

PREPARE NOW FOR THE NEXT WAVE

by **Richard C. Atkinson**
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Tidal Wave II--the demographic bulge created largely by the children of the Baby Boomers--is about to inundate California's colleges and universities. Between the year 2000 and the year 2010, the number of California high school graduates will mushroom by approximately 30 percent. Just as their parents--Tidal Wave I--made college attendance a defining issue of the 1960s, so this new generation of students is about to make the next 10 years the decade of higher education.

This scenario portends a major public policy shift for California. The K-12 system has dominated the state's public agenda for years. But the Baby Boomers, whose sheer numbers have made their issues the nation's issues, are now turning their attention to a college education for their children. Can California's attention be far behind?

Tidal Wave II will create the most challenging decade in the University of California's history. We currently enroll 150,000 full-time students on our eight general campuses. According to recent Department of Finance estimates, this number will leap to 210,000 within 12 years--an additional 60,000 students, or the equivalent of today's combined enrollments at UC Berkeley and UCLA.

The University's planned new campus, UC Merced, will bring educational opportunities to the underserved Central Valley but it is not the solution to Tidal Wave II. UC Merced is vital to California over the long term, and in the short term will create places for 1,000 students when it opens in 2005, growing to an enrollment of 5,000 by 2010.

But UC applications are rising every year and, given the complexities of building a new campus from the ground up, UC Merced is already on a fast track for completion six years hence. Even with UC Merced, 55,000 students remain to be accommodated at the other general campuses. We will have to expand by 5,000 new students annually to keep up with the demand.

Not even the hectic postwar years, which brought thousands of returning GIs to our campuses, posed so formidable a challenge. What will it take to accommodate the young people seeking a UC education in the next decade?

We have no plans for a one-size-fits-all solution; each campus will adopt strategies that work in terms of its particular strengths and circumstances. Besides increasing enrollments at a number of campuses, we will offer an expanded summer term, perhaps with lower fees to encourage students to enroll.

Those who do not want or need the residential campus experience can further their education at a growing number of off-campus centers, such as our new UC Center in Fresno or the Off-Campus Studies department at UC Santa Barbara.

As the nation's leader in educational technology we can reach even more students in libraries, community centers, and their own homes through technologically mediated learning.

But there is a vital difference between enrolling students and educating them. UC provides value to California only as it provides high quality in its educational programs. We do the state and our students no favor if academic excellence is left behind in the race to deal with the numbers.

The costs of enrolling the thousands of students coming into the University are considerable but not beyond California's means.

Equally important is a commitment by the State to assume the capital costs--constructing new buildings and bringing existing ones up to date and making them seismically safe. At UC, the total cost will be about \$5 billion over the next 10 years.

This is a huge investment that will require hard public policy choices. Yet there are sound arguments for seeing education as a continuum, from kindergarten through college, and for investing in the end of the continuum as we do in the beginning. California needs an educated populace for all the obvious reasons--to create a society that understands the obligations and privileges of citizenship, to fuel the prosperity essential to solving our most serious societal problems, and to make its rich human diversity an asset. And in this post-Proposition 209 era, no strategy for increasing diversity in the state's public colleges and universities can succeed without broad access.

Education has been California's historic answer to the question of how to build a society that works. It is still the answer. We need to keep that squarely in mind as we prepare the next generation of Californians for the world they will face in the new century.

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