *access*, performance funding focuses also on student *success* (Shulock, 2011).

### **CSU Reform to Remediation and Graduation Completion**

Building on a 2009 graduation initiative, in September 2016 the CSU launched the Student Success and Graduation Initiative 2025 (SSGI 2025). SSGI 2025 was launched in part by data that suggests that California will be short one million college graduates by 2025 (CSU Chancellor White, 2014). The CSU has also utilized the initiative as reinvigoration of the CSU’s role in graduating the majority of Californians as well as its responsibility in educating the largest number of first generation, low-income, racial minority students in the state. The SSGI 2025 goal is to graduate more than one million degrees in the next ten years by closing the underrepresented minority equity gap, the equity gap for students receiving the Pell Grant, improving both the 4-year and six-year graduations rates for freshman, and the two- year and four-year graduation rates for

transfer students. To accomplish these goals the CSU has pledged to address the following areas, better academic preparation, improve student engagement, utilize data-driven decision-making, and eliminate administrative barriers to success. CSU campuses have been allotted specific funds to meet that goals outlined in the initiative.

One year following the announcement of SSGI 2025, in August 2017 the CSU announced a complete overhaul of its remedial policies with EO 1110, which is slated to take effect in Fall 2018. This newest Executive order supersedes EO 1048 and replaces elements of EO 665 (CSU, EO1110, 2017). Leading up to the CSU's formal announcement, some CSU campuses have issued extensions to the one-year to proficiency mandate of EO 665. San Francisco State made the decision to offer Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 admits an automatic third semester to complete remediation. The New Executive Order does eliminate the provision in EO 665 that permitted the dis-enrollment of non-compliant students. The Chancellor's Office stated that the goals of EO 665 remain and that campuses should continue to "encourage" students to complete remediation within one year (Chancellor's Office presentation, September 29, 2017). However, the Chancellors office has not outlined official policy on the dis-enrollment of students or whether that would be an option at campuses. The new mandate does continue to stress the importance of completing remediation early with the Early Start program. Admission to the CSU, for those who are not deemed "not college-ready" will continue to be dependent on enrollment in an Early Start course.

In response to questions or a lack of data about the validity of testing as an effective instrument of remedial assessment, EO 1110 mandates the elimination of the ELM and EPT for remedial assessment in favor of a multiple assessment techniques that will include high school GPA, SAT/ACT scores, and AP scores. The intent is to take a more nuanced or blended approach to remedial assessment (Chancellor's Office presentation, September 29, 2017). Additionally, the Executive Order mandates that all campuses eliminate traditional non-credit remedial courses in favor of credit-bearing courses in math and English. Campuses can elect to offer these courses in either a co-requisite model that includes an additional 1-unit support class or campuses can expand their "stretch" programs. An expanded and improved version of the Early Start program must be made available by Summer 2019. Early Start will remain mandatory as a condition of admission, but the courses must be credit-bearing and made more substantial by mandating that students earn 3 units of credit for the courses. These reforms are informed by data that suggests that students who complete 30 semester units within their first year are more likely to graduate on time (Complete College America, 2012) and they support the SSGI 2025 initiative.

As a market-responsive institution, the CSU has responded to the completion agenda and the neo-liberal appeals for remediation reform. Additionally, the potential future for outcome-based funding in California could be a factor in the current reform movements at the CSU. Regardless of the reasoning behind the new initiatives, they seem to illustrate that institutional needs may finally be at least partially in line with students

needs. The response to EO 1110 has not been without criticism. The conservative criticism, and in particular the media response, to the elimination of remedial classes reinforces a concern about standards. In response to the CSU's elimination of remedial courses, *The San Diego Tribune* reported:

If the CSU wants to reassure parents and taxpayers that its prime commitment is learning—not improving appearances by downplaying student shortcomings – it must set up accountability measures to ensure a CSU degree retains credibility (*The San Diego Tribune*, August 2017).

This statement revisits past arguments on the remediation issue. It is vested in the argument that students need to meet standards before access can be granted. Or more specifically that giving remedial students direct access to gateway courses somehow jeopardizes the curricular excellence for all students. Even further, the standards argument is invoked to suggest that broader access or reforms that recognize inequities seem to lower the standards of the institutions and the students who attend it. The statement suggests a continuance of the sentiment that institutions are responsible for holding individuals accountable for a perceived set of flaws. It also expresses a middle-class material anxiety over the value of a degree that is becoming challenging even for the middle class to afford (Soliday, 2002). Soliday suggests:

If, after all, remediation is viewed as one barometer of institutional exclusivity, then those middle-class parents who send their students to mid-level institutions--

which is to say, most parents-- want an exchange value for the degree they are increasingly going into debt to finance (Soliday, 2002, p. 113).

It seems likely that the CSU may have anticipated the enduring standards debate. Perhaps to assuage the concerns of stakeholders, including middle-class parents, the CSU has emphasized the importance of ensuring the quality of the new English and mathematics curriculum. In fact, the Executive Order lists academic rigor within three of the six guiding principles of new mandate.

Other criticism for EO 1110 has come from CSU faculty and the California Faculty Association, who have called for a delay in implementation of EO 1110. Their concerns lie more squarely with student need. Similar to previous mandates, faculty assert that they were not consulted in the decision to reinvent remediation at their campuses and the timeline provided for Fall 2018 implementation is extreme (CFA, 2017). The mandate includes the creation of a “multiple measures” assessment, which the faculty assert they will be responsible for creating in addition to a complete redesign of pre-college Early Start courses and remedial courses that will need to be redesigned into college level courses (CSUN, Department of History Memorandum). The “multiple measures” tools have been outlined, but a clear definition of “college-readiness” using those tools is unknown and uncharted. Faculty at California State University Northridge issued a memorandum to their campus Provost requesting an appeal to reconsider EO 1110 “with full faculty consultation to effectively study challenges faced by students

needing developmental course and to offer well-considered and planned alternatives” (CSUN, Department of History September 18, 2017).

The general consensus amongst faculty seems to be that the order to eliminate remediation was hastily put together and appears to be a “quick and simple” approach to the complex problem of college-readiness. The Chancellor’s Office Board of Trustees’ assert that it is dedicated to the academic preparation component of SSGI 2025, which ensures that all students are on a path to success and degree completion by completing 30 semester units or 45 quarter units in their first term (Chancellor’s Office presentation, September 29, 2017). The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the CSU’s senior strategist for academic success and inclusive excellence stated “our timeline for implementation is aggressive, but we’ve got more than enough evidence to suggest that our current treatment of students, with the use of developmental education courses, doesn’t serve them very well... And we have worked with and talked to our faculty... who are ready to roll up their sleeves and do the hard work that we need to do to serve our students better” (*Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 2017). Faculty, on the other hand, suggest that although the CSU appears to be rightly concerned about the underrepresented minority students that are overrepresented in the current remedial programs, the acceleration of the EO 1110 mandate treats these students once again as “guinea pigs” in the CSU’s experiment with remediation reform (CSUN, Department of History Memorandum, September 18, 2017). Some faculty and representatives at the CFA suggest that the CSU Chancellor’s Office has created a “high stakes” situation for minority students by making their success

contingent upon restructured remedial courses that have not been developed yet. If remedial courses are indeed the primary barrier to student's success then thoughtful research and analysis (CFA, 2017) will be needed in order to not jeopardize the long-term of students.

This chapter highlighted remedial policy as a direct response to changing demographics, broad social change, and the increased economic insecurity felt by the middle-class. The neo-liberal and neo-conservative "power bloc" (Apple, 2001) have limited access for students, in particular underrepresented minority students in remedial programs. The literacy crisis and the standards movement have served as a distraction from the neo-liberal agenda, which has resulted in the state's gradual disinvestment in education (Soliday, 2002). The view of education as a private good rather than a public service has turned students into consumers and has shifted social responsibility away from the state and onto individuals (Apple, 2001). This shift in state responsibility is manifested in both financial disinvestment, but also in practices that hold individuals responsible for social problems (Giroux, 2014).

The intent of this chapter was to illustrate the profound effect that economic and political ideologies outside of the CSU have had on remedial policy and have amplified structural inequality and disparities in student success. The second part of this chapter considered the recent shift in the educational terrain from access to outcomes. The CSU's mission has historically focused on access and both EO 1110 and SSGI 2025 have shifted the CSU's attention to outcomes. This shift could be an example of neo-liberalism

working for students, by increasing institutional accountability for student outcomes.

However, the faculty concern that EO 1110 is just another “gimmick,” (CFA, 2017) does present the possibility that this could be a neo-liberal mode of thinking that looks for results and cost-effective fixes to complex problems.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **Summary of Findings**

This study examined remediation policy in postsecondary education using a critical discourse analysis approach (Rogers, 2004). The intent behind this approach was to reveal the power relations and the inequities that are embedded in higher education and by extension, remediation policy. Critical discourse analysis is rooted in a rejection of the social practices that are believed to be neutral and rational truths that are not representative of any particular interests (Rogers, 2004). A critical historical analysis of remediation's underpinnings in the modern university argues that remediation policy is generated by institutional interests and is not exclusively about student need (Soliday, 2002). Critical thought is stifled by a hegemonic discourse "that defines truth as ahistorical, authentic, and absolute and therefore closed to debate" (Lipman, 2006, p. 59). This study intended to counter the excessive focus on individualism that is often used to downplay the political interests of institutions. Extreme individualism has been used to generate many of the absolute binaries that are associated with remedial students such as "ready" or "not ready" and "successful" or "failing." These absolutes of "student need" are used to generate remedial policy and justify the remediation reform movements that have influenced decision-making at the CSU. In this study a comprehensive historical examination of remediation policy was utilized to challenge these absolutes. This historical analysis highlights that the CSU, though it is described as a democratically

aligned institution, is not immune to these absolute “truths” and the hegemony surrounding remediation discourse.

Chapter 1 discussed the recent discourse on remediation that has incited educational stakeholders to evaluate and address the implications of remedial placement on student success. The chapter also introduced recent concerns with the impact that placement in non-credit bearing courses has had on degree completion and more specifically the inequities in underrepresented minority degree attainment at CSU campuses. It also discussed the recent “backlash” against offering remediation at four-year colleges, as critics argue that it poses a threat to educational quality (Soliday, 2002).

Chapter 2 discussed the foundations of remedial education to challenge the “myth of transience” which is the notion that remedial education is a necessary tool to address the unique needs of a new generation of students (Soliday, 2002). The history illustrates that remediation has always been “needed” and despite “evolving membership” in the modern university, white upper-class students also “needed” remediation (Soliday, 2002). Demystifying the transience myth challenges the discourse that has aligned remediation with low-income minority students. Remediation has always served as a “crisis management” tool that helped institutions negotiate access with excellence (Soliday, 2002). This tool allowed institutions to increase enrollment while formalizing the boundaries between “high” and “low” disciplines during a time when White middle-income students entered universities in greater numbers (Soliday, 2002). The intent of this chapter was to highlight the historical “gate-keeping” function of remediation that

served to regulate enrollment during a time of social change and increased opportunity for poor students.

Chapter 3 argued that the driving force behind the CSU's reform efforts since the 1980s have been guided by an almost pathological need to reduce remediation. Furthermore, remediation reform efforts via EO 665 and EO 1048 set time limits on remediation, forcing non-compliant students to complete their remedial courses at community colleges. The chapter argues that the CSU's attempts to reduce remediation have been largely guided by institutional rather than student need. Whether intentional or not, these reforms undermined the CSU's democratic mission by limiting access for academically dis-enrolled students. Evidence suggests enrolling in a two-year college reduces the likelihood of obtaining a Bachelor's degree (Kurlaender & Long, 2009). The overrepresentation of minority students in non-credit bearing remedial courses at the CSU suggests that the disparity in underrepresented minority degree completion could be explained by remedial policy at the CSU. The CSU's upcoming remediation reforms suggest that the CSU has begun to draw correlations between its remedial practices and the inequities in underrepresented minority degree completion.

Chapter 4 discussed the convergence of neo-liberal and neo-conservative thinking, which have infiltrated contemporary US educational policy and redefined the value of education. Education is now viewed as a private good rather than a collective public good (Callan, 2009). The result has been that social problems are reduced to problems that correlate with individual flaws. The neo-liberal faction has influenced

remediation policies at the CSU that represent a business-style management philosophy that elevated the importance of standardized testing and the standardization of curriculum to regulate and publicly assess students (Apple, 2001). An examination of CSU remediation practices suggests that the CSU has been heavily focused on student accountability and performativity both through standardized assessment and through timelines that force remedial students to constantly perform and demonstrate their value (Apple, 2001). Neo-liberal ideologies that rely on performativity as well as quick fix solutions have normalized the CSU's practices that dis-enroll remedial students who do not meet remediation timelines. Additionally, the neo-liberal force of privatization that has defunded higher education has been guided by a logic that limits enrollment at the CSU through its remediation practices.

Neo-liberal policies have also resulted in less effective remedial programs that focus on cost cutting over quality. The CSU's Early Start program much to the dismay of faculty focused on an accelerated "inoculation" approach to administering remedial curriculum (Duncheon, 2015). Programs like Early Start privileges administrative ease, statistical merit, and market success over well thought out programs informed by the professional knowledge of faculty (Goodwin et al., 2017). At the CSU, the marketization of education has made data metrics the most important decision-making tool and has de-emphasized the value of faculty expertise. In this regard, data is the driving force behind decision-making surrounding student success.

The historic social changes that occurred in the 1960s granting wide-ranging access to historically marginalized students may also have fueled the 1970s literacy crisis and the neo-conservative standards movement. This movement directly impacted institutional approaches to remedial policy. At the CSU, this played out in repeated attempts to make college-level English and math proficiency a requisite of admission, even in cases where students clearly already met CSU admissions criteria. One way that the CSU has been able to negotiate neo-conservative concerns about admission standards with its open access mission is by using remediation as a strategic management tool (Soliday, 2002). By retaining its remedial programs, which are historically attached to marginalized students, the CSU has been able to symbolically demonstrate its democratic mission. However, the CSU, like many postsecondary institutions, abused the discourse of “student need” that justified decades of remediation practices to push remedial enrollment into bottom tier institutions. What has resulted is an educational system in California that is highly stratified by race and class with the lower tiers closely aligned with unrepresented minority and low-income students (Soliday, 2002). While the CSU has maintained a symbolic portrayal of access, the social, economic and political forces that have influenced remedial practices nation-wide have jeopardized its mission statement.

### **Final Thoughts and Recommendations**

The CSU’s recent mandate to overhaul remedial policy suggests that CSU leaders have likely concluded that students will always need remediation. The elimination of

demoralizing non-credit courses that increase time to degree and specifically single out some student's "deficiencies" has proven harmful to student success. The CSU's mandate to eliminate standardized tests is a significant and positive reform that challenges both the neo-conservative and the neo-liberal reliance on standardized assessment. Standardized tests have prevailed in educational policy for over four decades as the primary tool for reinforcing standards and defining success. For this reason, the CSU's elimination of traditional remedial assessment is no small feat and offers hope that other states could follow suit.

A complex web of social, economic, and political forces influenced decision-making at the CSU, prioritizing institutional need over student need, resulting in limited access for some students. The CSU's graduation initiative 2025 shows a renewed investment in not only improving access for students, but also improving outcomes for all of its students, in particular marginalized students. The CSU's investment in the completion agenda has the potential to positively align institutional needs with student need. Improvement of four-year graduation rates undoubtedly benefits the CSU's "statistical health" (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013), but the elimination of demoralizing non-credit remedial classes and the abolition of standardized tests as the sole measure of readiness, in efforts to support completion goals, will also support student need. If the CSU is to effectively balance student need with institutional need, and student access with student outcomes, several steps can be taken as stakeholders embark on the new reforms.

This study has repeatedly critiqued the CSU's "one-year to proficiency" timeline as well as dis-enrollment practices that force "unremediated" students to complete their remediation at community colleges. The CSU must be careful in enforcing time limits on English and math proficiency. Although EO 1110 supersedes elements of EO 665, the Chancellor's office has not officially outlined time limits on remediation. CSU representatives have stated that the Chancellor's Office recommends that CSU campuses continue to "encourage" students to complete English and math proficiency within one year (Chancellor's Office presentation, September 29, 2017). However, the Chancellor's Office has not clearly defined how or whether one-year time limits will be enforced.

Through the examination of the CSU's reform mandates, this study has captured the faculty perspective of these reforms. With almost every remediation mandate issued, faculty have asserted that their governance over curricular issues and their unique understanding of students needs have been undermined by decision-making that does not properly engage faculty consultation (CFA, 2017). The CFA expressed this sentiment following the announcement of the new mandate.

The faculty have been expressing their views about why these policies won't work. You should listen to the faculty who work with students and create the curriculum. They are not administrators who haven't taught at the CSU and do not know our students beyond their numerical representation on spreadsheets (CFA, 2017).

The Chancellor's office stated with its SSGI 2025 initiative that it plans to utilize data-driven decision-making to "identify and advance the most successful academic and support programs (CSU, SSGI 2025). While data and metrics are helpful, it would be beneficial for the CSU to utilize data in conjunction with faculty expert advice, as data does not always align with professional judgment (Goodwin et al., 2017). Faculty at CSU campuses have developed very effective "stretch" programs in English (Goen-Salter, 2008). As faculty continue to develop "stretch" courses in both English and math, faculty should be given the autonomy and resources needed to further develop such courses. Since the EO 1110 mandate was issued, faculty have expressed concern as to whether the CSU will provide the necessary financial resources to revamp the pre-college curriculum (CFA, 2017). Continued and thorough consultation with faculty in conjunction with known data must influence decision-making leading up to implementation of the order in Fall 2018. The CSU is, after all, known as a teaching institution rather than a research institution, and thoughtful engagement with faculty will not only capitalize on the CSU's strength as a teaching institution, but will lead to more nuanced solutions that address student needs. As evidenced by Duncheon's study (2015) on faculty sense-making following EO 1048, faculty vehemently opposed Early Start, but were ultimately resigned to it as yet another mandate. The recent study by Kurlaender et al (2017) that suggests the Early Start program did not improve student outcomes, advancing the argument that full support of faculty is a requisite for the successful implementation and design of curriculum.

The CSU has a history of implementing quick-fix, cost-effective measures that are highly reliant on data metrics, but that do not necessarily capture the complexity of the problem. Should California shift to an outcomes based-funding model in the future, the CSU should carefully examine and critique policies that have the problematic potential to penalize students or set unrealistic limits on degree completion. Low-income students who attend the CSU are more likely to experience financial barriers that necessitate part-time enrollment. On a higher level, we have already witnessed federal policies such as the limitations on Pell Grant that have used time limits to incentivize expedited degree attainment. Faster is not always better for students. The CSU should be cautious about any future incentives designed to promote speedy degree completion. The business management-style philosophy behind the completion agenda could pose potential harm to marginalized students if outcomes are emphasized over access. More selective institutions tend to have higher graduation rates (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). “High risk” students are vulnerable to policies that exclude when graduation rates are overemphasized (Rodriguez, 2015). The CSU must retain admissions and remediation policies that maintain access for marginalized students.

As Soliday (2002) contends, there is some evidence that as colleges shed their remedial programs, they tighten admissions standards, which further delineates the boundaries between upper and lower tier institutions. The CSU has not yet made any formalized plans to change admissions policies, although it was announced that with the elimination of remediation, campuses should now require four years of high school math

so that students are better prepared (Chancellor's Office presentation, September 29, 2017). Throughout remediation's historical evolution at the CSU, there have been many attempts on the part of the CSU Trustees to increase admissions standards in the name of "quality." The elimination of traditional remedial classes should serve students at the CSU well, but the CSU must resist pressures influenced by neo-conservative fears about quality that have historically threatened access for remedial students. The CSU must continue to adhere to the governance established by the Master Plan, but it should also advocate for its reauthorization.

In recent years educational stakeholders have called for a reexamination of California's outdated Master Plan. As this study has argued, lack of preparation only accounts for a portion of degree completion outcomes (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). The CSU's concerns regarding the disparity in underrepresented minority degree completion will likely only be partially solved by EO 1110. No singular policy will ensure that students are college-ready. The CSU's overhaul of remedial education is not the "magic bullet" (Tierney, 2015) that will help the CSU reach its 2025 graduation goals. Many educational stakeholders see the revision of the Master Plan as a necessary ingredient in improving both access and outcomes. To ensure better degree outcomes for underrepresented minorities, the eligibility pools for California's upper and middle tier institutions must be increased (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). The Public Policy Institute of California suggests that the UC should change its admissions eligibility to the top 15% of High school graduate and to the top 40% at CSU (PPIC, 2010) (cited in Geiser &

Atkinson, 2013). The proposed eligibility targets would expand enrollment at the CSU and the UC by 20% (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). In California, Latino students are one of the fastest growing demographics, but have the lowest eligibility rates (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). If the eligibility rates are not expanded, the implications could be severe, and the underrepresentation of minority students in California's four-year colleges could worsen overtime (Geiser & Atkinson, 2013).

The CSU will truly support student need as long as it continues to democratize education by opening its doors to more students. The upcoming remediation reforms at the CSU should not only be regarded as a measure to improve graduation rates, but as a measure that improves outcomes through greater inclusivity. The CSU's remediation policies of the past and the structural inequities embedded in California's higher education systems have resulted in exclusionary practices that limit the democratic value of education. These policies do not demonstrate a "crisis" of standards, but rather a "crisis" of social responsibility (Giroux, 2014). A liberal arts education that was formerly valued as a key source of democratic critique and public good is increasingly valued instead for its ability to prepare individuals for success in the market. The CSU's agenda to accelerate and improve graduation rates is a positive goal, but it must not overshadow the true value of what the CSU can offer its students as "a place both to think and to provide the formative culture and agents that make democracy possible" (Giroux, 2014). This is the value of education as a public good, and it is only possible when inclusivity is encouraged on all levels through every means possible.

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