
Interview request with campus President Jeffrey D. Armstrong re. Black student enrollment

Matt Lazier [REDACTED]
To: Mikhail Zinshteyn <mikhail@calmatters.org>

Fri, Oct 28, 2022 at 5:44 PM

Mikhail, sorry again for the delay on this, and thanks for your patience. Unfortunately, we aren't able to accommodate an interview on this. However, I've gathered some information here that addresses your questions.

First, it is important to say Cal Poly recognizes the gap in its enrollment of Black students and to say broadly that with a statewide mission and focused on STEM education, it is Cal Poly's goal to enroll a student body that reflects the demographics of the state that we serve.

It is equally important to say that while Cal Poly is proud of the progress our campus has made in attracting and enrolling a more diverse student body, the university also recognizes the need for more progress toward our goal and is eager to identify and implement additional measures to further this work. Pointedly, this includes attracting and enrolling more Black applicants.

There are many obstacles and issues that make reaching this goal more complex, and some of these examples address the specific questions you are asking.

As one example, Prop. 209 prevents the university from enrolling students based on race and ethnicity.

At the same time, Cal Poly is a destination campus located outside of major metropolitan areas and situated in a community that is less diverse than the campus itself. This sets Cal Poly apart from metro-area campuses, such as those you mention.

To illustrate that point:

- At San Diego State, the median distance from home for newly enrolled students is 12.6 miles. Cal Poly's, by contrast, is 165 miles.
- Similarly, looking at UCLA's enrollment, the majority comes from the region they serve, which is far more diverse than San Luis Obispo County. Los Angeles County is 49% Hispanic/Latino and 7.9% Black. So, highly qualified students from that area can apply to a high academic institution and attend school without leaving their region. Conversely, San Luis Obispo is 23.8% Hispanic and 1.8% black (and 67.5% white). And for Black students in particular, Monterey and Santa Barbara counties (our two surrounding counties) are 2.5% and 1.7% Black respectively.

Given that our students are coming from further away and that the overall new student enrollment of our campus is more diverse than the county we live in, there is a challenge in asking students to leave their diverse communities to come live, study and work in a less diverse community and incur greater cost to receive their education.

There are two factors that impact that cost of education. The first is that the overall high cost of living in the area impacts students who do not have the option of living at home with family — which, as indicated above, is higher than many competitor, metro-area institutions.

The second, and perhaps more crucial where it concerns attracting and enrolling underrepresented students, is that the CSU historically has been underfunded by the state on a per-student basis, and the system's financial aid structure has historically made Cal Poly more expensive to attend than the UCs, net of financial aid, for students from families with incomes less than \$90,000 per year.

Cal Poly's main competitors for students are the UC campuses, which historically have been able to offer more financial aid to students with lower incomes (a group which we know, unfortunately, contains a higher share of underrepresented minority students).

This means that many of the academically qualified underrepresented student applicants who might have had interest in Cal Poly were either not applying to the university or applying but choosing other competitor institutions that were ultimately cheaper, net of financial aid.

With this in mind, the university has taken several steps in recent years to increase the amount of financial aid it can offer to students with lower incomes, including:

- Focusing on and continuing to grow its [Partner School Program](#), which works to attract more lower-income, first-generation and otherwise underserved prospective students.
- Doing away with our early decision admissions program in 2016, after evaluation of data showed that the early option created a disadvantage for lower-income families by requiring applicants to make a binding commitment before knowing their full financial aid status.
- Creating the [Cal Poly Scholars](#) program, which provides financial aid and other support programs and services to high-achieving California students who come from lower-income backgrounds;
- Implementing the [Cal Poly Opportunity Fee](#), which increased fees paid by out-of-state students, with revenue directed toward significantly growing the Cal Poly Scholars program; and
- Implementing the [Cal Poly College Based Fee Student Aid and Learn by Doing Plan](#), with revenue aimed at further growing the Cal Poly Scholars program and at supporting the university's hands-on curriculum.

The result has been five consecutive years of enrolling the most diverse incoming class in the university's history. (We are awaiting final official numbers from our October census, but we expect this year's incoming class to have the highest ever percentages of women, first-generation

students, Asian students, Hispanic/Latino students, and students from partner high schools — and to be the highest-achieving ever academically.)

And now, with the implementation of the College Based Fee adjustment, this fall is the first time in decades that Cal Poly's net cost of attendance was lower than the UC.

Specific to Black students, the challenge remains to attract and enroll more applicants.

Although this is the first year of implementation of the College Based Fee increase and official data is not yet available to share, preliminary indicators are that the net cost of attendance is making its intended impact in attracting more lower-income students. However, the challenges related to cost of attendance extend beyond low-income students. A consistent response from admitted Black students who choose not to attend is that they have received a larger financial aid and scholarship package at competitor institutions. This response is consistent across income levels and is reflected in the yield rate of our admitted Black students being much lower than the average yield rate.

The university will continue to focus on the Partner Schools Program with the aim of attracting Black applicants and finding specific programs and avenues of outreach to connect directly with the Black community. An example is the university's partnership with the [Rex and Margaret Fortune School of Education](#). Cal Poly works with the Fortune School to help prepare curriculum to prime students for success at community colleges as well as at Cal Poly and other CSU campuses. We would recommend that you reach out to Margaret Fortune for comment on this partnership and the university's efforts.

As well, the California Community Foundation offers the [Cal Poly Black Student Scholarship Fund](#), providing financial aid to Black students in a Prop. 209-compliant manner. The scholarship was established by an anonymous donation, and CCF seeks additional donors to grow the scholarship's reach. More online: <https://www.calfund.org/calpolyblackstudentfund/>.

The university also provides co-curricular programming aimed at students of color, to provide support as they pursue their studies, including the [Men of Color Success Initiative](#) and the [Black Academic Excellence Center](#).

In addition, a major focus for Cal Poly is strengthening ties to the California Community College system to create a more transfer-friendly process, including reviewing curriculum at the college level as part of Cal Poly's ongoing transition from its current quarters calendar to a semester calendar to match the rest of the CSU and majority of community colleges. This change is set to take effect in Fall 2026.

Finally, regarding graduation rates, the four-year rate for Black students from the 2016 cohort are lower and an area of ongoing examination for the university. However, when looking at six-year

11/10/22, 2:22 PM

CalMatters Mail - Interview request with campus President Jeffrey D. Armstrong re. Black student enrollment

rates for that cohort, it's important to note that those of Black students are higher than all other ethnicities.

Thanks again — and let me know if you have any follow-up questions and I'll do what I can to track down info.

[Quoted text hidden]