

# The Civil Rights Project



*Proyecto Derechos Civiles*

**\*\*\* NEWS RELEASE \*\*\***

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CONTACT: Civil Rights Project  
310/267-5562; crp@ucla.edu

## ***UCLA Report Finds California Community Colleges Cannot Afford to Ignore the Opportunity to Increase BAs for Underrepresented Students***

LOS ANGELES – With the passage of California State Bill 850 in 2015 and new community college bachelor’s degree programs due to commence in 2017, California has the unprecedented opportunity not only to provide an important spur to the state’s economy but also to make significant gains in BA production among its underrepresented (URM) students. So far, policymakers do not appear to have seized on this opportunity by explicitly making equitable degree production a goal.

A new report by the UCLA Civil Rights Project, [\*\*\*The Baccalaureate in the California Community College: Current Challenges & Future Prospects\*\*\*](#), examines the potential for increasing BA degrees among underrepresented students by considering how community colleges in three other states demographically similar to California have managed their community college bachelors’ programs. Researchers Patricia Gándara (UCLA) and Marcela Cuellar (UC Davis) unfortunately found few good models in Florida, Texas, and Washington that California could adopt. Since the BA programs in these other states were uniformly framed as meeting workforce needs, very little or no attention was made to their possible role in increasing equitable access to BA degrees.

California is lagging behind in college degrees – soon to be at least one million short by latest counts—because its URM population, and Latinos in particular, are not acquiring them. In 2015, more than 58% of Asians and almost 45% of non-Hispanic whites in California had at least a Bachelor’s Degree. For African Americans, this percentage was 27% and for Latinos barely 13% (U.S. Census, 2015). Clearly, this creates an untenable situation for the economy of a state in which the majority of its high school graduates are African American and Latino.

One prominent reason for this disparity is that California channels most of its postsecondary students of color, and low-income students, into two-year colleges from which they must transfer to acquire a four-year degree. Unfortunately, this doesn’t happen often enough. According to the new report, if the state had a goal of increasing the baccalaureate degree production among these groups of students -- which it currently does not -- it would create programs in places where most of these students reside, in fields that are likely to attract them, and in ways that would recruit these student groups.

Principal Investigator Patricia Gándara stated, “SB850 has the potential to take a state that is 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation in baccalaureate completions and make significant gains in BA production among those students who have been least likely to get a college degree. But this will not happen without conscious attention to this as a goal. Unfortunately, we have seen the potential go unrealized at other colleges we have studied.”

This research on the other states found that:

1. Generally, the process of selection of campuses to offer the BA had not considered their proximity or accessibility for underrepresented groups.
2. At the campus level there was little readily available data on program diversity.
3. There was little evidence of any targeted outreach to underrepresented groups.
4. The individuals we interviewed were not opposed to seeing the BA programs as a tool for increasing equity in access to the BA. For the most part, they just hadn't thought about it extensively.

As California becomes the 22<sup>nd</sup> state in the nation to roll out baccalaureate degrees in its community college system, the report offers a set of recommendations that could help the state achieve both workforce readiness and greater equity of opportunity to complete a baccalaureate degree. These recommendations include:

- Set a goal of increasing underrepresented students' access to the BA at California's Community Colleges, then collect data and monitor the extent to which these programs both enroll and graduate underrepresented students.
- Offer programs in regions where underrepresented students are concentrated and in areas of study that are likely to attract these students.
- Devise marketing and outreach plans to reach underrepresented groups.
- Consider barriers to access as programs become more popular and demand for them increases.
- Consider the rich linguistic diversity of California's students as an important factor in admission to the BA programs, since research shows that language skills are especially coveted by employers.

The report can be found [here](#).

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### **About the Civil Rights Project at UCLA**

Founded in 1996 by former Harvard professors [Gary Orfield](#) and Christopher Edley, Jr., The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles is now co-directed by Orfield and [Patricia Gándara](#), professors at UCLA. Its mission is to create a new generation of research in social science and law on the critical issues of civil rights and equal opportunity for racial and ethnic groups in the United States. It has monitored the success of American schools in equalizing opportunity and has been the authoritative source of segregation statistics. CRP has commissioned more than [400 studies](#), published more than [15 books](#) and issued numerous reports from authors at universities and research centers across the country. The U.S. Supreme Court, in its 2003 [Grutter v. Bollinger](#) decision upholding affirmative action, and in Justice Breyer's dissent (joined by three other Justices) to its 2007 [Parents Involved decision](#), cited the Civil Rights Project's research.