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Commission Calls for New Master Plan

In a study released today, "A New Plan for a New Economy: Reimagining Higher Education," the Little Hoover Commission calls for a new master plan for higher education that addresses both the state's need to substantially increase the number of graduates and the reality that state resources are limited.

Though the state was well-served by the 1960 Master Plan, substantial changes in California, together with new opportunities, warrant a rethinking of the state's strategy for higher education, one that looks at what best serves students and the state as a whole.

"The Master Plan is dead and probably has been for a long time. California's future depends on a new, transformative Master Plan that will be smart enough to take us through the next 50 years," Commission Chair Jonathan Shapiro said.

The Great Recession forced state government to slash spending for public higher education and for public colleges and universities to turn away California students. California is recovering, but it must change its model for higher education if it hopes to meet the needs of a growing population and provide workers with the skills to compete in the world of the 21st century.

The Commission found that that the state lacks a strategy for achieving statewide goals for higher education. It urges California's leaders to start the public discussion about how to change the state's higher education system to meet the state's current and future civic and workforce needs with the finite financial resources it has.

The Commission found that online education has enormous potential to expand the reach of public higher education, if used in a manner that benefits students. California's colleges and universities already are using online courses, though they have yet to aggressively engage online education in ways that could help more students complete their programs on time and transfer course credits between systems. This is an area in which California higher education institutions, so long recognized as national leaders, should be setting the standard.

The Commission encourages the Legislature to provide incentives for developing online courses, particularly for high-demand and bottleneck courses, that would be awarded credit system-wide and, ideally, across all three segments.

The Little Hoover Commission is a bipartisan and independent state agency charged with recommending ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of state programs. The Commission's recommendations are submitted to the Governor and the Legislature for their consideration and action. For a copy of the report, visit the Commission's website: www.lhc.ca.gov.