



It is with heavy hearts that we release this report authored by Tatiana Melguizo and her colleague, Susan Bickerstaff. It was one of the last projects Tatiana undertook before her untimely passing, which was a great loss for the field and for those who knew her. As with all of Professor Melguizo's body of work, this paper endeavors to move forward her vision of greater equity for those students so often left behind. It was our honor to work with Tatiana, and to count her not only as a valued colleague but as a friend. Her work will continue to live on through the many students and colleagues she influenced so deeply.

-Patricia Gándara and Gary Orfield, Civil Rights Project Co-Directors

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New Research Describes Developmental Education in CA's Community Colleges and Efforts to Dismantle It

Reforms Likely to Benefit Students of Color, Low-income Students and English Learners

The UCLA Civil Rights Project is publishing today a report by Susan Bickerstaff and Tatiana Melguizo, [*Developmental Education Reform as a Civil Rights Agenda: Recent History & Future Directions for California*](#). The new paper explores developmental education at the community college level, intended as a remedy to unequal pre-college academic experiences but often functioning as a barrier to both college access and success.

The California Master Plan for Higher Education made a huge bet on community colleges. More than any other state, California relies on its two-year campuses to transfer students to four-year institutions for bachelor's degree completion. Today, enrolling 1.8 million students in its 116 community colleges, the system has not met those expectations. In fact, projections are that given the shortfall in college graduates, California soon cannot meet its needs for college-educated workers. A major reason for this is that too many students—especially students of color, low-income students and English learners—arrive at college under-prepared for the courses they need to take. As a result, they are assigned to prerequisite “developmental education” classes that often do not strengthen their understanding of the material or yield the college credits needed to progress toward their degrees.

One of the most ambitious reforms to developmental education in the California Community Colleges was launched by Assembly Bill 705 (AB705), passed by the California state legislature in 2017. AB705 directs community colleges to utilize multiple measures of high school performance to determine college readiness, replacing standardized placement tests. Efforts like this, to dismantle the traditional

system of developmental education, will likely benefit racially minoritized students, and students for whom English is not their primary language, as they have historically been referred to developmental education at higher rates than their peers.

The [paper](#) describes the research that prompted developmental education reform approaches nationally and in California, the efforts in California that led to the passing of AB705 and its implementation and outcomes. Bickerstaff and Melguizo conclude with five key practice and policy recommendations for California community college leaders as they move toward realizing a civil rights agenda for college access and success in the next 25 years: (1) Address faculty and practitioners' beliefs; (2) Move from structural to instructional reform; (3) Improve data accessibility, reporting, and accountability; (4) Expand equitable college access opportunities for students in high school, and (5) Tackle barriers facing English learners.

California has not been alone in its challenges over developmental education. Many states have been struggling to find ways to reduce or eliminate developmental education as we now know it, with varying degrees of success. This has been a particularly active time for the community colleges in California and we hope that the account presented here is useful to community college educators across the nation.

[*Developmental Education Reform as a Civil Rights Agenda: Recent History & Future Directions for California*](#), by Susan Bickerstaff, senior research associate of the Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, and Tatiana Melguizo, of blessed memory, professor of education at the Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California, is commissioned and published by The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA, as part of its ongoing research series, *A Civil Rights Agenda for the Next Quarter Century*, in commemoration of the Project's 25th anniversary.

A memorial for Tatiana Melguizo will take place virtually on Monday, April 8, 2024, at 11:30am PT. Please [register here](#) if you would like to attend.

About the UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles:

The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles is co-directed by UCLA Research Professors Gary Orfield and Patricia Gándara. Founded in 1996 at Harvard University, CRP's 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 U.S. CRP is a trusted source of segregation statistics, has commissioned more than [400 studies](#), published more than 25 books and issued numerous reports monitoring the success of American schools in equalizing opportunity. 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. In June 2023 Justice Sotomayor cited CRP's research in her dissent to the court's decision banning affirmative action in *SFFA v Harvard College*.

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