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California Colleges

California's Systems of Public Higher Education Could Better Address Student Housing Needs

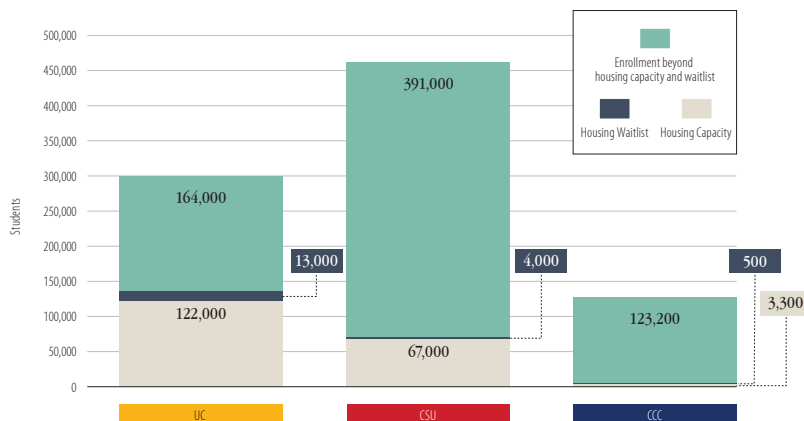
Background

The campuses of California's three systems of public higher education—the University of California (UC), the California State University (CSU), and the California Community Colleges (CCC)—enroll more than 2 million students. Students have the options of living in campus-operated student housing facilities (campus housing) or living off campus, which can include living alone or with parents, relatives, or housemates. Research indicates that students who live in campus housing have better outcomes than students who live off campus. Nevertheless, campuses are only able to accommodate a proportion of their student population in campus housing, and not every student seeks campus housing. In response to high construction and land costs for campus housing and to facilitate access to higher education, the State established the Higher Education Student Housing Grant Program (Grant Program) to provide affordable, low-cost housing options for students enrolled at the three systems. This audit reviewed the efforts of all three systems to provide affordable student housing and to assist students who are experiencing housing insecurity.

Key Findings

- » Despite the State's efforts to promote an increase in student housing, the three systems have not assumed a strategic leadership role in planning for housing across their respective campuses.
 - The system offices do not direct or conduct any centralized planning efforts to increase the availability of student housing, relying instead on their individual campuses to conduct such planning.
 - The system offices compile and submit to the Legislature annual capital outlay plans that are informed by their respective campuses and do not specify how proposed housing projects would contribute to accommodating the needs of students.
 - None of the system offices has fully assessed the unmet demand for campus housing across their respective systems, relying instead on incomplete measures, such as housing waitlists that may understate that demand.
- » Progress on some CCC projects has stalled because of significant changes that were made to the funding structure of the Grant Program.
- » Grant Program projects also may not remain affordable after construction because of insufficient monitoring requirements.
- » The nine campuses we reviewed did not always provide accurate or required information on their websites about the cost of attendance or housing assistance programs.

The Number of Students Enrolled Systemwide Significantly Exceeded the Number of Available Beds in Fall 2024



Key Recommendations

- » If it determines that California's public higher education systems should assume stronger oversight of their respective campuses in planning campus housing, the Legislature should declare in state law its intent that the system offices should assume that role in planning campus housing, and it should identify the appropriate responsibilities for systemwide oversight to ensure that students' housing needs are met.
- » The Legislature should also require the system offices to each develop and implement a process to biennially assess the unmet demand for campus housing across their respective campuses.
- » The system offices should each establish a policy and process to ensure that beds or rents remain affordable for the life of each campus housing project using Grant Program funding.
- » To ensure that prospective students and their families have access to accurate and reliable information, the three systems should establish procedures to regularly monitor their respective campuses' websites to provide information about the cost to attend college and about available housing assistance programs.