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Testimony to the Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education
Monday, December 7, 2009

Good Afternoon Chairman Ruskin, Vice Chair Negrete McLeod and Members:

For the record, my name is Erica Romero, Executive Director of HACU's Western Regional Office. On behalf of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, I would like to thank the committee for inviting our testimony. HACU's mission is simple – “to Champion Hispanic Success in Higher Education.” In CA, where one out of every two K-12 students and future workers is Latino, our mission is vitally important to the future of the state.

Regrettably, despite their high and growing proportion in K-12 enrollments, only 36% of last year's high school graduates were Latino. In higher education, only 30% of community college students, 23% of CSU students, and 13% of UC, and 16% of AICCU students are Latino. While these numbers are an improvement over the past, clearly we

have major representation drops at all levels of education. For this reason, we encourage the committee to look at the following:

Eligibility and Access

As we know, our discussion on eligibility and access begins at a time when students are being turned away from all segments of public higher education because of budget cuts. But for Latino students, the issues of access and eligibility run even deeper-- only 25% of Latino students have completed A-G requirements. We must ensure that all students, regardless of socio-economic status or race, have access to highly qualified teachers and a rigorous curriculum. Higher education, of course, has a critical role to play through teacher preparation programs. We must also work to ensure that all students and their families are aware of the A-G requirements that are required for a public 4-year education. In addition, we continue to laud successful programs such as MESA, Puente, EOP and others that provide critical resources to first-generation college-going students. Finally, while HACU is advocating for additional federal resources for Hispanic-Serving School Districts (those with enrollments that include 25% or more Latinos) to work with Hispanic-Serving Institutions of higher education to create a seamless PK-16 pipeline, the state also plays a critical role in this area.

Affordability and Financing

The thought of 32% tuition increases in one year is difficult to justify. We know those increases were necessary to mitigate deeper cuts that would have been necessary without that funding. We want education to be affordable – but it also must be high quality and accessible. Students need to be admitted, find courses they need to graduate in a timely manner, have access to professors, counselors and support services. This access would have been seriously compromised if additional personnel and program cuts had to be instituted. Our state must look at ways to provide necessary resources to the higher education segments so that such tuition increases are made unnecessary.

As for financing, HACU remains committed to advocating for additional resources for financial aid outreach programs. Despite having much lower median incomes, according to the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute only 30% of Latino students use some form of grant aid to pay for their higher education. If higher education is to be affordable, students must be made aware of federal and state resources available to them. In addition, we continue to advocate for the full funding of Cal Grants which enable many low income students to fulfill their dream of a higher education.

Accountability

HACU has supported, and will continue to support, legislation that implements a system of accountability for higher education. Access to higher education is only half of the equation; equally important is student success. We should be ensuring that students are leaving our higher education system having achieved the degrees that they went in seeking. This system should incentivize, not punish, institutions for their success in this area. Such system should also account for resource disparities across institutions and academic readiness differences among the students they serve.

Coordination and Efficiency

Given that over 80% of all Latino college students in California attend community colleges, we must continue to work towards ensuring that the transfer pathways to the CSU and UC are as attainable to academically qualified students as possible. The segments, and academic senates, should strive to eliminate barriers to transfer, work with students to facilitate transfer while they still have access to all the financial aid programs, and also create or expand support systems for these students to ensure their ultimate success. But the pathways should not end with a bachelor's degree; increasingly advanced degrees are vital to financial success. We must ensure that Latino students are successfully being identified and recruited into teacher credentialing programs, medical

schools, law schools, and other graduate degree programs. Programs that help in the identification of students, and provide them with information they need to successfully matriculate in advanced degrees, should be lauded and funded.

We know these are difficult financial times, which are significantly hampering higher education; however, we remain committed to working with the Legislature to ensure Hispanic higher education success. Thank you for your time.