

# **DON'T LET MISCONCEPTIONS CLOSE THE DOOR ON STUDENTS**

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A state budget-driven question recently posed suggested that MESA and efforts like it should be discontinued. The essence of the question was this:

If the University of California cannot accommodate current student demand, why should we maintain UC campus recruitment programs like MESA?

The first thing to address is the misconception that MESA is a campus recruitment program – **it is not**. It is a pre-university student development program. MESA works to increase the number of students who are eligible for four-year institutions. We identify students who have the potential to attain four-year degrees in math and science and support them across multiple years so they can realize their academic potential. MESA challenges students academically, supports success and leadership development and exposes them to a variety of professional and postsecondary options. When they are ready, we expect participants to consider a variety of university options. While we want UC campuses to be among the options, we do not want them to be the only options.

We are proud of the large number of MESA high school graduates and community college transfers who have attained their baccalaureate degrees from the CSU and independent institutions, in addition to those who graduated from UC. Last year, of the extremely high proportion of MESA's graduating seniors who attended college, 47 percent enrolled in the California State University, while 43 percent enrolled in the University of California. Furthermore, 5 percent enrolled in independent California colleges and 5 percent enrolled in out-of-state institutions.

Many people assume erroneously that MESA is an arm of the UC because our statewide office is located in the UC Office of the President. While the UC serves as the administrative steward, the program operates as a partnership between UC, the CSU, California Community Colleges, independent colleges and universities, the CDE, individual school districts and schools, community-based organizations and the private sector. These segments are all represented on MESA's Statewide Board of Directors. We work hard to remain accountable to all our education partners.

The second issue to address concerns MESA's practice of increasing demand for higher education because it does so at a time when severe space constraints make accommodating current demand very difficult. While MESA does increase the number of California students prepared for university study, its students represent segments of the population that, historically and presently, are not properly reflected among university students.

MESA students choosing to be university-bound usually must overcome formidable barriers. All are from low- and moderate- income backgrounds. Many are from families where neither parent went to college or, if they did, they never completed their degree. For many students, English is their second language. MESA students come from

disadvantaged schools that do not enjoy a widespread college-going culture or from community colleges without strong records of transfer.

California's economic engine needs highly skilled, university-educated workers to fuel its growth, both as producers and consumers. California's financial investment in MESA and its students, currently approximately \$435 per year per student, deserves to be protected. When one considers the economic return from a highly skilled, university-educated worker versus that of a high school graduate, it becomes clear that calls to eliminate student development efforts like MESA, Puente and EAOP, are penny-wise and pound-foolish.