

Testimony before The House Committee on Education and the Workforce  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training  
Hearing on Improving College Access and Completion for Low-Income and First-  
Generation Students

Statement of Charles J. Alexander  
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Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Hinojosa, and all the Members of the subcommittee for inviting me to testify today. My name is Charles J. Alexander and for the past nine years, I have served as the Associate Vice Provost for Student Diversity and Director of the Academic Advancement Program (AAP) at the University of California, Los Angeles.

I am a product of a single parent household and when I was young my mother aspired for me to attend college one day. As I came to the end of my senior year in high school, I felt I was prepared to enter college and compete with the rest of the students who were entering higher education institutions that year. However, I soon learned that college was much more challenging and rigorous than my high school. I was fortunate, however, to be recruited by a college success program that provided me with a summer bridge experience and the academic support services and guidance that I needed. Four years later, I completed my Bachelor's degree and later went on to earn my Masters and Doctorate in the Sociology of Education. I can attest to the fact that if it were not for the academic support and the encouragement of my mother and extended family, I would not be here today sharing testimony with this committee. Even after all these years, I still appreciate the support that my college academic support program gave me to succeed in my profession and life.

Let me share with you a model student academic support program that I oversee at UCLA. The Academic Advancement Program (AAP), in existence at UCLA since 1971, is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic academic program, that advocates access, equity, opportunity, and excellence. AAP has a threefold mission—to ensure the success and graduation of its more than 5,500 undergraduates; to prepare students to enter graduate and professional schools; and to develop the academic, political, scientific, economic, and community leadership necessary to transform and lead our society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. AAP students represent approximately 23% of the UCLA undergraduate student body. AAP is an academic community that supports its students by providing them comprehensive, integrated services, setting the highest standards for them, promoting academic, personal, and programmatic excellence, and building communities of shared learning and learners. AAP staff foster in students a sense of belonging at the university, and inspire and challenge them to expand their personal and academic goals by building on the great wealth of resources and life experiences they bring to the university. AAP is supported by a mixture of state, federal and foundation funding. State funds represent the majority of AAP's overall budget. Included in my written testimony is a table highlighting the funding sources for the program.

## 2013- 14 AAP Funding Sources by Type

<u>Funding Sources</u>	<u>Expenditures</u>	<u>% of Total</u>	<u>Comments</u>
State Funds	\$2,615,790*	54%	AAP Administration, Counseling, Peer Learning, Graduate Mentoring and Research, Communications and Evaluation, New Student Programs, and Center for Community Partnerships.
Sales and Services	\$55,894	1%	From FSP and TSP IEI and computer lab printing fees.
Contracts & Grants	\$490,899	10%	Federal and state grants to support McNair, High AIMS, Jack Kent Cooke, and other student programs.
Gifts and Endowments	\$1,725,865	35%	Scholarships/stipends awarded to students from private donors and foundations.
<u>Total</u>	<u>\$4,888,448</u>		

AAP pushes all its students to graduate with the broadest and most enriched education possible. Belief in the strengths of its students drives all AAP’s programs. A significant number of AAP students come from low-income families (73%), and are eligible for Federal Pell grants; 97% are the first in their family to go to college; and, 63% are from historically underrepresented communities—African American, Latino, and Native American.

Each summer, AAP runs a rigorously academic 6-week residential program for 400 entering freshmen and transfers. This is approximately 12% of the approximately 3,400 students who are eligible for the program. Students take 2-3 university courses and complete 10-13 units toward UCLA degree

requirements. The summer bridge program could enroll more students if additional funding were available. The program is funded primarily by institutional and donor based scholarship dollars. AAP provides peer-facilitated learning communities (tutoring) based on a dialogical pedagogy, collaborative learning workshops, academic and personal counseling and peer counseling, research opportunities, innovative science programs, and scholarships. AAP has a comprehensive mentoring program that encourages all AAP students to prepare for graduate and professional schools, and provides resources and support to this end: students meet with faculty for roundtable discussions and intern for local, state, and national organizations. AAP also arranges for many of its students to engage in academic research under the direction of faculty and to publish their work in the university's academic and literary journals.

AAP also oversees a federally-funded TRIO program: The Ronald E. McNair Research Scholars Program for first-generation, low-income students, and historically underrepresented students who are on track to pursue their Ph.D.s. Twenty-three of the first thirty-three McNair Scholars are enrolled in graduate programs.

Over the past 10 years, AAP has responded to the growing number of AAP-eligible transfer students entering UCLA by providing a framework for transfer students to become part of an academic community, to take

ownership of their undergraduate experience, to engage the broader university, and to excel. AAP's work with its transfer students has resulted in a dramatic increase in their 4-year graduation rates—from 61% fifteen years ago to 83% today. In the same time period, African American rates rose from 45% to 83% and Latino rates rose from 66% to 83%.

**One-Year Persistence / Four- and Six-Year Graduation  
Most Recent Rates at Fall 2013 for  
FRESHMAN COHORTS Entering UCLA  
by Gender, Declared Ethnicity, and  
Financial Aid (Pell/Stafford) Status**

	Freshman Cohort Entering Fall 2012  1-Year Persistence Rate	Freshman Cohort Entering Fall 2009  4-Year Graduation Rate	Freshman Cohort Entering Fall 2007  6-Year Graduation Rate
All Freshmen	96	74	90
Women	97	79	92
Men	96	66	89
African American	96	58	85
American Indian	96	61	86
Chicano/Latino	96	64	84
Asian/Pacific Islander	99	77	93
White	96	78	91
Other/Unknown	92	73	93
International	93	63	85
Pell Grant Recipients	96	70	88
Subsidized Stafford Loan (no Pell Grant)	96	74	91

Neither Pell nor Subsidized Stafford Loan	96	61	89
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Students in the cohort who received Pell Grant or Stafford assistance at any time.  
 Graduation rates are minimum values based on mid-October degree records; when degree records are complete these rates may increase by one or two percentage points.

**One-Year Persistence/ Two- and Four-Year Graduation  
 Most Recent Rates at Fall 2013 for  
 TRANSFER COHORTS Entering UCLA  
 by Gender, Declared Ethnicity, and  
 Financial Aid (Pell/Stafford) Status**

	Transfer Cohort Entering Fall 2012 1-Year Persistence Rate	Transfer Cohort Entering Fall 2011 2-Year Graduation Rate	Transfer Cohort Entering Fall 2009 4-Year Graduation Rate
All Transfers	95	63	89
Women	95	70	92
Men	94	56	86
African American	91	56	84
American Indian	100	65	78
Chicano/Latino	96	62	84
Asian/Pacific Islander	97	58	90
White	95	67	91
Other/Unknown	95	69	90
International	89	66	89
Pell Grant Recipients	96	58	89
Subsidized Stafford Loan (no Pell Grant)	96	69	88
Neither Pell nor Subsidized Stafford Loan	93	68	91

Students in the cohort who received Pell Grant or Stafford assistance at any time.  
 Graduation rates are minimum values based on mid-October degree records; when degree records are complete these rates may increase by one or two percentage points.

AAP pushes its students to use all of UCLA's resources. It strongly encourages its students to join the University's College Honors Program. College Honors at UCLA is a nationally renowned program that provides students the organization and environment within which to pursue individual excellence. Students attain College Honors by completing a diverse selection of honors course work and maintaining excellent grades. The percentage of AAP students in Honors has increased from 4% in the early 1990's to 17% today.

Another campus partner who AAP works closely with is the Program for Excellence in Education and Research in the Sciences (PEERS). PEER is the primary retention program for entering URM life and physical science students at UCLA. Each year PEERS welcomes approximately 100 entering underrepresented freshmen life and physical science majors. PEERS enhances the academic performance of first-year and second-year science students through a combination of personal counseling, collaborative learning workshops in mathematics, chemistry, and physics, research talks by UCLA faculty, and seminars designed to improve student retention and support student interest in research. Faculty, graduate student tutors/facilitators, and trained academic counselors guide the PEERS students through their first two academic years. Since its inception in 2003, 340 students have completed the PEERS program and 84% have graduated from UCLA with a degree in science. This rate is more than double the URM



average of 41% at UCLA and exceeds the overall campus average (67%) and average for non-URM students (72%). During the last 5 years (2011-2014), 84% of PEERS students graduated with science degrees. Notably for the students that graduated in 2014, 50 of 55 (91%) finished with a degree in a science major. Of the 340 graduates, 197 (58%) engaged in faculty mentored research experience and the primary outcome for PEERS graduates is to enter MD or PhD programs.

Our controlled study shows that PEERS has a significant impact on academic performance and persistence. We found that PEERS students take more science classes in their first two years (so are more likely to graduate on time – see below), earn better grades in those science classes, have a higher overall GPA and are more likely to be in a science major at the beginning of their third year. This benefit is seen whether PEERS students are compared to a control group of similarly prepared students, or incoming students with Math SAT scores of above 650 (High Math SAT ). Even though the High Math SAT group of students is better prepared for college science classes than the PEERS group, PEERS students out perform this group in all four measures (science courses taken, class and overall GPA, and retention). Engagement in PEERS clearly improves academic success and retention in science, eliminating the achievement gap of URM science students.

Today, at UCLA, African Americans and Latinos graduate at the highest rate ever: the 6-year graduation rate for African American and Latino students who entered as freshmen is 84%.

Many AAP graduates continue their education by going into Ph.D. programs or professional degree programs. They become doctors, lawyers, educators, urban planners, and political leaders; and a large number of AAP graduates focus their work on serving the poor and the under-served.

AAP exchanges ideas and best practices with the University of Michigan, the University of Maryland, the University of California, Berkeley, the University of California, Irvine, the University of Texas at Austin, the Vrije University of Amsterdam, the University of Rwanda, College of Education, and the University of Johannesburg.

We have also hosted and been visited by educators from Australia, Great Britain, South Korea, the Netherlands and South Africa who would like to replicate how we do what we do at their own institutions.

A tenet of AAP's philosophy that has resulted in spectacular graduation rates is the belief that when students work in the program to promote the success of other students, they gain the self-confidence and self-respect that propels them to graduate. By employing AAP students as tutors (over 160) and as

Peer Counselors (17), AAP sets up models of academic achievement and promotes the values of giving back to the community. Most AAP student employees are paid with work study and institutional funds. 100% of these students graduate. A 100% graduation rate is AAP's goal for all of its students.

Let me close by thanking Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Hinojosa, and the other members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.